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L'Origine du château médiéval

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Huis Bergh castle (© Rens Marskamp).

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Hans-Wilhelm HEINE	
Innovative Methoden zur Erfassung und Vermessung von Burgen in Wäldern und Flachgewässern (Niedersachsen) ...	197
Méthodes innovantes pour le relevé de châteaux situés en forêts ou sous des eaux peu profondes en Basse-Saxe	
<i>Innovative methods for surveying castles located in forests or shallow water in Lower Saxony</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	202
Connie JANTZEN & Rikke Agnete OLSEN	
Boeslum by Ebeltoft. Unexpected information from an «ordinary» site	203
Boeslum par Ebeltoft. Des informations inattendues en provenance d'un site « ordinaire »	
<i>Boeslum bei Ebeltoft. Unerwartetes von einer normalen Fundstelle</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	209
Jan KOCK	
Dendrochronological dating and research into fortresses in Denmark.....	211
Datation dendrochronologique et étude des forteresses au Danemark	
<i>Dendrochronologie und Burgenforschung in Dänemark</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	222
Conleth MANNING	
Clogh Oughter Castle, Co. Cavan, and thirteenth-century circular towers in Ireland	223
Le château de Clogh Oughter dans le comté de Cavan et les tours circulaires en Irlande au XIII ^e siècle	
<i>Clogh Oughter Castle (Grafschaft Cavan) und die irischen Rundtürme des 13. Jhs.</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	232
Pamela MARSHALL	
Making an Appearance: some thoughts on the phenomenon of multiple doorways and large upper openings in Romanesque donjons in western France and Britain.....	233
Apparaître : quelques réflexions sur le phénomène des portes multiples et grandes ouvertures hautes sur les donjons romans de l'ouest de la France et de Grande-Bretagne	
<i>Sich zeigen: Überlegungen zu Mehrfachzugängen und zu den großen Öffnungen in den oberen Geschossen romanischer Donjons in Westfrankreich und Großbritannien</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	242
Kare MCMANAMA-KEARIN	
Forced Focus: a room with a viewshed	243
Regard obligé : chambre avec point de vue	
<i>Erzwungener Fokus: Zimmer mit Sichtbereich</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	247
Werner MEYER	
Drapham Dzong. Excavations of a motte castle in Bhutan, 2008-2010	249
Drapham Dzong. Fouilles d'un château à motte du Bhoutan, 2008-2010	
<i>Drapham Dzong. Ausgrabung einer Motte in Bhutan, 2008-2010</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	257
Paul NAESSENS & Kieran O'CONNOR	
Pre-Norman Fortification in eleventh- and twelfth- century Connacht.....	259
Les fortifications pré-normandes des XI ^e et XII ^e siècles dans la région de Connacht	
<i>Vornormannische Befestigungen des 11. und 12. Jhs. in Connacht</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	268
Richard D. ORAM	
Dundonald, Doune and the Development of the Tower and Hall in Late Medieval Scottish Lordly Residences.....	269
Dundonald, Doune et le développement de la tour et de la grande salle dans les demeures seigneuriales écossaises du bas Moyen Âge	
<i>Dundonald, Doune und die Entwicklung von Turm und Saal in spätmittelalterlichen Adelsitzen Schottlands</i>	
Résumé, Abstract, Zusammenfassung	279

Paul NAESSENS & Kieran O'CONOR*

PRE-NORMAN FORTIFICATION IN ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH- CENTURY CONNACHT

1. INTRODUCTION

THIS PAPER examines the development of fortification in Connacht in the 100-year period prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans to Ireland in 1169. Their later conquest of large parts of the western province of Connacht took place in the 1230s. The evidence for the use of such fortifications during the early Irish engagement with Anglo-Norman forces is also explored. While the process is as yet poorly understood and there is some disagreement regarding the dynamics of change, it is generally accepted that Irish society was evolving towards a centralised monarchy during this period and that the inter-dynastic struggles that were associated with this process resulted in a greatly militarised landscape. An understudied feature of this evolving landscape was the construction of fortifications on a scale not previously witnessed in the country. The question of whether these pre-Norman fortresses can be termed 'castles' has been the subject of much debate over the last 50 years and this issue is addressed here using the evidence of contemporary witnesses, the work of recent scholars and new data emerging from a recent study of the great western lakes which was funded by The Heritage Council of Ireland.

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2. IRISH SOCIETY C.1100

The traditional picture of a stable and unchanging social order in early medieval Ireland has in recent decades been challenged in favour of a more complex view of a society that was constantly evolving¹. Much evidence exists to suggest that the "tribal, rural, hierarchical and familial"² society proposed by Binchy had already assumed a more dynastic character by the ninth century. The period between the beginning of the Viking age and the arrival of the Anglo-Normans witnessed great changes in the political and military landscapes of Ireland. In AD 800 perhaps as many as 150 petty, autonomous kingdoms existed, owing only nominal allegiance to over-kings, whereas by the twelfth century the country was on the cusp of the establishment of a centralised monarchy³. This political evolution was accompanied by a great increase in the scale and duration of military campaigns as various dynasties vied to enforce their authority over the island⁴. The process reached its apogee in the reign of Turlough O'Conor who was responsible for the

