

Eva Lenneis (ed.), *Erste Bauerndörfer - Älteste Kultbauten. Die frühe und mittlere Jungsteinzeit in Niederösterreich*. Wien 2018: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, pp. 479. numerous figures in text. Archäologie Niederösterreichs 1.

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A synthetic overview of the whole prehistory and early history of a country or a certain region is always an ambitious task that poses demanding challenges. Researchers involved in such a task face many controversial questions today: who is the audience for such projects? What has to be chosen out of the constantly growing data and how should it be presented? Ernst Lauermaun and Franz Pieler, editors of a new series 'Archäologie Niederösterreichs' (Archaeology of Lower Austria) followed a quite different perspective than the recent 'The Past Societies' series in Poland (Urbańczyk 2016).

The new Austrian series draws upon a five volume work from the 1990s but significantly exceeds its capacity: a printed hardback edition of not less than 11 volumes is planned, and e-book versions of them are scheduled as well.

The whole series is addressed to everyone interested in the prehistory of the Lower Austrian countryside and this broad, but still quite local target group, explicitly approached by the head of the government (*Landeshauptfrau*) in the foreword of the first book already published, justifies the choice of the publication language: it is consequently only in German, without any English summary.

Interestingly, specific volumes are not published in chronological order. The first that was released in January 2018 and is reviewed here deals with the early and middle Neolithic (MN): the Linear Pottery Culture (LBK) and succeeding western group of the Lengyel Culture (LC) as well as to a limited extent the Stroke Pottery Culture (STK). This volume was edited by Eva Lenneis, who invited 17 researchers to participate in this project.

In the traditional printed form of the book diverse modern techniques have been applied, for example virtual reconstructions and computer visualisations. In general numerous excellent figures: maps, plans, photos and drawings as well as the overall outstanding quality of this edition are its real strength. It is both an intellectual and sensual pleasure to hold such a book in one's hand and turn its pages.

It is very hard to make an overview of the whole period in one book and it is similarly difficult to summarise it in a brief review. The presented book has a lot of various types of information, very condensed, and although its predecessor was published not so long ago (Lenneis *et al.*, 1995), the growth of new data obtained due to various large-scale emergency excavations as well as special research projects is really impressive. Everyone can pick out something particularly interesting for him- or herself that is why this review will present quite a subjective view of this excellent book.

The whole volume starts off with an introduction (chapter 1), which contains a brief history of research on the early and middle Neolithic periods in Lower Austria (Joris Coolen, Michael Doneus, Elisabeth Rammer). This is followed by a presentation of a settlement of specific cultures on a regional level with relation to different natural conditions (Joris Coolen), elaborated further in more detail for selected micro-regions that were the subjects of intensive research projects, such as the Horn basin (Franz Pieler), the Melk region, known only from non-invasive survey programs (Joris Coolen) as well the St. Pölten region, extensively studied due to recent emergency excavations (Christoph Blesl and Eva Lenneis).

The core part of this volume consists of two main chapters corresponding to the main chronological parts of the period in question: chapter 2 deals with the early Neolithic LBK culture, chapter 3 with LC and STK cultures of the middle Neolithic. The structure of both chapters is very similar. At their beginnings, houses and settlements are presented, although the description of the LBK (by Eva Lenneis) is much longer than that of the MN cultures (Eva Lenneis, Elisabeth Rammer). This is due to a much better state of research on the early Neolithic, which enables the application of hierarchical division of settlements into special sites, central sites, secondary sites and single households. Especially in this part of the book, much hitherto unpublished data is presented. The following sub-chapter dealing with LBK burials (Eva Lenneis), both from graveyards and settlements is similarly much longer than the corresponding section for the LC and STK (Eva Lenneis, Christine Neugebauer-Maresch), which reflects the unequal quantities of data for both periods in Lower Austria. When it comes to finds of figurines as well as anthropo- and zoomorphic vessels for the two stages of the Neolithic, the similar richness of the material available leads to comparably detailed chapters on cult and religion (LBK by Nadezdha Kotova, Peter Stadler, Eva Lenneis, MN by Elisabeth Rammer, Michael Doneus).

