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Britons and Bretons: Some New Evidence From Le Yaudet

By BARRY CUNLIFFE AND PATRICK GALLIOU

The settlement of Le Yaudet, in northern Brittany, occupies a prominent position on a headland dominating the estuary of the river Léguer. It is the focus of a long-term research excavation, now in its tenth year, designed to study continuities and discontinuities in the occupation sequence from the Iron Age to the late medieval period. The paper focusses on late Roman and early medieval occupation. Tenuous evidence for late fourth- to early fifth-century military use is considered. Thereafter, fields worked by the 'lazy bed' method were laid out: contemporary corn-drying ovens have produced dates in the sixth and seventh centuries. The results are discussed in the context of the sparse historical evidence and other contemporary finds from Brittany.

The part played by British immigrants in the transformation from Armorica to Brittany has been, and continues to be, a subject of lively debate. For many commentators the story begins with the famous passage from Gildas' *The Ruin of Britain*, thought to have been written about A.D. 540, in which the writer describes the fate of British survivors in the aftermath of the battle of Mount Badon. Some of them, he tells us, 'made for lands beyond the sea' adding that so great was their distress that instead of singing sea shanties they chose the psalm 'You have given us like sheep for eating and have scattered us among the heathens' (Gildas, *de Excidio* 25,1). Nowhere in Gildas' account is the destination of the dispossessed mentioned but Procopius, writing just after the middle of the sixth century, believed that people from Britain were still, at that time, moving to Gaul to settle (*de bello Gothico* 8,20). It was he who first refers to Armorica by the name of *Britannia* though the presence of *Britanni* on the Loire had been noted by Apollinaris Sidonius 70 years or so before. It was, however, not until the late sixth century that contemporary sources, including Gregory of Tours (*History of the Franks*), unambiguously adopted the term *Britannia* for the peninsula. It was still being called Armorica at the Council of Tours, in 567, when reference is made to *Britanni* and *Romani* present in Armorica. These texts, together with a study of the linguistic evidence and the *Lives* of the saints, provided the starting point for Joseph Loth's *Emigration Bretonne en Armorique* published in 1883 and the relevant sections of Arthur de la Borderie's *Histoire de Bretagne* which appeared in two volumes in 1896 and 1898. Both writers agreed that the incoming Britons settled in the western part of Armorica in the period beginning A.D. 460. For Loth it was these immigrants who introduced the language of Breton replacing the Vulgar Latin which, he believed, had been spoken widely throughout the province during the Roman period.

Since the publication of these seminal works over a century ago, details of Loth's interpretations have been called into question. In several papers published in the 1950s and 1960s, Chanoine F. Falc'hun challenged the belief that the Breton language was brought to Brittany in the fifth century by the immigrants, arguing that much of the native population of Armorica continued to speak Gallic, closely akin to the Celtic spoken in the west of Britain, throughout the Roman period and that the arrival of the British migrants simply helped to strengthen the local language (Falc'hun 1951/1963a; 1962; 1963b).

A second challenge to the accepted orthodoxy came from Nora Chadwick (1969). Chadwick suggested that the immigration to Armorica had begun considerably earlier, perhaps as early as the late third century when the native populations of southwest Wales and the southwest peninsula of Britain began to come under pressure from Irish raids and later Irish settlement. For her the migration was a long drawn-out process. These issues were explored in some detail by Léon Fleuriot in his comprehensive study of the origins of Brittany published in 1982.

Until the early 1970s much of the discussion of Breton origins had focused on the linguistic evidence enlivened by the sparse historical record, both of which were open to a variety of interpretations. It was at this stage that Pierre-Roland Giot, following an earlier review of the anthropological evidence (Giot 1951), began to develop a systematic archaeological approach to the problem. In three major excavations Giot set out to explore the possibility of establishing stratigraphical sequences spanning the relevant centuries from the end of the Roman occupation to the Carolingian period: at St-Urnel, Plomeur (Finistère), a cemetery associated with an oratory in use during the period from A.D. 400–1100 was excavated (Giot and Monnier 1977; and 1978); on the island of Lavret, one of the archipelago of Bréhat off the coast of Côtes d'Armor, he examined an early Christian monastic settlement and cemetery which began its existence in the shell of a Roman building of the second century (Giot 1982a; Giot 1984; Giot 1987; Giot 1999; Giot and Querré 1985); while on Ile Guennoc, Landéda, Finistère a small enclosed medieval farmstead was excavated beneath which earlier phases of occupation were examined producing radiocarbon dates in the period A.D. 400–1000 (Giot 1982b). As a result of this fieldwork Giot has been able to sketch an outline of the ceramic development of at least the latter part of the period (Giot 1997). Another excavation, at Livroach, Poullan (Finistère) uncovered a small rectangular drystone building sheltering a large corn-drying oven which yielded a radiocarbon date of *c.* A.D. 550–900 (Gif-4160), at 95% certainty (Peuziat 1980). In parallel with the excavations of Giot and others, programmes of fieldwork integrated with documentary research, like the East Brittany Survey (Davies and Astill 1994 and Astill and Davies 1997), have begun to show the potential of these approaches.

Together these excavations and field programmes have demonstrated how much there is to be learned of Brittany in the centuries following the end of the Roman period if studies, of suitable scale, are carried out at appropriate sites. It was in this context that the programme of work at Le Yaudet, Ploulec'h (Côtes d'Armor) was begun.

THE SITE OF LE YAUDET

The site of Le Yaudet on the north coast of Brittany occupies a promontory of about 10 ha jutting out into the estuary at the mouth of the river Léguer (Illus. 1 and 2). The river valley, at this point a deeply incised ria, delimits the promontory on its east and north sides: the west side overlooks the narrow Baie de la Vierge. On its landward side the headland is divided from the mainland by a steep west-facing valley along which the road leading from the village of Le Yaudet to Le Pont Roux now runs.

The headland, like much of the surrounding land, is composed of granite – the *granit de Plouaret*. It can be divided into three topographical zones, an upper plateau to the south rising to a height of 61 m OD, a lower plateau to the north averaging 30–40 m OD, with a valley in between enhanced by a spring. The 25 m contour marks the edge beyond which the land around the lower plateau falls steeply in cliffs to the shore. The 50 m contour approximates to the equivalent break of slope around the upper plateau. For the most part the soil is thin, covering a varying thickness of decomposed granite and granitic sand, but three prominent outcrops of rock break the surface: Les Rochers de Beaumanoir, Les Rochers du Château and Pierre Branlante.

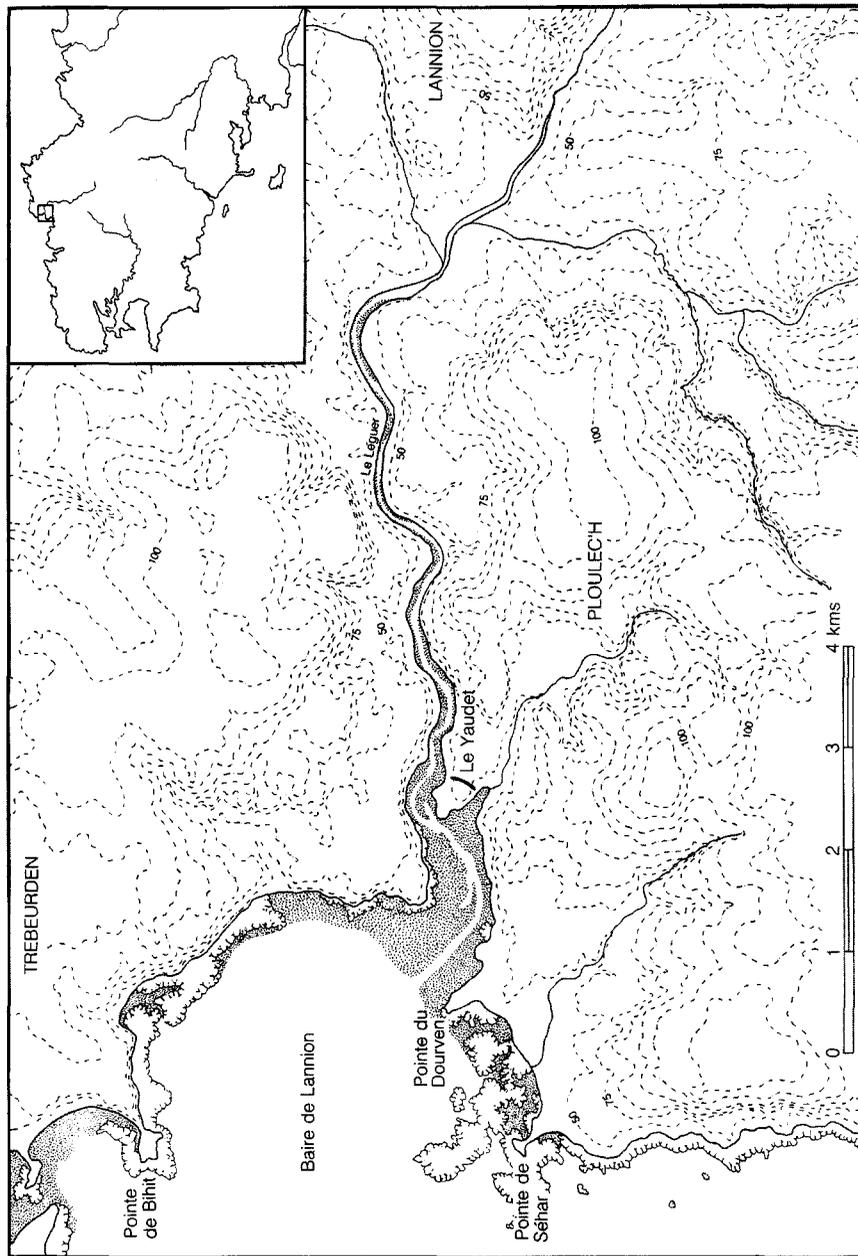
The defensive system, largely of iron age date, is most evident as a massive rampart flanking the southeast side of the upper plateau, where it overlooks the valley, running from Les Rochers de Beaumanoir to the north edge of the escarpment. On the east side of the headland, sections of a late Roman defensive wall can still be seen above ground.

