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REVEALING FORGOTTEN HILLFORTS - ARCHIVAL SOURCES OF EASTERN PRUSSIA'S GERMAN RESEARCH HISTORY ON PREHISTORIC FORTIFICATIONS

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Hillfort research in former German Eastern Prussia, today divided into a Lithuanian, Polish and Russian part, goes back to the 1830s. Until 1945 mainly German archaeologists registered a total of approximately 500 monuments of this type. Nevertheless hillfort research right before the second world war was still at the very beginnings. Only a few hillforts experienced a more detailed investigation, with a varying quality and extent. But beside a few preliminary reports in archaeological journals of the time and newspaper articles these results remained mainly unknown to the wider scientific community. The reports and documents related to the pre-war excavations were kept in the Prussia-Museum in Königsberg, but it's collection and archive was lost for half a century during the post-war period. Only after 1990 big parts of the archive were rediscovered, re-sorted and can now systematically be filtered for hillfort related information.

This paper sheds light on the different archival sources related to hillfort research in former Eastern Prussia and gives examples, how rich the material in the archives sometimes is. As a best practice example, relevant archival material of excavations at the hillfort Kraxtepellen (today Jantarnij, Russia) will be presented to demonstrate, how original documentations can add to the understanding of modern hillfort research. Kraxtepellen was the only hillfort completely excavated in the German research period. Based on the archival sources it is possible to reconstruct the main phases of this hillfort, used between pre-Roman Iron Age and the medieval period. Furthermore adjacent settlements have been discovered by in the vicinity, making the hillfort Kraxtepellen one of the best investigated settlement chambers of the region. It was hidden in the archives so far, but can now be revealed.

Keywords

Eastern Prussia, hillforts, research history, Prussia museum, archival sources

Note/comment