

## **RADIOCARBON DATING OF THE »ANTHROPOLITHEN« FROM THE FISSURE FILLINGS OF BAD KÖSTRITZ (THURINGIA)**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, human skeletal remains were found together with bones of Ice Age animals in the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* near Bad Köstritz (Lkr. Greiz). They came to light during limestone and gypsum mining in karst fissures of the upper Zechstein (Changhsingian, Late Permian) which were filled with Pleistocene sediments. The find context caused heated discussions in the scientific community (Böhme 2011): At that time, Georges Cuvier's catastrophism theory was still prevailing and according to these ideas human life could not have existed before the last universal flood. Therefore, the human remains had to be younger than the »primeval animals« discovered at the same time. Ernst Friedrich von Schlotheim (1820), one of the founders of palaeontology as a scientific discipline, called the remains »Anthropolithen« and introduced some of these artefacts into his collection.

In the subsequent decades these findings were largely forgotten and the true age of the human bones from Bad Köstritz as well as the development of the fissure sediments remained unclear. Therefore, the geologist Ernst Zimmermann required a systematic examination of a large number of diluvial as well as of modern human remains (Heß von Wichdorf 1931). In his publication on the geological exploration and history in Thuringia until 1843, Bruno von Freyberg (1932) pointed out the importance of the sites at Bad Köstritz, and the question whether humans already lived during the Diluvian was discussed here for the first time.

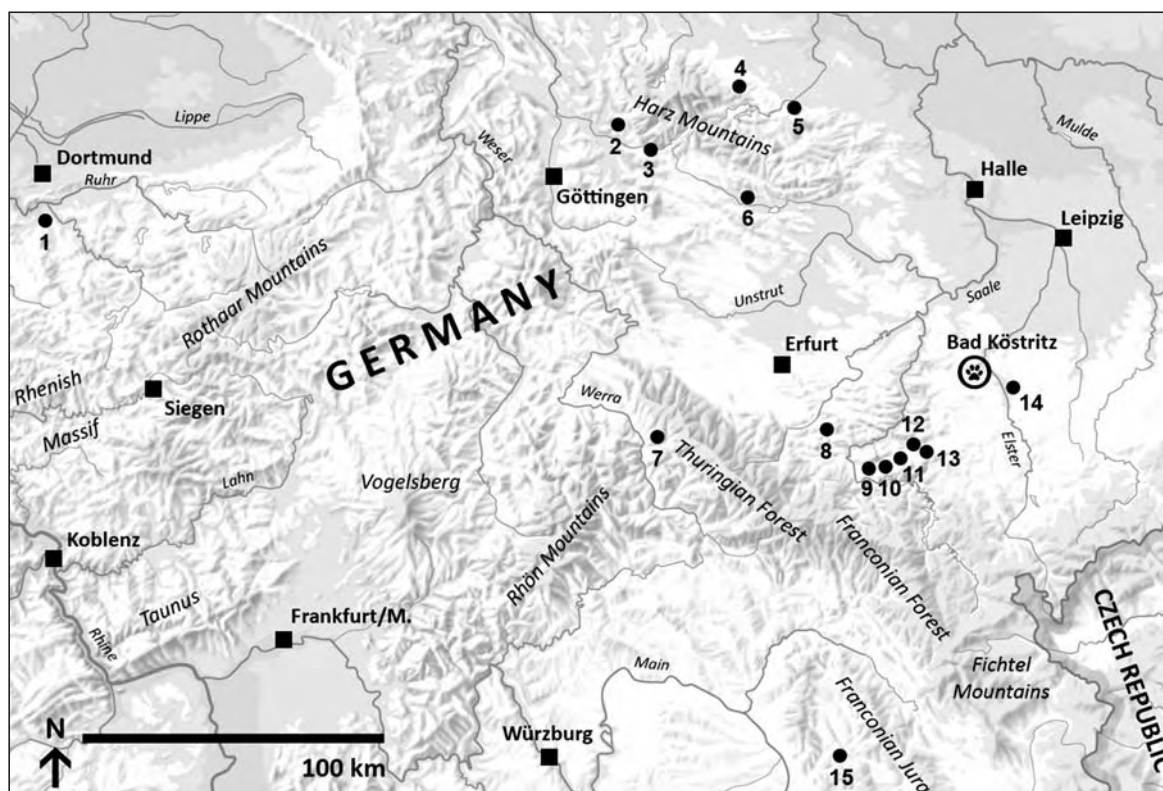
Some of the »Anthropolithen« of the Schlotheim collection have survived in the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin until today thus offering the opportunity to test the age of the human bones by radiocarbon dating (AMS) and to contribute to the explanation of the fissure fillings.

