

How to classify fortified settlements?

The theoretical and practical approaches to categorize fortified settlements in Bronze Age and Iron Age

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In the history of archaeological research regarding the classification of fortified settlements of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, there have been many different approaches to classify them. One of the more fundamental approaches focuses on simply identifying the topographical location of these sites. They are basically identified as hilltop settlements and fortified settlements in the lowland.

Other approaches seem to be slightly more successful at describing the function(s) of the ramparts, like the division into promontory forts and into circular ramparts or ring forts. In the European Bronze Age, this approach most likely corresponds to the geographical location; naturally most of the hilltop settlements are promontory forts and most of the fortifications in the lowlands are ring forts.

A completely different approach is provided by a classification based on site size hierarchy, which is perhaps one of the more controversial approaches. V. Vasiliev categorises the fortifications of the First Iron Age/Late Bronze Age in Romania according to their size in supra regional centres. Other well-known approaches are the *Fürstensitz* model of W. Kimmig, which is also a controversial approach to the classification of social structures within fortified settlements.

This list of theoretical investigations into this phenomenon could go on indefinitely. All these attempts are only explaining certain aspects of fortified settlements:

- a.) Explanations via geographic location.
- b.) Explanations via construction features.
- c.) Explanations via social and economic functions.

How is it possible to find a more holistic approach in order to understand as many aspects of the Late Bronze Age fortifications as possible? This contribution should be an attempt at finding a more quantitative approach on the basis of archaeological evidence for different functions of these settlements and should lead to a discussion.