

The Nebra Sky Disc

EUROPE'S HEART
3,600 YEARS AGO



View into the Unstrut Valley
near Nebra.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták, Munich.

Past Worlds



The Nebra Sky Disc is one of the most important archaeological finds of the past century. It shows the world's oldest known concrete depiction of astronomical phenomena.

Elements of the day and night sky merge in front of an abstract network of stars. The sun and moon are not only shown in their course in the sky, but they are also explained. A ship appears between the horizons on a nocturnal journey across the celestial ocean. It is recorded here for the first time as a central mythical symbol in Europe.

The Sky Disc gives us an insight into the knowledge of our ancestors about the way of the world and its religious meaning 3,600 years ago. In 1999 it was snatched out of the ground by looters.

After a spectacular search operation in 2002, the bronze hoard finally came to the State Museum for Prehistory Halle (Saale). In 2013 the Sky Disc was included in the UNESCO ›Memory of the World‹ Register.

For many years this bronze find continues to inspire researchers of various disciplines. Their results not only explain the Sky Disc, but they also bring to light a lively and complex society in the heart of Bronze Age Europe.

**DISCOVER THIS SECRET WORLD AND FOLLOW US ON
THE SKY PATHS INTO BYGONE MILLENNIA!**



On the hunt for the Sky Disc

The history of its discovery is as exciting as the disc itself. From the time of its illegal excavation up to its confiscation, nearly three years had passed. During this time the bronze find was on an adventurous odyssey and changed hands through various looters, dealers, traders and middlemen. In February 2002 the Basel police in close cooperation with the State Office of Criminal Investigation, the Ministry of Culture and the State Office for Archaeology of Saxony-Anhalt, secured the find.

4 July 1999

No. 1

Sensational find near Nebra



The back-filled hole dug by the looters can be clearly seen as the darker coloured soil.

©LDA, Photo: Thomas Koiki.



This is the adapted fireman's axe the looters used to hack the Sky Disc out of the ground. It was heavily damaged during this improper recovery.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Liprāk.

Two looters come across the hoard containing the Sky Disc at the Mittelberg hill near Nebra.



← The Sky Disc after the first cleaning attempt. Achim S. had put the disc into soapy water for several days and afterwards cleaned it with steel wool. This caused fine scratches on the surface of the gold plating.

Photo: Taken by the dealer.

5 July 1999

- Sale of the objects for 32 000 DM to Achim S. from the Rhineland
- Soon afterwards inspection of the find spot by the person who found it and the dealer

1 March 2001

No. 4

Halle (Saale)

New museums director

Harald Meller is appointed State Archaeologist for Saxony-Anhalt and Director for the State Museum for Prehistory in Halle.

Summer 2000

No. 3

- Achim S. contacts Hildegard B., the owner of the pub 'Historia', here treasure hunters meet.
- They establish the contact to collector Reinhold S.
- Purchase of the disc for 230 000 DM

✗ I offer

No. 2

I search



This photograph shows the disc still uncleaned.

Photo: Taken by the dealer.

Autumn 1999
Achim S. offers the find for one million DM to various museums.

Sale failed

Extraordinary archaeological finds from Saxony-Anhalt are by law the property of the state.

May 2001

No. 5

First hint from Berlin

The first hint about an important find from Saxony-Anhalt was expressed by museums director Wilfried Menghin from Berlin. The objects were already offered to him for sale. Photographs exist of it.

▶ Prof. Menghin reports



- Launch of a search operation
- Traces of the disc disappear

No. 6

January 2002

Regarding: News article about the Sky Disc

A colleague from Munich reports to Meller: The news magazine Focus is planning a report about the Sky Disc. The colleague points the journalist to Meller. The journalist establishes contact to Hildegard B.

No. 7

6 February 2002

- Hildegard B. informs Meller that the current owner wants to sell the objects for 700 000 DM
- Meller signals interest

16 February 2002

- Accompanied by a lawyer and an undercover investigator Meller meets Hildegard B., her lawyer and his Dachshund in her pub 'Historia'
- A meeting with the owner Reinhold S. is agreed, meeting location Basel

22 February 2002

- Authorities in Basel request mutual assistance at the department of public prosecution Halle.
- Joint police action planned with Meller as front man

No. 9

11 March 2002

No. 11

A long journey has ended

Official hand-over of the hoard to the State Museum for Prehistory Halle.



Condition of the finds after the hand-over 2002 before their restoration.

©LDA, Photo: Taken in the State Office of Criminal Investigations.

February 2002

No. 10

▶ Contemporary witnesses about the confiscation



Headline: Successful arrest

Meller agrees to look at a sword and the Sky Disc and pretends to check their authenticity. Meller gives the signal for the police arrest.

Basel police arrests all participants. The missing pieces are recovered during a house search in the Rhineland.



← Reconstruction of the find situation based on the results of the excavations and the statements made by the finder.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Liprāk.

▶ Reconstruction of the find situation at the Mittelberg hill.



No. 15

May 2005

- The finder Henry W. testifies again
- Drafting of a sketch of the find situation
- Reconstruction of the find situation on the Mittelberg



According to the finder the disc had been buried upright. The other bronze finds were carefully placed in front of it.

©LDA, Sketch: Finder Henry W., Graphics: Nora Seeländer.

July 2002

Dealer Achim S. surrenders to the prosecution.

He reveals find spot and names of the looters.

No. 12

No. 13

September 2003

- Criminal trial and conviction of the looters and dealer at Naumburg district court
- Sentencing to several months imprisonment on probation, fines and social work

