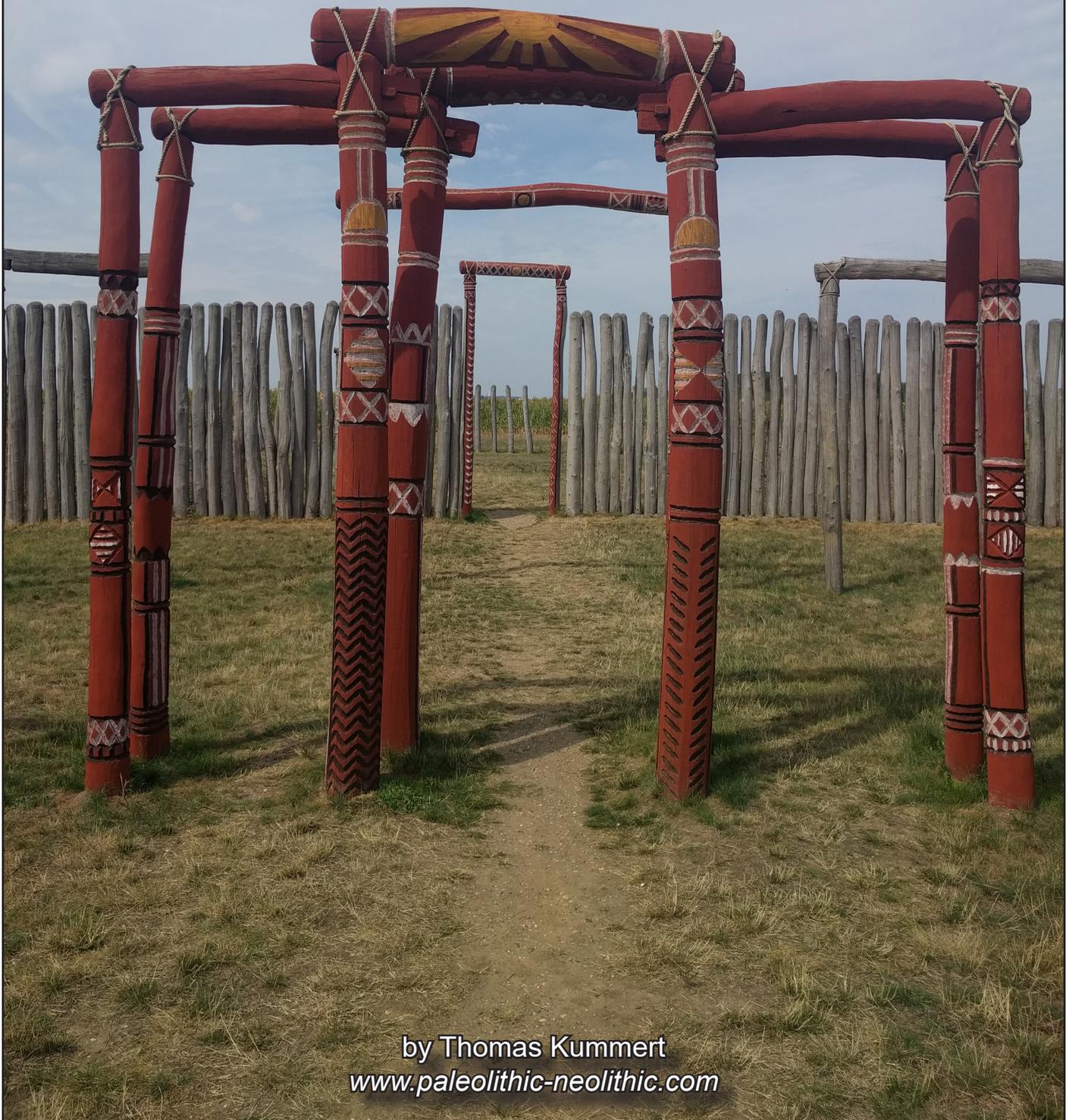


# Ritual Cult Ring

## People of Poemmelte



by Thomas Kummert  
[www.paleolithic-neolithic.com](http://www.paleolithic-neolithic.com)



Imagine 5,000 years ago our ancestors erected massive ring walls with hundreds of rather long and neatly straightened tree trunks. For what purpose did they do this? Could only be for ceremonial use. For housing purposes the ring was too large. And as defense system they were too small and not defensive enough.

