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# Mesolithic pits in Germany

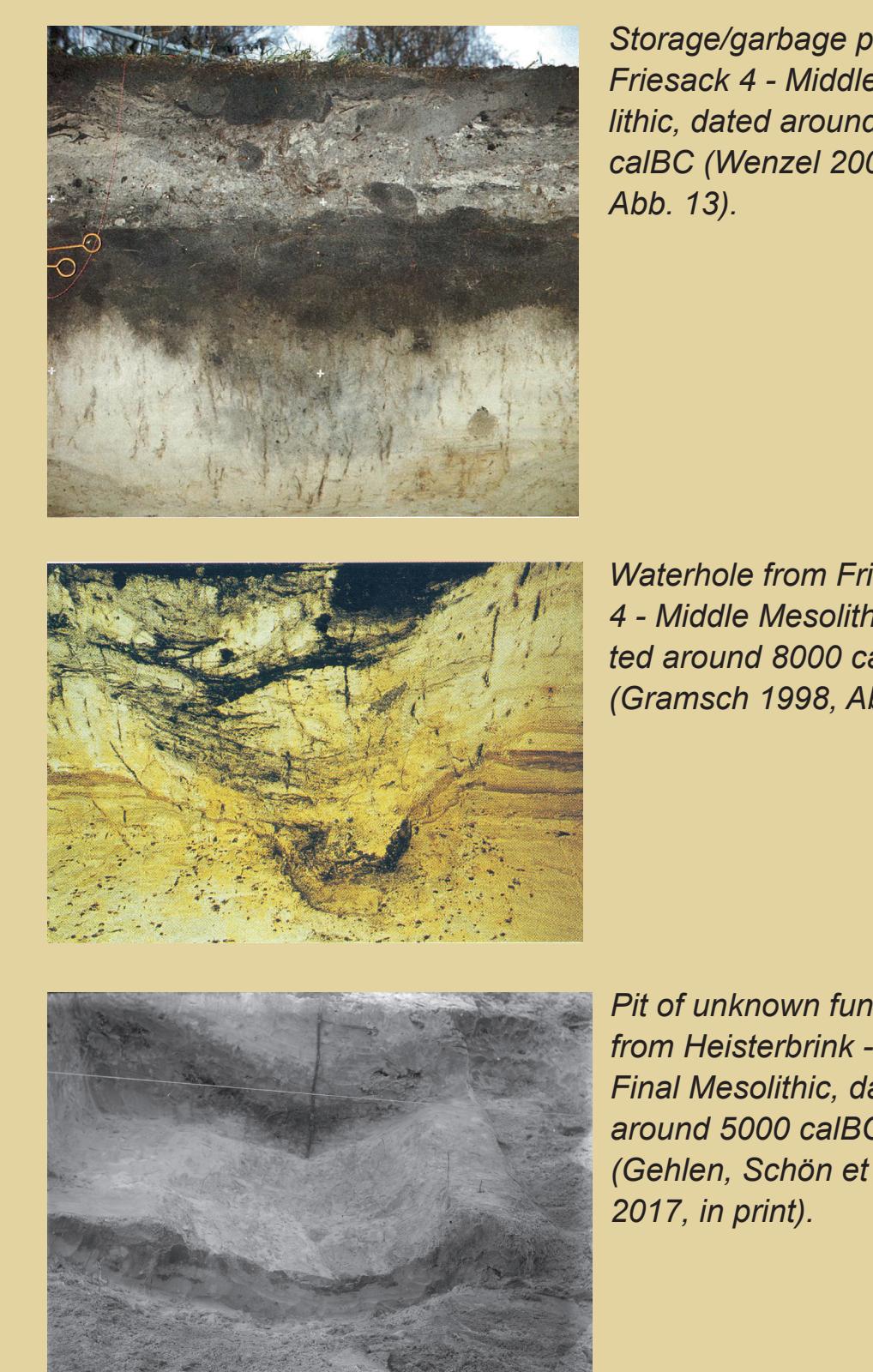
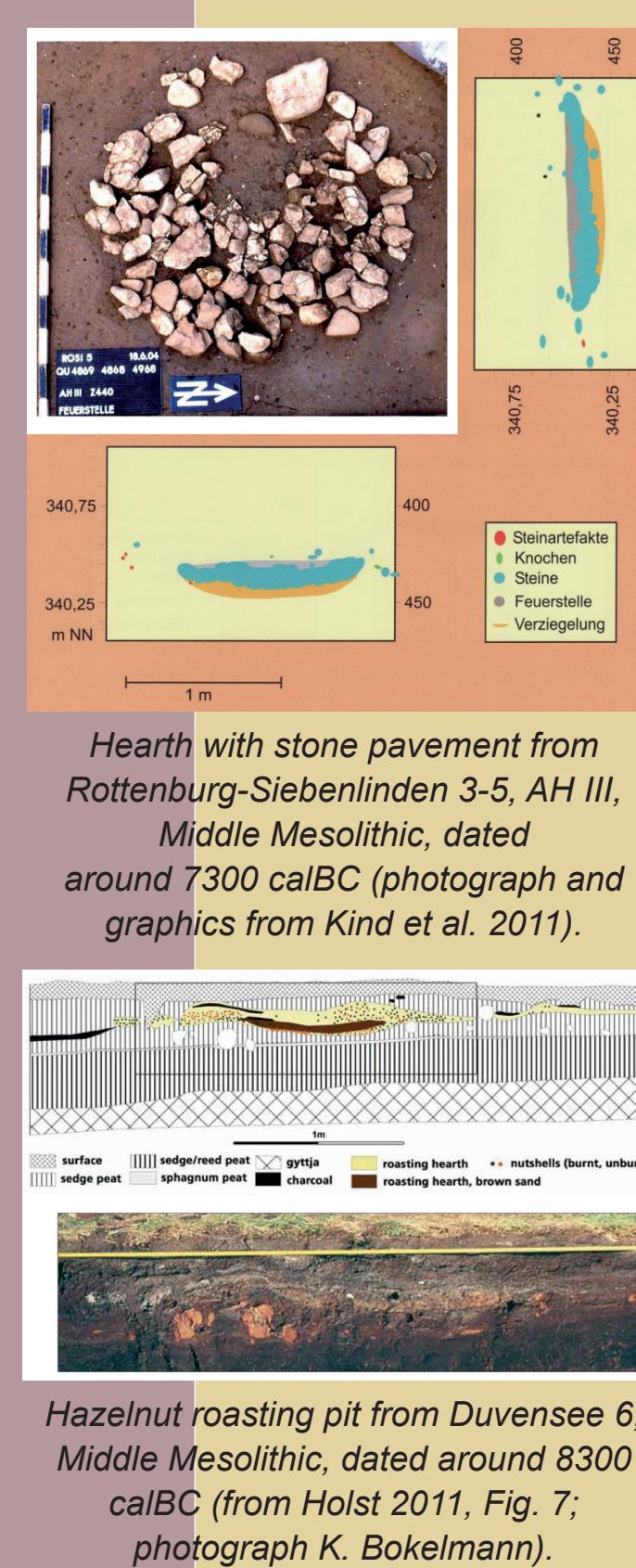