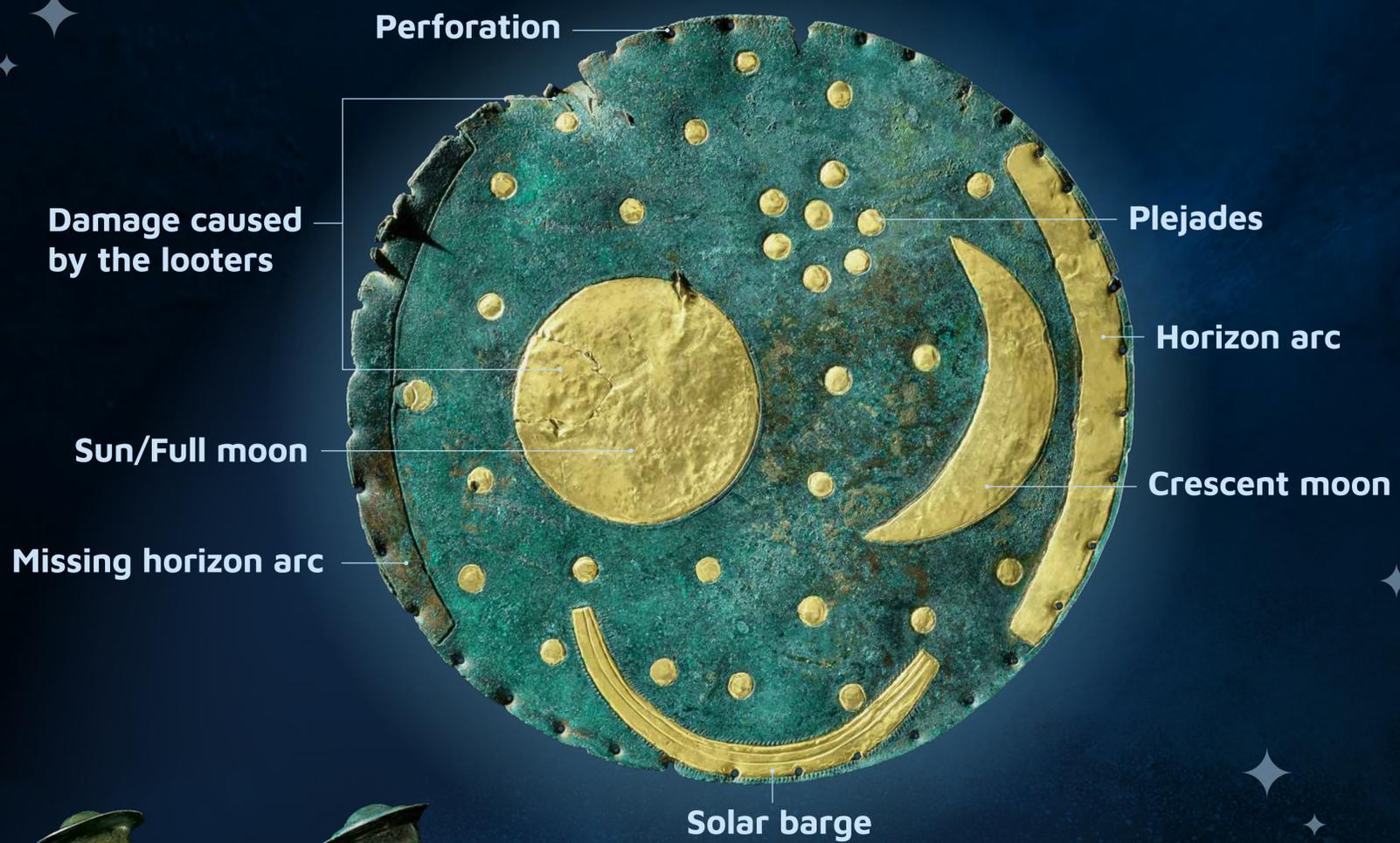
September 2004

- Start of the appeal proceedings Hildegard B./ Reinhold S.
- After 33 days of trial, Land court Halle confirms previously made sentences.

No. 14



The Hoard from the Mittelberg near Nebra



Fragments of two spiral armlets



©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták



Reaching for the Stars

The Nebra Sky Disc shows 32 stars, a crescent moon and a full moon or sun. Two horizon arcs frame the picture on both sides. The gold sheeting with long grooves is of different colour and more strongly curved. It is interpreted as a sun barge.

The disc was deposited on the Mittelberg hill near Nebra alongside two spectacular gold and copper decorated swords, two axes, a chisel and two spiral armlets. People consciously chose that location, because the hill had been a special place over centuries.

The original colour of the disc was probably an iridescent black. Today, the green colour of the corroded bronze dominates.

©LDA, Graphics: Klaus Pockrandt.



2.2 kg

∅ 31.4 cm



Phase 1

Second half 18th century BC



Phase 2

First half 17th century BC



Phase 3

Mid-17th century BC



Phase 4

End 17th century BC



Phase 5

Around 1600 BC



The Ziegelrodaer Forest, to which the Mittelberg belongs, is the location of circa 800 burial mounds and therefore one of the densest burial landscapes in Europe. At the time of the depositing of the hoard, it was likely to be woodless. As traces of settlement dating to the Bronze Age are not evident on the hill, it is assumed, that the hoard was deposited on sacred ground, away from daily life.

As the Sky Disc has no other comparison, dating and a cultural classification can only be done by comparing the swords and the other deposited objects. They date the finds to 1600 BC. In the sword hilts were also traces of birch bark, that confirm the dating (1681-1401 BC, radiocarbon date). The Sky Disc and its accompanying objects were therefore deposited together at the Mittelberg hill at the end of the Early Bronze Age, around 1600 BC.

But when was the Sky Disc made? The way it looks today is the result of various changes to the disc, which were done over a period of 150 to 200 years. So far, we can distinguish between five phases.

AND EACH PHASE HOLDS ITS OWN SECRETS.

The Mittelberg hill is dotted with burial mounds dating to the third millennium BC. In many cases, they line up along the slope side of the river Unstrut (LIDAR-Scan).

Basic data ©GEOBasis-DE /LVermGeo LSA. Mapping and graphics: LDA.

The Mittelberg hill near Nebra in the Ziegelrodaer Forest, Saxony-Anhalt, with the excavation area in autumn 2002.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Liprák.



PHASE 1

The Lords of Time

The original version of the disc shows a sky with 32 stars, a lunar crescent and a full moon or sun. All celestial bodies keep a distinct distance from one another. The only recognisable cluster of stars is a group of seven closely placed golden dots: the Pleiades. They are mentioned in various old cultures from around the globe as calendar stars. Their disappearance in March and appearance in October can be read as the start and the end of the farming year in Europe.

But the night sky still hides more: The picture shows a leap year rule, that made it possible to reconcile the solar and lunar years. It states, when a leap month needs to be added. With the help of the Sky Disc, it was already possible more than 3,600 years ago to construct a functioning lunisolar calendar.

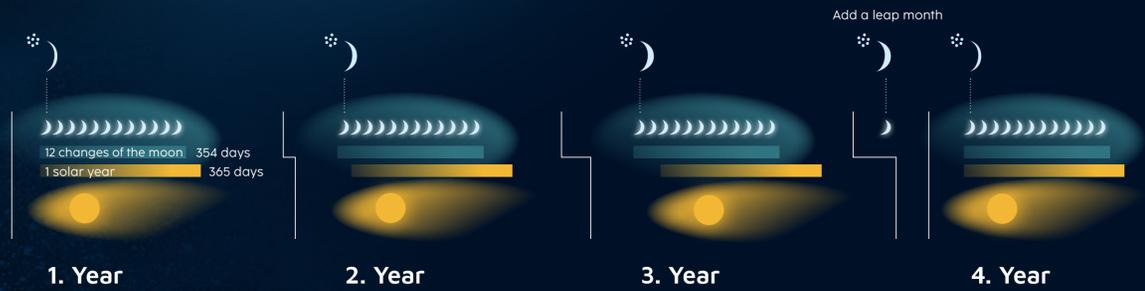
The first written account of such a leap year rule, which is based on the constellation of the moon in relation to the Pleiades, is first known only from the Babylonian cuneiform texts of the late 8th century BC. However, they are based on long descended observations of the sky. Astronomers assume that the leap year rule is coded in the number of the stars on the Sky Disc.



THE FARMING YEAR

3,600 years ago, in central Germany, the Pleiades were only visible in the starry sky between the 17th of October and the 10th of March. Shortly before their disappearance in March they appeared next to the crescent moon (left). At their re-appearance in October they could be seen next to the full moon (right). Already in the 8th century BC, the Greek poet Hesiod wrote down a mnemotechnic verse for the right timing of sowing and harvest. He points to the Pleiades: „When the Pleiades Atlagenes are rising, begin your harvest, and your ploughing when they are going to set [...]”.

Graphics: according to Wolfhard Schlosser.



THE LEAP YEAR RULE

Year by year in springtime the moon of various thickness passed by the Pleiades. When a crescent moon appeared in the spring sky next to the Pleiades that was as thick as the one depicted on the Sky Disc, one knew, that the lunisolar year had got out of step. To compensate for this, one had to add a leap month.

