

E. C. QUIGGIN MEMORIAL LECTURES 7

TADHG O'KEEFFE

**The Gaelic Peoples and their
Archaeological Identities, A.D. 1000-1650**



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE, AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Edmund Crosby Quiggin (1875-1920) was the first teacher of Celtic in the University of Cambridge, as well as being a Germanist. His extraordinarily comprehensive vision of Celtic studies offered an integrated approach to the subject: his combination of philological, literary, and historical approaches paralleled those which his older contemporary, H.M. Chadwick, had already demonstrated in his studies of Anglo-Saxon England and which the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic continues to seek to emulate. The Department has wished to commemorate Dr Quiggin's contribution by establishing in his name, and with the support of his family, an annual lecture and a series of pamphlets. The focus initially was on the sources for Mediaeval Gaelic History. Since 2006 the Quiggin Memorial Lecture is on any aspect of Celtic and/or Germanic textual culture taught in the Department.

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THE GAELIC PEOPLES AND THEIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL IDENTITIES, A.D. 1000–1650

In the early decades of the twentieth century the emergence of particular research-interests began the transformation of mediaeval archaeology from an antiquarian practice to an academic discipline.¹ The archaeological study of the earlier Middle Ages in the constituent parts of the Gaelic world certainly profited from this.² The focus of archaeological study of the later Middle Ages in Britain and Ireland, however, has long been on England and Wales, and on the colonial ventures which issued from there into lowland parts of Ireland and Scotland.³ The archaeology of Gaeldom between the first arrival of Normans in Britain and the Elizabethan period (1558–1603), and especially in the first two centuries of this time-span, has been explored much less thoroughly. Indeed, other than, perhaps, that Hebridean lordship which was established in the middle of the twelfth century and has been characterised as ‘the Lordship of the Isles’ from 1354,⁴ there is no single topographically-defined or politically-constituted region within the later mediaeval Gaelic world which is especially well understood from an archaeological perspective.

Our knowledge-deficit is largely a consequence of the relatively low visibility of much of that archaeological evidence: even the most

¹ It could be argued that the process did not reach fruition until 1956 – nearly two decades after the discovery of Sutton Hoo – and the foundation of the London-based Society for Medieval Archaeology; perusal of the contents of the society’s journal, *Medieval Archaeology*, reveals how quickly the discipline then established the reputation which it now enjoys, especially in the study of the Anglo-Scandinavians, the Anglo-Normans, and the later mediaeval English.

² For recent syntheses which build on deep scholarly foundations see Nancy Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London 1990), Harold Mytum, *The Origins of Early Christian Ireland* (London 1992), and Sally M. Foster, *Picts, Gaels and Scots* (London 1996; 2nd edn, 2004); no modern synthesis exists for Mann, but see *Recent Archaeological Research on the Isle of Man*, ed. P.J. Davey (Oxford 1999). The importance of the sea in providing unity between Ireland and Britain during this period is generally acknowledged, as in the case of Dál Riata, for example, but there is surprisingly little general synthesis transcending the modern political boundaries: Lloyd Laing, *The Archaeology of Late Celtic Britain and Ireland, c. 400–1200 A.D.* (London 1975), provided an attempt at such a synthesis. In Ireland the identification of the early mediaeval archaeological horizon as the product of an indigenous christian culture suited nationalist aspirations: see G. Cooney, ‘Building the future on the past: archaeology and the construction of national identity in Ireland’, in *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe*, edd. M. Díaz Andreu & T.C. Champion (London 1997), pp. 146–63.

³ This is evident in recent syntheses on Ireland and Scotland: see Peter Yeoman, *Medieval Scotland* (London 1995); T.B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland* (London 1987); Tadhg O’Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland. An Archaeology* (Stroud 2000).

⁴ See Ian Armit, *The Archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles* (Edinburgh 1996), pp. 205–26; for its early history see R. Andrew McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles. Scotland’s Western Seaboard, c. 1100 – c. 1336* (East Linton 1997).

informed of modern visitors to the landscapes of western Ireland and of the highlands and islands of Scotland will see little unequivocal evidence, other than churches and castles, of their occupation in the period 1000–1650. That deficit is a consequence of, as well as a contributor to, a tendency in narrative histories of mediaeval Britain and Ireland to present Gaelic culture as a marginal issue in marginal space, deserving of attention only at its interface with an ‘English’ polity.⁵ I can speak more authoritatively of Ireland than of Scotland in asserting that England’s post-Conquest cultural-political diaspora into the Gaelic world remains the central concern of archaeological enquiry,⁶ but the potential for an archaeology of mediaeval Gaeldom has been illuminated most brightly by recent work in Ireland,⁷ and this pamphlet is an attempt to advance such a project.⁸

My title refers in the plural to both Gaelic people and archaeological identity, acknowledging those variations which – against the view expressed by Edmund Spenser around 1600⁹ – existed across the Gaelic world in culture and polity and which also exist now

⁵ David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery. Britain, 1066–1284* (London 2003), with its self-evident theme of conquest, is a case in point. The emphasis on England reflects both the political culture of scholarship, at least in its formative years in the later 1800s and early 1900s, and the greater quantity and accessibility (both literally and linguistically) of its written sources. For Ireland see S. Harrison, ‘Refighting the battle of Down: Orpen, McNeill and the Irish nation state’, in *The Medieval World and the Modern Mind*, edd. Michael Brown & S. Harrison (Dublin 2000), pp. 171-82; for Scotland see E. J. Cowan, ‘The invention of Celtic Scotland’, in *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Middle Ages*, edd. Edward J. Cowan & R. A. McDonald (East Linton 2000), pp. 1-23. See also J.A. Atkinson, ‘National identity and material culture: decoding the Highland myth’, in *Nationalism and Archaeology*, edd. J.A. Atkinson *et al.* (Glasgow 1996), pp. 59-66.

⁶ This is particularly the case in the ‘research-sector’. Only one of the three projects on mediaeval settlement which are currently being directed by the Discovery Programme Ltd, for example, is targeting a Gaelic-Irish theme (see www.discoveryprogramme.ie for details), while only one of six papers in a recent collection of essays on mediaeval manorialism – *The Manor in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland*, edd. James Lyttleton & T. O’Keeffe (Dublin 2004) – examines the Gaelic-Irish world.

⁷ See P.J. Duffy *et al.*, ‘Recovering Gaelic Ireland, c. 1250 – c. 1650’, in *Gaelic Ireland. Land, Lordship and Settlement, c. 1250 – c. 1650*, edd. Patrick J. Duffy *et al.* (Dublin 2001), pp. 21-73, *passim*. However, Thomas Finan, *A Nation in Medieval Ireland? Perspectives on Gaelic National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 2004), a title published under an archaeology imprint, is a false start: his analysis of spatial data using Chi-square and Nearest Neighbour Analysis – methods popular during the quantitative revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s but rarely seen since – contributes nothing new. James Muldoon, *Identity on the Medieval Irish Frontier. Degenerate Englishmen, Wild Irishmen, Middle Nations* (Gainesville, FL 2003), which is not a work of archaeological enquiry, is more sensitive and offers a comparative ethnographic dimension. It might be appropriate to note here the assertion made in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. W.J. McCormack (Oxford 1999), that ‘no companion to Gaelic Ireland could be commissioned to the publisher’s satisfaction’ (p. 2).

⁸ Olivia Lelong’s use of unpublished data in her recent survey – ‘Finding medieval (or later) rural settlement in the Highlands and Islands: the case for optimism’, in *Medieval or Later Rural Settlement in Scotland: 10 Years on*, ed. Sarah Govan (Edinburgh 2003), pp. 7-16 – suggests the possibility of a fresh synthesis for Gaelic Scotland.

⁹ ‘Ireland and Scotland are all but one and the same’: Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland*, edd. Andrew Hadfield & W. Maley (Oxford 1997), p. 45.

in the archaeological record. But the matter of identity requires some brief explanation at the outset.

Ethnicity is a particular concern in contemporary archaeological enquiry,¹⁰ and it is certainly germane to the theme of this pamphlet. Language was probably the decisive indicator of ethnicity in mediaeval Britain and Ireland,¹¹ but primordial attachments underpinning the concept of nationhood were sometimes invoked in this same mediaeval world for political purposes, and the *falsches Bewusstsein* of biological origin – transferred by oral tradition and by the written origin-tale – certainly helped to define and politicise mediaeval ethnic identity.¹² Indeed, the history of mediaeval Britain and Ireland is, arguably, a history of politicised ethnicity: one can detect in much of the secondary literature an assumption that the islands' mediaeval population-groups ('Anglo-Normans', 'Gaelic Irish', 'Gaelic Scottish', 'English', 'Anglo-Irish', 'Anglo-Scottish') understood themselves to be ethnic collectives possessed of ideas of nationhood, and that their political interactions were fundamentally shaped by this.¹³

One could argue long and hard about the appropriateness of terms such as 'Anglo-Norman' to describe the peoples of mediaeval Britain and Ireland,¹⁴ but the critical issue from an archaeological perspective is that these population-collectives, whatever the preferred terminology for them, were not closed cultural systems.

¹⁰ Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity* (London 1997).

¹¹ Wilson McLeod, *Divided Gaels. Gaelic Cultural Identities in Scotland and Ireland, c. 1200 – c. 1650* (Oxford 2004), pp. 16-18.

¹² For primordial nationhood see *Ethnicity*, edd. John Hutchinson & A. D. Smith (Oxford 1996), p. v; for its political use see, for example, Robert Bruce's letter to the Irish seeking their support, discussed by Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge 1999), p. 1; for origin-tales in Ireland and Scotland see, respectively, John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory* (Cambridge 1994), and B. Webster, 'John of Fordun and the independent identity of the Scots', in *Medieval Europeans. Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Basingstoke 1998), pp. 85-102.

¹³ Maurice fitz Gerald, in a speech during the siege of Dublin in 1170 – reported to us (or written for us) by Giraldus Cambrensis –, was clearly cognisant both of a form of identity describable now as ethnicity and of its attendant politics: '... just as we are English as far as the Irish are concerned, likewise to the English we are Irish, and the inhabitants of this island and the other assail us with an equal degree of hatred' – *Expugnatio Hibernica, The Conquest of Ireland, by Giraldus Cambrensis*, edd. & trans. A.B. Scott & F.X. Martin (Dublin 1978), p. 81.

