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## Objects of Knowledge in Modern Settlement Archaeology. The Case of the Iron Age *Fürstensitze* ('Princely Residences')

### Summary

This paper attempts to analyze modern settlement archaeology as a kind of 'experimental system' that by technical means generates new 'objects of knowledge'. The productivity of such a perspective can be demonstrated by looking more closely at the development of modern settlement archaeology in Germany during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The objects of knowledge that constitute this field of research were not present from the beginning, but developed only gradually out of field archaeological practice. During this 'experimental' process on-site observations were combined with insights from more or less distant contexts, often in a quite unsystematic manner. Among the more complex objects of knowledge generated by modern settlement archaeology is the so-called Fürstensitz, or princely residence, of Central European Iron Age research.

Keywords: Pre- and protohistory; settlement archaeology; Iron Age; history of archaeology; history of science; experimental systems; objects of knowledge.

In diesem Beitrag wird die moderne Siedlungsarchäologie als eine Art ‚Experimentalsystem‘ analysiert, das durch technische Mittel neue ‚Wissensobjekte‘ generiert. Die Produktivität einer solchen Perspektive wird durch die genauere Betrachtung der Entwicklung der modernen Siedlungsarchäologie in Deutschland im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert veranschaulicht. Die Wissensobjekte, die dieses Forschungsfeld konstituieren existierten nicht von Anfang an, sondern entwickelten sich sukzessive aus der feldarchäologischen Praxis. Während dieses ‚experimentellen‘ Prozesses wurden Feldbeobachtungen mit Beobachtungen aus mehr oder weniger entfernten Kontexten mitunter in einer ziemlich unsystematischen Art und Weise miteinander verknüpft. Eines der komplexeren Wissensobjekten, das die moderne Siedlungsarchäologie geschaffen hat, ist der so genannte ‚Fürstensitz‘ der mitteleuropäischen Eisenzeitforschung.

Keywords: Ur- und Frühgeschichte; Siedlungsarchäologie; Eisenzeit; Archäologiegeschichte; Wissenschaftsgeschichte; Experimentalsysteme; Wissensobjekte.

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## 1 Introduction

One of the more complex objects of knowledge generated by modern settlement archaeology is the so-called *Fürstensitz* (princely residence) of Central European Iron Age research. This concept, which is still used today to describe a special form of concentration of political and economic power in early Iron Age Central Europe, was explicitly formulated by Wolfgang Kimmig (1910–2001) in the late 1960s in reference to his own fieldwork on the Early Iron Age hill-fort called Heuneburg near Hundersingen in the Upper Danube region in Southern Germany.<sup>1</sup> Today *Fürstensitze* are either seen as a historical reality beyond any reasonable doubt,<sup>2</sup> or as a theoretical construct that has to be carefully checked against the available archaeological evidence – and possibly modified or even abandoned.<sup>3</sup> It is no secret that my own preferences rest on the side of the latter position.<sup>4</sup> My objections are less directed towards the model itself, as presented in the 1960s by Kimmig, than towards its uncritical application in the decades that followed. Fifty years ago, Kimmig’s model clearly stimulated Iron Age research, but in the course of time the concept has become more and more of a burden for the development of appropriate ideas concerning social and cultural developments in the middle of the 1st millennium B.C.

Such reflections are of no immediate relevance to this paper and therefore need not be substantiated here. Instead, I will try to consider the problem here mainly from the perspective of an external observer. Thus, I discuss the *Fürstensitz* neither as a historical reality, nor as a model which requires further verification. Instead, in the context of this paper, *Fürstensitz* is primarily meant to designate an “epistemic object”<sup>5</sup> produced by (prehistoric) archaeologists to help bring the available evidence into a form that allows insights into the (political) structure of Iron Age societies of the Northern Alpine region.

Consequently, my reflections will focus on the 1950 and 1960s, when the ‘epistemic object’ *Fürstensitz* was coined. But my primary concern is not to re-evaluate this definition in the sense of a legitimization or a critique. By historicizing and contextualizing the *Fürstensitz* concept I hope to reveal a special epistemic constellation characteristic of prehistoric research in the middle of the twentieth century.