The Leap year rule easily explained



The Forged Sky

Everything indicates that the Sky Disc and the other Bronze objects from the hoard were made in central Europe. Scientific investigations confirm, that the copper in all objects originates from the eastern Alpine deposits at the Mitterberg near Bischofshofen (Austria). The tin alloy however comes from Cornwall in south-west England, just as the silver-rich gold of the disc ornaments and the sword decorations.

The Sky Disc was created in several steps: the casting of the bronze blank, forging after several times of re-heating, application of the golden appliqués and finally a careful re-heating and creation of a black patina. The dark, carefully polished bronze disc offered a splendid background for the golden stars of the night sky.

THE SECRET OF BRONZE

Bronze is an alloy consisting of circa nine parts of copper and one part of tin. The Sky Disc consists of an especially soft bronze with circa 2.5% tin. This is the reason why it could be re-worked easily later.

©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.

IMPORTED CRAFT

The Sky Disc's golden appliqués were attached in a way that had been unknown to Early Bronze Age central Europe at that time. The technical term for this is called damascening. It originates from the eastern Mediterranean and reached the North presumably via Greece.



Under-cuts on the surface with a bronze chisel.



Preparation of the inlaying under-cuts and fastening of the gold sheet.

©LDA, Illustrations: Christian-Heinrich Wunderlich.

Damascening experiment



PHASE 2

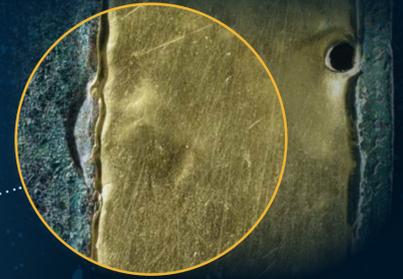
The course of the sun

In the next phase, two golden arcs were fixed on the edge of the Sky Disc. One of them is missing today but is visible by a distinct fastening groove. The adjacent star had been moved before the fixing of the arc. Underneath the retained arc, the distinct outline of two more stars is visible in relief. Both stars had been removed before the arc was attached.



One star was moved for the left horizon arc.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



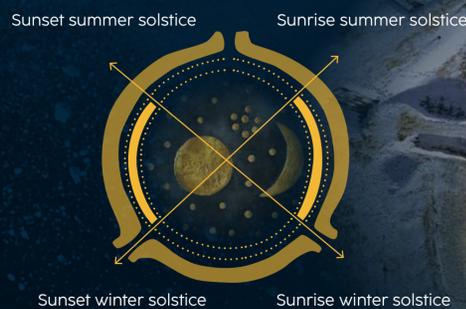
The right arc covers the damascening grooves of two stars.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.

The arcs span across the area on the horizon, in which over the course of the year sunrises and sunsets can be watched. The ends of the arcs mark the points of sunrise and sunset on 21 June and 21 December.

The significance of the solstices can already be seen in the circular enclosure of Goseck, around 3,000- years prior to the Sky Disc. This re-working of the Sky Disc is therefore based on long-known knowledge.

With the attachment of the horizon arcs one has made the encrypting of the leap year rule useless. Had the knowledge about it been forgotten?



LONG-KNOWN KNOWLEDGE

Already in the Neolithic period, people watched the course of the sun. One of the oldest evidence for this is the 7,000-year-old circular enclosure of Goseck. The artist of the Sky Disc however was the first to translate this observation into a two-dimensional depiction.

©LDA, Photo: Cerd Pie.



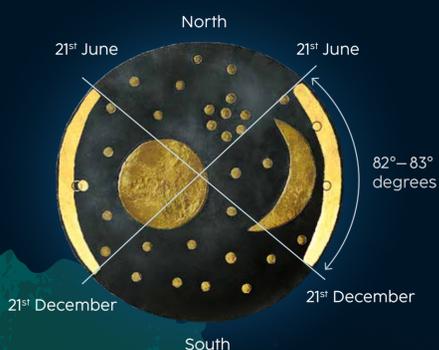
MAGDEBURG

Pömmelte

SAXONY-
ANHALT

HALLE
(SAALE)

Mittelberg near Nebra



At 82° the angles of the gold arc correspond with the angles of the annual solstice in the central German latitude.

©LDA, Graphics: according to Wolhard Schlosser and Klaus Pockrandt.



View into the Sky

The angle between the two horizon arcs points to the geographical latitude of the region 30 km north and south of Magdeburg. The Mittelberg hill is located circa 70 km south of this area.

Due to atmospheric refraction, we see the sun's rising and setting points on the horizon slightly shifted to the north - an optical phenomenon caused by the refraction of the Earth's atmosphere. This is how one can distinguish north and south on the Sky Disc.

Due to the constellation of the crescent moon in relation to the Pleiades, the right-hand side equals west, so like in modern-day maps of the stars, east and west are switched around. The mystery becomes clear when one holds the disc above the head towards the sky and one looks at the stars from below: Was the Sky Disc intended for looking into the sky?



PHASE 3

The Solar Ship

On the Nebra Sky Disc is one golden ornament that is very different from the others: the grooved arc at the lower edge. This gold sheet cannot be explained as a natural astronomical phenomenon. According to its shape and decoration, we can interpret it as a ship, like a sky barge, which cruises along the horizon powered by oars.

In the Aegean depictions of ships have a long tradition. It is typical to indicate paddles or oars with rows of short lines, similar to how it is depicted on the Sky Disc. Hence the model for the sun barge on the Sky Disc might come from the Aegean. From this period on the other hand we only know from the Egyptians a complex myth of a day and night journey of the sun.

In the Baltic, the ship becomes the most important symbol in the later Bronze Age. In particular on rock art, but also depictions on hundreds of razors from Denmark and northern Germany tell about the mythology of the sun's journey through day and night.



THE GOLDEN BOATS FROM NORS

Denmark, 1700 – 1100 BC, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

The hoard comprises more than 100 miniature boats. Some are decorated with concentric circles. The golden miniatures show the importance of travelling by sea inside and outside the known worlds.

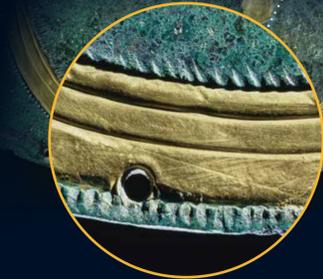
©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



BOAT DEPICTION FROM THE TOMB OF SENNEFER, MAYOR OF THEBES

Egypt, 15th century BC.

The banana shape and the division of the planks resemble that of the barge on the Sky Disc from Nebra.



The barge on the Sky Disc is one of the oldest depictions of a ship in central Europe.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



REPRESENTATION OF A SHIP ON A CERAMIC VESSEL FROM THE KOLONNA SETTLEMENT SITE ON AEGINA

Greece, 1950/1900 – 1750/1720 BC.

DEPICTIONS OF SHIPS ON RAZORS

Jutland, Norderhøvsris, Vandel and Roskilde-Eggen, Denmark 12th – 10th century BC (Originals in Moesgård Museum Højbjerg and in the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen).

©LDA, Photos razors: Juraj Lipták.

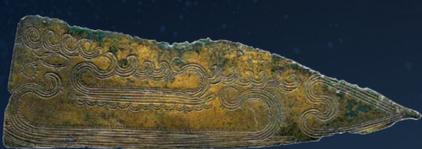
WHY DOES THE SUN SET ON ONE SIDE AND RISE ON ANOTHER? HOW DOES IT MANAGE TO MOVE ACROSS THE SKY?

