

Dunshaughlin Crannog

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I live quite near this crannog, so heres a bit more information on it :)

A crannog was a lake dwelling, a type of settlement quite common in Ireland up to the year 1000. The word comes from the Irish word crann (tree) since wood was one of the main materials used. First piles of stones were laid on the lake bed, and then wooden stakes were driven into the stones around the perimeter to form a wall. Then mud, earth, wood and more stones were placed inside the perimeter until the surface came above the level of the lake, sometimes bridges were also used for access and dug out canoes have also been found. Reconstruction Co. Clare, Ireland

The Lagore site was excavated by American students in the 1930's where they made a grisly discovery, “during the building of the crannog it seems a massacre took place; the victims bodies were cut to pieces and scattered about; the backs of their heads were chopped off and left behind but the rest of the skulls were carried away’. The crannog is situated about a mile slightly north east of Dunshaughlin at the eastern end of the old lake bed. It was first found in 1839 when the drain which cuts across the site was deepened, the following year this was reported to the Royal Irish Academy: “about a mile to the east of Dunshaughlin near the margin of a cut away bog, is a circular mound, slightly raised above the surrounding plain, its highest central part being eight feet above the margin and the circumference being 520 feet. A few years ago labourers, while cleaning the stream-way, discovered several bones protruding from its sides; and in May 1839 the quantity of bones found in the drain was so great that a further examination was made, when it was discovered that the greater part of the mound was composed of the remains of animals". Cleaning of the river and turf cutting

In 1848 and 1849 cleaning of the 'river' and turf-cutting again brought the site to notice. Some details were published in a book called "The Lake Dwellings of Ireland" by W.G. Wood-Martin in 1886. It was to be almost another fifty years until the site was excavated by the Harvard Archaeological Expedition in Ireland between 1934 and 1936. In the interval of nearly a century since Wilde's first investigations a considerable part of the site had been dug over but the Harvard excavations found much of interest for which dates may be suggested from historical sources. The river leading off the bog seems to have been deepened by man, I have heard reports from farmers that in order to drain the land they had to "blast" the rock out. In the picture below the river flows from the left to the right, so the erosion pattern looks quite odd.

The river is only about 3-6 inches in places, but it is about 6-8 foot below ground level (as shown below). Just out of frame to the right is a large mound, approximately 8 foot across and 8 foot high, it seems quite obvious that they tried to drain the lake by cutting this river deeper than it originally was and they piled the soil they removed from the river onto the bank.

Lagore -Loch Gabhair, the lake of the goat - is mentioned in Irish historical manuscripts and documents as the seat of local kings between 785 and 969 and references to the 'island of Lagore' leave no doubt but that the crannog was their residence. But the history of the site may be traced back long before 785. Many Irishmen boast descent from kings. The claim is not always justified, but it is not always preposterous, for Ireland had a redundancy of royal blood. In many parts of the country tribal sub-kings and provincial over-kings remained in power until the end of the sixteenth century.' Thus begins the classic 1973 study, Irish Kings and High-Kings by Francis John Byrne. The author estimates that 'there were probably no less than 150 kings in the country at any given date between the fifth and twelfth centuries. Since the total population was probably well under half a million this multiplicity of royalty is all the more remarkable'. There was a hierarchy of kings starting with the ri, who was head of a tuath, and rising to various over- and high-kings, who claimed suzerainty over a confederacy of tuaths. There were at one time five major kingdoms in Ireland, known as Cuig Chuige na hEireann. Meath, from Mide meaning 'middle, was one of these and coincided roughly with the present diocese. The disintegration of Ulster and other changes led to the divisions as shown in the map about the year 800. Lagore was within the domain of the Southern Ui Neill kings. This dynasty was descended from the sixth century king Diannait MacCerbaiill. Two of his sons were named Colman and Aed. The two great branches of this dynasty called after them were the Clann Colmain Moir, also known as the Maelseachnaill kings -who ruled from Lough Ennell over Mide, modern day Westmeath; and the Sil nAedo Slaine, who were the kings of Brega, which corresponds roughly to today's county of Meath as well as parts of Louth and north Dublin. There were in fact two Bregas, which means 'the heights': the kings of North Brega were resident in Knowth while it was in Lagore that the kings of South Brega were based. The two Bregas were intensely hostile to each other. Below these again were several vassal kings and-tribes. Only a few miles away from Lagore was, of course, Tara, the most famous seat of Irish royalty. By the time of the first mention of the kings of Lagore - late eighth century -Tara had long been abandoned as a royal site. Indeed the legend of the cursing of Tara by St.,Ruadan of Lorrha thus precipitating its downfall dates from the middle of the sixth century. There is in fact up to then little evidence of a centralised monarchy and the ancient law tracts do not refer to a High-King with which Tara was so long associated. It was in the ninth century that the first attempts to create such a myth appeared. By then the Kingship of Tara was of mere titular importance as Tara maintained a certain cultic significance and mystique. When the Vi Neill dynasty assumed the role of the most powerful kings in Ireland they felt that they could aggrandize their claims by referring to themselves as High Kings Qf Tara. So the reality was that while the Sil nAedo Slaine owned the abandoned

