

or peasant houses. They seem to avoid the term 'nucleation', and they prefer circumlocutions such as 'the overall form crystallised by the eleventh and twelfth centuries'. Their misunderstanding of the term 'drage' leads them into an unnecessary speculation about the villagers' use of barley.

This report marks a useful interim stage in our understanding of Stratton. Now the accumulated data can be used to devise a clear picture of the settlement's development with plans of each period which select the most important features. Such a study ought to give equal attention to all periods and not focus on the period before 1100.

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St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, North Yorkshire: Archaeological Investigations and Historical Context.

By Philip Rahtz[†] & Lorna Watts. 21 x 29 cm. x + 327 pp, 33 colour plates, 140 b&w pls and figs, 34 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021. ISBN 978-1-78969-482-6; epub: 978-1-78969-483-3. Price: £48.00 pb.

The isolated church of Kirkdale, in a stream-valley at the heart of Ryedale, is of national importance as regards two stages in its existence: in the eighth century, and then in the mid-eleventh. A project there during 1994–2014 was the culmination of Philip Rahtz's brilliant career as an excavator and interpreter of early medieval sites. While the excavations were on a small scale, they yielded some very significant results. We owe their publication now to the hard and devoted work of his widow, Lorna Watts, who completed the project in sometimes very difficult circumstances, and has made a splendid job of it.

Kirkdale was clearly an important minster during the Northumbrian golden age. It could be the place that Bede calls *Cornu Vallis*, but is otherwise undocumented before the 1050s, and so assessment of its early status depends on the material evidence. Small trenches in fields north and south of the church offered tantalising hints of a precinct, containing structures, which extended along the stream-valley. Fragments of earlier footings under the standing church walls could represent a seventh- to eighth-century church (with tenuous evidence for some kind of late Roman presence in the background). More conclusive is the spectacular pair of eighth-century carved grave-slabs from shrine-type monuments of outstanding quality and importance. The excavations now add a fragment of a reticella glass rod and a lead plate with an Old English inscription that perhaps includes the word 'bone-box'. These are all very exceptional items, and the authors reasonably argue that eighth-century Kirkdale had a strong role in memorialising the special dead. Whatever it was, it was an international and metropolitan place in the pre-Viking period and anything but 'remote' in a cultural sense. That point bears emphasis, since its location at the interface between the North Yorkshire Moors and the Vale of Pickering is comparable to that of the better-documented minster at Lastingham, whose eremitical remoteness is emphasised by Bede. In that cosmopolitan world, 'seclusion' was more symbolic than literal.

A stone church of the ninth or tenth century, perhaps with an eastern apse, was apparently rebuilt once and then destroyed by fire. It was probably after this disaster that Orm Gamalsson 'had it newly built from the ground for Christ and St Gregory' during 1055–65, as he famously boasts in the sundial inscription over the south door. Orm's church – a key building for immediately pre-Conquest English Romanesque – can now be more confidently defined as the nave with west and south doorways, the chancel arch and chancel, a north-east porticus and (just possibly) a north aisle.

The yield of significant data from this unfunded project, sustained by the enthusiasm of the excavators and local residents, exceeds that from many much larger ones. The report is straightforward, easily used, and provides all the necessary evidence. It passes the acid test for excavation reports in setting out the facts in an objective and non-dogmatic fashion and in suggesting interpretations while leaving the door open for different ones.

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Garranes. An Early Medieval Royal Site in South-West Ireland. By William O'Brien & Nick Hogan. 21 x 30 cm. x + 386 pp, 379 colour and b&w pls, figs and tables. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2021. ISBN 978-1-78969-919-7; e-pdf: 978-1-78969-920-3. Price: £45.00 hb. Open Access.

The name Garranes (properly Lisnacaheragh, the place-name of the site itself) will be familiar to every student of early medieval Ireland. Rare among ringforts in possessing a documented history of sorts relating to the period between the sixth and tenth centuries AD, it can be provisionally identified as the *caput* of the Éóganacht Raithlenn, a branch of the Munster Éóganacht dynasty. The large multivallate site was first investigated by Ó'Riordáin in the 1930s, when its 'royal' status was archaeologically affirmed by both the complexity of the defences and the artefacts recovered; these revealed the substantial scale and range of industrial activity, especially skilled bronze-working. This impressive tome combines the results of field research in 1990–92 and 2011–18 with a reappraisal of the earlier work, plus other studies setting the site archaeology in a broader historical and landscape context. The volume includes different types of research outputs, moving from discussions of dynasties to more conventional excavation reports, where the results are published in some detail – rather more than is necessary perhaps, though it was good to see the full colour finds illustrations.

In archaeological terms, the site narrative at Lisnacaheragh is not greatly changed. Ó'Riordáin excavated a fairly narrow N–S transect across the site and the entrance, as well as a substantial part of the north-east quadrant. There was no direct evidence for housing, but part of a roundhouse inside the north-western quadrant was identified in O'Donnell's work in 1990–92, which also produced the first radiocarbon dates, indicating occupancy during the fifth and sixth centuries. The rest of this structure was revealed in 2017

excavations just to the south; no hearth was identified, but truncation by post-medieval cultivation could be the cause. Further radiocarbon dates confirmed fifth- to seventh-century usage. The lack of pre-modern dateable material beyond this period is notable.

