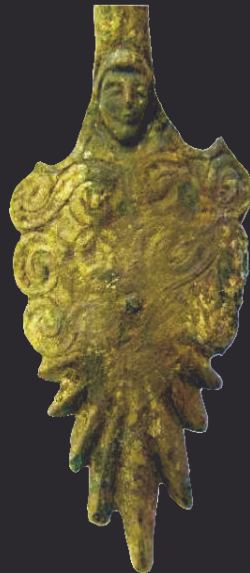


# The Early Iron Age in Central Europe

Proceedings of the conference  
held on the 2<sup>nd</sup>– 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2015  
in Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

# Die frühe Eisenzeit in Mitteleuropa

Sammelband aus der Tagung  
abgehalten am 2.– 4. Juli 2015  
in Hradec Králové, Tschechische Republik



edited by/herausgegeben von  
Martin Trefný

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## **Excavating a dendrochronologically dated “Lusatian” stronghold in the middle Elbe valley. A Polish-German cooperation project in Kemberg, Wittenberg county, Saxony-Anhalt**

Louis D. Nebelsick – Anna Swieder – Katarzyna Zeman-Wiśniewska

### **Abstract**

In September 2014 an excavation with Polish and German researchers and students took place at the stronghold of Kemberg near Wittenberg in Saxony-Anhalt. In a three week campaign, a trench was excavated on the boggy margins of this Late Bronze/Early Iron Age swamp fort, which is the most northwestern example of its type.

We discovered an excellently preserved multilayered platform structure made of wooden boards and beams located at the base of the rampart. This may have either served as the foundation of the rampart or reinforced the berm just in front of it. Posts rammed into the sandy subsoil in front of this structure may indicate the presence of a fence or palisade. Preliminary results of dendrochronological and radiocarbon analyses date platform to the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, the putative palisade may date to the later 10<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Late Bronze Age channelled “Lusatian” pottery conventionally dated from 1000–800 BC rested directly on this wooden structure. The layer above it was filled with sherds belonging to the most western variant of the Early Iron Age Bialowice pottery which was in use in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC in an area stretching from Glogów in the south-east to Wittenberg in the north-west. Large quantities of high-quality pottery, a bird-shaped rattle, and animal bones were also found in the moist sediments at the foot of the rampart. Massive layers of charcoal

and a large charred beam in the layers documented above point to a violent end to this swamp fort, perhaps some time during the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Thus, the Kemberg rampart will play a crucial role in understanding the relative sequence and absolute chronology of late prehistoric defended settlements between the Elbe and Vistula valleys.

### **Keywords**

dendrochronology – Lusatian culture – stronghold – Bialowice culture – Saxony-Anhalt

### **Zusammenfassung**

Im September 2014 wurde am Burgwall von Kemberg bei Wittenberg in Sachsen-Anhalt eine Ausgrabung zusammen mit polnischen und deutschen Wissenschaftlern und Studenten durchgeführt. In einer dreiwöchigen Kampagne konnte eine Sondage am nördlichen sumpfigen Rand der spätbronze-/früheisenzeitlichen Anlage durchgeführt werden. Der Kemberger Burgwall ist der nordwestlichste Vertreter dieser Art von Befestigungen.

Am Wallfuß wurde eine ausgezeichnet erhaltene, mehrschichtige, rostartige Struktur aus hölzernen Spaltbohlen freigelegt. Sie könnte entweder als Fundament des Walls oder als Verstärkung einer vorgelagerten Berme gedient haben. Die in den sandigen Untergrund vor dem Wall eingetieften Pfosten belegen vielleicht die Existenz einer Einzäunung oder Palisade. Vorläufige Ergebnisse von dendrochronologischen und Radiokohlenstoffanalysen datieren den Holzrost in die Mitte des 9. Jhs. v. Chr. und die mutmaßliche Palisade in das späte 10. Jh. v. Chr.

Fragmente der für gewöhnlich in die Zeit von 1000–800 v. Chr. datierten spätbronzezeitlichen kannelierten „Lausitzer“ Keramik lagerten direkt über dieser Holzstruktur. Die



Fig. 1. Aerial photo (a) and digital elevation model (DEM) (b) of the later prehistoric stronghold at Kemberg, Wittenberg county, Saxony-Anhalt, top of the photo (photo R. Schwarz [LDA], 20.08.2002, LBno. 5204, Dia 28-05. DEM: © GeoBasis-DE / LVerGeo LSA, C22-7006480-2015).





Fig. 2. Copper engraving (detail) of the town of Kemberg with the stronghold to the right from 1787 (after Neumann 1787, calendar sheet March).

darüberliegende Schicht war mit Scherben verfüllt, die zu der westlichsten Variante der früheisenzeitlichen Billendorfer-Keramik gehören. Diese ist im 7. Jh. v. Chr. und frühen 8. Jh. v. Chr. in einem von Glogów im Südosten bis nach Wittenberg im Nordwesten reichenden Gebiet in verbreitet. In den feuchten Sedimenten am Wallfuß wurden zudem große Mengen hochqualitativer Keramik, eine vogelförmige Rassel und Tierknochen gefunden. Massive Schichten mit Holzkohle und ein großes verkohltes Holz in den darüber dokumentierten Strata weisen auf ein gewaltsames Ende dieser Sumpfbefestigung hin, vermutlich im frühen 6. Jh. v. Chr.

Der Burgwall von Kemberg wird daher eine Schlüsselrolle für das Verständnis der relativen und absoluten Chronologie der spätprähistorischen Befestigungen zwischen dem Elbe- und Weichseltal spielen.

