

Summary

This publication presents the results of the excavations that were carried out in 2010 and 2011 at Büsserach/Mittelstrasse. The work uncovered part of an early medieval craftsmen's quarter north of what is today the heart of the village of Büsserach. The site was the first early medieval craftsmen's settlement of considerable size to have been discovered and excavated in Canton Solothurn. From the point of view of Swiss iron-industry research, it can be seen as the eastern continuation of the extensively studied medieval mining area in the Bernese Jura region and Canton Jura.

Following a brief introduction into the geology and history of Büsserach, the book begins with a condensed overview of previous archaeological investigations carried out at Mittelstrasse, from the initial discovery of the site in 2008 to the excavations carried out in 2022. Covering an area of just over 3000 square metres, the extensive excavations of 2010 and 2011 alone uncovered 24 pit dwellings, 15 pits, four post-built structures, five hearths, three smiths' hearths, the remains of three bloomeries, two large slag deposits, two stone-paved zones and more than 200 post pits. Based on radiocarbon-dating results, the structures can be divided into five consecutive phases of occupation (5th to 11th centuries AD).

The iron slag dominated from a quantitative point of view, followed by the pottery and metal finds. Other categories, such as implements made of glass, stone, bone and antler, were represented in smaller quantities. The diversity of wares and manufacturing techniques among the ceramic finds showed that the settlement over the course of its existence was supplied with pottery from several different regions. Hardly any of the ceramic finds were identified as being from the locality. Typological comparisons

allowed us to link the pottery to ceramic wares known from north-western Switzerland. The periods of production identified in north-western Switzerland confirmed the chronological sequence established for Büsserach. Various tools and a large amount of production waste, which made up approximately half of all the iron finds, were associated with the iron industry. Evidence was also found of textile and leather processing. The archaeozoological investigations showed that domestic cattle were the main source of meat. As suggested by the advanced age of slaughter, the animals were initially used as work animals and then butchered and eaten at the end of their lives. Other animals were domestic pigs, sheep/goats and chickens.

The settlement appears to have almost exclusively served as an area of iron production and processing. Some 4.7 tonnes of slag were recovered during the excavations. They were the main focus of the analysis presented here. Structural elements of only one of the bloomeries survived. However, the presence of two further bloomeries was indirectly attested to by tuyeres and furnace wall fragments as well as specific types of slag. Various hearths, smithing areas and pits were also found. The analysis of the waste from iron production and smithing allowed us to draw conclusions with regard to the layout of three workshops and provided us with an insight into the entire chaîne opératoire of early medieval iron processing. The knowledge gained enhances and supplements the results previously obtained from other sites. The publication ends with a comprehensive synthesis, which provides a review of the archaeological investigations that took place after 2011 and summarises the results of the analysis.

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