## 2 Epistemic objects in prehistoric archaeology

In the sciences, epistemic objects are means to create reliable, new knowledge concerning the structure of the world in which we live. They are able to accomplish this task only

1 Kimmig 1969.

2 E. g. Biel 2007.

3 E. g. Eggert 1989.

4 E. g. Veit 2000.

5 Rheinberger 2001.

in combination with ‘technical objects’ (particle accelerators, for example). The latter’s task is to function reliably and flawlessly.<sup>6</sup> Technical objects also play a significant role in the fabrication of archaeological knowledge. This is especially obvious with regard to the multitude of archaeological field techniques, but it also applies to many processes in the field of archaeological find analysis, such as the seriation of find complexes or the cartographic representation of spatial distributions, that are primarily of a technical nature. These techniques should not be seen as isolated scientific tools, but as more or less closely related to the ‘epistemic objects’ or ‘objects of knowledge’ under examination. In the context of settlement archaeology for example ‘the culture layer’, ‘the post hole’, ‘the pit house’ and ‘the dwelling pit’ may be regarded as typical objects of knowledge. These objects were not present from the beginning, but developed only gradually out of archaeological fieldwork undertaken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century on a relatively small number of key sites.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from such elementary objects of knowledge, prehistoric archaeology, and in particular settlement archaeology, has created much more complex objects of knowledge. A good example is ‘pile dwelling’, an object of antiquarian research in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its discovery (or rather ‘construction’) is strongly associated with the work of the Swiss historian and antiquarian Ferdinand Keller (1800–1881). Keller based his conclusions concerning prehistoric relics found together with impressive fields of wooden posts at the shores of many Swiss lakes on experience gained while exploring Swiss and English prehistoric dry land sites.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the pile dwelling phenomenon ultimately came into existence in a process that could be characterized as ‘experimental’. But this process clearly was not limited to on-site observations. Rather the information gathered ‘in the field’ was combined in an imaginative way with observations from more or less distant contexts. The unsystematic method repeated itself, as observations in foreign contexts used as analogies were not themselves investigated thoroughly; instead, seemingly relevant ‘facts’ were taken from general education. In this sense field archaeology should not be regarded as a closed experimental system that produces results only through highly controlled processes conducted onsite. To the contrary, systems of this kind are not only open to external influences, but would not work without such external input.

Processes similar to those at work in pile dwellings in the nineteenth century can be detected in early research on prehistoric fortifications (*Burgenforschung*). Both fields of research contributed considerably to the development of modern settlement archaeology, and hence to the discovery that discolorations in the soil (representing post holes

6 Mehrtens 2008, 37; see also Rheinberger 2001.

7 As e. g. the Bronze Age settlements *Römerschanze* near Potsdam and Berlin-Buch or the early Neo-

lithic site of Köln-Lindenthal.

8 Cf. Trachsel 2004.

or pits) could be used to reconstruct the outline of buildings and even of whole settlements. In this context it is necessary to mention the excavations of Carl Schuchhardt (1859–1943) in the Roman legionary camp at Haltern in Westphalia as well as in the prehistoric ‘castles’ of northern Germany.<sup>9</sup> These were among the first attempts at reconstructing architectural structures built without stones.

From this point it was only a small step to the large-scale excavations carried out in the first half of the twentieth century, for example by Werner Buttler (1907–1940) and Waldemar Haberey (1901–1985) at Köln-Lindenthal<sup>10</sup> or by Gerhard Bersu (1889–1964) on the Goldberg hilltop near Nördlingen.<sup>11</sup> These archaeologists exerted a strong influence on more recent settlement archaeology, not only in Germany (Kimmig and other archaeologists of the next generation took part in the Goldberg excavation and gained their first field experience here) but for example also on the British Isles, where Bersu involuntary spent several years during World War II.<sup>12</sup>

### 3 The *Fürstensitz*-concept as a complex object of knowledge

The development of even more complex objects of knowledge like the *Fürstensitz* or as well the so called *Herrenhof* – ‘chief’s farmstead’, a large enclosed complex – of later prehistory becomes intelligible only in such a context. Their ‘creation’ is to be seen in the context of large, state-financed excavation projects in post-war Germany, such as the Heuneburg excavation in south Germany<sup>13</sup> or the excavation at the Feddersen Wierde near Cuxhaven,<sup>14</sup> which offered an opportunity for refining such initially vague objects of knowledge as the *Fürstensitz* or the *Herrenhof* by means of systematic excavation and documentation of larger parts of selected, well preserved sites. They relied from a technical point of view on the experience of an older generation of excavators, who had passed down their knowledge to a younger generation of archaeologists, mostly during fieldwork.