1. See for example Ó CRÓINÍN 1995; Ó CORRÁIN 1972; CHARLES-EDWARDS 2000.

2. BINCHY 1954, 54.

3. FLANAGAN 2005, 917.

4. FLANAGAN 1996, 58; Ó CRÓINÍN 1995, 276.

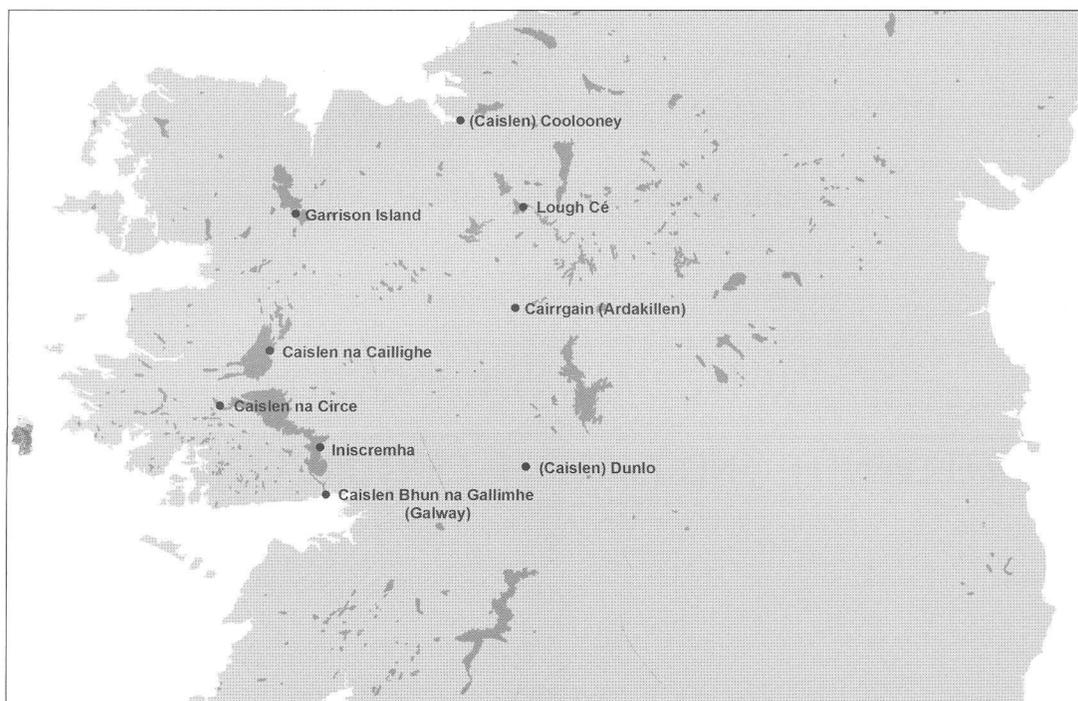


Fig. 1: Location map of sites mentioned in the text.

construction of a range of fortifications in the west of Ireland as part of his military campaigns in the first half of the twelfth century⁵. Historical evidence for the building of large defensive sites is curiously lacking for the remainder of the country with only a few notable exceptions, suggesting perhaps that Connacht under the O'Conors was at the forefront of this innovatory process. There have, however, been further developed, defensive sites identified in western Ireland in the recent past by the present authors, possibly dating to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and these are discussed here as part of a review of the current state of research into pre-Norman fortification in Ireland (Fig. 1).

3. PRIMARY EVIDENCE FOR PRE-NORMAN FORTIFICATION

In the twelfth century native chroniclers introduced new terms to describe the type of fortification being erected by Turlough O'Conor and his son, Rory, in their efforts to secure Connacht against incursions by rival claimants, particularly those from Munster. These terms *caislén*, *caisdeoil* and *caistéil*, derived from the Latin word for 'castle' *castellum* or the French word *chastel*, are used, for example, to describe the building of three fortifications in 1124. The Annals of Tigernach for that year record that:

"Three castles (were built this year) by the Connaughtmen, namely, the castle of the river Galway, and the castle of Cúlmaile (Colooney), and the castle of Dunlo"⁶.

These fortifications and others, such as those recorded at Athlone and Lough Cairrgin (Ardakillen), served the function of providing a ring of defence around O'Conor's *capita* and demesne lands in Connacht. During this period, O'Conor, who along with other claimants to the high-kingship is referred to as *rígh Érenn co fressabra* (king of Ireland with opposition), expended most of his resources in subduing those kingdoms that were outside of his direct control in Munster and Leinster. The necessity for these fortifications is shown in later entries, for example in 1232 when:

"The castle of Galway was destroyed by the fleet of the Munstermen. Lochlann Húa Lochlainn was killed by them on the same day. Flaithbertach Húa Flaithbertaig was the admiral of the fleet"⁷ and also in 1136 when a "raid on Loch Cairrgin by the men of Teffa" is recorded and "they burned its castle"⁸.

It is clear from these entries that the chroniclers are aware that these buildings are an innovation and seem to be a departure from what has gone before. What is also apparent is that they are informed of the existence and probably the nature of the true 'castle' outside Ireland and are applying this epithet to the innovatory style of fortification that is appearing in the landscape of Connacht. Whether they actually considered these fortifications to be morphologically and functionally comparable to the Anglo-Norman and European castle is a moot point.