### Schlagwörter

Dendrochronologie – Lausitzer Kultur – Burgwall – Billendorfer Kultur – Sachsen-Anhalt

The medieval town of Kemberg is perched on the southern rim of the broad valley bottom of the river Elbe ca 15 km south of Wittenberg. While the historic town centre lies on a low sandy plateau, a more prominent but much smaller hummock known as “Burgwall” (English: hill fort) with an area of ca 2,5 ha and a height of ca 3 m is situated just east of the town. It is hemmed in by swampy meadows of the Elbe valley on three sides. This stronghold is connected to Kemberg’s medieval centre by a straight axis, the “Burgstraße” (English: castle street) in the west and has been used as the town’s cemetery since the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD (Fig. 1; see also Böhme, forthcoming). Despite centuries of erosion and levelling, the remains of a slight rampart surrounding the site are still detectable, and when new graves are dug Late Bronze and Early Iron Age and very sporadically medieval sherds find their way to the surface. Remarkably, there is a copper engraving printed in an Upper Lusatian almanac from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century AD (Fig. 2; Neumann 1787) which shows a panorama view of Kemberg from the south and a detailed depiction of the site. This presumably earliest illustration of a prehistoric

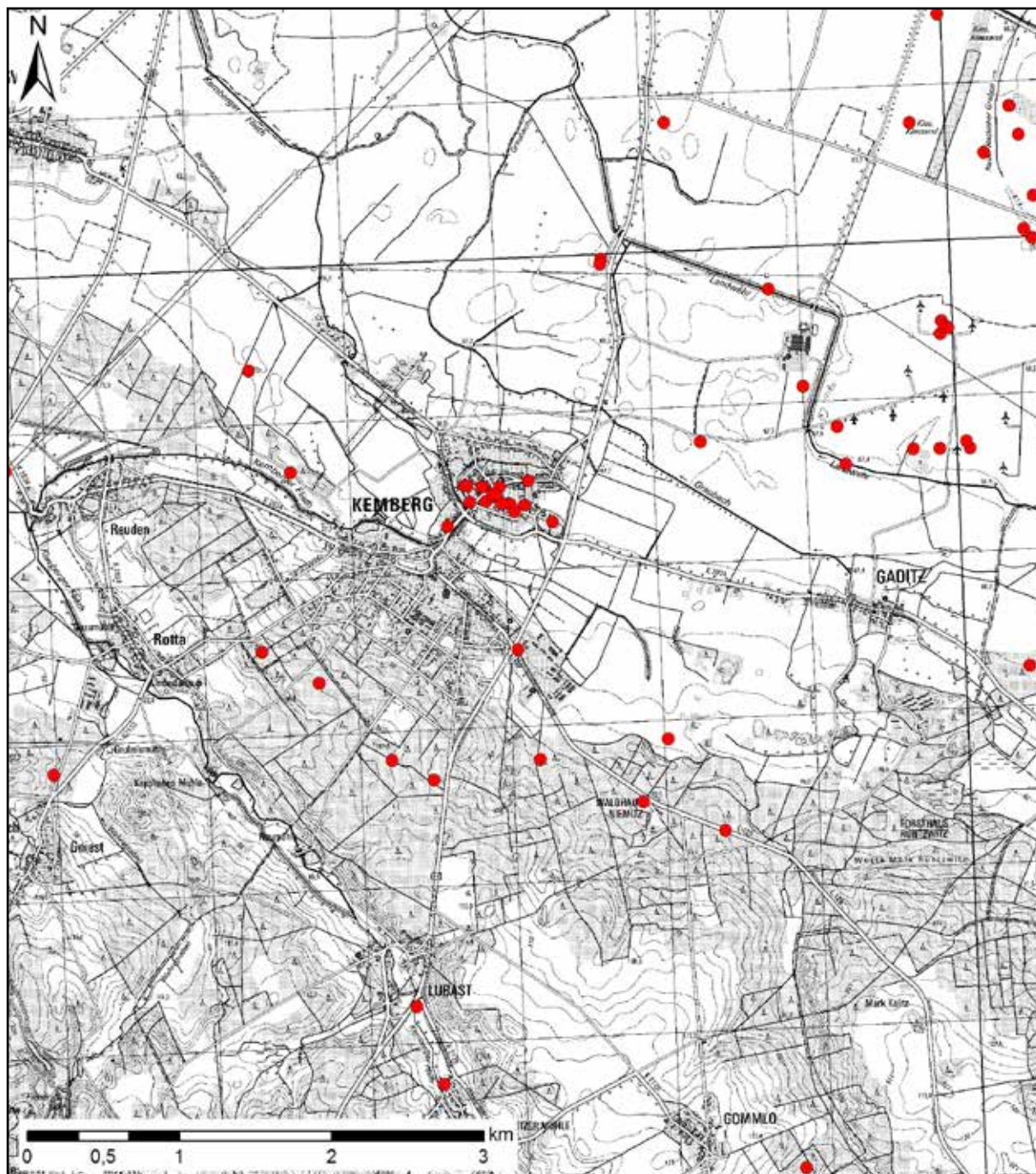


Fig. 3. Topographical map of the archaeological sites in the environs of the Kemberg stronghold (base map © GeoBasis-DE / LVerGeo LSA, 2013, 010213).

stronghold in Central Germany presents the early Baroque funeral hall, which still exists today, surrounded by a fence or a wall on the margins of the ring shaped rampart. Moreover, a berm can apparently be seen at the ramparts base, as well as what may be a slight ditch and a hollow road way.

Due to the fact that this site is occupied by a

long lived, still working cemetery and that its margins are swampy, archaeological activity has been restricted to sporadic surface collecting from the inside of the stronghold revealing mainly late prehistoric sherds (Grimm 1958, 14; 16, Abb. 8; 313, Nr. 643). The only significant find recorded to date from the interior was a probably early Hallstatt period Białowiec

juglet that was said to contain amber beads and a small bronze disc<sup>1</sup>. Yet, the thesis that the Kemberg cemetery had been the site of a major early medieval castle “Burgwardium” mentioned in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century AD charters, raised doubts whether the upstanding remains of the rampart were prehistoric at all (Zschieschang 2003, 291). Due to these difficulties, the site has only been sporadically accepted as belonging to the swamp forts that are particularly characteristic for the north-eastern Central European Lusatian group of the Late Bronze Age Urnfield and the Early Iron Age Hallstatt culture<sup>2</sup>.