In the case of the Heuneburg, the term *Fürstensitz* first occurs in the subtitle of a report on the 1950s excavations directed by Kurt Bittel (1907–1991) from Tübingen University and Adolf Rieth (1902–1984) from the Tübingen unit of the State Heritage Management Program.<sup>15</sup> Both referred to older publications from the 1870s by Eduard Paulus (‘the Younger’, 1837–1907), who had persisted in viewing the mound of the Heuneburg hill-fort as related to some adjacent tumuli. These tumuli – due to the rich grave finds discovered during unsystematic excavation in one of these burial mounds –

9 On Schuchhardt see: Grünert 1987.

10 Buttler and Haberey 1936.

11 Cf. Parzinger 1998.

12 Evans 1989; Krämer 2001.

13 Kimmig 1968; Kimmig 1969; Kimmig 1983.

14 Haarnagel 1979; cf. Burmeister and Wendwowski-Schünemann 2006.

15 Bittel and Rieth 1951.

had been labeled the ‘Hundersinger Fürstengrabhügel’, prince’s burial mounds of Hundersingen.<sup>16</sup> Yet, only in 1921 was Walter Veeck (1886–1941) able to prove by means of small-scale excavations that a tentative connection existed between these tumuli and the hilltop-site.

It was not until 1948 that the first systematic topographic and archaeological survey of the site, with its surrounding ramparts and ditches was initiated. The results of the 1950s excavations have been summarized by Bittel and Rieth in a small booklet which appeared in 1951 (Fig. 1). Here the late nineteenth century argumentation that used the funerary evidence to give meaning to the adjacent settlement site has been reversed for the first time. Bittel and Rieth claim that their excavation of the defensive structures of the site (Fig. 2) has, for the first time, justified labelling Heuneburg a *Fürstensitz* of the Early Iron Age. Furthermore, the neighborhood of the large mounds and princely burials seemed to fit into this picture.<sup>17</sup> The authors also mention the absence of undisturbed, peaceful development within the settlement, since the excavations revealed at least three successive defensive systems of differing structure as well as signs of destruction and fire. Finally, Bittel and Rieth sketch out a working program for the years to come that was supposed to solve open questions by means of systematic archaeological fieldwork.

In 1951, Wolfgang Kimmig and Wolfgang Dehn took over as directors of the Heuneburg project. In the decades that followed it was Kimmig, who had followed Bittel as head of the Institute of Pre- and Protohistory at Tübingen University, who primarily carried on the research and popularized the Heuneburg within archaeological circles and beyond (Fig. 3). In diverse publications he elaborated on the conclusions of Bittel and Rieth. A short publication from 1955 exhibits a certain terminological change, with Kimmig replacing the term *Fürstensitz* with the term *Adelssitz* (‘noble seat’), emphasizing the aristocratic structure of the supposed ruling elite of the Heuneburg. Kimmig claimed that the political structure as described in Caesar’s report on the Gallic war (58–52 BC) may well have been in existence half a millennium earlier.<sup>18</sup> Although this argumentation was at that time widely accepted among his colleagues, Kimmig’s terminological proposal, which he renewed in his programmatic paper of 1969, did not prove successful in the long run.

In 1968 – after 14 years of systematic fieldwork on the Heuneburg – Kimmig published a first synthesis in the form of a guide addressed to the wider public. Here he presented the Heuneburg as a citadel for the nobility quite different from medieval castles (Fig. 4). Far from emphasizing the uniqueness of this site, Kimmig argued that citadels

16 For details see Schweizer 2006, 82–85, with references.

17 Bittel and Rieth 1951, 53.

18 Kimmig 1955, 301.

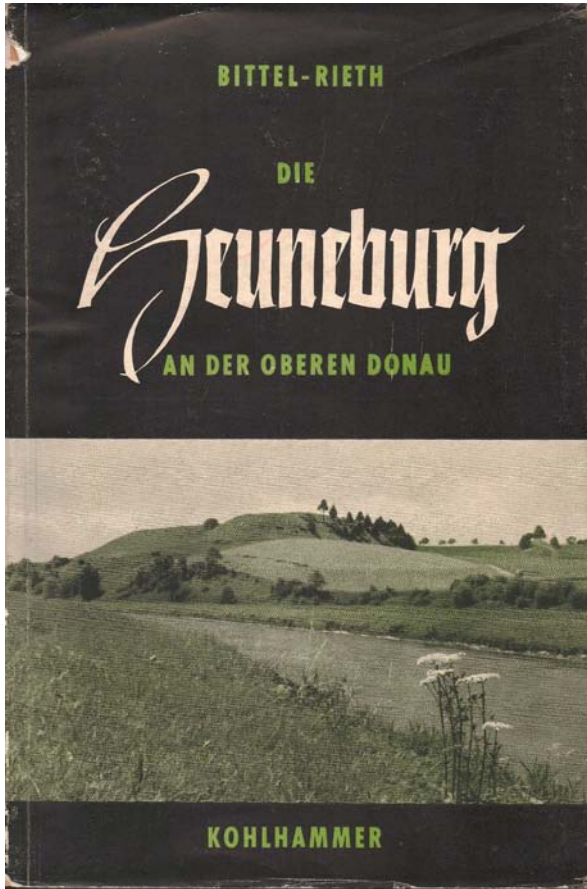


Fig. 1 Cover of the booklet “Die Heuneburg an der oberen Donau” of 1951.

