

UTE SEIDEL, Oberderdingen-Grossvillars, Lkr. Karlsruhe. *Epirössen und der Beginn der Michelsberger Kultur*. With contributions by Tillmann Baum, Jutta Hoffstadt, Michael J. Kaiser, Birgit Regner-Kamlah and Werner Scharff. *Forschungen und Berichte zur Archäologie in Baden-Württemberg* volume 21. Reichert-Verlag, Wiesbaden 2022. € 59,00. ISBN 978-3-7520-0647-6. 392 pages with 103 b/w figures and 46 colour figures, 26 tables and 22 plates.

Starting out from one site, Ute Seidel covers the Epirössen and Michelsberg periods in southwest Germany. “Epirössen” is a term for a period that encompasses the centuries after the Central European major Middle Neolithic archaeological cultural entity of Rössen, largely confined to western Central Europe. The term was coined by now Münster-based German prehistoric archaeologist Ralf Gleser (GLESER 1995), and is largely accepted by most Central European scholars. Epirössen encompasses terminal Middle Neolithic (MNL) entities, such as Bischheim, but also regional groups like Schussenried and Schwieberdingen, basically all southwest German typological predecessors to the Young Neolithic (*Jungneolithikum*) Michelsberg culture (MK).

It is also the period of major social and possibly economic changes in Central Europe as Epirössen runs parallel to the eastward expansion of the early Michelsberg culture from the Paris Basin / Ardennes to the Rhineland / Middle Rhine Valley. In absolute terms, Epirössen encompasses the centuries between 4500/4400 and 4200/4100 BCE.

U. Seidel’s book is first and foremost conceptualised as a site monography, but in the second part, goes much beyond that aspect. The site in question appears in the title, Oberderdingen-Grossvillars, a small, rural hamlet near Karlsruhe, in the Kraichgau hill-region, bordering the Upper Rhine valley, and situated in the modern state of Baden-Württemberg. Data presented goes back to a *German Research Foundation* (DFG) project of 2008–2014 which ran parallel to another project on MK in France and Germany, namely “The Beginnings of Social Complexity: Enclosures, Raw Material Utilization and Territoriality in the Neolithic. German-French Research on Michelsberg Culture”, financed by the French Agence National de la Recherche (ANR) and the DFG. Unfortunately, the reviewer has not yet finalised this project’s publication, and therefore is filled with deep respect towards the achievement by Seidel’s complex publication.

Discovered in the early 1990s, the site of Oberderdingen was partially excavated in 2000/2001 revealing a considerable number of Late MNL (Bischheim) and early YNL (Michelsberg) features. These were located on a slightly elevated promontory. Seidel starts out by meticulously describing the numerous features and the archaeological material contained therein (pp. 20–33). This can be typologically divided into ceramics from the Bischheim horizon and ceramics from the Michelsberg horizon. Apart from numerous pits, there are also remains of what might have been a palisade.

The following pages are devoted to an again meticulous description of the respective vessel units, and their decorations (pp. 37–64). This is followed by other materials such as lithics and bone artefacts (pp. 65–68). This section is complemented by excellent high-resolution photos and plates with detailed drawings at the end of the volume. All in all, the material is well represented, and the volume will serve as an excellent ceramics reference publication for the period.

The next chapter 2.5 then discusses the typological classification of the Bischheim ceramics (pp. 71–80). Seidel attributes this assemblage to a regional Bischheim style of the 44th/43rd centuries cal BC (p. 75). However, there were no typological indications for any contacts to early Michelsberg. Chapter 2.7 is a brief description of the lithic material from the site (n= 13), written by Jutta Hoffstadt (pp. 81–83), Michael Kaiser added a very short chapter (2.8) on the raw materials (pp. 84). The majority of the artefacts were made out of Jurassic chert, one out of the tabular variety from Baidersdorf (*Plattenhornstein*).

The following parts of the volume are then devoted to more general questions, starting out with a comparison of the Epirössen horizon and Michelsberg (Part II). The first chapter in part II briefly describes the research history (pp. 86–88), the second chapter is devoted to the spatial dimension of the interrelationship (pp. 89–114). This chapter is co-authored by Tillmann Baum, who was responsible for the GIS-based analyses. On page 110 and following, Seidel takes the lead again sums up the results. First and foremost, visibility field analyses show that enclosures had a function in controlling the landscape, possibly also in overseeing transportation routes. Another important insight is that the MK arrived from outside the study region and occupied the same profitable soils as the antecedent Epirössen groups, pushing those gradually aside into less favourable environmental niches.

On the following pages Seidel – again meticulously – brings together botanical and zoological information on the economic aspects of the MK land use, concluding that a dominance of cattle and a farming strategy different from the Epirössen groups cannot be supported by the southwest German data (pp. 110–114). At the same time however, Seidel does note that this regional data base may well be insufficient and is contradicted by faunal data from nearby Switzerland. The latter, and other evidence would make an agropastoralist economy, different from the preceding period, more likely for the Young Neolithic (JACOMET et al. 2016).

The debate about an agropastoral orientation of Michelsberg economy has recently been complemented by a Europe-wide study on milk-use, in which data from a number of Michelsberg sites were included (EVERSHED et al. 2022). These Michelsberg samples are responsible for the particularly high signal (50%+) in milk sherds in Central Europe between 4000 and 3500 BCE.

