HAUS DER MUSEEN

Archaeological Museum
of the Canton of Solothurn

WHAT REMAINS

Stories unearthed

Welcome

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Archaeological Museum of the Canton of Solothurn

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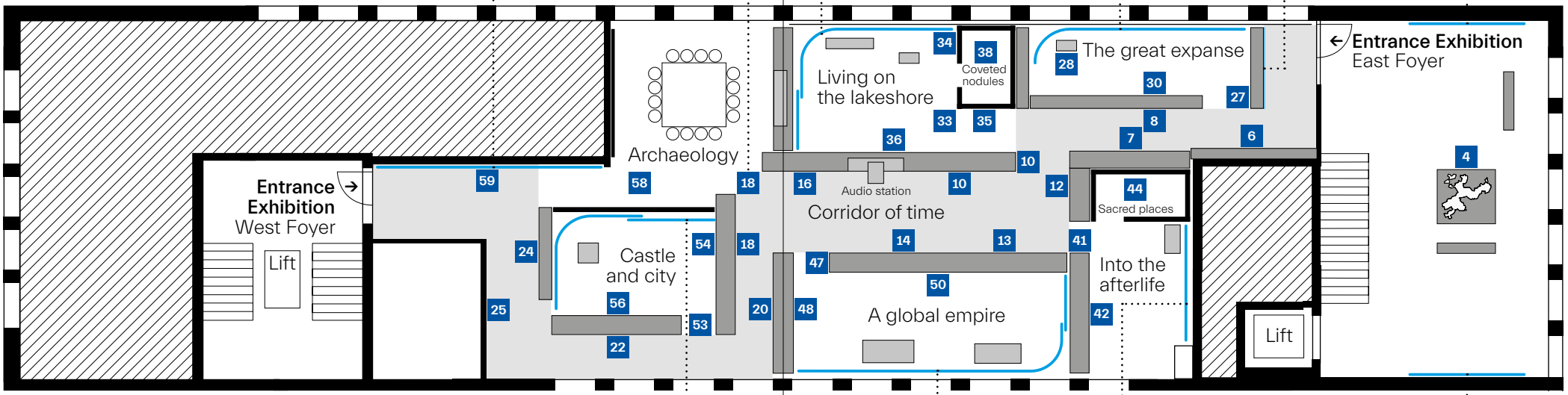
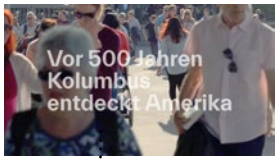
The numbers indicate the page numbers in the museum guide.





WHAT REMAINS
Stories unearthed

We all leave traces behind. This has always been so. Many things disappear but others remain concealed in the ground for hundreds or even thousands of years. This is also true for the Canton of Solothurn.

WELCOME TO THE CANTON OF SOLOTHURN!
Use the model to locate the different communities in the Canton of Solothurn. The index cards in the filing cabinet opposite it guide you through the most important sites in the communities of the Canton of Solothurn, beginning with A for Aedermannsdorf and ending with Z for Zullwil.

0 These communities have archaeological sites that are open to visitors.

This symbol denotes a community where an excavation is currently ongoing.

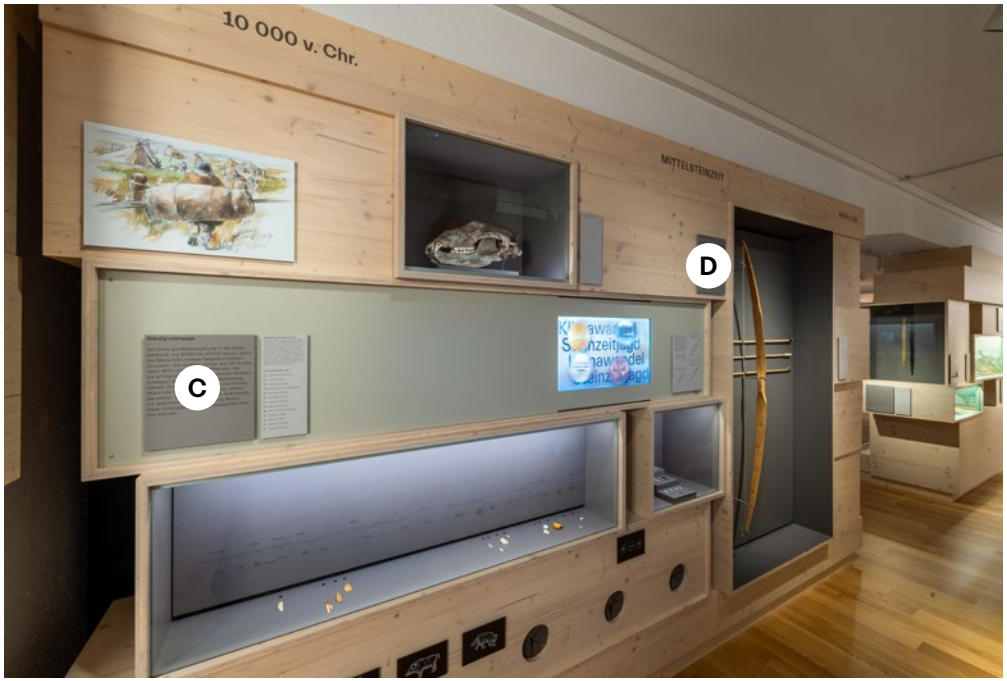
Here you can find out more about the current archaeological and heritage preservation measures in various Solothurn communities.

A

The earliest finds from the Canton of Solothurn
At first glance they look just like ordinary stones. They were embedded in the ground until a plough exposed them. The second glance reveals the truth: they have been worked. They are tools made of flint and quartzite. They are 40 000–80 000 years old. Neanderthals used tools such as these to cut up their meat, work their hides and carve bone.

B

The Kastelhöhle cave – the Early Stone Age in the Kaltbrunnental valley
A unit of archaeological layers measuring 3 metres in thickness, excavated between 1948 and 1950, yielded thousands of stone tools and fragmented bones from slaughtered animals. The finds were recovered from three overlying layers and are 14 000–40 000 years old. During that time, people repeatedly lived or sought refuge in the Kastelhöhle cave. The cave is well hidden in a narrow valley cut deep into the landscape. It offers shelter and there is water nearby. Various hunting grounds are only a few hours' walk from here.

