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Atlantic Currents

Essays on Lore, Literature and Language
Essays in honour of Séamas Ó Catháin

Sruthanna an Aigéin Thiar

Aistí ar Sheanchas, ar Litríocht agus ar Theanga
Aistí in onóir do Shéamas Ó Catháin



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CHAPTER TWENTY

'Minifundismo' and Rundale: Similar Complexes with Similar Origins?

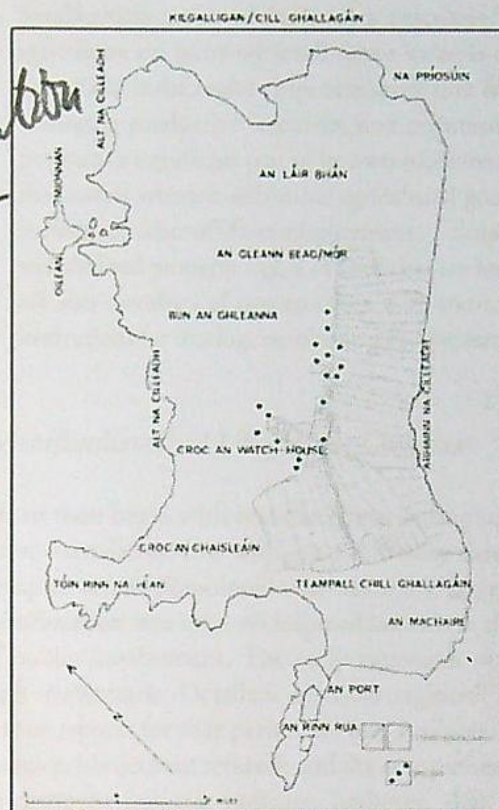
PATRICK O'FLANAGAN

Introduction

Many years ago, Séamas Ó Catháin and I collaborated on a project whose context was an Irish-speaking 'village' in Kilcommon Parish, in the barony of Erris. The product was a book entitled, *The Living Landscape: Kilgalligan, Erris, County Mayo*, and it was a study of how placenames functioned as a dimension of the geographical memory of a community (Figure 1).

Returning to that context but not specifically to that community, I would like to respond to some of the issues discussed by Yager in a series of articles and more recently by Slater and Flaherty. Kilgalligan was and is a 'rundale village' and Yager's work on, 'What was rundale and where did it come from?'¹ made me mull over my own field experiences and consider, once again, the vast literature on this topic going back to such writers as Evans, McCourt, and Buchanan.² In the late 1960s, I was preparing my PhD dissertation on Galicia, Spain and simultaneously working in North Mayo, Ireland. The Galicia that I encountered had some clear correspondences with Ireland in terms of its cultural landscapes and rural social structures. Galicia was then on the verge of significant change,³ and was then largely a world of subsistence farming known as *minifundismo*. This organisation of production was and is the antonym, in every respect, of *latifundismo*: both complexes are explained below.⁴ In Ireland by contrast, and somewhat earlier, a subsistence farming complex, known as *rundale*, was residual and principally confined to remote and upland areas, mainly, though not exclusively, in the west of Ireland and this essay is the principally concerned with western upland rundale. In their prime, both *minifundismo* and rundale defined most aspects of life for those involved in its delivery and those shackled to it by ownership or by rental arrangements. Since the mid nineteenth century in

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Ireland, those involved were always in a minority: in Galicia until recently, the vast mass of rural society were manacled to it. In Irish research not enough attention has been accorded the relationship between rundale and small farming communities. Less consideration has been given to comparisons between rundale and similar complexes on the continent of Europe including *minifundismo*.

Figure 20.1 The townland of Kilgalligan, Erris, County Mayo, showing striped farm land. [Source: S. Ó Catháin and P. O'Flanagan, *The Living Landscape, Kilgalligan, Erris, County Mayo*, Dublin, 1975]

This essay then represents a very preliminary inquiry. It is part of a wider study specifically related to *minifundismo* and rundale and the socio-territorial organisational elements sustained by them. Insofar as it is possible, I will attempt to compare and contrast the leading characteristics of the two production complexes in an effort to establish whether we are dealing with a process of Atlantic diffusion or independent development. In this analysis more space is given to *minifundismo*, as it has attracted less scholarly attention, even in Galicia. Space constraints curtail further comparisons and contrasts with other parts of Atlantic Europe. What we are dealing with are effectively two European smallholding contexts whose dimensions and contradictions have been addressed by many authors. The following general definition of smallholder is the best that I am aware of:

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Smallholders are rural cultivators practising intensive permanent diversified agriculture on relatively small farms in areas of dense population. The family household is the major corporate social unit for mobilising agricultural labour, managing productive resources, and organising consumption. The household produces a significant part of its own subsistence, and it generally participates in the market where it sells some agricultural goods as well as carrying on cottage industry or other off-farm employment . . . Smallholders have ownership or other well defined property rights in land that are long-term and also heritable. They are also members of communities with common property and accompanying institutions for sharing, monitoring and protecting such resources.⁵

'Minifundismo': A Ubiquitous Complex

Let us then begin with *minifundismo*, noting its recurring and most representative ingredients. It is with great difficulty that the apogee of this production complex can be pinpointed with accuracy. By apogee, I mean the period when *minifundismo* was most widespread and when there was a maximum threshold of public involvement. The early twentieth century appears to have been its high watermark. Detailed, credible regional agricultural and demographic census reports for that period are not available – even those for the 1970s lack veracity. Meticulous research and the comprehensive regional records of various government agencies indicate, however, that it was the ubiquitous system throughout Galicia and that it extended into northern Portugal,⁶ and El Bierzo in León.⁷ Like *latifundismo*, in parts of southern Iberia, *minifundismo* was the dominant mode of production and land use, and distinctive social structures were tied to its extraordinary architecture. *Latifundismo*, by contrast, is a production complex associated with Portuguese Alentejo and Spanish Andalucía. Its cardinal characteristics are holdings larger than 250ha, cereal monocultures, dry farming and very large clustered town-sized settlements. Abel Bouhier, *minifundismo*'s master interpreter, described what he encountered in Galicia before the 1960s as *Un vieux complexe agraire*. Today most of its primary structural features are cultural landscape *fossils*.⁸

Galicia is a cultural and, now, politically autonomous region of some 30,000 sq. km; with a population of 2.78 million (2006). It is slightly smaller than the Irish province of Munster but has almost treble its population. (Munster's 2006 population was 1.1 million and its area is 39,000 sq. km). Galicia possesses some of the most attractive, enduring and visually stunning

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cultural landscapes in Western Europe. It is currently experiencing a period of relentless and unremitting transformation.⁹ Many of its most alluring and attractive ingredients are now being smothered by the inexorable construction of modern urban roadside bungalows and apartment blocks and mass withdrawal from farming activities. In its heyday, its landscapes animated and sheltered a diverse and opulent popular culture.¹⁰ *Minifundist* agriculture has done much to shape its cultural landscapes.

Structural Ingredients

Holding size, fragmentation and their implications

Today *minifundismo* exists in Galicia only in residual form. It is and was always dominated by subsistence agricultural production with many family members working, full or part-time outside the farm. Today, farming is less marked by diversity in production and it is moving to more specialised monocultures in some areas. Many of its key structural ingredients no longer actively function, such as the intricate management of *agras/agros* detailed below.¹¹ Rural society is now reinforced by participation in non primary activities and overwhelmingly by social support programmes

Small pulverised and pulverising holdings were the order of the day up to recently and, in 1964 for example, a stunning 96 per cent of all farms in the Galician province of Pontevedra were less than five hectares in extent. Extreme fragmentation also has been a constant characteristic and, in work conducted by this writer in the early 1970s, the average number of parcels per holding was found to be 31, and the average, parcel or plot size was only a few square metres (Figure 20.2).

Productive Ingredients

Until recently intensive polyculture was the complex's leitmotif. Polyculture means that a farmer simultaneously grows many different crops, a practice that enhances biodiversity. The areas devoted to these crops are too minute for each product to be labelled a separate enterprise. Domestic food provision took precedence, and maize cultivation (irrigated or rain fed) ruled as the most salient land use. Like potatoes in Ireland, maize was adopted as a food crop gradually during the seventeenth century it had achieved mass acceptance during the eighteenth century.¹² Usually, irrigated kitchen crops and fruit farming formed a key constituent of most holdings. Very few animals, predominantly the *Rubia Gallega* cattle breed, were kept for multi-tasking: for haulage, ploughing, for