A fuller picture of the Kemberg stronghold began to emerge after the turn of the millennia with the advent of systematic rescue archaeology in Kemberg and its environs. Excavations in the historic town centre carried out by J. Meffert (2006), revealed late prehistoric pottery which he dated to the “developed Bronze Age” suggesting that the Kemberg stronghold may have been associated with a contemporary suburban settlement. Extramural settlement activity has long been known from a series of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age strongholds including the “Wallberge” near Falkenberg/Elster, Elbe-Elster county, and the stronghold between Malitschkendorf and Schlieben, both Elbe-Elster county, ca 50

km east of Kemberg (Buck 1979, 45; Buck 1982). Recently discovered impressive examples include the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age stronghold complex of the Proitschenberg and the Ortenburg near Bautzen, Bautzen county, in Upper Lusatia whose suburb covered the entire area of the later medieval town<sup>3</sup>. Further examples are a large settlement complex covering the plateau adjacent to the stronghold Lossow, Frankfurt (Oder) county, in eastern Brandenburg (Mehner 2010) and also the vast settlement at Wennungen, Burgenlandkreis county, in southern Saxony-Anhalt which extends almost 700 m behind a thickly settled, fortified promontory fort<sup>4</sup>. Strongholds with suburban settlements (or perhaps more aptly settlements with a defended acropolis) are probably best seen in the context of early urbanisation<sup>5</sup> which – considering the fact that its beginnings can clearly be dated back to the turn of the millennium – should rather be seen as the result of an endemic social dynamic rather than copying Mediterranean templates<sup>6</sup>. In the case of Kemberg, excavations in the swampy river bottom north of the stronghold revealed remains of a Late Bronze Age settlement and cemetery, which – along with find spots recorded in the hinterland of the site in the last century – show that the stronghold and its

1. Site archive of the State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt (LDA), Kemberg ID 1499, 93. Interestingly, a late Urnfield period juglet from the Heidenschanze stronghold near Dresden-Coschütz, Dresden county, was also found containing bronze jewellery and pendants (Coblentz 1967, 199, Abb. 21), suggesting that depositing small jewellery sets in juglets may represent a traditional deposition practice.

2. Kemberg is given a miss by most surveys of Central German/West Polish hillforts with the exception of A. Jockenhövel and K. Simon (1999, 165, Nr. 18) and R. Spehr (1981, 81, Abb. 1) who mistakenly assigns it to the Latène period.

3. Meffert (2002) has collated the various find spots of Białowice pottery discovered during different rescue excavations in the town centre. The true extent of the extramural settlement was probably even larger. For a series of major satellite cemeteries related to the Ortenburg/Proitschenberg complex that looms over the crucial ford over the river Spree used by the historic Central European Via Regia which connected Silesia with the Rhineland (Coblentz – Nebelsick 1997, 13, Fig. 1).

4. For the vast settlement complex near Wennungen with evidence for painted daub see H. Meller and M. Becker (2013).

5. For instance the Heuneburg near Hundesingen, Sigmaringen county (Krause et al. 2015; Fernández Götz – Krause 2012).

6. See J. Collis (2014) and N. Sharples (2014) who both question the diffusion of urbanism from the Mediterranean. See also A. Vanzetti (2004) for complex interfaces between indigenous social dynamics and acculturation during the initial phases of urbanisation in Iron Age Italy.





Fig. 4. The massive wooden structure at the base of the rampart during the excavation (photo A. Swieder).

suburban settlement were the hub of an intensively settled landscape (Fig. 3).

A major breakthrough towards understanding the chronology of the Kemberg stronghold site came in 2010 when a rescue excavation was carried out by S. Koch (LDA) following the course of a pipeline dug along the road that runs on the north-western edge of the site (Koch forthcoming). To everyone's surprise, the soggy soil on the swampy margins of this fort not only revealed signs of human occupation in the form of layers with large amounts of pottery sherds but also remains of ancient wooden posts and planks. The posts which were found ca 5 m away from the base of the rampart were

probably part of a fence or a palisaded perimeter barrier protecting the stronghold. These wooden structures were dated both by radiocarbon and especially dendrochronological analysis to the time around 960 BC i.e. to the Late Bronze Age (Ha B1/Per. IV)<sup>7</sup>. This is the earliest dendrochronological date ever measured for a swamp fort of the Lusatian type.

In 2014 the LDA joined forces with the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (UKSW) in Warsaw to conduct a small research excavation in the swampy meadow north of the site in order to answer a series of questions raised by the previous rescue dig<sup>8</sup>. Some of these questions were:

7. Six samples of wood were kindly analysed dendrochronologically by K.-U. Heußner (German Archaeological Institute, Berlin) but only two dates could be determined. An oak post (HK-no. 3170:10:4, lab.-no. C 57399) from a palisade from the outer edge of the trench has a felling date around/after 955 BC. Another oak post (HK-no. 3170:17:15, lab.-no. C 57400) has a felling date around/after 968 BC. Two wood samples were radiocarbon dated by the Curt-Engelhorn-Centre for Archaeometry gGmbH in Mannheim. A wooden sample (HK-no. 3170:21:24, lab.-no. MAMS 11617) from the inner edge of the trench taken from angular, massive horizontal timbers lying on top of each other (the grid platform in our excavation) could be dated within the time frame 1054–950 cal BC (1  $\sigma$ ) and 1116–937 cal BC (2  $\sigma$ ). Another wood sample (HK-no. 3170:25:38, lab.-no. MAMS 11616) from a burnt layer on the periphery of the trench was dated into the time period 975–899 cal BC (1  $\sigma$ ) and 1001–847 cal BC (2  $\sigma$ ).