It must have been for ritual cult use because their entrances were indicating the winter and summer solstices. Which was an important indicator for farming communities. Let's take a step back and look at the situation of migration in Mideurope at the time.

**Pre-History**

But what level of cultural development we could expect at that time in rural Germany? Let me try to give you the big picture. Latest research results indicate that our ancestors were far more developed and skillful than we previously thought.

Only a few hundred kilometers further north and a stunning 300.000 years earlier man in this case homo heidelbergensis used hunting spears. Now

imagine these pre-historic spears barely differ from modern Olympic competition spears in length, weight and point of gravity. The major surprise was they had a similar flight path and could kill wild horses at a distance of over 50 meters.

The next archeological proof of developed humans in this case homo sapiens in Europe dated around 40.000 years ago when they created rather realistic and highly skillful cave paintings at Chauvet in southern France and carved numerous animal figurines made of mammoth ivory including a rather large lion man statuette on the Swabian Alb near Ulm in Germany.



**Corded Ware & Bell Beaker Cultures**  
Getting closer in time we know that the Corded Ware Culture dated around 2900 BC so-called after their way to decorate their pottery ware was widely spread in Germany. They were normads arriving in Europe from Asian steppe. This culture was also known to

bury their deceased with gifts like stone axes.

Then followed the Bell Beaker Culture about 300 years later so-called after the typical form of their drinking vessels. These early Bronze Age people hunted with bow and arrow and possessed already metallurgic working knowledge to produce arms.

So they were able to produce gold colored weapons by adding tin to bronze and they knew that tin made copper harder for weapon purposes.

#### *Aunjetitz Culture*

Both these rural farming cultures were predecessors of the more sophisticated Aunjetitz Chieftdom, as experts call it which produced the famous Nebra Sky Disc. But recent research indicate that Bell Beakers and Aunjetitz might have been the same tribe.

It is interesting to note that Bell Beaker and Aunjetitz both erected long houses and buried their dead in wooden boxes or carved out tree trunks. With this new discovery Bronze Age history in Germany needs to be rewritten.

Previously the huge forest covered area which is today's Germany was believed to be sparsely inhabited by unsophisticated small farming communities.

#### *Poemmelte Cult Site*

The important cult ring at Poemmelte close to

Schoeneberg southeast of Magdeburg in Saxony-Anhalt has been fully reconstructed based on detailed excavation results which first started in 2005 and again in 2019.

The outcome of its reconstruction is really impressive when looked at from the visitor's platform. With a massive diameter of 115 meters it was the largest ritual site in ancient Europe.

This cult site was entered via the first ring of wooden poles behind which lay a circle of numerous pits, then followed an earth wall with ditch behind and finally the palisade wall.

The inner ceremonial area ring measured 46 meters across and allowed several hundred persons to enter. The site was carefully chosen on higher ground above the flood line between the important rivers Elbe and Saale along which ancient trading routes were running.

This structure is unique in Early Bronze Age Germany at the change of Neolithic Period to Bronze Age around 2300 BC. It looks similar to Stonehenge and Avebury in England which were erected at the same time also by members of the Bell Beaker Culture.

Avebury and Poemmelte both started with a small square cult site. Again this is proof that active long distance trade and travel including intercultural exchange took place already. Our ancestors





5,000 years ago were far more mobile than we possibly can imagine.

#### *Example Stonehenge*

Please remember that 2900 BC Stonehenge was first a burial site with single wooden poles serving as grave markers. Only 500 years later stone monolith were erected replacing the wooden poles.

And in the vicinity of Stonehenge a site called Woodhenge was erected at the same time. But the diameter of its wooden pole circle only measured 50 meters. But in one point they differ. The Stonehenge area was in antiquity a huge ritual cult site with numerous structures spreading over many square kilometers.

*Poemmelte & Nebra Sky Disc*  
Excavations at Poemmelte indicate that this cult site was used for 300 years after the wooden pole ring was erected 2300 BC. So it was about 500 years older than the Nebra Sky Disc and certainly have influenced its design.