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milk and very occasionally for open-market sale. Producing food for animals was always a constant challenge and cattle were frequently grazed on the 'long mile'. Likewise because of food shortages, cattle were normally stabled and fed on poor rations such as gorse (*Ulex europaeus*). Permanent pasture was a notable exception rather than the rule. The most commercial sector of these holdings was their wood products, usually pine woods (*Pinus pinaster*) or eucalyptus. On infertile upland areas, additional blocks of land were held and worked jointly by local (usually parish) communities. Traditionally, land use was organised in aureoles around the 'village' centre.¹³ The extent of the land use rings was normally related to topography, holding size, land quality and water availability. They mirrored what von Thünen has posited earlier for such systems.¹⁴

Land use responses to population pressure and growing food security since the seventeenth century were to continually prompt increases in food production for human domestic consumption and market disposal of any residual surpluses.¹⁵ Crops with the highest food value were increasingly favoured. Mechanisation was virtually impossible to implement on these holdings and, consequently, farm families had to perform most farm work utilising hand implements or hand-held mechanised tools. Inheritance practices promoted relentless subdivision of holdings.

Territorial Organisation, Enclosure, Settlement And Society

Miniature open fields known as *agras* or *agros* were the most common form of enclosure and their dimensions were related to their physical locales and neighbourhood population densities. By locales I am referring to what are known as *aldeas* or *lugares*. They usually consist of private holdings and unimproved lands held jointly by all landholders and of one or more house agglomerations or clusters, varying between five and twenty farmhouses.

Aldeas are larger *meso* units of enclosure, broadly equivalent in significance and size to townlands in Ireland and carry the same connotation as the Irish word *baile*.¹⁶ The number of these units per parish in Galicia normally corresponds with the average recorded in Ireland, where a civil parish counts about twenty different townlands. The *agra* was the most intensively cultivated, enclosed area – usually devoted to maize. It was divided into minute unenclosed parcels set out in two or three sections. The entire *agra* was marked off to distinguish it from the smaller *huerta* or garden cropped zone beside the 'village' and land devoted to wood production often privatised commonage [Figure 20.3]. The rationale for this form of enclosure was to permit stock to

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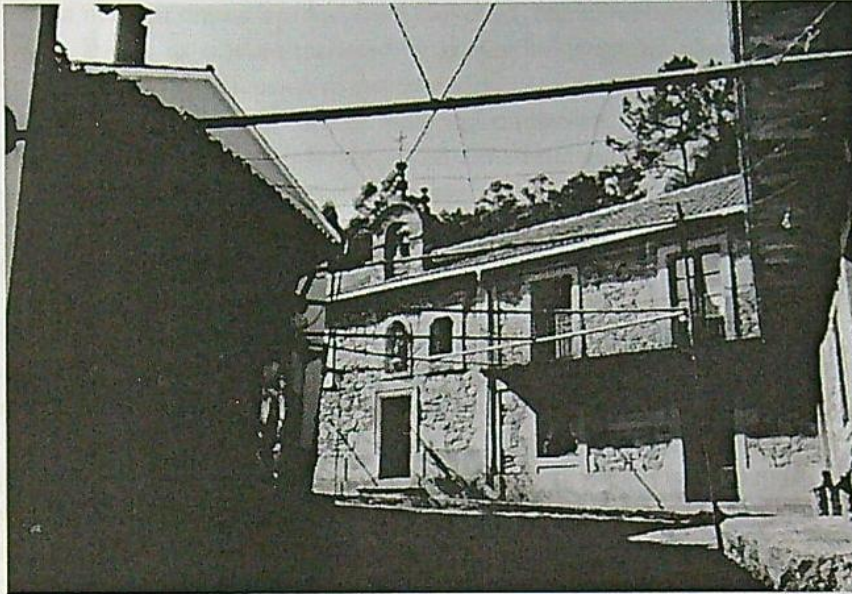


Figure 20.2 Former rentier's house and private chapel in the aldea of Balbagos, Noia 15200, Corunna. [Source: P. O'Flanagan]