Much of the volume addresses new work at other enclosures in the immediate vicinity, involving extensive geophysical survey as well as excavation. This identified early medieval activity and possibly a roundhouse at Lisnamanroe, with radiocarbon dates here endorsing settlement between the fifth and sixth centuries. At Lisheenagreine, a double-ditched enclosure was explored, with an internal souterrain (first identified in the nineteenth century) and a large pit; radiocarbon dates support site usage mostly in the eighth to tenth century, though two dates generated were of the fifth- to sixth-century. Small-scale excavations were carried out at two further enclosures and a souterrain, but without major results.

Diverse papers are collected as 'specialist studies' and include an edited text of the medieval poem on Ráith Raithleann; a review (not obviously connected to the sites) of the tenth- to fourteenth-century political history of the region; a Bayesian analysis of the radiocarbon dates available, demonstrating probable contemporaneity of settlement; a short paper on imported pottery offering a useful update on this material in Ireland; an analysis of the metal-working residues from the recent excavations; and some pollen studies relating to the region's prehistory. The final contributions offer wider reviews, drawing mostly on recent syntheses of Irish early medieval archaeology, although one of these usefully evaluates map evidence for the disappearance of ringforts in early modern times.

The academic strength and integrity of the work are substantial, but the amount of 'overview' could probably have been slimmed down a bit. Occasional overlap occurs between chapters, and not all of the material seems strictly relevant to the archaeological focus. Colour illustrations are used lavishly throughout and presentation is to a high standard in terms of quality of design, etc., but the text as a whole might have benefitted from some kind of 'executive summary' at the beginning and a few more fingerposts at key places. It would have been interesting also to reflect on the relatively short timespan of site use when compared with the longevity of the monuments, still named and known in the landscape as places over a thousand years after they were abandoned.

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Ireland Encastellated, AD 950–1550. Insular Castle-Building in its European Context. By Tadhg O'Keeffe. 16 x 24 cm. 240 pp, 99 b&w pls and figs. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2021. ISBN 978-1-84682-863-8. Price: €45.00 hb.

Castles have always somehow seemed naturally 'at home' in Irish medieval settlement studies, given that so many formed components within a predominantly non-nucleated rural settlement pattern — alongside other forms of secure, defended or enclosed monuments such

as ringforts, raths and cashels — that had ancient origins. Recent years have seen Irish castle studies booming, with several works of synthesis, fresh studies of individual sites and numerous PhD theses refreshing the subject. The key achievement of Tadhg O'Keeffe's ideas-led volume is to offer something entirely new by shifting the prism of castellology to consider the interrelationship between insular traditions of defence and the wider European context of castle-building. Covering the period between the tenth and sixteenth centuries, the text stresses both how sites in Ireland deserve greater recognition on the wider European stage and how developments in fortress building on the island, both before and after the Anglo-Norman conquest and colonisation, can be viewed as part of the European mainstream rather than as traditions peripheral to it.

The volume's style and tone are as distinctive as its scope. Discursive, argumentative at times and always lively, ideas bubble away through an expertly constructed narrative. Innovative thinking is everywhere: prominent, for example, is detailed exploration of the shared ground between traditions of church-building and fortification-building, in a way not often addressed due to the compartmentalised nature of scholarship. In this way and others, the volume opens up new ways of looking at castles that have much wider — indeed, perhaps universal — applicability, with its implications stretching far beyond the island of Ireland.

The meat of the volume is contained in four key chapters sandwiched between an Introduction (Chapter 1) and Conclusion (Chapter 6). Chapter 2 has as its focus 'private' fortification in the periods immediately before and after the Anglo-Norman conquest, in so doing collating a wealth of evidence for pre-Norman 'encastellation'. Here and elsewhere, O'Keeffe does a great job of speaking to a non-Irish audience: the text is especially good on navigating critically and circumspectly through the complex medieval and modern terminology around these sites. Chapter 3 explores rectangular donjons, including exemplars at Trim and Maynooth, while Chapter 4 looks at 'medieval modernism' (high medieval trends) and Chapter 5 considers a 'late medieval epilogue'. The text concludes with some reflections for future research.

Within this chronological narrative, potted case studies focus on sites and their associated landscapes worthy of wider international recognition. Two examples that leap out are Roscommon castle, Co. Roscommon, where O'Keeffe favours a less explicitly colonial explanatory framework for the castle's construction and a less scientific analysis of its form than is usual, instead placing emphasis on its watery wider landscape, which is seen as having ancient ceremonial associations. At Balymoon, Co. Carlow, an unfinished (early?) fourteenth-century castle defined by a plan of continuous ranges around a central rectangular courtyard suggests forward-looking thinking around castle design that is related to planning for an unusually complex medieval household. For settlement historians and archaeologists a key area of interest will be in O'Keeffe's emphasis that castles and tower-houses were themselves settlements and intrinsic elements of the non-nucleated settlement pattern, rather than providing insight into seigneurial re-shaping of the landscape through planning.