A cereal storage from the late Roman burgus "Im Winkel" at Obermendig (county Mayen-Koblenz, Rhineland-Palatinate, Western Germany)

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Archaeological investigations

In the Segbach-Valley (Fig. 1) north of Mayen there are particularly favorable preconditions to explore the conditions and circumstances of the economic boom of the region in Roman times. This area is located directly next to the Roman millstone quarries (Mühlensteinbrüche) and may also have been interesting because of the presence of good clay and several mineral springs. The valley was densely inhabited during the Roman period.

Based on excavations in two Roman villae "Im Winkel" and "Lungenkärchen" questions about landscape history or the relationship between economic activity and settlement development is investigated interdisciplinary.

Introduction

One of the most important mining areas of Ancient Europe for basalt, tuff and clay is located in the region between Mayen in the Eifel and Andernach on the river rhen (Rhineland-Palatinate, Western Germany). In this region the stone- and ceramic industry reached an immense volume of production for the inter-regional demand in Roman times. While current archaeological and mineralogical investigations focused on the antique industrial location Mayen, there is no further research on Roman land use. For these issues the project "Land use in the surroundings of a Roman 'industrial region'" - Interdisciplinary studies in the environment of the antique quarry area and pottery center near Mayen", funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), has conducted several archaeological investigations since 2009. In this context investigations of plant macro-remains were carried out at the Laboratory of Archaeobotany at the Institute of Prehistory, University of Cologne.

Burgus

The burgus has been excavated for the first time in the late 1950s and again in 1961 by the Office of Archaeological Heritage in Koblenz. It turned out to be a 21.5 × 11.5 m large building with a rectangular ground plan, which had no entrance on the ground floor. The walls were built of up to 1.4 m wide basalt blocks (Fig. 3 and 4). Inside the building were two rows of five large blocks of basalt (Fig. 5). Such foundations for pillars, carrying intermediate floors, are typical components of a granary.

The archaeological artefacts indicate that the building was used in the time between the first half of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, with a focus in the second half of the 4th century. Thus, it is synchronous with the late phase of the villa. The burgus was destroyed by a fire and inside the building an approximately 1 m thick layer of charred grain was found.

Archaeobotanical analysis

During the excavation in 1961, small samples were taken from the layer of charred grain within the burgus, but remained untested. As part of the new research project, they could have been analyzed for the first time.

The samples had a total volume of 370 ml and consisted of approximately 2300 plant macro-remains. Cereals had a share of approximately 99%, essentially grains of Triticum spelta (Fig. 6), but also of Triticum durum, Hordeum vulgare ssp. vulgare and Triticum aestivum var. durum. Besides many glume and few others (e.g. Avena sp. and Agrostemma githago) were present. The low proportion of faba bean clearly shows that a stock of cleaned spelt flour was stored inside theburgus.

In addition to the grains, there was also a small, almost complete, charred fruit of Malus (Fig. 7) and charred remains of presumably bread or porridge.

Fig. 1: The Roman villae "Im Winkel" and "Lungenkärchen" and other Roman sites near Obermendig by Mayen. (eyepixel) 1: Villa 2. Burgus; 2: water pipeline; 3: fort; 4: suspected Roman road; 7: archaeological surface finds; 8: aerial mapping. (Base map 1:20 000 by Mayen © GeoBasis-DE/LVermGeoRP2012-06-12; graphical revision B. Streubel, RGZM).

Fig. 2: (overleaf) "Im Winkel" - O. Overmann (google earth), O. Gernaat (google earth); 5: Gernaat plots of buildings and structures (red), and the excavated areas (green). Archaeological Institute of the University of Cologne © GeoBasis-DE/LVermGeoRP2012-06-12.

Fig 3 & 4 (overleaf) "Im Winkel" - Burgus. Excavation plan of Fehr/Röder 1961 with the new excavation areas of 2010.

Fig. 5 (overleaf) "Im Winkel" - Burgus. Documented walls during the excavation in 1961 (left) and in 2010 (right).

Fig. 6 & 7 (overleaf) "Im Winkel", Burgus. Charred fruit of Malus (Fig. 7) and charred remains of presumably bread or porridge.

References