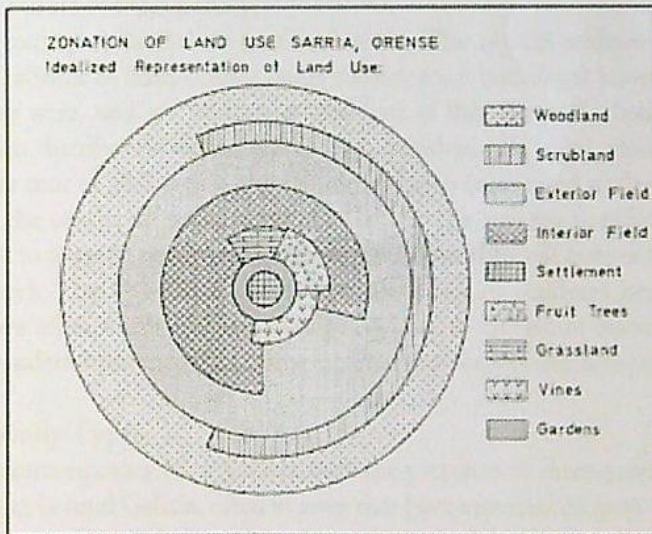


Figure 20.3 Zonation of land use, Sarria, Orense, Galicia. [Source: G. R. Zimmermann in P. O'Flanagan, 'Social and territorial organisation in Galicia. A spatial unconformity', *Finisterra, Revista Portuguesa de Geografia* 13 (1978), 77-101.]

low res

I have asked for this to be improved

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graze on the *agra* once crops had been harvested. Intricate, hand constructed terraces, known as *socalcos*, traversed by gravity-fed irrigation channels were often a feature of *agras* located on slopes of varying gradients.

Aldeas usually consist of one or more agglomerations of between five and twenty farmhouses and their holdings and sometimes unimproved lands held jointly by all landholders. Most clusters were, and are still composed of domestic residences and their outbuildings: only the parish centre counted a church, a 'school', more rarely a retail outlet or a bar.

In upland and more mountainous areas, *agras* were much less extensive and were invariably surrounded by vast areas of commonage, known as *monte*, small areas of which were occasionally brought under cultivation at intervals of nine to ten years. In coastal areas, outfields disappeared under population pressure.

Agras were then jointly managed by all 'village' landholder families, co-operation being essential for their expeditious functioning. Crops like maize were sown in rotation and the stubble fields were opened to animals in winter once crops had been removed. *Huertas* were the most privatised part of the complex. Even here, however, intricate arrangements were entered into to ensure that water would be available for irrigation of kitchen crops, orchards and vines. *Agras* are now mostly fossils. Outfields served as reserves for fuel, bedding, commercial woodlands, coppicing, honey output, game, grazing, occasional cropping, at times of food scarcity.

Most *agra(s)* possessed their own settlement. The typical settlement form was a small cluster of farm-houses (large robust stone buildings) known as an *aldea*. There were, and are, countless variations of this theme. Galicia counts 31,000 *aldeas* distributed within some 3,793 parishes, this total representing some 46 per cent of all Spanish population *entidades* (nucleated settlements as defined in the census of population). In Galicia, the average population per entity tallies to some 26 residents (figures applicable to the final quarter of twentieth century). The Spanish national equivalent is 446 residents per entity. Parishes have often a very early ancestry going back to Gothic or Suevic times; *aldeas* have indeterminate origins, some are medieval, others much more recent.

Society/Family Types

Studies of contemporary rural Galicia note the presence of three-generational families living in rural Galicia, often in areas that have experienced farm and plot consolidation as, for example, within the milk-shed of the modern Feiraco co-operative on the doorstep of Santiago de Compostela, A Coruña. Grandparents are now regarded as valuable household assets as their ability to claim a state

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pension endows households with additional economic leverage. Until recently, state pensions were not generally available in rural Galicia. Their now near universal availability has strengthened pre-existing family structures. It is not clear what kinds of households formerly prevailed. There were significant gradations of wealth amongst the residents of these farm clusters usually expressed in housing and outbuilding, notably the *hórreo* or maize store.

