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REGIONAL VARIATION IN IRISH PRE-ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE

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This paper demonstrates that the five Irish early medieval church types have markedly differential distributions. In particular, most of those with antae are in the east, while most of those without antae are in the west. It is shown that this regionalism cannot be interpreted as a deliberate strategy of material differentiation on the part of particular politico-cultural groups. A reconsideration of the chronology suggests that many of the antae-less churches are relatively late, and so the division is primarily indicative of differences in the period and rate of mortared church construction, something that is influenced by both environmental and cultural factors. It is suggested that differences in church dimensions between east and west are indicative of subtle economic differences; and a range of archaeological evidence is used to sketch other economic and cultural variations. These patterns highlight the importance of exploring regionality, even when studying relatively cohesive entities such as early medieval Ireland.

INTRODUCTION

In a thought-provoking retrospective on the study of early medieval archaeology in Ireland, O'Sullivan proposed that in the first half of the twentieth century 'central themes were put in place which have continued to shape archaeological writing on the ... period'.¹ One of those he lists is 'the perceived unity of material culture throughout the island'. Ample evidence for this assumption can be found in the literature.² For example, the de Paors³ stated that 'the very shape of the island makes for a unity of culture, since the wide lowlands offer no formidable barrier to the spread of new fashions once they have become established in the country',⁴ while Lynn has argued that ringforts and their related artefact assemblages are indicative of 'a uniform culture over the whole island'.⁵ Archaeologists have tended to synchronize characteristics from different areas into a single narrative uncomplicated by regional variation.⁶ Where they are recognized, regionalisms are often explained away as the result of differential survival. For example, in a discussion of Irish high crosses, Henry at one point recognizes the existence of sculptural schools⁷ but elsewhere writes that 'neither [their general] distribution nor the groups which one has to outline for convenience's sake have a very definite meaning'; she negates the significance of discrete groups such as those in the Ahenny area by suggesting that they 'may ... have been more widespread at one time'.⁸

That Ireland was culturally cohesive is clear from the documentary sources (see below), and even a cursory look at the archaeological evidence indicates that Irish politico-cultural groupings did not have markedly contrasting material cultures. This cohesiveness is in itself something that merits examination,⁹ but archaeologists must also seek to characterize the material diversity

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that patently exists¹⁰ and to investigate what it may reveal about cultural and economic variation and the formation of subtle regional identities. To date, the most promising studies in this regard have been about various categories of sculpture;¹¹ but the theme of regionality has also begun to permeate the study of early medieval buildings. For example, in 1988 Colin Rynne stressed that 'the uniformity of design shown in these mills is a clear indication that the skills of those plying the trade traversed the whole island',¹² but a decade later he had recognized 'widespread variations on [the] basic design [which] can best be explained in terms of regional millwrighting traditions'.¹³ In this article the focus is on church buildings, a subject that has been dominated by a concern with typology and chronology. This is exemplified by the suggestion that barrel-vaulted churches developed directly from drystone churches of Gallarus type (see figs 2 and 6).¹⁴ Apart from the obvious architectural objections (see below), this argument shows a total disregard for regional variation, given that these two church types are almost exclusively at opposite sides of the country. It was Harbison who first pointed this out, and he illustrated the point with a distribution map of drystone churches.¹⁵ Remarkably, this remains the only published distribution map of an Irish early medieval church type, and there have been no other attempts at spatial analysis.¹⁶ In general, scholars of other areas of western Europe have been more cognizant of regional variation.¹⁷ Anglo-Saxonists, for example, have long been aware that there were three main traditions of church building in pre-Viking England: those of Kent, Northumbria and Mercia;¹⁸ and differences in Later Saxon churches have been discussed in relation to stone supply in particular.¹⁹ Nonetheless, as Carver recently commented, much of the variety in Anglo-Saxon architecture has been 'long observed but little understood'.²⁰

TYPOLGY, CHRONOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTION

Once the five Irish pre-Romanesque church types in Harbison's categorization²¹ are mapped it becomes clear that their distribution is crucial to our understanding of them (fig 1).²² This paper is primarily concerned with Types 2 and 3, unicameral mortared buildings which represent the vast majority of extant churches, but first we shall take a brief look at the other types. Type 1 churches (fig 2) are of drystone construction, and originally had corbelled roofs, though the only intact examples are at Gallarus and Skellig Michael. Excavation now suggests that the type developed in or around the eighth century, but it is possible that they were still being built towards the end of the period.²³ As figure 1 illustrates, this is a local building type largely confined to peninsular Kerry, with just a small handful of outliers elsewhere on the west coast (the provincial and county names are shown in fig 10). It is no coincidence that this area, referred to here as Zone 1, also has by far the highest concentration of drystone domestic buildings in the country.²⁴ However, it would be misleading to see Type 1 churches as evolving from an 'indigenous' building tradition that extends into prehistory,²⁵ for several excavations in the area hint that there was a general shift from wattle to drystone construction a few centuries into the early medieval period.²⁶ Whatever the reasons for this localized shift,²⁷ the result is that peninsular Kerry has the highest survival rate of early churches in the country.²⁸

Of the mortared churches, Type 4 are small buildings, with thatched or shingled roofs and a rectangular chancel separated from the nave by a plain semicircular arch (eg Killiney, Co Dublin and Trinity, Glendalough: fig 3). Type 5 churches can also have a chancel, but their defining feature is a barrel vault surmounted by a corbelled roof (eg St Kevin's, Glendalough: fig 4). The examples mapped in figure 1 generally lack Hiberno-Romanesque sculpture,²⁹ but Type 5 vaulting clearly derives from eleventh-century Romanesque technology abroad.³⁰

