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# Between defensive and symbolic. ‘Fortified’ hill-top sites in the Irish Late Bronze Age

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## Résumé

A steep increase in the number of enclosed hill-top sites in many parts of Europe during the Late Bronze Age has long been taken as a key indicator of increased levels of inter-group violence in the final centuries of the second millennium BC. With more than one hundred Late Bronze Age ‘hillforts’, the island of Ireland provides an excellent case-study region to test this hypothesis. Based on the Irish evidence we challenge the somewhat simplistic notion that an increase in the number of enclosed hill-top sites primarily reflects an increased need for protection from would-be warlike aggressors. Instead, we maintain that many of the enclosing features observed at Irish Late Bronze Age hill-top sites are not primarily defensive in nature, and that an increased emphasis on social display at an inter-group level provides an important motive for the enclosure of these sites.

**Mots-Clés:** Late Bronze Age, Ireland, hillforts, warfare, social display

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