### **THE KARST FISSURE IN THE *WINTER'SCHER GIPSBRUCH***

The former gypsum quarry is located about 1 km northwest of Bad Köstritz (**fig. 1**) on the western side of the Elster valley near the village of Gleina. The site lies about 15-20m above the Holocene floodplain (Puff et al. 1995). The surface of the middle terrace, which is largely covered with Pleistocene sediments, is exposed here. At this location, the Zechstein deposits have been eroded, and karst formation of the Zechstein sediments continues up until today (Hornig et al. 1981).

The site had been discovered by the physician Karl Georg Ludwig Schottin who in 1828 presented his findings at the »Versammlung der Naturforscher und Aerzte« in Berlin. He concluded that probably bone remains of different age had been recognised in the sediment-filled fissures and that the activities of burrowing mammals (e. g. *Vulpes*) might have been responsible for the accumulation of the find assemblage (Schottin 1829). H. Heß von Wichdorf (1931) supported the idea of an animal burrowing system resulting in the deposition of younger faunal elements with the human remains in its fissures and cavities (see also Böhme 2011, 42).

The most important site of a mixed fauna and the human remains in the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* was found below 4m of diluvial clay in a c. 0.6-0.7 m wide channel. The channel was filled with loose boulders and diluvial and alluvial animal remains and human bones, and reached from the top of the gypsum cone



**Fig. 1** The locality of the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* in Bad Köstritz (Thuringia), including all caves of the German central uplands mentioned in the text, based on an orohydrographic map: **1** Hagen, Lennetal («Blätterhöhle»). – **2** Osterode am Harz («Lichtensteinhöhle»). – **3** Scharzfeld, Lkr. Osterode am Harz («Einhorn-Höhle»). – **4** Rübeland, Lkr. Harz («Rübeländer Höhlen»). – **5** Quedlinburg, Lkr. Harz (Seweckenberge). – **6** Kosackenberg near Bad Frankenhausen, Kyffhäuserkreis («Kulthöhlen»). – **7** Bad Liebenstein, Wartburgkreis (Altensteiner cave). – **8** Allendorf, Lkr. Saalfeld-Rudolstadt («Abri Fuchskirche»). – **9** Saalfeld, Lkr. Saalfeld-Rudolstadt («Teufelsbrücke»). – **10** Roter Berg near Kamsdorf, Lkr. Saalfeld-Rudolstadt («Fuchslöcher»). – **11** Burg Ranis, Saale-Orla-Kreis («Ilsenhöhle»). – **12** Oppurg, Saale-Orla-Kreis (Zechstein reef of Gamsenberg). – **13** Döbritz, Saale-Orla-Kreis («Urdhöhle», «Kniegrotte», «Wüste Scheuer»). – **14** Gera («Lindenthaler Hyänenhöhle»). – **15** Burggailenreuth, Ebermannstadt, Lkr. Forchheim (Gailenreuther cave). – (Map Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie with additions by O. Hampe).

steeply down 12 m to the bottom of the hill. It seems to be clear that the fissure fillings of the gypsum karst with older fauna were associated spatially with younger sediments.