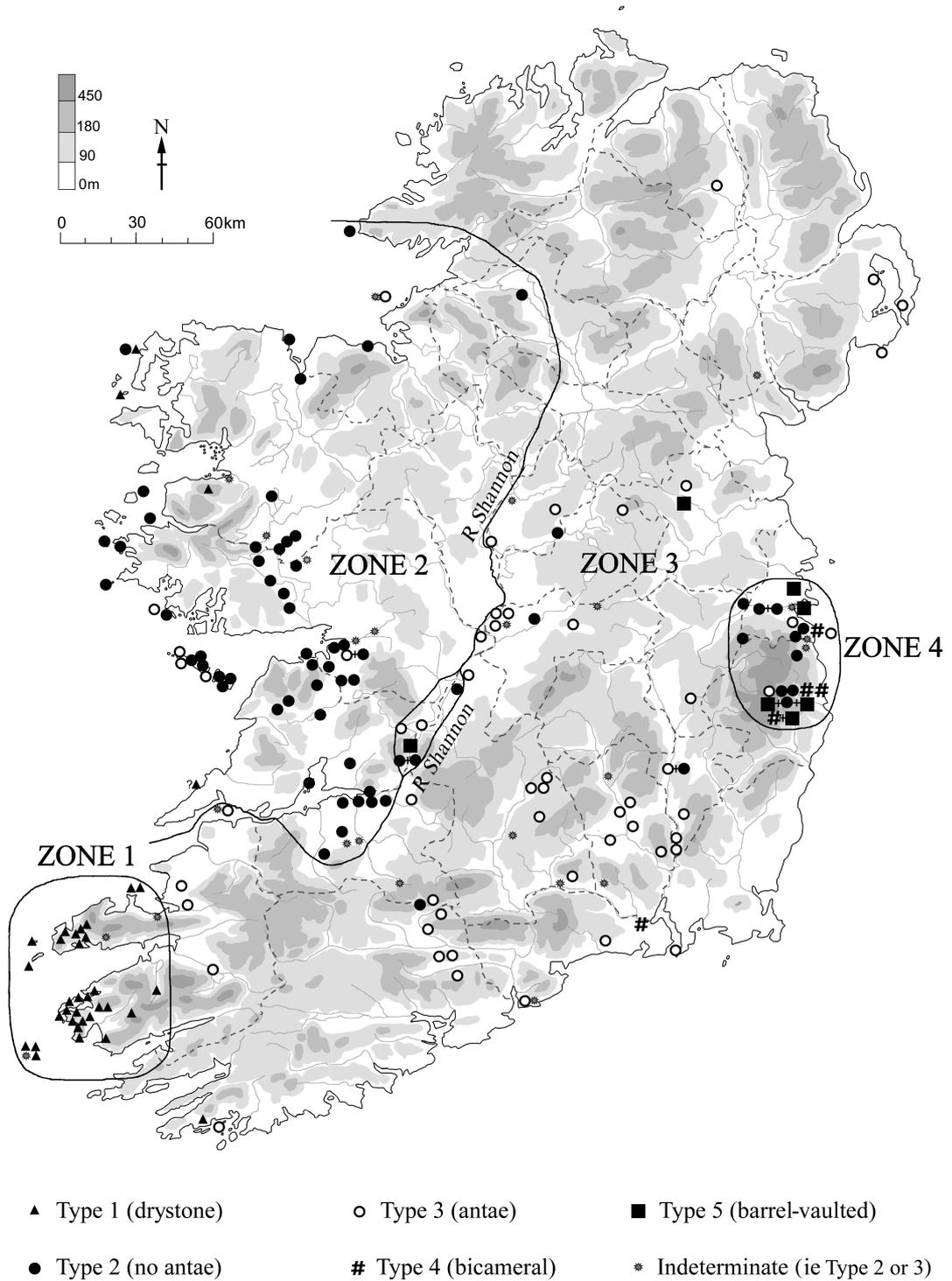


Fig 1. Early medieval church types (the plus sign indicates a second phase of building)



Fig 2. Type 1 drystone church at Gallarus, Co Kerry. *Photograph: author*



Fig 3. Type 4 nave-and-chancel church, Trinity, Glendalough. *Photograph: author*



Fig 4. Type 5 barrel-vaulted church, St Kevin's, Glendalough. *Photograph:* author

Nave-and-chancel churches obviously have a much older pedigree abroad, but most scholars agree that the earliest extant Irish examples belong to the latter half of the eleventh century.³¹ Figure 1 shows that both types are concentrated in the Dublin/Wicklow area, referred to here as Zone 4. It will already be clear that the traditional characterization of these buildings as pre-Romanesque is problematic from both a formal and a chronological point of view.³² The term is applicable only in so far as they pre-date the majority of buildings with Romanesque sculpture. As we shall see, there is probably a more substantial overlap between Types 4 and 5 and the plain unicameral mortared churches (Types 2 and 3). Zone 4 therefore emerges as the only area characterized by a degree of architectural diversity in the later eleventh/early twelfth centuries, for it also features several Type 2 churches and a few Type 3 churches. In my opinion, its unique character should be viewed in the context of the ecclesiastical and economic links between Dublin and England, and the political wrangling between Dublin and Glendalough at a time when the Hiberno-Norse port was emerging as a powerful, reform-minded force in the Irish Church.³³

This paper is primarily concerned with the mortared unicameral churches, which number approximately 150. The main distinction within this group is the presence or absence of antae: ie Types 3 and 2 respectively (see figs 5 and 6). Antae are pilaster-like projections of the side walls beyond the gables that, most authors agree, are 'translations into stone of the corner posts of timber prototypes'.³⁴ Notwithstanding O'Keeffe's scepticism,³⁵ compelling evidence in favour of this is found at St MacDara's and, to a lesser extent, Kilmalkedar. In these churches the antae form part of a skeuomorphic package, in which the blocks of the corbelled stone roof seem to mimic wooden shingles, while the antae themselves continue up the gables and terminate as decorated stone finials, in order to imitate the end timbers of a wooden roof.