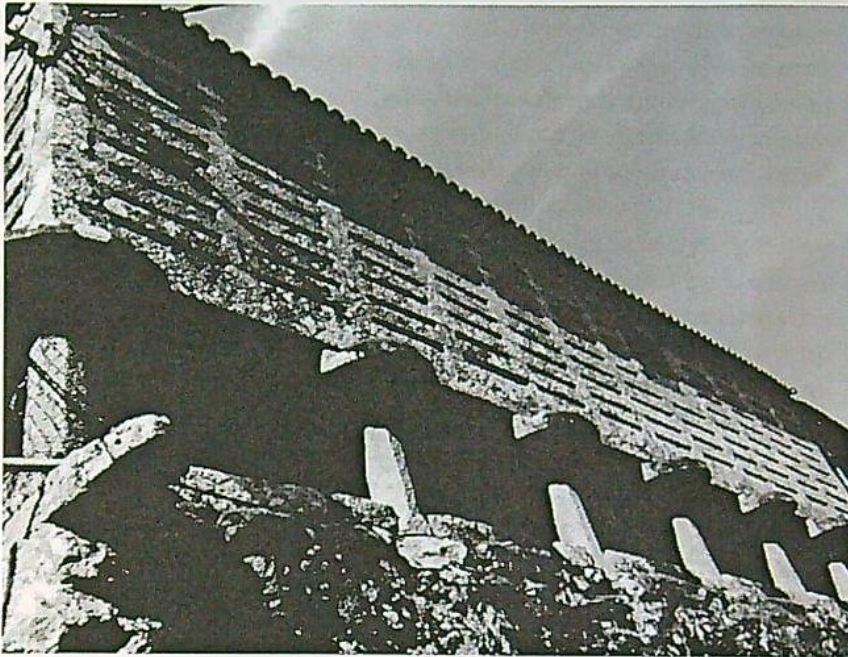


Figure 20.4 A *hórreo* or farm maize store in the aldea of Balbargos, Noia 15200, Corunna.
[Source: P. O'Flanagan]

Evolution, Consolidation and Demise of Minifundismo

Some Spanish geographers and jurists have argued for a nineteenth-century origin for *minifundios*. Historians have posited even earlier medieval twelfth-century origins. Complex tenorial developments (space constraints precludes detailed consideration) have facilitated the evolution of *minifundismo*. Mention may be briefly made of a heritage of letting and sub-letting through legal contracts/instruments introduced by the medieval monastic orders. Known as *foros*, these contracts were the vehicles whereby large ecclesiastical and secular landowners let out sections of their territories. Many indentures were appropriated by

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a hierarchy of middlemen and the ultimate lessor was a tenant farming family whose holdings were continuously becoming pulverised and fragmented.¹⁷

Minifundismo was not regarded as a subject for serious scholarly consideration in Spain. In most pre-1940 national dictionaries, *latifundismo* was defined; *minifundismo* was not. Today all the ingredients that configure *minifundismo* viz: small size, fragmentation, reduced economic viability, high productive capacity and subsistence agriculture retain pejorative connotations. The tone of official documents, from the 1950s onwards, is negative towards *minifundismo* while simultaneously extolling the attributes of *latifundios*. Villares argues that there was no negative view of *minifundismo* during the Enlightenment. Observers at that time noted that it was capable of providing enough sustenance for families yet negative perceptions only began to appear in the nineteenth century.

Conducive factors nurturing these negative attitudes were already evident from early on: growing scarcity of cultivable land; rapid population growth and institutional practices for intergenerational wealth transfer. Villares asserts that in some areas *minifundismo* was already a fact of life in the late Middle Ages. Enormous monastic holdings served as nurseries for its emergence. It is impossible to give a quantitative estimation for the amount of territory under *minifundismo* before the mid-nineteenth century, or even a century later. Spain's mid eighteenth-century census, *Catastro de la Ensenada* confirms that smallholdings (less than two hectares) were then the norm in Galicia.

Rundale

A working definition of rundale has been posited by Andrews:

Rundale is the intermixture in a single cornfield of unfenced plots belonging to different farmers. A clachan is a cluster of farm houses or what early nineteenth century Irish writers would simply call a village.¹⁸

And Andrews continues

The infield was continuously cultivated and coincided with low-lying ground next to the cluster. The outfield lay on higher and less productive land, belonged to a group of farmers which was cropped for a few seasons with fertiliser and then abandoned. . .