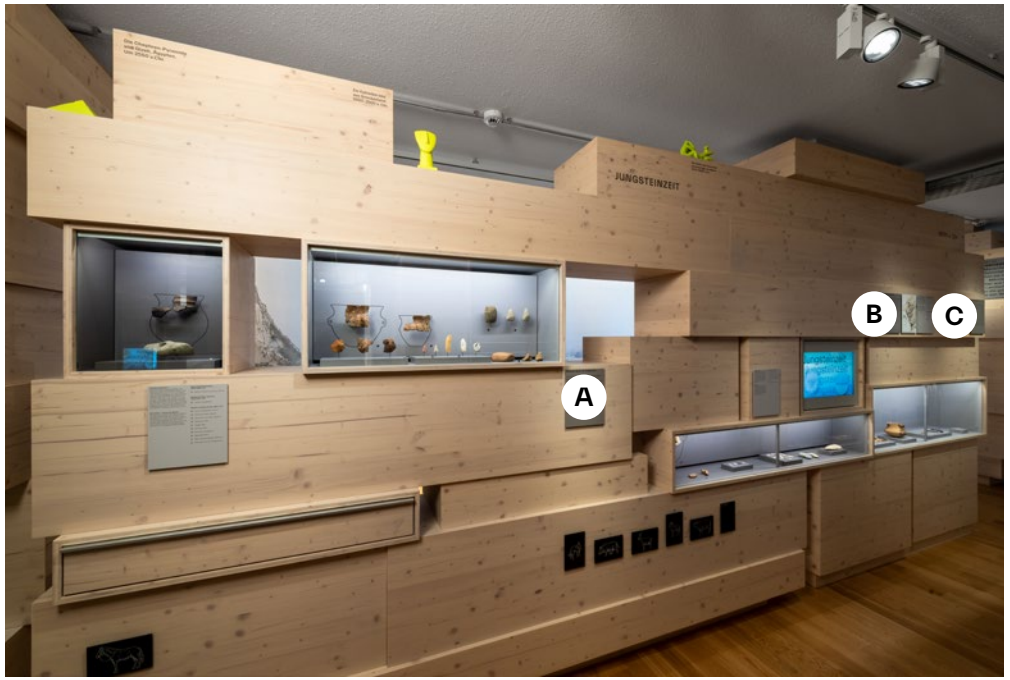


C

Always on the move
At the end of the Early Stone Age and during the Middle Stone Age, 8000 to 15 000 years ago, the people in our region lived in small groups. They roamed the landscape in search of game and edible plants. Wherever they found animals to hunt and plants to gather, they set up camp. They lived in tents, under rock shelters and in caves. When their sources of food ran low, they moved on. Because they frequently changed where they lived, they did not have many possessions. Everything had to be portable.

D

Hunting as a form of subsistence
Over the many millennia, the climate changed several times. It alternated between warm and cold periods. Plants and animals adapted, as did humans. In the Early Stone Age, large herds of wild horses and reindeer roamed the open, treeless tundra landscape. At that time, humans hunted using spears and spear throwers. At the end of the last Ice Age, the climate gradually became warmer. Trees began to grow and dense wooded areas expanded. Small herds of roe deer and deer lived concealed in the woods. Humans developed a new method of hunting using bows and arrows.



A

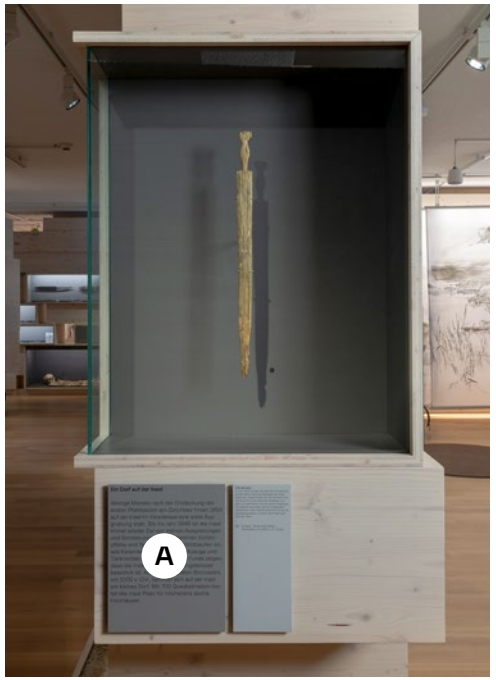
The earliest Neolithic farmers
The first farmers built small villages. They cleared the woods. Using ground and polished stone axes they chopped down trees to build their houses. They ploughed fields and planted cereals, pulses, flax and poppies. They bred sheep, goats, cattle and pigs. With the onset of the Neolithic period, pottery making was invented. Ceramic vessels were used for cooking and for safely storing and preserving the harvested grain. The new lifestyle was more labour-intensive but also fed more people. One failed harvest, however, meant that the entire village could go hungry.

B

Stone cists for the afterlife
It was a widespread custom in the Late Stone Age to bury the dead in large stone cists. A belief in life after death was probably the reason why these elaborate funerary structures were erected using massive stone slabs. The deceased were buried with weapons, jewellery and stone tools as well as ceramic vessels full of food and drink. The more affluent people were in life, the richer their grave goods were in death. The stone cists were often repeatedly used. The skeletal remains of earlier burials were simply moved to one side to make room for new bodies.

C

From bows and arrows to ploughs
Humans had spent most of their history as migrating hunters and gatherers. The Neolithic Revolution changed this: people became sedentary farmers and cattle breeders. This was not a sudden change, but a slow process. It began some 12 000 years ago in the Middle East. All wild species, from which cereals were cultivated and domestic animals bred, existed there. Settlers brought the farming lifestyle from the Middle East to central Europe. The first farmers and the local hunters and gatherers probably lived side by side for several centuries.



A

A village on the island

A few months after the first pile dwellings were discovered on Lake Zurich in 1854, the first excavation was mounted on an island in Lake Inkwil. Until 1946 the island continued to be the subject of small excavations and test trenches, which brought to light oak posts and fir wood construction timbers as well as pottery fragments, stone tools and animal bones. All these finds attested to the fact that the island was occupied from as early as the Neolithic period. A small village was also built there in the Late Bronze Age, around 1000 BC. Measuring no more than 700 square metres, the island could only accommodate about six timber-built houses.

B

Fashionable clothing pins

During the Bronze Age women wore sheath dresses fastened at the shoulders with long bronze pins. Because the deceased were buried in their own clothes, remnants of such garments have been found in graves. The fabric has long decayed, but the pins and other items of jewellery such as neck and arm rings made of bronze have survived. The shapes and decorations of such dress accessories evolved over the course of the centuries along with changing fashions. Differences in these costumes can also reflect social and regional variation.

C

A bronze smith's workshop

The bronze smith was in big demand in the village, because very few people knew how to cast and forge bronze. It was created by melting together the correct amounts of copper and tin. This alloy was then cast into a mould, which resulted in a basic version of the intended object. The next step was to file it and harden it by hammering. That is how bronze smiths created jewellery, weapons, tools, horse tackle and fittings for wagons. Any broken pieces or items that were no longer in use could be melted down and reused to make new objects.

D

A dense network of settlements

During the Bronze Age there was a village on an island in Lake Inkwil. People, however, not only lived on the lakeshores but also further inland. This is shown by more than one hundred known sites located mainly on the fertile terraces along the southern foothills of the Jura Mountains. And then there were the settlements on the mountains and hilltops of the Jura region. In many cases, the fact that a village once existed there is only hinted at by some isolated finds such as pottery fragments and sometimes a few post holes. Rows of stones or hearths are the only architectural components that have survived – everything else has disappeared over the centuries.

E

Wealth from bronze

The invention of bronze around 2200 BC was the impetus for the dawning of a new age. Trade in copper and tin, the two components of bronze, gave rise to an exchange of goods across all of Europe: whilst copper occurred in the Alpine region, tin had to be imported from England, Spain or Brittany. Outside of traditional agriculture, new occupations evolved: mining, bronze working, the trade in raw materials and transportation. Those who controlled these new sectors were able to acquire status and power. Richly furnished graves and precious votive offerings to the gods attest to the existence of this new upper class.

A

Elevated locations offered protection and good vantage points

There were many so-called hilltop settlements in the Jura region during the Bronze Age. Their difficult-to-access locations on rocky ridges and terraces offered natural protection. Whilst the Frohburg Castle hill near Olten and the Lehnfluh near Oensingen probably also served as vantage points to keep control over the trade routes that ran below them, the Gross Chastel near Lostorf and the Portifluh near Nunningen are probably more likely to have been places of refuge in times of conflict. In some cases, a rampart construction of soil, stones and timber and a ditch dug in front of it offered further protection for the inhabitants.