Within the defended area lie the earliest surviving buildings of the settlement of Le Yaudet, dominated now by the Chapel of the Virgin – a structure largely rebuilt in the second half of the nineteenth century. The secular buildings are, for the most part, of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century origin but some may incorporate earlier elements. Around the settlement the field boundaries and lanes of the earlier agricultural landscape can still be traced though active farming ceased in the 1960s. In 1980 most of the headland was acquired by the Département, at the urging of the Commune of Ploulec'h, to provide protection against building development and to allow archaeological research to proceed.

In the last twenty years much of the old pasture and arable has reverted to a scrub dominated by broom, gorse, sloe and bracken, while the mixed oak woodland on the steeper slopes, once managed as a source of firewood, now grows wild. The varied natural vegetation which has re-established itself, the dominating presence of the sea and the antiquity of its cluster of granite buildings give Le Yaudet an unforgettable quality.

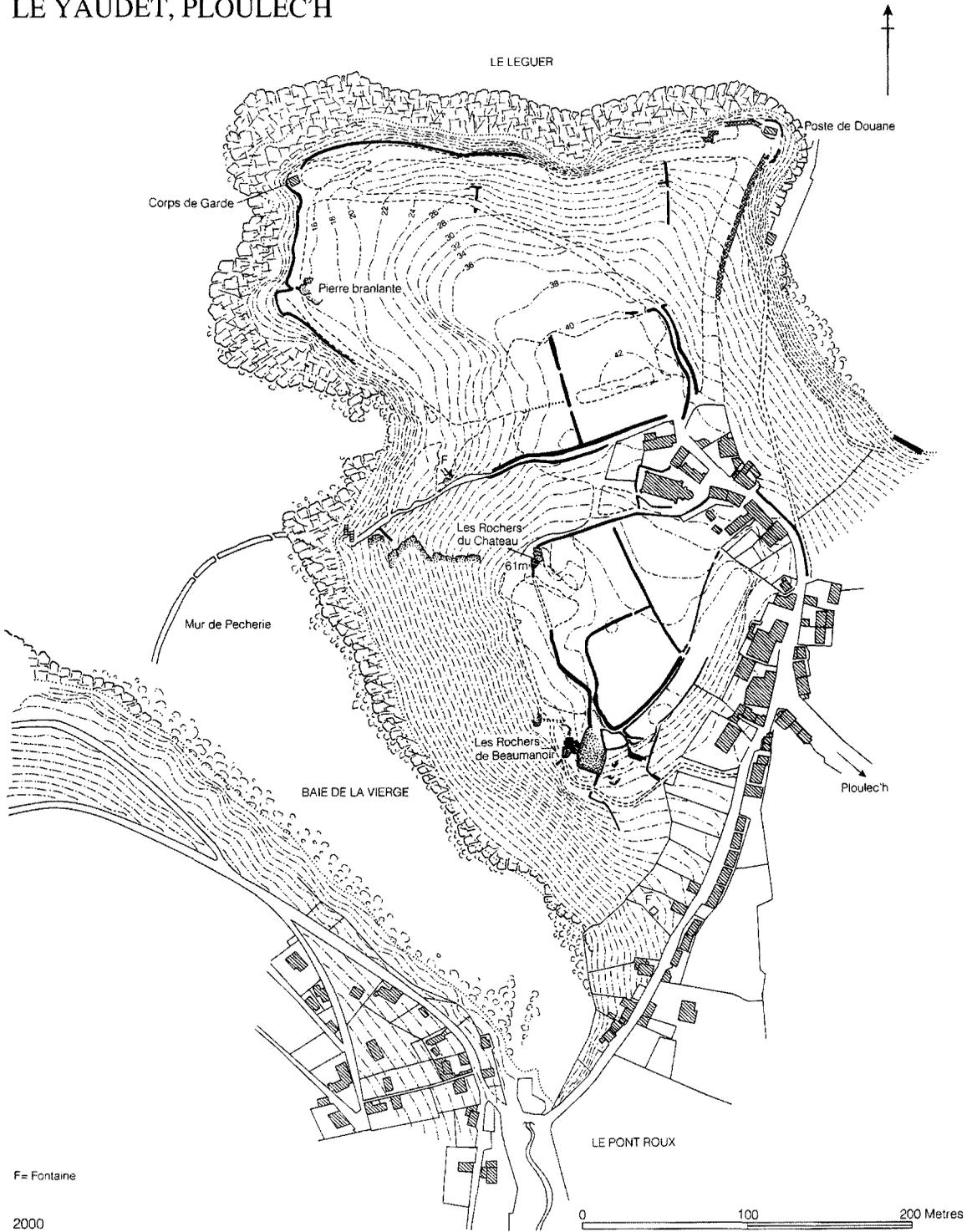
LE YAUDET IN LEGEND AND HISTORY

The complex question of the early history of Le Yaudet was first comprehensively addressed by Guillotin de Corson in 1888, drawing widely upon myth, legend and earlier documentary sources like the *Vita* of Saint Tugdual. He concluded that in the sixth and seventh centuries Le Yaudet was the seat of the bishop of the Trégor, concurrently with Tréguier. Much debate ensued, largely centring around the



Illus. 1 Location of Le Yaudet

LE YAUDET, PLOULEC'H



Illus. 2 Plan of Le Yaudet today

development of the episcopal organization of western Brittany in the early medieval period (Fleuriot 1954b; Chadwick 1969, 242; Pape 1978; Tanguy 1984 and 1994; Guillotel 1992). Fleuriot believed that following the invasions of the early fifth century the ancient diocese of inland Carhaix had been replaced by two dioceses, the centres of which lay at the coastal sites of *Aquilonia* (Quimper) and Le Yaudet, but by the time of the arrival of St Tugdual *c.* 525 the centre at Le Yaudet had been transferred to Tréguier, leaving the memory of Le Yaudet's former importance reflected in the names *Vetus Civitas*, recorded in a charter of 1267 (*Morice 1742*, Pr I, 1006), and *Vieille Cité*, found first in a charter of 1485 (*Arch. des C-d'A*, IE, 2013). In the most recent, finely balanced, discussion Tanguy (forthcoming) concludes that there is no convincing evidence that Le Yaudet had ever been a bishopric. The fact remains, however, that from the Middle Ages Le Yaudet and its chapel have been much revered, attracting very large numbers of pilgrims to its *pardon* held on the third Sunday in May.

PREVIOUS DISCOVERIES AND EXCAVATIONS

Casual archaeological discoveries have been made from time to time over the last two centuries or so (Du Mottay 1869 and 1885; Harmois 1912; Pape 1978, A33–35; Sanquer 1983), during which time there have been four small-scale archaeological investigations. In 1935 a number of skeletons were found during building work in parcelle 29 just opposite the church to the northeast. They were without close dating evidence but are most likely to be early medieval (Savidan 1935; Mazeres 1936). From 1952 to 1954, Léon Fleuriot directed the uncovering of the Roman gate and adjacent wall at the northeast corner of the promontory close to the Poste de Douane. From this gate a carefully terraced road led down the face of the cliff to a shelving landing place in the protection of a shallow cove. The excavation has not been published in full but interim reports were prepared (Fleuriot 1952, 1953 and 1954a; Merlat 1954 and 1955). Further excavations were undertaken by Professor Garlan in 1969 in parcelles 5, 12, 13, 20 and 22 in a series of small sondages exposing Roman and medieval material. This work is also reported only in a brief interim account (Garlan 1969). Finally, in 1978, at the time when the present car park was being constructed, a circular ditch of bronze age date, first identified on an aerial photograph, was examined.

Thus, before the current excavations began, sufficient evidence had been amassed from historical references, casual finds and limited excavations to show that the site had been in use from at least as early as the Bronze Age. The massive rampart, which formed an *éperon barré*, was most likely to be of iron age date, at least in its final form, and the discovery of Armorican and Carthaginian coins indicated occupation in the Middle and Late Iron Age and hinted at the maritime importance of the site. In the late third century A.D. the headland was intensively occupied and a defensive wall was built which can still be traced at the northeast corner and along the east side. The documentary evidence suggested that the site, called *Vetus Civitas* in a document of 1267, retained its importance, at least in memory, into the medieval period (de la Borderie 1853; Fleuriot 1954b). Small-scale excavations confirmed that the headland

remained in use throughout the Middle Ages up to the time when the buildings, presently standing, were built.

By virtue of its archaeological record and historical tradition Le Yaudet was clearly a place of considerable potential, particularly for the study of settlement continuity from prehistoric to historic times. Its extent, fortifications and commanding position in the estuary of the Léguer – a major route to the interior – ensured that it will have functioned as a central location in the socio-political development of the region. Its particular interest, from the point of view of the present paper, is that the late Roman fortifications and medieval occupation horizon held out the hope that stratigraphical evidence might be found of occupation spanning the intervening centuries.