of this kind may have existed at a distance of 15 to 20 km. Only later did Kimmig attribute a much more exclusive character to his *Fürstensitze*, which is made clear by the distribution map he added to a number of his publications.<sup>19</sup> This map (Fig. 5) was reproduced with minor modifications by many scholars in the decades that followed.

But let me come back to the guide from 1968, the interpretative parts of which remained practically unchanged in a new edition published in 1983. Here Kimmig gives a vivid description of how he imagined Early Iron Age society in south-western Germany. He confronts the reader with a ruling dynasty, vassals and slaves, as well as with farmers, craftsmen and priests. In the center of Kimmig’s ideas stands a kind of charismatic leader, ruling the Heuneburg-region with ‘patriarchal calm’:

<sup>19</sup> Kimmig 1983, 9; Kimmig 1990.

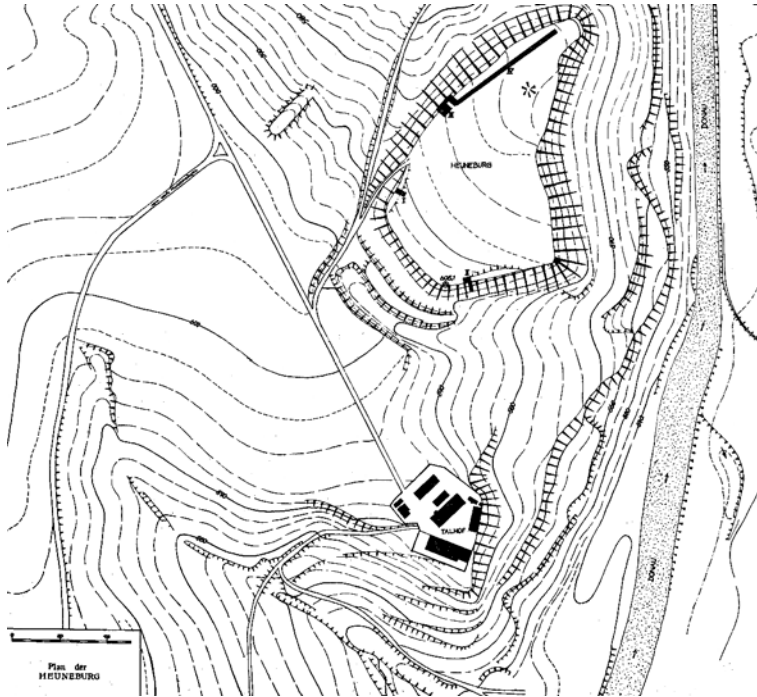


Fig. 2 Topographical situation of the Heuneburg-hillfort after Kurt Bittel and Adolf Rieth in 1951.

We may think of this man as a dynamic ruler, who had at his disposal the means to rebuild the settlement mound and thereby to create a power center of his own dynasty. This man obviously was conscious about his descent, since he placed emphasis on being buried in the middle of his people.<sup>20</sup>

Kimmig concludes that, although the “name and dynasty of the citadel’s noblemen will be wiped out forever [...] fourteen years of patient and planned research were enough to generate a historic landscape from what had been a terra incognita.”<sup>21</sup> Here it becomes clear that Kimmig’s reasoning is informed by an implicit analogy between the planned layout of the Heuneburg settlement and the systematic, long-term research on the site. This places Kimmig and his fellow excavation directors residing in Hohentübingen castle, where the Institute of Pre- and Protohistory of Tübingen University has been housed since the early 1920s,<sup>22</sup> in a certain sense at the same level as the ruling elite of the Early Iron Age. In both cases a kind of ‘dynastic structure’ is visible (although in academic circles descent normally lacks a biotic element). I will not go into the details of such an

20 Kimmig 1968, 100. Translation by the author.

22 Veit 2006.

21 Kimmig 1968, 119.



Fig. 3 Wolfgang Kimmig (1910–2001) in 1955 at his office at the Institute for Pre- und Protohistory of Tübingen university, located in Hohentübingen castle.

ethno-psychoanalytic perspective within the history of archaeology,<sup>23</sup> since the information given so far is sufficient to illustrate the dominant role of historical imagination in Kimmig's work. He sketches out a historical scenario, but eventually leaves it to others to check the 'facts' carefully against the archaeological evidence.

