

In a good neighbourhood. On the alleged regional homogeneity of medieval and early modern “settlement landscapes” in northern Lower Austria

Thomas KÜHTREIBER and Roland FILZWIESER

Summary

Through the advent of modern prospection methods in archaeology, more and more deserted medieval villages are becoming recognisable, and their former house, village and field structures have become apparent. Thus, they can be compared with the settlements in their immediate neighbourhood that have survived to the present day. This allows not only for the investigation of regional similarities as well as differences, but also for the identification of any

peculiarities of the deserted villages in terms of settlement form and positioning in the landscape, which could set them apart from neighbouring villages and possibly even provide clues as to their abandonment. Two areas in the Lower Austrian regions of the Waldviertel and the Weinviertel several exemplary cases that are considered in this paper.

Keywords: deserted medieval village, Middle Ages, Modern Ages, farmstead, Lower Austria

1. Introduction

Both the Waldviertel and the Weinviertel in Lower Austria, north of the Danube and west and east, respectively, of the Manhartsberg can be regarded as regions with a particularly high density of deserted medieval villages (DMVs). However, while the Waldviertel is characterised by a rather harsh climate and less-fertile soils, the lower-lying Weinviertel benefits from a substantial amount of fertile loess-covered soils.¹ This is partly evident from the numerous Lower Austrian DMVs documented by Kurt BORS, which were mainly found and documented in these two regions, as can be observed in the now-digitised Deserted Medieval Villages Archive of the Austrian Society for Medieval and Modern Archaeology (DeVill²). Yet these findings should be viewed with caution, as BORS had a particular focus on and interest in some regions, such as the northern Waldviertel and the so-called Lange Thal³ in the Weinviertel, which can also be clearly discerned from the distribution of DeVill's site documentation (fig. 1).⁴

Nevertheless, it cannot be completely dismissed that certain regional cultural landscape characteristics can be associated to certain regions of Lower Austria, which may makes it tempting to make generalisations. It therefore comes as no surprise that research was long focussed on the

search for regional cultural homogeneities, especially in the period between 1880 and 1960, often based on observations from the Franciscan cadastral map (ger. Franziszeische Kataster).⁵ Research paradigms were based on the assumption of long-term continuities of settlement, farm and house forms, connected to certain periods and in the case of house types even to cultural and ethnic identities.⁶ The question must also be raised as to the extent to which the later shift from such ethnic attributions to “regional identities” sought to pursue a more neutral or perhaps more “innocent” concept.⁷ However, the underlying logic remains the same.

In line with such ethnological approaches, from the 1960s to the 1980s – depending on the state in question – medieval archaeology regarded DMVs as a means of determining early conditions, the “roots” of rural settlement. The abandonment of villages was seen as the representation of a “frozen state”, in contrast to the modernised cartographic depiction and scientific documentation of settlements during the 19th and 20th centuries. A key insight gained from these archaeological excavations of deserted villages is that the establishment of villages with a regular

¹ FELGENHAUER-SCHMIEDT 2009, 69.

² <https://devill.oegmn.or.at/sites> [Access: 28.11.2024].

³ BORS 1988.

⁴ FILZWIESER et al. 2024; SCHARRER-LIŠKA et al. 2024.

⁵ MANSBERGER et al. 2016; see also the Franciscan cadastral map on Arcanum Maps: <https://maps.arcanum.com/en/map/cadastral/> [Access: 28.11.2024].

⁶ Referring to rural houses and farmsteads: BRUNNER-GAUREK 2025, 366–371; referring to rural settlements: KRAUSE/Th. KÜHTREIBER 2014, 225–226, 235.

⁷ TSCHOFFEN 2003; KNOLL/SCHARF 2021, 8, 10; MIESGANG 2025, 307–311.

Figure credits

- Fig. 1: Data: <https://devill.oegmn.or.at/sites>, Map tiles: © OpenStreetMap contributors. Graphic: Roland FILZWIESER.
- Fig. 2: Data: after BORS 2013 and DeVill <https://devill.oegmn.or.at/entity/198911> [Access: 28.11. 2024], Map tiles: © Esri – Source: Esri, i-cubed, USDA, USGS, AEX, GeoEye, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, UPR-EGP, and the GIS User Community, Graphic: Roland FILZWIESER.
- Fig. 3: Data: after BORS 1993 and DeVill <https://devill.oegmn.or.at/map/204938> [Access: 29.11.2024], Map tiles: basemap.at, Processing and graphic: Roland FILZWIESER.

Fig. 4: Data: Map riles: basemap.at, Graphic: Roland FILZWIESER.

Fig. 5: Data: after BORS 1993 and DeVill <https://devill.oegmn.or.at/map/204938> [Access: 29.11.2024], Haselbach und Wollmannsberg: Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv (NÖLA) FK map UM 154/03 and FK map UM 480/02

Figs 6–9, 15: Data: BEV, Graphic: Gábor TARCSAY.

Figs 10–14: Maps: NÖLA, Graphic: Gábor TARCSAY.

In guter Nachbarschaft. Zur vermeintlichen regionalen Homogenität mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher „Siedlungslandschaften“ im nördlichen Niederösterreich

Durch das Aufkommen moderner Prospektionsmethoden in der Archäologie werden immer mehr verlassene mittelalterliche Dörfer erkennbar und ihre ehemaligen Haus-, Dorf- und Feldformen sichtbar. So können sie mit den bis heute erhaltenen Siedlungen in ihrer unmittelbaren Umgebung verglichen werden. Dies ermöglicht nicht nur die Untersuchung regionaler Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede, sondern auch die Identifizierung von Besonderheiten der Wüstungen in Bezug auf Siedlungsform

und Positionierung in der Landschaft, die sie von den Nachbardörfern abheben und möglicherweise sogar Hinweise auf ihre Aufgabe geben könnten. Anhand von zwei niederösterreichischen Regionen im Waldviertel und im Weinviertel werden hier einige exemplarische Fälle vorgestellt.

Schlagworte: Wüstung, Mittelalter, Neuzeit, Bauernhof, Niederösterreich

Mag. Dr. Thomas KÜHTREIBER
Universität Salzburg
Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der
Frühen Neuzeit (IMAREAL)
Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit
Körnermarkt 13
3500 Krems an der Donau
Österreich
thomas.kuehtreiber@plus.ac.at

Mag. Dr. Roland FILZWIESER
Universität Wien
Vienna Institute for Archaeological Science (VIAS)
Franz Klein-Gasse 1
1190 Wien
Österreich
Universität Wien
Human Evolution & Archaeological Sciences (HEAS)
Universitätsring 1
1010 Wien
Österreich
roland.filzwieser@univie.ac.at