¹⁴ R.L. Graeme Richie, for example, listed a number of possible politico-ethnic labels for the people of colonial Scotland in the central Middle Ages: 'Breton, Lotharingian, Flemish, Picard, Artesian, Cenomanian, Angevin, general-French and Norman': *The Normans in Scotland* (Edinburgh 1954), p. 157.

Cultural practices, or folk-cultural practices,¹⁵ could transgress political boundaries – the Statutes of Kilkenny bear a sort of retrospective witness to that – to the extent that any group-identity defined according to language, political organisation, or origin-tale is largely undetectable in the archaeological record.¹⁶

As a general rule, the social units which archaeologists reconstruct by using recurring material-culture traits can rarely be confidently equated with the collectives to which the individuals of the past felt that they themselves belonged, or in which their contemporaries understood them to belong. Those social collectives which archaeologists reconstruct may be no less real, but an increasing awareness of the difficulty of knowing how exactly to recognise evidence of collective identity in the archaeological record has deterred many archaeologists from attempting to identify nuclear groups and culture-areas. In this pamphlet I seek to expose the archaeology of a collective – the Gaelic people of the central and late Middle Ages – constituted in terms which, by their nature, are not archaeological. I have chosen, therefore, to discuss *archaeological identity*, which is their identity as it is expressed in the archaeological record, and not the archaeology of their ethnic identity. I have also chosen to discuss that identity in the plural, to allow for multiple identities shifting across time (from the eleventh to the seventeenth century) and shifting within the one place (Ireland or Scotland). I do not explore possible archaeological manifestations of those many cultural (and indeed military, as with the *gallóglai*) connexions between Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland which Wilson McLeod has recently examined.¹⁷ Suffice it to say that neither the model of Gaelic Scotland's cultural dependence on Gaelic Ireland, for which McLeod has provided a brief but critical historiography,¹⁸ nor the

¹⁵ McLeod, *Divided Gaels*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ The model of acculturation has been deployed to explain such cultural transgressions – see, for example, B. Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies* 26 (1988/9) 329-51, at p. 331 –, but I have argued elsewhere – 'The English settlement of Carlow in the Middle Ages', *Áitreabh* 10 (2005) – that this model, which seems at first glance to offer some conceptual sophistication to the discussion of 'gaelicisation' and 'anglicisation', is flawed, since it presupposes that Gaelic and anglicised people had very specific, or essentialised, cultural profiles capable of transference across political boundaries. Gaelic communities located within the geographical boundaries of colonial lordship constitute a separate problem which I have not discussed in this pamphlet but which is introduced in 'The English settlement of Carlow'.

¹⁷ McLeod, *Divided Gaels*, pp. 14-54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

model of Gaeldom as some sort of consolidated entity capable of political unification,¹⁹ can be sustained by use of the archaeological evidence.

The specific categories of evidence discussed in detail here, with admittedly a greater emphasis on Ireland than on Scotland, are the built environment of both secular élite-society and the Church, as well as general landscape- and settlement-archaeology. The artefactual evidence is also very valuable for any understanding of identity in the past, but there is comparatively little published research on that body of material, and I have therefore omitted it from consideration here.

* * * * *

The first category of evidence which I shall examine here is the castle: I shall deal first with Ireland, and then with Scotland. The principal value of the castle for the archaeologist resides in its architecture, the analysis of which can filter through to the wider discourse about mediaeval civilisation. Architecture can be used to establish chronology when there is no historical record of construction or alteration; where there is such a record, the evidence of architecture can provide clarification. Dating of architecture using comparative stylistic analysis is sometimes accurate to within a couple of decades and is almost always accurate to within a century. Comparative contexts of castle-designs on local, regional, and national scales can also be established, thereby allowing us to identify degrees of conservatism or innovation and perhaps even to trace the transmission of stylistic ideas to and from individual buildings. Architecture, finally, can be interpreted in terms of function and meaning. For example, castles are conventionally thought of as places associated with the élites of militaristic societies,²⁰ and so their plans and exterior elevations can be analysed for their practical or symbolic effectiveness in the prosecution by their garrisons of aggressive or

¹⁹ S.G. Ellis, 'The collapse of the Gaelic world', *Irish Historical Studies* 31 (1998/9) 449-69, at p. 453.

²⁰ For an authoritative articulation of the common definition of 'castle' as a protected residence of a member of an élite whose power was exercised within a 'feudal' context see A. Saunders, 'Five castle excavations: reports of the Institute's project into the origins of the castles in England', *Archaeological Journal* 134 (1977) 1-156, at p. 2.

defensive duties; but castles can also be analysed both as residential environments for households and as the symbol-laden settings in which rituals of lordship (other than the waging of war) and of domesticity took place.²¹

There are areas of uncertainty in castle-studies in general, with which we need to deal at the outset. A general problem is terminology. The words *caisté́l* and *caisléan* which were used in the Gaelic-Irish world in the twelfth century have fairly unambiguous etymological roots in *castellum* and can therefore be translated confidently as ‘castle’. However, other contemporary Gaelic words – *dún*, *dúnad*, *daingean* – also indicate high-status, protected places,²² and, while each is likely to be an alternative to ‘castle’, we cannot be sure that they do not represent specific types of place, whether functionally or architecturally, which the chroniclers knew not to describe as ‘castle’.²³ Moreover, we cannot be certain that the meanings of any of these words, including Modern English ‘castle’ itself, were static in time and space. These are not minor points of semantics; on the contrary, as archaeologists acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the architectural language of castles and an acute awareness of the intelligibility of that language to mediaeval spectators, these issues are beginning to emerge as central concerns in modern castle-studies. An exploration of these issues lies beyond the scope of this pamphlet, but it is possible to proceed regardless.

We are uncertain about the date at which castle-building began in the Gaelic world. The earliest use of words for ‘castle’, or its various equivalents, suggests that castles were a feature of Gaelic

²¹ There is an increasing tendency in castle-studies to emphasise ‘peacable power’, domesticity, and symbolic meaning in the interpretation of castles. See Charles Coulson, *Castles in Medieval Society. Fortresses in England, France, and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford 2003), and Matthew H. Johnson, *Beyond the Castle Gate. From Medieval to Renaissance* (London 2002), for the earlier and later phases of the Middle Ages, respectively. For a manifesto for similar thinking in Ireland see T. O’Keeffe, ‘Concepts of “castle” and the construction of identity in medieval and post-medieval Ireland’, *Irish Geography* 34 (2001) 69-88.

²² For specific references and their contexts see M.T. Flanagan, ‘Irish and Anglo-Norman warfare in twelfth-century Ireland’, in *A Military History of Ireland*, edd. Thomas Bartlett & K. Jeffery (Cambridge 1996), pp. 52-75, at 60-3, and C. Doherty, ‘The vikings in Ireland: a review’, in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, edd. Howard B. Clarke *et al.* (Dublin 1998), pp. 288-330, at 324-7.

²³ The problem of translation is not confined to twelfth-century contexts. The late sixteenth-century poet Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, for example, in his poem on Lifford Castle, makes no use of *caisléan* in his extensive vocabulary for describing this ‘castle’ of Maghnus Ó Domhnaill in county Donegal (K. Simms, ‘Native sources for Gaelic settlement: the house poems’, in *Gaelic Ireland*, edd. Duffy *et al.*, pp. 246-67, at p. 247).

Ireland in the early twelfth century. Most of the documented examples were located west of the Shannon in the lands of Ó Conchobhair.²⁴ We know almost nothing of their physical character. Tantalisingly, *Caistél Dúin Leódha* (Ballinasloe, county Galway), mentioned in 1124, was still extant in the early eighteenth century when an antiquary observed and described morphological characteristics which suggest that it was a motte;²⁵ mottes (high, flat-topped, earthen mounds) are the classic relict-features of European timber-castles of the period, and until recent years their appearance in Ireland was attributed exclusively to the Anglo-Normans.²⁶ If Gaelic-Irish castles of the pre-colonial period had motte-like mounds, the landscapes of Ireland's élite may have looked much the same to lower social ranks in eastern Ireland before the 1170s as they did in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Given the evidence that castle-building was a feature of Gaelic-Irish society prior to Anglo-Norman arrival, it seems likely that it continued to some extent in western Ireland where Anglo-Norman lordship was not established until well into the thirteenth century.²⁷

The recording of 'castles' by twelfth-century writers need not represent the beginning of the process of incastellation. Places known among contemporaries as 'castles' may have existed for many years prior to the early 1100s, and we might possess no record of them because contemporary writers felt no need to mention them specifically.²⁸ Future research may reveal a connexion between the

²⁴ B.J. Graham, 'Timber and earthwork fortifications in western Ireland', *Medieval Archaeology* 32 (1988) 110-29; T. O'Keefe, 'The fortifications of western Ireland, A.D. 1100-1300, and their interpretation', *Journal of the Galway Historical and Archaeological Society* 50 (1998) 184-200.

²⁵ K. Nicholls, 'Anglo-French Ireland and after', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 370-403, at p. 389.

²⁶ For a general account of the changing paradigm in the study of Irish earth-and-timber castles, see Robert Higham & P. Barker, *Timber Castles* (London 1992), pp. 70-7.

²⁷ Identifying the sites of Gaelic-Irish earth-and-timber castles in western Ireland is difficult enough without attempting to distinguish between those erected before and after 1227, the year in which Richard de Burgh was granted Connaught (Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery*, p. 312). For a recent discussion of Gaelic-Irish earth-and-timber castles see Tom McNeill, *The Castle in Ireland* (London 1997), pp. 10-16, 72-4. Some native castles of the motte-and-bailey type have been identified in areas of eastern Ireland which lay immediately outside colonial control: for alleged examples in Uí Thuirtri, County Antrim, and in the Slieve Bloom mountains in county Laois see respectively T.E. McNeill, *Anglo-Norman Ulster. The History and Archaeology of an Irish Barony, 1177-1400* (Edinburgh 1980), pp. 102-3, and Kieran Denis O'Connor, *The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlement in Ireland* (Dublin 1998), p. 76. The authors of these studies have assumed that in the absence of any historical indication of colonial settlement the mottes are best regarded as native, but the possibility that the mottes represent abortive attempts at colonial settlement should not be discounted.