Fig 5. Type 2 church at Kilrush, a relatively minor site on the outskirts of the Hiberno-Norse port of Limerick. *Photograph: author*

I would concur with the established view that most Type 2 and Type 3 churches were erected between *c* 900 and the first few decades of the twelfth century.³⁶ Their remarkable simplicity makes stylistic dating notoriously difficult, but we are fortunate in that the two most common words for church in the annals specify whether it is of wood (*dairthech*) or stone (*damliaic*). This allows us to sketch the slow spread of mortared stone construction from about 900 onwards.³⁷ Establishing a cut-off point for their construction is more difficult, but I would suggest that the majority are earlier than *c* 1130 or 1140. There must have been an overlap with the Romanesque churches that start to make an appearance in Munster in the early decades of the twelfth century.³⁸ In the west, most buildings with Romanesque sculpture date to the latter half of the century; even then there is no reason to assume that all new churches had to be embellished in this way.³⁹ However, I would not accept Harbison's argument that, in some western areas, the buildings under consideration here were simply plain alternatives to Romanesque and even Transitional (ie late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century) churches.⁴⁰ Two detailed studies have shown that, apart from lacking sculpture, Type 2 and Type 3 churches differ from Romanesque ones in their masonry style and in certain other details, including proportions.⁴¹ Furthermore, several plain churches in the west of the country were excluded from the present study because their masonry, and sometimes other minor characteristics, make them more akin to the Romanesque group.⁴² Thus, there is no shortage of churches, both plain and decorated, which are likely to belong to the middle and later decades of the twelfth century: this supports the possibility that most of the churches discussed here are earlier. Chronology is considered further below but, having established these broad parameters, I want to look now at their distribution. The survey revealed a striking dichotomy in this regard: Type 2



Fig 6. Type 3 church at Sheastown, a relatively minor site in Co Kilkenny. It later became the chancel of a parish church. *Photograph:* author

churches are concentrated in the west, mainly west of the Shannon and in Co Limerick (Zone 2), though a substantial number also occur in Dublin/Wicklow (Zone 4),⁴³ while Type 3 churches predominate over the rest of the country (Zone 3).⁴⁴

PROVINCIAL IDENTITY

Mapping variations like these is relatively straightforward, but interpreting them poses a greater challenge.⁴⁵ Scholars such as Hodder have shown that regional differences, especially in

high-investment phenomena such as monumental architecture, are sometimes developed and maintained deliberately, as conscious expressions of political and/or ideological allegiance.⁴⁶ However, it should be emphasized at the outset that many politico-cultural groups are difficult to identify archaeologically since they do not choose an 'overt affiliation in material culture as part of their competitive strategies'.⁴⁷ This is particularly likely in the absence of major ideological or societal differences. Nonetheless, it is worth briefly exploring the possibility of a political motivation in the present case, first because there is a degree of correspondence between the distribution of Type 2 churches and the province of Connaught, and secondly because it gives us an opportunity to address the issue of provincial identity in Ireland.

In considering this possibility it is important, first of all, to emphasize the essential unity of Irish culture in the period.⁴⁸ While the social system was by no means static, it was remarkably cohesive, given the degree of political fragmentation that pertained.⁴⁹ But participation in a unitary social system does not necessarily require complete cultural uniformity.⁵⁰ Irish society generally operated at a local level⁵¹ and, while the Irish were ultimately seen as having a common origin, genealogies went to great lengths to distinguish between different groups.⁵² In this regard, it is interesting to note Ó Donnabháin's study of skull morphology in a number of early medieval populations, which suggests that gene-flow within the island was not even,⁵³ perhaps because topographical and/or politico-cultural divisions favoured a degree of endogamy. There are also hints that the provincial divisions – which became increasingly important politically as the period progressed – were concurrent with subtle cultural differences. These may be indirectly expressed in the cosmological associations of the various provinces⁵⁴ and peculiarities have been noted in the law tracts⁵⁵ and political structure⁵⁶ of Munster in particular, while some archaeological evidence for economic and cultural variation is outlined below (see pp 35–40). However, the question being posed here is whether the elite consciously used material culture as a way of reinforcing these divisions. When we examine the fluctuating boundaries of Connaught it becomes clear that church form was not chosen with this in mind.

Compared to the other provinces, Connaught was initially underdeveloped politically. It took the consolidation of Uí Briúin power in the late eighth century for it finally to acquire a functioning provincial kingship.⁵⁷ The northern and central section of the Connaught boundary corresponds quite well to that of Zone 2 (compare fig 1 with fig 10),⁵⁸ though in the eleventh century some Connaught groups did expand into parts of Cavan, Leitrim, Longford and even Meath,⁵⁹ which are in Zone 3, albeit a part of it with relatively few extant churches. There is a more marked discrepancy between the boundaries at the south, for Zone 2 extends convincingly into Thomond (Co Clare) and Uí Fidgente (in north central Limerick). Thomond was probably part of Connaught until the eighth century⁶⁰ but, by the time these churches were being built, it was the home territory of the O'Brien overkings of Munster. The O'Briens also effectively dominated southern Connaught at this time, but the predominance of Type 2 churches in these areas cannot be interpreted as part of a political strategy on their part, not least because two of the ecclesiastical sites most closely associated with them, Tuamgraney and Inishcealtra, have Type 3 churches.⁶¹ Furthermore, if architecture was being actively used as part of a strategy of identity-formation on the part of Connaught, one might expect other regions to adopt a similar strategy, but in fact there are no clear architectural divisions within Zone 3, though it spans several kingdoms and three provinces.

This conclusion is particularly significant because of the fact that Irish secular polities seem to have expressed themselves most clearly in the ecclesiastical sphere.⁶² While the Church had the potential to transcend local identities,⁶³ in practice it was organized along territorial lines: the fortunes of principal churches were closely linked to those of secular dynasties, and most of

their affiliates were located in the same secular territory.⁶⁴ Because of this, and because Irish polities lacked centralized political institutions that are easy to recognize archaeologically, ecclesiastical monuments are often the clearest material expression of royal power.⁶⁵ But, while the distribution of high crosses and churches can be influenced by the activities of certain powerful polities (see below), deliberate cultural differentiation was not common. Renfrew has highlighted the fact that, due to peer-polity interaction and competitive emulation, rival polities are often characterized by the appearance of institutional features, such as architecture and particular artefacts, which are very similar in form.⁶⁶ A good example of this is seventh-century England where, according to Geake, 'the process of making kingdoms [...] is indicated, paradoxically, by those kingdoms becoming all very much like each other and therefore archaeologically very difficult to distinguish'.⁶⁷ In this case the various nascent kingdoms seem to have chosen the same policy: to legitimize their authority by creating material 'continuity' with Roman Britain.⁶⁸ Ireland was characterized by considerable cultural cohesiveness from about the fifth century, and given how much of its material culture was essentially Roman,⁶⁹ one wonders whether this was the result of a similar strategy on the part of Irish polities. If anything, this cohesiveness is likely to have been reinforced at the time the mortared churches were being built. This was a period of heightened national consciousness that was expressed, for example, through the literary recasting of the ninth-century Viking raiders as enemies of the state instead of relatively minor players in local and regional conflicts.⁷⁰ Rather than document in detail the contemporary emergence of kings claiming jurisdiction over the whole country, the learned classes rewrote history to incorporate an elaborate myth that pre-Christian Ireland was a single political entity complete with institutions such as an all-Ireland assembly.⁷¹ They also elaborated the idea that the Irish were ultimately descended from a common ancestor.⁷² The power of these myths would have made a strategy of material differentiation unsuitable, especially for provincial kings whose ambition it was to translate them into political reality.⁷³

