

Coming Together in the Iron Age: Population Aggregation and Urban Dynamics in Temperate Europe

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Recent research has shown that Iron Age urbanization processes in temperate Europe were a non-linear phenomenon, which included changing and dynamic cycles of centralization and decentralization. In general terms, it is possible to establish the following sequence in the area immediately north of the Alps: (1) a first wave of centralization occurred in the so-called *Fürstensitze* or 'princely sites' of the sixth and fifth centuries BC; (2) a period of decentralization, which some authors have linked with the 'Celtic migrations' recorded in classical sources; and (3) a new phase of centralization that would lead to the development of large unenclosed centres, and of the fortified *oppida* in the second and first centuries BC. This sequence is in marked contrast to the developments that can be observed in wide areas of the Mediterranean world, where many major settlements show a continual, relatively gradual development from the Early Iron Age to Roman times, and sometimes even up to the present day.

This paper will summarize the new evidence for the different stages of Iron Age urbanism, discussing the social dynamics that lie behind the appearance, abandonment, and reappearance of major agglomerations in temperate Europe during the first millennium BC.