THE CURRENT PROGRAMME OF EXCAVATIONS

The current excavations began in 1991 as a Franco-British venture organized by le Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique, University of Brest and the Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, under the joint direction of the authors of this paper. The work has been carried out with the permission of the Service Régional de l'Archéologie de Bretagne, the Département des Côtes d'Armor and the Commune of Ploulec'h. Each year a team of some twenty to twenty-five archaeologists have worked on the site for a period of three weeks.

The research design has been refined as the excavations have progressed but the principal aim throughout has been to study the social and economic systems which have shaped the lives of the community living on Le Yaudet from the mesolithic period to the present day and to assess the relationship of the changing community with its region. This has involved three types of excavation: sectioning to elucidate the structure and development of the defences; sampling to assess the extent of occupation in the different microenvironments on the promontory; and area excavations where stratigraphy is well preserved to examine the nature of successive phases of settlement. Interim reports have been prepared after each season's work and a summary of the first four years' work has been published (Cunliffe and Galliou 1995). Two volumes of the excavation monograph series, presenting the topography and history of the site and the results of the study of the defensive circuit, have been prepared for press (Cunliffe and Galliou forthcoming).

Before discussing the early medieval phase of occupation it will be helpful to summarize, briefly, the sequence of occupation revealed by excavation up to the beginning of the late Roman period.

The headland has produced a scatter of early prehistoric artefacts of mesolithic, neolithic and early bronze age date, all in secondary contexts, while small assemblages of mid-late bronze age pottery were found in contemporary contexts in the southwest corner of the headland, close to the outcropping granite tors and sealed beneath the later rampart. There is some possibility that the early settlement was defended by a cross-ridge rampart but this has still to be tested. The earliest iron age occupation is represented by parts of two rectangular buildings of the mid La Tène period lying at the northeast corner of the promontory.

In the late La Tène period the headland was defended by both a massive rampart, 4–5 m in height, built across the neck of the promontory, and a rampart of slighter proportions following the shoulder of the cliff along the east, north and northwest edges of the promontory. Only along the southwest edge of the upper plateau, between Les Rochers du Château and Les Rochers de Beaumanoir, does there appear to have been no artificial defence, but here the natural defences are exceptionally strong (Illus. 3). This first rampart was probably of *muris gallicus* construction, fronted by a near-vertical stone wall with some evidence of cross timbers within. After a period of occupation a major refurbishment took place around the entire defensive circuit. The cross-ridge rampart was substantially enlarged: a sloping front of loose rubble forming a glacis was surmounted by a vertical wall 2 m high. The contour rampart was widened and was faced by a stone wall along the cliff top. A third stage of reconstruction appears to have affected only the cross-ridge rampart which was widened and heightened towards its northeast end with tips of granitic sand. The main entrance to the site in all probability occupied the position taken by the present road flanking the cross-ridge rampart at its northern end. Another gate has been identified at the northeast corner of the promontory giving access to the shelving beach below. Such dating evidence as there is would suggest that the entire iron age defensive sequence belonged to the late La Tène period (c.120–c. 50 B.C.) with the possibility that the latest strengthening of the cross-ridge rampart may have been a response to the Caesarian campaigning in Armorica in 56 B.C.

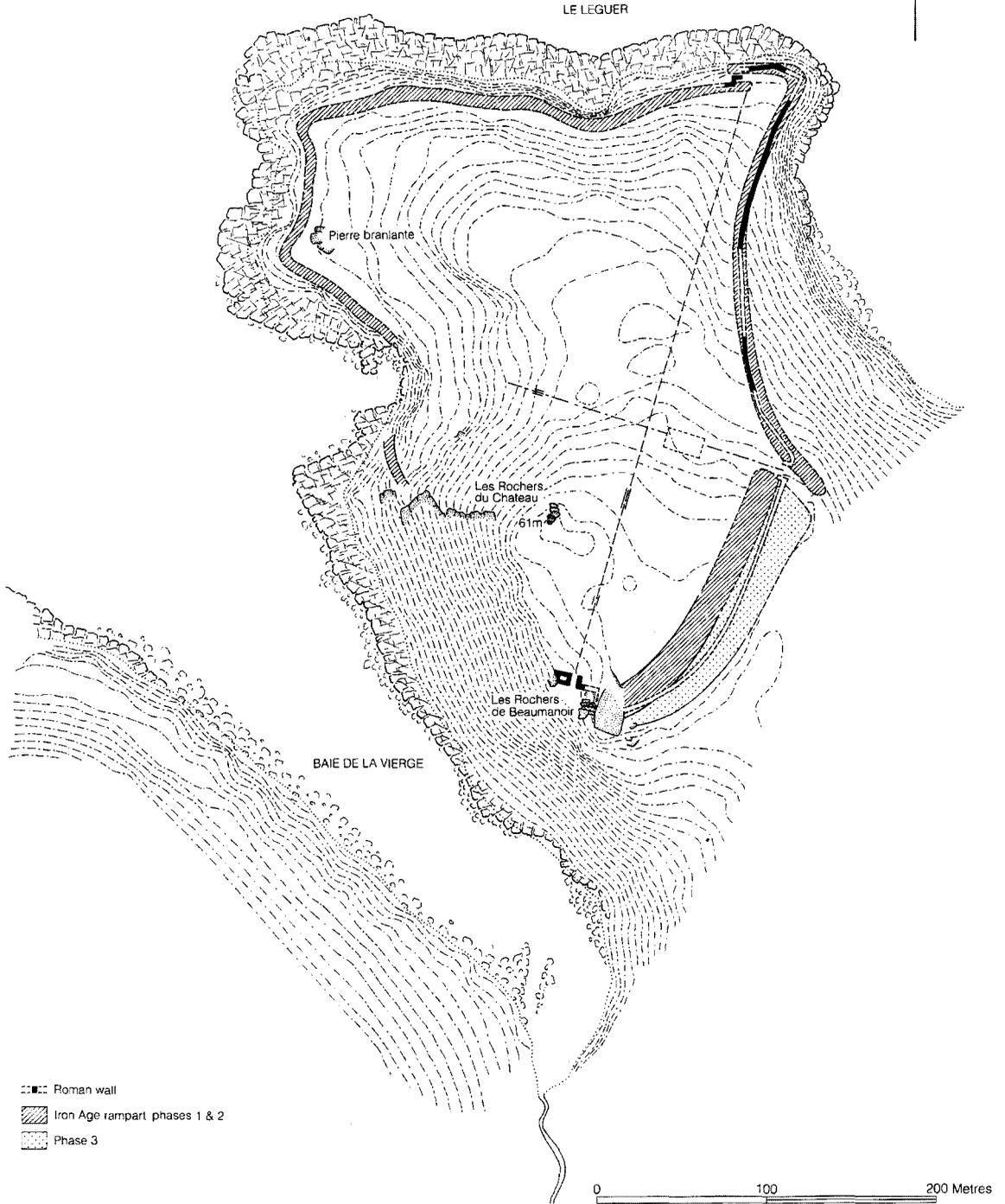
Occupation within the defended enclosure continued throughout the late first century B.C. and first century A.D. The site remained in use during the second and third centuries though the intensity of the occupation seems to have declined.

LE YAUDET DURING THE GALLIC EMPIRE (Illus. 3 and 4)

In the late third century A.D. the old defensive circuit, abandoned for more than three centuries, was brought back into use by the construction of a masonry wall, 1.8 m thick and more than 3 m high, built along the crest of the iron age rampart. The wall survives in part along the east side of the promontory with a gate, still well-preserved, at the northeast corner. Another gate has been discovered and excavated at the southwest corner immediately to the west of Les Rochers de Beaumanoir. Around the rest of the circuit coastal erosion and levelling to create fields probably account for there being no trace of the wall. It remains highly probable that the main entrance through the Roman fortifications, like that of its predecessor, was at the north end of the cross-ridge rampart roughly beneath the present road. The field name evidence hints at a fourth gate on the west side of the promontory giving access to the bay.

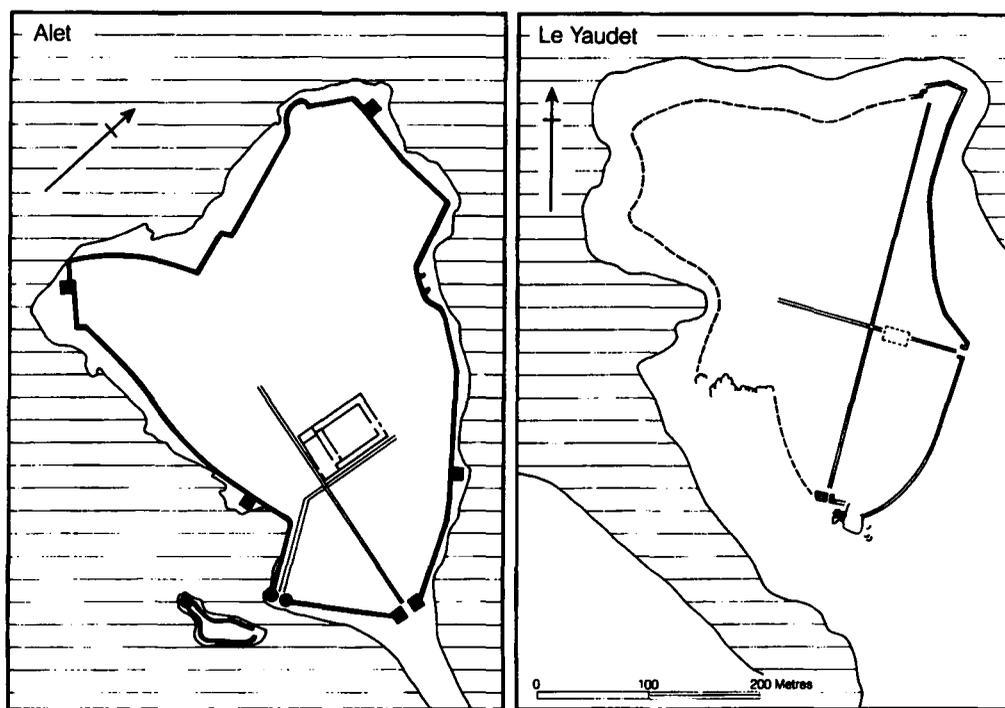
Having established the position of three, and possibly four, gates it is possible to make sense of certain interior details that have come to light in the excavations. The most significant is the evidence of an orthogonal grid of internal roads based on two axes at right angles. The N-S axis ran directly between the southwest and northeast gates and certain lengths of it have been identified in the excavations as slight terracing in the natural bedrock and worn, leached bands of granitic sand. The postulated main E-W road would have run between the main southeast gate and the supposed west

LE YAUDET, PLOULEC'H Late Iron Age & Late Roman defences



Illus. 3 Le Yaudet: the iron age and Roman defences

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Illus. 4 Comparative plans of the late Roman defences of Le Yaudet and Alet

gate. Part of the road, represented by a strip of compacted leached natural sand, was exposed in one of the trial excavations.

