Anglo-Norman Parks in Medieval Ireland. Fiona Beglane.
Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015. xii + 228 pp. $70.

Irish Demesne Landscapes, 1660–1740. Vandra Costello.
Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015. 256 pp. $74.50.

Both of these books make important contributions to understanding the history of privately owned and managed landscape spaces from the Middle Ages to the early eighteenth century. Parks, either for the storage of animals or woodland for human use or as segments of nature preserved for aesthetic enjoyment, have been a feature of European landscapes for at least a millennium.

Fiona Beglane looks at the existence and distribution of medieval parks on this westernmost extremity of Europe — focusing attention on the form and function of parks, their ownership and management, and their distribution on the island of Ireland. As the title indicates, the focus is principally on Anglo-Norman Ireland since the native Gaelic Irish lordships do not appear to have engaged with enclosed parklands. Parks were an important landscape manifestation of the feudal world, where landowning elites emparked large or small swathes of land for their private use. The most significant parks were developed for the retention of fallow deer for hunting, or simply as corrals for cattle and livestock, or as repositories of forest timber and its fruits, which with fishponds, tillage fields, mills, and villages were reflections of the North European manorial system.

In comparison with England, such parks were relatively sparse in Ireland — considerably less than one hundred, compared with from two to three thousand in England ca. 1300. Of course, the principal difference in Ireland was that the Anglo-Norman conquest and settlement was always partial in its regional impact — as the author points out, the Irish landscape was physically and legally very different from that of England. Documented parks were found only in the predominantly eastern Norman colony. Their location is often reflected in surviving park placenames, though a great many of these are also legacies of the later development of landscape parks in the eighteenth century, which are examined in Costello's *Irish Demesne Landscapes, 1660–1740.*

Royal parks, of which there were a great many in medieval England, were the property of the Crown, with stringent regulations on their use. As one would expect with the king being a distant figure in Ireland, there was only one royal park, at Glencree in Wicklow. Other significant parks were held by archbishops and bishops of the medieval Church, and by great Anglo-Norman land magnates such as the de Burghs, FitzGeralds, de Clares, Butlers, and so on. In England parks were managed to provide fallow deer for hunting or more frequently as corrals for other livestock, though as in Ireland most were not extensive enough for hunting and were essentially live larders to provide venison or other meat, or stores of timber. The parks in Ireland mainly functioned as cattle pastures, woodlands for timber and wood products, or as pannage for browsing pigs.

Red deer, which were regarded as the noblest form of hunting, were usually associated with the chase across unenclosed extensive countrysides, which were still common in Ireland in the medieval period in contrast to the much more crowded and cultivated landscapes of England. Gaelic Irish elites probably hunted red deer as cross-country quarry. This strenuous form of hunting was associated with martial training for men in lands where war and interterritorial strife were common, as was the case in medieval Ireland, and where knowledge of local landscapes was a valuable strategic asset. But the evidence for links between deer and parks in Ireland seems to be limited enough and much of the author's discussion is necessarily speculative and based on English experience.

Costello's study forms an appropriate follow-up to the examination of medieval parks and also happily covers the period in Irish landscape history that preceded the blossoming of an interest by landowning elites in the picturesque as a landscape aesthetic, examined recently in Finola O'Kane's important *Ireland and the Picturesque: Design, Landscape Painting and Tourism 1700–1840* (2013). The seventeenth century witnessed the reestablishment of the tradition of hunting from the medieval period in Ireland, and deer parks were certainly marks of prestige for the new landowning elites of the seventeenth century. However, these seemingly natural gardens, woods, and parklands (often collectively called demesnes, which itself confusingly refers to the lands belonging to the manorial lords under the feudal system) were highly contrived landscapes carefully planned and managed, in keeping with a developing craze for improvement. These parks were designed to facilitate hunting and encourage breeding — reflected in carefully designed clumps of trees, avenues and rides, warrens, and duck decoys, all with practical functions. Although Beglane's medieval parks had a modicum of symbolic importance as reflections of an order under the control of a powerful feudal lord, the demesnes and estate parklands that emerged in the later seventeenth century had a much greater symbolism and significance for landscape meaning. A burgeoning Anglo-Irish consciousness strove to imprint its distinctiveness from the English metropole in its evolving landscape and reached a pinnacle of development in the Irish picturesque of the later eighteenth century.

Demenses and garden design were part of a wave of interest in moral, social, and economic improvement. Landscape gardens were to be practical and pleasing, embodying the principle of *utile et dulci* (197). Gardens and good husbandry were marks of the superiority of the new British (Costello calls them English) settler class in Ireland. This was demonstrated through an imposition of order and regulation, which was manifested in classic geometric landscapes of the later seventeenth century. Tamed, indeed tortured, nature displayed a drive for order in rigidly geometric gardens and avenues, and in the topiary of trimmed and pollarded shrubs and trees. Parks and gardens were developed for the enjoyment of their produce (in orchard fruits, in the fish and game of their ponds, pigeon houses, and warrens) and their views and prospects reflected in *allées*, avenues, parterres, pleasure grounds, and bowling greens. Lavish garden statuary, monuments, and follies displayed for neighbors and tourists the classical education and cultural sophistication of their owners.

The plantation, maintenance, and management of trees and woodlands was seen as an important mark of landscape improvement: "tracts of woodland on demesnes symbolised the civilizing influence of landowners who created landscapes where productivity, amenity and delight were interwoven" (99). Although tenants in Ireland exploited the forests more unsustainably than in Britain, many landowners tried to manage and regulate use of their woodlands through coppicing and pollarding, for example. Pollarding had been practiced in medieval parks and continued in the early modern period as a method of preserving parkland trees from browsing by deer and cattle, but by the eighteenth century it was carried out for more aesthetic reasons — with avenues of pollarded trees making for fashionably improved views. Much of garden design and contents paralleled the expansion of the British Empire and landowners were keenly interested in obtaining exotic plants and seeds from the New World for showy display in their properties. Many of the ideas for parklands and garden design in Ireland were obtained on grand tours by the landowning elites who replicated fashionable classical designs from France, Italy, or Greece in their demesnes and houses.

Both books are copiously illustrated with diagrams, maps, and photographs, Costello's containing nine color plates, and both make important additions to our knowledge of Irish landscape history and its location in the broader English and European worlds.

Patrick J. Duffy, *Maynooth University*