
New research on prehistoric fortifications in Austria – Results of the Dietenberg excavations in Styria

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Abstract

The Dietenberg in western Styria is one of the most important sites in prehistory of the region. Collections and excavations have proven a period of settlement from the Copper Age to the end of the Latène Period, which is characterized above all by an extensive hillfort in the Late Iron Age. In addition to the various settlement terraces, the fortification of the Dietenberg is particularly impressive and special. Based on the LiDAR data, it is possible that there were several staggered ramparts behind one another, with further transverse ramparts in front of the massive main rampart. Until now, the defensive structure on the Dietenberg was considered to be Late Bronze Age and was attributed to the Urnfield Culture, which is widespread in Central Europe.

The special fortification of the hilltop settlement was now the focus of research and also represents a rare phenomenon of prehistoric defensive structures with transverse ramparts. These defensive structures, so-called 'Rider's lanes', which is a literal translation from the German term "Reitergassen", are particularly widespread in Central Europe, but quite rare. The term "Riding lanes" does not represent a *terminus technicus* here, however, but is primarily based on the first research on this topic in the 1960s. The actual function of these structures has not yet been fully clarified, which is why more neutral terms should be used here for such architectural phenomena, such as transverse ramparts or approach obstacles. These approach obstacles were laid out relatively uniformly and usually run at right angles to a rampart. In addition to questions about their function, the dating of these structures raises also many questions.

Excavations at Dietenberg revealed that the approach ramparts consisted of mounded earthen walls with a V-shaped ditch over 1 metre deep between them. The upper end of these ramparts was secured by layers of stone and separated from the main rampart beyond by a shallow ditch. This main rampart also had an earth embankment, but the core consisted of a structure of quarry stones.

On the basis of the finds made, this site can be dated to the late La Tène period.

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