The identification of the orthogonal plan throws interesting light on the substantial terracing which can be observed in the heart of the 'village'. Two artificial terraces were created on either side of the east-west road immediately to the east of its crossing with the north-south road. In such a position, in a military establishment, one might have expected there to have been a *principia*. In a civilian settlement the site might have been occupied by a forum/basilica arrangement. It is interesting to note that one of the terraces was chosen for the construction of the church, which aligns exactly with the Roman grid. The present church was largely rebuilt in the mid nineteenth century, but it incorporates part of an earlier building on the same site which, nineteenth-century descriptions suggest, included features of eleventh-century date (Anon 1853). It is not unreasonable to suppose that the earliest church was established among the ruins of one of the central Roman buildings.

In all details so far described the late Roman fortified site of Le Yaudet was closely comparable to the site of Alet at Saint Malo in the estuary of the Rance (Illus. 4). Here an orthogonal road plan was identified, with a '*principia*' at the main crossing within which a cathedral church was built at the beginning of the ninth century and totally rebuilt a century or so later (Langouet 1996).

At Le Yaudet there is clear evidence to suggest that the interior of the fortified area was heavily built up in the late third century. On the sloping ground in the northeast

corner of the site a substantial rectangular timber building, exactly aligned with the main road grid, was discovered terraced into the natural slope. It was constructed on a frame of vertical timbers and was roofed with *tegulae* and *imbrex* tiles. Elsewhere, Roman tiles and other traces of timber structures are common.

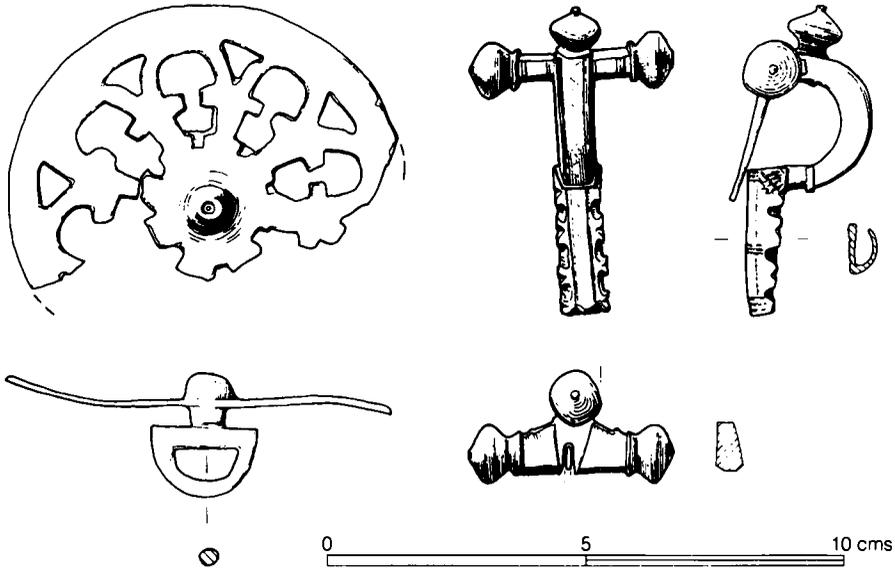
The intensive refortification and occupation of the site belong to the period of the Gallic Empire (A.D. 260–84) as the coin evidence so clearly bears witness. Of the 99 Roman coins recovered from the current excavations, 90 belong to this period. What is equally striking is the absence of coins issued between 284 and 330. The coin histogram from Alet also shows a dramatic diminution in the number of coins in this period (Langouet 1996, fig. 64). At Le Yaudet the implication of the coin evidence would seem to be that, after the end of the Gallic Empire, the site was probably abandoned for much of the first part of the fourth century.

This is not the place to enter into a long discussion of the historical context for the late third-century fortifications of the site. A conventional view would be to argue that the fortification of Le Yaudet and Alet was undertaken in response to the threat of pirates in the Channel, the defences belonging to the same series as the Saxon Shore forts of southeast Britain. However the Armorican sites differ in many significant ways to the British and there is no positive reason to suppose that pirates had reached the Armorican coast at this time. A more plausible suggestion is that, in choosing to return to major fortified sites of the Late Iron Age, the government of the breakaway Gallic Empire was claiming legitimacy through continuity with ancestors from the time of the free Gauls. The idea has much to commend it but cannot be pursued further here.

THE LATE FOURTH AND EARLY FIFTH CENTURIES

Among the few late fourth-century coins recovered were two minted in the period 388–402, one of which was a silver *siliqua* of Arcadius. Other finds of this period include a fine cross-bow brooch of the mid to late fourth century and a phalera from a late Roman horse harness (Illus. 5). Together these three items point to the high-status, possible military, reoccupation of the site at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries. The only feature which can, at present, be shown with certainty to belong to this period was a small sunken-floored structure close to Les Rochers de Beaumanoir. The phalera came from within the filling of this feature and the brooch from only a few metres away. The excavations of 2000 have, however, begun to expose stone-built structures pre-dating the early medieval fields (to be described below). These will be further explored over the next three years.

One explanation for this small, but highly significant, assemblage is that it represents the settlement of a group of *foederati* who sensibly chose to base themselves in a well-protected *enceinte*. How extensive was the reoccupation it is not yet possible to say. The only late material so far found has come from the upper plateau in the protection of the main cross-ridge rampart. If we are, indeed, dealing with *foederati*, it is worth recalling Chadwick's suggestion that confederate troops from Britain were taken to Gaul by Magnus Maximus in 388 and were active in the protection of Armorica against northern invaders (Chadwick 1969, 162–65). A letter of Apollinaris Sidonius (*Epistulae* I, 7), referring to events in 468, mentions *Britanni* already established on the



Illus. 5 Late Roman metalwork from Le Yaudet

Loire as auxiliary troops under their chief Riothamus. Riothamus and his 12,000 'Bretons' are referred to by a slightly later writer, Jordanis (*Romana et Getica* ch. 45), who records that they responded to a request for help from the Emperor Anthemius in the face of Visigothic raids sometime around 470 (Chadwick 1969, 195–96).

The archaeological evidence from Le Yaudet is consistent with the presence of a military detachment in the early fifth century. Earlier, in the late third and fourth centuries, the site was receiving Black Burnished pottery from the Poole Harbour region of southern Britain, most likely as the result of direct maritime contact between the two ports. If, at the end of the fourth century, troops were leaving Britain for Armorica it is not inconceivable that they would have used the traditional shipping lanes and ports which had been in operation in the centuries before. If so, then the late fourth- and early fifth-century occupation at Le Yaudet might, more appropriately, be considered to be the beginning of the earliest medieval settlement rather than the end of the Roman. The site, evidently, has great potential for throwing light on these important historical questions.

THE TRANSFORMED LANDSCAPE, A.D. 450–1000

Evidence for early medieval activity has been found across the upper plateau and is particularly well-preserved in the deeply stratified sequences examined behind the main cross-ridge rampart, where several phases of activity can be distinguished. The horizon of concern here is stratified above the latest Roman material and below medieval stone buildings and their associated occupation levels, the pottery from which would suggest a beginning in the tenth or eleventh century.