People in the Bronze Age explained this question with a myth, which we find also on the razors from the north.

Interview with Fleming Kaul – Myth from the journey of the sun



MORNING



The upper ship moves to the right, it can be regarded as the morning ship. A fish pulls the sun upwards to its rise following in the direction of the ship. Underneath is a boat moving to the left: the night ship.



NOON



A horse pulls the sun out of a hull. It can be interpreted as a sun horse, which at noon takes over the sun from the morning ship.



AFTERNOON



A horse lands on a ship. This image represents the transfer by the horse of the sun from the noon ship to another ship, that moves along the sky in the afternoon.



EVENING



On this blade towards evening, a snake takes over the sun from the afternoon ship. It seems to be hidden in the snake's coils. The animal accompanies the sun to her nocturnal journey to the underworld.

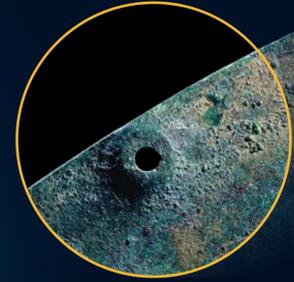


PHASE 4

Symbol of Power

In this phase the edge of the bronze disc was perforated. Presumably one fixed the disc once to a surface of organic material. The perforation does not consider the gold ornaments. Therefore, the use of the Sky Disc had changed. Evidently, its presentation was now more important as for example a standard.

We know many later examples of sun standards from rock art from northern Europe. They show figures and ships in combination with rings, round discs or wheel crosses in the context of festive processions. The objects are fixed to ships like standards or are carried by the crew. The ship itself becomes therefore a holy symbol and swimming temple of the Bronze Age.



Detail of the perforation, rear view.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



A rock art depiction from Lökeberg in Bohuslän (western Sweden) shows a whole fleet of ships. The sun discs and sun symbols let us assume that a ritual act is portrayed.



The perforation of the Sky Disc indicates that it was once presented as a standard at celebrations, processions or the public appearance of the ruler.

©LDA, Illustration: Max Flügel.



SUN STANDARD FROM JUTLAND

Denmark, 1200 – 500 BC.
National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

This 7 cm tall model shows, how larger cult discs might have been fixed or used. The decoration of the grooved handle is reminiscent of lacing. The amber inlay presents a cross-shaped drilled hole. When the standard is held against the light, it resembles the shape of a wheel cross – a sun symbol.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



The only 'crew' of the ship on the rock art from Egely on Bornholm (Denmark) are two-wheel crosses on standards. They show a possible attachment of sun standards.

Illustration: Flemming Kaul, Copenhagen.

The World Model of the Sky Disc

For thousands of years, people assumed that there was a dome spreading across the sky, on which stars were attached.

The ancient Egyptians believed, that every day the sun barge would cross the sky on the star covered back of the Goddess Nut. Her body hereby is the firmament.

The Sky Disc also contains such a story. It could be seen as a dome, still 1,000 years before the ancient Greek scientists.

The view of the human being in the heart of the world is limited by horizons – the mythical threshold that carries the sun barge.



Artistic reconstruction of the world model at the time of the Sky Disc.

©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.

The idea of the world covered by a dome



PHASE 5

At the End of this World



The Nebra Sky was carefully deposited 3,600 years ago together with other selected bronze objects. Everything suggests, that a horizon arc had been removed before it was deposited.

Evidently someone has also separated the disc from the material it was fixed to because the remains of some attachment that was pushed through the holes could not be found. There were also no remains for attaching the axes and chisel. Such treatment of a bronze object is well known from metal hoards that have survived from the Bronze Age from the Atlantic Coast up to the Black Sea and from southern Sweden up to the Mediterranean.

We don't know exactly when the Sky Disc was made and how much time has passed between the changes. At the end, the image gets buried. One furnishes its burial like that of a prince: with gold decorated weapons, tools and jewellery.

THE TIME OF THE SKY DISC HAD PASSED.

Contemporary witnesses about the importance and authenticity of the Sky Disc



The Beginning

When the first farmers and stock breeders came to central Europe in around 5500 BC and pushed out the resident hunter and gatherers, a new era began. People became settled, started building villages and established stable communities. The land was linked to the ancestors. From circa 3500 BC this farming world was shaken up. Innovations like the use of draught animals or long-range migrations of communities changed societies. During the 3rd millennium BC, two large archaeological cultures finally occupied vast areas of Europe.

Early Bronze Age followed, a phase of a cultural peak. Power was in the hands of a few, who also might have created the Nebra Sky Disc.

AND AROUND 1600 BC THE EMPIRE OF THE SKY DISC BROKE APART.



DEPOSITING OF THE NEBRA HOARD ON THE MITTELBERG HILL IN SAXONY-ANHALT

©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.



Goseck Solar Observatory



Princely Tomb Bornhöck

5500 BC 5000 BC 4500 BC 4000 BC 3500 BC 3000 BC 2500 BC 2000 BC 1500 BC 1000 BC 500 BC



First farmers and stock-breeders in central Europe



Discovery of wheel and wagon



Pyramids of Gizeh



Stonehenge



Foundation of Rome



FROM STONE AGE TO BRONZE AGE

Change of epochs

Around 2200 BC the Bronze Age starts in central Europe. The now extensive use of metal did not yet cause a decisive break in the cultural and economical development. New archaeo-genetical investigations have shown that a large part of the population of the late Stone Age – those belonging to the Corded Ware Culture and the Bell Beaker Culture, have migrated from the Eurasian steppe. They are direct ancestors of the Bronze Age population.

- DISTRIBUTION**
- Corded Ware Culture (2800–2200 BC)
 - Bell Beaker Culture (2500–2050 BC)
 - Early Bronze Age Únětice Culture (2200–1550 BC)

©LDA, Map: based on Klaus Pockrandt, according to reference LDA.

CORDED WARE CULTURE

CORDED WARE BEAKER
Halle (Saale), Saxony-Anhalt
2450–2325 BC, H: 11 cm.

FACETTED AXE, AMPHIBOLITE
Spielberg, Burgenlandkreis, Saxony-Anhalt
2575–2450 BC, L: 15.1 cm.

©LDA, Photos: Juraj Lipták.

2800 – 2200 BC

The Battle Axe Warriors from

The Corded Ware Culture is one of the two big cultures of the third millennium BC. Originating from the eastern steppe, it unites large parts of Europe up the river Rhine with its cultural attributes. We can identify those mainly from their burial rites. The Corded Ware Culture owes its name to the corded-shaped decoration of its beakers. These were often put into graves as grave goods. Also typical are faceted and sharpened stone axes with holes. They are regarded as distinctive symbols of men and warriors.

Reconstruction of a warrior from the Corded Ware Culture.
©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.

BELL BEAKER CULTURE

ÚNĚTICE CULTURE

2500 – 2050 BC

Horsemen, Metallurgists, Bowmen

The mysterious Bell Beaker Culture fascinates researchers for over one hundred years now. Current research results suggest that it also originates in the east. The fast spread of this culture across large parts of Europe is astonishing: Bell Beaker people were very mobile. Were there bowmen on horseback who brought along new knowledge on metallurgy?

