

Conference report: Interpreted Iron Ages – case studies, method, theory. 1. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie

On the weekend leading up to All Hallows Eve 2004 the international conference „Interpreted Iron Ages – case studies, method, theory. 1. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie“ took place in the Schlossmuseum in Linz, Upper Austria. The conference was co-organised by Jutta Leskovar of the Upper Austrian Country Museum (OÖ. Landesmuseum) and Dr Raimund Karl of the University of Wales Bangor.

It was the declared goal of this conference to establish a platform for discussion of all sorts of interpretative approaches to the Iron Ages. Purely antiquarian presentations of finds or features without any interpretative approach were explicitly excluded, and will be in the future. Quite contrary to that, unusual, controversial papers, presenting departures from, and often even radical criticisms of, commonly held assumptions on the Iron Ages were specifically invited, to provide for a wider spectrum of discussion than usual. Altogether, 24 papers were presented by as many scholars from all over Europe, although a clear majority of speakers was from central Europe and focussed on discussions of the central European Iron Ages. With 8 papers on each of the three conference days, much room was left for discussion.

The papers presented covered a wide range of different topics, although many papers were dealing with either gender-related or social questions. The split between papers covering the early and later European Iron Age was relatively even. A slight overhang towards papers covering the early Iron Age might be explained by the close vicinity of the conference venue to the most beautiful archaeological findspot in the world (at least in the opinion of the organising team), Hallstatt. Most papers did focus on the German speaking area of central Europe, even though individual papers on areas of Italy, Spain, France, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Finland and Estonia did look well beyond that. Many papers concentrated on the interpretation of burial evidence, most clearly those dealing with physical anthropology and DNA-analysis. Other papers were dealing with terms that have become important in the course of the history of the discipline, like Kimmig's "Adelssitze", but also very generally the term "time" itself, with its double importance for us as a structuring factor for our sources, but our own approaches as well.

Even though the program was relatively densely packed, much room had been left for discussion, and good use was made of this. Both intensity and quality of discussions was, according to the unequivocal agreement of delegates, of exceptionally high level during all of the three days. We, the organising team, would like to again thank all participants, whether speakers or members of the audience, as their contributions made discussions very lively and interesting.

Although the topics for the papers were quite different from each other in many regards, the impression that they were just a random collection of unrelated presentations never arose. This was clearly obvious from the discussions, which reflected the common understanding that – although many different methods and cases were discussed – everything connected into a broad discussion of interpretative archaeologies and their applications to Iron Age materials. As this was, to a large extent, the intended outcome of the conference and its organisational arrangements, it was decided that no major changes would be implemented for the upcoming 2. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie in 2006. Neither will there be a restriction to any more specific topic within interpretative archaeology, nor will the restriction on purely antiquarian papers be lifted for the next conference.

Currently, the conference proceedings are in preparation. It is expected that it will be possible to publish them as a volume of „Studien zur Kulturgeschichte Oberösterreichs“ in the second half of 2005. The 2nd “Interpreted Iron Ages”-conference, the 2. Linzer Gespräche zur interpretativen Eisenzeitarchäologie, are scheduled to take place at the same venue for fall 2006 (3.-5.11.2006). Submission of paper and poster proposals (with c 500 word abstract) is possible from now until the end of April 2006, when the programme for the next conference will be decided. We hope that we will be able to provide a similarly fertile climate for discussions then.

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Dezember 2004