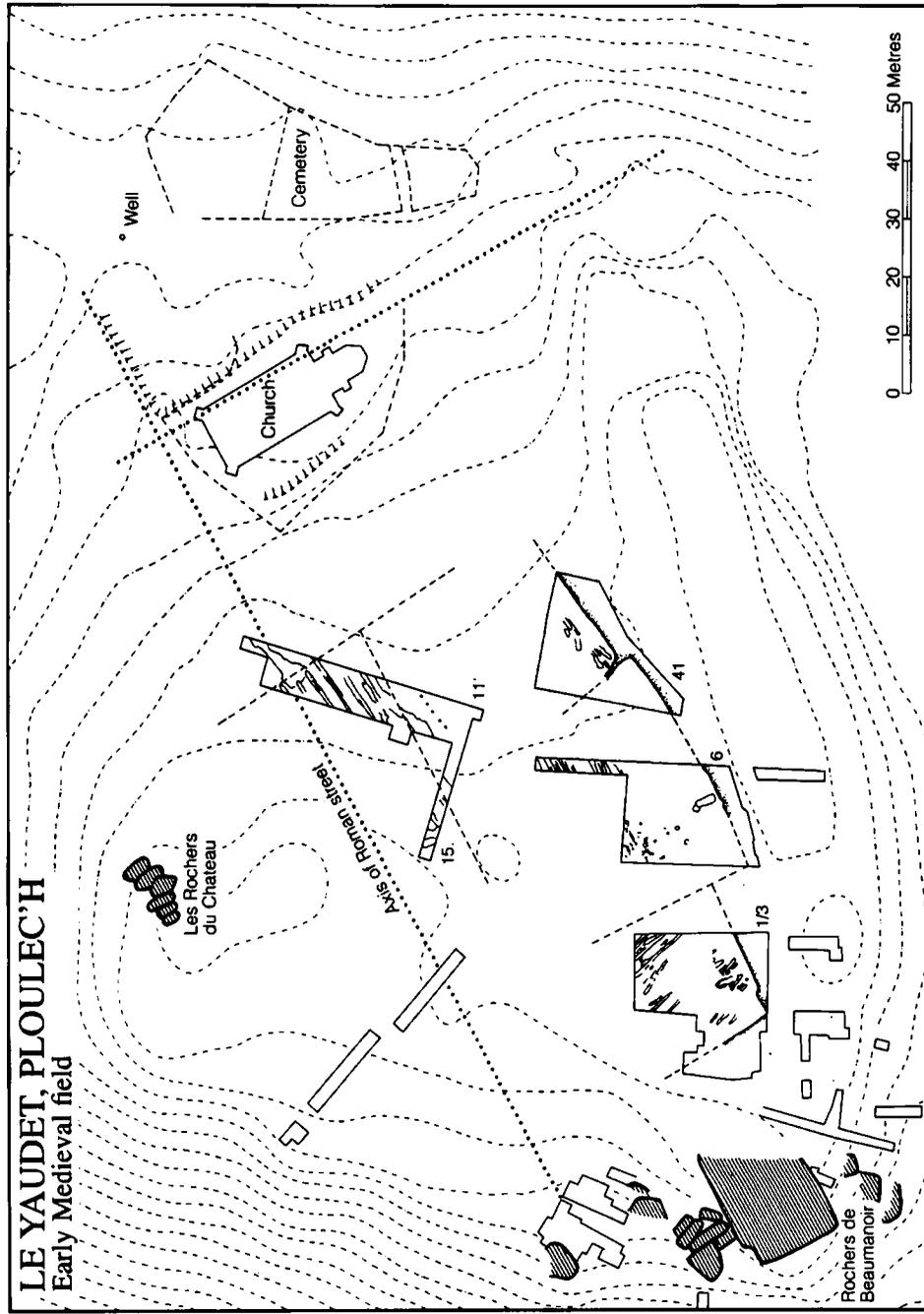
Early in the post-Roman period a series of cultivation plots was systematically laid out from the back slope of the old rampart extending northwards across the upper plateau towards Les Rochers du Château (Illus. 6 and 10). The field boundaries were best preserved at their southern extremity where they were terraced into the back of the rampart, but further to the north, where the stratigraphy is shallower, the edge of at least one plot can be distinguished. Although the plan, at present, is incomplete, the original land apportionment was evidently highly systematic. The main axis from which the system was laid out appears to have been that of the Roman N-S road, although one of the plots extended across the road line.

The southern ends of two plots were readily defined in trenches 1/3 and 6. In both cases the southern boundary was created by piling up stones, derived from the spread of rubble on the back of the rampart, to form a low revetting wall against the rampart slope (Illus. 7). The walls were comparatively well built and survived to what was probably their maximum height of 0.6 m. The wall exposed in trench 1/3 had a complex history. Part of it was rebuilt on two separate occasions and part was subsequently removed, probably in the later medieval period, leaving only a scarp in the rubble beneath to mark its position. Further to the north, in trench 11/15, one of the field boundaries seems to have been defined by a hedge, marked now by heavy leaching and ancient root disturbance running in a clearly defined band across the natural granitic sand.

To the east, in parcelle 1016, the recent excavation (July 2000) has exposed part of two fields divided by a wall and terraced into the rubble behind the rampart (Illus. 8). Here the southernmost boundary wall could be shown to be rebuilt on three separate occasions.

Cultivation in at least three of the fields was by 'lazy bed' agriculture which involved digging parallel trenches some 0.6 m wide and 2 m apart and heaping up the soil in between. The benefit of this system was that the trenches provided drainage and access paths while the 2-m wide strip of enhanced soil between, which was no doubt systematically manured, could be hand-cultivated by a worker standing in the narrow trenches. Such a system was widely used in Atlantic regions of Europe and is still practised in remote areas today. The method is described for Ireland by Estyn Evans (Evans 1942, 91–92) and, in a broader geographical context, by Pierre Flatrès (1957, 301–20) who, at that time, was of the opinion that the technique of creating raised cultivation ridges was introduced with the potato. However, there is now undisputed evidence to show that cultivation ridges, locally known as 'cord rigg' and found extensively in Northumberland, pre-date the construction of Hadrian's Wall (Gates 1999).

Archaeologically the system is represented at Le Yaudet by a series of parallel trenches in the bottoms of which paired spade marks could sometimes be traced. The trenches can easily be distinguished where they were cut into the underlying granitic sand (Illus. 9 and 10) but where they are not deep enough to penetrate the sand they are more difficult to trace. Where hard granitic bedrock was encountered the cultivators made no attempt to cut it away. For these reasons the system of trenches, as it now survives in the archaeological record, is incomplete though quite cohesive.



Illus. 6 Le Yaudet: general plan of the early medieval features behind the rampart



Illus. 7 Field wall in trench 1/3

The cultivation plot encountered in trenches 1/3 and 27/34 has, so far, been the most informative (Illus. 9). Here it has been possible to trace three separate phases of trench digging, each on a slightly different alignment. It was also possible to demonstrate that a large corn-drying oven (F114), found towards the corner of the field, had been built after cultivation had begun but that it went out of use before the final phase of cultivation. The three phases demonstrable in the working of the field may correlate with the three phases noted in its south boundary wall. In the same area there was clear stratigraphic evidence to show that cultivation had ceased by the eleventh century at which time buildings and contemporary occupation layers had spread over the old fields.

The extent of this early medieval cultivation has not yet been precisely delineated but it was limited on the southeast by the old rampart and on the west by the ridge of outcropping granite running from the Rochers de Beaumanoir to the Rochers du Château. It may originally have extended northeast beneath at least part of the later medieval village (but see below, p. 222).

Between the cultivation plots a number of structural features were found. Rows of stake-holes, post-holes and shallow scoops exposed in trench 6 evidently represent activity possibly associated with light structures of some kind while a row of large



Illus. 8 Cultivation plots and field wall in trench 41

rectangular post-holes in trench 11/15 are likely to belong to a more substantial construction. Further excavation is needed to elucidate the nature of this activity.

Within the plots three substantial drying ovens (F114, F127 and F195) were identified two of which, F114 and F195, were fully excavated. Ovens F114 and F127 lay side by side in trench 3. Both pre-dated one phase of 'lazy-beds' and appear to have been cut into an earlier system. F195, in trench 6, could be shown to have been in use after the adjacent field wall had been built since the stones of the wall face close to the oven flue were scorched red. If the ovens were broadly contemporary, the simplest explanation would be to suppose that they were built after the fields had been laid out in one of the periods of fallow, and that later at least one of the fields was brought back into cultivation. It could, however, be that oven F195 replaced oven F114 when cultivation recommenced.

Oven F114 was totally excavated (Illus. 11 and 12). It was composed of large flat slabs of granite set upright in a rectangular trench, so creating an oven chamber 0.8 by 2.8 m. The spaces between the stones had been packed with clay. A shallow stoking chamber lay at the southeast end. That the structure had functioned as an oven is shown by the intense heat to which the interior had been subjected. The base was covered by a thin layer of compacted charcoal and soot mixed with fragments of burnt