BELL BEAKER FROM SCHKOPAU
Saalekreis district, Saxony-Anhalt
2500–2450 BC, H: 15.5 cm.

WRIST-GUARD AND COPPER DAGGER
Halberstadt-Sonntagsfeld, Harz district, Saxony-Anhalt,
2275–2200 BC,
L: 10.3 cm / L: 9.1 cm.

©LDA, Photos: Juraj Lipták.

CLASSICAL ÚNĚTICE CUP
Ufrungen, Mansfeld-Südharz district,
Saxony-Anhalt, 1950–1650 BC, H: 7.5 cm.

ÚNĚTICE CULTURE SOLID-HILTED DAGGER, BRONZE
Hoard from Schollene, Stendal district,
Saxony-Anhalt, around 2000 BC, L: 24.3 cm.

AXE HOARD FROM GRÖBERS-BENNEWITZ
Saalekreis district, Saxony-Anhalt, 1775–1625 BC.

©LDA, Photos: Juraj Lipták.

2200 – 1550 BC

Bronze rush Únětice Culture

Monumental princely graves and huge metal treasures of the communities along the river Saale and Unstrut display wealth and power in the Early Bronze Age. These are due to fertile soil, salt deposits and an advantageous geographical situation, which permitted control over the exchange of goods. New genetical investigations of the population point to a mixture of characteristics of the Corded Ware Culture and the Bell Beaker Culture.

Reconstructions of a Bell Beaker Culture Bowman.
©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.



Sacred Landscapes

The architecture of the Pömmelte ring sanctuary relates to many astronomical and calendrical events. On certain days sunrise and sunset could be watched through openings in the palisade circle or the circular ditch.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



An area south-east of Magdeburg, near the river Elbe, must have been of special sacred significance for people during the period between 2,300 and 1,900 BC. Here they first erected the circular enclosure of Pömmelte and a little later that of Schönebeck.

These are so-called circular ditched enclosures, that feature seven circles of ditches, posts or palisades. They were certainly built gradually. The size of the monument in Pömmelte is comparable to that of Stonehenge, although it was constructed of wood.

In contrast to Schönebeck, there were many deposits made in sacrificial pits. These deposits also included human remains. The two sites therefore served different ritual acts.



Reconstruction of the Pömmelte ring sanctuary.
Photo: dpa/Jens Wolf.

The Pömmelte Ring Sanctuary

Already in 2800 BC, at the time of the Corded Ware Culture, people erected the first sanctuary at this location. Around 300 years later people of the Bell Beaker Culture built the circular enclosure of Pömmelte. During the Early Bronze Age people of the Únětice Culture took over the ritual site and continued using it. At the same time, within sight, they constructed a new circular ditched enclosure close to modern-day Schönebeck. This was also the location of an earlier Corded Ware Culture cult site. Just after the enclosure of Schönebeck had been finished, the Pömmelte ring sanctuary was dismantled and burnt down.

Those who constructed the enclosures consciously chose sites at which ancestors had already erected sanctuaries. This line of tradition legitimised their actions. Inside the circular enclosure of Pömmelte, remains of their ritual acts had been found a few years ago.

We can conceive a societal and religious change in the enclosures of Pömmelte and Schönebeck that happened in the transition from Stone Age to Bronze Age. It coincides with the establishment of powerful elites.

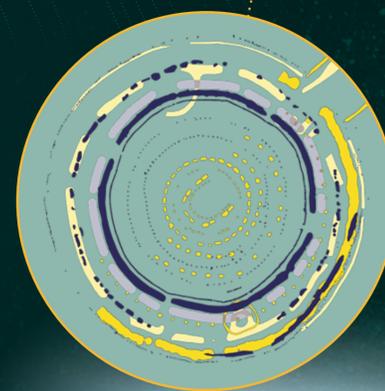
THE CIRCULAR ENCLOSURE AT SCHÖNEBECK

The location of the circular enclosures of Pömmelte and Schönebeck (Salzland district) along the river Elbe. Here also the largest Early Bronze Age settlement of central Europe was discovered.

PÖMMELTE RING SANCTUARY

FEATURES

- Circular ditched enclosure
- corded ware quadrangle
- early bronze age house
- bell beaker house
- excavation planum



FEATURES

- Pömmelte
- Banks at Pömmelte
- Stonehenge
- Banks at stonehenge

©LDA, Map: Anna Swieder.



STONEHENGE ALONG THE RIVER ELBE

The monumental circular ditched enclosure of Pömmelte (blue) was built of wood. Its diameter of 115 m is exactly that of its counterpart in stone Stonehenge (yellow). Even structurally the two enclosures are similar.

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Exciting view:
A drone flight above
the Pömmelte ring
sanctuary



The World in their Hands

During the Early Bronze Age, a new elite established itself in central Europe. Their representatives were buried with lavish grave goods in monumental burial mounds. These exceeded everything that had been there before. The most important princely graves are to be found in Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.

Simultaneously, especially in the central area around the river Saale, splendid bronze treasures were buried, like they don't occur at other places. The Únětice ruler based their claim to power also on the past. Their burial rite combines elements of the Corded Ware and Bell Beaker Cultures who had been immigrated there many centuries before. In addition, the regalia of the dead consisting of golden pins and rings show integration into the ruling systems of all of Europe.

The Princely Burial Mound at Leubingen

The mound was excavated in 1877 and excellently documented. Latest investigations revealed that it was 48 m in diameter and 8.5 m high. Underneath the stone filling was the wooden burial chamber of the prince. The dead man was lying on his back and facing upwards to the sky, contrary to what was the normal custom at the time.

The burial custom links to various older traditions: mound, burial chamber and opulent furnishings with weapons are characteristic for burials of the Corded Ware Culture; metal tools, daggers and gold jewellery for the hair can be found in Bell Beaker Cultures graves.

Reconstruction of the Leubingen Prince.
©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.

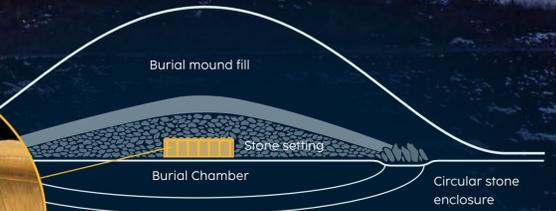
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BURIAL CHAMBER OF THE PRINCE.

The grave goods were located along his right side. The dead man also did not wear the gold jewellery on his body.

©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.

