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### **Enclosing space and opening new ground in Iron Age studies**

An introduction

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# Enclosing space and opening new ground in Iron Age studies: An introduction

*Tanja Romankiewicz, Manuel Fernández-Götz, Gary Lock & Olivier Büchsenschütz*

## 1. Understanding the Iron Age phenomenon of *Enclosure*

Iron Age studies are characterised by a diversity of perspectives based on different research traditions and theoretical approaches (Büchsenschütz, 2015; Fernández-Götz et al., 2014; Hunter & Ralston, 2015; Krausz et al., 2013; Moore & Armanda, 2011). The material record of the period testifies some commonalities and broader trends connecting distant regions, but there is also a marked heterogeneity in terms of social configurations and historical trajectories (Thurston, 2009).

Among the most widely distributed features of the period are enclosures, from fortifications to field systems. Although the enclosing of space is a long-term process that goes back at least as far as the Neolithic (Harding et al., 2006), the end of the Iron Age in particular saw an exponential increase in establishing boundaries of all sorts. This dividing of the physical and mental landscape between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ has led some scholars to refer to the period as “the age of enclosure” (Haselgrove, 2007).

This volume explores this phenomenon of enclosure from Scotland to the Eurasian continent and highlights new discoveries as well as recent trends in scholarship, from discussions of individual case studies to grander narratives. At the same, it has been conceived as a *Festschrift* for Ian Ralston, Abercromby Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh and one of the leading figures in European Iron Age studies of the last decades. Professor Ralston’s research interests have always pivoted around Scotland and the nearer continent, in particular France, and the contributions in this volume – offered by some of his many friends, colleagues and disciples – try to reflect this geographical focus while also showing his wider personal and professional networks in other regions such as Iberia or Germany. In terms of content, the papers included in the volume cover many of Ralston’s main research interests, most notably fortifications at hillforts and *oppida* (cf. Ralston, 2013) which have been a recurrent topic for him, from his PhD thesis on Limousin (Ralston, 1992) to the recently concluded “Atlas of hillforts of Britain and Ireland” (Lock & Ralston, 2017a and b; forthcoming)

While designing this book as a celebration of Ian Ralston's work, we have also tried to go beyond a typical *Festschrift* collection of essays based only on the contributors' personal connections to the honorand. Instead, we have tried to produce a volume that has a clear overarching topic with interconnected contributions, and carries its own academic merit by investigating the concept of *Enclosure* in Iron Age Europe in an increasing order of scale. This is reflected in the three-fold framework of the book, ranging from specific architectural considerations, to investigations into settlements at the site level or on a regional scale to broader topics that connected communities across Europe and Asia: 1) Building enclosures; 2) Creating settlement communities; and 3) Marking landscapes through time.

Each section considers case studies from geographically different regions, ranging overall from Scotland to the Eurasian steppe.

## **2. Building enclosures**

The first block of four papers considers elements of defensive architecture, how these defences worked and how these elements made the defences work. In roughly chronological order, this section starts with a paper by Axel Posluschny on the well-known 'princely seat' of the Glauberg in central Germany, where the main phases of use have been dated to the Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène periods. Examining the nature of the different enclosing works, and in particular the incomplete outer ditch/rampart system, Posluschny presents new data from his own excavations and opens avenues for future research. This adds a new interpretation to the ongoing debate about the function of this site's incomplete enclosure and their relationship with the burials.

The following two contributions connect with literary evidence, specifically on Caesar's Gallic war, and examine old and new archaeological evidence in comparison with the Classical text. Philippe Barral and Stephan Fichtl – in collaboration with Vincent Guichard, Jean-Paul Guillaumet, Martine Joly, Pierre Nouvel and Matthieu Thivet – undertake a re-evaluation of the famous *muris gallicis* fortification type. While its original definition is based on the descriptions by Julius Caesar, new archaeological discoveries allow for the establishment of subdivisions within this general category and highlight the complexities in the different types of constructions. Most interestingly, *muris gallicis* was not restricted to defensive works, which raises important questions about cultural association not only regarding architectural styles but also of building techniques. In keeping with the territory of Late Iron Age Gaul, Sophie Krausz develops a careful analysis on Caesar's assault ramp constructed during his siege of the *oppidum* of *Avaricum* in 52 BC. Despite many remaining uncertainties due to lack

of documentation, and the loss of above-ground archaeological evidence, a new reading of Caesar in comparison with similar ramps preserved at Dura-Europos (Syria) and Masada (Israel) allow for some general conclusions to be drawn. Enlarging from joint work with Ian Ralston, the conclusions not only refine but reverse some previous perceptions.