8. A preliminary note (Nebelsick – Swieder – Zeman-Wiśniewska 2015) and a number of press releases (e.g. Pastuszka 2015) appeared during and shortly after our dig. A comprehensive preliminary report (Nebelsick – Swieder, forthcoming) is in preparation.

EXCAVATING A DENDROCHRONOLOGICALLY DATED “LUSATIAN” STRONGHOLD IN THE MIDDLE ELBE VALLEY

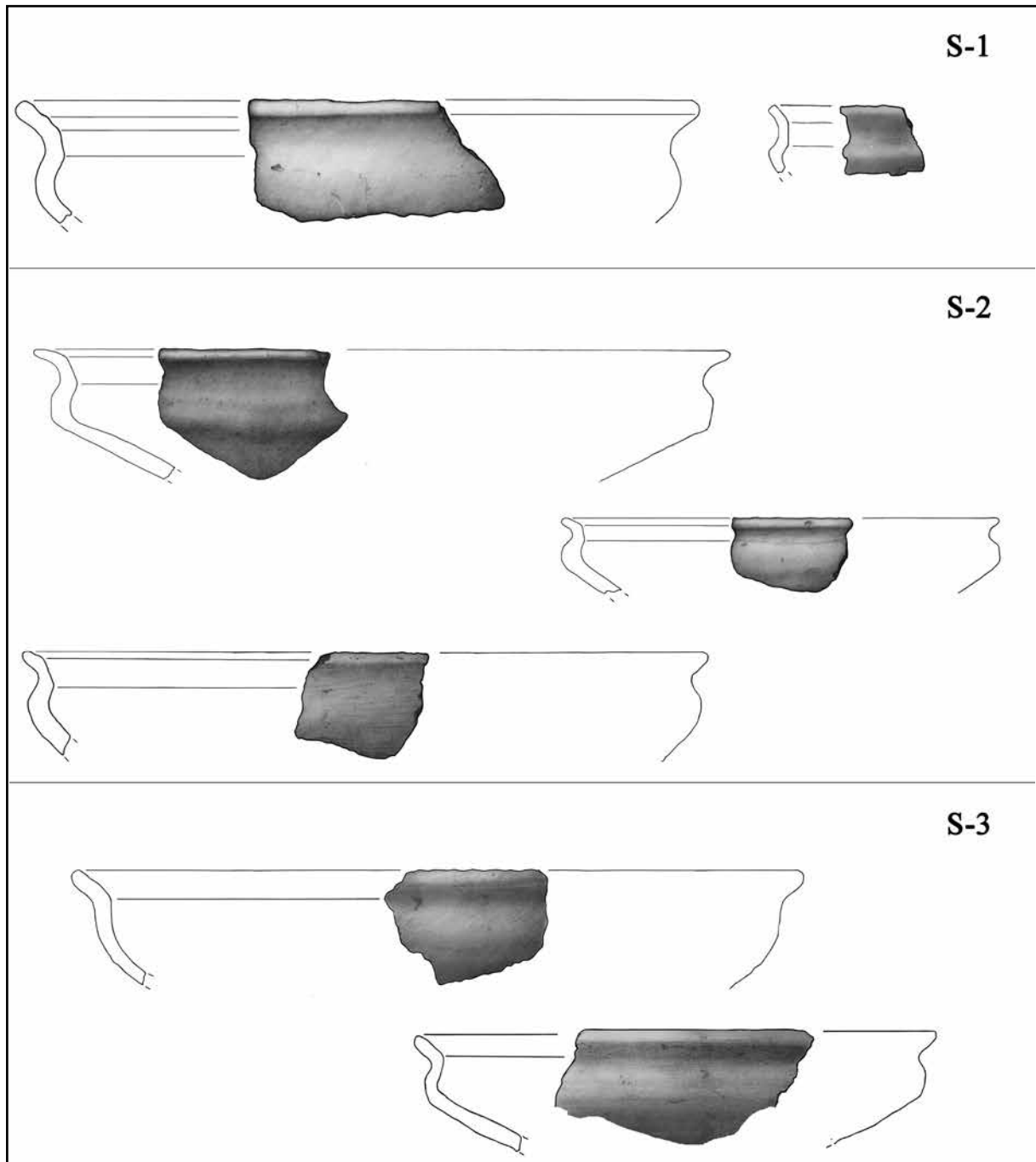


Fig. 5. Fragmented Late Bronze Age bowls with faceted rims from the earliest layers of the outer defences of the Kemberg stronghold (drawings J. Panev, J. Schindelbauer).

1) What was the condition of the wooden structures preserved in the swampy ground on the edge of the site?

2) Which elements of the fortification do they date and which pottery phases can be associated with structures that can be absolutely dated?

3) Moreover an important heritage manage-

ment issue had to be addressed, i.e. whether and how drainage activities in the meadows around the site were effecting the preservation of prehistoric wood.