site of Tara their kings lived in places such as Raith Airthir (Oristown), Knowth and Lagore. But the kings of Lagore never rose above the status of local kings since almost all of the high-kings of the Southern Vi Neill came from the Clann Colmain Moir or occasionally from the kings of North Brega in Knowth. Diarmait Ruanaid (died 664) is the first high-king mentioned in the annals to have had a residence in Lagore. He was the grandson of Diarmait MacCeraill, who was the king of Tara at the time of the alleged cursing by Ruadan and who has been mentioned earlier as the progenitor of the Southern Vi Neill dynasty. A story is told that in 651 Diarmait Ruanaid's nephews were crushed to death in a mill by a certain Maelodran while they were on a foray into Leinster. Diarmait gathered his armies to attack the Leinstermen but Maelodran set off alone to surrender himself. It is recorded that he came to Lagore where he was forgiven by Diarmait and became his battle-champion. The next reference to Lagore is that another nephew of Diarmait, Fin-nechta Fledach, defeated the men of Leinster near Lagore in 676. Neither Diarmait's son, Cerna, ch Sotal (died 663), nor his grandson, Niall (died 701), are referred to as kings but Niall's son, Conall Grant (died 718), was known as the king of South Brega, a title which was interchangeable with king of Lagore. One of Conall's brothers was the high king Fogartach (died 723); Fogartach's son Fergus (died 751) was also king of South Brega; while Fergus' son, Maelduin (died 785) is the first of the family to be called king of Lagore. All this implies that from about the middle of the seventh century, when Diarmait Ruanaid arrived there, the crannog at Lagore was a place of importance, and then by the early part of the next century it had passed into the hands of local rulers descended from the high kings. The next event of importance in the history of Lagore occurred in 850 during the rebellion of Cinaedh MacConaing - a minor king of Ciannachta in the Duleek area - against the high king of the southern Ui Neill, when the 'island of Lagore' was burnt 'level with its floor'. This Cinaedh also burned the church at nearby Trevet with two hundred and sixty people inside. Revenge was gained the next year, however, when the high king, Maelseachnaill, with the help of the then king of Lagore, Tighernach, defeated Cinaedh and drowned him in the river Nanny. Another destruction of the crannog took place in 934 when it was looted by Amlaibh ua h-Imair, probably Olaf, son of the Norse king of Dublin. This may have brought on the decline of Lagore as a place of importance, for with the death of Beollan Mac Ciarmmc, king of Lagore, in 969 the site disappears altogether from the historical record. The decline was accentuated shortly afterwards when Maelseachnaill MacDomhnaill of Mide extended his power eastwards and Brega – and so Lagore -lost whatever autonomy it had hitherto enjoyed. Mide was now into Meath, so to speak. This Maelseachnaill, incidentally, was to become the undisputed high king of Ireland from 980 to 1002. Three times he raided the Norse city of Dublin and imposed tribute and it was one of these victorious Mide forays which was the occasion of the celebration of the Dublin Millennium in 1988! Although deposed by Brian Boru, Maelseachnaill returned as high king from 1014 -after the battle of Clontarf -to 1022.