Indeed, many problems concerning the structure of Iron Age society seem to have been solved before excavation had even begun. This may be illustrated by the following citation: "We still don't know to what extent the inner area of the Heuneburg was covered with buildings. However, the existence of a market run not only by local farmers is most likely."<sup>24</sup> Kimmig was convinced that foreign traders also offered goods and luxuries at this market. Given the rudimentary state of the typographic and comparative analysis of the materials discovered during the excavations on the Heuneburg before 1968, it is astonishing to be confronted with such a detailed reconstruction. Apart from Riek's publication of his pre-war excavations in the Hohmichele burial mound in 1962 in the new monograph series *Heuneburgstudien*, publications on material from the Heuneburg did not appear until the 1970s and 1980s starting with Günter Mansfeld's 1974 work on the fibulas.

23 For the theoretical background of such an approach cf. Erdheim 1982.

24 Kimmig 1968, 122.



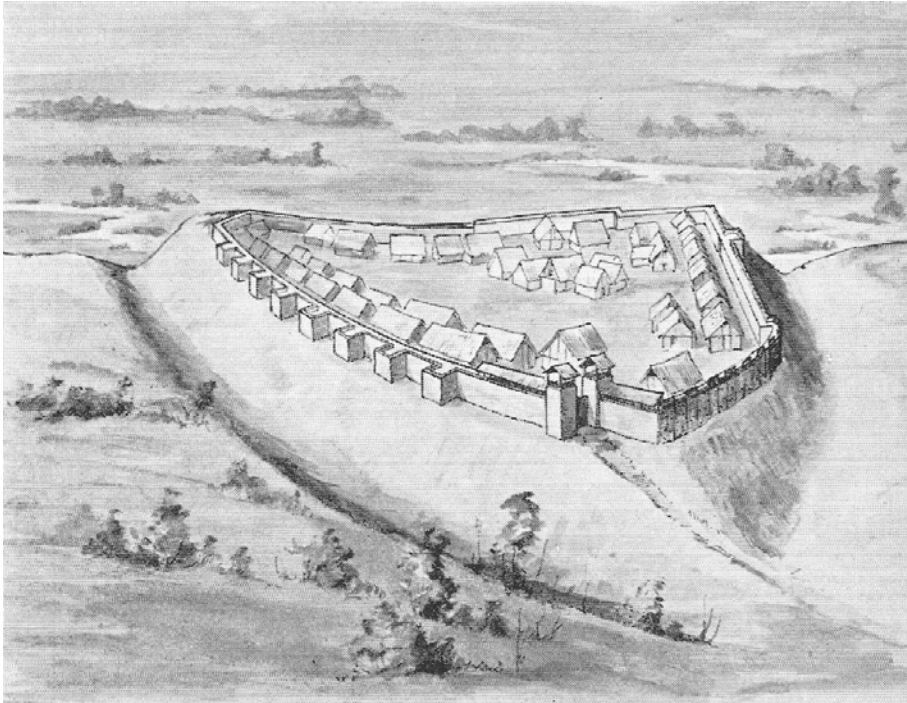


Fig. 4 Reconstruction of the *Heuneburg* with fortifications and buildings by Wolfgang Kimmig in 1968.

The stratigraphic sequence and the architectural evidence were finally published between 1989 and 1996 by Egon Gersbach,<sup>25</sup> who joined the project in 1963 and was responsible for all organizational and technical aspects of the excavation. From this time on a clear division of work becomes apparent. While Gersbach organized and supervised the more practical activities on the site, Kimmig concentrated his activities on integrative and comparative work. His interest was less focused on details than on the large lines of a historical interpretation. And quite similarly to his supposed *Fürst* with his far reaching contacts, Kimmig cared about the international recognition of the Heuneburg project. In this context it proved particularly useful for him to have been in contact with French prehistorians for decades.<sup>26</sup> In France, similar archaeological situations of hillforts surrounded by large burial mounds became apparent. In particular, the protohistoric monuments around the Mont Lassois in Burgundy seemed to reproduce the pattern discovered in the region of the Heuneburg.<sup>27</sup>

25 Gersbach 1989; Gersbach 1995; Gersbach 1996.

26 His contacts can be traced back to his activities in the office responsible for the protection of cultural

heritage in France during the German occupation (see Olivier 2004).

