

Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte (Halle)

Advanced

Halle is a city in the southern part of the German state Saxony-Anhalt. Halle is an economic and educational center in central-eastern Germany and the birthplace of Georg Friedrich Händel. Since I once had close relations with the Max-Planck-Institute of Microstructure Physics in Halle, I was there a lot - and never saw anything of the city.

Meanwhile I changed that and I'm glad. There is a lot to see and the "Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte", i.e. the Museum of the German state of Sachsen-Anhalt dedicated to prehistory. It is not only a highlight but a must for anybody interested in the stone age and early metals.

You'll find an unbelievable amount of stone and bronze objects in mint conditions. This is mostly due to heavy surface coal digging since the 19th century but also to some recent luck; I'll get to that.

The museum is housed in an imposing early 20th century building with large and airy rooms. Most of the objects are displayed in an old-fashioned way, meaning that not only can you actually see the objects, there are also well-written explanations, readable without using a flashlight while lying on your belly. Moreover, there are good models, many highly interesting maps, and fascinating artistic impressions of what things might have looked like.

The high point of the museum is the famous "**Nebra sky disk**". I have referred to it [before](#).



The disc is a unique one-of-its-kind object. That would be sufficient to make it famous. It was "discovered" by treasure hunters who tried to sell it; illegally of course. Two elaborately made **bronze swords** ([shown here](#) and in large scale [here](#)) and a few smaller items completed the loot. The finders were eventually caught by international police forces in a highly spectacular way, and the objects found their way into the museum.

The Nebra sky disc is from about 1600 BC and features the oldest concrete depiction of the cosmos worldwide. In June 2013 it was included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register and termed "one of the most important archaeological finds of the twentieth century".

The whole thing was a stupendous sensations with all kinds of repercussions. The museum spared neither time nor effort to accommodate these fabulous objects in style. A special room was dedicated to the Nebra things, and the rooms given to middle bronze age were completely redone. That's partially quite unfortunate since the museum then succumbed to the dreaded "[Keep-things-in-the-dark disease](#)", like so many others before. While the Nebra objects are perfectly illuminated and displayed, this cannot be said for many other things; I'll get to that.

First, however, let's look at some stone age stuff. Below you see why I like this museum so much. It gives a whole case with good explanations and pictures to a really unassuming tiny object:



- Well - it's the oldest man-made material: **Birch bark tar** or birch pitch. Absolutely essential to early humans. I've told you about that [elsewhere](#). The next example also pays tribute to the museums old but great ways of presenting their stuff.



Woman from Bad Dürrenberg. (7.000 - 6.600 BC)

Source: Photographed in the Museum in April. 2018

- Just an elderly lady? Yes - but a special one. Read the description! The stuff in her grave indicates that she wielded power, probably as a shaman. The close inspection of her skull indicated that she had a kind of bone deformation that allowed her to induce semi-consciousness or trance by certain movements of her head. Clear texts and pictures guide you through the details.
To top it off, an artists interpretation of what she might have looked like is provided, based on some of the things in her grave, that really tickles your phantasy:



**Woman from Bad Dürrenberg. (7.000 - 6.600 BC);
artists conception**

[Large size](#)

Source: Photographed in the Museum in April. 2018

- Pictures like that do help your imagination (possibly in more than one way). That's why I give you another one:



Homo Sapiens; around 40.000 BC
Brought along some technology like designer cloth
(and good looks)
and replaced (after some mingling) the Neandethals.

Source: Photographed in the Museum in April. 2018

It's time for the more serious stuff. I've seen many stone axes with holes before but never wondered how those stone age guys drilled the holes. They definitely did not have the usually assumed [hollow copper drill](#). The museum shows and explains how it was done. Go there yourself to find out.

It suddenly became clear to me that all that hole drilling *after* copper tools became available was nothing new to the ancient artisans. They had done it before for thousands of years with less sophisticated tools



Partially drilled stone axe and some drilling cores. 6.900 - 6.600 BC; definitely no copper drills then.

