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ence to other late LBK killings, and indeed also to late fifth millennium killings in Lower Alsace (Lefranc et al. 2021); and the stresses, strains and fissions of LBK communal life could have been explored through the example of Vaihingen, not far from the Rhine valley (Bogaard et al. 2011; Bogaard et al. 2016). That is not to say that the dead represented at Herxheim were definitely killed on the spot, and the discussion of bone freshness noted above should be remembered, but given what we know of other LBK massacres, that is certainly plausible. I am inclined to follow Andrea Zeeb-Lanz (2019b) here in her proposal of mass sacrifice in the context of troubled times following raids and attacks. The authors here stress their inferred movement of bodies or body parts into Herxheim, but despite their emphasis on fragmentation and bodily mobility, they do not state explicitly what their vision is of the fate of the remains unaccounted for.

Given all the uncertainties remaining, it is foolish to be dogmatic about what really went on at Herxheim. I hope that continuing research can realistically address the problems still remaining. I would want to worry about the numbers of the dead involved. Can we be sure that the current extrapolated figure is robust? Could there be 'sidedness' in the patterns of deposition around the enclosure? It would be good to see further isotopic and aDNA analyses of the human remains, to try to pin down the origins of the mortuary population even further. I am not familiar with the statistical clustering method for analysis of the radiocarbon dates, as discussed by the authors. I would advocate a renewed attempt, suitably funded, at multiple radiocarbon dates to be interrogated in a Bayesian chronological framework, with robust priors to work around the calibration plateau. It would be desirable to see continuing detailed research up and down the Rhine valley, so that the state of settlement in the latest LBK and in its aftermath could be compared in detail from region to region (cf. Denaire et al. 2017). In these ways, a better understanding of the context and history of Herxheim may emerge in due course. I do not think that the authors here have come up with the best answers, but their stimulating paper may become part of the motivation for continuing and renewed research on this remarkable site.

Modelling the unique: fragmentation, bodily mobility and the case of Herxheim

By Daniela Hofmann

This is a thought-provoking piece, in which the authors use a coherent theoretical approach to provide an alternative model for one of the most controversial, but also one of the most well-studied sites of the European Neolithic. Given the huge amount of information available and the many conflicting viewpoints, this is no easy task, but it has borne fruit: John Chapman, Bisserka Gaydarska and Tina Jakob treat us to new ideas of why the unique body-transforming practices at Herxheim may have begun or ended when they did, provide new arguments for moving the study of the *Linearbandkeramik* (LBK) away from a limiting sedentist paradigm, and offer a concerted interpretative effort concerning the modalities of deposition at the site. Basically, they have opened a whole lot of cans of worms at once, and it is hard to know how to do this justice in the framework of such a short comment.

Am I convinced about the reading? Well (perhaps fittingly for Herxheim), only in parts. The argument that is being framed here boils down to two axes of criticism of the model published by Andrea Zeeb-Lanz (2019a): the question of who the people were who ended up at Herxheim and how they got there; and the question of how the depositional process worked. These two issues are not necessarily linked, and I am in far greater agreement with the authors on one than on the other.

The idea that the remains of already deceased individuals were brought to Herxheim is certainly interesting and creative, as the sheer number of people buried at the site has always been an interpretative problem. Post-mortem mobility has also been raised in quite a different context by Ensor (2021, 17–30), who suggests that the dead were returned to their natal communities to be buried with their respective birth paternal (or maternal) lineage group, thereby critiquing the widespread interpretation of patrilocality offered on the basis of genetic and isotopic studies of cemeteries. If something like this was the case here, the many diverse birth locations represented in the isotopic values would suggest a spatially dispersed lineage, much more so than on contemporary cemetery sites. This is interesting, and could for example be investigated further with additional aDNA work aimed at revealing biological relatedness. In contrast, Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob here put forward a model whereby different settlement communities bring "their" dead to Herxheim, in other words it is still co-residence-based units that would be relevant for defining identities. Still, it is argued that these units are now more dispersed than before, and require a central place. Again, this is a suggestion worthy of further investigation. Are there always central ritual sites when LBK communities expand? How does a central place like Herxheim compare with the proposed central sites of the earliest LBK phase, such as Bad Nauheim-Nieder-Mörlen (e. g. Schade-Lindig 2002; Schade-Lindig / Schwitalla 2003; Nehlich et al. 2009)? Or do we now, at the end of the LBK, see the first intimations of a pattern that was to become more common later in the Neolithic, with rondel enclosures or with the causewayed monuments for instance of the Michelsberg culture, which can be read as fixed centres around which a more mobile community moves?