REASSESSING THE ZONE 2/ZONE 3 DICHOTOMY

We must therefore look to other factors to account for these patterns. One variable that should always be borne in mind is chronology. In my opinion, the orthodox tenth- to early twelfth-century date range is simply too broad, and leads to a static picture which obscures the significance of the spatial variation that exists. Elsewhere I have published an article on pre-Romanesque masonry in which I argued that this chronology can be refined.⁷⁴ I will summarize the argument here before considering its implications for the Zone 2/Zone 3 dichotomy. The study involved the analysis of the masonry of most of the extant churches according to nine criteria including coursing, quality of fitting, block size, and so on. Significant patterns emerged, and in particular it was possible to identify five local masonry styles, mainly in the west of the country: north-west Clare/south-west Galway, the Aran Islands, Lough Corrib/Lough Mask, Limerick and, finally, east Munster. Obviously geology has a significant influence but, contrary to previous opinion,⁷⁵ this study demonstrated that it did not determine masonry style. For example, there were significant differences between north-west Clare/south-west Galway and the Aran Islands, despite the fact that they have essentially the same geology. In the former area masonry is generally of coursed and very carefully fitted blocks with very few interstitial spalls, while in the latter area coursing is generally not as consistent and blocks are more likely to be set on edge and relatively poorly fitted with generous use of spalls. The point is underscored by cases such as the round tower at Cashel, where the style of masonry is consistent throughout,

despite the fact that two rock types are employed. Clearly then, cultural factors must have come into play. However, the differences between the local styles are generally so subtle that they cannot be interpreted as having been consciously developed as part of a specific social strategy; rather, they are habitual variations that develop at a non-discursive level.⁷⁶ Habitual practices only evolve among craftspeople who work together regularly, so these discrete styles arguably represent the areas in which particular groups of masons operated. Active and repeated imitation is essential in developing these styles,⁷⁷ and so where, as here, they are apparent in small groups of structures it can be inferred that they were built in a relatively short period, perhaps no more than two or three generations.

A number of factors, both archaeological and historical, combine to suggest that the local styles developed in the period from the latter half of the eleventh century to the early twelfth century. For example, mortar samples from five of the Aran churches have produced radiocarbon determinations that strongly suggest they were built some time after the turn of the millennium.⁷⁸ Similarly the round-headed, cross-decorated doorways of some of the east Munster churches suggest they are late eleventh- or early twelfth-century.⁷⁹ Following a suggestion by Conleth Manning,⁸⁰ it was argued that antae-depth is a more widely applicable chronological indicator than these doorways, with shallow antae generally indicating a late date. A clear pattern emerged in which buildings that are independently dated to before *c* 1000 have unusually deep antae, while those with shallow antae are much more likely to have other architectural features suggesting a late date.⁸¹ Only a minority of churches belonging to one of the masonry styles have antae but, significantly, they are invariably shallower than average and, in many cases, are amongst the shallowest extant examples. Apart from a broad chronological framework, the annals also give us an indication of the type of site at which stone churches occurred. Manning's thorough study led him to conclude that they spread 'mainly to centres of *great importance* from around 900 only to become the commonest type of new church at *relatively important* centres by the late eleventh century'.⁸² In this regard it is significant that virtually all churches belonging to one of the local styles are at sites of local or, at best, regional significance rather than sites of 'great importance'.

It can therefore be argued that the habitual masonry styles are indicative of the development of local building 'industries' in certain areas during the eleventh century. Given that these styles are likely to represent quite a short building period, and one which probably extended into the first few decades of the twelfth century (see above), it may be that they developed primarily from the mid-eleventh century onwards, a possibility supported by both archaeological and historical evidence. This suggests that mortared churches were quite rare until well after the turn of the millennium. Building on this pattern, I also attempted to distinguish between churches earlier or later than the mid-eleventh century in areas lacking a local masonry style (reproduced in fig 7). In some cases, annalistic or radiocarbon evidence places a church in the earlier group, while in others an early date can be suggested based on antae-depth and/or aperture type. Some of the individual datings in figure 7 are speculative, and it was presented not as a definitive chronological framework but as an interpretative model that will need further substantiation and refinement. However, the model is based on definite patterns in the historical and archaeological record and provides a much better 'fit' between theory and data than was previously possible.⁸³ If accepted, it transforms the question of regional variation, for all the churches known to belong to the earlier group are Type 3 while most of those in the later group are Type 2. The conclusion that antae got shallower over time might also be seen to support the possibility that Type 2 churches are a relatively late phenomenon: the eventual outcome of this trend.⁸⁴

A few Type 2 churches may be earlier. For example, Kilmacduagh, Co Galway, and Kilfenora, Co Clare,⁸⁵ occur at regionally important sites, and their masonries do not belong to the local north-west Clare/south-west Galway style. But only the former definitely lacks antae and, even if both did, evidence of a clear Zone 2/Zone 3 dichotomy in the early period is lacking. Nor, it seems, did such a dichotomy develop after the mid-eleventh century, for the Type 2 form was by then the most common choice for new churches in most areas. It obviously predominates in Connaught and Clare, and is also much more common than Type 3 churches in the hinterlands of the Hiberno-Norse ports of Limerick and Dublin. Furthermore, if the dating suggested above is accepted, then the east midlands and middle reaches of the Shannon saw the erection of more Type 2 churches than Type 3 churches during this period. The only Type 3 churches for which late dates could reasonably be argued are Temple Dowling at Clonmacnoise and possibly Lynally, while Type 2 churches occur at Agharra, Lemanaghan and Friar's Island (Phase 1).⁸⁶