27 Cf. Brun and Chaume 1997.

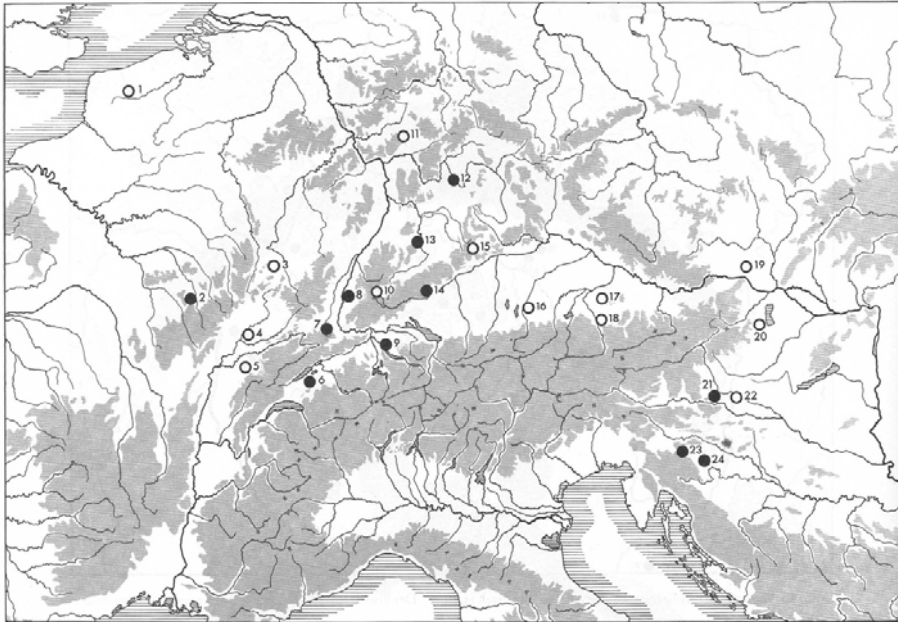


Abb. 5 Späthallstatt/frühhlatènezeitliche »Fürsten-« bzw. Herrensitze in der Zone nördlich und südlich des Alpenbogens. – 1 Kemmelberg, comm. Kemmel, Westflandern. – 2 Mont Lassois, comm. de Vix bei Châtillon-sur-Seine, Côte d’Or. – 3 Sion, comm. Saxon-Sion, Meurthe-et-Moselle. – 4 Gray, Haute-Saône. – 5 Camp-du-Château bei Salins-les-Bains, Jura. – 6 Châtillon-sur-Glane bei Fribourg. – 7 Britzgyberg bei Illfurth, Haut-Rhin. – 8 Münsterberg von Breisach, Kr. Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald, Baden-Württemberg. – 9 Uetliberg bei Zürich. – 10 Kapf bei Villingen im Schwarzwald, Baden-Württemberg. – 11 Glauberg bei Glauburg, Wetteraukreis, Hessen. – 12 Marienberg von Würzburg, Unterfranken, Bayern. – 13 Hohenasperg bei Asperg, Kr. Ludwigsburg, Baden-Württemberg. – 14 Heuneburg a. d. oberen Donau, Gem. Herberlingen-Hundersingen, Kr. Sigmaringen, Baden-Württemberg. – 15 Ipf bei Bopfingen, Ostalbkreis. – 16 Kyberg bei Oberhaching, Kr. München. – 17 Hellbrunner Berg bei Hellbrunn, Land Salzburg. 18 Helpfau-Uttendorf, Oberösterreich. – 19 Michelberg bei Stockerau, Niederösterreich. – 20 Odenburg-Sopron, Westungarn. – 21 Burgstallkogel bei Klein-Klein im Sulmtal, Kärnten. – 22 Radkersburg, Steiermark. – 23 Ringwall Vir bei Sittica (Sittich), Unterkrain, Slowenien. – 24 Novo Mesto (Rudolfswert), Unterkrain, Slowenien. – Gefüllte Kreise weisen auf Herrensitze mit einem Wahrscheinlichkeitsgrad über 50%, offene Kreise auf solche mit einem Wahrscheinlichkeitsgrad unter 50%.

Fig. 5 Spatial distribution of the *Fürstensitze* according to Wolfgang Kimmig in 1990.

Even though Kimmig strongly emphasized the important role of large systematic excavations in answering historical questions on an interregional scale, his procedure at first sight seems to deviate considerably from an ‘experimental system’ that regularly produces knowledge basically by technical means. Nevertheless, Kimmig’s relatively simple concept of the *Fürsten-* or *Adelssitz* as outlined in his paper from 1969,<sup>28</sup> effectively stimulated empirical research well beyond the Heuneburg area in the decades that followed.