The ring entrances were erected precisely on the axis of the

winter and summer solstices demonstrating a sophisticated local astronomical knowledge 5,000 years ago. This shows that farming communities at the time followed already annual, fertility and sun cycles.

For ceremonies the east entrance was the most important and its various pole and beam gates were decorated with carved and painted symbols. Colors used were red, white, black and ochre as can be seen in the pictures.

#### *First Beginnings*

The site was erected over time

in phases but still following a concept till it's end. The first structures including two pits and a square trench measuring 14 meters were created around 2900 BC. On this square a wooden burial hut was possibly used for ceremonial purposes by members of the Corded Ware Culture.

The burial gifts included stone axes and knives as indication of the social standing of the deceased leader. This hut was then covered with earth to create a small tumuli.

#### *Second Phase*

A first circular trench was dug out about 2300 BC. Then several wooden pole rings were added. The outer rings consisted of poles set apart and only the inner ring was constructed as palisade wall not allowing any view inside.

Between the outer rings excavations unearthed various objects. Their position seemed to have specific importance. In the northeast section grinding stones were deposited and in the southwest stone axes.

Experts believe grinding stones represented the female





cultural sphere with home activities, fertility and natural powers.

Stone axes were indicating the male sphere with power of destruction but also reconstruction, spiritual sunrise and possible rebirth.

***Burials or Human Sacrifice?***

Male deceased were found in the east of this ring section and were ceremonial burials. Recent investigations discovered 13 seated burials of men aged between 17 to 30 years of age.

Female, youth and child burials were done on the western side. So male and female were divided by the important solar line again pointing to the different spheres in life and death.

These burials indicate they were all killed and buried in simple shaft graves. Two woman and five youth were buried here without arms and legs. Four were killed with clubs, axes or arrows and one body was tied up.

What does this tell us? Was it a human sacrifice? Or had

in their belief only men the chance of rebirth? Were human sacrifices practiced here for better harvests? Or was the family of an important leader killed and buried with him?



Or were they just secondary burials for various reasons? This is still a very open subject and it needs to be seen if results will come out from ongoing research.

Poemmelte was a multi culture burial site. First used by Corded Ware tribes and then by Bell Beaker people and finally by the Aunjetitz Culture. The latter two might have been the same people.

Recent investigations discovered various small burial mounds in the Poemmelte area.

***Third Phase***

In the period of 2300 to 2050 BC about 30 shafts were dug over two meters deep to bury drink sacrifices plus drinking vessels, mill stones, stone axes and animal bones.

All objects were intentionally broken not to be used after the ritual meeting. This might have been part of ceremonial sacrifices.

Human body parts were placed on tree bark, leather or in baskets. Thereafter the shafts were filled with gravel.



If we look at the four depots discovered with human skulls it is clear that various rituals were performed here.

In Neolithic times skulls indicate a vivid ancestor cult. Three shafts were crowned by skulls. Were they enemy trophies or again just an ancestor ritual?

***Close by Settlement***

New excavations on a three hectare area started in 2019 show that a large settlement existed right next to the cult ring. The Bell Beaker people erected six long houses about 2500 BC and later the Aunjetitz clans lived in 30 long houses built from 2300 BC. During Aunjetitz

times it was the largest and therefore first protourban settlement in Mideurope.

This residential area is measuring over 200 square meters. Over 300 artefacts were found here so far. Clearly the pole holes of a long house erected as a two ship structure up to 20 meters long. But we also know that Poemmelte was visited by tribes from afar.

***End of Poemmelte***

Suddenly in 2050 BC this important cult ring was dismantled. Poles were piled up in the center and burned. This was a ritual destruction. So far no reason could be established