²⁸ Indeed, Ireland's earliest 'castles' may have been built in the tenth century, a period which has been identified as one of 'feudal' transformation in Gaelic Ireland: see Doherty, 'The vikings in Ireland', pp. 322-4, and, more briefly, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200* (London 1995), pp. 291-2. For a

construction of these ‘castles’ and the apparently widespread abandonment of the practice of building ringforts – the protective enclosures of the upper-strata native Irish of the earlier Middle Ages – by about A.D. 1000.²⁹

Gaelic-Irish stone castles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are also difficult to identify; not until the fifteenth century and the emergence of the tower-house can we recognise incastellation in stone on a scale commensurate with the authority which Gaelic-Irish lords possessed. Nonetheless, Tom McNeill has made a strong case for identifying a number of polygonal enclosure-castles in eastern Ulster as native Irish constructions of the later 1200s and 1300s.³⁰ Two probable native castles of stone in central Ulster are Harry Avery’s Castle (County Tyrone) and Elagh Castle (County Londonderry).³¹ Both possess twin-towered gatehouses which seem to have been modelled on Anglo-Norman types farther to the east and south-east,³² but neither of them could have functioned as conventional gatehouses since neither provided direct access to the courtyards behind. While we may see here the work of (fourteenth-century?) Gaelic-Irish patrons who chose to copy some of the formal language of military architecture in the colony, we do not know whether these somewhat idiosyncratic versions of a gatehouse-type represent a wilful tinkering with that language, as I suspect to be the case, or rather reflect a simple ignorance of how the colonial versions worked.

Kieran O’Conor, in the most substantial and thought-provoking publication in its field, has addressed this problem of high-status

critical review of the construct of feudalism itself see Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals. The Medieval Evidence reinterpreted* (Oxford 1994); the historiographical context has been outlined by Marjorie Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest* (Manchester 1999), chapter 6.

²⁹ C. Lynn, ‘The dating of raths: an orthodox view’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd series, 38 (1975) 45-7, and ‘The medieval ring-fort – an archaeological chimera’, *Irish Archaeological Research Forum* 2 (1975) 29-36. Radiocarbon and dendrochronological dates from ringforts support this chronology: see Matthew Stout, *The Irish Ringfort* (Dublin 1997). This view of ringfort-abandonment is not universally accepted, however: see B.J. Graham, *Medieval Irish Settlement: a Review* (Norwich 1980), pp. 35-9, and O’Conor, *Medieval Rural Settlement*, pp. 89-94.

³⁰ See McNeill, *The Castle*, pp. 158-60.

³¹ McNeill, *Anglo-Norman Ulster*, p. 114, and ‘The archaeology of Gaelic lordship east and west of the Foyle’, in *Gaelic Ireland*, edd. Duffy *et al.*, pp. 346-56, at 352-3. The original publications are by E.M. Jope *et al.*, ‘Harry Avery’s Castle, Newtownstewart, Co. Tyrone: excavations in 1950’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd series, 13 (1950) 81-92, and S.G. Rees-Jones & D.M. Waterman, ‘Recent work at Harry Avery’s Castle, County Tyrone’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd series, 30 (1967) 76-82.

³² See, for example, the gatehouse at Castleroch in county Louth, erected in the 1230s.

Gaelic-Irish sites of the central Middle Ages.³³ He has compiled contemporary literary and documentary references to *crannóga* (artificial settlements in lakes) and ringforts, two settlement-types generally regarded as essentially early mediaeval in date, as well as archaeological evidence of their thirteenth- and fourteenth-century occupation.³⁴ He has also assembled references to two other types of site, neither of which has a clear archaeological identity. The first is the *inis* (island) site; some examples may have been *crannóga*, while others may have been natural islands which were provided with some form of defence. The second is the *longphort*. In the pre-colonial era this word referred to a port or encampment for ships, but Gaelic-Irish chroniclers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries used it to refer to inland or dry-land places which seem to have had at least a modicum of protection. O’Conor’s translation of *longphort* as ‘stronghold’ is appropriately neutral: it accommodates the interpretation of some of these as permanently protected places, and of others as encampments which, like the Viking-Age examples, were used temporarily or occasionally.³⁵

O’Conor’s collection of data is very valuable, but his suggestion that *crannóga*, and *inis*- and *longphort*-sites, were not referred to as castles ‘because they were not regarded [by chroniclers] as defensive enough to be termed such’³⁶ contains two linked assumptions which need to be challenged. The first assumption, which I have already

³³ O’Conor, *Medieval Rural Settlement*, chapter 4. For more recent statements see K. O’Conor, ‘The morphology of Gaelic lordly sites in north Connacht’, in *Gaelic Ireland*, edd. Duffy *et al.*, pp. 329-45.

³⁴ O’Conor, *Medieval Rural Settlement*, pp. 77-82, 89-94; see also Aidan O’Sullivan, *The Archaeology of Lake Settlement in Ireland* (Dublin 1998), pp. 152-6. O’Conor has argued for greater continuity of ringfort-construction and occupation between the early and central Middle Ages, but I support Lynn’s argument (see above, n. 29): see T. O’Keeffe, ‘Rural settlement and cultural identity in Gaelic Ireland, 1000–1500’, *Ruralia* 1 (1996) 142-53.

³⁵ A site about which the dedicatee of this series wrote – Cloonfree, county Roscommon – was described as a *longphort* in the early fourteenth century: E.C. Quiggin, ‘O’Conor’s house at Cloonfree’, in *Essays and Studies presented to William Ridgeway*, ed. E.C. Quiggin (Cambridge 1913), pp. 332-52. The site can be identified confidently as the large moated site in that townland. The moated site is a type of earthwork enclosure firmly associated with the Anglo-Normans – for a general discussion see Terence B. Barry, *The Medieval Moated Sites of South-east Ireland* (Oxford 1977) –, but it is significant that Cloonfree was designed by ‘Englishmen’: see K. Simms, ‘Native sources for Gaelic settlement’, p. 251. Some other moated sites in Roscommon – B.J. Graham, ‘Medieval settlement in co. Roscommon’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 88C (1988) 19-38, at pp. 29-32; K. O’Conor, ‘The moated site on Inishatirra Island, Drumharlow Lough, co. Roscommon’, *County Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society Journal* 7 (1998) 1-3 – have been identified as Gaelic-Irish constructions. For a general discussion of this point see T. O’Keeffe, ‘Ethnicity and moated settlement in medieval Ireland: a review of current thinking’, *Medieval Settlement Research Group Annual Report* 15 (2000) 21-5.

³⁶ O’Conor, *Medieval Rural Settlement*, p. 77.

alluded to above,³⁷ is that in the Middle Ages ‘castle’ had a very specific definition outside which these three named classes of monument fell. The second is that defence was the principal element in this definition. We do not know how ‘castle’ was defined in Ireland in the later Middle Ages, even in the well documented Anglo-Norman areas, nor do we know whether it had any special cachet which prohibited its use for some types of structures or among some grades of society.³⁸

The monument-types which O’Conor has discussed were undoubtedly important as high-status settlements and as expressions of secular power, and they seem to bridge a gap between the short phase of native incastellation in pre-colonial Ireland and the prolonged phase of tower-house building among the late mediaeval Irish. The use of site-types – *crannóga* and *longphuirt* – with pre-colonial ancestry, coupled with an apparent reluctance among chroniclers to use words for ‘castle’ (even if these structures were castles by any functional definition), may suggest that the Gaelic-Irish élite of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries retreated to tradition, perhaps to express their own historical identity at a time when they had to share the island with foreign settlers.³⁹ Seen in this light, their ready embrace in the fifteenth century (if not a little earlier) of the tower-house, a castle-type of non-native origin, is especially interesting.

Before we consider the tower-houses, there is another part of O’Conor’s thesis which requires attention: it is the complex of intersecting ideas and arguments which he has presented under the heading ‘Houses, lack of castles, and military tactics in Gaelic Ireland during the medieval period’.⁴⁰ Two elements of his exploration of these issues are of interest here.

The first is that ‘few castles were built by Gaelic lords before the fifteenth century because the Irish did not employ these monuments in the defence of their territories against large-scale attack

³⁷ See above, p. 7.

³⁸ O’Keeffe, ‘Concepts of “castle”’.

³⁹ There may be other manifestations of this: for example, there was a renewed interest in ‘Celtic’ art among later mediaeval Irish artists (see, for example, the Trinity College harp: O’Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland*, pl. 16).

⁴⁰ O’Conor, *Medieval Rural Settlement*, pp. 94-101.

... [but] used the rugged nature of the landscape as a military tool to prevent or slow down the advance of an army'.⁴¹ This is an interpretation founded on those assumptions about the nature and function of 'castle' which I discussed briefly above,⁴² and perhaps also on assumptions about the nature of warfare within, and prosecuted from the outside on, the Gaelic world.⁴³ The second is that Gaelic lords of the period under review did not build large, complex houses because of a social custom which he has identified as the periodic redistribution of lands of a kindred-group among its male members.⁴⁴ O'Connor has acknowledged that his evidence is from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but has suggested that the process was also a part of earlier life. However accurate may be his interpretation of the proprietorship of land as ever-shifting, the suggestion that the élite Gaelic-Irish population was unwilling to invest in sophisticated architecture on that account can be challenged. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Gaelic-Irish lords (and perhaps even those of the fourteenth century) had no qualms about investing in tower-houses.⁴⁵ The testimony of Stephen of Lexington that Irish kings dwelt in small huts made of wattle⁴⁶ certainly offers an unflattering vision of the accommodation of royal households in the Middle Ages, but the statement of Roger of Howden half a century earlier that the Irish built for Henry II a wattle-palace *ad mos illius patriae* suggests that such material was traditional for such prestige-architecture and that it may have been retained for symbolic value.⁴⁷

The tower-houses, the small private castles of the late mediaeval gentry, are remarkable for their distribution across political and ethnic boundaries in Ireland: they were erected by the élite of colonial and Gaelic-Irish stock, as well as by the gaelicised colonial families. Most

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴² See above, p. 7.

⁴³ See Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords. The Changing Political Structures of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge 1987), chapter 8, especially pp. 125-8.

⁴⁴ O'Connor, *Medieval Rural Settlement*, p. 97.

⁴⁵ I cannot agree with O'Connor's statement that 'it must be *presumed* ... that such strongholds [tower-houses] operated outside this system of periodic land redistribution' (*ibid.*: italics added).