5. FLANAGAN 2005, 917-9.

6. STOKES 1897, 45.

7. STOKES 1897, 57.

8. STOKES 1897, 155.

Our main source for the Anglo-Norman view on Irish fortification is the even more ambiguous evidence of the Cambro-Norman cleric Giraldus Cambrensis. Although Cambrensis definitively states that the Irish did not possess castles (although elsewhere he does note that Irish lords lived in crannogs)⁹, it should be borne in mind that his travels in Ireland were not extensive and he would certainly not have witnessed at first hand the fortifications of the O'Conors in the west. It could also be said that in his efforts to stigmatise the Irish as primitive, backward and in need of the civilising influences of the Anglo-Normans, Cambrensis was willing to ignore any evidence for architectural innovation among the natives. An argument to the contrary, however, has also been made, suggesting that it would have been in Cambrensis' interest to glorify his Anglo-Norman compatriots, particularly his own, numerous relatives, by portraying them as taking Irish castles, had such structures existed¹⁰.

4. A REVIEW OF MODERN RESEARCH INTO PRE-NORMAN FORTIFICATION

The father of Irish castle studies, Harold Leask¹¹, quite rightly dismissed the Irish raths and cashels of the strong farmer and nobles as being considered worthy of the term 'castle'. He also rejected the aforementioned fortifications constructed in the twelfth century by O'Conor and others, remarking quite presciently that "they are not of the same character" as the great structures of the invaders¹². His final comment on the matter was that "there remains no vestige of a native Irish castle of the twelfth century". In the sixty years since Leask's work this view has largely prevailed despite the steady emergence of evidence for greatly developed fortification prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. His comments have had the unfortunate effect of diverting the debate on pre-Norman fortification down a semantic cul-de-sac so that more time is often spent on discussing whether Irish fortifications should be termed 'castles' than is expended on the actual study of their nature and function.

The notion of evolving forms of defensive architecture in pre-Norman Ireland remained understudied throughout the next two decades until it was addressed in a significant new work by Donnachadh Ó Corráin¹³ published in the 1970s. He linked the emergence of developed fortification with the existence of some of the characteristics of so-called emergent feudalism in Irish society in parallel with developments in England and western Europe. Terry Barry¹⁴, commenting on Ó Corráin's ideas in 1987, made passing reference to the fortifications of the O'Conors that were erected in the first half of the twelfth century but remarked

that the link between the fortresses and nascent feudalism must remain tentative as no trace of any of the historically recorded sites has survived. While this is true, other fortresses of the same period, located in relatively close proximity to the recorded O'Conor fortifications and serving the same function, have survived and have been the subject of a recent Heritage Council of Ireland funded study which is discussed below.

Brian Graham¹⁵ in his 1988 discussion of medieval timber and earthwork fortifications suggested that the pre-Norman sites built by Turlough O'Conor would have had a significant wooden component in the form of towers, walkways and palisades were he to have been influenced by developments in England and western Europe. He highlighted several instances of the burning of fortifications recorded in the annals of the period suggesting that timber formed part of the structures¹⁶. He also suggested that these sites fulfilled Saunders'¹⁷ conceptual definition of the castle as "a fortified residence which might combine administrative and judicial functions, but in which military considerations were paramount". McNeill¹⁸ writing in 1997 identified the problem with using such a definition as the deciding factor in awarding the appellation 'castle' to a particular site. He stated that the problem lies not with the sites themselves but with "our attempts to produce a simple definition for such a protean thing as the castle". He was critical of Graham's attempts to link references in the annals to Connacht fortifications of the pre-Norman period and suggested that "the connection between the new word (*caislén*) and a new type of site is not made, nor does he (Graham) establish any way of recognising such new sites, other than by references in documents"¹⁹.

O'Keefe²⁰ writing in 1998 made the important point that the use of the explicit terms *caisté* and *caislén* (castle) should not divert us from the examination of other sites that were potentially developed fortifications of the eleventh to twelfth centuries and were probably part of the same building programme in at least some cases. Some fortifications such as that at Ballinasloe are referred to as *dún*, *longphoirt* and also as *caistel* which he maintained was evidence of the chroniclers being less concerned with the implications of the terminology than we are today. He further argued that if we are to accept that Irish society was essentially feudal in nature in the twelfth century, then every private defended fortress should in essence be considered a castle regardless of its appellation in the native chronicles. De Meulemeester and O'Conor, then again, have recently made the statement that not every private defended residence was a castle in the high medieval period, even in so-called 'feudalised' societies²¹.

9. DIMOCK 1867, 182.

10. O'CONOR *et al.* 2010, 35-36.

11. LEASK 1951, 6.

12. LEASK 1951, 7.

13. Ó CORRÁIN 1972.

14. BARRY 1987, 54.

15. GRAHAM 1988, 115.

16. GRAHAM 1988, 116.

17. SAUNDERS 1977, 2.

18. MCNEILL 1997, 9.

19. MCNEILL 1997, 11.

20. O'KEEFE 1998, 188.

21. DE MEULEMEESTER & O'CONOR 2007, 324; O'CONOR *et al.* 2010, 31-32.

In 2007 Barry²² made a further significant contribution to the debate on the appearance of the new terms in the twelfth-century annals and the implications of these terms. He dismissed the evidence of Giraldus Cambrensis on the grounds of the limited geographical scope of his travels in Ireland and also disagreed with McNeill's²³ statement that the use of the new terms in the annals was the result of "men attracted to new, fashionable and boastful words". While Barry²⁴ claims that the castles built by Turlough O'Connor were "strategically necessary for the powerful O'Connor dynasty in their campaigns in Meath and elsewhere" he did not explicitly explore the military function of these fortifications. The function that O'Connor's fortresses fulfilled was to maintain a ring of defence around his own territories to protect them from invasion while he was engaged in bringing other claimants to the high-kingship to heel in Leinster and Munster. Barry²⁵ reiterated the claim that "we currently lack... any surviving element of these structures, whatever they were, either above ground, incorporated into later buildings, or as discovered through archaeological investigations". He also favoured the notion that pre-Norman fortifications were primarily composed of earth and stone in their defensive perimeter while it would be logical to assume that secondary components such as walkways, palisades and interior buildings would have been of timber.