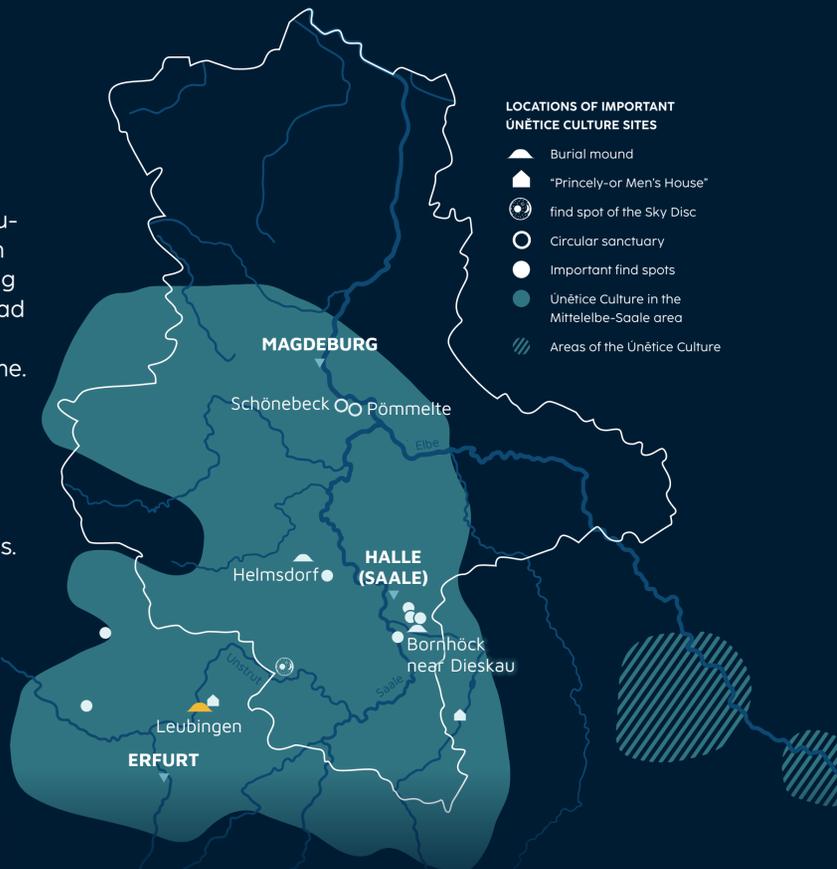


THE LEUBINGEN TUMULUS
©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



STRUCTURE OF THE LEUBINGEN TUMULUS

Diameter: 48 m, Height: 8.5 m, dated to around 1942 BC.



- LOCATIONS OF IMPORTANT ÚNĚTICE CULTURE SITES
- Burial mound
 - "Princely-or Men's House"
 - find spot of the Sky Disc
 - Circular sanctuary
 - Important find spots
 - Únětice Culture in the Mittelelbe-Saale area
 - Areas of the Únětice Culture



GRAVE GOODS FROM THE LEUBINGEN TUMULUS

Thuringia, around 1942 BC (Dendro dating).

The dead person was richly equipped with weapons and tools. The golden regalia indicate princely status. Even an antique object was amongst it, a then already more than 2,700-year-old stone axe. This huge axe must have appeared to people from the Bronze Age like a mythical weapon of prehistoric giants.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.



The Gold Find of Dieskau

This find is considered the largest gold assemblage of the Early Bronze Age in central Germany. Originally, it consisted of 13 objects with a weight of 1,850 g. Only five of them were preserved: one eyelet ring made of electrum, a pair of golden bracelets, an arm ring and an axe.

Workers found the gold in spring 1874 apparently in a place called 'Saures Loch (sour hole)' near Dieskau. Only three kilometres away on the same day the monumental burial mound Bornhöck was being removed, under which possibly another prince had been buried. In addition, in the Dieskau area, an unusual amount of bronze objects had been buried – this all points to an extraordinary ritual landscape.



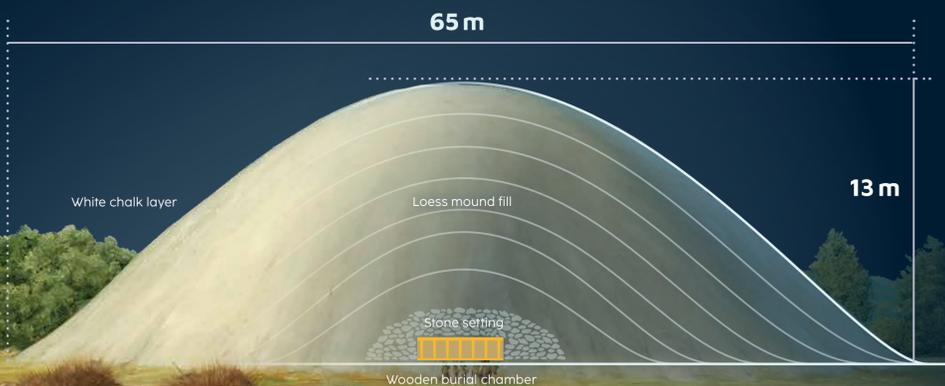
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The Princely Bornhöck Burial mound

Just a few kilometres south-east of Halle (Saale) a monumental burial mound characterised the landscape until the mid-19th century: the Bornhöck tumulus. Between 1844 and 1890 it was taken down to use the soil and it was soon forgotten.

The latest investigations in the past years proved it as the largest burial monument of the central European Early Bronze Age. The tumulus was 65 m in diameter and circa 13 m high. Its structure is similar to those of the sites in Leubingen and Helmsdorf. Traces of chalk around the edge of the mound show, that the Bornhöck was once whitewashed. In this way, the impressive monument erected 1850-1800 BC was visible even from a far distance.



RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BURIAL MOUND BORNHÖCK
Similar to the burial mound of Leubingen and Helmsdorf, in the centre of the mound was a wooden burial chamber, which was protected by a stone cairn and 20,000 m³ of earth. The Princely tumulus was covered in white chalk.

©LDA, Illustration: Karol Schauer.



INSIGNIA OF POWER

Gold hoard from Dieskau (Saalekreis district, Saxony-Anhalt), 1775–1625 BC.

The rings, that are today bent, belonged to the costume. The decorated axe is the only object with an exclusively symbolic function, as its blade is blunt and bent, it cannot be used. The image shows a replica, the originals ended up at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow after the Second World War.

©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.

The aerial photograph shows the excavation of the Bornhöck mound. The diameter of the entire burial mound (65 m) and the stone setting (18.5 m) are marked. Although only the lowest layers are preserved, thanks to modern methods of analysis many unusual discoveries could be made.

©LDA, Photo: Thomas Kolki, Graphics: Klaus Pockrandt.

FLOUR FOR THE MASSES

Two mill stone fragments (querns) (Bornhöck near Rassnitz, Saalekreis district, Saxony-Anhalt) 1850-1800 BC, length each more than 50 cm.

Within the remains of the burial mound were 22 fragments of extraordinary large mill stones. Projected onto the entire stone volume, the Bornhöck contained so many mill stone remains that would have been sufficient to mill flour for thousand of people a day.

©LDA, Photo: José Antonio Soldevilla.

MYSTERIOUS SIGNS

A loaf idol recovered from the earth deposit of the burial mound (Bornhöck near Rassnitz, Saalekreis district, Saxony-Anhalt) 1850–1800 BC. L: 4.2 cm, W: 2.7 cm.

The small objects are of fired clay and their shape remind us of modern loaves of bread. Their function is unknown. Perhaps they were used as a means of communication or they were used as a kind of proof for payment. They suggest contacts to south-east Europe.

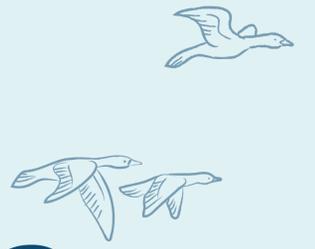
©LDA, Photo: Juraj Lipták.

AROUND 1600 BC THE ÚNĚTICE CULTURE OF CENTRAL EUROPE, WHICH LASTED FOR AROUND 600 YEARS, WAS ABOUT TO DISSOLVE.