⁴⁶ B.W. O'Dwyer, *The Conspiracy of Mellifont, 1216-1231. An Episode in the History of the Cistercian Order in Medieval Ireland* (Dublin 1970), p. 31.

⁴⁷ Marie Therese Flanagan, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship – Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century* (Oxford 1989), pp. 202-3; cf. P. Sims-Williams, 'The submission of Irish kings in fact and fiction: Henry II, Bendigeidfran, and the dating of *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 22 (1991) 31-61.

are four- or five-storey blocks of square or rectangular plan, are entered at ground-floor level, and have spiral stairs ascending to parapet-level. The lower stages of the towers tend to be poorly lit, but the upper stages, which contain the principal public and private spaces, have fairly large windows and fireplaces. The interpretation of these towers as defensive, and as indicators of increasing lawlessness,⁴⁸ cannot be sustained when their architecture is closely examined.⁴⁹

Tower-houses are distributed unevenly across Ireland. The heaviest concentrations are in the southern half of the island, from Wexford through Kilkenny, Cork, and Tipperary, to Limerick, Clare, and south Galway, and there are concentrations in coastal regions, particularly along the south and east coasts.⁵⁰ Areas which remained under Gaelic-Irish political control throughout most of the late Middle Ages (central Ulster, for example) tend to have relatively small numbers, except along safely navigable coastlines.

The origin of Ireland's tower-houses is still a matter of dispute. Small castles of tower-form were common around Europe in the late Middle Ages; so the Irish series can be interpreted as part of a pan-European phenomenon. Lowland England is the most obvious candidate for a place of origin of any new architectural idea in mediaeval Ireland, but tower-houses are surprisingly rare there. Tower-houses are found throughout Scotland, and this phenomenon is discussed below,⁵¹ but neither these nor the comparable northern English tower-houses provide convincing progenitors for the architecture of Ireland's towers; in any event, had the influence come from north Britain we might expect to find a heavier density of towers in north-east Ireland than is the case.

While the idea of erecting a castle of tower-form may have come from somewhere outside the island, the earliest manifestations of the idea in Ireland must be sought within the old colonial areas, rather

⁴⁸ T. Barry, 'Tower houses and terror: the archaeology of late medieval Munster', in *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms*, edd. Howard B. Clarke *et al.* (Dublin 2004), pp. 119-28.

⁴⁹ McNeill, *The Castle*, pp. 217-21. The same point has been made about Scottish tower-houses and their enclosing walls by R. Samson, 'The rise and fall of tower-houses in post-Reformation Scotland', in *The Social Archaeology of Houses*, ed. Ross Samson (Edinburgh 1990), pp. 197-243; see also his paper, 'Knowledge, constraint, and power in action: the defenceless medieval wall', *Historical Archaeology* 26 (1992) 26-44.

⁵⁰ C. Ó Danachair, 'Irish tower houses', *Béaloides* 45-47 (1977-9) 158-63.

⁵¹ See below, pp. 14-15.

than within Gaelic Ireland.⁵² In every part of Ireland the formal ‘grammar’ of tower-house architecture (for example, the arrangements of windows, the relationships between stairs and doors, and the relative positions of small private chambers and large semi-public rooms) suggests that that the halls and *donjons* (keeps) of the Anglo-Norman world, most of which were still in use in the fifteenth century, were very important influences. The use of this architectural language among the Gaelic-Irish castle-building élite of the late Middle Ages is a demonstration of how forms of material culture – including architecture – could be transmitted *as ideas* across cultural and political boundaries. More significantly, it suggests that some of the domestic rituals for which the micro-topography of tower-houses was designed in colonial areas were also adopted by the Gaelic Irish.

Given that the ethnic identities of the builders of tower-houses are not readily apparent to modern scholars who examine their architecture,⁵³ it may be that tower-houses also blurred for contemporary spectators the outwardly visible distinctions between élite Gaelic-Irish and English society of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Indeed, rather than simply indicate that native Irish society had experienced some degree of ‘anglicisation’, the tower-house may have been a vehicle by which the Gaelic-Irish actively drew themselves closer to English cultural practices.⁵⁴

The tower-house survived as a current architectural form into the seventeenth century in parts of Ireland: a Gaelic-Irish example, Derryhivenny, county Galway, an O’Madden castle dated by an inscription to 1643, is one of the very latest.⁵⁵ The tower-house’s demise in all parts of Ireland during the seventeenth century has been attributed to a recognition that its defences were inadequate in an age

⁵² I remain unconvinced by the recent suggestion that tower-houses may have developed simultaneously in native and colonial parts of Ireland: T. Barry, ‘The last frontier: defence and settlement in late medieval Ireland’, in *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: Essays presented to J. F. Lydon*, edd. Terry Barry *et al.* (Dublin 1995), pp. 217-28, at 223-4.

⁵³ In an important new review, Rolf Loeber has made some ‘highly tentative’ identifications of features which might characterise Gaelic-Irish tower-houses (‘An architectural history of Gaelic castles and settlements, 1370–1600’, in *Gaelic Ireland*, edd. Duffy *et al.*, pp. 271-314, at 297-8), but I am not sure that the distributional evidence supports the suggestions.

⁵⁴ O’Keeffe, ‘Concepts of “castle”’.

⁵⁵ Paul M. Kerrigan, *Castles and Fortifications in Ireland, 1485–1945* (Cork 1995), p. 68.

of more efficient siege-warfare.⁵⁶ While it is certainly true that changing political circumstances in late sixteenth-century Ireland necessitated the building of artillery forts with accommodation for professional soldiers, the decision to discontinue the tower-house in favour of a new residential building form, the Renaissance-style defensible house, was probably more proactive than reactive: rather than be a response to changes in the practice of warfare, it may reflect changing political and religious ideologies in the age of Reformation and Plantation.⁵⁷

* * * * *

The story of castle-building in Gaelic Scotland from the eleventh century onwards parallels that of Gaelic Ireland in some important respects. The first observation is that the small hillforts of the early mediaeval élite of Gaelic Scotland were generally abandoned in the closing centuries of the first millennium, with only a small number of the sites (Edinburgh and Stirling, for example) continuing in use into the later Middle Ages.⁵⁸ This phase of hillfort-abandonment seems to precede – as a preliminary stage perhaps? – the reconfiguration of old Pictish estates as thanages, a process which has been held to begin in the reign of Mael Colaim II (1005–34).⁵⁹ Unfortunately, we know little of the archaeology of the thanages, but castles would not be inappropriate features of them given what we know of the fiscal, administrative, and strategic roles of thanages within the kingdom.⁶⁰ Indeed, drawing on the experiences in several contemporary and near-

⁵⁶ T. Barry, 'Rural settlement in medieval Ireland', in *A History of Settlement in Ireland*, ed. Terry Barry (London 1999), pp. 110-23, at p. 121.

⁵⁷ The new architecture has been summarised by Maurice Craig, *The Architecture of Ireland from the Earliest Times to 1800* (London 1982), chapter 8. On ideology, the line of argument developed by Matthew Johnson for late mediaeval and Renaissance England – 'Reconstructing castles and refashioning identities in Renaissance England', in *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain*, edd. Sarah Tarlow & S. West (London 1999), pp. 69-86 – is generally applicable to Ireland.

⁵⁸ S.M. Foster, 'Before Alba: Pictish and Dál Riata power centres from the fifth to late ninth centuries A.D.', in *Scottish Power Centres from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, edd. Sally Foster *et al.* (Glasgow 1998), pp. 1-31, at p. 25.

⁵⁹ A. Grant, 'Thanages and thanages, from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries', in *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community. Essays presented to G.W.S. Barrow*, edd. Alexander Grant & K. J. Stringer (Edinburgh 1993), pp. 39-81.

⁶⁰ S.T. Driscoll, 'Formalising the mechanisms of state power: early Scottish lordship from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries', in *Scottish Power Centres*, edd. Foster *et al.*, pp. 32-58, at 35-8.

contemporary worlds – Anglo-Norman England, the knights’ fees in the Lothians, Galloway, and Strathclyde, and, of course, earlier twelfth-century Ireland –, we might expect the thanes to have been motte-builders. However, as Stephen Driscoll has observed,⁶¹ only ten of the seventy-one thanages had mottes, and these might be later intrusions. Driscoll has suggested that a thane’s *caput* may instead have been an enclosure with a hall and service-buildings. As a model, he has cited Goltho in Lincolnshire, the classic example of an English high-status residence of the eighth to eleventh centuries.⁶²

Very few mottes – about a dozen, perhaps – were built in western Scotland north of the Firth of Clyde,⁶³ and most of those which have been identified could not be described as ‘typical’.⁶⁴ Stone castles belonging within a recognisable European architectural tradition began to be built in Gaelic Scotland in the twelfth century, not least in those highland areas where stone was readily available. From this point the stories of castle-building in Ireland and Scotland diverged for about two centuries, before converging again with the appearance of the tower-houses in the fifteenth century.

The sites which the Gaelic-Scottish lords chose for their stone castles were often small islands or craggy rocks, and, while these were often the only practical sites available for structures of a defensive nature, they may also represent a conscious continuity with earlier mediaeval and even pre-mediaeval traditions of fortification.⁶⁵ However, from the twelfth to the sixteenth century the principal inspirations for the architectural forms of stone castles seem to have come from outside the Gaelic world, not from within, even if the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 42. See Guy Beresford, *Goltho: the Development of an Early Medieval Manor*, c. 850–1150 (London 1987), and P. Everson, ‘The problem of Goltho’, *Medieval Settlement Research Group Report* 5 (1990) 9–14.

⁶³ Higham & Barker, *Timber Castles*, fig. 2.28.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the mottes in Cowal: RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, VII.19.