Our excavation in Kemberg was carried out between September 8<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> by researchers and students from the LDA, UKSW, and the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wit-

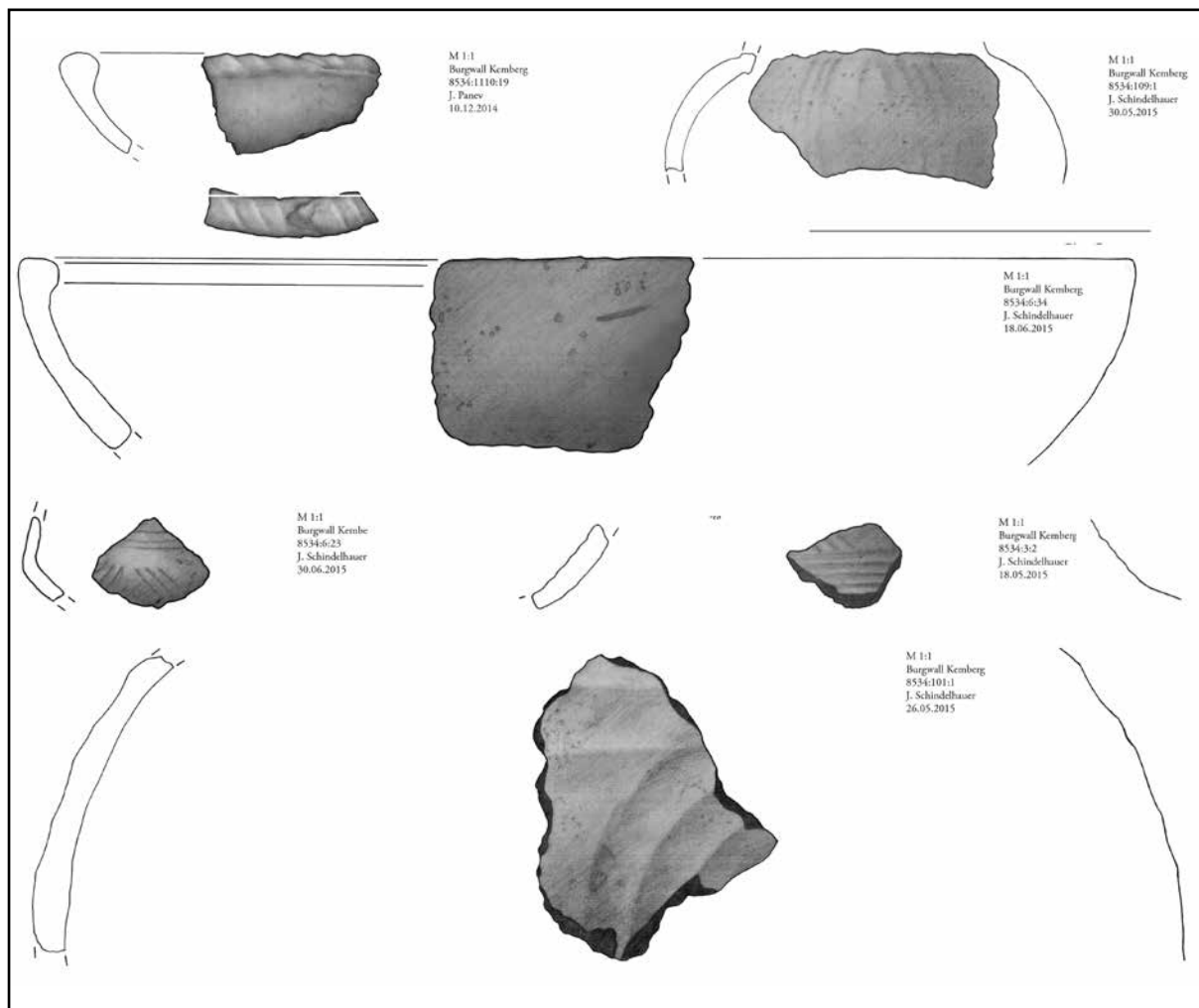


Fig. 6. Fragments of Bialowice pottery from the Kemberg stronghold (drawings J. Panev, J. Schindelbauer).

tenberg (MLU)<sup>9</sup>. We opened two trenches uncovering an area of ca 80 m<sup>2</sup> in front of the rampart. The most important result was that we could confirm the presence of extremely well preserved, massive wooden structures. The most impressive of them was a multi-layered platform made of wooden boards and planks (many over 2 m in length). It was found immediately adjacent to the edge of the rampart and probably extend from under it (Fig. 4). This massive construction is very similar to wooden foundations of the ramparts and

berms excavated from a series of strongholds in Lusatia, including the “Batzlin” stronghold near Lübbenau/Spreewald, Oberspreewald-Lausitz county (Breddin – Buck 1970, Abb. 2–3; Buck 1979, Abb. 33g), the “Schlossberg” near Senftenberg, Oberspreewald-Lausitz county (Herrmann 1970), the “Góra Zamkowa” near Wicina, pow. żarski, woj. lubuskie (Jaszewska – Kałagate 2013), as well as the recently excavated Białowice stronghold, the “Sumpfschanze” near Biehla, Bautzen county (Nebelsick – Kobyliński 2008; Kobyliński

9. The excavation was lead by L. D. Nebelsick (LDA/UKSW), A. Swieder (LDA), and K. Zeman-Wiśniewska (UKSW). Participating students included K. Czyżniak, R. Grochocki, I. Jacob, P. Kristin, M. Leloch, K. Radziszewska, H. Riediger, M. Szubski, and M. Witt. We would like to thank M. Wiśniewski who assisted us with photography. We also have to acknowledge the generous support of the state archaeologist, H. Meller (LDA), the help of the Kemberg mayor, T. Seelig, and the town’s archivist, G. Böhme, as well as the land owner, U. Höhne.



Fig. 7. Fragment of a bird shaped rattle from the Kemberg stronghold (photo M. Wiśniewski).