The most recent significant contribution to the debate on whether castles were built in Ireland prior to 1169 was by O'Connor *et al*²⁶ in a publication dealing with the archaeology of Lough Cé in Co. Roscommon. In a discussion devoted to the earliest stone enclosure on the Rock of Lough Cé, the issue of whether the fortification could be considered a castle in its initial twelfth-century form was raised²⁷. This was followed by a more general consideration on the nature of pre-Anglo Norman fortification in Ireland. One significant point raised by O'Connor was that for social, political, economic or military reasons, Gaelic lords generally were unwilling to invest in complex fixed defences, prior to their much later adoption of the tower house form of castle from c.1400 onwards. The lack of the use of primogeniture in matters of inheritance to lordship and the custom of gavelkind or partible inheritance were factors that discouraged Irish dynasts deploying significant resources in building major and complex fortified residences. It was also suggested that developed fortifications such as those recorded in the annals had their inspiration not in the developing European castle tradition but in the native enclosed settlement traditions of the rath, cashel and crannog²⁸.

22. BARRY 2007.

23. BARRY 2007, 34; MCNEILL 1997, 10.

24. BARRY 2007, 36-39.

25. BARRY 2007.

26. O'CONNOR *et al.* 2010.

27. O'CONNOR *et al.* 2010, 31-34.

28. O'CONNOR *et al.* 2010, 31-40. See also MCNEILL 1997, 168; O'CONNOR 2005.

5. NEW APPROACHES

Much of the research outlined above has focussed on the language and terminology used by contemporary writers to describe the innovations in military architecture that were taking place in the first half of the twelfth century in Ireland. Much has been made of the introduction of the words *caislen* and *caisdeoil* to the vocabulary of the native chroniclers and its implication for our understanding of the evolution of military building forms at this time. However, as Barry²⁹ has commented, it is unlikely that any of the sites recorded as *caislen* or *caistéil* at this time in the annals will ever be identified on the ground, mainly due to their obliteration by modern development. For example, no trace of the original site of Caislen Bhun na Gallimhe (Galway) was found in the course of extensive archaeological excavations that were undertaken in Galway over an extended period in the 1980s and 1990s³⁰.

A new study by the authors, on the other hand, has taken a more innovative approach in identifying some of the fortifications built either directly by, or at the behest of, the O'Connors in the eleventh to twelfth centuries. The weakness of the western flank of the core of the O'Connor kingdom was exposed in 927 when the annals record the occupation of the great western lake, Lough Corrib, by the Vikings³¹. While they were expelled within three years, their use of the Galway River and the lake to the north, to gain access to the heart of the province of Connacht, exposed the need for substantial defences and control points were the incursion not to be repeated either by the Vikings or native invaders from Munster and other regions. While the building of one *caislen* on the Corrib system, Caislen Bhun na Gallimhe, is recorded in the annals in 1124, other sites of the same genre on the western lakes are also mentioned in the native chronicles at a time prior to Anglo-Norman incursions in the region. A major fortification on Lough Mask, Caislen na Caillighe (Hag's Castle), which is still substantially intact, is recorded in the Annals of Loch Cé in 1195 when:

"Cathal, son of Diarmaid, son of Tadhg O'Maelruanaidh, was expelled from Connacht into Mumha; and he came again in the same year, through the strength of his hands, into Connacht, until he reached Caislen-na-Caillighe."³²

Two other possible sites that appear to be of the same genre were recorded on Lough Corrib in 1225, prior to the conquest of large parts of Connacht by the Anglo-Normans in the 1230s, as part of the recounting of the internecine warfare among the O'Connors at the time, a conflict that also involved the Anglo-Normans:

"It was then, moreover, that the son of Cathal Crobhderg and the Justiciary came to the port of Inis-cremha, after the

29. BARRY 2007, 33.

30. See FITZPATRICK, O'BRIEN & WALSH 2004.

31. O'DONOVAN 1856, 623.

32. HENNESSY 1871, 191.



Fig. 2: Aerial photograph of Iniscremha Island, Lough Corrib, Co. Galway.

Foreigners of Laighen and Mumha had departed; and O'Flaithbheartaigh (O'Flaherty) was obliged to give Iniscremha, and Oilen-na-circe, and also the boats of the lake, for the sake of his cows and people."³³

Of these three island sites two, Iniscremha and Caislen na Caillighe, retain their original architectural form while the third was transformed in the 1230s when an Anglo-Norman hall-house castle was built on the Lough Corrib island of Caislen na Circe.