Sediment fillings in fissures that were formed by karst processes and/or fracturing of rocks, with the occurrence of Pleistocene mammals and archaeological finds have repeatedly been discovered during mining or excavation in central Germany. Among Thuringian sites are the «Lindenthaler Hyänenhöhle» in the urban area of Gera (Liebe 1876; Auerbach 1929), the «Fuchslöcher» at Giebelstein on the Roter Berg near Kamsdorf (Lkr. Saalfeld-Rudolstadt; Richter 1879), and the fissure filling in the Zechstein reef of Gamsenberg (Saale-Orla-Kreis) south of Jena (Böhme 2001). In this context the finds from the gypsum karst fissure fillings of Seweckenberge near Quedlinburg (Lkr. Harz; Leibniz 1749) are of particular importance.

Although these fissure fillings may contain faunal elements of different age, they usually appear to have quite uniform sediments and older and younger associations can be better distinguished in cave deposits (e. g. «Ilsenhöhle» near Ranis [Saale-Orla-Kreis]: Hülle 1977; «Rübeländer Höhlen» [Lkr. Harz]: Schütt 1969; Steiner / Steiner 1969; Arnold et al. 1982).

Cave deposits with similar archaeological findings often occur in central Germany, in particular, in Thuringia (Walter 1985)<sup>1</sup>.



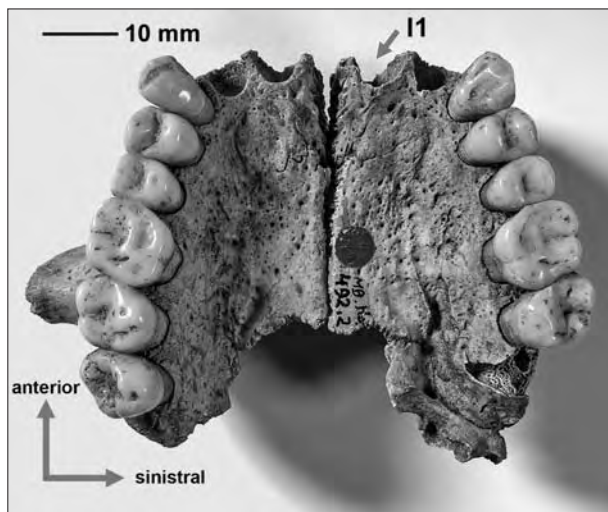
**Fig. 2** Overview of the Bad Köstritz »Anthropolithen« from the von Schlotheim collection in the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin. – (Photo C. Radke, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin).

## RADIOCARBON DATING OF THE HUMAN REMAINS

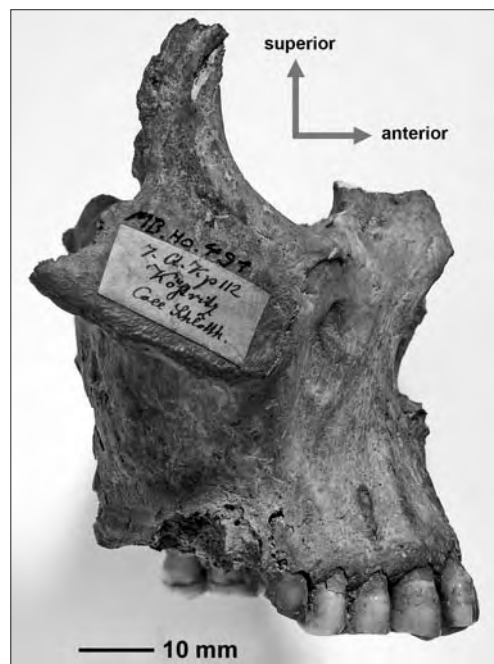
Ten objects belonging to the »Anthropolithen« from the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* are stored in the von Schlotheim collection of the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin (MB.Ho. 489-498). They display various states of preservation and consist of skull and dentition remains, and fragments of limb bones. In addition, there are a fragment of a left pelvic bone and two pieces of broken ribs (fig. 2). Furthermore, a significant number of fossil vertebrate remains is stored in the Berlin Museum with labels indicating that they have been found at the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* or Pohlitz (Böhme 2011). They include skeletal elements of amphibians (anurans), the common European adder, birds (including geese), and mammals such as eulipotyphlans (mole), shrews, rodents (myomorphs), lagomorphs, bats, carnivores (cave lion, cave hyena, fox), perissodactyls (horse, woolly rhinoceros), and artiodactyls (roe deer, red deer, reindeer, bison). In the Natural History Museum of London a human femur and parietal are stored also from the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* (BMNH M 16805, BMNH M 16806).