For the Heuneburg itself, examples of this more experimental approach can still be found around 1970. A paradigmatic case is Jörg Biel’s thesis on prehistoric hilltop-

28 Significant features were the division of the settled area between acropolis and suburbium, the existence of rich burials under tumuli (*Fürstengräber*) in

the vicinity of the *Fürstensitz* and the presence of imported goods, especially from the Mediterranean, inside the settlement and in the lavish tombs.

settlements in south-western Germany.<sup>29</sup> Even though this study was published nearly twenty years after Kimmig's paradigmatic paper, it was written in Tübingen at the high-time of the Heuneburg excavations (Biel presented his thesis to the faculty in 1972). Against this background it is not surprising that a chapter on Early Iron Age hilltop settlements is the most important part of the book. Here Biel tries to demonstrate the spatial efficacy of the *Fürstentiz* Heuneburg by means of a differentiated chronological analysis of the archaeological evidence from various hilltop sites in the vicinity of the Heuneburg.

Biel bases his argumentation on a distinction between four types of hilltop sites in the Early Iron Age<sup>30</sup>, the third of which he labelled "Fürstentiz":<sup>31</sup> Type I comprises very small settlements located on hilltop positions, but lacking fortifications (this type is of minor importance for subsequent argumentation); Type II comprises real hilltop settlements in extreme positions, that is to say sites far away from the communication routes, and partly at high elevations. According to Biel's analysis these locations are chronologically restricted to the early 'Hallstatt D' phase from around 650 BC;<sup>32</sup> Type III comprises fortified settlements in favorable positions close to communication routes like the Heuneburg. For this category the term *Fürstentiz* is reserved; Type IV designates real hilltop sites which have fortifications, but which – unlike type II settlements – typically existed over the whole time span under investigation.<sup>33</sup> This last type according to Biel is to be found only beyond the territories of the *Fürstentize*. In Biel's view it seems possible that these smaller hilltop settlements had a lasting existence when they lay outside the sphere of influence of a *Fürstentiz* (which according to Biel may have had a radius of up to 50 km). This seems to be confirmed by the spatial distribution of the sites presented by Biel on a small map (Fig. 6).

New research from the last few decades in this region has invalidated the conclusions Biel drew from this representation.<sup>34</sup> What seems important to me in the context of the arguments presented above is that by making things visible, Biel – in a limited sense – brought the *Fürstentiz* into being as an object of knowledge. By producing chronological charts as well as distribution maps, Biel made the *Fürstentiz* a reality even on a nonverbal level. In any case its character changed from that of an evocative historical term borrowed from historical studies to a 'real' object of knowledge that at least in part had been constructed experimentally.

Biel's arguments certainly might have been much stronger had he not attempted to formulate a particular historical interpretation of his observations at a very early stage in his analysis; he may indeed have stopped a promising 'experimental' process too early. In

29 Biel 1987.

30 The Early Iron Age includes the prehistoric phases 'Hallstatt C' and 'Hallstatt D'; from around 800 BC to the middle of the 5th century BC.

31 Biel 1987, 145–150.

32 Middle of 7th to middle of 5th century BC.

33 That is, in archaeological terms, from early Hallstatt D to Latène A/B: 7th to 4th century BC.

34 Cf. also Biel 2007.

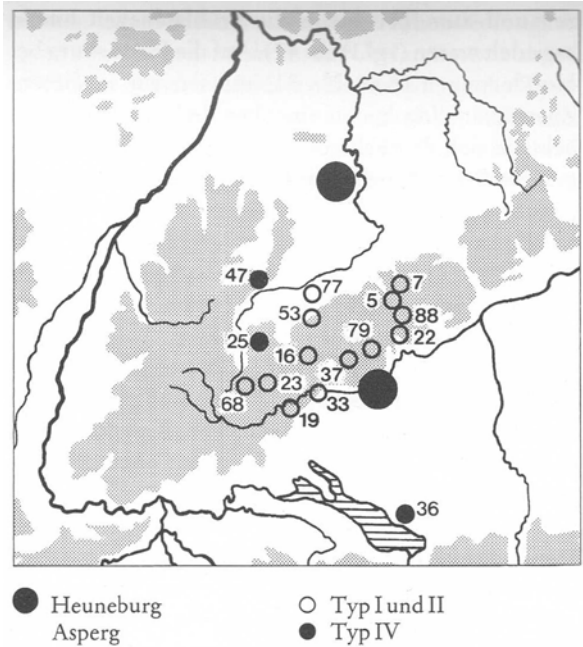


Fig. 6 Chronological and spatial distribution of Hallstatt-period hilltop sites in southern Württemberg (southwestern Germany) according to Jörg Biel in 1987.