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This kind of reclamation was a misguided attempt to segregate, colonise and extend the outfield and make its agricultural contribution permanent instead of temporary. The potato here had an alien and evil role where famine reveals the limitations of a particular physical environment and the weakness of a particular social class.¹⁹

In other words, population pressure forced 'villagers' to periodically cultivate the 'outfield' and a prerequisite here was the availability of manure and seaweed. The work of E. E. Evans and his students, Buchanan, McCourt and Proudfoot pioneered research on these complexes. They introduced the Scottish term *clachan* ('village') to the literature although it had no popular currency in Ireland, thereby linking the phenomenon with contemporary Scottish conditions. They argued for rundale's immense antiquity and continuity, in spite of excellent work on these themes by other scholars. Evans's work,²⁰ especially, was the butt of serious critiques by others, notably Jones Hughes,²¹ Andrews,²² Whelan²³ and Yager.²⁴

A Spatially Restricted Complex

Rundale farming was usually confined to poorer contexts, marginal areas, hills, moors and especially to the west of Ireland. It was never a ubiquitous system. Some people who lived on the hills and bogs of early nineteenth-century Ireland were not supported by the lands on which they lived. They were not farmers but cottiers: many survived by labouring or indeed by begging. Many hills and mountains were noted as reservoirs for vagrants. Here then lived some recently evicted former tenant farmers during lowland clearances as at Mallow.²⁵

Whiskey distilling and sheep stealing acted as another pull factor for settlement of bogs, as was the abundance of fuel for the poorest of the poor. Some farmers also erected cabins for his labourers as far away as possible from their houses in order to preserve his own gentility and security.²⁶

Structural Ingredients

Holding Size and Fragmentation

Gray's description of conditions in County Donegal on the eve of the Great Famine (1845) encapsulates rundale's leading ingredients. (The extent of the sample townland was some 205 statute acres):

The whole was occupied in one farm two generations ago; it then became divided into two farms, and those two have since subdivided into twenty-nine

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holdings, scattered into 422 different lots. The largest arable quantity of each holding is four acres, held in fourteen different parts of the townland; the average quantity of pasture per farm is three acres, held in lots in common. The largest portion of arable held by any one man is under eight acres; the smallest quantity of arable in any one farm is two roods. The pasture being held in common cannot be improved. . . They had been in the habit of subdividing their lands, not into two, when a division was contemplated, but into as many times two as there were quantities of land in the gross quantity to be divided. They would not hear of the equivalent of two bad acres being set against one good one . . . Every quality must be cut in two whatever its size, or whatever its position. Each must have his half perches, although thereby be ever so distant from his half acres. And this tendency is attributable to the conviction of these poor ignorant peoples, that each morsel of their neglected land is at present in the most productive state to which it can be brought.²⁷

The same author noted that 205 acres were divided between 29 tenants who farmed some 422 plots/parcels; co-tenancy had been responsible for bringing this scenario about as the heirs of each tenant got equal plots of each quality of land, irrespective of the widespread scattering of plots of the same quality. When it reported in 1845, the Devon Commission noted that, in general, rundale was in retreat in many parts of Ireland. Was this retreat prior to the famine the outcome of landlord interference and efforts at 'improvement' where such holdings were regularised? What were the causes of its demise? For many it relied on a discrete functional basis of lot-casting:

The lot-casting ritual was the communal system's vital core. Every time villagers gathered to draw new plots, they affirmed inescapably that the right to use the land derived from the community as a whole.²⁸

Productive Ingredients

The leading productive ingredients are now well known and have been clearly set out in the literature. Before the outbreak of subsistence crises it was a tale of intensifying monoculture based on potato cultivation, supplemented by sales of the exiguous and episodic outputs of the outfield (Figure 20.5).

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Figure 20.5 Kilgalligan, Erris, County Mayo. [Source: S. Ó Catháin and P. O'Flanagan, *The Living Landscape*, Kilgalligan, Erris, County Mayo, Dublin, 1975]

Settlement, Enclosure and Society

Settlement

The nature of the townland structure associated with rundale has already been well detailed. Some authors have identified five separate spatial components of rundale of which the most prominent were: a 'common' arable or infield, an outfield exploited for its rangeland properties.²⁹ In addition, common meadow, rough grazing and 'gardens' near the cluster have been suggested as integral elements. My own experience confirms only the presence of 'gardens', infields and outfields.

Enclosure

Small open fields were the norm – the infield as described by Yager. At maximum pressure each village had 'a number of tillage collops and grazing collops'.³⁰ In other words, as population numbers expanded and increasing mouths demanded sustenance, a finite limit of land for production arrived despite subdivision and rotation:

Stone walls divided the island (Iniskea South) into six segments called 'quarters', each cultivated by a handful of tenants who moved as a group every four years to whatever segments they drew in the lottery. The quarters were laid out with meticulous fairness.³¹

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Each tenant obtained equal portions of land of different quality – ideally!