In September 2011 we took three samples of bones from the Berlin collection for AMS dating and  $^{13}\text{C}/^{15}\text{N}$  isotope analysis at the Aarhus laboratory in Denmark:

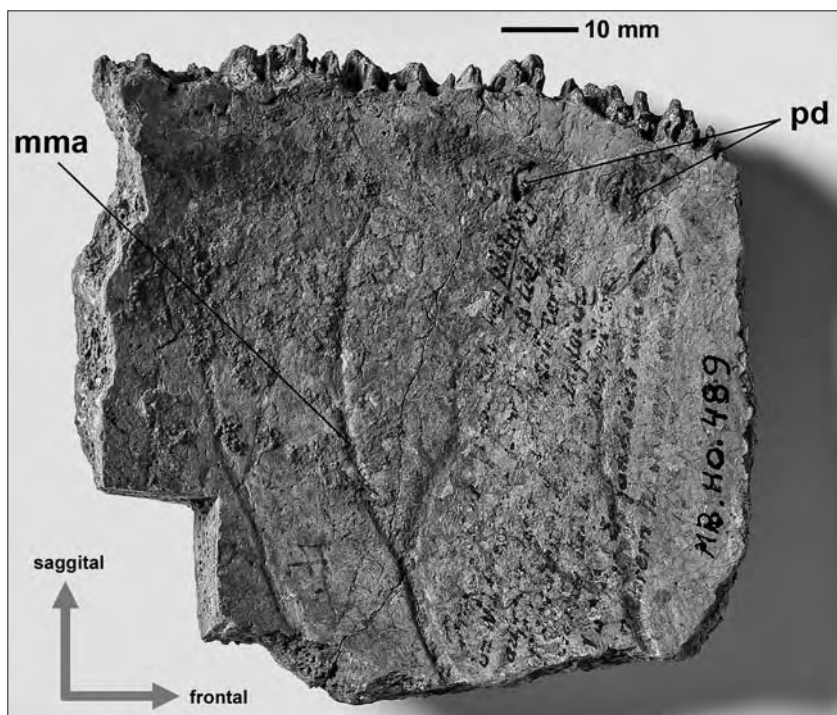
– sample 2011/1: first left upper incisor of a human jaw (inv. no. MB.Ho. 492; fig. 3)



**Fig. 3** *Homo sapiens*, MB.Ho. 492. Palatal view of the maxilla of which the investigated I1, sinistral originated (arrow). Calibrated age:  $1353 \pm 40$  BP (see tab. 1). – (Photo C. Radke, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin).



**Fig. 4** *Homo sapiens*, MB.Ho. 491. Right aspect of the maxilla. No collagen could be extracted from this specimen = age unknown. – (Photo C. Radke, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin).



**Fig. 5** *Homo sapiens*, MB.Ho. 489. Internal surface of the left parietal bone showing the ramified grooves for the middle meningeal artery (**mma**), and pacchionian depressions (**pd**) at the posterior margin (above) that become distinct in individuals of advanced age (Basmajian 1952; Mayet / Heil 1971). Calibrated age:  $4737 \pm 23$  BP (see tab. 1). – (Photo C. Radke, Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin).