The fortification of Iniscremha occupies approximately 60% of the island of Illauncarbry in Cargin Bay on the east side of Lough Corrib, Co. Galway (Fig. 2). The bay is delimited to the north and west by Clydagh House and its estate, while the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman hall house castle of Cargin lies to the northeast. The entire island, together with much of the Clydagh House estate lands to the west, has been planted with hardwoods which have reached full maturity. The interior of the fortification occupies a slightly raised area in the centre of the island towards the north side. Prior to the planting of hardwood trees on the island, the site was prominently placed in the landscape and would have commanded fine views on all sides, particularly to the south and west across the lake to Iarchonnacht (Connemara). The stone fortification of Iniscremha consists of a very substantial, well-preserved, enclosed island settlement (Fig. 3). The enclosing wall is surrounded by a deep and wide ditch filled with collapsed building stone, which is in turn enclosed by a low counterscarp. The outer facing of the ditch is revetted in stone in several areas. A gap in the counterscarp to the northeast opens to a level entrance area that is focussed on the site of Cargin castle on the northeastern lakeshore. There is one narrow opening in the cashel-like mortared wall to the southwest of the entrance

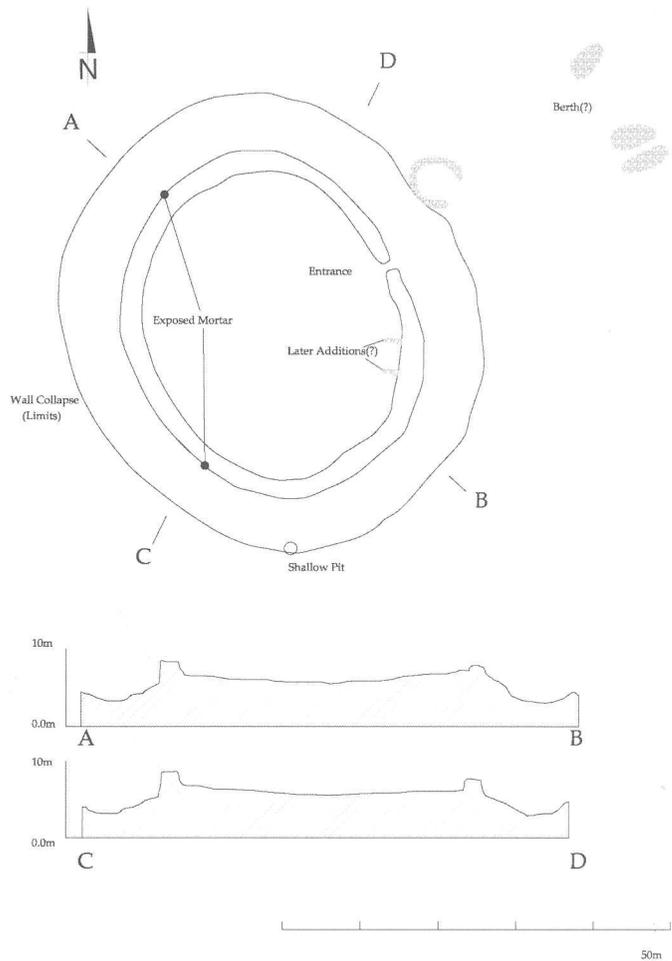


Fig. 3: Plan of the enclosure on Iniscremha Island.

area which appears to be modern. The remains of a substantial stone 'hut' fill the ditch to the west and north of the entrance area while a small rectangular pit feature lies in the south of the ditch abutting the counterscarp. The central area enclosed by the cashel-type wall is sub-oval in plan with the long axis running from north to south. The area enclosed is for the most part level and featureless apart from a round, sunken hollow or pit in the centre of the monument and the remains of two parallel drystone walls projecting from the eastern point of the internal face of the cashel wall. These walls project from the main enclosing wall at an angle of 90°. The projecting walls, the collapse and the entrance in the cashel walls are all most likely related to the late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century reoccupation of the site by a recluse named Carbry from whom the island takes its modern name³⁴. The enclosing wall is composed of a rubble core faced internally and externally with larger, roughly squared limestone blocks, the whole of which is bonded by a lime mortar (Fig. 4). A sample of this mortar,

33. HENNESSY 1871, 283.

34. WILDE 1867, 90.



Fig. 4: Mortared masonry cashel-like wall at Iniscremha.

extracted from the core of the wall, has been subjected to AMS dating and has indicated a construction date ranging from AD 1020-1180 for the cashel-like enclosure³⁵. While some of the blocks used in the building measure over 1m in length, the masonry cannot be described as pseudo-cyclopean as the overall average size of the stone in the walls is much smaller. A round 'hut' structure, composed of three to four courses of limestone, blocks the ditch to the north and east of the entrance gap in the counterscarp. The stones used in its construction are similar to those of the main wall indicating that this structure may have been built from collapsed stone taken from the ditch. The 'hut' or folly does not seem to bear any direct relationship to the main monument and was constructed long after the cashel declined in use as a fortification. A gap in the ditch and counterscarp in the northeast sector leads to a flat area that slopes gently to the northeast shore of the island. The remains of three stone landing places are visible protruding into the lake at this point (Fig. 5). This area, which faces the site of Cargin Castle, may constitute the original landing site and approach to the monument. Iniscremha may have served as an outer fortification protecting another Uí Fhlaithbheartaigh (O'Flaherty) settlement on the shore of the mainland which was subsequently demolished in the construction of Cargin Castle. This pairing of island fortification and adjacent mainland settlement site is also evident at the Rock of Loch Cé³⁶ and possibly at Caislen na Caillighe on Lough Mask where there are some remains of an undated fortification at Cushlough Demesne. However, the main point here is that this fortification at Iniscremha dates to either to the eleventh or twelfth centuries (remaining in use into the early thirteenth century) and, therefore, gives us an insight into the type of fortification built in Connacht during this time by the O'Conors and their vassal clans (such as the O'Flahertys) (Fig. 6).