B

The period of the Celts

From 450 BC onwards, Celtic culture spread throughout the whole of central Europe. Ancient writers have passed down the names of numerous Celtic tribes: the Helvetii lived on the Swiss Plateau whilst the Rauraci settled in north-western Switzerland. Society was strictly hierarchical in structure: on the one hand the upper echelons were composed of Celtic priests, the so-called druids, and on the other of powerful chieftains and warriors. A large cohort of tributary farming families took care of cultivating the land. The lowest echelons were made up of serfs and slaves.

C

ELUVEITIE – I am a Helvetian

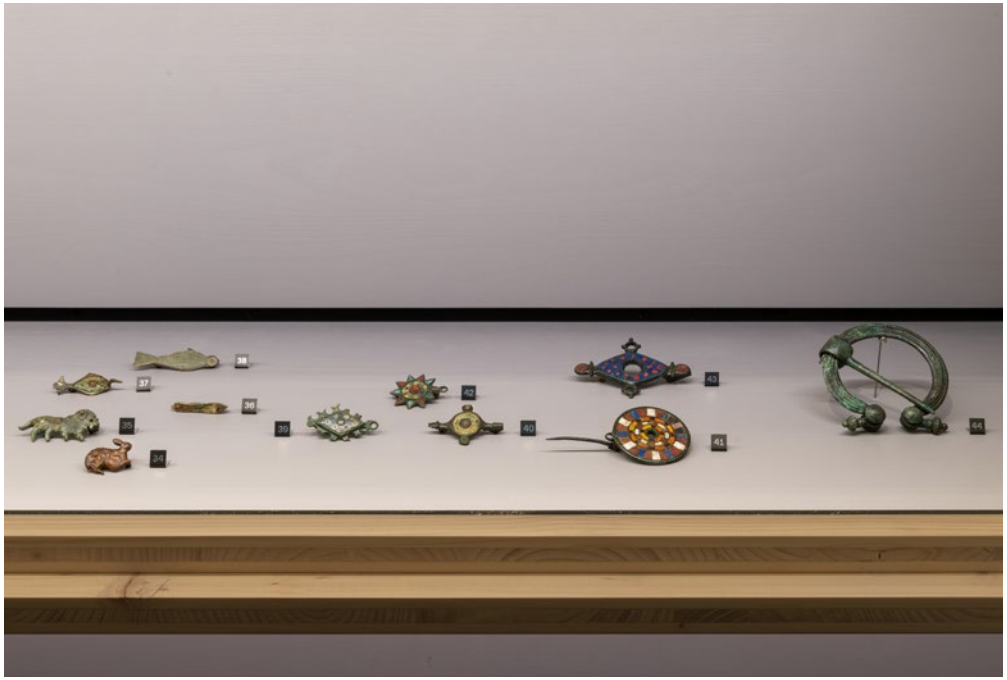
The Celts did not have their own system of writing. Some spoke Greek, as shown by Greek lettering on Celtic coins. Others spoke Latin and used the Latin alphabet, as they had maintained close trade relations with their Roman neighbours to the south from the 2nd century BC onwards. Wine and tableware were particularly popular commodities. In contrast to the Romans, who always mixed their wine with water, the Celts drank it undiluted. The introduction of the monetary economy made trading easier. The Celts also liked to pay for their imports with commodities such as slaves.

A

The Romans are coming
In 58 BC the Roman commander Julius Caesar brought the mass migration of the Helvetii to a halt at Bibracte in Burgundy. The assassination of Caesar and the ensuing civil war over his succession, however, delayed the Roman accession to power in what is today Switzerland and it was not until around 15 BC that Augustus brought the foothills of the Alps under Roman rule. Soon afterwards, some of the existing Celtic settlements were expanded and new ones were built in favourable locations. Amongst these were Solothurn and Olten, which were founded in the early 1st century AD as rest stops on the road that traversed the Swiss Plateau.

B

Almighty emperors
Augustus, Julius Caesar's successor, declared the Roman Republic a monarchy and in 27 BC became the first emperor of the Imperium Romanum. Until the fall of the western Roman Empire in AD 476, there was a succession of 67 legitimate emperors. They had absolute political and military power and were also the religious leaders. Coins distributed the likenesses and the ideological systems of emperors and empresses throughout the whole empire. All subjects were bound to adhere to the imperial cult. As we know from inscriptions, *Salodurum*, the Roman Solothurn, also had two temples dedicated to the imperial dynasty.

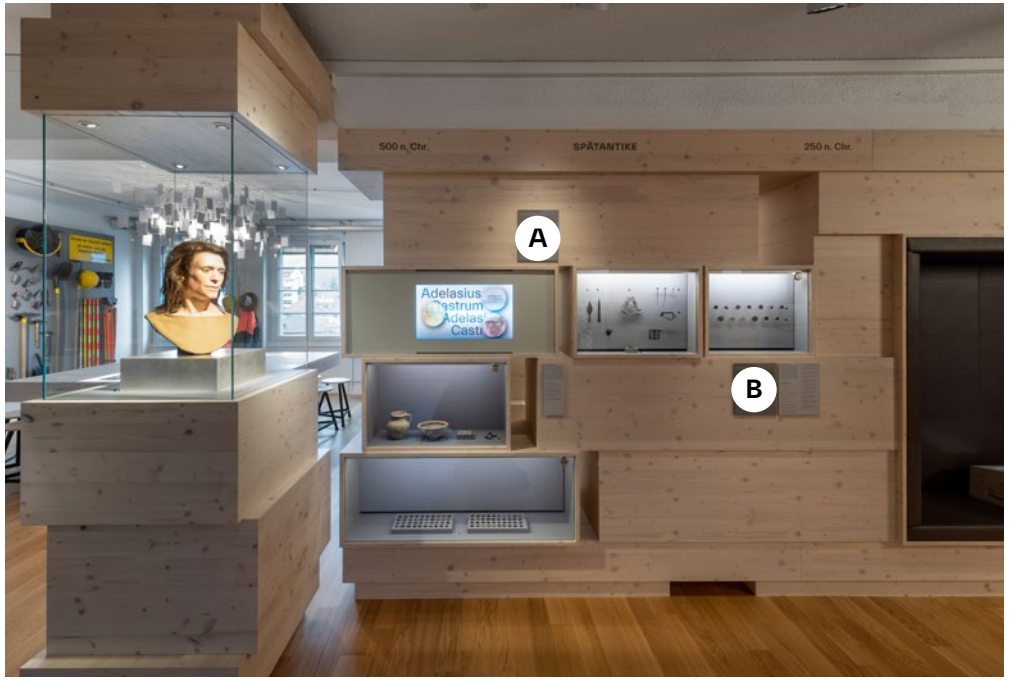


C

Gauls became Gallo-Romans
In the wake of the Roman conquest of Switzerland, the local population began to adopt many of the trends that were fashionable in the capital city. From the late 1st century AD onwards, women began to wear Roman tunics instead of their traditional dresses, which had been held together by brooches. These new garments were tailored and brooches were no longer needed. Nevertheless, the Celtic tradition of wearing colourful brooches lived on and they were simply attached to the tunics for the purpose of adornment. That is how traditional elements were intermixed with novelties, and a new "Gallo-Roman" culture was created.

D

The Roman pantheon had room for all the gods
The Roman pantheon accommodated many deities. Each god or goddess was associated with a particular aspect of life: Jupiter was the chief deity. Venus was the goddess of love, beauty and fertility, Mercury the god of trade and money. Like the Romans, the indigenous Celtic population also believed in a multitude of gods. When their territories were incorporated into the Roman Empire, their gods were incorporated into the Roman pantheon and some became associated with Roman gods. This tolerance towards other religions was one of the reasons why the Romans were successful in the politics of power and integration.



