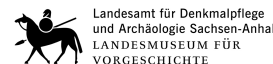


Press release**Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt - Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte
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<http://idw-online.de/en/news832398>Miscellaneous scientific news/publications
History / archaeology
transregional, national**Opening of the redesigned exhibition room on the “Shaman of Bad Dürrenberg” in the State Museum of Prehistory Halle**

The grave of the “shaman” of Bad Dürrenberg, one of the most important finds in Central European archaeology, was discovered by chance in the spa gardens of Bad Dürrenberg in 1934. Recently, it has been the focus of new investigations by the State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt. Using an interdisciplinary approach, new insights into the already known finds were gained and during renewed excavations at the site, remains of the burial pit and further objects were recovered. In order to make the new research results accessible to the public, the exhibition room on the 'Shaman' of Bad Dürrenberg in the State Museum of Prehistory Halle (Saale) has now been revised.

Next to the Nebra Sky Disk, the grave of the 'shaman' of Bad Dürrenberg (Saalekreis) is one of the most spectacular finds in Central European archeology and a highlight of the permanent exhibition in the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle (Saale). The 30 to 40-year-old woman was buried around 9,000 years ago in a sitting position with a child around six to twelve months old. A possible headdress made of deer antlers and animal tooth pendants indicate her special position as a 'shaman', as the spiritual leader of her group.

Re-examination of the grave pit

The grave was discovered by chance in 1934 during excavation work in what is now the spa gardens of Bad Dürrenberg and was recovered in just one afternoon. The redesign of the spa garden in the run-up to this year's State Garden Show opened up the opportunity to examine the site again. The subsequent excavations by the State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology (LDA) Saxony-Anhalt starting from December 2019 yielded impressive new findings. The exact location of the grave was located. In addition, remains of the grave pit, which had not been completely excavated in 1934, were found. These were recovered as a block and examined under laboratory conditions in the workshops of the LDA. Numerous new finds were recovered that underline the important position of the woman and significantly expand the known grave furnishings. At the same time, the excavations provided new insights into the grave architecture and the form of the grave pit.

Archaeogenetic studies on “shaman” and child

Through extensive archaeogenetic investigations, important aspects of the appearance of the “shaman” from Bad Dürrenberg could be determined. She was dark-haired, had light eyes and a darker skin tone. This phenotype is typical of Western European hunter-gatherers. Other Mesolithic individuals of this phenotype are known, for example, from what is now Luxembourg, Spain and England. Only with the switch to predominantly plant-based food in the Neolithic (5500 to 2200 BC) did light skin become an advantage. It helps with the production of vitamin D during the long periods of darkness in the winters of the northern hemisphere.

Furthermore, in the course of the investigations, the relationship between the woman and the child as well as the gender of the child - a boy - were clarified. The double burial is not, as long assumed, the burial of mother and child, the two individuals are only 4th or 5th degree relatives. Deposits on the right upper arm bone (humerus) and on the inside of a fragment of the child's skull are the result of bleeding under the skin, which may have been caused by a vitamin C deficiency disease (scurvy).

New discoveries underline the social position of the “shaman”

The discovery of another pit just one meter away from the grave of the 'shaman', was a surprise. In addition to a sandstone slab with clear traces of use and work tools made of quartz and flint, the remains of two real red deer antlers were discovered. The two antlers showed traces, which support their use as masks. The pit in which they were found was dug around 600 years after the 'shaman' and the child were buried. This suggests that the important woman's burial was marked and was still visited centuries after her death. Radiocarbon dating places the deposition of the antlers in the vicinity of the so-called 8.2K event: from around 6350 BC, the climate deteriorated within a few years. The annual average temperature fell by two to three degrees Celsius. It is possible that in this situation the grave of the 'shaman' was visited in the hope of help and the masks were deposited.

The totality of the new, outstanding results made it necessary to redesign the exhibition room on the “Shaman” of Bad Dürrenberg in the State Museum of Prehistory Halle (Saale) visually and in terms of content. The already iconic reconstruction image of the “shaman” in her ornate by Karol Schauer was updated according to the new data on her looks. A new panorama above the 'Shaman's' display case, also redesigned by Karol Schauer, allows visitors to immerse themselves in the time over 9,000 years ago. The view from the high terrace above the Saale, where her burial was, impressively shows the landscape of the time with mixed oak forests, stands of pine and elm trees and, in particular, hazelnut bushes. 17 drawers, a specialty of the exhibition design in the State Museum, offer visitors in-depth information about the life during the Mesolithic and the 'shaman' herself. A 3D replica and a film animation explain anomalies in the vertebrae and occipital hole of the 'shaman'. Certain movements of her head triggered a rolling of the eyes (nystagmus), which must have seemed to her contemporaries like a sign of contact with the spirit world.

The new finds from the recent excavations at the site in the spa gardens of Bad Dürrenberg are now also on show. For example, 14 pierced fossil *Gyraulus* snail shells that are only around five millimeters in size are outstanding. They could have been part of a necklace, braided into hair or sewn onto clothing and were brought from the Steinheim Basin in what is now Baden-Württemberg, over a distance of several hundred kilometers. The delicate objects not only testify to the dexterity of Mesolithic people, but also to amazing long-distance contacts 9,000 years ago.



The grave of the “Shaman” of Bad Dürrenberg in the redesigned exhibition room.
Juraj Lipták
State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt



One of the Gyraulus snails from the Bad Dürrenberg burial.
Juraj Lipták
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