
Tradition and Transition - The Mesolithic Cemetery of Groß Fredenwalde, Northeastern Germany

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Abstract

The Mesolithic burial site of Groß Fredenwalde in the Uckermark region is considered the earliest cemetery in Germany. A Stone Age multiple burial was first discovered in 1962 on top of a morainic hill, but only the detection of the Mesolithic burial of Strøby Egede, Denmark, raised more attention to the site. In the 1990s, radiocarbon dating confirmed the Mesolithic age of the Groß Fredenwalde burials. New research since 2012 has yielded evidence not only for several further graves at the site, but also for a unique set of burial traditions. Most of the graves date into an early Atlantic context between 6,500 and 5,900 calBC, but an extraordinary burial of a young man probably buried in upright position is about a thousand years younger (c. 4,900 calBC), indicating that this individual had been living side by side with the earliest farming communities of the LBK in this region. New fieldwork started in 2019 financially supported by German Research Foundation and has already yielded evidence of more burials. To date, at least eleven individuals from the site are known, originating from at least six graves in an area covering only a few square meters. The well preserved human skeletons make the Groß Fredenwalde assemblage one of the most important series of Mesolithic individuals of Central Europe. Isotope studies and aDNA-studies contribute to better characterize the Mesolithic economy and population before and after the advent of the first farmers in the region. Palynological and geochemical sediment analyses from adjacent Lake Behrendsee provide insight into landscape development and environmental changes connected with the arrival of the first farmers in the Uckermark region. The interplay between hunter-gatherers and early farmers is a crucial aspect within local and regional socio-economic processes. On a supraregional scale, grave goods and ritual characteristics find similarities in Mesolithic burial sites in Northern and Eastern Europe. The paper will present new research on Groß Fredenwalde and evaluate its significance in regional and supraregional context.

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