A

Protected by high walls
In the 4th century AD the Roman towns of Olten and Solothurn were reduced in size and fortified. Defensive walls of up to 9 metres in height and 2.5 to 3 m in thickness were erected around half of the town of Solothurn and approximately a quarter of the area of Olten. These *castra* (plural of *castrum*), which were approximately 1 hectare in size, secured the River Aare crossing and provided shelter and protection for the inhabitants of the surrounding farmsteads in times of conflict. The walls of the *castra* shaped the appearance of both towns well beyond Late Antiquity and are still visible in places today.

B

Places of refuge in the Jura region
From prehistoric times people have fled the lowlands in times of unrest or conflict and have sought refuge in the remote Jura Mountains. This also occurred in the late 3rd century AD, when bands of Alemannic warriors repeatedly carried out incursions across the border on the River Rhine, plundering and looting the regions on the Swiss Plateau. Occupied only on a temporary basis, the elevated settlements were often located on sheltered hilltops that were difficult to access. People from the Olten area, for example, sought refuge at the Frohburg Castle site near Trimbach or on Gross Chastel near Lostorf.

A

The “Röschtigraben” cultural divide

In the Early Middle Ages the area of the Canton of Solothurn was home to people from two different cultural groups, as can be seen by the grave goods. The north and west were largely Romanic whilst the east was Alemannic. The Romani were descendants of the indigenous Gallo-Roman population. The Alemanni came from the north and east and settled on the Swiss Plateau over the course of the 7th century AD. At the time the linguistic border between Romanic and Alemannic was located east of Solothurn. Over the centuries, it gradually shifted further west.

B

Nothing but graves

Life in the Early Middle Ages is mainly attested to by graves and grave goods, as shown by the fact that 46 municipalities in the Canton of Solothurn have yielded burials, whilst settlement remains have only been uncovered in five places. One of the aspects that causes this imbalance is the fact that inhumation burials were commonplace in the Early Middle Ages, which means that graves are easier to find; another factor is that houses were timber-built and tended to leave very little evidence in the ground. Early medieval cemeteries consisted of rows of graves. The deceased usually lay on the back with the head at the western end of the grave.

C

When bones begin to talk

The skeletons from Grenchen tell us a lot about the people who lived there in the Early Middle Ages. Most of them died before reaching the age of 45. The women faced greater risks during pregnancy, in childbirth and from post-natal complications. Infections could also prove fatal. The small group of elderly included anyone over 50 or 60 years of age. The average height for a woman was 1.61 m, whilst for a man it was 1.71 m. Dental health was poor: decayed and missing teeth were the norm whilst healthy teeth were the exception.

D

Adelasius Ebalchus from Grenchen, around AD 700

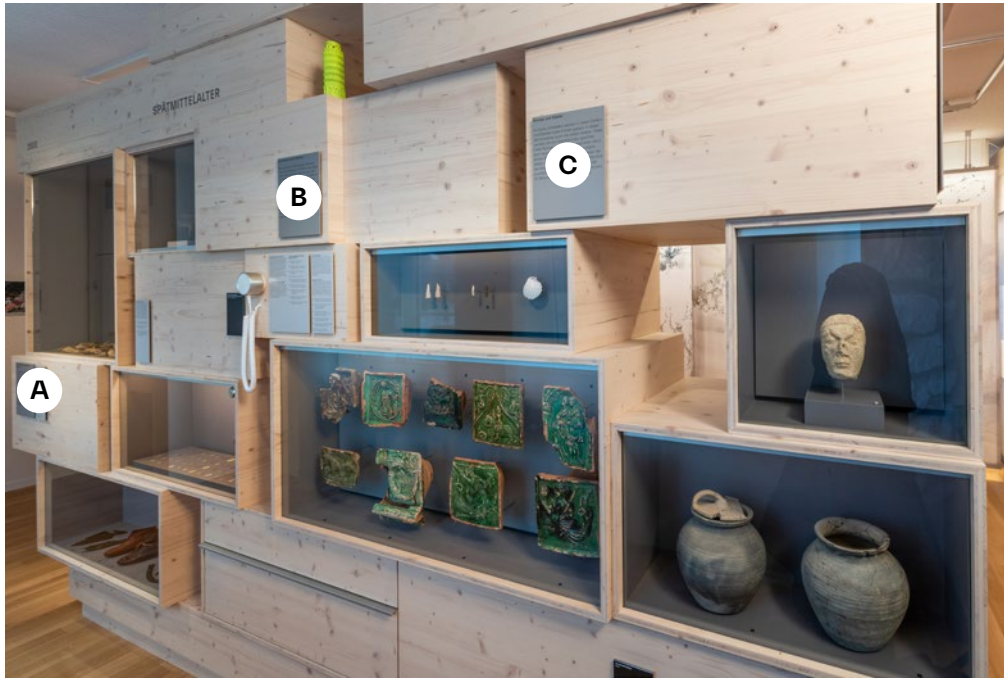
This young man, whom we shall call Adelasius Ebalchus, belonged to the old-established Romanic population that succeeded the Gallo-Romans. Adelasius was 1.73 metres tall. His health was not good: he was suffering from a chronic infection which had probably been brought on by pneumonia. Over the course of his protracted illness, he also exhibited signs of deficiency, which put additional stress on his immune system. Did this illness cause his death in the end? We cannot say. The fact remains, however, that Adelasius was only about 20 when he died. Some 1300 years later, facial reconstruction has brought the young man back to life.

A

Iron from the Jura Mountains
Iron ore is quite abundant throughout the entire Jura Mountain range. Between AD 600 and AD 1000 iron was produced on a large scale at a craftsmen's settlement near Büsserach. When ore is smelted in a "bloomery furnace", the iron is gathered in a sponge-like lump whilst the waste flows out the bottom of the furnace in the form of slag. Almost four tons of slag waste was left behind at Büsserach. The sponge iron, or bloom, is purified by repeated heating and hammering, and the resulting iron is then made into tools and other implements. The products from the Büsserach operation were intended for barter or trade.

B

Mighty strongholds
Noble families ruled over the surrounding area from their castles. A typical castle had a tower, an enclosing wall as well as residential and utility buildings. They were often built on elevated ground. In the Jura Mountains and their southern foothills, castles were mainly built on top of high, steep rocks. In this way, a castle's inhabitants were protected whilst at the same time maintaining control over the Jura passes. Moreover, by choosing a residence that overlooked the whole area, the lord of the castle demonstrated both his power and his wealth. The latter was accumulated from tributes, taxes and the compulsory labour imposed on his subjects.