⁶⁵ Rothesay Castle on Bute, erected around 1200 as a circular *enceinte* (four cylindrical towers were added at regular spaces on the exterior in the thirteenth century), may have been inspired by the indigenous architectural tradition of the *dún* rather than by the broadly comparable but geographically distant ‘shell-keeps’ at castles in southern England – for examples of ‘shell-keeps’ see Colin Platt, *The Medieval Castle in England and Wales* (London 1982), pp. 28–32. Its low-lying site distinguishes it not only from those Anglo-Norman ‘shell-keeps’, which tend to be on the summits of mottes, but also from other Gaelic castles of the western seaboard which tend to occupy naturally elevated spots with good panoramic views. See W.D. Simpson, ‘The architectural history of Rothesay Castle’, *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society* 9 (1936–40) 152–84, and R. Andrew McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles. Scotland’s Western Seaboard, c.1100 – c.1336* (East Linton 1997), pp. 242–3.

execution of these forms generally bears the imprint of local craftsmanship and taste. One outstanding stone castle of the period before the Wars of Independence, Castle Sween in Knapdale, dating from about 1200,⁶⁶ illustrates this point very well. This was an enclosure-castle of the MacSweens. Its plan is roughly rectangular, with angle and mid-wall pilasters on its external faces; indeed, prior to its alteration in the thirteenth century, it offered the same type of elevation to those who approached it from any one of its four sides. Castle Sween is probably the earliest in the series of *enceinte*-castles in western Scotland, and it may have provided inspiration for the builders of the other castles, for example, Innis Chonnell in Loarn and Duart on Mull.⁶⁷ But the origin of its design is difficult to trace. Ireland, whence the MacSween family was alleged to have descended and with which it had close connexions,⁶⁸ has no comparable buildings of an appropriate date. The pilasters suggest that we should look to the Norman world to the south for its inspiration: those pilasters can be paralleled on late eleventh- and twelfth-century Romanesque *donjons* in France and England.

Some thirteenth-century castles in Gaelic Scotland have cylindrical or near-cylindrical corner-towers, thereby revealing an awareness of the formal attributes of contemporary castles in the Anglo-Norman world.⁶⁹ The most unusual of these is the MacDougall fortress of Dunstaffnage in Loarn,⁷⁰ built in the first half of the thirteenth century to a trapezoidal plan in which the cylindrical corners were embedded in the curtain-walls, not standing proud of them as was the convention; its unusual form suggests that it was the work of a builder who was not fully familiar with his sources. Influence from Anglo-Norman Ireland has been suggested, though not very convincingly, for the small number of enclosure-castles with polygonal plans – for example, Mingary and Ardnamurchan – and the so-called ‘hall-houses’ as at Fraoch Eilean in Loarn.⁷¹

⁶⁶ For Castle Sween see RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, VII.245-59, no. 119.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II.223-31, no. 292 (Innis Chonnell), and III.191-200, no. 339 (Duart).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, VII.258.

⁶⁹ J. Dunbar, ‘The medieval architecture of the Scottish highlands’, in *The Middle Ages in the Highlands*, ed. Lorraine MacLean (Inverness 1981), pp. 38-70, at 46-7.

⁷⁰ RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, II.198-211, no. 287.

⁷¹ Dunbar, ‘The medieval architecture’, p. 64; see RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, II.212-17, no. 290 (Fraoch Eilean), and III.209-17, no. 345 (Mingary).

The tower-house phenomenon in Gaelic Scotland has a chronology broadly comparable with that of Ireland, although the dating of individual examples is rendered difficult, as in Ireland, by a lack of appropriate contemporary documentation and by a general absence of features which can be dated stylistically. The Gaelic-Scottish tower-houses do share some basic design-features with their counterparts in all areas of Ireland, and not just the Gaelic lands: from the fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century the towers were generally simple square or rectangular buildings rising to several storeys, while later sixteenth-century towers sometimes have single or diagonally-paired cylindrical towers. The two regional traditions are not exactly comparable, however: for example, towers of relatively early date within the western Scottish sequence (for example, the late fourteenth-century tower of Duart Castle and the tower – built about 1430 – of Breachacha Castle, both on Mull)⁷² often lacked any vaulted ceilings, whereas almost all Irish tower-houses built before the late sixteenth century possessed at least one vaulted ceiling. Nonetheless, the indications that the pedigree of western Scottish tower-houses can be traced in local castle-architecture of earlier date⁷³ offer a parallel with the development of tower-houses in Ireland.

* * * * *

It is generally the case in archaeology that, as we move lower down the social ranks, the problem of archaeological visibility increases, with the individuals of the very lowest ranks – slaves and unfree tenants – barely detectable. In the case of the mediaeval Gaelic world, all strata of secular society beneath the castle-owning élite, and not merely the unfree, are very difficult to isolate in the archaeological record. In consequence, archaeologists cannot draw from their own reservoir of data to speak independently and authoritatively about any subtle distinctions of social class and economic dependence around which mediaeval Gaelic society was

⁷² *Ibid.*, III.177-84, no. 334, and 191-200, no. 339, respectively.

⁷³ For example, the influence of thirteenth-century hall-houses can be seen in many of the tower-houses, as at Carrick in Cowal, built in the late fourteenth century, and Kilchurn in Loarn, built in the mid-fifteenth century: *ibid.*, II.231-40, no. 293 (Kilchurn), and VII.226-37, no. 116 (Carrick).

organised. They – we – tend instead to draw the non-élite sections of mediaeval Gaeldom into the poorly defined and badly titled category of ‘common people’.⁷⁴

The evidence that the pattern of ringfort-construction in Ireland had been abandoned at the end of the first millennium A.D. is strong, and the abandonment of small hillforts in Gaelic Scotland was perhaps a parallel process. In both lands these processes can be attributed to radical social change,⁷⁵ involving the emergence of centralised institutions of government and the assessment for taxation-purposes of land-units rather than social groups. These processes presumably led, in turn, to some degree of relocation of lower social levels as well as of those who had possessed ringforts; and here, drawing on the lowland-English parallel,⁷⁶ we might imagine that relocation to have been to nucleated settlements.

The location and nature of nucleated settlement in Gaelic lands in the central and later Middle Ages remain largely unknown. Churches had provided focuses for nucleation long before the period in which ringforts began to be abandoned, and, although attention is usually focused on the so-called ‘monastic towns’, lesser churches probably also had settlements clustered around them in the early Middle Ages.⁷⁷ Some settlements associated with early mediaeval churches may not have survived into the later Middle Ages; if so, they remain to be discovered in the empty fields around abandoned mediaeval churches. But other settlements around churches must have survived through the Middle Ages, their occupants comforted by that immunity from secular violence which was enjoyed, at least in theory, by the churches themselves.⁷⁸ Such settlements might now be detectable in the archaeological material beneath those living towns and villages which are their successors in the modern Irish landscape; they may even be detectable in the plans of those towns and villages,

⁷⁴ Armit, *Skye and the Western Isles*, p. 207.

⁷⁵ This was first suggested for Ireland by Lynn, ‘The dating of raths’ and ‘The medieval ring-fort’.

⁷⁶ Carenza Lewis *et al.*, *Village, Hamlet and Field. Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England* (Manchester 1997), pp. 235-8.

⁷⁷ See M. A. Valante, ‘Reassessing the Irish “monastic town”’, *Irish Historical Studies* 31 (1998/9) 1-18, and literature cited there.

⁷⁸ K.W. Nicholls, ‘Gaelic society and economy’, in *A New History of Ireland, II, Medieval Ireland, 1169–1534*, ed. Art Cosgrove (London 1987), pp. 397-438, at p. 403.

but topographical analysis is probably too blunt a tool to use for their retrieval.

Discussion of nucleations brings us to (the) *baile*. Our understanding of this noun, which is first attested in texts of the ninth century, has shifted during the past half-century of research.⁷⁹ Until the 1960s *baile* was usually thought to refer to a type of unenclosed nucleated settlement which was contemporary with the ringforts and which accommodated those who were excluded by their social class from ownership of ringforts. Clachans – those agglomerations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses associated with rundale (or infield-outfield) farming, which were mapped in their hundreds by the Ordnance Survey about 1840 – were once regarded (especially by folklorists and historical geographers working in Belfast) as their direct successors in the pre-Famine landscapes of western Ireland, of the Lecale district of County Down, of the Wicklow mountains, and of elsewhere.⁸⁰ But recent historical research has promoted a more complex understanding of the *baile*.⁸¹ In some instances the term seems to have been used with respect to the settlement itself, and in others it refers to a taxable unit of land (or townland, as we should say today). The context of its use is Ireland's own 'feudal revolution' – the transformation in the organisation of landscape and society in Ireland at the close of the first millennium A.D..

The relationship of *baile*-as-territory to *baile*-as-settlement is uncertain. The former is not directly detectable in the archaeological record, while the latter, detectable in theory, remains elusive. We cannot assume the *baile*-as-settlement to have had strict morphological boundaries: some of the settlements which were so described may have been substantial clusters, possibly centred on local, proto-parochial, churches;⁸² but others may have had no more

⁷⁹ See C. Doherty, 'Settlement in early Ireland', in *A History of Settlement in Ireland*, ed. Barry, pp. 50-80, at 66-71, for a review.

⁸⁰ Excavations were conducted at a clachan at Murphystown, County Down, in the 1950s in the hope of demonstrating the antiquity of the settlement-type, but they yielded nothing of mediaeval date except some pottery: R.H. Buchanan & B. Proudfoot, 'Excavations at Murphystown, Co. Down', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd series, 21 (1958) 115-26.

⁸¹ Doherty, 'The vikings in Ireland', pp. 315-17.

⁸² For the parochial status of churches before 1172, see R. Sharpe, 'Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland', in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, ed. John Blair & R. Sharpe (London 1992), pp. 81-109, and A. Empey, 'The layperson in the parish: the medieval inheritance, 1169-1536', in *The Laity and the Church of Ireland, 1000-2000*, ed. Raymond Gillespie & W.G. Neely (Dublin 2002), pp. 7-48, especially 13-14.

than a few houses in a loose agglomeration, depending on the size of the territory, its agricultural potential, and the size of the local population. Another unwarranted assumption would be that the settlements were static in time and space, as settlements can enlarge or contract at different times, and settlement-foci can shift even within small territories.⁸³

The clachans are no longer fashionable targets of mediaeval-settlement research in Ireland, although they remain of intrinsic interest as the oldest identifiable rural settlement-nucleations *without churches* in Gaelic-Irish culture. But recent work on morphologically comparable settlements – *bailtean* – in highland and Hebridean Scotland may provide some foundation-material for a reassessment of the relevance of the clachan in Gaelic Ireland's settlement-history.⁸⁴ Late eighteenth-century and later 'clearances' of western and highland areas of Scotland, including the former Lordship of the Isles, were processes which created hill-pastures and small family-holdings ('crofts') out of recently depopulated land.⁸⁵ The pre-croft settlements were the *bailtean*, and the agricultural exploitation associated with them involved open fields arranged in infield-outfield configurations with narrow plough-strips in the infields around the settlements.⁸⁶ The similarity between this system and the clachan-rundale system in Ireland is apparent.

