

THE CLOGHER YELLOW LAYER

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The purpose of this note is to draw attention to a fine stratigraphic sequence at the later Iron Age (or, popularly, Early Christian) royal site at Clogher, Co. Tyrone, Ireland. The sequence is illustrated by the simplified section shown in Fig. 1, one of several comparable sections which spanned the relevant features.

A flat-bottomed ditch (the 'Ring-ditch') with a small external bank capped by a palisade, and possibly a small internal bank and massive palisade, enclosed an oval area of about 50 metres internal diameter. After a period of primary silting (9) occupation debris, 'layers' (more correctly layer complexes) (7) and (8) on Fig. 1, had filled the ditch to a depth of about half a metre when a thick sterile layer of boulder 'clay' (sand and stones) (6), was laid down. This layer, which we have nick-named the 'Clogher Yellow Layer', is consistently found wherever the ditch has been sectioned. Above this layer a thin occupation deposit, (5), was partly sealed by the construction of the bank, (3), of a Ringfort about 70 metres across internally. Further debris, (2), contemporary with the occupation of the Ringfort had built up against its revetment, (4), and even, (1), over its inner slope.

Layer (9), the silt, was sterile, but from layer (8) (which contained a fair amount of derivative rubble and produced a clearly derivative C14 date) came a fragment of what appears to be a 'Nauheim' variant (?) brooch, a tiny bronze dome-headed nail and the rim of a fine glass vessel with white trail. The last should date to around the 5th/6th centuries A.D. (Harden, 1968, 193), which would not be inconsistent with historical arguments for dating the digging of the ditch to the later 4th century A.D. The brooch and rubble we would take to be survivals from possibly extensive, but destroyed, earlier occupation.

Layer (7), was the richest. It produced the debris (mould fragments, crucibles, bronze droplets and bronze scrap) from a bronze-founder's workshop. The production included penannular brooches of the 'Irish developed-zoomorphic' class which should be dated to around the 6th century A.D. An uncleaned brooch terminal (cf. Kilbride-Jones, 1937, Fig. 9.29), a lead model for a brooch pin (cf. *ibid.* Fig. 22.65), and a finished brooch (cf. *ibid.* Fig. 12.33) came from this layer, and another brooch from elsewhere on the site.

Of further interest is the fact that the bronze scrap included a broken bracelet of 'Lydney' type (Wheeler, 1932, 82-3, cf. Fig. 17c), late 4th century, giving a valuable clue to the origin of the occupants of the site (this will be discussed elsewhere).

Layer (7) also produced 31 sherds of 4 types of imported amphorae, only two of which can yet be closely paralleled (Thomas, 1959, Bii and Bi, also found together at Garranes. Bii was found with Biii at Dalkey and alone at Reask. I am grateful to T. Fanning for the last site). At least 76 amphora sherds come from the site, of at least 6 types.

Layers (5), (2) and (1), separated from (7) by the 'Yellow Layer' (6), produced almost no debris from the brooch factory, and only one very abraded amphora sherd. They did, however, produce some 32 sherds of Thomas' (1959, 96ff.) class E jars, bowls, beakers and a lid (not demonstrably any jugs), out of 47 sherds (at least 11 vessels) from the site. None came from below the 'Yellow Layer'. Layer (2) also produced a hoard of iron objects (including a small sickle, a bunch of 'knife blanks', a pair of shears and a double-edged axe), and 2 bronze handpins, one of which seems to be an uncleaned new-casting. There was in addition a great deal of workshop debris from other working areas scattered over the site, producing bronzework and goldwork. It might be added that although the triangular crucibles of the earlier phase continued into the later, small round flat-bottomed crucibles only appeared in the later phase. (The flat-bottomed and triangular crucibles were also found with class E ware at Ballinderry 2, Lagore and Garranes.)

41 sherds of other fine wares were found, not yet securely identified and mostly unstratified (in relation to the 'Yellow Layer'). They included two foot rings of large bowls or jugs of sandy buff fabric; two fairly certain, but undistinctive, pieces of Thomas A ware and a possible further 11 sherds of a flat-bottomed small red dish which might be allied to A ware. 9 sherds, unfortunately all unstratified, of fine red ware beakers and bowls with internal glaze, purple, brown and greenish, are extremely reminiscent of Romano British glazed wares.

The purpose of the 'Yellow Layer' was almost certainly to level up the site prior to the massive rebuilding represented by the Ring-fort, particularly necessary where the Ring-fort bank overlay the partially filled Ring-ditch. It should be added that layer (5) appears to have been of quite short duration, perhaps no more than a year or so. There is no evidence that the deposition of the 'Yellow Layer' represented a chronological gap of any great length. On the contrary the evidence from the site as a whole suggests no long break in occupation between the digging of the Ring-ditch and the abandonment of the Ring-fort (not much later than 800 A.D.). Yet the layer does separate, consistently, the deposition of 'B' amphorae from that of 'E' and allied wares and therefore serves to underline the usefulness of the imported wares in dividing the native material into two phases of the mid-1st millennium. It has seemed likely for some time that this division based on the imported potteries would serve as a framework for the period in west Britain, and particularly in Ireland (Clogher, Garranes and Dalkey for instance spanning both parts, Lagore, Ballinderry, Garryduff for example in the latter only).

