

BIWEEKLY COLLOQUIUM

Semester topic “Challenging environment and social networking as drivers of change”

Monday, May 27th, 4:15 p.m.

“Out of the mist and onto the table – the origin and spread of spelt at the Neolithic-Bronze Age transition.”

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Other than most cultural plants, the origins of spelt are mysterious, as no wild ancestor is known – spelt solely arose under cultivation. At the end of the Neolithic spelt occurs as a new cultivar in disparate locations. In Switzerland and South-West Germany, it is found in Bell-Beaker contexts, in Lauda-Königshofen in a corded ware context and it was also found at Brødrene Gram in Denmark. Two hypotheses about its origin are discussed: in the Near East - but then it is not known by which route it came to Middle Europe - or spontaneously from already local wheat species - which would explain its sparse occurrence at disparate locations. If European and Asian spelt had different origins, both hypotheses might be true.

In the beginning perhaps being a crop weed spelt becomes later one of the main crops in the early and middle Bronze Age in western central Europe, the Alps and their foreland. From there it apparently spread to Scandinavia, to southern France, to the Pannonian basin, and Greece. It was never introduced to the Iberian Peninsula or to Italy (south of the Po valley).

The shift to spelt (and also millets) during the course of the Bronze Age reflects a change in subsistence strategies: for the first time large fields were worked with ploughs, the first meadows occur, the shift from two aisled to three aisled houses in Scandinavia hints to the stabling of animals which made dung for manuring available - to name only a few examples. Spelt is a relatively undemanding plant with respect to soil quality and gives good yields even under harsher conditions. This might have been an advantage in a more extensive land use strategy on less productive soils.

Venue: Leibnizstraße 1, Seminar Room 204