LITTLE FLANDERS BEYOND WALES

A landscape archaeological contribution to the discussion of Flemish influence on settlement landscape in the British Isles.

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BACKGROUND

Little is known about the Flemings who, following the Norman-Conquest, settled in the British Isles. One of the few documented communities was in Pembrokeshire, South Wales. Shortly after establishing the colony between 1107 and 1111, elite Flemish immigrants came directly from Flanders to plant new settlements with striking morphological and geographical similarities to those in their homeland. One of them was Wizo Flandrensis, who built upon his arrival around 1112 a castle in the village of Wiston. The names of contemporary settlers are preserved in settlement place names of which Roberton (Robert), Lamington (Lambin) and Thankerton (Tancred) are just a few examples. However, nothing is known about the impact these Flemings had on the British landscape and settlements at the time. Nor is it clear which social and cultural processes were involved in the ab initio plantation of these settlements.

AIM OF THE PROJECT

This project aims to verify the hypothesis that there has been a translocation of the Flemish planted rural settlement system to the British Isles following direct immigration from Flanders. Socio-economic opportunism, ecological stress and demographic pressure following a wave of extension on marginal grounds along the margins of exploited lands in Flanders, caused this transfer of skills to areas equally hostile, both geographically and politically. Essentially, similar patterns of settlement morphology, site location and field systems can be discerned, therefore suggesting transregional patterns of marginal land management. Furthermore, this project wants to unravel the social and cultural processes of these Flemish migrations, clarifying whether the planting of settlements by Flemings was a top down or bottom up process between social elites and common peoples, and whether it was an indication of cultural intrusion or assimilation/acculturation.

METHODOLOGY: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH, INTEGRATING MULTI-PROXY DATA IN GIS

HISTORY
- Literature on Flemish migration
- Primary sources
- Cartography
- Place names
- Measuring units

LANDSCAPE
- Characterisation and typological classification of planted rural settlements in Flanders in order to create a reference model
- HLC Welsh settlements
- Aerial photography: orthogonal, oblique and historical
- LiDAR

ARCHAEOLOGY
- Augering
- Non-invasive geophysical prospection
- Existing archaeological data

Integration in GIS

CASE STUDIES

Both in Flanders and in Wales, the selected settlements are planted ab initio on marginal grounds, featured by long narrow fields perpendicular on the axis of exploitation and the presence of a mostly triangular dries or green structure.

Casestudies Wales
- Wiston (Pembrokeshire)
- Whitson (Monmouthshire)

Test cases Wales
- Angle
- Templeton
- Letterston (e.g.)

Casestudies Flanders
- Doornzele (e.g.)
- Woesten
- Kluizen