The antiquity of this pattern of settlement and agriculture in Scotland is a matter of debate. The long-held view that the western Scottish *bailtean* had ancient, even prehistoric, antecedents cannot be sustained, even though some of the sites are known historically to have had mediaeval occupation.⁸⁷ The settlement excavated at Lix in Perthshire, for example, lacked pre-1700 levels.⁸⁸ Excavation of a

⁸³ Brian K. Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement, Prehistory to the Present* (London 1996), pp. 120-7.

⁸⁴ See R.A. Dodgshon, 'West Highland and Hebridean settlement prior to crofting and the clearances: a study in stability and change?', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 123 (1993) 419-38; see especially p. 435, n. 1, for a comment on the terminology.

⁸⁵ D. Turner, 'Peasant housing and holdings in a marginal area – medieval settlement in the West Highlands and islands of Scotland: some problems', *Ruralia* 2 (1998) 71-7; A. Morrison, 'Scottish rural settlement studies: retrospect and prospect', in *Townships to Farmsteads. Rural Settlement Studies in Scotland, England and Wales*, edd. John A. Atkinson *et al.* (Oxford 2000), pp. 2-10.

⁸⁶ I.D. Whyte, 'The agricultural revolution in Scotland: contributions to the debate', *Area* 10 (1978) 203-5.

⁸⁷ Lelong, 'Finding medieval (or later) rural settlement', has cited a number of examples.

⁸⁸ H. Fairhurst, 'The deserted settlement at Lix, West Perthshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 101 (1968/9) 160-99.

tell-like mound at Coileagan an Udail, North Uist, offered contrary evidence by revealing a series of *bailtean* stretching back into the Middle Ages,⁸⁹ but this is not a typical site: the environmental and geomorphological conditions particular to this part of North Uist drew successive generations in the locality to the same place, thereby creating a tell-like settlement-mound which seems unique.⁹⁰ Robert Dodgshon has argued that the *bailtean* replaced patterns of scattered settlement within the townships, and that this happened no earlier than the thirteenth century and normally as late as the seventeenth or eighteenth century. He has also suggested that this shift from dispersed to clustered settlement be seen in the context of pan-European processes of settlement-nucleation under lordship-control.⁹¹

Although it seems that comparatively few *bailtean* existed long enough in the pre-crofting phase to have had particularly complex histories by the time of the clearances, the settlements were clearly in constant flux – even within their fairly short histories – because their occupants periodically abandoned and rebuilt houses.⁹² We are disadvantaged, however, in that Highland peasant-houses of the pre-crofting age were commonly constructed of perishable materials:⁹³ this restricts our capacity, first, to monitor early phases in *bailtean* and, secondly, to locate the isolated farmsteads which were abandoned when the *bailtean* emerged, especially in cases where the *bailtean* may be of mediaeval date.⁹⁴

The Scottish *bailtean* are generally assigned an earlier date of formation than the Irish clachans, and they began to be cleared some decades before the great famine of the mid-1800s destroyed so many Irish settlements. Nonetheless, both nucleation-types are broadly comparable in their spatial characteristics and in the infield-outfield organisation of their agricultural resources. I do not wish to promote afresh the model of *baile*-to-clachan continuity in Ireland which so attracted Estyn Evans and others in the mid-twentieth century, but

⁸⁹ I.A. Crawford & I. Switsur, 'Sandscaping and C14: the Udail, N. Uist', *Antiquity* 51 (1977) 124-36.

⁹⁰ Dodgshon, 'West Highland and Hebridean settlement', p. 421.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 419, 421, 435. Cf. Robert Barlett, *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Civilization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London 1993), chapters 5-6.

⁹² Archaeological excavation might one day show the same to be true of the Irish clachans.

⁹³ Turner, 'Peasant housing', p. 74.

⁹⁴ Lelong, 'Finding medieval (or later) rural settlement', p. 12.

Dodgshon's interpretation of the evidence from the Scottish townships certainly encourages the idea that the creation of townlands in Ireland at the end of the first millennium A.D. was accompanied by a relocation of population into small, clachan-like, nucleations,⁹⁵ the shapes and sites of which were in constant flux.⁹⁶ The Irish clachans, then, may be entirely late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century settlement-forms, but they represent an *idea* about settlement which is considerably older.

The grasslands of parts of central and northern Roscommon may preserve archaeological evidence germane to this debate. Underpopulated for as long as we have records, this district is crossed by great field banks, some of them surviving as low ridges of earth inside large 'improved' fields while others are still in use as 'living' field-boundaries.⁹⁷ These banks, and the fields which they once enclosed, pay no apparent heed to the location of ringforts, of which there are many examples in the region; they simply stretch across many square miles of countryside. The field-system pre-dates the first edition of Ordnance-Survey maps. It is probably mediaeval rather than early modern (late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century) in date. We do not know where those who made or farmed these fields dwelt, but they may have lived in the small, undated but evidently long abandoned, nucleated settlements scattered around the landscape and have daily travelled outwards to the fields, much as the farmers of contemporary English villages did.⁹⁸

A final category of settlement-evidence to be discussed here in this context of lower social strata relates to transhumance, the bringing of herds of cattle to upland pastures during the summer-months. Shielings, the huts and hut-clusters of farmers engaged in this activity, are especially well known in Scotland thanks to the estate-maps of the eighteenth century and the fieldwork of the Royal

⁹⁵ O'Keefe, 'Rural settlement'.

⁹⁶ Records of the Gaelic Irish living in 'impermanent agglomerations' in the late Middle Ages – K.W. Nicholls, *Land, Law and Society in Sixteenth-century Ireland* (Cork 1976), p. 9 – are also suggestive.

⁹⁷ M. Herity, 'A survey of the royal site of Cruachain in Connacht, IV, Ancient field systems at Rathcroghan and Carnfree', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 118 (1988) 67-84.

⁹⁸ We should avoid using the word 'village' to refer to the nucleations of Roscommon and elsewhere, because both the word and the spectrum of ideas which it expresses about settlement-form are creations of post-mediaeval thought: see Jean Chapelot & R. Fossier, *The Village and House in the Middle Ages* (London 1985), pp. 9-10; D. Austin, 'The "proper" study of medieval archaeology', in *From the Baltic to the Black Sea*, edd. David Austin & L. Alcock (London 1990), pp. 9-42, at p. 20; Doherty, 'Settlement in early Ireland', p. 54.

Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.⁹⁹ The practice was well established throughout the period under review here: radiocarbon-dating indicates that the shielings at Torrin on Skye, for example, were built between the twelfth and the sixteenth century and that those on the Burn of Edramucky were used from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, while fourteenth-century material was found in the excavation of probable sheilings on Gunna in the Inner Hebrides.¹⁰⁰ Booleys, the Irish equivalents, may have a comparable antiquity, but they are somewhat better attested archaeologically and historically in both the late Middle Ages and after. In 1596, for example, Edmund Spenser noted that the Gaelic Irish tended ‘to keep their cattle and to live themselves the most part of the year in boolies, pasturing upon the mountain and waste wild places and removing still to fresh land as they have depastured the former’.¹⁰¹

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From the archaeologist’s perspective, the concept of a ‘Celtic Church’ is more limiting than accommodating. There is little doubt that archaeological expressions of christian practice in early mediaeval Ireland and Scotland differ in many respects from those in Anglo-Saxon England, but the so-called ‘Celtic west’ was in fact home to many different ideas about the types of topographical and architectural setting, art, material artefact, and even burial rite appropriate to christian worship.¹⁰² The diverse archaeological manifestations of christianity in these western and northern parts of

⁹⁹ For a discussion of Gaelic-Scottish transhumance see Michael Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World* (Dublin 2000), pp. 173-7. For a discussion of evidence on Mann, see G. Quine, ‘Medieval sheilings on the Isle of Man: fact or fiction?’, *Rural Settlement, Medieval Europe 1992, Pre-printed papers*, VIII (York 1992), pp. 107-12.

¹⁰⁰ For Torrin see Armit, *Skye and the Western Isles*, p. 217; for Edramucky see J.A. Atkinson, ‘Rural settlement on north Lochtayside: understanding the landscapes of change’, in *Townships to Farmsteads. Rural Settlement Studies in Scotland, England and Wales*, edd. John A. Atkinson *et al.* (Oxford 2000), pp. 150-60; for Gunna see Lelong, ‘Finding medieval (or later) rural settlement’, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ B.B. Williams & P.S. Robinson, ‘The excavation of Bronze Age cists and a medieval booley house at Glenmakeeran, County Antrim, and a discussion of booleying in north Antrim’, *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 3rd series, 46 (1983) 29-40, at pp. 34-8. Cf. n. 9, above.

¹⁰² See W. Davies, ‘The myth of the Celtic Church’, in *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, edd. Nancy Edwards & A. Lane (Oxford 1992), pp. 12-21.

the Insular world reflect complex interplays between the pre-Christian pasts of the local societies and the cultural and intellectual stimuli to which they were exposed from the contemporary Christian worlds of England and the Continent. This is especially apparent in the art and architecture: for example, we see so-called La Tène motifs of indigenous pre-Christian origin on Insular reliquaries of Continental form, and pre-Christian building methods being put at the service of new Christian architecture.¹⁰³ We can detect in Irish and Scottish ecclesiastical art and architecture of the later Middle Ages a similar desire to reconcile tradition – in this case inherited from the earlier mediaeval Christian past – with new ideas inspired by developments elsewhere. This creative tension informs the architectural archaeology of the Gaelic Churches and is the theme developed in this section of the pamphlet.

Notwithstanding the likelihood that churches of great technical sophistication and aesthetic quality did exist in the Gaelic world prior to the Romanesque twelfth century,¹⁰⁴ the surviving remains of pre-Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture in Ireland and Scotland give us an impression that in these parts of Britain and Ireland greater value was placed on material objects for Christian devotion – manuscripts, free-standing sculpture, altar-plate – than on the built-environment in which that devotion took place. Indeed, if we can identify unity in ecclesiastical architecture of the pre-Romanesque Gaelic world, it is a unity in reluctance among Gaelic patrons and churchmen to explore, as did the Anglo-Saxons, the implications of the architectural developments of the Church in the Carolingian world. The one type of building which threatens this characterisation of conservatism, and which is a more positive indicator of a shared awareness of architectural form in the Gaelic world, is the Round Tower.¹⁰⁵ More than sixty of these still survive in Ireland, most of

¹⁰³ This theme was developed at length by Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to 800 A.D.)* (3rd edn, London 1965).