Illus. 9 Cultivation trenches in trench 1/3

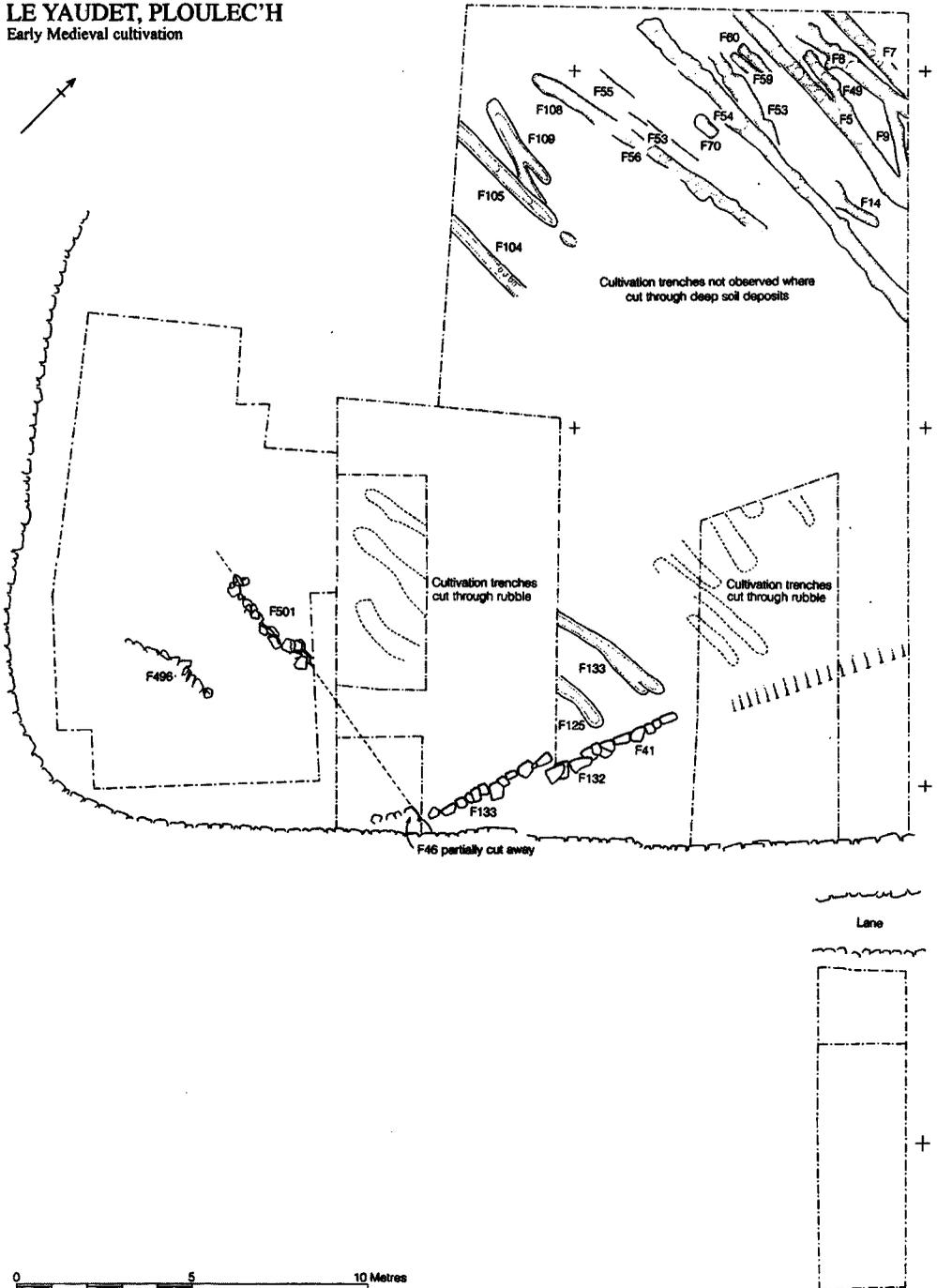
daub averaging 20 mm in thickness. Above this was a single fill consisting of dark grey-black sandy soil with flecks of burnt daub and charcoal mixed with large blocks of granite fairly tightly packed together.

Oven F195 was built in a somewhat different style (Illus. 13 and 14), though it is similar in size and general form to F114. The oven was constructed within a rectangular pit cut down to the granite bedrock. Its walls were built of irregular blocks set in rough courses with larger slabs laid on their sides at the lowest levels. Overall the floor was level except at the north end where it sloped up. The faces of most of the blocks and the floor were heavily burnt. The structure was built with its southern end close against the revetting wall, the face of which had suffered burning at this point. There was no stoking pit or other access to the flue chamber through the sides or end. The base of the structure was covered by a thin discontinuous layer of compacted charcoal and soot, above which was a single filling of black sandy soil packed with large blocks of granite.

Of the third oven, F127, which lay close to F114, only the corner projected into the excavation. It is unexcavated apart from the corner of its flue.

Exactly how these ovens functioned it is difficult to say. While F114 could have been fed with fuel from its 'stoking pit', this was not an option for F195 which could

LE YAUDET, PLOULEC'H
Early Medieval cultivation

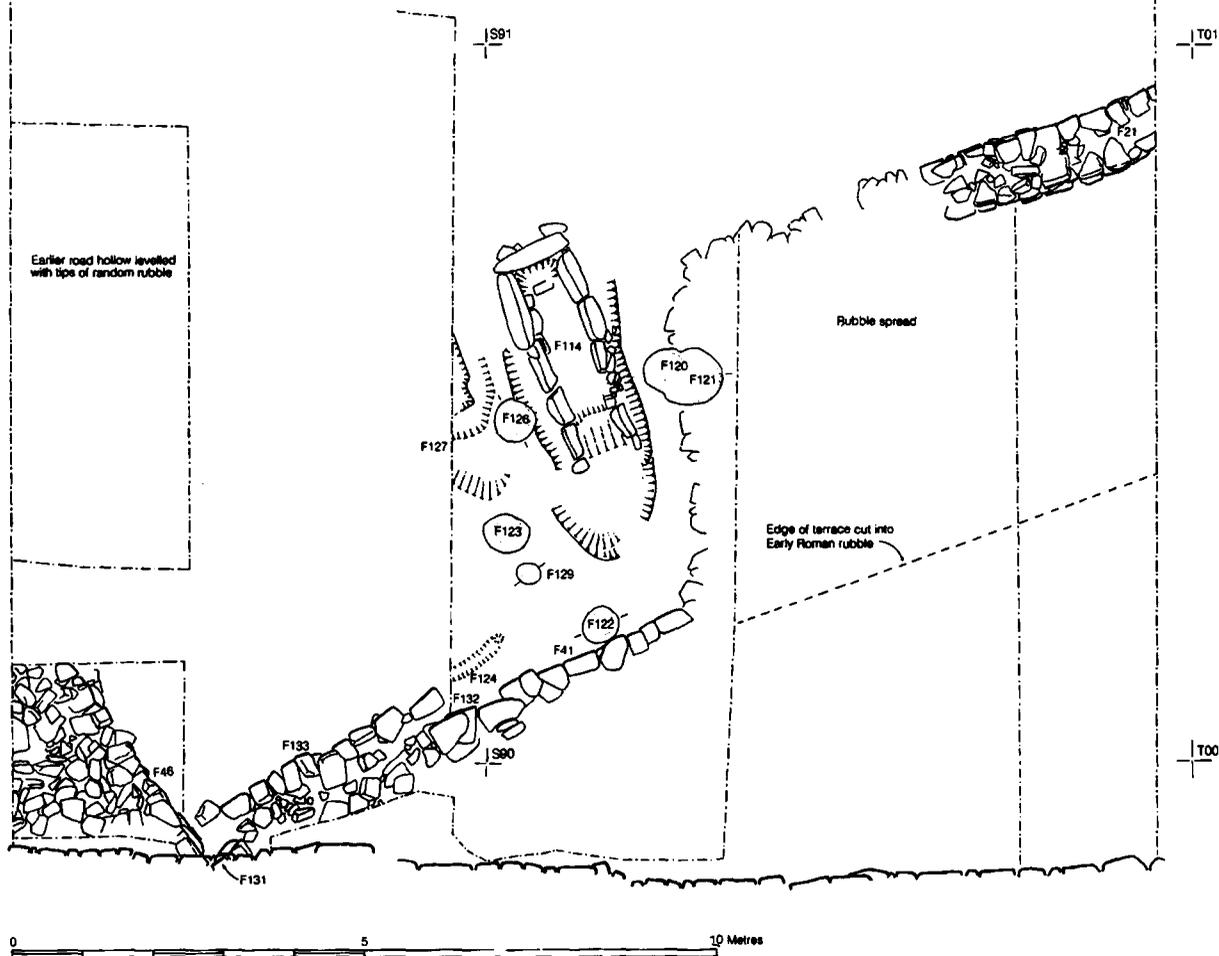


Illus. 10 Plan of cultivation plots in trench 1/3

LE YAUDET, PLOULEC'H

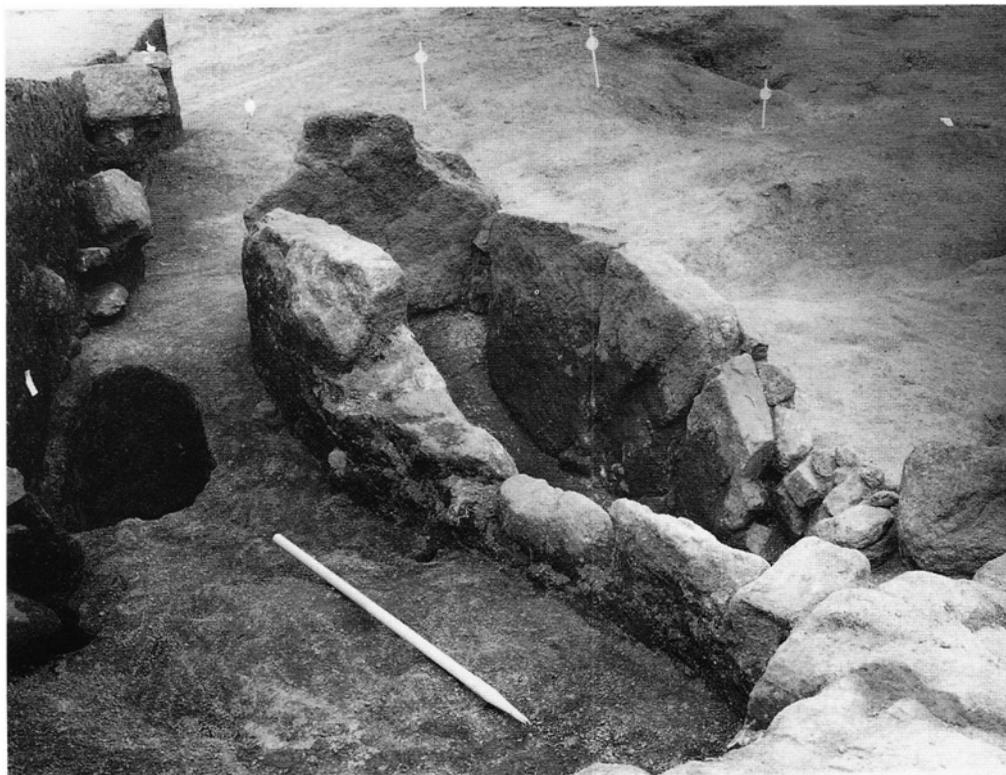
Trenches 1 & 3 1991-3

Roman to Early Medieval features



Illus. 11 Oven F114 — plan

only have been served from above. It is simpler, therefore, to think of these structures as little more than stone-lined trenches in which fires were lit. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility that they were fitted with temporary superstructures which were dismantled when a new fire had to be laid. A number of post-holes were found in the vicinity of F114: any or all could have been part of a superstructure. Two in particular, F126 and F120/121, appear to be a pair spanning the oven. No comparable post-holes were found near F195. Here the only associated structure was an area of stepped granite paving (layer 206) close to the northern end which seems to have been designed simply to provide a convenient approach.