any case it seems possible to imagine an archaeology with a much stronger emphasis on such practices of pattern recognition independent of concepts borrowed from (written) history. In this context mention should be made of more recent approaches that try to replace such evocative terms as *Fürstensitz* with more neutral terms such as ‘central place’ or ‘complex center.’<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the historical narratives which result from such approaches appear pale und lifeless to many scholars even today.<sup>36</sup>

According to Wolfgang Ernst there is a fundamental difference between ‘cold’ archaeological fieldwork and ‘hot’ historical imagination:

An abyss separates both practices. [...] It is the practice of historians to write a plausible history from fragmentary textual evidence in archaeology. Exactly here lies the difference between the archaeological field [...] and the archive-fictions of the historians.<sup>37</sup>

Later on, Ernst continues:

35 Cf. Gringmuth-Dallmer 1996.

36 Cf. Biel 2007; Kolb 2007.

37 Ernst 2004, 237. – Translation by the author. Originally: „Eine Kluft trennt die beiden Praktiken [...]. Es ist die Praxis der Historiker, aus fragmentarischen

Textbefunden in Archiven plausible Geschichte zu schreiben. Genau hier unterscheidet sich das archäologische Feld (im doppelten Sinne) von den Archiv-Fiktionen der Historiker.“

Excavators ‘on the site’ deal with material rather than verbal contexts, in collaboration with *technicians* rather than scholars specialized on texts. The scientific scope of work of prehistorians cannot be fixed with the historian’s vocabulary.<sup>38</sup>

Applying this distinction to the example presented in this paper, we may be inclined to look at Kimmig as representing the part of historical imagination and Biel as representing the part of archaeological fieldwork. A closer look shows that the situation is more complicated. As I have already tried to demonstrate, we certainly find elements of ‘cold’ archaeological reasoning in the publications of Kimmig, as well as strong elements of ‘hot’ historical imagination in Biel’s contributions. And as far as I can see, such a dichotomy is implicit to all archaeologies.

#### 4 Conclusion: Settlement archaeology as an experimental system?

The thesis behind this paper is that historiographical concepts developed within modern history of science, like ‘experimental system’, ‘epistemic object’ or ‘object of knowledge’, are perfectly applicable to prehistoric archaeology. The *Fürstensitz* discourse within Iron Age research has been used as an illustration. At a very early stage in Kimmig’s research, a certain configuration of data became visible, which – according to his expectations of how Iron Age society worked – forced him to see the archaeological evidence as having a special ‘form’ or ‘*Gestalt*’. This *Gestalt* he labeled *Adelssitz*, and he formulated at the same time some rather vague criteria for identifying such higher-order settlements in the archaeological record. The task of making this specific *Gestalt* (for which a majority of scholars preferred to use the term *Fürstensitz*) visible in the archaeological evidence, Kimmig largely left to others. This was achieved by field work combined with attempts to present the emerging spatial pattern by means of maps, chronological charts and other kinds of illustrations (representing ‘technical objects’). Along the way, the nature of the epistemic object called *Fürstensitz* permanently changed. Vague and blurred at the beginning it underwent a process of stabilization that was combined with a process of ‘black boxing’.<sup>39</sup> This means that the experimental system at work not only produced new knowledge, but at the same time even erased the complex process by which it came into existence.<sup>40</sup> Nowadays we have the means to gain a deeper understanding of these processes that ultimately gave rise to prehistoric archaeology as it is practiced today. To

38 Ernst 2004, 247–248. – Translation by the author. Originally: „Ausgräber befassen sich vor Ort eher mit materiellen den verbalen Kon/texten, im Team mit Technikern eher denn mit Textgelehrten. Das wissenschaftliche Arbeitsfeld der Prähistoriker

kann nicht mit dem Vokabular der Historiker fixiert werden.“

39 Cf. Latour 1999.

40 Cf. Stoff 2008, 50.

accomplish this aim it will be necessary to conduct more detailed analyses emphasizing the particularities of archaeological field practice and diverse techniques used by archaeologists in subsequent phases of archaeology's development. These studies will clearly be able to demonstrate the inadequacy of the famous term 'science of the spade,' to which many archaeologists still proudly refer today.

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