As has previously been mentioned, there is evidence for other island fortifications on Lough Corrib and also on the Corrib River at Caislen na Circe and Caislen Bhun na Gallimhe



Fig. 5: Possible stone landing place on Iniscremha Island.

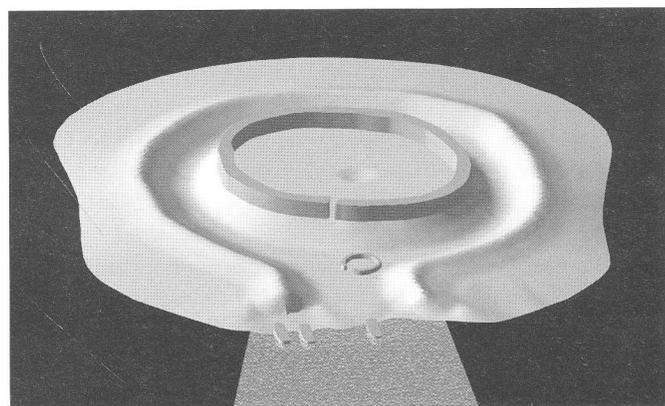


Fig. 6: Three-dimensional digital reconstruction of the enclosure on Iniscremha Island.

respectively. A similar fortification to Iniscremha also survives in a comparable landscape setting on Lough Mask. Caislen na Caillighe or the Hag's Castle occupies a substantial portion of Castle Hag island in the east of Lough Mask in Cushlough Bay. The island which lies approximately 400m from the mouth of the Robe River to the east commands extensive view in all directions and was an ideal location for regulating lacustrine and riverine traffic on Lough Mask and the latter river. As in the case of Iniscremha, Caislen na Caillighe consists of a substantial, mortared, stone-wall enclosed, raised, flat-topped mound (Fig. 7). The masonry of the enclosing element contains for the most part larger and less well coursed stones than that of Iniscremha and the monument lacks the substantial ditch and counterscarp of the Lough Corrib fortification, but otherwise the similarity in morphology, building fabric, scale and location between the sites is striking (Fig. 8). While Caislen na Caillighe is first mentioned in the native chronicles in 1195³⁷,

35. NAESSENS 2009.

36. O'CONNOR *et al.* 2010, 30-31.

37. HENNESSY 1871, 191.

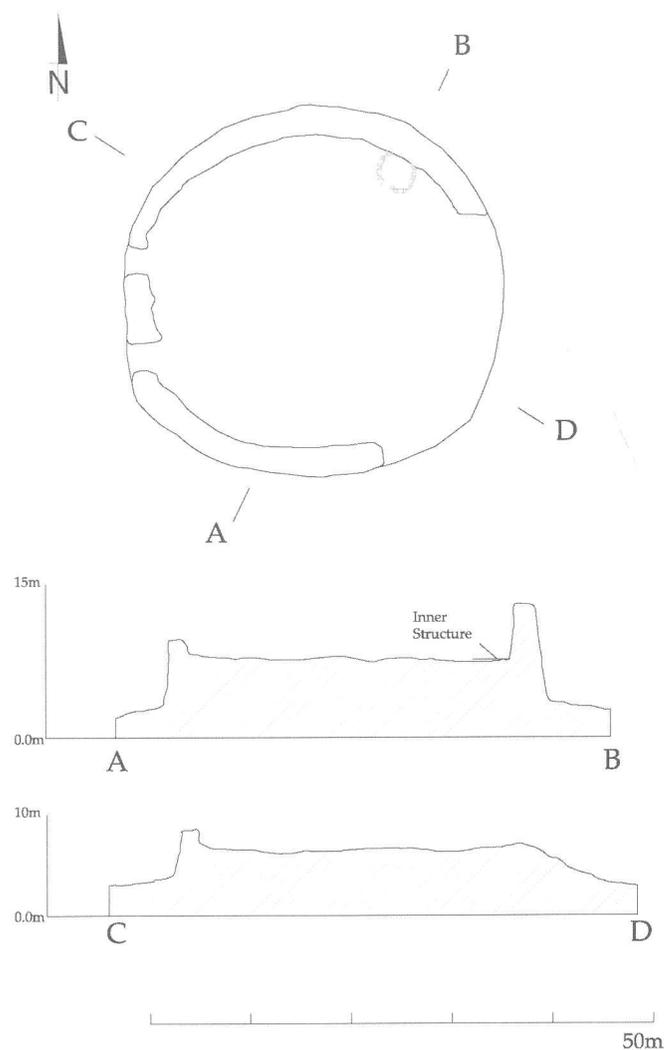


Fig. 7: Plan of the enclosure of Caislen na Caillighe, Lough Mask, Co. Mayo.

it appears to have either continued in use until, or to have been reoccupied in, the later sixteenth century. In 1586 a number of the Burkes' followers were attacked by Richard Bingham on the island and, following a bloody encounter, forced to flee from it³⁸. The enclosing walls of the monument may have been added to at this time as there is a clear difference in the width and masonry style between the upper and lower portions of the current walls. The interior of Caislen na Caillighe is relatively featureless apart from a small stone hut abutting the northeast wall of the enclosure and a small rubble filled pit feature in the northeast of the interior.