The section closes with Halliday's reflection on what characterises a hillfort – and what not. Based on his experience of compiling the database for the Scottish part of Ian Ralston's and Gary Lock's "Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland", Halliday explains the selection criteria for the Atlas sites and reflects on their consequences. As he discusses the sites that were *not* included in the Atlas, Halliday's paper presents on one hand an important companion for the Atlas publication. On the other hand, his discussion raises questions of wider relevance about the function, morphology, recording biases and states of preservation of hillforts and highlights the difficulties arising from ambiguous sites with characteristics that overlap with other monument categories.

### **3. Creating settlement communities**

The next thematic block starts with specific case studies in order to move to wider regional reviews, all of which investigate how enclosing space created communities within but also beyond the obvious earthworks. The section opens with a contribution by Rüdiger Krause on the Ipf hillfort in southwest Germany, similar to the Glauberg another prominent Late Hallstatt and Early La Tène 'princely seat'. Krause investigates the wider setting of the hillfort, based on fieldwork carried out in the last two decades which has enormously expanded our knowledge of the site and its surroundings. The discovery of several enclosed 'manors' and tumuli in its immediate vicinity has drawn the focus away from the study of the hillfort itself and its interior use and placed it into a wider settlement context. Krause raises questions about the sphere of influence of large sites within defined settlement areas (the so-called *Siedlungskammern*) and he discusses the potential of more nuanced site hierarchies that include complicated layers of status and control.

A similar topic is investigated by Murray Cook, Therese McCormick, Jennifer McAlpine, Ross Greenshields, Gordon Cook and Andrew McLean in a study of the greater Forth estuary region centring on Stirling, Scotland. Breaking up existing monument categories based on Cook's recent survey and excavation work in the area, the paper moves away from traditional hierarchical settlement models that consider hillforts and elaborate stone houses known as brochs as the social apex. Relating strategic landscape positions to wider social and economic connections and analysing architectural investments into sites regardless of their specific

material and morphology, the paper argues for a broader social strata in the region. Such developments appear also directly and indirectly linked with the increasing contacts with the Roman world in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Cook et al. paint a multi-layered settlement pattern, although some of this has to remain speculation due to the lack of sites with modern dating evidence.

The problems with site chronologies and phasing are also addressed by another British case study from the Late Iron Age. John Collis discusses his own and other investigations of the defended site known as Oram's Arbour, at Winchester in southern England. He uses Oram's Arbour and the nearby banjo enclosure of Owslebury to apply his new method of identifying site horizons based on changes in the artefactual assemblages, the character and relations of individual finds and their frequencies in different archaeological contexts. Collis' introduces this as a useful methodology also for continental or other artefact-rich sites to avoid restrictive phasing or biases created by an overreliance on exotic imports or grave goods. The latter two finds categories may represent depositional temporalities that were significantly different from everyday deposits within occupation layers. Collis demonstrates how work on individual sites can inform wider settlement models, and provides a review on Iron Age developments in and around the Winchester area in central Hampshire in light of his new conclusions.

While Collis' method cannot be applied to those artefact-poor archaeologies that Cook et al. included in their analysis, the exceptional site of Broxmouth in East Lothian is one of few such sites in Scotland for which a detailed chronology and hence settlement model has been established, using large sets of AMS radiocarbon dates from secure contexts for Bayesian modelling. Two papers refer to this site. Armit introduces its complex occupation history in which the area was cleared several times. Archaeological material from these phases only survives within cut features, primarily the ditches, which highlights the importance of total area excavation rather than small-scale sampling, as important evidence could be missed. Despite its truncation, the entirety of the evidence can be interpreted as representing a continuous occupation on site over about 800 years. However, neither in artefact, nor in architectural or topographical terms does Broxmouth stand out from other settlements in the area. This leads Armit to propose a lack of coercive leadership in East Lothian during the Iron Age, drawing on models of anarchic societies from anthropological research for his interpretation. Armit's study exemplifies the benefits of refining the temporalities of settlement horizons to inform social or economic models of wider relevance. Derek Hamilton and Colin Haselgrove also use the Broxmouth example together with other well-dated enclosed sites in Britain to take this approach even further. They show new avenues for using AMS radiocarbon dating and

Bayesian modelling to not only refine occupation and abandonment horizons beyond the level of individual sites, but also to map the dating of individual activities. Their recent research on Danebury and its settlement environment in particular enabled them to compress this site's occupation history as well as to trace subtle but important variations in occupation histories between sites of similar architectural morphology. This highlights the brevity and the dynamics of some of these activities and questions the contemporaneity of similar sites with important implications for understanding the settlement pattern of a region. Furthermore, Hamilton and Haselgrove cast their doubt on any settlement model that relies on architectural typology to date specific sites for which modern scientific dates are missing.