Clearly the date of the 'Yellow Layer', and thus of the division between these two phases, is of paramount importance. Three separate strands of information may be combined to provide a probable date-range, but the detailed arguments will be given elsewhere. Typologically the penannular brooches being manufactured in the (7) workshop suggest a date of 6th or very early 7th century. Stratigraphic analysis of the 10 Radiocarbon dates from the layers under discussion (for the method, Warner, 1976 with a refinement to be described elsewhere) suggests, after calibration, a 6th century date for the construction of the Ring-fort, and, therefore, for the laying down of the 'Yellow Layer'. Historically there are very strong reasons for ascribing the building of the Ring-fort to the sons of the Uí Cremthainn king Daimen Dam Argait, between A.D. 565 and about 600. In sum a date in the second half of the 6th century seems reasonable for the deposition of the yellow layer, and thus for the division between the importation of the 'B' ware and the 'E'.

KEY for Fig. 1

- (a) Turf, clean silt
 - (b) Gravelly silt
 - (c) Stoney sand and gravel
1. Occupation debris post-dating weathering of Ring-fort bank
 2. Occupation debris just post-dating construction of Ring-fort bank
 3. Ring-fort bank
 4. Inner revetment of Ring-fort bank
 5. Occupation debris just pre-dating construction of Ring-fort bank
 6. 'Yellow Layer'
 7. Layers of silt with occupation debris
 8. Occupation and destruction debris
 9. Primary silt in Ring-ditch

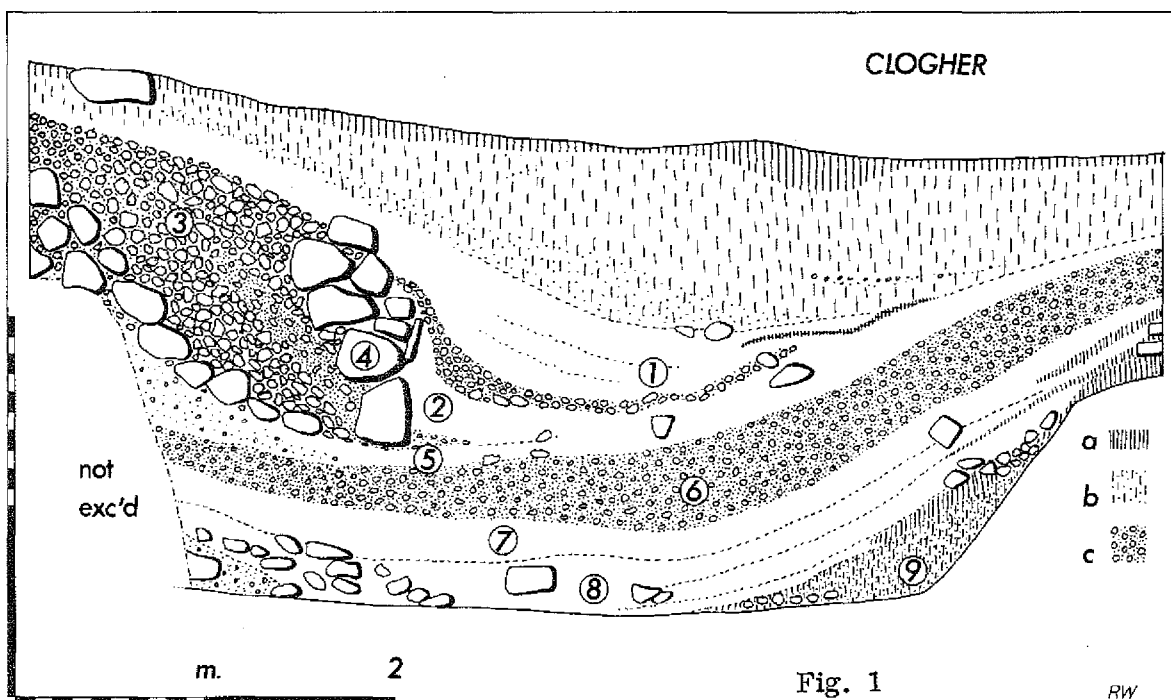


Table 1. Trench X only, to which section Fig. 1 relates

Layers	Amphora sherds	Bronze working debris	'E' sherds
1/2/5	-	2	4 (3+ vessels)
7	22 (3+ vessels)	475	0

Table 2. All Trenches

Layers or equivalent Date	Amphora sherds	'E' sherds
1/2/5	1	31 (11+ vessels)
7	47 (4+ vessels)	0
Whole site, including unstratified	76 (6+ vessels)	47 (11+ vessels)

We hope that our 'Yellow Layer' will be of some help to those working in this period and we will keep readers informed of any changes in this interpretation.

REFERENCES

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Ce bref article décrit l'importante séquence stratigraphique qui existe au fort Early Christian de Clogher, Co. Tyrone, en Irlande du Nord. En a démontré l'existence d'une couche supplémentaire située entre les deux couches qui contiennent respectivement l'une des amphores importées des pays méditerranéens, l'autre des pièces 'Class E'. Cette nouvelle couche s'est produite lorsque le 'Clogher Yellow Layer' s'est déposée sur le site, et elle date de la seconde moitié du sixième siècle.

Diese kurz Aufsatz beschreibt die wichtige stratigraphische Schichtenaufbau am Early Christian Fort von Clogher, Co. Tyrone, N. Ireland. Eine Lücke ist zwischen die Schichte demonstriert, die importierte mittelmeeerische Amphore und importierte Class 'E' Waren enthält. Diese Lücke kommt vor, wann der 'Clogher Yellow Layer' quer über der Stelle hintergelegt wurde, und ist zu der zweite Hälfte des sechsten Jahrhunderts datiert.