– Nebelsick 2015)<sup>10</sup>. Interestingly, massive wooden foundations have also been recovered from dry sites such as the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age promontory fort of Podrosche, Görlitz county, now used as the village’s cemetery (Herrmann 1970). It seems likely that these massive wooden platforms were a standard feature of Late Bronze to Early Iron Age stronghold architecture but they usually remain hidden unless excavations into wet stronghold’s margins with high groundwater levels expose them. In Kemberg, the wooden platform probably served as the base of the rampart and berm, stopping the stronghold’s wooden and earthen defences from slumping into the swamp. Posts that were rammed into the sandy subsoil in front of this structure may indicate the presence of a fence or palisade which possibly was part of the same barrier recorded by the former rescue excava-



Fig. 8. Paving in the northern parts of the trench (photo A. Swieder).

tion. This feature – which in most cases has the form of a double palisade or fence – has been recorded from a number of sites in Lusatia and beyond and has been interpreted variously as a defensive barrier or even as a break water<sup>11</sup>. Mostly, such palisades are seen as being contemporary with the rampart constructions they enclose, forming a complex multi-layer defensive and protective circuit. In the case of Kemberg, however, the dendrochronological results indicate that the palisade is likely to be significantly earlier (ca 100 years)

10. The exact correlation between this construction type and the massive platform/palisade constructions at the iconic Kujavian and Great Polish swamp forts – such as Biskupin, pow. żniński, woj. kujawsko-pomorskie (Żurowski 1952), Izdebno, pow. żniński, woj. kujawsko-pomorskie (Romanowska-Grabowska 1991), Jankowo, pow. inowrocławski, woj. kujawsko-pomorskie (Puziuk 2010, 31, ryc. 5), Objezierze, pow. obernicki, woj. wielkopolskie (Szamałek 2009, 84, ryc. 42), Słupca, pow. słupecki, woj. wielkopolskie (Malinowski 1964), and Świętne, pow. koniński, woj. wielkopolskie (Szamałek 2009, 84, ryc. 42) – is so obvious that some form of detailed exchange of knowledge and skills must have taken place between the craftsmen/builders designing and erecting these highly complex structures.

11. Palisades are a ubiquitous feature of Lusatian strongholds in both the Late Bronze as well as the Early Iron Age (e.g. Buck 1979, 33, Abb. 26). Their mainstream interpretation as breakwaters in front of the ramparts of wet defended sites must be called into question as they are also found around dry strongholds.



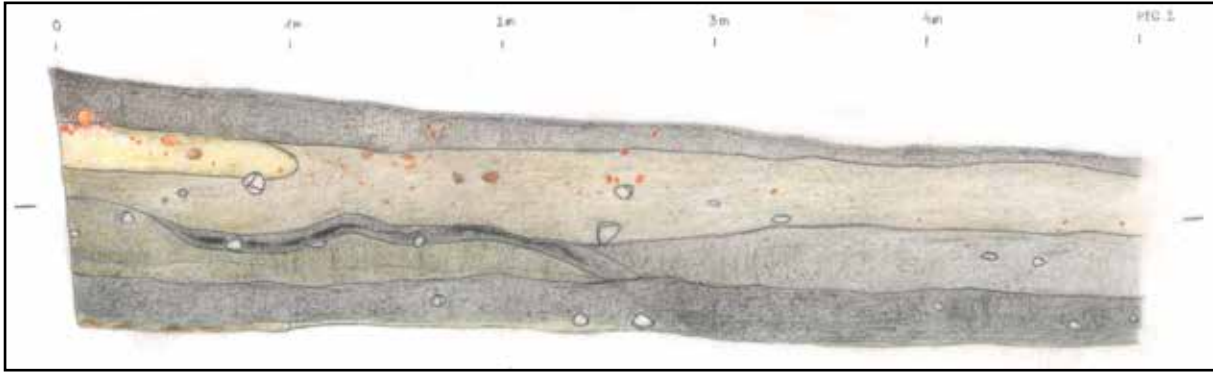


Fig. 9. The east facing section of the rampart's foot showing the charred layer (drawing K. Czyżniak).

than the rampart platform which dates to the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>12</sup>. Both date to the Late Bronze Age what makes this rampart unique in its quality and complexity in northern Central Europe at that time. Late Bronze Age “Lusatian” channelled pottery which can be typologically dated between 1000 BC and 800 BC<sup>13</sup> rested – amongst other material – directly on this wooden structure (Fig. 5) and the layer above it contained sherds belonging to the most western variant of Early Iron Age Białowice pottery (Fig. 6). This distinctive fine ware which was in use from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC in an area stretching from Lower Silesian Głogów, woj. dolnośląskie, in the south-east to Wittenberg, Saxony-Anhalt, in the north-west is related to symposial vessels of the eastern Hallstatt cultural province (German: Osthallstattkreis). The adoption of this pottery reflects the participation of the respective communities in a symposial/feasting culture with roots in the Mediterranean and is so radically different from the spartan ceramic traditions of neighbouring western and northern regions that it had been interpreted as an ethnic marker by

pre-World War II scholars<sup>14</sup>. Large quantities of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age sherds – which includes domestic pottery but also a high proportion of fine ware as well as a fragment of a bird shaped rattle (Fig. 7) – were found in these moist sediments at the foot and in front of the rampart. Several smashed animal bones also found their way into the swamp<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, there is evidence for cobbling and paving in this area (Fig. 8), indicating that the border zone between the settlement and the marsh was intensively used, possibly also for ritual activities and or feasting. The end of the use of the rampart's margins is marked by a burnt layer including charcoal (Fig. 9) and a charred plank that swept down the rampart's slope during the conflagration that apparently marks the final destruction of the stronghold. The exact time frame when this happened will have to be determined by future research. However, the analysis of the Iron Age pottery has indicated a distinct early Białowice (Ha C–D1) focus in the youngest material of that time that was excavated and has not revealed any shapes that would date later than to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

12. Dendrochronological dates, determined by K.-U. Heußner (German Archaeological Institute, Berlin), for the grid-construction include sample HK-no. 8534:1110:25 (lab.-no. C 79657) with a felling date of  $857 \pm 10$  BC and sample HK-no. 8534:1110:26 (lab.-no. C 79658) with a felling date of  $861 \pm$  “Waldkante” (2 years) BC. The radiocarbon dates, gained by the Curt-Engelhorn-Centre for Archaeometry gGmbH in Mannheim, for sample HK-no. 8534:1110:25 are 916–845 cal BC (1  $\sigma$ ) and 969–833 cal BC (2  $\sigma$ ) (lab.-no. MAMS 22383) and 893–815 cal BC (1  $\sigma$ ) and 898–811 cal BC (2  $\sigma$ ) (lab.-no. MAMS 22383).