Most of the people who railed against rundale in Ireland complained about ever decreasing plot sizes and that many holdings had become utterly dispersed through a process of relentless subdivision. Yager makes the interesting point that:

Tenants in Erris started fresh every few years, throwing all their land in a common pot, so that they did not have to put up with any more fragmentation than they found useful. Lot-casting could have done nothing to counteract the pressure of a growing population, but it would have protected families from the inefficiency and tedium of travelling ceaselessly among a growing number of shrinking plots.³²

While parcels of land (on infield) were periodically redistributed (every three or four years according to Mac Énrí, writing about Iniskea South), and every family was supposed to get equal shares of land, it did not happen in reality!³³ I am not convinced that the practice of periodic redistribution of plots was a characteristic of all rundale contexts.

Society

In spite of the excellent work conducted on many aspects of Irish family structures, I have been unable to locate any specific detailed demographic analysis of any clachan-rundale context even over the census years 1901 and 1911 or before or after. Yet there is an assumption in some of the literature that stem families populated these contexts as the dominant family type. (Stem families, as outlined by Varley, can be defined as three-generational households consisting optimally of the senior couple, their inheriting son and spouse, plus the children of the junior couple.³⁴) Other studies have indicated that stem families were in the main associated with small farmer and sometimes medium farmer contexts in Ireland: nobody has attempted to attribute them specifically to rundale contexts. The proportion of landless households in these contexts as elsewhere grew during the nineteenth century up to the Great Famine. We have no clear picture of their numbers or how this group fared in these contexts during the so-called 'post famine adjustment'.

Rundale tenant holders mainly populated these settlements mixed with a minority of landless families. We have no idea concerning the kinds of social hierarchies that emerged in these conditions. Census records robustly confirm that housing conditions varied from poor to appalling.³⁵

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Evolution, Consolidation and Demise of Rundale Complex

Leaving aside archaeological, early legal and archival sources (all of which only offer tentative evidence) recent research south of the river Bride in County Waterford confirms that the uplands in this area were subject to two types of reclamation, one of which was prescribed and the other more spontaneous or permissive.³⁶ Here in 1716 and 1717, the surveyor recognised different classes of mountain: 'outmountain' and 'mountain'; both of which were classed as 'commons'. The implication being that the latter could be reclaimed; the former presented more formidable obstacles to reclamation. One way of expediting gradual improvement of the 'mountain' was to mark it out in blocks of acres, enclose it and improve it. This was a systematic method of enclosure managed by the head tenant, usually with the approval of the land magnate. This form of prescribed enclosure was recorded north of the Blackwater on the platform of the Knockmealdowns.³⁷ Another more permissive means employed was the gouging out by settlers of small 'closes', between one to five acres in extent, at the edge of the infield titled 'inland' by the surveyor. Some 'closes' were also the site of a house. By the mid 1770s, when these lands were again mapped by professional surveyor Bernard Scalé, several occupied sites formerly populated by single house were now clusters occupied by people who do not appear in contemporary terriers. In the early 1840s, some of these clusters had expanded again – a few had disappeared altogether – emphasising the fluidity of this settlement type.

Some western farm 'villages', fishing and mining 'villages' such as those associated with copper on the Beara Peninsula, often possessed no outfields. In the vast expanses of bogs, in areas like west Mayo, outfields were enormous, maybe 10 to 20 times the size of minute infields as at Srahataggle, near Glenamoy in Kilcommon Parish, barony of Erris.³⁸ Elsewhere, along the south coast of County Cork, for instance, many small clusters evolved, more than likely in the late eighteenth early nineteenth centuries.³⁹ Residents in these settlements were almost exclusively dedicated to seasonal fishing at centres such as Carrigillihy and Mealmane just west of Courtmacsherry. These kinds of clusters even lacked rudimentary infields, and each household could only boast of a minute area, divided into parcels dedicated to kitchen crops. Needless to state, these clusters also lacked outfields as they appear to have evolved on the edges of existing larger holdings. Spillars's comments on Meelmane, County Cork, strike an interesting chord:

it stands [near Courtmacsherry] on nine acres of ground and consists of fifty-five houses of inferior description mostly inhabited by fishermen and sailors.