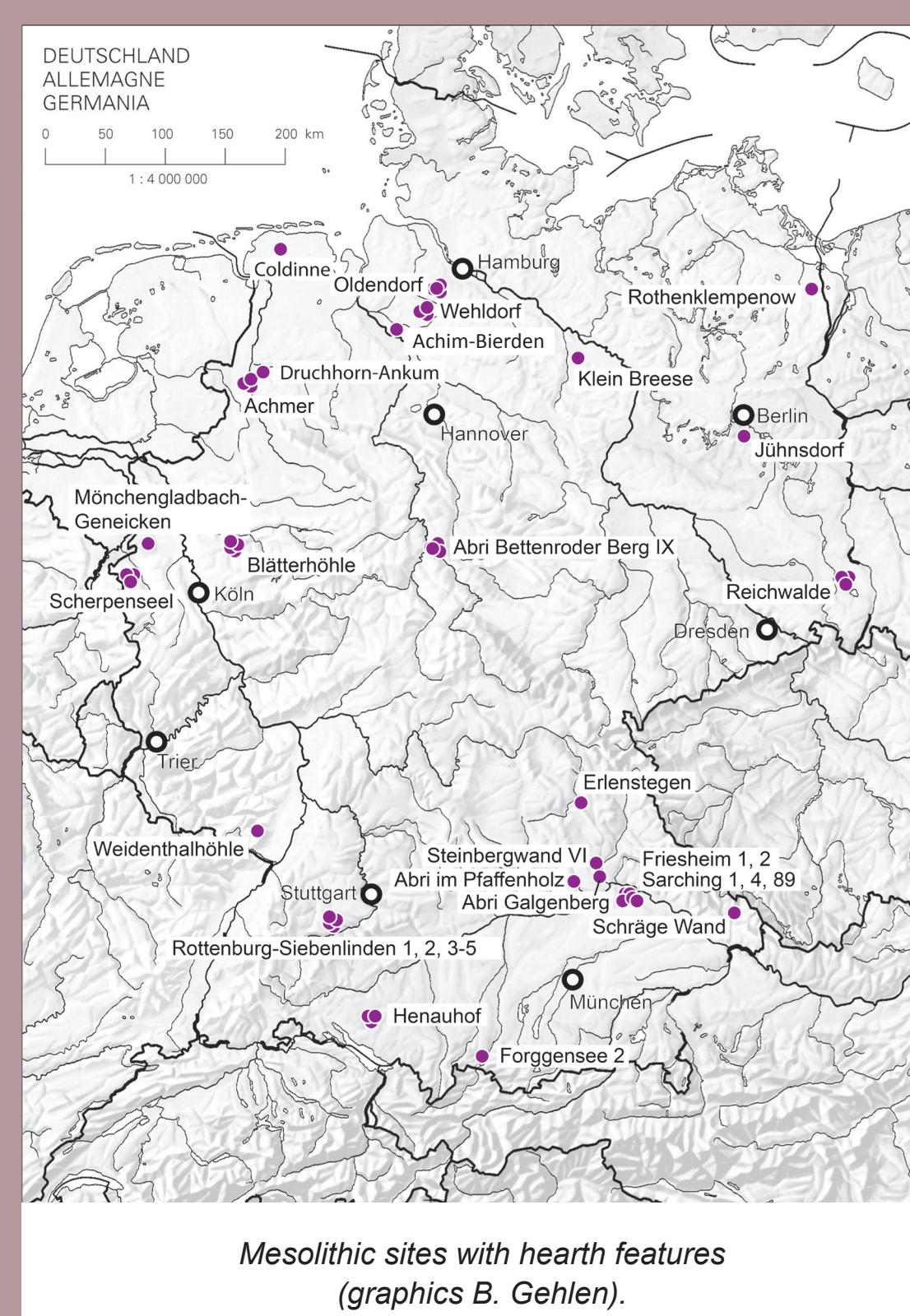
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## Abstract

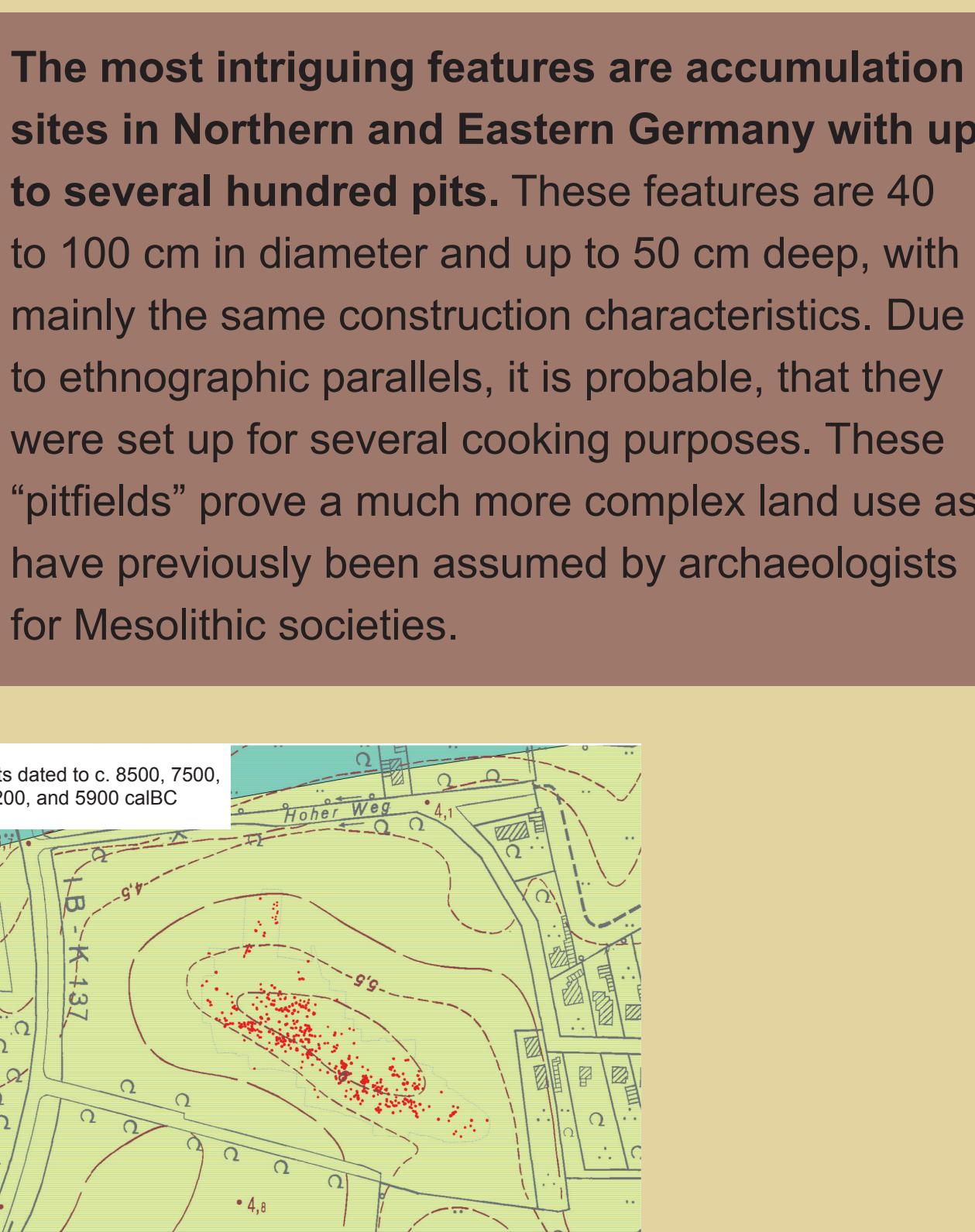
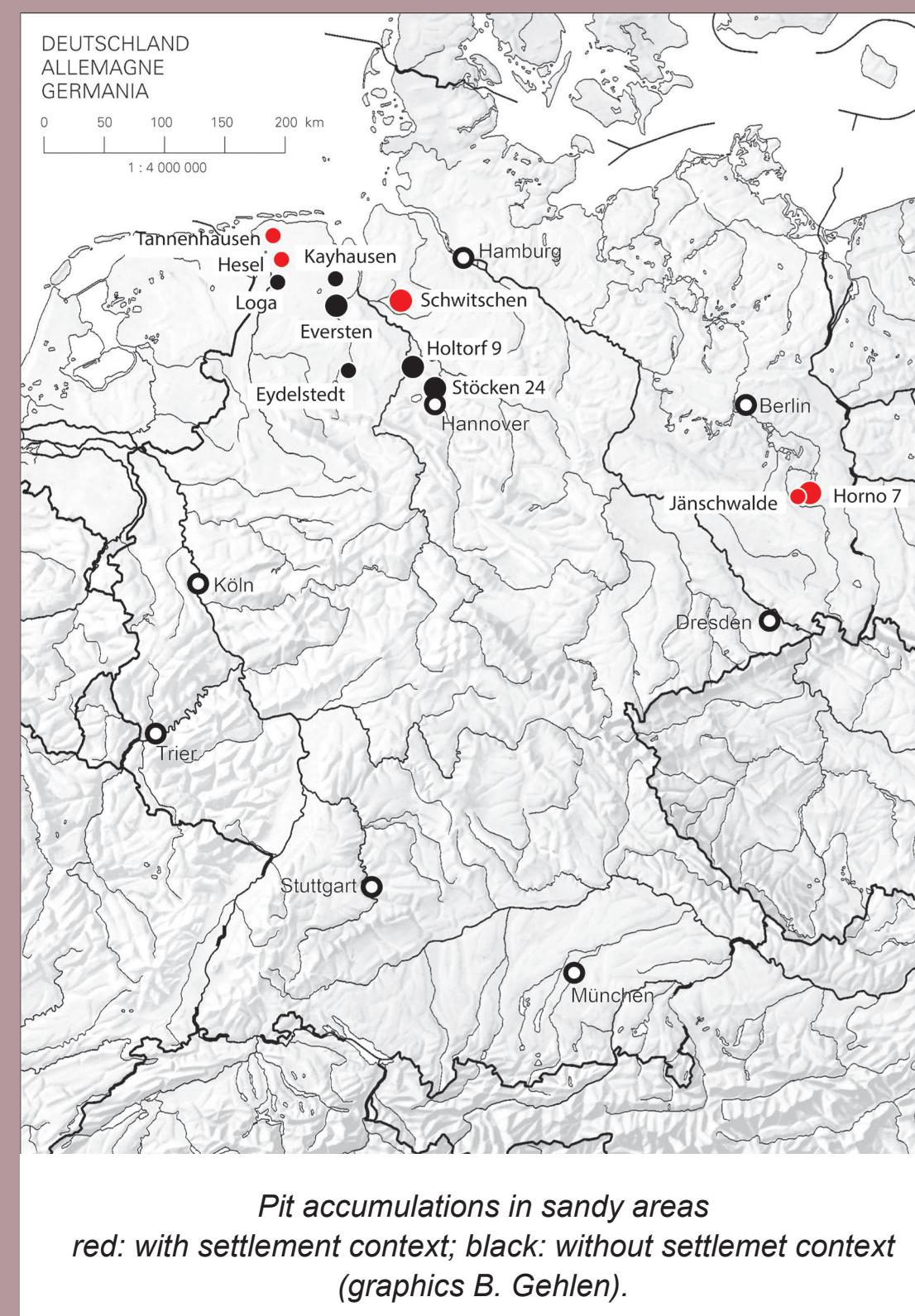
Inspired by the conference „Creuser au Mésolithique / Digging in the Mesolithic“ in Châlon-en-Champagne in March 2016, the authors start a compilation of Mesolithic pits in Germany. Although it is still incomplete, some statements can be already made. Nearly 80% of the single pits known until now come from settlement contexts. The majority was found in sandy soils or flood loams.

