



The Metal Ages – the Iron Age (800 BC to 50 BC)

In the **Early Iron Age**, also known as the Hallstatt period, the growing influence of the Celts resulted in a rather uniform central European culture, despite the presence of a multitude of regional groups. The introduction of iron processing did not bring about a sudden technological revolution, because the new metal was initially used only to quite a limited extent. Nevertheless, weapons developed quite considerably thanks to the introduction of iron and became more specialised, much to the benefit of the newly emerging élites. As a consequence, the region was soon controlled by a warrior class.

These Hallstatt-period princes established their centres of power in the form of fortified settlements. The phenomenon was widespread throughout the Swiss Plateau, south-western Germany and north-eastern France between 580 BC and 450 BC. Located along trade routes and in places of strategic importance, these settlements were used by the ruling class to maintain busy exchange networks with the Mediterranean region, as attested to by precious vessel sets of Etruscan and Greek origin found in élite burials. Towards the end of the Early Iron Age, the settlements, with their urban-like structures of organisation, had once again disappeared.

In the **Late Iron Age**, also known as the La Tène period, vast migrations occurred throughout all of Europe and earlier trade routes changed. Reorganisation of these networks was partly influenced by changes in Massalia's (Marseille) trade relations. The city increasingly looked to production sources other than those controlled by the regions to the north. The Late Iron Age is characterised, among other things, by the introduction of a monetary economy, by an ever-increasing diversification of specialised trades and by the refinement and uniqueness of the artistic output.



Archaeological sites
that gave their name to the Iron Ages

Societies and their environment

Characteristic of the Late Iron Age, so-called oppida, large fortified settlements usually found on hilltops were the main features shaping the landscape in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. They eventually led to the establishment of well-structured transport network. Construction and maintenance of these settlements required large amounts of resources and manpower, because whilst natural features such as hillsides and rivers were used as part of their defence systems, they were also protected by ditches, ramparts and palisades. The ruling élite were obviously able to mobilise a sufficient number of people to achieve such labour-intensive collective endeavours.

The Roman conquest brought an end to the Iron Age. Following Julius Caesar's victory over the Gauls in 52 BC, the present-day Alsace region became part of the Roman Empire.