This then is the historical evidence regarding Lagore as gleaned from the annals and the manuscripts. All these names maybe confusing and indeed there may be doubt as to whether some of them were historic personages at all. The happenings described should be viewed in the context of contemporary Irish society between the seventh and tenth centuries which comes across as a time of continuous warfare between kings and dynasties of varying status. Historians of this period are largely dependent for their source material on the annals later written up by monks. For the most part these are a chronicle of plunder, pillage, rape, war, cattle raids, destruction and death involving internecine strife among the Gaelic kings themselves or against the Danes. In this regard they differed little from today's newspapers in their tendency to highlight the bad news above the good. The reliability of the annals are sometimes open to question since they were written some centuries after the events they reported and the writers may sometimes be seeking to give a political boost to a particular tribe or dynasty by exaggerating or eulogising their roles in past events. Despite these reservations it is interesting that the historic evidence from the annals is strongly backed up by the findings from the archaeological excavations. This dates the founding of the crannog to the late seventh or early eighth century - close enough to the first historic reference in 651. Both sets of evidence also coincide fairly well regarding the end of the crannog - the last mention from the historical records dates from 969 while the archaeologists estimated the demise of Lagore as late tenth or early eleventh century. The archaeological findings tell us something about the lifestyle and culture of the people inhabiting the Dunshaughlin area between the seventh and tenth centuries. The huge amount of bones found show that farming was carried on. These bones were mainly of cattle and to a lesser extent of sheep, pigs and horses. Dogs, cats and fowl were also kept. Interestingly the bones of wolves were also discovered. Among the agricultural tools were a heavy iron ploughshare and a coulter as well as some sickles. The growing of wheat was indicated by the finding of wheat straw among the materials used to build the island. No other cultivated plants were detected. . From the point of view of crafts there is evidence of bronze-working from the findings of pieces of copper-ore. The indications are that this craft flourished in the seventh century, declined during the ninth but revived in the tenth. In contrast it seems that iron-working was more commonplace in the middle and later period when iron weapons and tools were made -perhaps a case of the weapons of war replacing the instruments of peace at the troubled times of Viking attacks? .~ Pottery was rare but glass-made objects were more evident. Most of the wooden objects taken from Lagore were household goods apart from the notable eight-oared dugout canoe now in the National Museum. Also found were shoes made from the skins of cattle as well as many scraps of leather and a wooden shoe last. Spinning and weaving were carried on as is evidenced by the finding of wooden spindles, spindlewhorls, fleece and animal hair. A bone dice indicates some form of game or amusement. A few remains of otter, deer, hare, fox and various birds suggest hunting but like many other crannogs -there is a surprising paucity of fish bones. Finally it is certain that the Lagore lake-dwellers were Christian: only a mile away was the church and monastery dating from St. Sechnall's time in the mid-fifth century and continuing in existence, as has been seen from the first chapter, into the twelfth century at least. This could scarcely have happened if the kings of the crannog were hostile pagans. .Many of the finds from the site , apart from the canoe are kept in the National Museum. These include spearheads, beads, pins and a fine bronze brooch engraved with Celtic interlaced work. McClenaghan makes this observation on the findings: "the great number of interesting finds from this crannog must have proved a source of considerable remuneration to some persons, so much

so that for a long time afterwards unscrupulous people tried to profit by selling fictitious finds of beads, bones and other antiquities; which they declared were found in this crannog. Thus they dragged the name of our town in the mire so that for a long time afterwards every faked or spurious antique was called 'a Dunshaughlin'. The site of the crannog can still be seen a few fields down off Lagore Road, a couple of miles outside the village but evidence of the extent of the lake comes right to the edge of the village.

But the visitor to the crannog site might be disappointed to be confronted by a mass of reeds and rushes in the marshy ground of Black Bog set amidst a landscape deserted except for sheep and cattle. Nearby the stagnant Broadmeadow River has almost come to a halt. The place where the archaeologists excavated in the wintry summers of 1934, 1935 and 1936 can be seen - what was once an elevated area is now a hollow and the earth which was removed now forms embankments all around. I have tried to locate the "crannog" there are approximately 4 different sites that I think may be it, all of the maps etc. locations but within a large distance. I did find some ridges that may have been from the excavations in the 1930's.

For More Information: [The Scottish Crannog Centre Reconstruction of a crannog.Channel 4 Time Team on Crannogs](#) [The Channel 4 Time Team on Crannogs.Channel 4 Time Team at Loch Migdale](#) [The Channel 4 Time Team excavation at Loch Migdale, January 2004.WikiPedia](#) [Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland A searchable database of archaeological sites in Scotland, including crannogs.](#)