– sample 2011/2: zygomatic surface of a human maxilla (inv. no. MB.Ho. 491; fig. 4)

– sample 2011/3: fragment of a human parietal (inv. no. MB.Ho. 489; fig. 5)

Together with one conventional radiocarbon date measured in the 1970s on the femur collected in 1820 (Gieseler 1971), a total of four radiocarbon measurements was conducted on the human remains from the

inv. no.	MB.Ho. 492	MB.Ho. 491	MB.Ho. 489
material	first upper incisor, left	zygomatic surface, maxilla	left parietal
description	only enamel left, not in one piece	no collagen	collagen
collagen yield	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.6 %
<sup>14</sup> C age	1353 ± 40 (ext)		4737 ± 23 (ext)
d <sup>13</sup> C (CF-CN)			-20.32 ± 0.1
d <sup>15</sup> N (CF-CN)			9.99 ± 0.12
d <sup>13</sup> C (dual-inlet)	-17.2 ± 0.7 (ext)		-20.21 ± 0.05
carbon fraction (MS)			0.418 ± 0.017
nitrogen fraction (MS)			0.146 ± 0.007
C : N ratio (MS)			3.33 ± 0.2
calibration and correction	calibration curve: IntCal09 (atmospheric)		
calibrated age	68.2 % probability 641 AD (62.7%) 690 AD 752 AD (5.5%) 762 AD  95.4 % probability 610 AD (83.5%) 722 AD 741 AD (11.9%) 770 AD		68.2 % probability 3631 BC (45.0%) 3578 BC 3573 BC (1.9%) 3569 BC 3535 BC (14.1%) 3517 BC 3397 BC (7.2%) 3385 BC  95.4 % probability 3634 BC (56.3%) 3555 BC 3540 BC (19.1%) 3506 BC 3427 BC (20.1%) 3381 BC

**Tab. 1** New radiocarbon dates on the human remains of the von Schlotheim collection from *Winter'scher Gipsbruch*. The probability method has been used to calculate the calibrated age ranges corresponding to 68.2% probability (1 $\sigma$ ) and 95.4% probability (2 $\sigma$ ). For more information on the radiocarbon dates see note 2.

*Winter'scher Gipsbruch*. Unfortunately, sample 2011/2 did not provide any collagen and only three radiocarbon dates are now available<sup>2</sup>.

Sample 2011/1 (MB.Ho. 492) dates to 1353 ± 40 BP (AAR-15693). The result is rather close to the earlier result of 1480 ± 125 BP obtained on the human femur which was found at a depth of about 15 m within Pleistocene sediments below the occurrence of rhinoceros remains (Gieseler 1971). The two dates thus indicate a deposition of human remains in the early medieval period (c. 550-720 AD).

The sample of the parietal fragment (MB.Ho. 489; sample 2011/3) is dated to 4737 ± 23 BP (AAR-15695) and proves an earlier, Neolithic deposition in the cave in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC (68.2 % probability: 3631-3385 cal BC). The <sup>13</sup>C value of -20.32 ± 0.1‰ and the <sup>15</sup>N value of 9.99 ± 0.12‰ indicate a terrestrial-based diet of the individual. The values are rather close to results for human remains from a Linearband Pottery culture context (Kreuz / Terberger in print) and from Neolithic inland sites in northern and eastern Germany of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium cal BC. The <sup>15</sup>N value of c. 10‰ might well be the result of a considerable part of protein rich food such as milk products and meat.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SITUATION AT WINTER'SCHER GIPSBRUCH

The interpretation of the findings in the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* as fillings of animal burrows appears questionable. The »fox or badger« channel dimensions given by H. Heß von Wichdorf (1931) down to a depth of about 12 m below the surface based on the descriptions by K. G. L. Schottin (von Schlotheim 1820) make this interpretation unlikely. The only detailed study of structures and sediments associated with a fossil animal burrow system has been conducted in northern Germany at Pisede near Malchin (Lkr. Meck-

lenburgische Seenplatte; Heinrich et al. 1983). There, a system of burrows used for several millennia in the postglacial period was documented. However, archaeological findings from this locality were not connected to the burrow system (Gramsch 1975).

For the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* at Bad Köstritz it is more likely that the subsidence of gypsum had been re-activated during the Holocene Climatic Optimum (Atlanticum) after the initial Weichselian filling of the probably Eemian hollows in the gypsum karst. As a consequence, new cavities appeared in the contact zone between the Pleistocene fissure fillings and the gypsum and younger sediments were deposited in them. The radiocarbon dates of the human remains from the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* match well with this interpretation. It is conceivable that these cavities were (temporarily) open and could be used for »funerary« rites from the Neolithic to early medieval times.