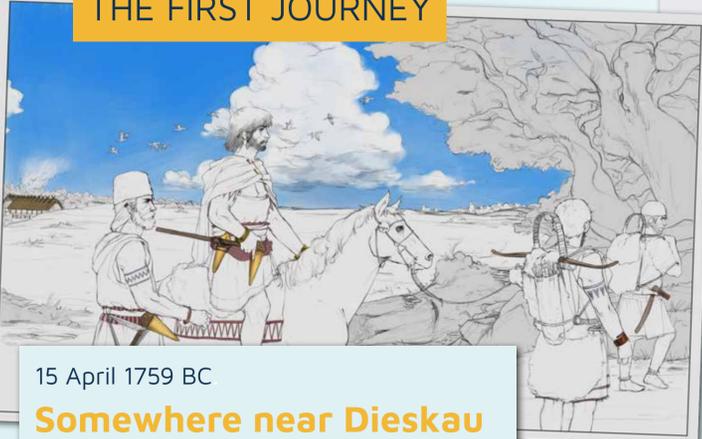
The last known magnificent graves in central Europe had already been sealed off generations before. Now, also the Sky Disc, the mighty symbol of knowledge of the princes, is getting buried. This time of transition marks the end and the new beginning of societal orders.



The Wide World at the Heart of Europe



THE FIRST JOURNEY



15 April 1759 BC

Somewhere near Dieskau

A journey to faraway places had been expected of a prince for as long as anyone can remember. To those who return awaits great respect, due to newly acquired knowledge and through the exotic objects that have been brought back. The destination should be the south, where beyond the high mountains a large ocean exists. The prince chooses companions for the long and dangerous journey.

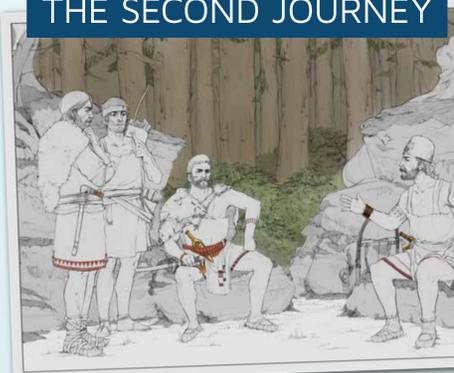
Not only people travel but also objects, knowledge and ideas reach neighbouring or further afield regions. This is true for our globalised world, but also for the Bronze Age. Apart from natural resources like copper and tin for the production of bronze, one also exchanged finished objects. Amongst them were also valuable showpieces out of special material like gold and amber.

The knowledge depicted on the Sky Disc had probably been imported from the Mediterranean to central Germany. We assume that for this, two journeys would have been necessary. During the first journey, astronomical knowledge would have been brought from Mesopotamia. During the second and later one, ideas about the sun barge would have been picked up in Egypt.

Thoughts on Trade and the exchange of ideas



THE SECOND JOURNEY



4 April 1641 BC

Somewhere near Dieskau

For a long time, people talked about the journey of the ancestor to the wonders of the south. There he got to know the secrets of the sky and put his knowledge down in the still highly honoured Sky Disc. Once again, a prince sets off with his companions towards the south, accompanied by curiosity

Early June 1759 BC

Italy

Several months later the group catches sight of the land south of the mountains. Following along rivers they marched further four weeks until they reach the sea. There they encounter an unfamiliar ship, which takes them further south following the coastline. In numerous ports at which the ship touches, the group learns of big miracles and decides to travel further east, to countries full of golden palaces.

Late May 1641 BC

At the foot of the Alps

Finally, the group reaches a lake-side settlement at the foot of the mountains. They take a break and prepare themselves for the crossing of the mountains. In the evening they sit together with dignitaries of the region and exchange stories and gifts.



18 July 1759 BC

Crete

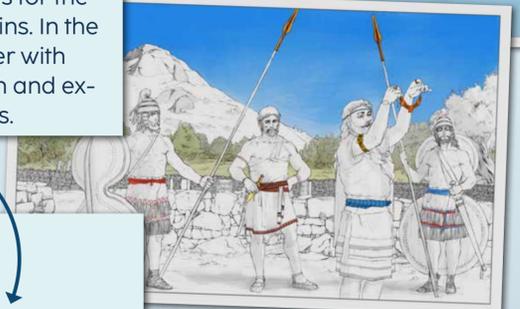
Finally, a trading ship takes the group to the island of Crete. There they are received with honours and are taken to Knossos. The impressive buildings, the colourful costumes and the precious jewellery of the people seem overpowering.



2 July 1641 BC

Mycenae

Having arrived on the coast of Greece, the group leaves their ship and travels further to Mycenae. Its ruler is known for his wealth and competence as a warrior. The prince presents him with a precious amber necklace, and they are allowed to be his guests for many days. A ship eventually takes them via Crete to the other side of the large sea.



2 September 1759 BC

Byblos

Finally, the group ends up in the port metropolis of Byblos. The prince of the city, pleased about the brought along gifts, receives them and shows them the splendour of his palace. But greater wisdom should allegedly be found further east. Therefore, the group asks for support for travelling further.

17 August 1641 BC

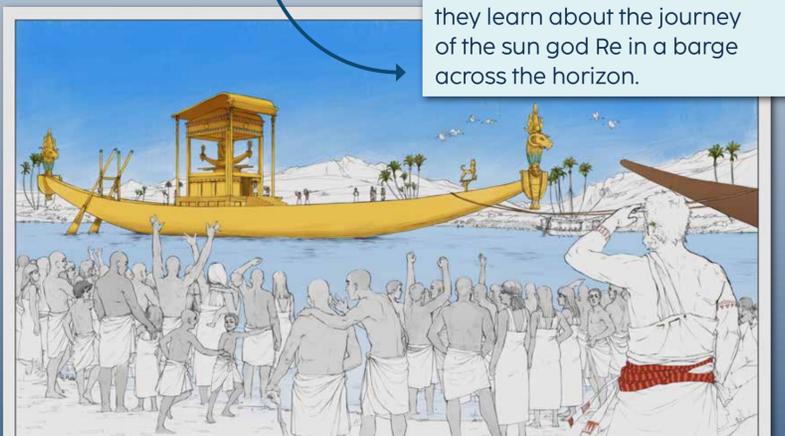
Egypt

After days at sea, the travellers reach Egypt. On their route into the hinterland, they can hardly comprehend what they see. The monuments, the gods and the festivities exceed all their comprehension. They even watch the pharaoh conducting a ritual. In a conversation with a priest, they learn about the journey of the sun god Re in a barge across the horizon.

3 December 1759 BC

Babylon

After they have crossed the desert, the group reaches the largest metropolis of Mesopotamia. Impressed by the brought along amber, the king permits the travellers to stay for many months and to speak to his court astronomer. During the night they observe together the night sky. The prince gets to know a lot about the movement of the stars and the moon and how the year can be ordered based on this knowledge.



✦ Pömmelte

The Sky Paths

✦ Halle (Saale)

✦ Langeneichstädt

✦ Nebra

✦ Goseck

For countless millennia people have observed the night sky, driven by the desire, to understand the universe and the secrets of life. Excavations in Saxony-Anhalt over the past years have revealed astonishing evidence for this deeply human aspiration.