Illus. 12 Oven F114

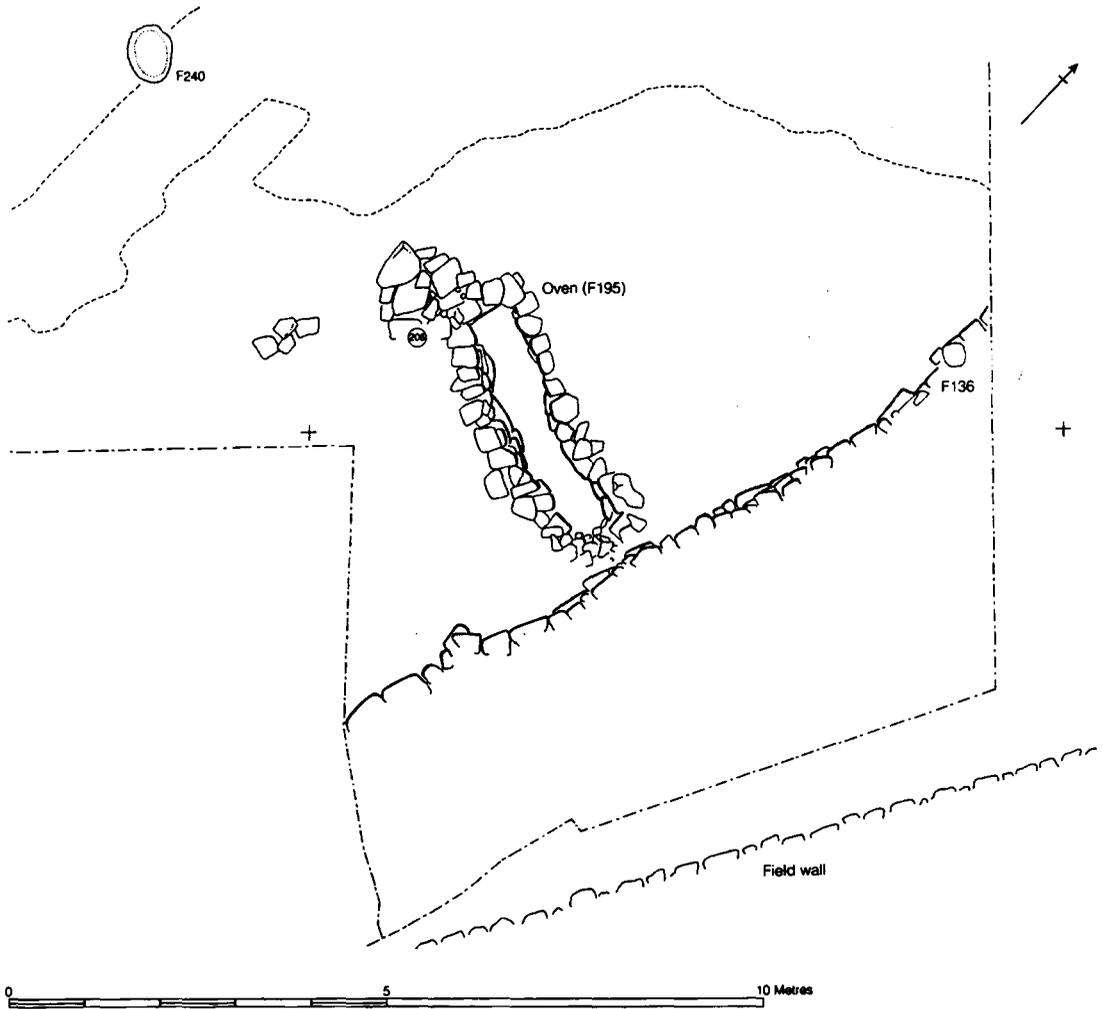
The charcoal-rich deposits in the two completely excavated ovens were systematically sampled; floatation of the samples to separate carbonized plant remains took place on site. The flots were studied by Gill Campbell, at the Environmental Archaeology Unit of the University of Oxford. Both ovens produced large well-preserved assemblages of plant debris. The samples from F114 contained large amounts of cereal remains. In layer 8, towards the bottom of the filling, rye grain was dominant whereas free-threshing wheat grain was more abundant in the sample from layer 3 higher up. Both samples also contained rye and bread-wheat chaff as well as small amounts of cultivated oats and barley. Weed seeds included *Raphanus raphanistrum* (wild radish), *Polygonum persicaria* (redshank), *Fallopia convolvulus* (black bindweed), *Anthemis cotula* (stinking mayweed) and small grasses.

The three samples taken from F195 all contained large amounts of rye grain as well as oats, some of which is of cultivated type, free-threshing wheat (all probably hexaploid) and six-row hulled barley. In addition to the weeds noted from F114, *Chenopodium cf album* (fat hen), *Atriplex* sp. (orache), *Vicia/Lathyrus* sp., *Rumex* sp. (dock), *Tripleurospermum* sp. (mayweed) and *Lapsana communis* (nipplewort) were also present.

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Trenches 6 & 9 1994-5

Roman-Early Medieval



Illus. 13 Oven F195 — plan

The samples were sufficiently rich in grain to suggest that the prime function of the ovens was to dry grain in order to make it easier to grind. Another possibility, that they may have been for malting, should also be borne in mind (Reynolds and Langley 1979). It is clear that the principal crops of the early medieval period at Le Yaudet were rye, bread wheat and oats with lesser amounts of barley. This is in contrast to late iron age samples from the site which showed that hulled wheat, possibly both emmer and spelt, and barley were the dominant crops. Rye and oats are more suited to poor soils and rye also shows some salt tolerance. This would argue that the early medieval crops were grown in the immediate vicinity, perhaps on the adjacent fields, while the



Illus. 14 Oven F195

iron age crops may well have been brought to the site from the richer *limon* soils found further inland in areas around Ploulec'h.

Samples of individual grain were selected from both ovens and were submitted to the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit. Dr. Paul Pettitt reported the results as follows:

OxA-6716 Le Yaudet F114/8 charred seed $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -19.2$ per mil 1410 ± 45 B.P.

OxA-6717 Le Yaudet F195/3 charred seed $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -21.3$ per mil 1325 ± 55 B.P.

When calibrated the dates become:

OxA-6716 A.D. 605–660 (68.2% confidence)

A.D. 550–680 (95.4% confidence)

OxA-6717 A.D. 650–770 (68.2% confidence)

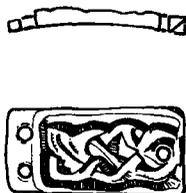
A.D. 600–820 (95.4% confidence)

The dates fall squarely within the early medieval period. While, at the 95% confidence level, it is not impossible that the two ovens were broadly contemporary, the dates would comfortably support the suggestion offered above that oven F195 may have replaced oven F114.

The Le Yaudet ovens are not unique. An oven very similar in size and structure was found in what appears to be a contemporary building at Livroach, Poullan (Finistère)

(Peuziat 1980). It produced a single radiocarbon date of 1310 ± 80 B.P. (Gif-4160) which calibrates, at 95% confidence, to A.D. 550–900—similar to the date range of the two Le Yaudet structures. Another oven was found inserted into a megalithic cairn at Quelarn, Ploubennalec (Finistère). A radiocarbon date for it of 1340 ± 40 B.P. (Gif-6072) calibrates at 95% confidence to 590–795 B.C. (information from the excavator, P.-R. Giot). Similar ovens (*tranchées-foyers*) were excavated at Creac'h Gwen, Quimper (Finistère), but are there thought to date to the tenth century (Menez and Batt 1988).

The large-scale excavation of the well-preserved and closely stratified cultivation soil of the field in parcelle 1016 in July 2000 produced a small decorated copper alloy strap fitting (Illus. 15). The fitting is decorated with simple, fairly crudely executed asymmetric interlace. Such interlace has wide-ranging affinities. Similar decoration occurs, for example, on Frankish as well as Insular metalwork, manuscripts and other media from the seventh and eighth centuries but also on tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian objects. Given the context, a seventh- to eighth-century date is more likely (H. Hamerow, pers.comm.).



Illus. 15 Early medieval bronze strap decoration

There is little that can at present be said about the nature of the settlement contemporary with the fields, but the likelihood is that it lies beneath the present cluster of early post-medieval houses close to the church which itself replaces a much earlier structure built on or within the ruins of a Roman building (Illus. 16). The location is favoured in two ways: it lies close to the main gate, immediately within the defended area, and it is the most sheltered place on the headland, well out of reach of the westerly winds. The cemetery, discovered in 1935 at 30 m or so to the east of the church, seems to have developed in the strip of land close to the eastern defensive wall separated from the church by part of the settlement. An alternative suggestion put forward by Professor Gwyn Meirion-Jones (Meirion-Jones and Jones 1997) is that the first church may have occupied the lower Roman terrace, immediately to the east of the present church. If so, then the cemetery would have been immediately adjacent to it. There is no positive evidence for this but the suggestion is plausible and could be tested by excavation.