## DISCUSSION: HUMAN REMAINS FROM FISSURES AND CAVES

Human remains are known from fissures and caves in central Germany from different prehistoric periods. Important human bones of the Late Upper Palaeolithic are available from the Magdalenian layer of the »Kniegrotte« (Saale-Orla-Kreis; Feustel 1974; Höck 2000). This is in accordance with the general Magdalenian evidence, as loose human bones or secondary burials were repeatedly documented in caves (Orschiedt 2002; Street / Terberger / Orschiedt 2006; Kozłowski et al. 2012).

Scattered human remains from the »Blätterhöhle« in Westphalia date to the Preboreal (Orschiedt et al. 2008, 20; Orschiedt et al. 2010), and remains from the »Urdhöhle« (Saale-Orla-Kreis) can be related to the Boreal period (Terberger et al. 2003). Both sites prove the use of caves for the deposition and funeral rites during the Early Holocene. This is confirmed by further evidence from the Czech Republic, Belgium, France and Britain (Grünberg 2000; Terberger et al. 2003; Orschiedt et al. 2008). Child bones found at »Abri Fuchskirche« (Lkr. Saalfeld-Rudolstadt) are AMS dated to the Late Mesolithic (Erl-11929:  $7688 \pm 57$  BP; c. 6500 cal BC) and in this case the skeletal remains can probably be assigned to a primary burial (Küßner / Birkenbeil 2008-2009).

In the Neolithic Linearband Pottery culture caves were used for special treatments of human bones and/or funeral rites. This was for example the case at the »Jungfernhöhle« (Lkr. Bamberg) around 5000 cal BC. The »Blätterhöhle« represents a well-documented example for the significance of caves in burial rites during the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC (Orschiedt et al. 2008; 2010; 2012; Orschiedt 2012). At this site, the deposition of human remains of more than seven individuals probably related to the Wartberg culture can be proven for the period of c. 3600-3000 cal BC. We can well imagine that similar rites and depositions have occurred at the open karst fissure at the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch*. Around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium cal BC the transition from the Baalberge culture to the Salzmünde group took place in central Germany (Müller 1999), and we may expect that the dated individuals belonged to one of these cultural entities. It is interesting to notice that at this time collective burials were established in Hesse and Westphalia (Wartberg culture) and in the northern lowlands in megalithic tombs (Funnelbeaker culture) (Orschiedt 2012, 219). Caves and fissures might be interpreted as another location for collective burial rites.

A ritual interpretation of the human remains is supported by further evidence from caves of central Germany (e. g. Eisel 1886; Geyer / Moser / Walter 1970) and in particular by the Late Bronze Age finds of »Lichtensteinhöhle« (Osterode; Lkr. Harz) (Flindt 2009; Flindt 2010; Flindt et al. 2013) and by the »Kulthöhlen« (Kyffhäuserkreis; Behm-Blanke 1958; Behm-Blanke 1976; Flindt / Leiber 1998), where rituals and burials continued until the Late Hallstatt culture of the Iron Age (see also Grote / Terberger 2011; Orschiedt 2012).