East Munster/west Leinster is the only substantial area where antae remain ubiquitous until well into the twelfth century. Thus the Type 2/Type 3 dichotomy has become a much more localized and temporally specific issue. A neat politico-cultural explanation is ruled out by the fact that east Munster/west Leinster spans a number of kingdoms. Nor can it be argued that the form was maintained by a particular group of masons, for the area is somewhat more extensive than that characterized by the east Munster masonry style.⁸⁷ Thus the reasons why the type was perpetuated there remain obscure. Viewed in the context of the architectural models available in contemporary Europe (some of which, we must assume, would have been known to those commissioning these churches),⁸⁸ the differences between Type 2 and Type 3 churches are very minor. Ethnoarchaeological studies have shown that minor variations can be socially significant,⁸⁹ and it may be that these types had particular associations that are now difficult to recover.⁹⁰ But ultimately it seems unlikely that the differences between them were of major ideological or cultural importance. Their lack of antae means that Type 2 churches do not make as overt a reference to wooden antecedents as Type 3 churches, but at least some of them had other skeuomorphic features,⁹¹ and their simplicity indicates that they were produced in a similar architecturally and culturally conservative milieu.⁹²

INTERPRETING REGIONAL VARIATION IN CONSTRUCTION RATES AND CHURCH AREAS

This reassessment serves as a reminder that chronology must always be considered even when interpreting what appear to be geographically discrete distributions. Indeed, it seems that all four of the architectural groupings outlined above (Zones 1–4) have as much to do with temporal as with spatial variation.⁹³ In the present case, the formal dichotomy is replaced by more significant regionalisms, especially variations in the rate of stone church construction. In the earlier period most of the building seems to have occurred in the east and south, especially in the east midlands and middle reaches of the Shannon basin. This pattern is reinforced when we consider the stone churches in the region at Clonard, Ardracran, Durrow, Kilcullen, Roscommon and Kells that have not survived but that are referred to in the annals before 1050.⁹⁴ In contrast, this latter region saw relatively little building in stone after the mid-eleventh century while other areas, especially parts of Connaught, Limerick and east Munster/west Leinster, experienced substantial building campaigns in which quite minor sites acquired stone churches.

The motivations behind the initial move to mortared stone construction are considered elsewhere,⁹⁵ but the relatively high concentration of early examples in the east midlands and middle reaches of the Shannon must surely reflect the fact that this was a culturally vibrant area with an unusual number of important sites,⁹⁶ and dominated by what was still the most powerful polity in Ireland throughout much of the tenth century: the Southern Uí Néill. The paucity of later churches here is striking: it makes the overall density in the area quite low, resulting in an unusual discrepancy between church density and the general density of known early ecclesiastical sites.⁹⁷ One possibility is that it relates to the particular character of the Church in this area. We know that sites like Clonmacnoise, Kells and Glendalough invested heavily in supplementary monuments such as round towers and smaller churches during the later tenth and eleventh centuries. It is possible, therefore, that the paucity of stone churches at relatively minor sites was the result of a concentration of resources at key centres such as these. Secular patronage may have been focused on major monastic sites, not least because they possessed important relics,⁹⁸ and these sites may themselves have actively diverted surpluses and labour away from local church sites. However, it seems likely that environmental factors were more influential still. Limestone is the bedrock over much of this area, but it is of variable quality and deep soils and peat mean that it is often quite difficult to access.⁹⁹ In this regard it is notable that a good proportion of the extant churches are of minority rock types such as sandstone and shale.¹⁰⁰ It may therefore have been easier for minor sites in this area to build in wood rather than attempt to overcome these constraints.

Conversely, easy availability of stone and lime for mortar¹⁰¹ clearly encouraged the development of small-scale building 'industries', especially in parts of Limerick, Clare and Galway,¹⁰² and this in turn encouraged more minor sites to commission churches.¹⁰³ However, favourable environmental conditions do not explain the apparent surge in the rate of church building from the mid-eleventh century.¹⁰⁴ It is, of course, immediately tempting to link it with the 'great rebuilding' of local churches in England, a process which also appears to have begun in earnest from around 1050 and continued for several decades thereafter,¹⁰⁵ but this would be to overstate considerably the rate of building. Of the 120 or so churches belonging to the later group, a little fewer than eighty are the principal church at a mainland site. Though significant, this is hardly comparable to the 'general, national activity' that left a substantial proportion of English parish churches with an eleventh- or twelfth-century core.¹⁰⁶ Nor are the plain, unicameral Irish buildings, with their idiosyncratic masonry styles, aesthetically or technologically related to the Late Saxon and early Romanesque churches of contemporary England. Many of the English churches are at recently founded secular church sites, and are seen as an important step in the development of the parish system. In contrast, those in Ireland are at long-established, functionally diverse sites, and there is considerable disagreement about whether clerics and secular lords were concerned to provide comprehensive pastoral care prior to the twelfth-century reforms.¹⁰⁷ There *is* good evidence that ecclesiastical *paruchia*e were becoming more territorialized, in line with the evolving secular power structures, and this seems to have coincided with some reorganization, and indeed rationalization, of the local church network.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps the more widespread use of mortared stone should be seen as an assertion on the part of some relatively modest sites of their position within these evolving *paruchia*e. If so, it may sometimes have been aspirational, for a few of them failed to find a position in the later medieval network.¹⁰⁹