All other 'mundane' artefacts are described in the following sub-chapters under the common title 'material culture'. After the pottery with a discussion of the respective relative chronologies based on it (LBK by Eva Lenneis and Franz Pieler, LC by Michael Doneus and Elisabeth Rammer, STK by Eva Lenneis), lithics (both parts by Inna Mateiciucová), ground stone (LBK by Eva Lenneis, MN by Gerhard Trnka), as well as bone, teeth and antler artefacts (all by Daniela Fehlmann) are presented. In the latter parts, one can find some remarks on the Neolithic subsistence and economy, which constitutes a good transition to subsequent sub-chapters on 'economy – trade – raw materials'. The chapter then outlines issues connected with agriculture (all by Marianne Kohler-Schneider), animal husbandry including hunting practices (all by Erich Pucher) as well as raw material supply and distant contacts (LBK by Inna Mateiciucová, Eva Lenneis, Michael Götzinger, MN by Inna Mateiciucová, Gerhard Trnka, Michael Götzinger). The final sub-chapters (in both cases written by Eva Lenneis) deal with the absolute chronology of specific periods. Each of these two basic chapters has its own reference list, followed by general as well as detailed maps with catalogues of all sites from the period in study.

The shorter chapter 3 includes an additional, relatively extensive sub-chapter (placed between papers on settlements and burials) written by Wolfgang Neubauer, Goerg Zotti and Eva Lenneis on enclosures, mainly ringworks, which are the best studied type of middle Neolithic sites in Lower Austria. This presentation is based mainly on recent systematic and extensive research on them including survey but also digital terrain models used as a tool to estimate the suggested astronomic and other orientation of these monuments. The obtained results are sobering, they remove the hope for a rapid and simple solution of this fascinating phenomenon. It is worth mentioning that authors in general resist the temptation of grand narratives, remain grounded in regional data, sometimes even criticizing overhasty interpretations such as the claims that Goseck is the 'oldest observatory'. Interestingly the impact of Central German research on the circular enclosure discussion is practically ignored here: the only paper from the whole Halle ringwork conference (Bertemes and Meller 2012) mentioned in this book is by Austrian Gerhard Trnka and this omission cannot be explained by any language barrier.

This regional and highly empirical approach distinguishes the whole reviewed publication (this can explain the small mistake in the Central-European presentation of the MN with STK extending over Lesser Poland instead of the local Malice Culture: fig. 3_01). Therefore it offers a very good overview, which can serve as a starting point for subsequent studies and interpretations than a singular voice in a particular discussion for example on the origins of the LBK or circular enclosures phenomenon, although the data from this country indeed have the potential to play a crucial role in such debates. The existence of such controversies is of course not at all neglected in this book but they are only briefly mentioned and not comprehensively elucidated. Interestingly not all authors share the same point of view on different disputed topics. For example Nadezdha Kotova and Peter Stadler suggest that the origins of the LBK can be related to rapid direct contacts (migrations) from Anatolia (chapter 2.3.1.) whereas other authors (Eva Lenneis, Franz Pieler – chapter 2.4.1.1.) stress the role of the Starčevo culture in this process. There is also no consistent interpretation of the demise of the LBK: according to Lenneis the observed chronological hiatus between this culture and the LC can be explained by insufficient research (chapter 3.7.), Wolfgang Neubauer in his paper on enclosures stresses their innovative character which could have resulted from the need to legitimate power and rights of a new population (chapter 3.2.1.). This impression of a completely new beginning at this time, albeit not so explicitly stated, is additionally strengthened by data presented in other chapters (especially on economy, chapter 3.6.). It would have been tempting to follow this issue more closely, which is not, however, the task of such an overview.

Contradictions of this kind (pointed out in the preface by Eva Lenneis) are not a weakness and by no means result from a lack of cooperation between the researchers involved in the project. On the contrary – the whole book makes a very coherent and well-balanced impression. Although it is a compilation of papers by many authors almost no information is unnecessarily repeated, which is actually unusual for such publications. The whole volume is very well prepared, coordinated and supervised by the editor who did not, however, restrict

the authors' autonomy too much. That is why some issues important for them (such as the excellent chapter on the reconstructions of landscape and vegetation – chapter 2.5.1.1.) have a presentation that is much longer than the average and the chapters are of disproportionately various length.

In general one can admire the discipline of all authors who, as already mentioned, consequently followed the rules of an overview of local prehistory for every interested person (finding a balance between a popular and scientific publication) and did not lose too much space to very specialised controversies or grand, pan-European narratives. This has resulted in a comprehensive compendium presenting the current state of research on the early and middle Neolithic periods in Lower Austria.

This publication does not refer to the very recent chronological estimations concerning the quite late beginnings of the LBK (Jakucs *et al.*, 2016). This may be due to the fact that, although published in 2018, the papers had been prepared since 2012. Over time more and more material will not be up to date anymore, however the whole volume will definitely not lose its relevance for a long time. Because of its consistent empiricism, this important book will be a basic source of information about the early and middle Neolithic cultures also beyond Lower Austria itself.

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