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There are no shops in the town, which is of an irregular and uninteresting appearance.⁴⁰

Several centres of primary production, such as those associated with mining on the Beara Peninsula, also lacked infields. Finally, Cill Rialaigh, situated on Bolus Head behind Ballinskelligs on the Iveragh Peninsula, County Kerry, the home of *seanchaí* Seán Ó Conaill, was a settlement, in an end of the road location.⁴¹ Its meagre infield, running down to sea cliffs tells another story. Here, as so often elsewhere, it was the outfield that sustained this community. Periodic cultivation and fishing provided auxiliary sustenance for this community and other communities.⁴²

The apogee of the rundale system coincided with a period of intense population increase, that is between the 1770s and the eve of the Great Famine. Buchanan argues that rundale's obliteration was spread over two centuries in the east, beginning later in the west and its demise was compressed over 50 years.⁴³

Devon Commission (1845-7) evidence, as already noted, indicated that this complex was already in general retreat and was also even on some of the remotest islands by the 1880s.⁴⁴ Landlord 'regularisation' appears to have generally accelerated from the mid nineteenth century onwards.⁴⁵ Subsequently, the efforts of the Congested Districts Board and the Land Commission completed the erasure of many of rundale's landscape fossils.

The Two Complexes Compared and Contrasted

Let us first consider some of the main differences between the two complexes:

Minifundismo was an ubiquitous complex, rundale was not and was confined largely to western marginal and end of the road upland locations.

Rundale became increasingly a monocultural productive complex often supported by exiguous products of extensive grazing. *Minifundismo* was characterised by intensive polyculture; maize and horticultural outputs acted as its backbone and some finance for its practitioners was raised by the infrequent sale of wood or domestic labour.

Rundale traditions, especially its monocultures, were a major contributory factor to subsistence crises in mid nineteenth-century Ireland. Rundale communities produced landless offspring. These people, frequently termed 'cottars', often colonised the most marginal places and many resided in houses at the edge of the clusters on commonages, occasionally working as part-time farmers or seasonal migrants.

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Both complexes emerged within the broad context of large landed properties. Each complex was characterised by different temporal phases of growth. Both complexes entered into crises, at different times, early in the nineteenth century. Both breached their carrying capacities and both areas intensified their roles as emigration nurseries. In Ireland, the crises morphed into full-blown subsistence crises ultimately subverting many communities. The final phase of *minifundismo*'s disappearance began during the 1950s.

Different rural societies emerged recently from their ruins. One could well argue that in Ireland rundale has been erased as have the communities that it supported. The practice of *minifundismo* is now all but a memory in Galicia; legacies still evident reveal many rural communities still residing in the clusters remain a cardinal feature of the region's rural settlement patterns. Three-generational stem families are common, with many of the younger being involved in pluriactivities. Large trophy houses now characterise many clusters; roadside sites are favoured locations for these houses, sometimes financed by the savings of returned emigrants. By contrast most rundale settlements are now abandoned or have shrunk to one or two houses.

From the mid eighteenth century onwards in both areas, rapid population growth transpired. Enhanced food security fuelled much of this increase. In Ireland, the potato was the culprit, in Galicia the earlier adoption of maize was pivotal; farming there increasingly diversified and there were many different channels of nutrient production. Both areas experienced Malthusian crises more or less at the same time. In Galicia, migration and polyculture were the safety valve; in Ireland famine, greatly increased mortality rates and migration cut through many rundale communities. Both complexes supported subsistence farming practices.

There are several possible explanations regarding the evolution of *minifundismo* and rundale. Given that the former was demonstrably in existence in Galicia by the twelfth century, it may well have been exported to Ireland on some subsequent date.⁴⁶ Its existence in Ireland is cartographically confirmed by the Bateman survey of 1716–17.⁴⁷ A much more likely explanation is that both systems evolved *sui generis* as a result of population pressure, tenurial developments and forms of ethnic cleansing. In the Galician case, land magnates demurred at the development of a convoluted series of leasing instruments facilitating a continuous grinding of the leaseholds into ever smaller plots and allowed middlemen to squeeze even higher rental returns. In Ireland, rundale developed in prescribed and permissive conditions invariably on the edge of the larger holdings, usually in unpromising locales.

Notes

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