Along with their appearance, the highly differential distribution of these churches sets them apart from contemporary churches in England. This complements a range of evidence, discussed elsewhere, that quarrying and stone transportation was organized on an *ad hoc* basis¹¹⁰ compared to Late Saxon England, where cut stone was regularly transported over 60km, and certainly

compared to early Norman England.¹¹¹ It is interesting to contrast the clustered distribution of the later churches (fig 7) with the relatively even distribution of the broadly contemporary pre-Romanesque round towers (fig 8). Clearly this latter pattern is governed by the fact that round towers were restricted to important sites. Such sites required one (and never more than one) tower, and they usually had the resources to commission it regardless of geology or the availability of local masons.¹¹² However, it is not clear when the building trade developed to the extent that most local sites could afford to commission a stone church. My impression is that, in contrast to most of England, Ireland's stock of stone churches accumulated incrementally and unevenly. Outside areas where the environment was conducive, they appear to have been particularly common in areas of political and/or cultural importance, including the core area of Southern Uí Néill authority during the tenth century (see above), *Dyflinarskíri* (the hinterland of Dublin), in the later eleventh,¹¹³ and the territory of the McCarthys in the first half of the twelfth.¹¹⁴ O'Keeffe has identified 160 churches with Romanesque sculpture, a figure comparable to that for pre-Romanesque churches,¹¹⁵ though, especially in western areas, it could be augmented by several churches which are probably contemporary though they lack decorative sculpture (see above). No countrywide figure is available for Transitional churches, but certainly the diocese of Kilfenora, Co Clare, is atypical in that over half its parish churches incorporate Transitional fabric,¹¹⁶ and, again in this case the easy availability of building stone must be seen as significant. A proper assessment of later medieval parish churches is well beyond the scope of this paper, but it seems that it was only in the fifteenth century that Ireland experienced something comparable to the 'great rebuilding'. The dearth of earlier fabric in many parts of the country, for example at less than 5 per cent of later medieval church sites in peninsular Kerry,¹¹⁷ brings to mind Blair's comments on Devon: 'It is impossible without excavation to know whether this phenomenon merely reflects late medieval wealth, or also an absence of Romanesque and earlier Gothic phases which meant that churches were still in a "vernacular" state as late as c.1400.'¹¹⁸ It may well be that the vernacular often persisted in parts of Ireland, and one possibility that should seriously be considered is that this sometimes meant building in wood. Indeed this may go some way towards explaining the scale of rebuilding which was necessary in the fifteenth century.¹¹⁹ Certainly in our period its continued use is a critical limiting factor in the ability of archaeology to map general developments in the church network. We cannot know, for example, whether the rise in the number of stone churches in some areas was complemented by the rebuilding of timber churches elsewhere.

However, the stone churches do allow us to look at economic and cultural variation in the areas where they became common. Elsewhere I have argued that there is a general (though by no means exact) correlation between the status of a site and the size of its church, and also that the majority were congregational, though whether that congregation was lay, monastic or mixed is another matter.¹²⁰ Many of the largest are relatively early churches at major sites but, as figure 9 shows (when looked at in conjunction with fig 7), the mid-eleventh- to early twelfth-century churches can also vary substantially in size. In particular it must be significant that, even ignoring the diminutive island churches, the vast majority of mainland churches west of the Shannon are less than 40m², while most of those in Munster and west Leinster are greater than 40m².¹²¹ This division does not correspond to the Zone 2/Zone 3 boundary, for most of the Limerick churches are over 40m² (contrast fig 9 with fig 1). It is also worth noting that the Munster and Leinster churches (including those in Limerick) are more likely to feature relatively sophisticated apertures: especially cross-decorated doorways, round-headed doorways, round-headed windows with exterior rebates and/or true-arched window opes and embrasures, and gable-headed windows formed of bevelled blocks.

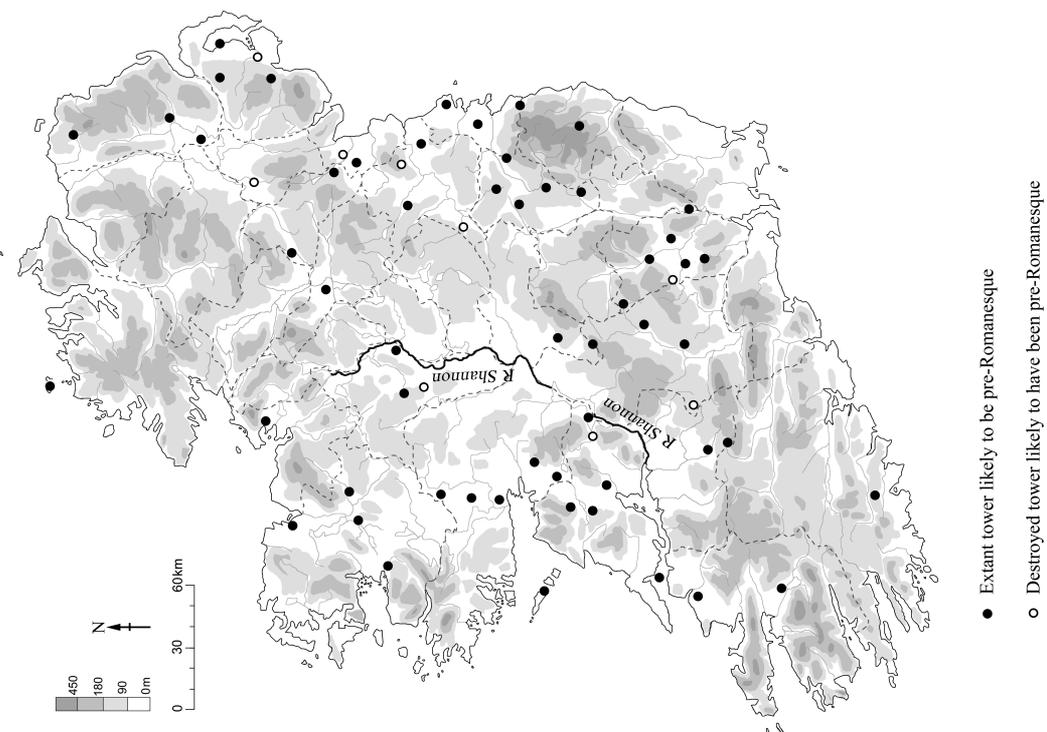


Fig 8. Pre-Romanesque round towers (after Barrow 1979 and Lalor 1999)