Source: Photographed in the Museum in April. 2018

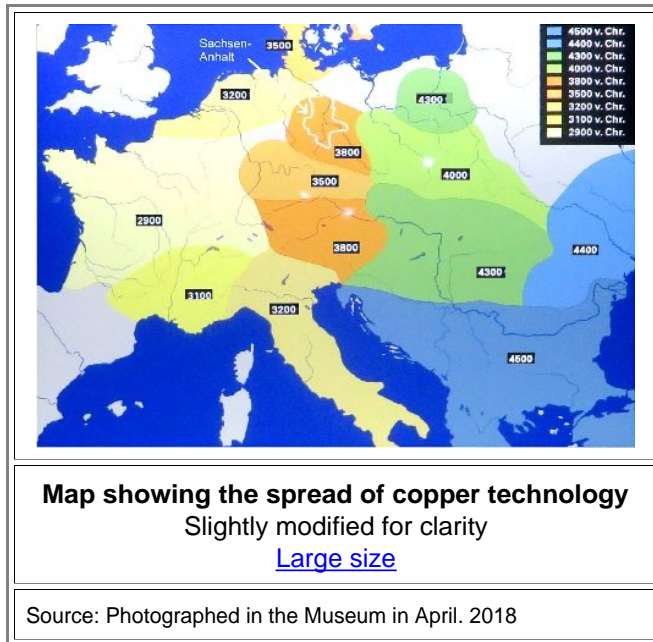
Another impressive feature is the wall of a huge room. It is covered with many thousands of **stone tools**. Far better than to keep all that in some dark basement.



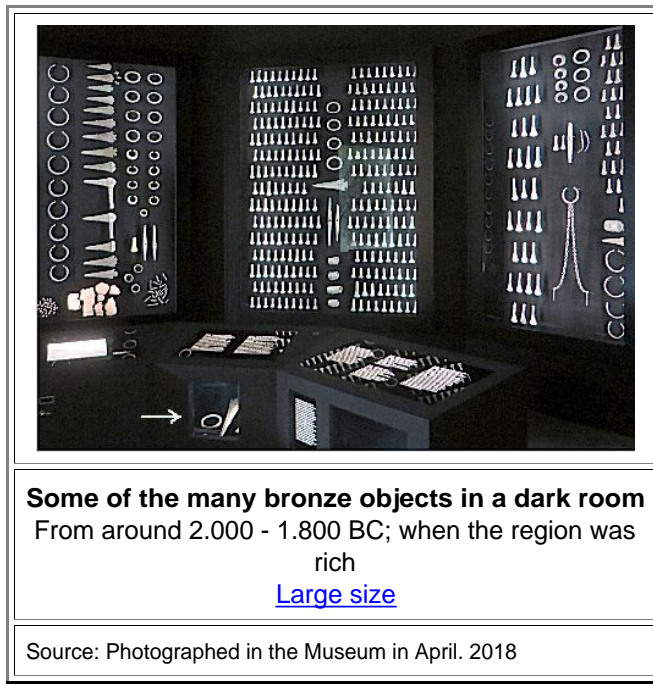
Stone tools and how you work wood with them
[Large size](#)

Source: Photographed in the Museum in April. 2018

One could spend a long time in this room alone - and I haven't even mentioned the ceramics there and elsewhere. I learned a lot about early cultures in middle Europe, including a thing or two about the influx of copper and bronze technology from the South-East. For example, how it spread (see below), what kind of trade was of importance, and why the area changed between being rich and prosperous to being rather poor a few times. Many clear and detailed maps and drawings were very helpful in this respect; below is one:



Let's turn to the unbelievably rich collection of bronze objects in the newly redone room. Here is the centerpiece, showing just parts of what is there:

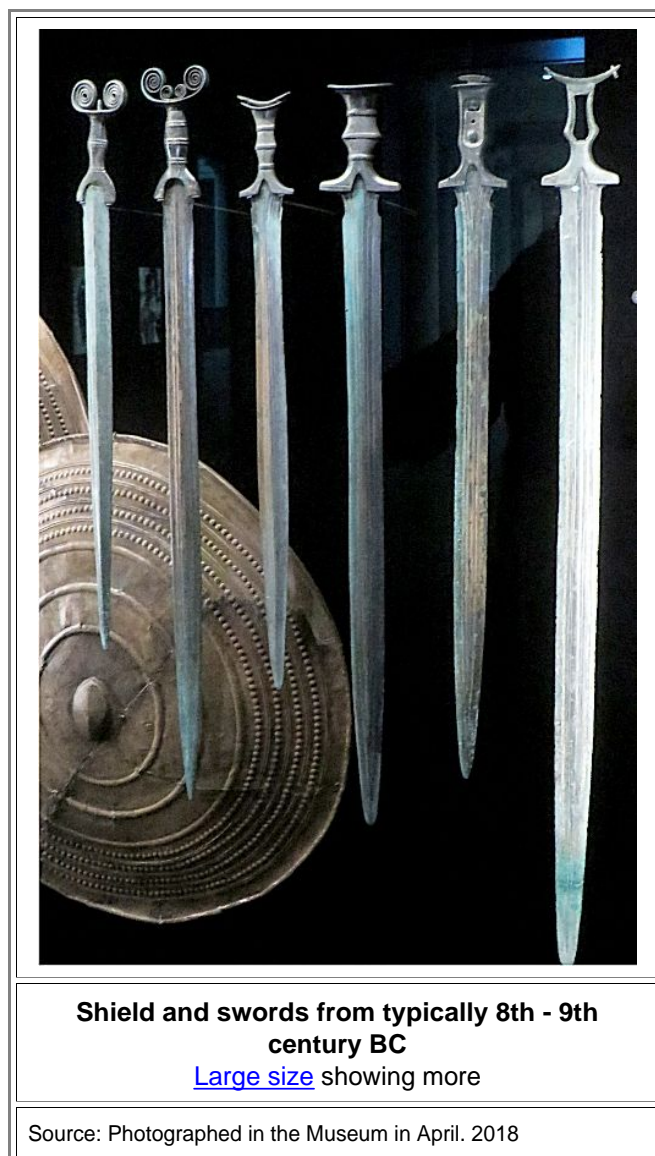


Note the objects marked with a white arrow. They are almost at floor level and appear to be made from gold. No description is visible. If you want to find out what it is, you must either lie down on your belly or point your camera and hope that you will be able to look at a clear picture later. Here is the best I got:

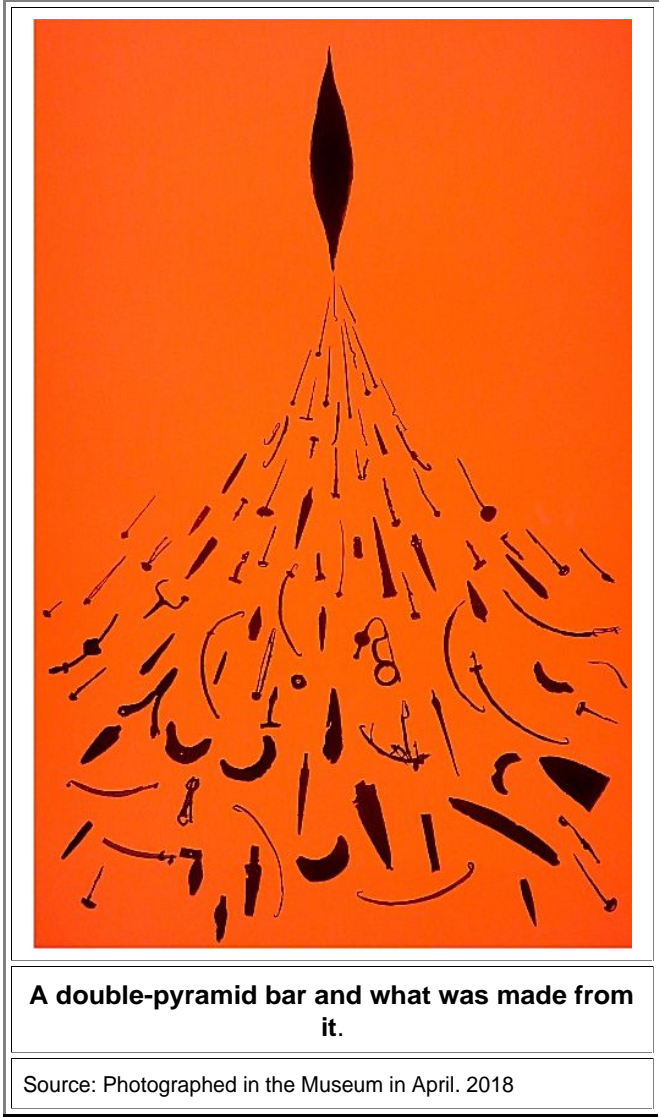


● Aha! After heavy contrast enhancement it became possible to read the inscription on the glass. It tells you that these pieces are modern bronze casts. They are supposed to give you an impression of what bronze things looked like when they were new and shiny. How anyone with an IQ above that of an avocado can come up with such a design is a mystery to me.

▀ Of course you will see magnificent bronze swords and other objects (including mysterious ones), too. Here is an example



If we now move to iron and iron technology, there is not all that much. What there is, however, is interesting. Celtic and Roman artifacts and, as before, good explanations. I learned, for example, that the ubiquitous [bipyramidal shape](#) of trade iron was so popular since it helps the smith to make plenty of small objects by drawing out just a little iron from the "tails" as needed. The museum provides a fascinating poster showing what iron was [mostly used for](#):



Enough! You must go there. When you leave, make sure to buy the booklets explaining the things you saw. They are brief (for museum books) but very well written and highly interesting. I have learned a lot from reading them and can highly recommend them.