The tourist network Himmelswege (Sky Paths) invites you on a journey through the prehistory of Saxony-Anhalt at five selected stations: Travel back in time to bygone millennia and let yourself be whisked away into the world of archaeology and astronomy on the Sky Paths.

www.himmelswege.de

Sky Paths

MAGIC MOMENTS OF THE MILLENNIA

Landesamt für Denkmalpflege
und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt
LANDESMUSEUM FÜR
VORGESCHICHTE



HALLE (SAALE)

The State Museum of Prehistory

The State Museum of Prehistory in Halle (Saale) houses one of the most important archaeological collections in Europe. Sensational finds are presented in Germany's oldest purpose-built museum for prehistoric archaeology in impressive staging.

www.landesmuseum-vorgeschichte.de

ARCHE NEBRA
Die Himmelscheibe erleben

NEBRA

The Nebra Ark

The Nebra Ark (Arche Nebra) guides you into the fascinating world of the Nebra Sky Disc. Not far from the find spot of this unique hoard the Visitor Centre connects archaeology and astronomy and presents the exciting story of the renowned bronze disc.

The centrepiece of the Nebra Ark is the digital planetarium. The show makes the complex astronomical knowledge, which is encrypted on the Sky Disc, comprehensible.

www.himmelscheibe-erleben.de

RINGHEILIGTUM
PÖMMELTE
Steinzeitkult an der Elbe

PÖMMELTE

The German Stonehenge

To the south of Magdeburg, only a few kilometres away from the Elbe, archaeologists discovered the remains of a more than 4,000-year-old cult site. The Pömmelte ring sanctuary is the reconstruction of this fascinating find.

www.ringheiligtum-poemmelte.de

SONNEN
OBSERVATORIUM
GOSECK
SOLAR OBSERVATORY

GOSECK

The Solar Observatory

The circular ditched enclosure of Goseck is the earliest archaeological evidence for systematic observations of the sky. The imposing monument with a diameter of around 70 m was completely excavated and exactly reconstructed on the original site. Just like 7,000 years ago, when the complex was built by Stone Age farmers, the course of the sun can be observed again today from within.

www.sonnenobservatorium-goseck.info

LANGENEICHSTÄDT

Das Grab der
DOLMENGÖTTIN
Langeneichstädt

The Tomb of the Dolmen Goddess

The stone chamber with the dolmen goddess stands for another aspect of the Sky Paths, the view into a world beyond. In the highly stylised oval representation we can discover human features. Some interpret it as portrayal of the "Great Goddess" and as a symbol of fertility. The menhir with its language of symbols and signs gives us a view into the conception of the afterlife more than 5,000 years ago.

www.himmelswege.de

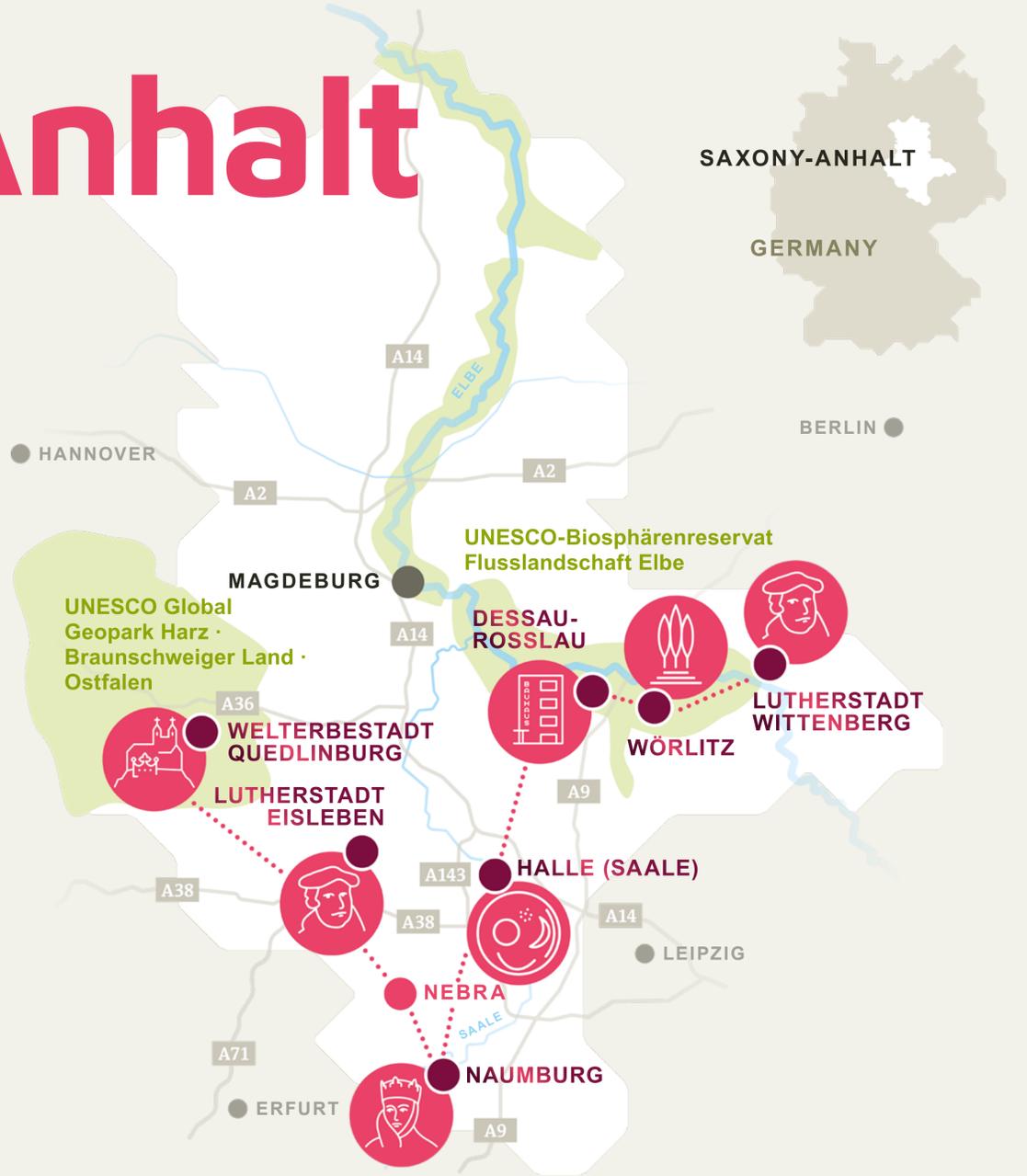


Saxony-Anhalt

Saxony-Anhalt is proud of its heritage, and with good reason: our state has a unique concentration of significant landmarks in German and European history. This is where you will find fascinating sites in intellectual history. Our legacy is internationally renowned: UNESCO has awarded five cultural sites, a biosphere reserve and various precious documents World Heritage status.

The Inspiring Six are testament to the proximity and interconnections between the cultural heritage in the area.

The Bauhaus in Dessau, the Luther Memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg, the Garden Kingdom Dessau-Wörlitz, the World Heritage City of Quedlinburg, the Naumburg Cathedral and the Nebra Sky Disk belong to the state of Saxony-Anhalt like its hyphen in the name.



INSPIRES
OUR
FUTURE.



IMPRINT

The Nebra Sky Disc

EUROPE'S HEART 3,600 YEARS AGO

Poster exhibition by the State Office for Heritage Management and Archaeology Saxony-Anhalt and State Museum for Prehistory Halle (Saale)

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Realisation and Design: KOCMOC (Leipzig)

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Nebra Sky Disc (Himmelsscheibe von Nebra®)

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