A

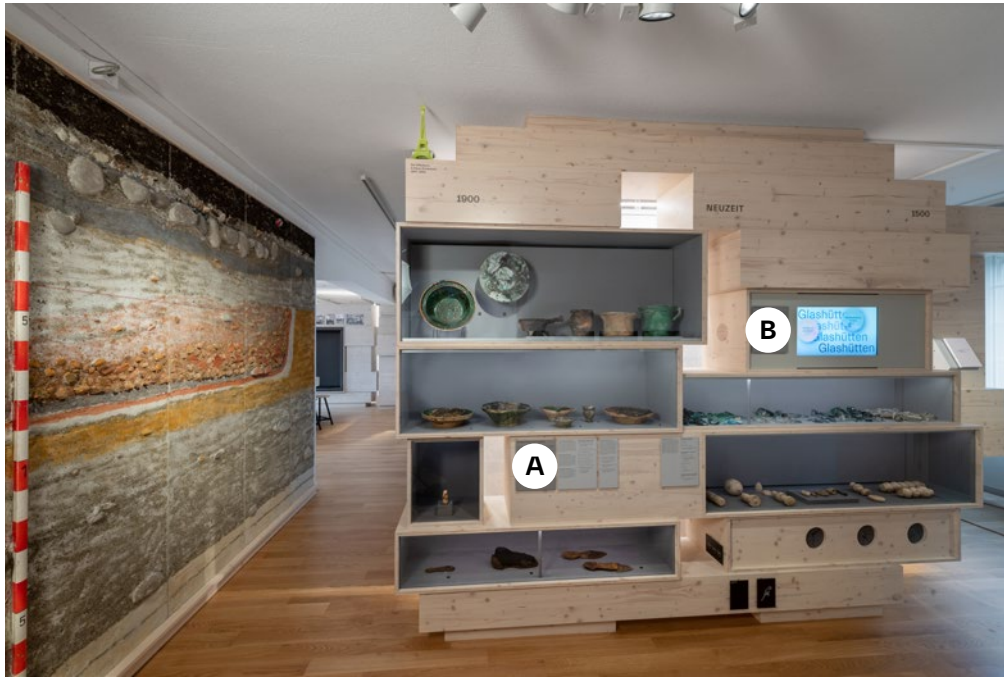
“Des handtwerckhs undt gantzer zunfft nutz” (Of great use to the craft and the entire guild)
In the Late Middle Ages, craftsmen and tradespeople joined together to form guilds. Only members of the guilds were permitted to practise their individual crafts. The associations established standards of quality, set appropriate pay rates and prices and protected their members against foreign competitors. They also organised city wardens and fire brigades. Thanks to the guilds, tradespeople were eventually recognised as a separate estate. Along with Patrician families and merchants, they began to have a say in the political, economic and social events in late medieval towns and cities.

B

Dragons and unicorns
From around 1350 onwards, plants, animals and people were depicted on stove tiles. In the Middle Ages, almost all depictions, including gestures, colours and numbers, had symbolic meaning. Many symbols actually had several meanings. The lion, for instance, symbolised both Jesus and the devil. Important sources of medieval symbolism were the Bible and other theological works as well as ancient books on animals such as the Early Christian *Physiologus*, which was widely read in medieval Europe.

C

Churches and monasteries
In many villages and towns the first churches were built in the Early Middle Ages. The earliest monasteries also date from that period. They were often founded by noble families. Many monks and nuns had aristocratic backgrounds or came from the urban upper classes. Before the first universities were founded in the Late Middle Ages, the monasteries with their libraries, schools and scriptoria were the main centres of education, culture and science.



A

The smallest room was a treasure trove
Latrines not only contain faeces but also a vast array of household and workshop waste. Not every house in a post-medieval town had its own outhouse. Instead, people used chamber pots whose contents were emptied into a (communal) latrine – or sometimes simply thrown out the window. The streets were generally very dirty and there was often a foul odour in the air. Sanitation did not improve until the introduction of water closets and a public sewage system from the mid-19th century onwards.

B

Glassworks in the Jura region
Glass was manufactured in the remote and densely forested Jura valleys from the Late Middle Ages to the early modern era. There was enough firewood, ash and sand available locally to operate the glass kilns. Besides the usual greenish "forest glass", the Hug family from Gänsbrunnen also produced high-quality blue and colourless glass in the 16th and 17th centuries. More recently, between 1778 and 1852, the Gressly family from the Guldental valley operated a glassworks in Mümliswil-Ramiswil, seasonally alternating it with another one in Bärschwil. They produced bottles, drinking glasses, apothecary jars and window glass.

C

Above the ground
If a building comes to light during archaeological excavations, usually the only parts that remain are its foundations or features that were dug into the ground such as cellars or pits. These remains are often destroyed by subsequent development. However, visible remains, which bear witness to the past, can still be found all over the Canton of Solothurn. They range from simple granaries to dwellings and farmhouses to mills, landscape pavilions, churches and monasteries.

A Hunting reindeer in the gorge at Oensingen around 13 000 BC

Around 13 000 BC

THE GREAT EXPANSE

Humans roamed the landscape hunting and gathering food. They repeatedly camped in the Rislisberg cave – men, women and children. From here they had a good view of the treeless landscape and could see the vast herds of reindeer from afar.

A

The oldest work of art from the Canton of Solothurn

This incised drawing of an ibex head is the reason why the Rislisberg cave near Oensingen is such an extraordinary site. Apart from similar finds discovered in the Cantons of Schaffhausen and Geneva, this is the only Early Stone Age figurative depiction to have come to light in Switzerland so far. Who created this drawing and why? Does it tell a story? Or was it supposed to invoke a successful hunt? Or was it made just for the pure joy of creating a drawing? All these questions will probably never be answered.

A

Fire was precious because it was essential for survival
Various hearths were found overlying each other in the Rislisberg cave. It was therefore occupied more than once. Numerous animal bones attesting to the communal consumption of game were found strewn around the hearths. Humans have used fire since time immemorial. Roasting and cooking meat makes it easier to digest whilst smoking it helps to preserve it. A campfire also creates a sense of community: it provides a source of heat and light and helps to protect humans against predators.

B

Skin and bones were also valuable
In order to survive, people hunted animals 15 000 years ago. However, these animals were not only used for their meat. Every part of an animal could be put to good use. Hides and furs were made into clothing and tents, sinews were used to make thread and string, bones and antlers were turned into weapons and tools. Certain animal bones were used for a very special purpose: the long bones of large birds and the shins of mountain hare, for instance, were particularly useful to make sewing needles. Even teeth were used – for example to make a necklace.