13. Niederkaina III, mainly IIIB = Ba B3 (cf. Puttkammer 2008, 70–126).

14. For instance by members of the “Kossinna school” such as W. Kropf (1938) and H. (Agde 1939). This ethnic classification of Iron Age pottery users in Central Germany was first called into question by G. Kossack (1950).

15. We thank H.-J. Döhle (LDA) who made the archaeozoological analyses of the bone material.



Although the evidence for an intensive use of the stronghold’s marshy margins seems remarkable, it is far from being unique. Similar finds were made in wet sediments in front of the large Late Bronze/Early Iron Age stronghold “Schlossberg” near Burg, Spree-Neiße county (Korluss – Jahns – Methner 2005), which is located on the edge of a former river channel, possibly indicating its use for watering animals or for riverine transportation. Whether this was the case in Kemberg, is still an open question. However, it is worth noting that a, presumably medieval, dugout canoe was found during melioration work in the 1970s in the wet meadows a few hundred metres north-east of the stronghold (Schmidt – Nitschke 1977). This shows that before the intensive melioration of the Elbe valley bottom in the post-medieval period, navigable oxbows are likely to have run through the low lying marshy land which is now occupied by drainage ditches and shallow streams. This would also help to explain the choice of the Kemberg hummock as the site of a major later prehistoric fortification. Like the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age fort “Kesselberg” at Elsnig, Nordsachsen county<sup>16</sup>, which lies 30 km east of the Kemberg stronghold it would have had controlled the fertile lower reaches of the moraine plateau and afforded easy access to the river Elbe.

There were other surprising finds made during our excavation. A few sherds dating to the Late Neolithic Bernburg culture (ca 3200–2800 BC) show that the site had an unexpectedly long history of occupation. These finds are all the more remarkable, as Bernburg pottery was typically being made and used by communities living on the eastern flanks of the Harz Mountains and in the Saale river basin well to

the west of Kemberg, making our site the most eastern Bernburg culture findspot discovered so far<sup>17</sup>. The choice of the Kemberg hummock as a settlement site does, however, correspond to a Bernburg settlement pattern that includes the use of defended settlements on the edge of river valleys<sup>18</sup>. A few medieval sherds show the sporadic use of the wetland site in the 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century AD and correspond to a few “Slavic” sherds<sup>19</sup> which were recovered as surface finds from the site’s interior. While these few finds show that the site was occupied in the early medieval period it remains unclear whether it was being used as a stronghold. Evidence for the use of the swampy margins of the site resumes in the early modern period. Large-scale post-medieval disturbances, including a layer of brick and pottery on the base of a track on the foot of the rampart and a large pit, both dating to the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century AD, can possibly be linked to historically known brickworks just east of Kemberg which supplied the prosperous Renaissance town with building material.

In conclusion, our excavation has revealed that the Kemberg stronghold which has been largely ignored by the scholarly community was a major Late Bronze and Early Iron Age fortification whose Iron Age inhabitants were using Białowice pottery. It is the most north-western stronghold belonging to a series of forts spaced along the southern edge of the Elbe valley. This suggests that by the Early Iron Age the band of fertile land, lying between the southern edge of the middle Elbe and the sandy moraine uplands of the “Dübener Heide”, was subdivided in territories controlled by stronghold sites beginning in Kemberg, following Elbe upstream over the “Kesselberg” at Elsnig, the putative hillfort on the “Hartenstein” crag

16. Like Kemberg the ca 100 m x 110 m large, circular rampart enclosed the plateau of a hummock on the southern edge of the Elbe river bottom. Sporadic diggings and sand pitting have revealed Late Bronze/Early Iron Age pottery (cf. Agde 1939, 58; 183; Hülle 1940, 75; Jockenhövel – Simon 1999, 163, Nr. 8).

17. Thanks to R. Schwarz (LDA) and T. Schunke (LDA) for this information.

18. Examples include a fortified settlement of the Bernburg culture near Hundisburg, Börde county, on the edge of the river Beber (Rinne – Müller 2012). It is also possible that the Bernburg sherds we found are the remains of a settlement of the Globular Amphora culture.

