

## A Pan-European Study of ancient Souterrains and of ancient concepts of Underground Living: Preliminary thoughts.

I need to spend some time studying the following two references relating to work by members of the UIS Italian Commission on Artificial Cavities:

1. **Classification of Artificial Cavities. A First Contribution by the UIS Commission by Mario Parise, Carla Galeazzi and Martin Dixon [ [artificialcavities.wordpress.com](http://artificialcavities.wordpress.com)]**
2. **Creating a Map of the Underground Heritage in the Mediterranean Area : A Visual Representation for a Comparative Research by Polimeni, B et alia (2019) IN G. Amoruso, R. Salerno (eds) Cultural Landscapes in Practice. Lecture Notes in Civil Engineering, Vol. 26, Springer. [found at [dora.dmu.ac.uk](http://dora.dmu.ac.uk)]**

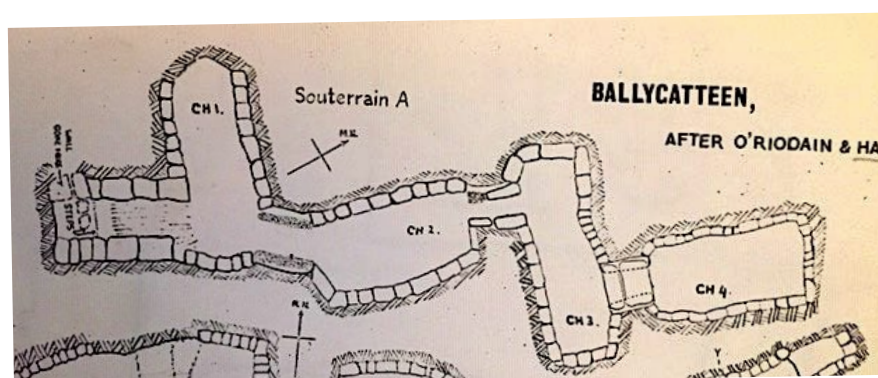
**Proposal?.....** A Comparative Study of Souterrain Architectures across the European Mainland (France, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic) and on to Britain and Ireland.

How might one attempt this? Who would co-ordinate? How would the study be framed?

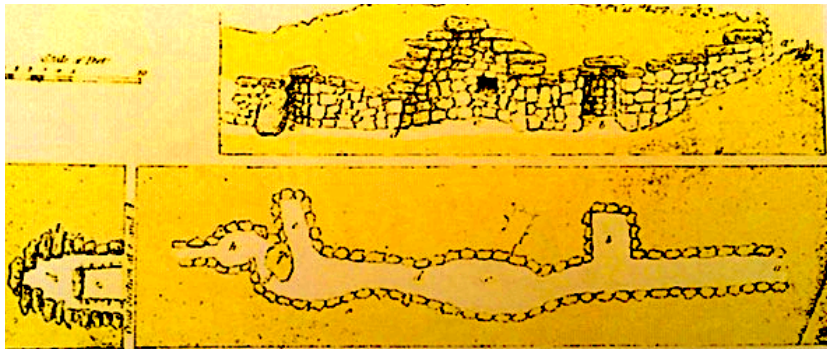
**Souterrain architectures:** For each structural type found in the above European landscapes, if that type were defined by agreed similarities ( e.g. ground plan type, passage and cubicle module lay-outs), could such research lead to the creation of a classification system which would work and would a geography of the spread of structural types become feasible? If so, then what type of ancient cultural geography would be revealed and what might it say about European cultural migration and the forgotten lives of the less fortunate social levels in those many centuries before the Middle Ages came to be; centuries some would describe as the world of 'Celtic' or 'Barbarian' peoples, but at the same time a world of clans and tribes each with its own social stratigraphy and laws?

**How dis-similar are these groups of structural plans from each other?**

**Group 1:**



**Souterrain A at Ballycatten tri-vallate ringfort, Near Bandon River and Kinsale County Cork. (After O Riordáin 19...).** How does this compare with the plan of a souterrain from the Hebrides below?



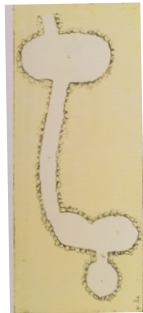
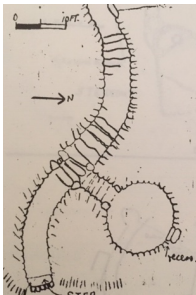
**Sectional View and Ground Plan of Underground Gallery called *Uamh Sgalabhad*, Near *Mol a Deas*, Huishnish, Island of South Uist (Proceedings Society of Antiquaries Scotland, Vol. VII, Plate XXXV.)**

## Group 2

In terms of vernacular architecture and regardless of size measurement how different are the two structures below? Yes, that structure on the right hand side does not have a sub-rectangular chamber so ignore it. But, there is a long passage and a circular cell does project from one side of the enlarged passage end. There may be very few direct replications of vernacular structural forms across the souterrain record for Western Europe but there are some elements for comparison within the modular nature of what were constructed. The souterrain on the left below is the **Carn Euny** fogous, Cornwall. On the right is a 'semi-subterranean **both** and underground gallery at ***Meal na hUamh, Mol a Deas***, Huisnish, Island of South Uist ( from PSAS Vol.VII, Plate XXXIII).

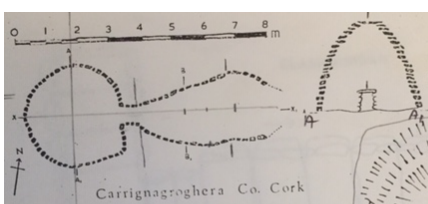
Note that just like some ***clocháns*** the **both (bothy)** is sod-covered and though not strictly subterranean, in another sense it is! Both sites are drystone built. In the context of making a distinction between what is surface built, and then sod covered, and what is built in a trench and fully submerged after backfilling, I doubt if it made any difference both being engineering

solutions suited to local circumstances i.e. if there is a good depth of boulder clay or glacial drift material beneath the local grass surface then create a souterrain which is fully submerged in a trench, if not then build it on the surface and cover it with sods.



The circular plan projecting cell / chamber at each of the above sites is a feature found in quite a few souterrain plans from Western Europe and it can occur in both clay/ rock tunnelled as well as in drystone built sites. Fr. Dinneen's Dictionary mentions something called a **Cuileach** i.e. 'a storehouse or a small side room for a sleeping apartment'. However he is referencing a traditional Irish cabin dwelling. Is the concept behind the word older and is that what such projecting little cells were called? In Scotland a **Cuiltean** was the name for a 'milk cupboard' in a **bothán** (bothy). In his privately printed pamphlet of 1892 called *The Underground Life*, author David Macritchie (page 13) referring to a bothy house - with underground gallery attached to it - known to have been in use up to the 1840s on the Island of Boreray when visited by the residents of St. Kilda for fowling and hunting sheep. It had 6 croops, 'in Gaelic **crub** = a wall-bed'. Does a word like this also describe wall-chambers in the walls of **cahirs** in the West of Ireland e.g. at Leachanabuile near Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry?

### Group 3 : Co-incidence or something else?



**Carrignagroghera, Fermoy, Co. Cork at the west tail end of the Carn Tierna (the Lord's Cairn) Hillfort from report by M. J. O'Kelly and Dr. E. Shee in the Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society [see [corkhist.ie](http://corkhist.ie)]**

**NB= Insert here the American beehive souterrain-like structure from Massachusetts for comparison.**