C

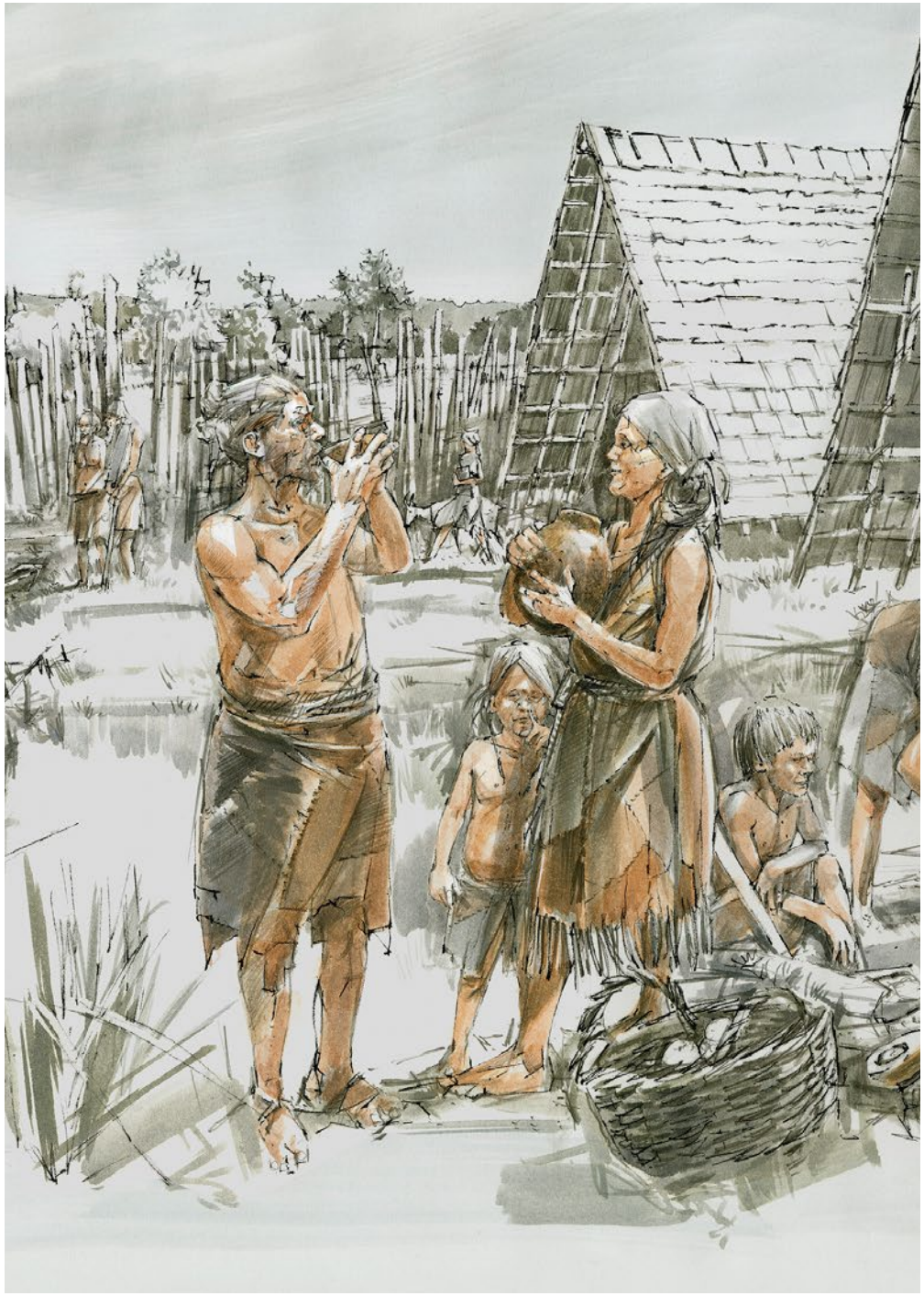
“Miss, we’ve found bones and stones.”
Children playing in the Rislisberg cave in 1969 found peculiar-looking bones and stones, which seemed familiar from school. The children told their teacher and she informed the Department of Archaeology of the Canton of Solothurn. In 1973 the cave was carefully excavated. It was 4 metres wide and almost as long but only 1.5 metres high. The excavation brought to light 35 000 fragmented animal bones and 20 000 stone artefacts. Most objects were waste but they still provided a lot of valuable information. The finds were approximately 15 000 years old and contained facts and details about the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the people who had lived in the area at that time.

D

Flint – the Stone Age steel
Tools and weapons were made of stone 15 000 years ago. That is why it was called the Stone Age. Flint, as a material, is very hard and can be knapped into razor-sharp pieces. Some 20 000 worked flint fragments were recovered from the Rislisberg cave. Most were simple flakes – waste products that normally occur when stone is worked. A few hundred were classified as blades, points, borers, scrapers, burins and backed bladelets. They were used as weapons and tools like today’s metal blades or projectile points.

E

I and the others – what is all the adornment for?
It is not known when humans first began to adorn themselves. They probably always have. Adornment is a natural feature. It can also be seen in the animal kingdom, in the form of long hair, for instance, or colourful feathers, large horns or teeth. They are used to impress when searching for a mate, to emphasise their own worth or compete with their rivals. Are humans so very different? Adornment is an expression of a person’s individuality, whilst at the same time having a social significance. Adornment can also denote group affiliation by age, status, social class, ethnic background or culture. Adornment is a form of communication.



A Inside a pile dwelling around 3800 BC

B Building a house on Lake Burgäschi around 3800 BC

Around 3800 BC

LIVING ON THE LAKESHORE

More than 6000 years ago humans adopted a sedentary lifestyle and began to live as farmers. These early farmers built the first villages, among them the pile-dwelling settlements on Lake Burgäschi.

A

A building site 6000 years ago

The houses in a Neolithic village were simple post-built constructions. Piles were driven into the ground to support the roof, which was covered with wooden shingles or strips of bark. The walls were made of wickerwork plastered with loam, the floor was packed clay. Construction timbers were usually felled in the late autumn and winter months. The craftsmen knew how to split the timber into boards and shingles. Experiments have shown that a village community could have built one of these houses in a few days, or within two weeks at most. The houses lasted roughly 30 years, after which time they became unsound and had to be rebuilt.

B

Pile dwellings – UNESCO World Heritage

The pile dwellings are the remains of villages that lie under water or beneath thick sediment deposits. It is not only the stone implements and ceramic vessels that have survived under water, but also items made of wood, textiles and plant fibres. The pile-dwelling settlements are an invaluable archive below ground for the period between 5000 and 800 BC. That is why they are considered to be among the most important European cultural goods. In 2011, UNESCO inscribed 111 such sites around the Alps on their World Heritage list. This also included two sites in Solothurn: Burgäschisee Ost and the island in Lake Inkwil.

A

Pile dwellings on Lake Burgäschi
People lived on Lake Burgäschi as early as 6000 years ago. Numerous excavations that have been mounted there since the 19th century have uncovered evidence of at least ten Neolithic settlements dating from the period between 4800 and 2600 BC. The village at "Burgäschisee Ost" was excavated in 1943/44. The houses measured c. 4×7 metres. They were not built on platforms in the water but were erected on the lakeshore. On its landward side the village was protected by a palisade. Thousands of artefacts made of stone, pottery, bone and wood paint a picture of how the people lived on the lake around 3800 BC.

B

Trading goods over vast distances
The exchange of goods brought raw materials and commodities from far away into the village. Axe blades made from a black rock called aphanite, for instance, came to Lake Burgäschi from the Vosges mountain range in France and flint blades came from southern Germany. Copper was a popular, though rare, commodity imported from south-eastern Europe. The metal was exchanged in the form of small beads. All these finds attest to a widespread network of contacts throughout Europe. Goods that had to be transported from far away regions were valuable. Only those with something worth offering in exchange were able to acquire a copper bead or an aphanite blade.

C

Clever craftsmen
Ever since people began to live in permanent houses, their personal belongings have increased significantly. Innovations included polished stone axes, ploughs, sickles, weaving looms and pottery. Specialist craftsmen did not yet exist at the time. Each household carved its own wood and bone implements, wove its cloth and made ceramic vessels. Neolithic people were highly adept at using natural raw materials. Besides stone, other common materials were clay, wood and plant fibres. Tools, implements and items of jewellery were made from bone, antler, horn and teeth. Hides were processed to make leather whilst sinews were used as string.

D

Making a living from the land
The farmers on Lake Burgäschi bred cattle, sheep and pigs. The animals were considerably smaller than their wild counterparts, the aurochs, mouflon and wild boar. Besides meat, the livestock also provided milk, wool and dung. Cattle were also used as draught animals and beasts of burden. Grain in the form of porridge or bread was a staple food. Various species of wheat, including einkorn, emmer and naked wheat, and also barley were cultivated. Besides cereals, other crops included flax and poppies, whose seeds are highly nutritious, and also peas. The latter were an important source of protein. Wild fruit, mushrooms and nuts added more variety to the diet.

E

An old favourite: venison stew
Besides farming and cattle breeding, hunting still played an important role in the Late Stone Age. The main game animals were deer, roe deer, wild boar and bear. Huge European bison and aurochs, now extinct, were rarely killed. Fishing was an important source of food in pile-dwelling villages. Both nets and fishing rods were used. Hunting and fishing contributed to the diet, particularly in lean times with regard to the food produced by farming.