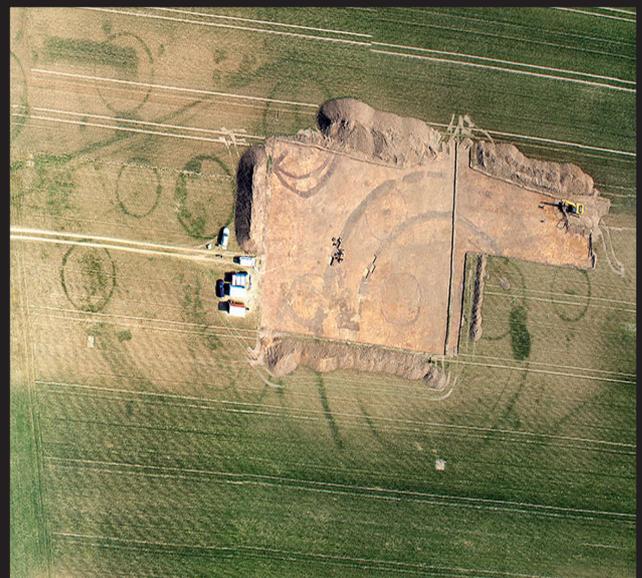
why this happened. It was a drastic measure.

The trenches were filled up with the ash and earth from the walls and various burials were placed in the pits left by the pulled out poles and closed up. Was this the end of Poemmelte? And more importantly why?

The Poemmelte ritual site was sporadically used thereafter in 1600 BC and again 600 years later.

***Schoenebeck Cult Ring***

This interesting site is situated only a kilometer away but still in sight of





Poemmelte on a hillock at the border of Elbe River. It is younger and dated around 2100 BC and was definitely used by the people of the Aunjetitz Culture.

Unfortunately there are no visible remains left today. But aerial surveys revealed its existence and excavations took place in 2004. These established a central structure

with various rings consisting of trenches, wooden poles and earth rings. The entrances were positioned in the same directions to winter and summer solstices as in Poemmelte.

As can be seen in the pictures in total seven additional rings were found next to it. This site was different to Poemmelte as it had an open concept with

poles set apart and no palisade wall. Only on the southeast side towards Poemmelte a short section was erected as palisade wall to object views from and towards Poemmelte.

The outer circle measured 90 meters and the inner ceremonial area had a diameter of 30 meters. And again the entrances marked the winter and summer solstices. When





entered the structure starts with a circular trench, followed by an open pole ring, second trench and open and partly palisade wall plus two pole rings.

We know that this cult site was used for different functions and ceremonies. But so far only limited finds were made during excavations of an area of 6,500 square meters. These included pieces of large pottery storage vessels plus potsherds from smaller ceramic ware.

Animal bones mainly from cattle and firestone tools which were produced on site. Surprising is the discovery of a single upper leg human bone. Different to Poemmelte there is no proof of any human sacrifices here.

But next to the rings 40 Bronze Age and Early Iron Age burials were discovered. Unfortunately they were in such a bad condition that no conclusions about their sex, age or cause of death could be established.

In addition about 40 Late Bronze Age burials including group burials were found close by. We can be certain to learn soon more about new research results from both Schoenebeck and Poemmelte ritual cult sites.

### Summary

The fully reconstructed Poemmelte ritual cult ring is a

unique example to help us understand that our ancestors 5,000 years ago were already highly sophisticated with well established social structures and strong religious beliefs. They were far traveled and brought back different skills and knowledge. This included metallurgical smelting of bronze and working with gold to produce jewelry and weapons.

But the cult ring served various purposes. It was a vital ritual place for farming based communities in the area as well as from far away. They met here and celebrated various rituals. The ring entrances indicated precisely the summer and winter solstices. But also sacrifices were practiced here possibly for better harvests we assume.

### Travel Tips

If you want to visit this intriguing site only a few kilometers south of Schoenebeck you either reach it in a good hours drive from Berlin or via Magdeburg which is only 20 kms away from the site. You can not miss it as there are many sign leading you there.

The open air site is open all year round and can best seen from the visitors platform. There are many information plates in both German and English giving you a detailed account of excavation and research results.

I recommend also visiting the small local Salzland Museum in Schoenebeck. Check their website for further information

[www.salzlandmuseum.de](http://www.salzlandmuseum.de) or [www.Salzlandkreis.de/bildung/kultur/salzlandmuseum/ringheiligtumpoemmelte](http://www.Salzlandkreis.de/bildung/kultur/salzlandmuseum/ringheiligtumpoemmelte)

### Picture Credits

We thank the Salzland Museum in Schoenebeck for making available some of their pictures.