Clearly, this opens up avenues of additional research. What is more, this new model for Herxheim contributes to the overdue de-sedentarisation of the European Neolithic. Not every site needs to be settled long-term by all of its residents, and not all kinds of mobility are due to crisis. With a view to the Alpine foreland, one can suggest many other models in which a resilient system of landscape exploitation can be maintained through mobility at some social scales (e. g. Ebersbach et al. 2017 for a summary). The question is when such systems were developed, and perhaps the transition at the end of the LBK is one likely point.

One key issue, as Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob rightly stress, is dating – still very imperfectly understood for the latest LBK. Relaxing the constraints of the model proposed in the Herxheim site monograph, as has been attempted here, opens the possibility that Herxheim could have been "fed" with the normally occurring dead. We would not require long-distance raids abducting hundreds of people whose 'Home Communities' were somehow unable to defend themselves, nor mass sacrifices. This is one of the key contributions of this article, and the different possibilities proposed should be taken seriously and tested further. In particular, we now also need more research in the uplands to try and identify when they were first visited by LBK communities, and how intensively they were ever settled. Building on the work of Sandra Fetsch (2012), situating Herxheim in its wider regional context remains a priority.

This leaves us with the problem of the extraordinary violence, possibly including cannibalism for some individuals, meted out on the human remains, which has always been stressed as unique to Herxheim. Given the rivalling conclusions of the various anthropological studies, there may be more variation here than is generally acknowledged, and there may be room for more than one scenario. All this opens once again the question of LBK personhood, in how far fragmentation may have been a part of the post-mortem biography of (most?) people and objects. Was the character of persons and objects changed by fragmentation, or did fragments remain fundamentally tied to previous identities? Did it matter how extensively and even violently fragmentation was carried out, can we distinguish care of kin from violence against enemies, or is this hopeless from our modern-

day perspective? These are questions of a largely philosophical nature, but in as far as they open new readings, and help to integrate Herxheim with what is known from other mortuary practices, they are worth pursuing.

So far, then, I am in agreement that our perspectives on Herxheim can fruitfully be widened, and that this helps us address broader questions about life and death in the LBK. But what about the idea that the remains of specific pots and specific people were deliberately combined to create a specific alliance? Here I must confess myself a sceptic. The sheer quantity of remains, increased if one takes into account the ditch fills and the enclosure interior lost to erosion, would make it a virtually impossible task to keep track of each fragment, especially if there was a longer timescale to the site. The level of administrative work for the group of Guardians (thought to be small) would be immense, indeed it would tax the capabilities of most modern-day administrators, even in Germany. In addition, most remains (other than calottes and a few bundles of bone tools, for example, see Haack 2020) are not carefully combined with anything, they have quite evidently been tipped into ditch segments in one fell swoop. This creates a general link between people, objects, and the places they came from, but it seems to suggest rather an effacement of the specifics, of the individual person and the individual piece. Fragmentation – in the form of theatrically charged breakage – is a powerful agent here, but one of transformation, in which old identities and associations are dissolved (see also Hofmann 2020b).

The depositional model proposed by A. Zeeb-Lanz (2019b) thus seems to provide the more convincing explanation. If, as Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob suggest, Herxheim was in use for longer, and there were more gatherings, then above-ground deposition of parts of the material (at least for a time) can explain the different post-depositional histories of re-fitting fragments, while the incorporation of material into the ditches could have been periodic, and not necessarily marked with great formality, explaining the appearance of the spreads or "concentrations". Moreover, we do not yet have any counterparts for Herxheim – for example the sites hundreds of kilometres away where many sherds of the Palatinate style would turn up – and that could support the proposal of sherd exchange made by the authors here. This does not detract from the fact that associations may have been created, cemented or challenged at Herxheim, and the "ritual midden" substance created by fragmentation and admixture may not have been thought of as powerfully charged. But this does not rely on the small-scale management and tracking of every single piece.