In any event it seems probable that at least part of the earliest post-Roman settlement spread into the area west of the present church, now permanent pasture. It is hoped in future years to extend the programme of area excavation into this zone.

AFTER THE FIELDS

It was in the tenth or eleventh century that the village began to spread westwards from its nucleus around the church, along the slight col between the cross-ridge rampart

LE YAUDET, PLOULEC'H

Early Medieval



Illus. 16 Le Yaudet: the early medieval settlement and its fields

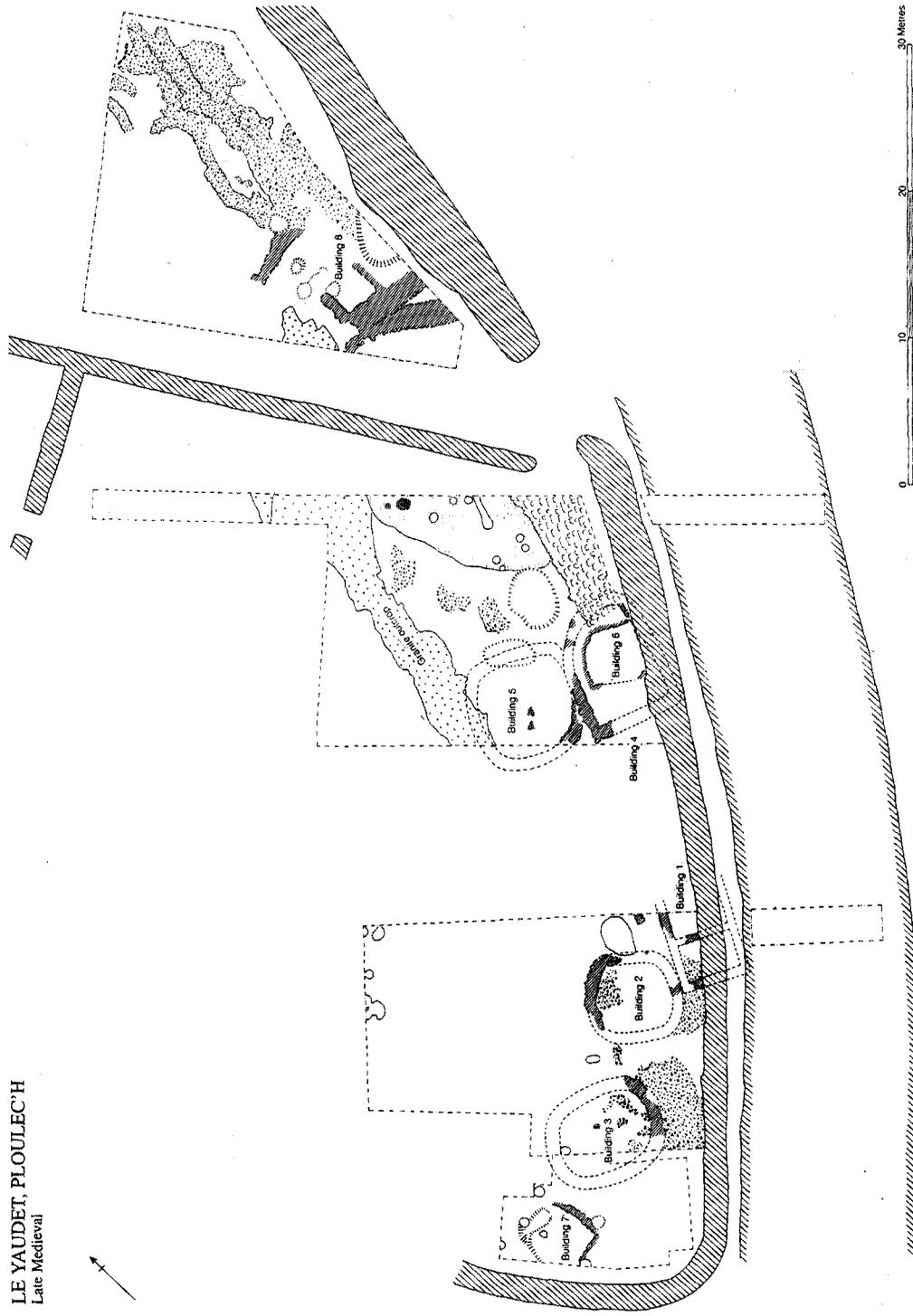
and Les Rochers du Château, covering the early field system and the structures associated with it. A number of houses of the extended village have been exposed together with cobbled areas and refuse dumps (Illus. 17). One of the structures was rectangular but the rest were modest one-roomed cottages of oval plan—a type well-known from other medieval rural sites in Brittany (Batt 1998). Once established this part of the village seems to have remained in use into the fourteenth century after which the area reverted to agricultural use once more. The architecture and associated finds suggest that this part of the medieval village was of low status. Pottery, copious in quantity, was restricted to cooking vessels—the ubiquitous *marmites*—mostly made in a local fabric but with ‘*onctueuse*’ ware (Giot 1971 and Giot and Morzadec 1996) making up some 3% of the total. Imported wares were very rare and were restricted to a few sherds of Saintonge jugs. The very limited range of pottery forms suggests that the eating and drinking equipment would have been made in organic materials, such as wood, leather and horn.

SOME IMPLICATIONS AND TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained from the first ten years of fieldwork and excavation at Le Yaudet amply demonstrate the quality of the evidence which the site holds. In this brief survey the choice was made to emphasize only part of the rich historical record, focusing on the period of transition following the collapse of Roman control. Le Yaudet, by virtue of its position, commanding excellent harbours and the river route to the interior, controlled a major route node. Cross-Channel contacts with central south and southwest Britain can be demonstrated at least as early as the third or second century B.C. through the tangible evidence of imported British pottery; the maritime contacts were maintained throughout the Roman period. Further evidence for Channel shipping in the Roman period is vividly provided both by the burnt-out wreck in St Peter Port Harbour on Guernsey (Rule and Monaghan 1993) and by the vessel carrying lead from Britain that foundered on the reefs of Les Sept Îles north of Ploumanac’h (L’Hour 1987). It is not at all unlikely that this ship was making for the harbour of Le Yaudet. Although it will never be possible to assess the volume of shipping crossing the Channel in iron age and Roman times, we can assume that the coastal communities of southern Britain were in regular and constructive contact with their neighbours on the northern coast of Armorica.

In the period of turmoil which characterized the last four decades of Roman government, three contenders for power amassed substantial armies in Britain and led them to the Continent, in 383, 401 and 407. According to Gildas (*de Excidio* 13,1) Magnus Maximus who led the exodus in 383 was accompanied by ‘a great retinue of hangers-on’ who, after the death of Maximus in 388, never returned. Little is known of the geography of the initial movements, but it is worth recalling that Nennius had access to a tradition recording that the force which Maximus took with him was eventually settled on ‘Mont Jovis’ and ‘these are the Armorican Britons and they have never returned to this day’ (*Hist. Brittonum* 27). Given these quasi-historical scraps and what can be deduced from the archaeological evidence about the vitality and longevity of the cross-Channel trading links between Britain and Armorica, Chadwick’s

LE YAUDET, PLOULEC'H
Late Medieval



Illus. 17 Late medieval settlement, immediately behind the rampart

argument (1969, 164–73) that the British migration to Armorica was under way by the last decades of the fourth century is entirely reasonable. It is not inconceivable that the force which Maximus led used the cross-Channel routes to ports like Alet and Le Yaudet. Some of the ‘hangers-on’ may have chosen to stay among people already familiar to them, others may have returned to Armorica to settle after the failure and death of Maximus a few years later—but here we begin to stray into the realms of the historical novel. What is clear, however, is that the early fifth century saw the beginning of the breakdown in civil order throughout Armorica. This much is implied by Zosimus (*Hist. nova* VI,5) for A.D. 410 and by the major Bagaudic revolt which gripped the country in 435–37 (*Chronica Gallica* 435, 437).

Within this broad historical context must be placed the evidence for the late fourth- to early fifth-century occupation in Le Yaudet. It represents a community, of uncertain size and ethnic origins though probably military in nature, established within a well-fortified *enceinte*. Similar evidence, in the form of belt buckles, cruciform fibulae and penannular brooches, has been recovered from the sites of villas, temples and cemeteries scattered throughout Brittany (Galliou 1983, 261–68). It is not impossible that we are seeing the beginnings of the British settlement—the bow-wave that was to swell to tidal proportions by the middle of the fifth century.

What followed at Le Yaudet was the emergence of a well-organized agrarian community by the beginning of the seventh century, living and farming within the confines of the old defensive circuit. It is not yet possible to say how early this phase of occupation began but the evidence does show that the fields had already been in use for some time before the ovens (from which came the dated samples) were built. Whether or not the archaeological evidence will ever be sufficient to establish continuity (or discontinuity) between the early fifth-century occupation and that of the late sixth remains to be seen. What is certain is that by *c.* A.D. 600 a community, possibly of early Bretons, was firmly entrenched in Le Yaudet establishing a tradition that has remained unbroken to the present day.

The pioneering work of Giot at St-Urmel, Lavret and Ile Guennoc, the discoveries of Peuziat at Livroach and the current work at Le Yaudet have amply demonstrated that archaeology has a major contribution to make to the intricate theme of the transformation of Armorica to Brittany. The challenge now is to design research programmes that will allow the archaeological potential to be realised and brought into constructive dialogue with the textual and linguistic evidence.

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