A

Mining 5000 years ago
Flint was mined below ground in the "Chalchofen" area between Wangen and Olten. No effort was spared in reaching the much sought-after material. More than 4-metre-deep shafts led down into a subterranean system of ducts with tunnels of up to 10 metres in length. Using rock hammers, the miners shattered the rock and then prised the nodules out of the limestone using tools made of deer antler. Since the tunnels were only 40 to 60 centimetres wide the work was probably carried out by children and adolescents. Flint from Olten was traded for goods from numerous Neolithic villages throughout the Swiss Plateau.

B

The victims of a mining disaster or a burial?
When a garage was built on the main road in Wangen near Olten in 1971, a tunnel of the "Chalchofen" flint mine was cut and the skeletons of two adults and a child were discovered. How did these 5000-year-old skeletons end up in a mining gallery? Were the three individuals perhaps the victims of a tunnel collapse? Because the ceiling of the gallery was still intact, this possibility can be ruled out. Instead, the people living in the nearby villages, seem to have used obsolete mining tunnels to bury their dead.

A Burial of a wealthy lady at Subingen around 650 BC

Around 650 BC

INTO THE AFTERLIFE

The wealthy Celtic women of Subingen were buried with magnificent jewellery and ceramic vessels full of food and drink. After burial, massive mounds were constructed over the graves.

A

For women only
A village cemetery dating from the 7th century BC was found in an area east of Subingen called Erdbeeri-Ischlag. It comprised twenty burial mounds with approximately sixty to seventy graves. The first of these was dug in the centre of the mound and the other burials were then gradually added around it. Judging by the grave goods, most of the deceased were women. There were very few men or children present. Were they buried in a separate cemetery? We know that the women belonged to the upper class. They displayed their wealth with precious jewellery which accompanied them on their journey into the afterlife.

A

Votive offerings – gifts to the gods
Humans have always felt that supernatural powers or deities were responsible for their fate. Sacrifices were made in order to gain their favour or to give thanks. During the Bronze Age, people often buried valuable items such as weapons, tools and jewellery made of bronze in prominent locations: near springs, next to large boulders or in caves. Bodies of water also appear to have been popular locations – particularly precious objects were submerged in rivers and lakes. That way, the objects were for ever taken out of human hands and dedicated instead to the gods.

A The dining hall at the Roman villa “Im Fustlig” around AD 200

B The vicus at Olten around AD 200

Around AD 200

A GLOBAL EMPIRE

In the Roman period, our region was populated by more people than ever before. Olten was a stopover on a major long-distance route. One farmstead after another was built in the southern foothills of the Jura Mountains.

A

Roman Olten
Olten was a *vicus*, a settlement that sprang up on a road. Its ancient name has not been handed down. From the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD, the town covered an area of 250 by 300 m in what is today the city centre. As a stopover located on an important transport junction, it had not only residential houses, but also taverns, warehouses and shops. However, very little archaeological evidence has survived. The main road through the *vicus* coincided with today's Baslerstrasse road. A bathhouse was located between the road and the river. Potters' workshops operated in various locations.

B

Long-distance transport routes
Road networks covered an estimated 100 000 kilometres overall and are considered to be one of Rome's main civilisational accomplishments. The roads were lifelines through which the Roman Empire was organised, administered and supplied. As early as Roman times, Olten was a transport hub. This was a suitable location for the main road through the Swiss Plateau to cross the River Aare. It also crossed the route from the Alps via Sursee to Olten and via the Unterer Hauenstein towards *Augusta Raurica*. As a navigable body of water, the River Aare connected Olten to the River Rhine.

C

Global trade
Wine from Crete or dates from Palestine – the Romans imported foodstuffs and consumer goods from all over the Mediterranean region into our area. A well-organised system of traffic and transport promoted the exchange of goods throughout the provinces and between the provinces and the capital. Imports were no longer a luxury but became affordable. A uniform monetary system made it easier to trade goods. Important long-distance routes ran through Switzerland, from Lake Geneva to Lake Constance and across the Jura Mountains. Olten and Solothurn were stops along the way and, as such, part of the international trade networks.

A

Give and take
Worshipping the gods was a permanent feature in the everyday lives of those who lived on Roman estates. Families had their own domestic shrines with small statuettes of the tutelary gods and the deities favoured by each family member. People made offerings to the gods, for instance in the form of wine, fruit, flowers or pastries. In return they expected the gods to help and protect them and to grant their wishes. The ancient belief system was based on the principle that "I give so that you will give".

B

The inhabitants of the estate in the afterlife
From the 1st to 3rd centuries it was the custom to cremate the deceased on a funeral pyre. To sustain them on their journey into the afterlife, they were provided with food as well as personal belongings such as clothing and jewellery. After the cremation, the mortal remains and the burnt grave goods were interred. A farmstead's cemetery was usually located outside its walls. The Roman law that banned burials inside the settlements also applied throughout the provinces. The only exception were infants, which were buried uncremated inside the houses.

C

A densely populated area
In the Roman period the southern foot of the Jura Mountains was an area of intensive farming. The farmsteads, so-called *villae rusticae*, were densely scattered across the landscape at intervals of two to four kilometres. Sunny terraces with fertile soils, excellent transport connections and the proximity to cities like Olten and Solothurn were all good reasons to build a farmstead in the area. Rural farms supplied the urban population with grain, fruit and meat. The estates to the north of the Jura Mountains sold their produce in the colony town of *Augusta Raurica*. The sale of their surplus made the estate owners rich.

D

Comfortable living in the villa
Estate owners used their wealth to upgrade their residences and turn them into ostentatious edifices. Having arrived through an imposing entrance, which often had lateral towers with a pergola in between – the sprawling estate, which sometimes consisted of several wings, offered all the conveniences of Roman architecture: underfloor heating, glazed windows, water pipes, bathrooms and a sewer system. The walls of the reception rooms, dining halls and other living areas were decorated with colourful murals and the floors were adorned with mosaics.

E

The utility area of the villa
Depending on its size, up to one hundred people could live on a rural estate. Besides the owner and his family these included the steward, various craftsmen and agricultural workers, their families and several slaves. All these people were dependent on the estate owner or were even his property. The servants' living quarters were located in the utility area, the so-called *pars rustica*, which also housed workshops, stables and stores. The farmhands and their families lived in cramped conditions in simple houses that had no luxuries like baths or underfloor heating.

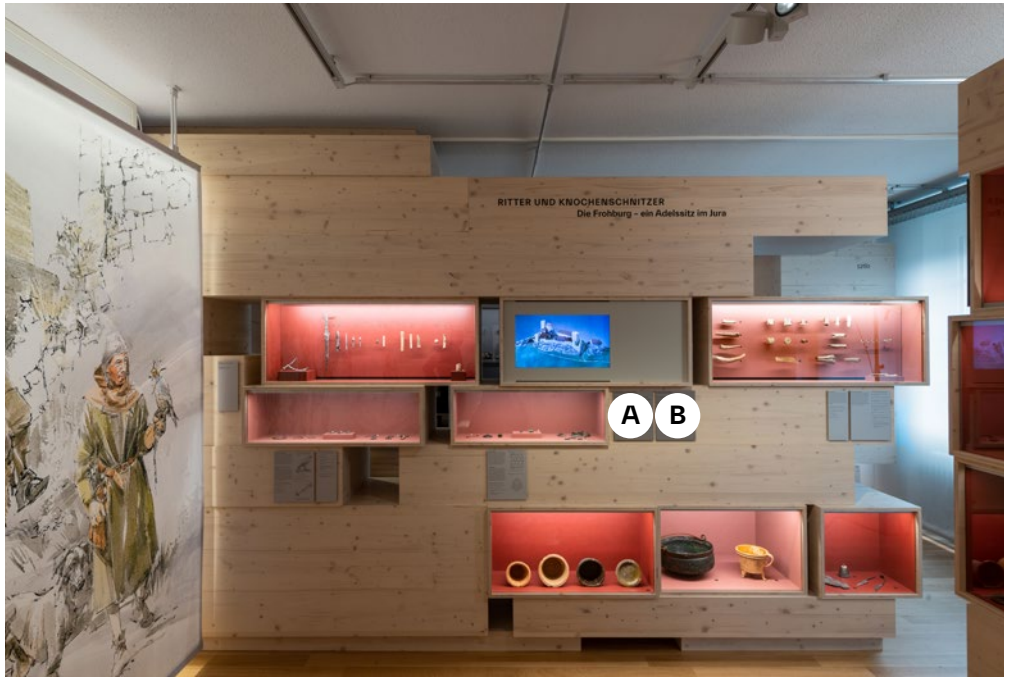
A The small town of Altreu on the River Aare around 1300