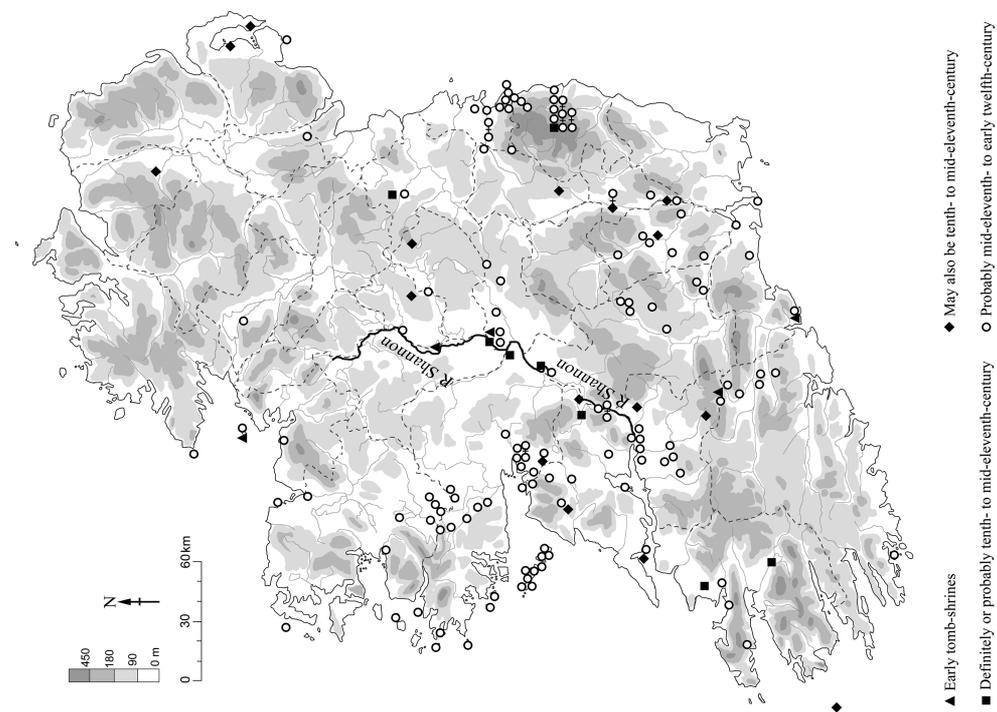


Fig 7. Likely date ranges of the mortared churches (drystone churches have been omitted)

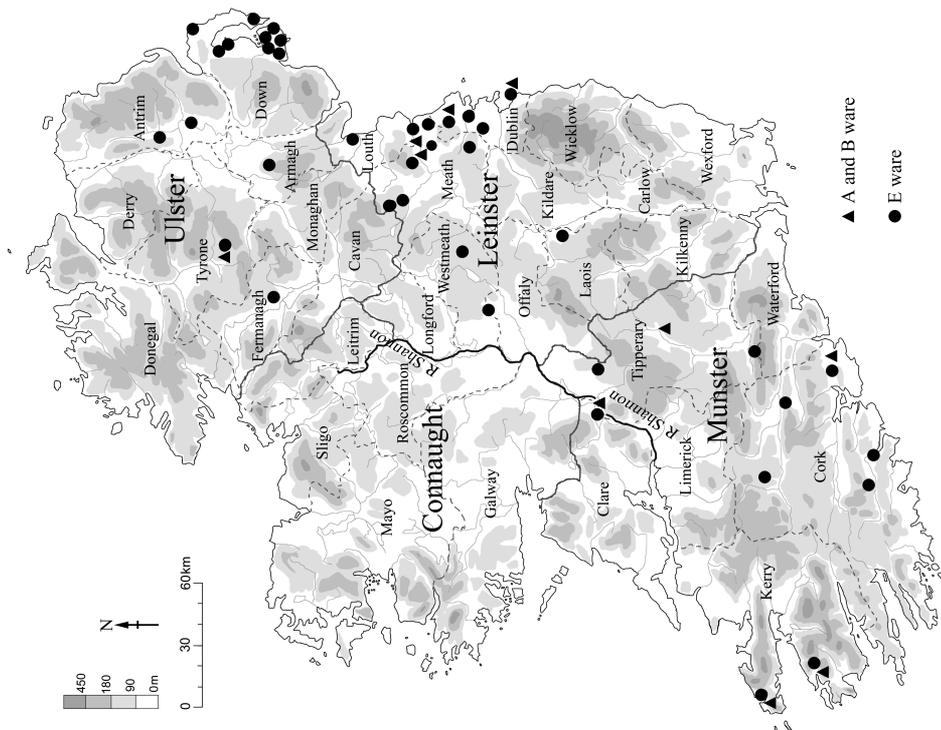


Fig 10. Distribution of A, B and E ware, also showing provincial and county names and divisions (after Thomas 1990)

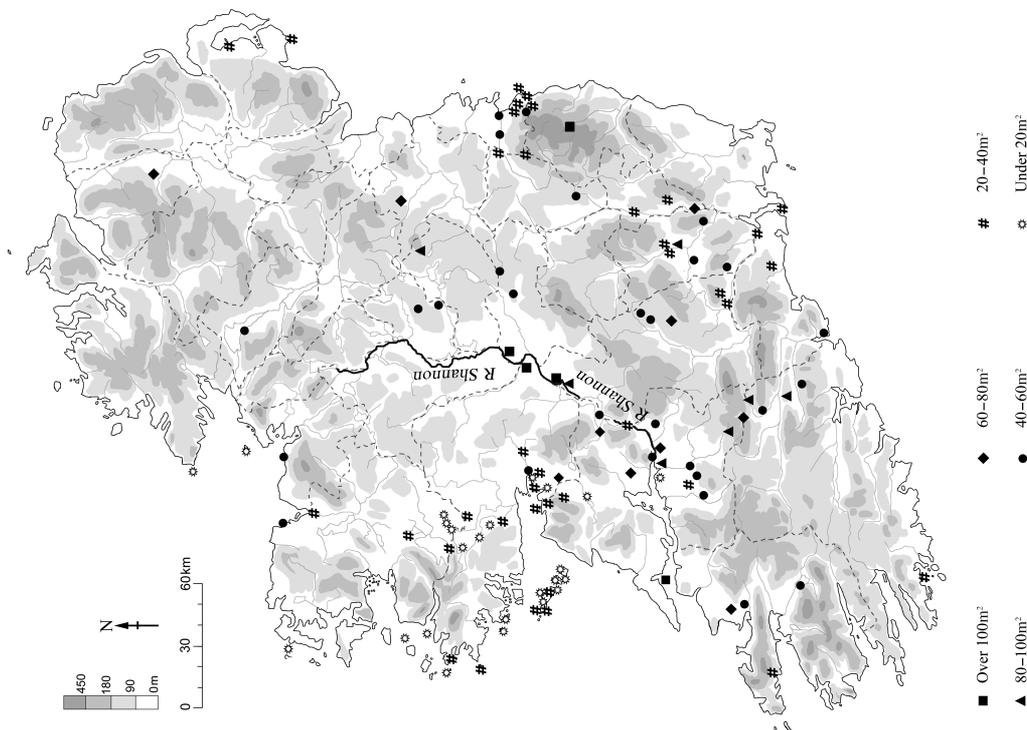


Fig 9. Known areas of the principal mortared churches at a given site (subsidiary churches have been omitted)