Although features are known from the Early and the Final Mesolithic, the pits stem mainly from the Middle and the Late Mesolithic. Most fascinating are the accumulations of small pits with up to 390 features, discovered in the last decades in sandy soils in Northern and Eastern Germany, and the dating of the oldest “Schlitzgruben” into the Late Mesolithic.

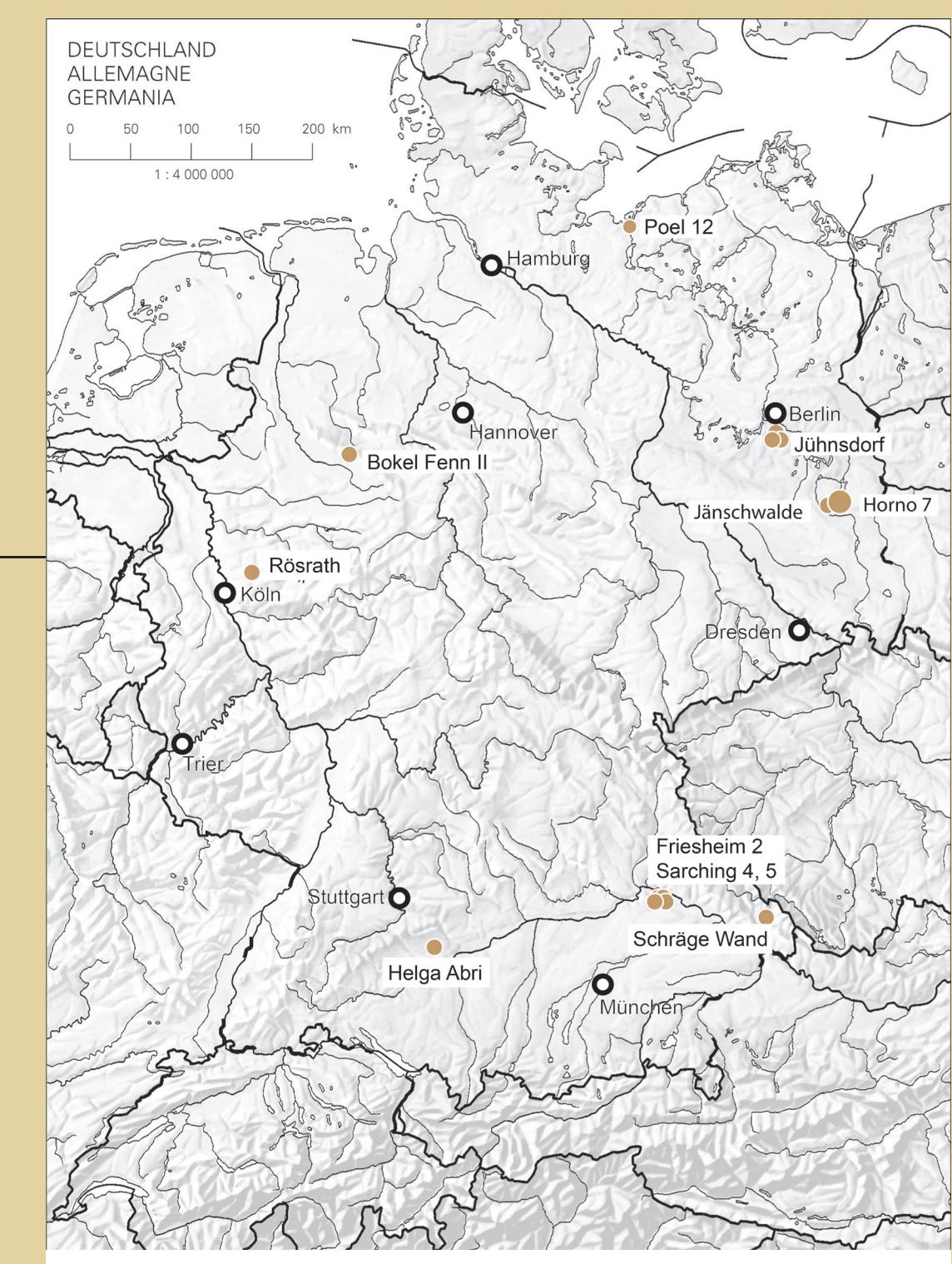
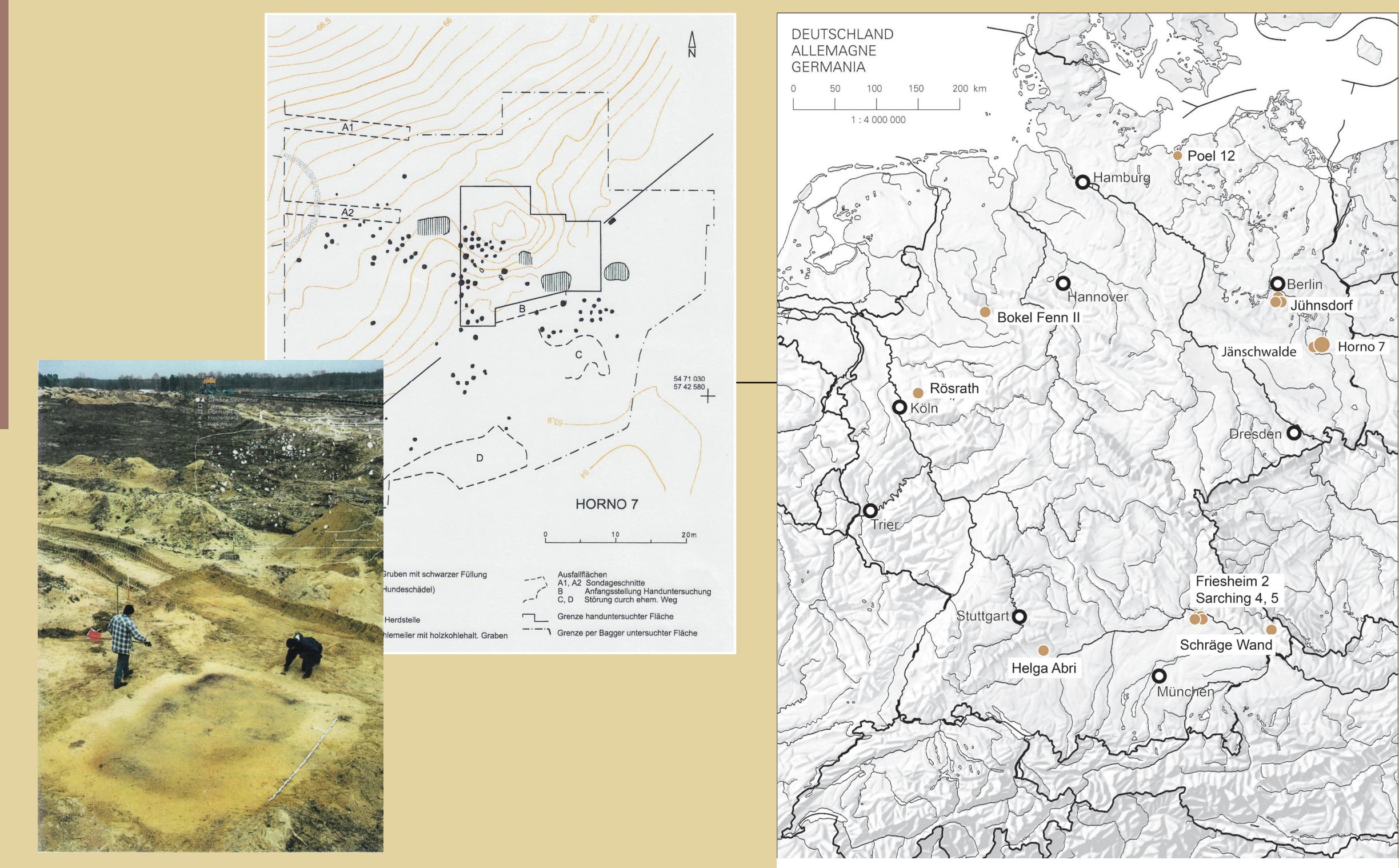


### In Germany the following categories of Mesolithic pits can be distinguished:

1. Hearth pits from settlement contexts (140 features from 46 sites/layers);
2. Hazelnut roasting pits (five features from five sites);
3. Storage pits / garbage pits (four pits from two sites);
4. Waterholes (four pits from two sites);
5. Pit accumulations within settlement contexts (*sensu stricto*) (more than 550 pits from six sites);
6. Pit accumulations outside settlement contexts (more than 210 pits from five sites);
7. Mesolithic dwelling-features and other building structures (20 features from 11 sites);
8. Schlitzgruben or v-shaped pits (Mesolithic number unknown);
9. Single larger pits of unknown function (three pits from three sites);
10. Pits from Mesolithic treefalls (12 features from three sites).



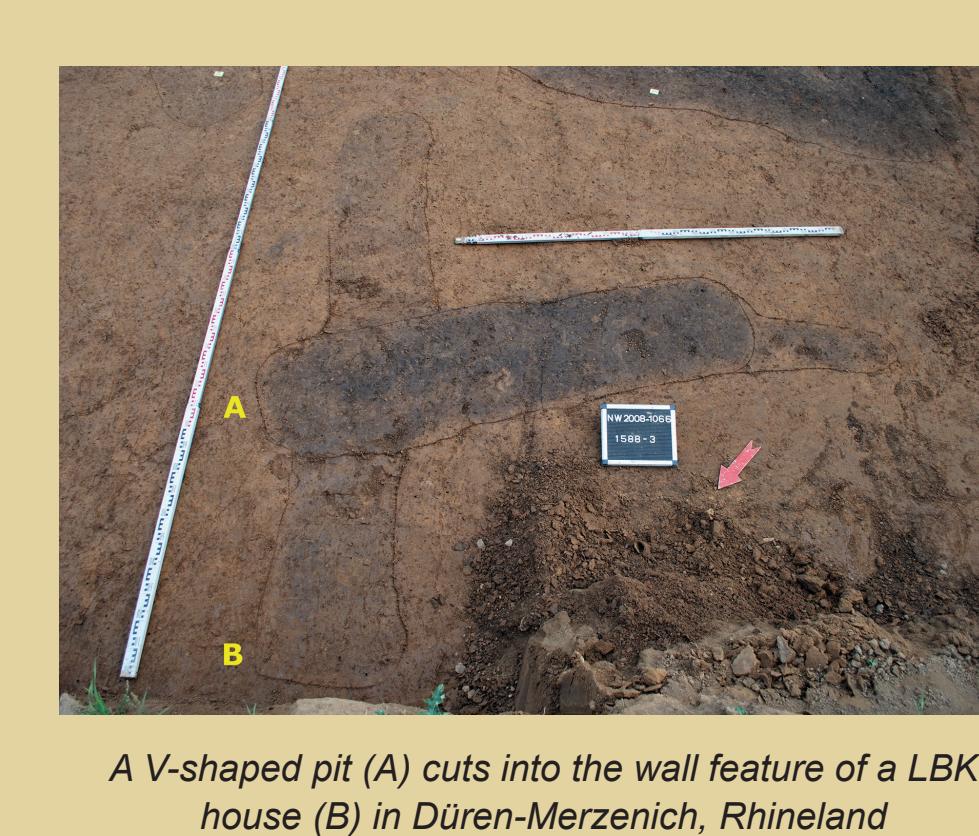
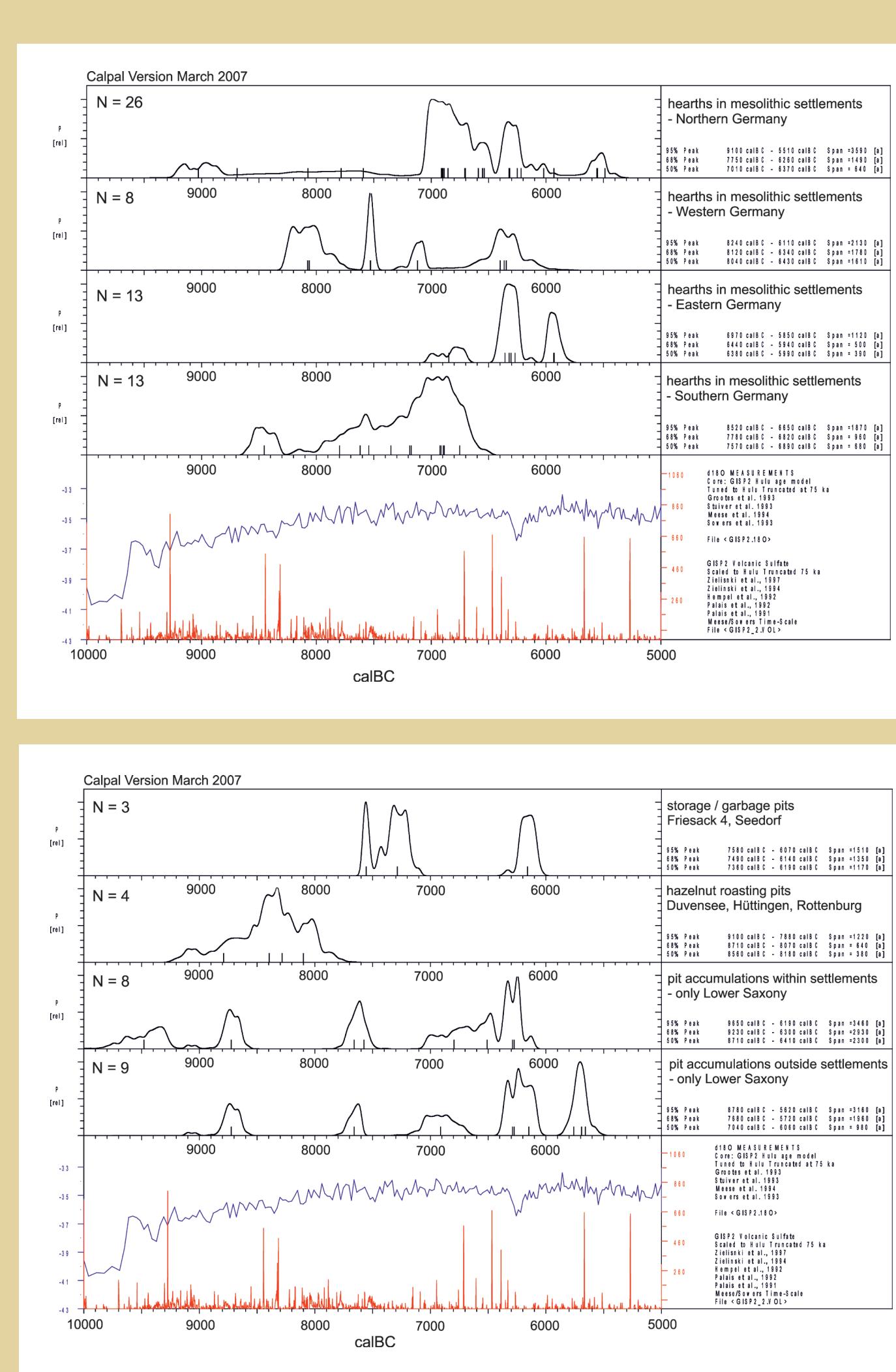
The most intriguing features are accumulation sites in Northern and Eastern Germany with up to several hundred pits. These features are 40 to 100 cm in diameter and up to 50 cm deep, with mainly the same construction characteristics. Due to ethnographic parallels, it is probable, that they were set up for several cooking purposes. These “pitfields” prove a much more complex land use as have previously been assumed by archaeologists for Mesolithic societies.



**85 C<sup>14</sup>-dates from 52 sites and/or layers are available from pit features in Germany.** 57 dates come from hearths within settlement contexts, 28 from other features. Only few hearth pits are dated to the Preboreal or early Boreal period. Most of these features from Northern, Eastern, and Western Germany date into the Late Mesolithic of the 7th millennium. In Southern Germany, most dates are from the Middle and Late Mesolithic (8th and 7th millennium). 