Yet another fortification of similar morphology and landscape location survives on Lough Cullen in north Co. Mayo. Illanee or Garrison Island is located 150m from the western shore of the lake at the mouth of the Carra River. Once



Fig. 8: Mortared masonry cashel-like wall at Caislen na Caillighe.

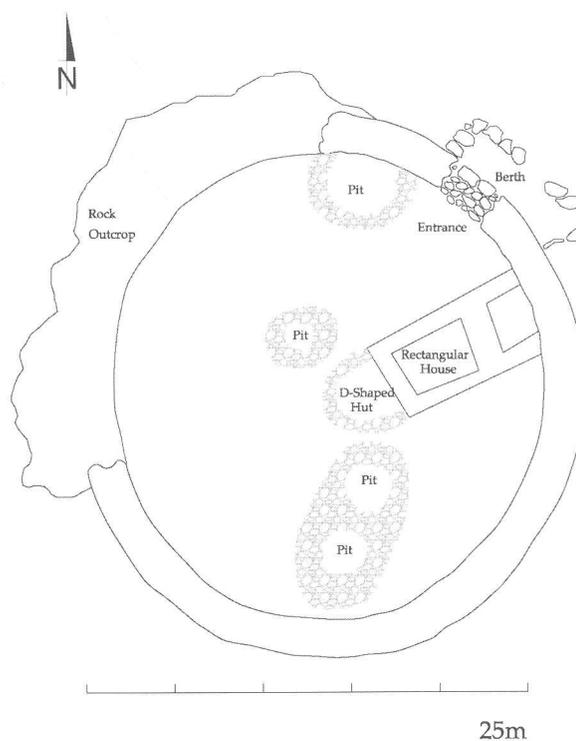


Fig. 9: Plan of the enclosure of Garrison Island, Lough Cullen, Co. Mayo.

again the site commands extensive views over the lake and surrounding landscape. It has been previously suggested that the location of the fortification was chosen to control undesirable water traffic throughout the Lough Conn/Cullen area and also with a view to regulating access to the Moy River to the east³⁹. An impressive stone cashel-like monument of similar scale and

38. HENNESSY 1871, 471.

39. LAWLESS 1999, 89.

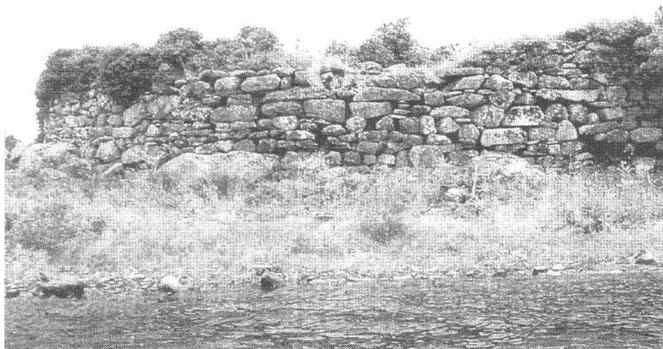


Fig. 10: Mortared masonry cashel-like wall at Garrison Island (photo: C. Lawless).

proportions to Iniscremha and Caislen na Caillighe occupies the northern portion of the island (Fig. 9). The walls of this enclosure were bonded with a good-quality lime mortar much of which has eroded resulting in significant collapse of the enclosing walls in some sections (Fig. 10). Garrison Island differs from Iniscremha and Caislen na Caillighe in that there are surviving buildings in its interior. A possibly two-roomed house is located in the northeast quadrant of the enclosure with a small D-shaped hut abutting its southwest gable wall. An entrance to the northwest of the cashel opens onto a rectangular berth for the mooring of boats. This berth now stands on dry land due to the lowering of the level of the lake by 1.82m in 1965⁴⁰. Another distinctive feature of the construction of the Garrison Island fortification is the use of stone rather than earth to raise the interior by 4m.

The Rock of Loch Cé in Co. Roscommon was also probably a morphologically similar island fortification, located at the eastern end of Lough Key. It has long been argued by O'Connor⁴¹ that this fortification may have consisted of a crannog-type fortification enclosed by a mortared cashel-like wall. It is first mentioned in the native chronicles in 1159 and was besieged by a combined Anglo-Norman and Gaelic Irish army in 1235. A notable feature of that attack was the use of fireboats by the Anglo-Normans suggesting perhaps that the walls featured some form of wooden defensive superstructure or had timber defences on the eastern side of the present island. The threat of fire was so great that the *Annals of Loch Cé* record that "The people who were in it were seized with fear at these stratagems, and they came out of it on parole and conditions"⁴². The site continued in use through to the twentieth century with multi-period alterations including the building of a tower house castle and a later folly, all of which tends to obscure the earlier archaeology of the original fortification⁴³. The evidence from Lough Cé might suggest that the tops of the enclosing walls around

Iniscremha, Caislen na Caillighe and Garrison Island had timber breastworks.

The construction of the fortifications of Iniscremha, Caislen na Caillighe and Garrison Island should be viewed against the background of developing and evolving styles of native settlement and fortification. FitzPatrick⁴⁴ has recently argued against seeing the native building practice as 'monolithic' and has put a strong case forward viewing Gaelic Irish builders as innovators rather than as conservatively tradition-bound. In the case of island fortification in the west there is much to support this thesis.