B Falconry at Frohburg Castle around 1300

Around AD 1300

CASTLE AND CITY

In the Middle Ages, noble families lived in castles, from where they ruled over the surrounding region and its population. By founding towns and cities they strove to expand their power. Some of these cities have survived up to the present, whilst others have since disappeared again.



A

Ruling from lofty heights
In the High Middle Ages Frohburg Castle was the ancestral seat of one of the most important noble dynasties in the region. The first complex with an enclosing wall, a hall and various timber-built structures was erected on the rocky plateau high above a narrow section of the valley near Trimbach in the 10th/11th centuries. By around 1200 the extensive complex was completed with a new and more massive enclosing wall, several towers, ostentatious stone buildings, cisterns as well as residential and utility buildings. After 1250 the castle no longer served as the main seat of the Counts of Frohburg. It lost its status and from the early 14th century it began to fall into disrepair.

B

Living at the castle
As befitted their rank, the Counts of Frohburg travelled everywhere on horseback. Their lavish lifestyle included elegant clothes and jewellery as well as fine furniture. The nobles amused themselves by playing games, putting on parties and by hunting. Apart from the aristocratic family and their courtiers, other inhabitants of the castle included servants, maids and craftsmen. Bone carvers, for instance, used deer and beef bones to make various items of everyday use such as combs, buckles and gaming pieces.

A

The Gugler are coming!
In 1375 the Gugler descended on the Swiss Plateau. According to various chroniclers, this troop of mercenaries under the command of a French nobleman, Enguerrand de Coucy, laid waste to several towns, including Altreu. Archaeological evidence of a catastrophic fire has, in fact, been found. Whether it can be associated with the Gugler, remains unknown. In any case, the town's ultimate demise came in 1389 when the city of Solothurn took control over Altreu. The new lords had no interest in rebuilding a rival town. It was gradually abandoned and eventually forgotten.

B

Altreu, the town
In the second half of the 13th century, the Counts of Neuenburg-Strassberg founded the small town of Altreu in their dominions south of Selzach. With its town fortifications, its citadel and its residential buildings facing onto an alleyway, Altreu had all the elements of a planned town typical of its time.
A bridge crossed the River Aare at Altreu. The town had an estimated 350 to 500 inhabitants. They earned their living from crafts and commerce. They also farmed the fields outside the town walls.

A

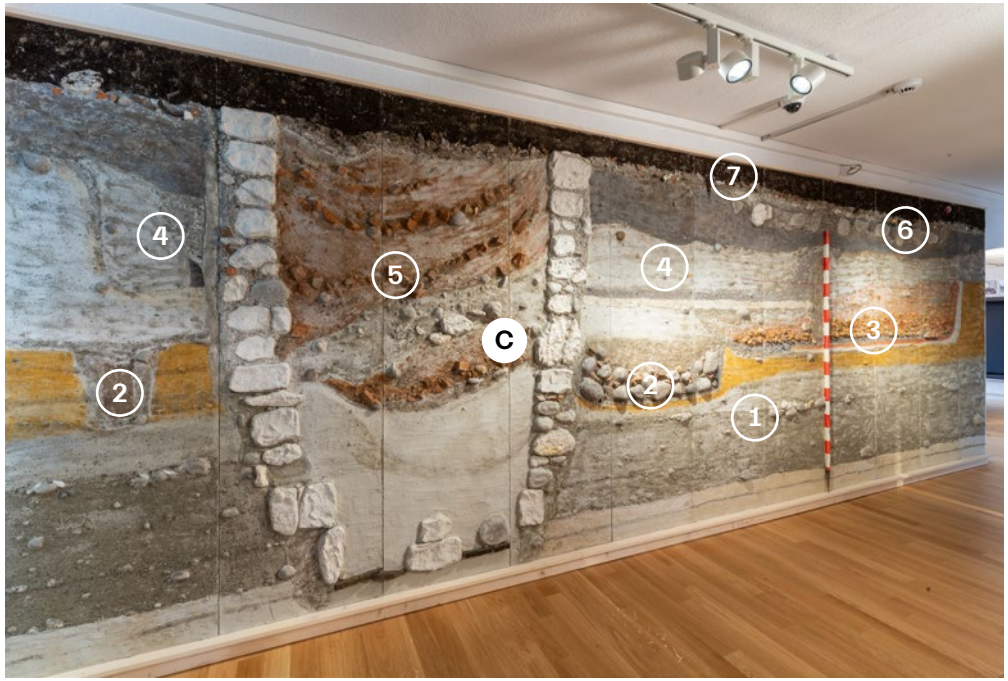
When the past comes to light

Nowadays rescue excavations are carried out whenever an archaeological site is threatened by destruction, for instance due to development or because of natural erosion. During the excavation the evidence that has survived in the ground is recorded and the finds are recovered. This ensures that information about the past is preserved for future generations. Archaeologists make sure that the evidence is examined, protected, interpreted and not lost.

B

Where did we come from? Searching for answers

When things that have survived in the ground for centuries or millennia are brought back to light by archaeologists, it opens a window on the past lives of our ancestors. Questions are raised: how old are these things? Why did they end up in the ground? What did people eat at the time? What illnesses and ailments did they suffer from? And what did the landscape look like at the time? To answer all these questions, archaeologists use various methods and auxiliary sciences.



C

Layer by layer, archaeology is about discovery

People lose things or conceal precious objects in the ground. People also bury their dead. Very often people do not dispose of their waste. So it is left behind to be dispersed by the elements and by animals until it is deposited in a pit or in a ditch. Eventually it is covered by soil. Some things quickly decay, others survive for millennia. When the ground is opened up, all the lost, discarded and deposited objects that have survived the passage of time are rediscovered. Archaeological finds are part of our history – they tell stories about the lives of our forebears.

Section from an excavation

1 Advanced stages of the Early Stone Age: flint-knapping site; 14 000 years old
2 Bronze Age: fire pit and posthole; 3400 years old
3 Roman period: potter's kiln; 1800 years old
4 Middle Ages: pit dwelling/weaver's workshop; 800 years old
5 Early post-medieval period: well; 300 years old
6 Post-medieval period: cellar floor; 200 years old
7 Modern era: gardens; 50 years old

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Opening hours
Tuesday to Sunday 10 am – 5 pm,
closed on Mondays.
Schools by appointment from 8 am.
The museum is closed on the following
public holidays:
Christmas Eve, Christmas Day,
New Year's Eve, New Year's Day.

Admission fees
Adults: CHF 5.–
Children, adolescents, schools:
free admission.
Swiss Museum Pass holders:
free admission.

Getting here
Bus stop (Olten Konradstrasse)
and car park (Munzingerplatz)
next to the building.
The Haus der Museen is
wheelchair accessible and
has a restaurant (MAGAZIN).