23 dates from hearths stem from sites in Northern Germany, 13 from Southern Germany, 13 from Eastern Germany and only 8 from Western Germany.

Storage (or Garbage) pits, which were filled with fish bones and/or silex artefacts, date to the Middle and the Late Mesolithic of the 7th and 6th millennium. Hazelnut-roasting pits are only dated to the Early Boreal or 9th millennium, although roasting of hazelnuts still has been practiced in latter Mesolithic periods. Features from pit accumulation sites date from the 10th to the 5th millennium with a certain focus in the 7th millennium. But up to date only 17 of more than 750 features are dated.

Calibration of C<sup>14</sup>-dates from the pit features in Germany (calibration W. Schön, graphics B. Gehlen).



**Schlitzgruben, or V-shaped pits and ditches**, are a global phenomenon. They have been described in Germany since the early 20th century but have rarely been investigated in greater detail, also because they usually do not contain any archaeological findings. Their function is under discussion since they were firstly documented. One of the first explanations is having a current renaissance: the function as a hunting pit. Examples from the Rhineland strengthen this hypothesis. The infillings of all features are relatively dark and have similar geochemical characteristics.

Only two C<sup>14</sup>-ages are available, which both date into the Mesolithic and early Neolithic (6440–6250 and 5480–5360 calBC). Additionally, OSL (optical stimulated luminescence) dating of the time the Schlitzgruben were filled with sediment (Rhineland and Saxony-Anhalt) revealed ages between the Mesolithic period and the Middle Neolithic (Gerz 2016).