

Hold it at all cost?

Some thoughts about the interplay between defensibility and profitability of prehistoric fortifications based on ethnographic observations

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Prehistoric archaeology has a long history of interpreting the past and creating a picture about “how it could have been”. By using ethnographical analogies, our ancestors in this science established many axioms, which nowadays very often are part of our primary understanding of ancient civilizations. Prehistoric fortifications form a special field for those models and are popular for picturing the daily life of past populations. But very often, it is ignored, that those Life image reconstructions, which we normally use and which we have in our mind most of the time, only refer to a small amount of ethnographical possibilities.

In the intended talk, I want to show some of the problems, which occur, if we use the established opinions on who, why and how prehistoric fortifications, especially the well-known Bronze Age hill forts, uncritically. By contrasting the established high value of the defensibility of ancient fortifications with thoughts about their “profitableness” – or better “usability” – the talk plans to open a new view on the questions if those enclosures, that seem indefensible, were nevertheless a refuge for greater parts of the bronze age population.

To support those thoughts, some examples from the field of ethnography – especially from precolonial societies from South America and Africa - are shown, which will illustrate, that warfare in Bronze Age Europe must not have been a brave joust between famous heroes, as Homer once wrote it. And that a wall does not need to be a huge accumulation of stones, baffles and bastions, to create a “Bigger Bang”.