19. Thanks to J. Fahr, Leipzig, for the chronological classification of these medieval sherds.

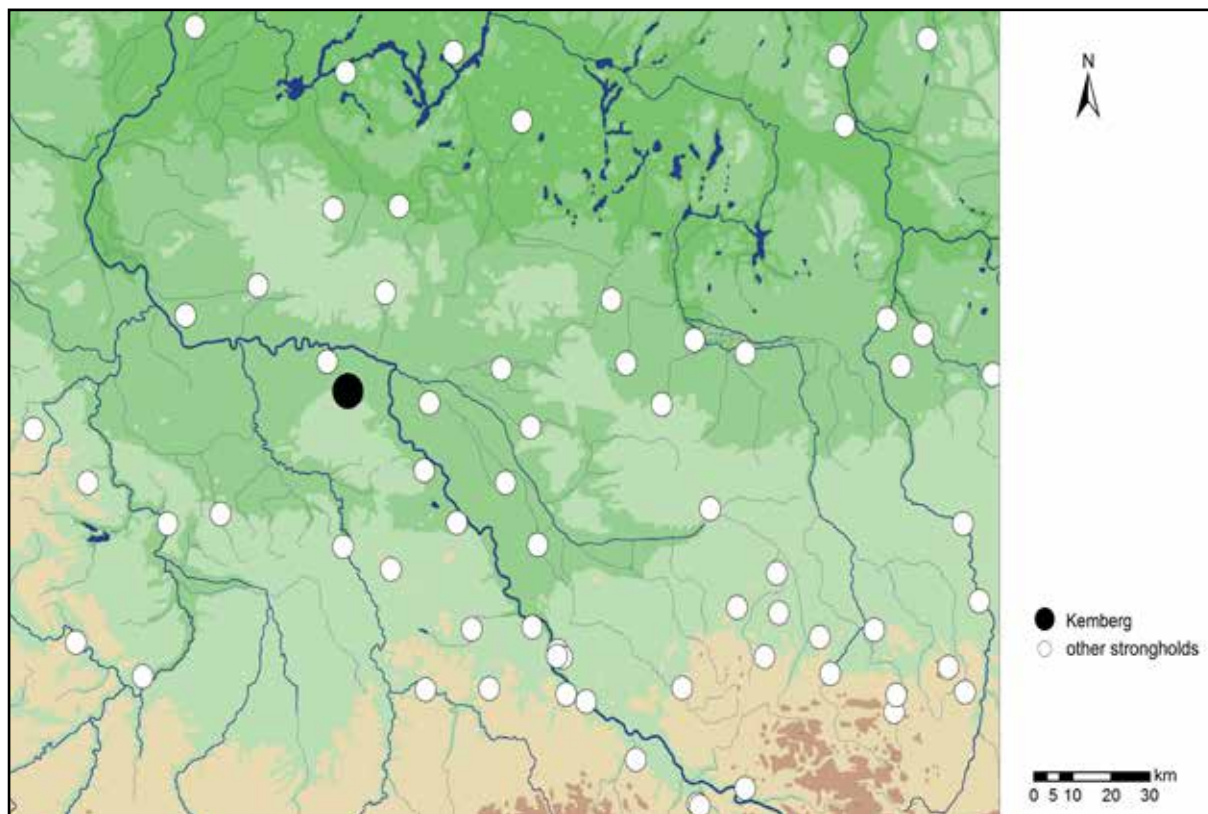


Fig. 10. Distribution of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age strongholds between the river Saale in the west and the bend of the river Warta in the east (base map N. Seeländer [LDA]; modified after Niesiołowska-Wędzka 1974; Koepke 1996).

at Torgau, Nordsachsen county<sup>20</sup>, via the “Kessel” near Mehderitzsch, Nordsachsen county<sup>21</sup>, to the “Burgberg” near Poppitz, Meißen county<sup>22</sup>.

It is, however, the presence of well preserved, datable wood that makes the Kemberg stronghold a crucial contributor to our knowledge of the development of late prehistoric strongholds north of Germany’s Mid-range Mountains (Fig. 10). Enmeshing the development of Northern European strongholds into an absolutely dated framework has long been obscured by the devastating impact of the Hallstatt period <sup>14</sup>C-calibration plateau (8<sup>th</sup>–

5<sup>th</sup> century BC). Slowly dendrochronology is beginning to fill the gap. In contrast to western Hallstatt strongholds, whose wooden constructions date to the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Billamboz 2008), Early Iron Age strongholds in eastern Central Germany and western Poland have a much earlier chronological range. The published results available to date show that trees used to build the ramparts of strongholds of the “Biskupin type” in Kujavia were being felled in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Ważny 2009; Harding – Rączkowski – Ważny 2009, 64). Multiple probing from what has proven to

20. The isolated “Hartenfels” porphyry crag which dominates the surrounding flat-lands has been the site of intensive building and levelling (at least) since the Early Middle Ages and is now incrustated by the magnificent early baroque palace of the Saxon prince-electors. Not surprisingly, no traces of earlier activities have been recovered so far. The summit of a closely analogous erratic stone peak, the “Schlossberg” in Eilenburg, Nordsachsen county, which is the site of a medieval castle was intensely settled and presumably defended in later prehistory (cf. Reuter 1995, 265; see also Herrmann – Donat 1985, 307 f., Nr. 148/4).

21. Pottery from the swamp stronghold “Kessel” (English: cauldron) near Mehderitzsch dates to the Early Iron Age (Kaufmann 1971; Niesiołowska-Wędzka 1974; Peschel 1990, 24 f.; 87, Taf. 40,12–14).

22. The “Burgberg” on the edge of the Elbe valley near Poppitz is an Early Iron Age hill top stronghold (Peschel 1990, 22 f.; Jockenhövel – Simon 1999, 163, Nr. 7).

be a fortifying palimpsest around the Wicina stronghold in Lower Silesia has revealed that a sequence of building renovations and repairs that stretch from the construction of the initial rampart in 737/736 BC with latest repairs taking place in 571 BC which must have been shortly before its annihilation by Scythian warriors (Krapiec – Szychowska-Krapiec 2013; Krapiec – Szychowska-Krapiec 2014). Interestingly, wells from the remarkable circular, palisaded, enclosed elite residential site at Milejowice, pow. wrocławski, woj. dolnośląskie, were being built from ca 680–610 BC on, and are thus contemporary to the dates from the Early Iron Age swamp forts from Lusatia, the “Schlossberg” near Senftenberg and the “Sumpfschanze” near Biehla that were being built in the 630s BC (Kobyliński – Nebelsick 2015). Clearly the early dates from Kemberg are just a starting point to begin to understand the sequences of political formation and desintegration which characterise the turbulent

beginnings of the last millennium BC on the northern periphery of the Hallstatt culture.

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Umschlagsbild: Henkel einer etruskischen Schnabelkanne aus Ostrov bei Pilsen