Finally, David Breeze for his part examines the question of occupation activities at hillforts for the period of the Roman conquest of Britain. He returns to the ancient written sources to compare these with the archaeological evidence in order to shed light on the role and efficiency of fortified indigenous settlements during the Roman conquest of Britain. While he is critical about the informative value of the historical sources and their accuracy, he questions how many hillforts would have been actively occupied during the different phases of the conquest and how effective they were against large-scale assault. His review highlights how few hillforts received literary descriptions, especially when comparing these sources with Caesar's detailed evidence from Gaul.

#### **4. Marking landscapes through time**

The third and last thematic block moves beyond specific sites and settlement pockets and considers elements that mark boundaries or align space to create wider social, political, cultural or economic entities. All these investigations are rooted in the Iron Age but expand into much earlier and/or later periods to trace the development of such concepts through the *longue durée*. The first two contributions in particular also extend the geographical scope, with the team around Luis Berrocal-Rangel exploring north-south connections in the European Atlantic west from Scotland to southern Spain and the team around Chris Gosden investigating an east-west axis between Europe and Asia.

Luis Berrocal-Rangel, Pablo Paniago and Lucía Ruano discuss wider connections between the architecture and landscape settings of defended sites using in particular the example of promontory forts in coastal but also inland locations, and the phenomenon of up-right stone rows (so-called *chevaux-de-frise*) associated with hillforts in different Atlantic regions. Their contribution proposes a common background for the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age examples

based on long-term maritime contacts that can be traced back to at least the third millennium BC.

Using the example of mound technology, Chris Gosden, Peter Hommel and Courtney Nimura explore how monuments within Eurasian landscapes not only demarcated space but also coordinated groups through time, for the communal construction of such projects, but also for the monuments' recurring uses that allowed maintaining continuity across space and time. Their investigations from the Eurasian steppe to Central Germany highlight how such technology of marking and bounding space mapped out places within the physical landscapes as well as the cultural and spiritual mindscapes of these people. The apparent synchronicity in creating large and richly furnished burials across Eurasia at the beginning of the Iron Age argues for a broad latitudinal connectivity, which validates such overarching approaches as also undertaken in their recent research project on European Celtic art and its eastern links.

The following paper by Jesús R. Álvarez-Sanchís and Gonzalo Ruiz Zapatero explores similar topics of connectivity and group coherence albeit on a smaller scale within later prehistoric Spain. They analyse the emergence of urban settlements in 'Celtic' Iberia in relation to the dynamics of open and/or enclosed rural settlement within the wider territories associated with specific socially and politically associated groups. As a result, they identify different layers of interconnected identity. These relations, which can be described as representing ethnic identities in a modern scholarly understanding of the term, increased during the Late Iron Age and under the influence of the Carthaginian and Roman Empires.

Olivier Büchsenschütz also considers the topic of social and political groupings of different social strata and how these may have found expression through architectural markers in the landscape. He cautions that specific sizes and elaboration of different enclosures should not be equated with private, aristocratic ownership or with lower status and communal occupation *per se*. Those sites identified as aristocratic satellite seats around large hillforts and *oppida* may not necessarily tie into a wider community coherence as even within larger *oppida*, the seats of noble families were not integrated into an overall site layout but remained very individualistic and self-contained. Some of the large enclosures in the vicinity of the *oppida* may not have been occupied at all but – in analogy to medieval and later periods – were used to exclude lower social groups from these areas in order to use them possibly as parks or hunting grounds. His picture of the *oppida* landscape is therefore very nuanced, but also socially divisive.

The last paper of the volume by David Rose and Manuel Fernández-Götz examines the role of commemorating and perhaps worshiping venerated warriors and ancestors at monuments in the landscape. Focusing on the well-known enclosed ritual places in Late Iron Age northern Gaul

such as Gournay-sur-Aronde, Ribemont-sur-Ancre and the Titelberg, the authors reflect on how these sites – directly or indirectly connected with the realm of warfare – were acting through time as focal points for the communities of the wider area. By introducing the term ‘memoryscape’, they place this regional phenomenon into a broader discussion of prehistoric practices of appropriating an older past; a practice that although transformed in its physical and built expressions still carried through into the Roman era.