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## Notes

- 1) Most famous are the caves in the stromatolith-bryozoan reefs of the Zechstein near Döbritz (Saale-Orla-Kreis) such as »Urdhöhle« (Feustel et al. 1971), »Kniegrotte« (Richter 1931; Feustel 1974), »Wüste Scheuer« (Feustel 1974), »Teufelsbrücke« near Saalfeld (Feustel 1980), and the joint cave »Ilsenhöhle« in a Zechstein reef near the castle of Ranis (Hülle 1977). Also of importance are the examples of the Gailenreuther cave in the Franconian Alb (Lkr. Forchheim; Esper 1774; Rosenmüller 1804), the Altensteiner cave in Bad Liebenstein (Lkr. Wartburg) discovered in 1798, and the »Einhorn-Höhle« near Scharzfeld (Lkr. Osterode) in the western Harz Mountains, already known since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (see **fig. 1**).
- 2) <sup>14</sup>C ages are reported here in conventional radiocarbon years BP (before present = 1950; Stuiver / Polach 1977). All calculated <sup>14</sup>C ages have been corrected for fractionation so as to refer the result to be equivalent with the standard  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  value of  $-25\text{‰}$  (wood). Reported  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  and  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  values for the AMS datings have been measured by high-precision stable isotope mass spectrometry. Calibrated ages in calendar years have been obtained from the calibration curves in Reimer et al. (2009) by means of the OxCal v4.1 calibration programme using the terrestrial calibration curve, IntCal09 (Bronk Ramsey 2009).

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### Zusammenfassung / Abstract / Résumé

#### Radiokarbondatierungen der »Anthropolithen« aus den Spaltenfüllungen von Bad Köstritz (Thüringen)

Der Beitrag diskutiert die Entstehung und die Funde einer Karstspalte im Winter'schen Gipsbruch bei Bad Köstritz (Lkr. Greiz), die im frühen 19. Jahrhundert entdeckt wurde. Die aus der Spaltenfüllung geborgenen eiszeitlichen Tierknochen und menschlichen Überreste (»Anthropolithen«) spielten eine Rolle in der Debatte um den frühen Menschen. Neue Radiokarbondatierungen von diesen im Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin aufbewahrten Menschenresten (Sammlung von Schlotheim) stützen mit einem frühmittelalterlichen und einem neolithischen Alter (4. Jt. v. Chr.) die These, dass sich die Karstbildung im Holozän fortsetzte und so pleistozäne und holozäne Sedimente mit Knochenresten zur Ablagerung kamen. Abschließend wird die Bedeutung von Höhlen und Spalten für die prähistorische Deponierung/ Bestattung von Menschenresten diskutiert.

#### Radiocarbon dating of the »Anthropolithen« from the fissure fillings of Bad Köstritz (Thuringia)

This article discusses the development and finds of a karst fissure in the *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* near Bad Köstritz (Lkr. Greiz). The site was detected in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the collection of Ice Age animal bones and human remains played a role in the discussion of early men at that time. The human remains from the von Schlotheim collection (Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin) were sampled for radiocarbon dating and an early medieval and a Neolithic date (4<sup>th</sup> millennium cal BC) support the interpretation of ongoing karst development during the Holocene. This process explains the mixture of Pleistocene and Holocene finds in the filling. The final chapter discusses the role of fissures and caves for prehistoric burials/depositions of human remains.

#### La datation par le radiocarbone des »Anthropolithen« contenus dans les fissures de Bad Köstritz (Thuringe)

Le texte contribue à la discussion sur l'origine et les découvertes faites dans une fissure karstique de la région du *Winter'scher Gipsbruch* pres de Bad Köstritz (Lkr. Greiz). Elle a été découverte au début du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Des ossements animaux et des dépouilles humaines datent de la période glaciaire et jouent un grand rôle dans débat regardant les premiers hommes. Ces dépouilles humaines, archivées au Museum für Naturkunde de Berlin dans la collection du Baron von Schlotheim, ont été examinées avec une datation par le radiocarbone qui les date dans le 4<sup>e</sup> millénaire av. J. C. (Néolithique) et le début du Moyen Âge. Ces nouveaux résultats servent à soutenir la thèse que la formation du karst continuait à l'Holocène et pour cette raison des sédiments pléistocènes et holocènes avec des restes d'os pouvaient se stratifier. Enfin, l'importance des grottes et fissures concernant des rites d'enterrement préhistorique est discutée.

Traduction: M. Schultka

### Schlüsselwörter / Keywords / Mots clés

Thüringen / Neolithikum / Höhle / Karstspalte / Menschenreste

Thuringia / Neolithic / cave / karst fissure / human remains

Thuringe / Néolithique / caverne / fissure karstique / dépouilles humaines

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