Indeed, while the elaboration of a quite detailed alternative model is thought-provoking, it also perhaps tries to challenge too much at once, turning everything on its head: from ritual rubbish we go to careful management of each single fragment, from a large population to a small group of Guardians, from victims to ancestors, from sedentism to mobility, and from a short-term event to recurring pilgrimages. In the pursuit of this general reckoning, some nuances are also lost. For example, by *Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob p. 15–16* it reads as though the term 'Home Communities' relates to both people in the uplands relatively near Herxheim and those several hundreds of kilometres away in Czechia or Bavaria, which may unhelpfully blur different sorts of relations. Also, it is far from "clear" (as stated on *p. 21* by *Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob*) that all the remains deposited at Herxheim were somehow "ancestral", a term that suggests specific genealogical ideas and would require further investigation and comparison with other sites, in particular given the skewed demographic profile. It is not explained how the Guardians, few in number, could pull in quite so many resources and maintain an unparalleled long-distance network when they had no economic resources of their own, nor why they would go homicidal once this no longer worked. The supposed correlation between declining frequency of imports and declining density of deposition could, however, be tested statistically. In sum, many elements of this detailed scenario are per-

haps deliberately provocative. After all, the data as they stand are not clear-cut enough to absolutely support any single position: they remain blurry at the edges. This thoughtful article thus challenges researchers to look at the material afresh, rather than providing the final word. I hope that the challenge will be taken up.

The problem, if we want to call it that, is that Herxheim is so unique. In spite of recognisable elements, no other enclosure is like it, few sites can begin to rival the level of imports, and no depositional event reaches this level of complexity. No other site has therefore caused a similar level of controversy. The number of people interred remains difficult for any interpretation, as does the quantity and quality of material, and the fact that in spite of the incredible amount of work put down by a large team only parts of it could be studied and published. The severe erosion that has impacted this site, like so many others, will also always be a limitation for the understanding of depositional processes.

Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob have also grappled with this uniqueness and these limitations, and like others before them have picked on different aspects from which to attack the problem, and reached conclusions written from this necessarily partial perspective. As they themselves state, any narrative of Herxheim will be a simplification. Their main success is the gauntlet they throw down for future research. From their model, even the more provocative parts of it, one can generate propositions for further research that can then inform on LBK social dynamics more broadly. For example, previous isotopic and aDNA research has tended to privilege whole interments – but do fragmented remains everywhere have a greater variability of origins? Do they require their own sampling, recording and interpretative strategies? Is there room for more statistical interpretation of recurrent depositional associations, at Herxheim and beyond? Who was in the uplands when? Even more crucially, the authors have provided us with a lively account that sees LBK people as political agents, rather than standard entities pushed around by climatic and demographic events beyond their control.

Mine is therefore a middle of the road position – there is much here that I found inspiring and important for future research, notably concerning various aspects of mobility, and much that I found less convincing, in particular regarding the micro-management of depositional processes. In this case, the middle of the road, half-way between slave-raiding blood-thirsty raiders and homicidal ritual Guardians angry at falling import levels, may be a dangerous place to be. Yet we are some way from a resolution, and will never be able to understand Herxheim completely. Undoubtedly, the excavation and study of this site have lastingly expanded our horizons of what it is possible to think and write about the LBK. Chapman / Gaydarska / Jakob take us one step further along the road, but there is still some way to go.

After the break? Against parts and wholes

By Stefan Schreiber

John Chapman's, Bisserka Gaydarska's, and Tina Jakob's article makes us pause and reflect on many levels. I agree with the authors on a lot of aspects. However, I am happy to contribute a few more thoughts from a New Materialist point of view. As I am not an expert in the archaeology of *Linearbandkeramik* (LBK) myself, I would like to focus on the theoretical part, even if it takes up a rather small part of the article.

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References of figures

Fig. 1: J. Chapman / B. Gaydarska / T. Jakob. – *Fig. 2:* re-drawn by L. Woodard from authors' multiple sources. – *Fig. 3:* B. Gaydarska. – *Fig. 4:* Zeeb-Lanz / Haack 2016, fig. 2. – *Fig. 5:* Haack 2016a, pl. 66. – *Fig. 6:* Denaire 2019, fig. 10. – *Fig. 7a:* re-drawn by L. Woodard from Zeeb-Lanz 2019b, fig. 6. – *Fig. 7b:* re-drawn by L. Woodard from Turck 2019, fig. 56, modified by L. Hies (RGK). – *Fig. 8:* re-drawn by L. Woodard from original by J. Chapman, B. Gaydarska and T. Jakob. – *Fig. 9:* A. Häußer, GDKE Außenstelle Speyer. – *Fig. 10:* Haack 2016b, pl. 66,1; 67,2. – *Fig. 11:* Haack 2016b, pl. 71,3. – *Fig. 12:* A. Zeeb-Lanz, GDKE Außenstelle Speyer. – *Fig. 13:* Turck 2019, fig. 59. – *Fig. 14:* Turck 2019, fig. 51. – *Tab. 1:* J. Chapman / B. Gaydarska / T. Jakob, layout: L. Hies (RGK).