¹⁰⁴ Examples must have included the churches at Kildare – S. Connolly & J.-M. Picard (trans.), 'Cogitosus: Life of Saint Brigit', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987) 5-27, at pp. 25-6 – and Forteviot (Foster, 'Before Alba', p. 19).

¹⁰⁵ There is an extensive literature on these. See especially G. Lennox Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland* (Dublin 1979); Brian Lalor, *The Irish Round Tower* (Cork 1999); Roger Stalley, *Irish Round Towers* (Dublin 2000), and 'Sex, symbol, and myth: some observations on the Irish Round Towers', in *From Ireland coming. Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ 2001), pp. 27-48. For a different perspective see Tadhg O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers. Buildings, Rituals, and Landscapes of the Early Irish Church* (Stroud 2004).

them dating from the eleventh or twelfth century, and there are two pre-twelfth-century examples in Scotland (at Abernethy and Brechin)¹⁰⁶ and one on Mann (at Peel). I have suggested elsewhere¹⁰⁷ that the Irish towers might, like the square turriform churches of Anglo-Saxon England,¹⁰⁸ have been monuments of secular kingship or lordship.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries were the period of Romanesque-style architecture in continental Europe, and this style penetrated the Gaelic world around 1100.¹⁰⁹ Romanesque is generally regarded as a style created for ecclesiastical contexts; domestic and military architecture which can be described as Romanesque is generally not common and is particularly rare in the Gaelic world.¹¹⁰

The word Romanesque is a fairly modern creation: it was first used in the early nineteenth century to describe works of architecture from the central Middle Ages, and it was intended to convey the impression of an architectural idiom with clear formal and conceptual roots in Roman architecture.¹¹¹ Today's scholars possess a more refined vision of the relationships between Classical and mediaeval civilisations, and – while links between works of the ancient Roman world and so-called Romanesque churches are still identified and regarded as important, particularly in parts of southern Europe where Roman remains survived into the twelfth century – the contributions of local, non-Roman traditions, as well as of Arabic culture, are now regarded as no less significant.

Romanesque architectural projects executed by Irish and Scottish patrons and masons owe much to the Anglo-Norman (or English) Romanesque tradition which emerged in the mid-eleventh

¹⁰⁶ For their date and context see N. Cameron, 'St Rule's Church, St Andrews, and early stone-built churches in Scotland', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 124 (1994) 367-78, at p. 375. It might be noted that the square tower of St Rule's Church, assigned a date before 1127 by Cameron, has a height of 33 metres, which is about 100 mediaeval feet, the approximate height of a number of largely complete Round Towers in Ireland.

¹⁰⁷ O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*.

¹⁰⁸ M. Audovy *et al.*, 'The tower of All Saints' Church, Earls Barton, Northamptonshire: its construction and context', *Archaeological Journal* 152 (1995) 73-94.

¹⁰⁹ Tadhg O'Keefe, *Romanesque Ireland. Architecture and Ideology in the Twelfth Century* (Dublin 2001).

¹¹⁰ Castle Sween is a rare example.

¹¹¹ For an account of the early history of the word see Tina Waldeier Bizzarro, *Romanesque Architectural Criticism. A Prehistory* (Cambridge 1992).

century.¹¹² Excluded from this category are the twelfth-century Romanesque churches of the Cistercians which, despite bearing some evidence of native workmanship,¹¹³ adhere fairly strictly to that Order's preferred architectural design with its cross-Continental distribution.

By the second quarter of the twelfth century, English Romanesque style had diffused into eastern lowland Scotland where its influence, and particularly the influence of its expression in Durham Cathedral, is manifest in the early twelfth-century Dunfermline-Abbey church, and later in the small churches of Leuchars and Dalmeny; the style even reached Kirkwall Cathedral on Orkney.¹¹⁴ The English Romanesque idiom also penetrated southern Ireland in the early twelfth century, exerting profound influence on the cathedral churches erected at major centres of the reform-movement, notably Cashel, Ardfert, Roscrea, and Lismore.¹¹⁵ The formative influence on this Irish tradition seems to have come from the Bristol-Channel area where the abandoned cathedral of Old Sarum, the precursor of Salisbury Cathedral, may have been particularly influential in its genesis. Influence from the German *Schottenklöster* has been suggested, particularly with respect to Cormac's Chapel at Cashel where a pair of square Romanesque towers resembles the towers of the *Jacobskirche* at Regensburg; but better parallels for the towers at Cashel may be those still extant at Exeter Cathedral or those which formerly existed at Hereford Cathedral.¹¹⁶

By the closing decades of the twelfth century the style, metamorphosed by local taste, was widely distributed in the Gaelic

¹¹² The most useful compendium of Norman and Anglo-Norman architectural detail remains V. Ruprich-Robert, *L'architecture normande* (2 vols, Paris 1884/9). For a recent analysis see Eric Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England* (Oxford 2000).

¹¹³ See, for example, Baltinglass Abbey, county Wicklow: T. O'Keeffe, 'Diarmait Mac Murchada and Romanesque Leinster: four twelfth-century churches in context', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 127 (1997) 52-79, at pp. 71-7.

¹¹⁴ N. Cameron, 'The Romanesque sculpture of Dunfermline Abbey: Durham versus the vicinal', *The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions* 14 (1986) 118-23; E. Cambridge, 'The architectural context of the Romanesque cathedral at Kirkwall', in *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen 1988), pp. 111-26.

¹¹⁵ R. Stalley, 'Three Irish buildings with West Country origins', *The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions* 4 (1978) 62-80; T. O'Keeffe, 'Lismore and Cashel: reflections on the beginnings of Romanesque architecture in Munster', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 124 (1994) 118-52.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

world.¹¹⁷ The patronage of Diarmait Mac Murchada had been instrumental in the spread of this style into southeastern Ireland in the middle of the twelfth century,¹¹⁸ while its spread across the Midlands, Thomond, and Connaught in the century's second half was clearly facilitated by the support of Ó Conchobair and Ó Briain overkings.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the most energetic of the Gaelic patrons of new churches in the twelfth century was an Ó Briain: Domnall Mór, overking of Munster 1168–94, was involved in the foundation of five, and possibly six, Cistercian monasteries and the building or rebuilding of cathedrals at Limerick, Killaloe, and Cashel.¹²⁰

The crucial ecclesiastical site in Gaelic Scotland, in so far as we can say that there is one, is Iona. The architecture which survives there suggests that the island's masons and patrons were at least conscious of architectural developments in Ireland. A small pre-twelfth-century church known as 'St Columba's Shrine'¹²¹ is certainly of 'Irish type': it is an extremely rare example outside Ireland of a church with *antae* (projections of the side-walls past the end-walls). The small St Oran's Chapel has a western doorway in a Romanesque style comparable with that found in Ireland,¹²² although one of the arch-rings of the door has a row of heads which may be local versions of the so-called 'beak-head', a classic device of Anglo-Norman Romanesque sculptors.¹²³ The ruin of the Augustinian nunnery which was founded on Iona about 1200¹²⁴ possesses several late Romanesque and early Gothic features with Irish parallels, among which are clearstorey-windows placed above the piers (rather than the arches) of the nave-arcade, quoin-shafts on the exterior eastern corners of the church, string-courses which rise and plunge for decorative effect, and

¹¹⁷ Curiously, church-builders in the ecclesiastical province of Armagh seem to have had no more than a fleeting familiarity with the style: T. O'Keeffe, 'Romanesque as metaphor: architecture and reform in twelfth-century Ireland', in *Seanchas. Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin 2000), pp. 313-22.

¹¹⁸ O'Keeffe, 'Diarmait Mac Murchada'.

¹¹⁹ Their patronage has been discussed in detail by O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*.

¹²⁰ His patronage has been discussed by T. Garton, 'A Romanesque doorway at Killaloe', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 134 (1981) 31-57.

¹²¹ RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, IV.42, 52.

¹²² Other West-Highland churches tend to have southern, not western, doors (Dunbar, 'The medieval architecture', p. 62).

¹²³ F. Henry & G. Zarnecki, 'Romanesque arches decorated with human and animal heads', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd series, 20/21 (1957/8) 1-34 + plates 1-15.

¹²⁴ RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, IV.152-79, no. 5.

the use of lighter-coloured stone for the internal and external surrounds of windows and doors. Comparatively little early fabric survives of the Benedictine abbey founded on Iona about 1200, but its string-courses and wide-splayed windows can certainly be paralleled in Ireland. The idea is not inconceivable that central and western Ulster provided masons for both the Benedictine and Augustinian communities at Iona.¹²⁵ It has also been suggested that Saddell Abbey (Kintyre), the first of the Cistercian houses founded in western Scotland and colonised from Mellifont, the first of the Irish houses, may have had Irish masons employed in the making of some of its carved stonework.¹²⁶

Iona certainly exerted strong influence on the shaping of western Scotland's regional traditions of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. This is apparent, for example, in the windows of the Gothic chapel at Dunstaffnage, erected in the second quarter of the thirteenth century.¹²⁷ More striking still is the early thirteenth-century east window of Killean parish-church:¹²⁸ most of the devices used on major Romanesque and early Gothic windows in the two monastic houses at Iona make an appearance here, while the use of so-called Romanesque 'beak-head' ornament suggests that the mason also looked at St Oran's Chapel.

The number of new churches built across the Gaelic world seems, however, to have decreased in the thirteenth century. In

¹²⁵ This suggestion has been made with respect to the abbey (*ibid.*, IV.267, n. 105), but it is more appropriate to the nunnery, and it might also be noted that the nave of the Anglo-Norman church of St Nicholas in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, had arcading comparable with that of the nunnery at Iona. Furthermore, early examples of the West-Highland tradition of sepulchral sculpture – K.A. Steer & J. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh 1977) – have eastern Ulster parallels of early thirteenth-century date (RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, IV.26 and 268, n. 132). St German's Cathedral at Peel on Mann was started in the twelfth century, but it was substantially enlarged to become a Gothic church in the early thirteenth century. The bishop under whom the enlargement took place, Simon, hailed from Argyll, but the new architecture bears a close resemblance to the Cistercian abbey of Grey, County Down, founded by John de Courcy, lord of Ulster, to whom Affreca, daughter of King Godred II of Mann, was married (McDonald, *The Kingdom*, pp. 208-9). Regarding parallels in Ulster for West-Highland effigial sculpture, we might note that the effigy on the late fourteenth-century O'Cahan tomb at Dungiven, County Londonderry, can be compared with items of sculpture at Iona: see the new assessment by T. E. McNeill, 'The archaeology of Gaelic lordship', in *Gaelic Ireland*, edd. Duffy *et al.*, pp. 349-51.