## **5. Enclosing space and opening new ground**

All papers have discussed aspects of enclosed spaces and how these affected individuals, groups, wider communities and landscapes. They show the value of re-examining the architectural and artefactual details for specific sites (Barral & Fichtl, Collis, Krausz, Posluschny) or in a wider regional or supra-regional context (Berrocal-Rangel et al., Cook et al., Halliday, Krause, Rose & Fernández-Götz), but also what can be gained from moving beyond a too narrow focus on the enclosed spaces alone (Álvarez-Sanchís & Ruiz Zapatero, Armit, Berrocal et al., Cook et al., Hamilton & Haselgrove, Krause, Rose & Fernández-Götz). The value of reviewing and reinterpreting written sources in light of the archaeology of protohistoric<sup>1</sup> sites has been demonstrated by several contributions, which have also shown the limits of such undertakings (Barral & Fichtl, Breeze, Krausz; and even where more limited evidence survives (Álvarez-Sanchís & Ruiz Zapatero, Rose & Fernández-Götz). The contrast of the detail available for Krausz’ work could not be clearer to Breeze’s investigation into the textual sources for Britain, which leads him to question the effectiveness of British hillforts as fortifications.

In terms of new or reviewed methods, the paper by Collis introduces an interesting alternative analytical process for finds-rich sites, while Armit’s reanalysis of the extensively excavated site at Broxmouth shows how the more speculative aspects in contributions by Cook et al. or Posluschny could be solved because they have to rely on very small areas of investigation. The small-scale works also draw the problems with chronology and dating into sharper relief. It is not surprising that Hamilton and Haselgrove are able to refine the chronologies and site histories only for sites excavated at a larger scale within well-understood wider settlement landscapes. Their results, however, are able to strengthen our understanding of the timing and tempo of *enclosure* as a phenomenon that is so characteristic of the Iron Age. Are we any closer then to making more general statements regarding enclosure building and its function? Here,

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<sup>1</sup> A term that Ian Ralston has been very prolific in pushing its use in British archaeology.



Hamilton and Haselgrove are more sceptical, which chimes with the conclusions from all the contributions of this volume. While the existing radiocarbon chronologies “imply a wave of Iron Age hillfort building between the mid-5th and mid-4th centuries cal BC across southern and central Britain”, it is not clear what instigated it – a rapid need for effective defence (and against whom? – as investigated for the Roman Iron Age by Breeze and Krausz) or whether it represents a more gradual process of growing community coherence and emancipation that was architecturally expressed within and beyond the hillfort category (Álvarez-Sanchís & Ruiz Zapatero, Armit, Barral & Fichtl, Berrocal et al., Cook et al., Gosden et al., Posluschny, Rose & Fernández-Götz; compare Hingley, 2006). The short lifespans that are increasingly demonstrated for individual occupation periods contrast with the long occurrence of enclosure building within the Iron Age and, at least in some cases, the debatable efficiency against military threats.

Here, several papers not only explore the difference in elaboration and location of enclosed sites but also their size. What could be demonstrated as reflecting social strata in some areas (compare Álvarez-Sanchís & Ruiz Zapatero and Krause here, but also recent work at Batilly by Fichtl 2012) may have to be questioned as a general go-to explanation for all such sites, as demonstrated here by Büchsenschütz’ interpretations and Halliday’s evidence of small sites without high status associations. Hamilton and Haselgrove’s caution of not dating sites by architectural morphology finds support in Büchsenschütz and Cook et al.’s arguments who also question similarities in function between similar sites, or vice versa how different sites could have had similar functions, especially regarding status expressions. These chronological and architectural pitfalls should be born in mind when interrogating the data from the new hillfort Atlas as Halliday invites us all to do, and to develop new criteria for new models of understanding enclosed sites, in Scotland, Britain more widely, Ireland and beyond, to open up new ground on old enclosures.

One theme within the book – highlighted by the final paper by Rose and Fernández-Götz – seems to carry through in most of the contributions, a theme that chimes with recent trends in more theoretical thinking about prehistoric societies: memory and memoryscape (Boric, 2010; Van Dike & Alcock 2003). Whether it is the careful curation of commemorative sanctuaries in Gaul (Rose & Fernández-Götz), the mound-building using earlier fortification technology (Barral & Fichtl), mounds being woven into fortifications (Posluschny) or settlement networks (Krause), or whether it is mound-building more generally across large swathes of Eurasia (Gosden et al.), again and again we see the use and reuse of sites and architectural themes to make links to an earlier past in order to understand or explain the Iron Age presence. That such

later prehistoric conceptions of time, legacy and ancestry will require consideration and further investigations has also been made clear by those examples where such links were deliberately negated, as with the newly discovered female burial under the rampart at the Glauberg, or the erasing of earlier phases at the Broxmouth site.

Through time and space in the Iron Age, people have left their mark on the land by drawing lines around and across places (compare Sievers, 2006), marking boundaries in physical and metaphorical ways. In this way, they not only curated but also created their own past and their own presence. By enclosing space, they have also opened up new ground for new communities, new identities – for their formation as well as their deconstruction.

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