On current evidence it would seem that this site type, with the notable exception of the Rock of Lough Cé example, did not function as a lordly residence but probably as a garrisoned fort protecting the western flank of the economic heartland of the O'Connor kingdom of Connacht and, also, controlling north/south movement on the great western lakes. The exact character of the defences of these sites and the nature of the interior buildings has yet to be established, however, there is no evidence in any examples for piercing arrow-loops or any ancillary defensive structures beyond the enclosing stone element. The masonry style used to construct the enclosing wall of Iniscremha is very much in the same style as that of the eleventh- and twelfth-century ecclesiastical buildings of the Lough Corrib and Mask district, suggesting that the impetus behind this architectural form is a regional one employing local masons and is not inspired by the emerging European and Anglo-Norman traditions⁴⁵. It is suggested here that these sites served a specific military function and were not defended lordly residences of the type that would have been considered 'castles' in the strict sense. Giraldus Cambrensis, had he had the opportunity to observe Iniscremha or Caislen Bhun na Gallimhe, would have noted a difference in the scale and function of these sites, in comparison with other native enclosed settlements, but would not have recognised them as castles of an Anglo-Norman type, even timber ones. He would perhaps, as we can today, have recognised their ancestry in a synthesis of native building styles between the raised rath, the stone cashel and the crannog, adapting the Irish building traditions to a new military purpose. It was this innovation that inspired the native chroniclers to reach for new words borrowed from the Anglo-Norman world to describe what was to them, a novel form of military architecture.

6. CONCLUSION

The evidence from sites like Iniscremha, Caislen na Caillighe, Garrison Island and the Rock of Lough Cé seems to suggest that by the eleventh and twelfth centuries quite substantial fortifications were being built, in the Connacht area at least, in comparison to what had been seen before. These more

40. LAWLESS 2001, 116.

41. O'CONNOR *et al.* 2010; O'CONNOR 2001, 331-36

42. HENNESSY 1871, 329.

43. O'CONNOR *et al.* 2010.

44. FITZPATRICK 2009.

45. See Ó CARRAGÁIN 2005, 99-149.

sophisticated fortresses were a response to the growing militarisation seen in Irish society at this time. It appears that the native chroniclers introduced terms derived from the Latin word *castellum* to describe these new-style fortifications. However, these new structures obtained their inspiration from a fusion of the native rath, crannog and, in particular, the cashel traditions. The architectural concepts behind these super-cashels did not derive from the Anglo-Norman/European castle tradition, contrary to what certain scholars have implied in the past. It is highly likely that Anglo-Norman observers upon seeing such fortifications would not have considered them to be castles, being used to more complex masonry and Hen Domen-type timber structures.

On a countrywide level, the evidence outlined in this paper perhaps helps solve the academic dilemma that has plagued scholarship on the topic of Irish pre-Norman fortification since the 1970s. Giraldus Cambrensis clearly believed that the Irish did not possess what he considered to be castles. On the other hand, as stated, scholars have noted the use of new words in the annals that seem to suggest that something innovative was happening in terms of fortification in pre-Norman times. The evidence presented here does indeed show that there was a

development in fortification during this pre-Norman period, seemingly linked to changes in society. However, these fortifications seem to have lacked the defensive and structural complexity that was associated with contemporary European castles. In conclusion, Giraldus Cambrensis and other Anglo-Normans do not seem to have regarded any Irish fortifications as castles, despite some of them at least representing a development in terms of their scale and defensibility when compared to what had been seen in earlier periods in Ireland.

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RÉSUMÉ, ABSTRACT, ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Les fortifications pré-normandes des XI^e et XII^e siècles dans la région de Connacht

Cet article étudie l'évolution des systèmes défensifs dans le nord-ouest de l'Irlande aux XI^e et XII^e siècles jusqu'à l'arrivée des Anglo-Normands en 1169. La thèse des auteurs est centrée sur l'idée que les fortifications irlandaises de cette époque, en général plus importantes et plus solides qu'auparavant, se sont développées à partir de la tradition indigène du « rath », du « cashel » et du « crannog ». Des travaux récents sur quelques sites lacustres dans l'ouest de l'Irlande sont présentés à l'appui de cette thèse.

Pre-Norman Fortification in eleventh- and twelfth- century Connacht

This paper examines the evolution of fortification in Connacht during the 11th and 12th centuries, prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans to Ireland in 1169. Our main argument is that Irish fortresses of the period, while generally stronger and more substantial than what was seen before, evolved out of the native cashel, rath and crannog traditions. Recent fieldwork carried out in the west of Ireland on various lakeland sites is used to demonstrate this point.

Vornormannische Befestigungen des 11. und 12. Jhs. in Connacht

Im vorliegenden Aufsatz werden die Befestigungen in Connacht (Nordwestirland) zwischen dem 11. und 12. Jh. und der anglo-normannischen Invasion von 1169 untersucht. Basierend auf aktuellen Feldforschungen in mehreren Seefundstellen Westirlands wird die These vertreten, dass sich die irischen Befestigungen dieser Zeit aus den verschiedenen Typen einheimischer Ringwälle und Crannogs entwickelten, obwohl sie in der Regel umfangreicher und mächtiger waren, als bisher angenommen.