The following chapter 3 (pp. 115–208) of Seidel's monography deals with the stylistic relationship between Epirössen and earliest Linear Pottery culture (LBK; *Linearbandkeramische Kultur*) in southwest Germany, starting out with a review of the past and current discussion (pp. 115–118). She introduces regional overviews from throughout Michelsberg, also including Hessen. Apparently, though, she was unaware of past and ongoing studies particularly in the Rhine-Main region and adjacent landscapes, like the hill-top site of Kapellenberg. Admittedly, the first dissertation on that region was never printed by a publisher but it is officially and publicly available as a printout from the Johannes Gutenberg-University library in Mainz, Germany (ZIMMER 2012). Much easier available is a summary with initial information (ZIMMER 2011).

It seems, that Seidel had finished her text at the same time (2017) when another dissertation on Michelsberg in Hessa was about to be submitted, namely the one by Sandra Fetsch. Therefore, the new data and dates have only made it sporadically into the volume, mostly in footnotes (such as number 529 on p. 117 or 1338 on p. 212). The dissertation by S. Fetsch is now published online, containing all dates and data (FETSCH 2021). Also available is another publication by FETSCH (2020).

To complete Seidel's overview, it may be noted here that Fetsch also postulated an expansion of Michelsberg into the Rhein-Main region from the west, with early sites dating to 4200 BCE. According to her study initial settlements were few and far between, but were installed close to salt sources, indicating that this resource may have played an important role in expanding into this region.

Chapter 3.2 of Seidel's monograph is then concerned with the various stylistic Late Middle Neolithic/Epirössen groups bordering Michelsberg, such as Bischheim, Aichbühl, Schussenried, Schwieberdingen, and various others (pp. 119–149). Analyses are based on pottery decoration styles.

Following others, Seidel stresses the socially “informative character” of ceramic decoration styles, which is seen as enforcing group identities (p. 119). These stylistic analyses are completed by a

spatial representation of the various Epirössen style groups, which shows their gradual retreat from west to east, during the periods of Michelsberg expansion (Phase I and II). A regional southwest German analysis in higher spatial resolution (pp. 185–194) shows, how Michelsberg gradually expanded into the region, continuously replacing regional ceramic styles. This expansion is accompanied by a southward movement of Michelsberg enclosures, a phenomenon which had already been discussed and mapped by Erwin Keefer and Rüdiger Krause (KEEFER/KRAUSE 1992). Their line of argument is now much extended and filled with abundant new data. Following E. Keefer and R. Krause, Seidel provided a fine regional study on the territorial expansion of Michelsberg culture.

It is a bit unfortunate, however, that Seidel's line of argument is almost entirely restricted to ceramic styles and motifs, without considering other components or internal social dynamics. The latter is largely due to the fact that she worked qualitatively, not quantitatively. Therefore, her approach remains monothetic, without considering dynamic changes in signalling processes. Nevertheless, her approach does enhance the traditional typo-chronological methodology for southwest Germany by underlining that chronological charts (like the one presented on pp. 220) are shaped by social and political processes.

Chapter 4 of part II is devoted to the age model of the Michelsberg culture (pp. 209–219). Seidel discusses a considerable number of local and regional past and current chronologies together with a typo-chronological discussion of styles and their respective local origins. The treatment of ¹⁴C-Dates is a bit 'traditional', in that Seidel only uses single calibrated age measurements to support and back up her typo-chronological age model. This is all the more surprising, as she had recently spearheaded a publication with a complex Bayesian age-model of the site of Heilbronn-Klingenberg "Schlossberg" (SEIDEL et al. 2016). A wider scale Bayesian age model would have helped to estimate and validate the chronological questions addressed in the new publication. Also, a summed probability distribution calibration of all dates would have helped to visualise the dynamics in form of a time series. The table presented instead in chapter 5 on pages 222–223 is good, very detailed, but not so helpful when it comes to e. g. population dynamics, in relation to other data – e. g. climate – during this rather interesting period. In any case is chapter 5 the last chapter of the monography, rounding up the book, and followed by German, English and French summaries.

The volume has a thorough number of appendices, with a lot of additional information, like a site-focused catalogue on the major site of Oberderdingen-Großvillars, but also a catalogue of the Epirössen sites mentioned in the text, as well as Michelsberg sites in the state of Baden-Württemberg, moreover a list of the ¹⁴C-dates addressed in the chronological part with an extensive table with single plot dates. Particularly the latter body of data would have been of interest for a wider audience working with ¹⁴C-dates and age-models, therefore it would have been good to make them accessible in a digital format on any of the repositories available for the storage and publication of data. As it is now, this information has to be extracted from the PDF version of the volume (https://www.academia.edu/100848427/2022_Oberderdingen_Grossvillars_KA_Epir%C3%B6ssen_und_der_Beginn_der_Michelsberger_Kultur [last access 10.07.2024]). The book ends with a series of high-quality plates showing ceramic material from Großvillars and neighbouring sites.

Summing up, Ute Seidel's book is a meticulously collated study, full of highly informative detail covering various aspects of the archaeological record in southwest Germany and beyond, between 4800 and 3900 BCE. The volume is an exceptional example of positivist German traditional typo-chronology, garnished with additional details on settlement systems and economy. It will serve as a rich source for further analyses on topics such as population movements and dynamics, social conflict, and settlement dynamics of farming and agro-pastoral societies in the Central European Middle and Young Neolithic. As such, it is certainly guaranteed a long shelf-life.

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