¹²⁶ Dunbar, 'The medieval architecture', p. 40; see RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, I.140-5, no. 296. Rushen Abbey on Mann, originally Savignac but later Cistercian, was colonised from Furness in Cumbria, and there is little hint of any Irish connexion in its now fragmentary remains (McDonald, *The Kingdom*, pp. 217-18).

¹²⁷ RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, II.124-9, no. 243.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.129-38, no. 287.

western Scotland a new cathedral was built at Lismore,¹²⁹ but its long, aisleless church suggests relative diocesan poverty. Substantial alterations were planned for the abbey at Iona in the last third of the thirteenth century,¹³⁰ but these were also abandoned.

The patronage of new monastic houses also decelerated in Gaelic Ireland after the first quarter of the thirteenth century. This may, in part, have been a response to the new circumstances of cohabitation on the island with Anglo-Normans, but we should also recognise how comprehensively the twelfth-century reform-movement had already populated Ireland with new monastic houses, especially of Cistercians and Augustinians, leaving few resources for more new foundations. However, the early decades of the thirteenth century saw the erection of some interesting buildings west of the Shannon, many of them associated directly with, or at least built with the acquiescence of, Cathal Croibhdhearg Ó Conchobhair, the Anglo-Norman-supported overking of Connaught from 1195 to 1224. The principal works include the Cistercian abbey of Knockmoy, county Galway, the Augustinian abbey of Ballintober, county Mayo, and the Augustinian priory-church (known as O'Hyne's Church) at Kilmacduagh, county Galway. Although the Gothic style had been introduced into eastern Ireland by the Anglo-Normans by the time of Cathal's accession, the buildings which I have mentioned here are essentially late Romanesque.

The transmission of stylistic ideas across political and ethnic boundaries in mediaeval Ireland is an issue which has not been explored: we know that ideas generated in the colonial lands after 1200 did penetrate the Gaelic-Irish world, but we know little of the processes of transmission. Some works of architecture in the thirteenth century were essentially shared projects, and so the designations 'Gaelic-Irish' and 'colonial' have little analytical value. An exceptionally good demonstration of this is the Dominican friary at Athenry, county Galway. Founded in 1241 by Meiler de Bermingham, within a century it had its refectory, chapter-house, dormitory, and 'scholar-house' erected under the patronage of four different Gaelic-Irish lords, and a 'great guest-chamber', a Lady-

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, II.156-63, no. 267.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.23-4.

Chapel, and part of a tower erected under the patronage of three scions of colonial families.¹³¹

Athenry possesses windows with so-called ‘English Decorated Style’ tracery, even in those parts of the complex erected under Gaelic-Irish patronage. Tracery seems to have held a particular interest for native patrons, and their craftsmen sometimes excelled at experimenting with the Decorated-Style repertoire and, less obviously, with the repertoire of the next English Gothic style, the Perpendicular.¹³² The architecture itself remained as modest in the later Middle Ages as it had been for many centuries previously, the exception being the friary-architecture of the Franciscan communities of fifteenth-century western Ireland.¹³³

It is unfortunate that little remains of the non-sculptural decoration, furnishings, and altar-plate of Gaelic-Irish churches. Shrines or reliquaries associated with churches have had the best survival-rate, thanks in part to their custody within the same families over many generations.¹³⁴ The shrines of the twelfth century are especially spectacular: they include the Cross of Cong, made in 1124 to house a portion of the True Cross, the Shrine of St Patrick’s Bell, made about the same time to encase a bronze bell associated with the saint, and the Shrine of St Lachtín’s Arm, made in the early twelfth century in the shape of the corporeal relic which it was intended to contain. New shrines were executed later in the Middle Ages, as – for example – the *Domhnach Airgid*, made around 1350 at the behest of the abbot of Clones, county Monaghan, to contain a gospel-book of eighth- or ninth-century date. These later mediaeval shrines have decorative devices which indicate clearly that the artists and their patrons were looking back to their native cultural heritage. If the shrines and reliquaries represent continuity with the pre-colonial past, the effigial sculpture¹³⁵ which survives at some Gaelic-Irish

¹³¹ R.A.S. Macalister, ‘The Dominican church at Athenry’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 43 [6th series, 3] (1913) 197-222; M. Blake, ‘The abbey at Athenry’, *Journal of the Galway Historical and Archaeological Society* 2 (1902) 65-90.

¹³² O’Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland*, pp. 148-53.

¹³³ See C. Mooney, ‘Franciscan architecture in pre-Reformation Ireland’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 85 (1955) 133-73; 86 (1956) 125-69; 87 (1957) 1-38, 103-24.

¹³⁴ A recent account, with illustrations, is that of Raghnaill Ó Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries of the Middle Ages* (Dublin 1994).

¹³⁵ See John Hunt, *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture, 1200–1600. A Study of Irish Tombs, with Notes on Costume and Armour* (2 vols, Dublin 1974).

foundations is clearly a conceptual borrowing from the colonial world: the effigies of, for example, Feidhlimidh Ó Conchobhair at Roscommon and Conchobar Ó Briain at Corcomroe, county Clare, both carved around 1300, were manifestly executed in imitation of what was appearing in colonial workshops. As tomb-sculpture it is, by any standards, fairly crude; when the Gaelic-Irish workshops produced first-rate tomb-sculpture, as in the sixteenth century, it was often for patrons who would usually be described as Anglo-Irish.

In Scotland, Iona remained a centre of architectural and sculptural innovation into the late Middle Ages, and there continued to be stylistic affinities between its buildings and contemporary Irish structures.¹³⁶ The extensive rebuilding of its abbey-church in the middle of the fifteenth century was undertaken by masons who, perhaps long out of practice on projects of such a scale, took considerable inspiration from the earlier work at the site. Consciousness of earlier stylistic tradition seems also to have informed new building work at Ardchattan in Loarn¹³⁷ where the angle-shafts used on the external corners of the new choir replicated those of the original thirteenth-century building. The rich sculptural tradition of late mediaeval (but pre-sixteenth-century) Gaelic Scotland – manifest in grave-slabs, tombs and effigies, and free-standing crosses,¹³⁸ as well as in the architectural sculpture of Iona – reflects a similar fascination with the past: the motifs are a mixture of influences from local and international Romanesque and Gothic, as well as more ancient Pictish and Scandinavian, stylistic traditions.

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I have discussed only selections of the themes and materials which are of interest to the archaeological study of the Gaelic world in the

¹³⁶ RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll*, IV.24. The name of a mason of Donegal-extraction but domiciled in western Scotland – Domhnall Ó Brolcháin – is even preserved on a capital (*ibid.*, IV.27). Another Irish mason's name – Maol Seachlainn Ó Cuinn, of Antrim-extraction – is preserved on an effigial sculpture at Iona, as well as at Oronsay Priory on the cloister-arcade and on the Oronsay (or MacDuffie) Cross (*ibid.*, V.230-54, no. 386).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, II.95-115, no. 217. Ardchattan, founded about 1230, is a rare example of a foundation of the Valliscaulian Order; indeed, Scotland possesses the only three houses of this strict congregation to have been founded outside France.

¹³⁸ Steer & Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture*.

central and late Middle Ages, and the discussion can be no more than a pot-boiler until such time as this field is paid the attention which is its due.

I suggest, however, that a central problem in the development of an archaeology of the Gaelic world between the tenth and the seventeenth century is neither a scarcity of data (although more data, particularly of a material-culture nature, are certainly needed) nor the relatively small number of projects with carefully considered research-agenda but rather the underdevelopment of a general philosophy of mediaeval archaeology itself. Although archaeology is a discipline with a very long tradition of introspection about methods, relatively few archaeologists dealing with historical periods reflect specifically on the implications of having written sources contemporary with the archaeological remains, or on the different strategies used within each discipline to interpret these resources.¹³⁹ In consequence, interpretations of archaeological evidence of historical date are generally contingent on the historical matrix, and it is not unusual to find it implied in the literature that the value of archaeology in such historical periods is its 'potential ... to illuminate historical records'.¹⁴⁰ It is incumbent on us to recognise, first of all, that archaeological and historical source-materials tell us different things, even when they relate to the same phenomena, so that, when one is missing, the other is not an adequate replacement. Secondly, we must recognise that the material remains themselves can be understood as constituting a form of text: just as chroniclers chose their words and arranged them according to rules of grammar and genre, potters and builders chose their material and arranged it in configurations intelligible to those for whom their products were intended. The legibility of 'material text' to archaeologists is contingent, then, on some understanding of the grammatical rules by which pottery-forms or window-types had signifying value. However similar were some institutions of the Gaelic world in the twelfth and still in the sixteenth century, some of the cultural practices of the Gaelic peoples had changed very radically during the intervening

¹³⁹ John Moreland is among the exceptions: see his 'Method and theory in medieval archaeology in the 1990s', *Archeologia Medievale* 18 (1991) 7-42, 'The Middle Ages, theory, and Post-Modernism', *Acta Archaeologica* 68 (1997) 163-82, and *Archaeology and Text* (London 2001).

¹⁴⁰ Armit, *Skye and the Western Isles*, p. 206.

period, and archaeology, the discipline, is charged with investigation of those cultural practices through their material expressions.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ I have great pleasure in acknowledging Professor David Dumville, both for honouring me with the invitation to give the Quiggin Memorial Lecture for 1999 and for offering his customary hospitality during my stay in Cambridge.

Bibliography of suggested reading

A. Inventories

County-inventories published by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland provide basic raw material, but neither series is complete, even for the formerly Gaelic parts of the two countries.

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- Armit, Ian, *The Archaeology of Skye and the Western Isles* (Edinburgh 1996)
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C. Histories of Ethnicity and Cultural Identity

- Broun, Dauvit, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge 1999)
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