- Over 100m²
- ◆ 60-80m²
- 40-60m²
- ▲ 20-40m²
- Under 20m²

It might seem, *prima facie*, that this discrepancy in size simply reflects a more widespread use of stone in the west, leading to the erection of small churches at very minor sites. However, while true in some instances, this is untenable as a general explanation because even locally important sites in Connaught such as Oughtmama,¹²² Drumacoo, Ross Hill Abbey and Killursagh, Co Galway, have relatively small churches.¹²³ Instead, the pattern may be a reflex of the fact that the west was economically peripheral. It may simply indicate that Connaught sites were not as well resourced as those further east and therefore had no choice but to build smaller churches; this seems unlikely, however, for the easy availability of limestone there would have offset these economic constraints to some extent. Alternatively, underlying economic differences may have contributed to subtle divergences in how the ecclesiastical networks in these areas developed. It is generally true, both in Ireland and elsewhere, that the Church tends to be more localized in peripheral areas where secular power is relatively fragmented, as it was in Connaught when the ecclesiastical network was being established (see above).¹²⁴ There are relatively few major monastic sites west of the Shannon. This may have encouraged a more dispersed pattern of investment in ecclesiastical sites, in which secular loyalties, and therefore patronage, was more likely to be directed towards local sites. Apart from the church buildings themselves, it is possible that there was a denser network of ecclesiastical sites in the relevant areas west of the Shannon than in east Munster/west Leinster. This is certainly suggested by the, admittedly provisional, maps of ecclesiastical settlement published to date.¹²⁵ Again this may indicate a slightly more diffuse ecclesiastical structure, which would have meant that Connaught sites tended to have relatively modest requirements and were therefore more likely to build smaller churches. While many of the Type 1 drystone churches are probably earlier than these mortared ones (see above), they are relevant to this discussion of long-term variation. They are substantially smaller than even the Connaught churches and, significantly, the area where they predominate (Zone 1: see fig 1) has a particularly dense ecclesiastical network in which the vast majority of sites are only of local importance.¹²⁶ It should be stressed that these variations are not indicative of different ideas about how the Church should be organized;¹²⁷ rather, they may reflect slight differences in the *scale* of organization. Such differences are the least one should expect, especially given that the Irish Church was characterized by disorganized growth *in situ* rather than an episcopally organized mission.¹²⁸ As noted above, these churches belong to a period when the network was undergoing some reorganization, but clearly this did not entirely negate these long-standing regional differences.¹²⁹ Further evidence for such differences may well emerge through comparative studies of other common features such as ecclesiastical enclosures.¹³⁰ Here, however, I wish to broaden the discussion beyond the ecclesiastical sphere and briefly consider how some other patterns in the archaeological record may correlate to economic and/or cultural variation between east and west.

OTHER EVIDENCE FOR ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL VARIATION

To begin with, it is notable that first- and second-century Roman material is concentrated in eastern counties and, while fourth- and fifth-century material also extends into the 'southern inland area', it is notably absent west of the Shannon.¹³¹ The distribution of fifth- to early sixth-century Mediterranean A and B wares and late sixth- to seventh-century Gaulish E ware is also uneven (fig 10).¹³² Campbell sees this pottery as 'the only visible residue of a much more significant trading system' focused on royal sites, with the imports acting as a mechanism for maintaining royal authority.¹³³ The trade effectively siphoned off some secular surpluses to the

Continent, and he posits a link between its demise and the late seventh-century increase in secular patronage of the Church in the form of metalwork and manuscripts.¹³⁴ Campbell notes that Ireland and western Britain were economically peripheral in this period and could merely react 'to developments in core areas over which they had no control'.¹³⁵ But some areas of Ireland were clearly more peripheral than others for, as figure 10 illustrates, the lands north and west of the Shannon seem to have had little or no involvement in this trade. Thus, if we accept Campbell's model, it follows that churches in the east experienced a greater increase in revenue when the trade ceased. This is arguably supported by the fact that relatively little luxury ecclesiastical metalwork of the Insular period has a western provenance: the finest examples come from the east midlands, north Munster and parts of Ulster.¹³⁶ It is, of course, dangerous to overemphasize the impact of this relatively small-scale and episodic trade,¹³⁷ and certainly we are dealing here, at most, with quite minor socio-economic variation.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, it is interesting that the regions which benefited from it remained 'core' areas in terms of investment throughout the period.

The east midlands and middle reaches of the Shannon became particularly important in the ninth and tenth centuries. There is some evidence that the Viking incursions led to a shift in resources from some of the coastal sites that had been of central importance during the initial fusion of Irish and Anglo-Saxon art styles.¹³⁹ Thus, while the Ulster cycle developed in the north-eastern coastal sites of Druim Snechta and Bangor, it was copied and rewritten in Clonmacnoise.¹⁴⁰ Clonmacnoise and other monasteries of the middle Shannon basin, such as Lorrha and Terryglass, also became the major repositories of *Céli Dé* literature, when Tallaght and Finglas in Co Dublin went into decline.¹⁴¹ Irish scholarship during this period was relatively conservative, and there was a general shift from Latin to Irish.¹⁴² It is fitting, therefore, that some of the earliest extant mortared churches, with their simple unicameral plans and clear references to hallowed wooden antecedents, were built at sites which were heavily involved in this scholarship. There is also a remarkable concentration of high-quality scriptural crosses in the east midlands and middle reaches of the Shannon. Apart from the sheer wealth of the monasteries themselves,¹⁴³ secular patronage, and especially Uí Néill patronage, appears to have been instrumental in this. Harbison in particular has highlighted the contrast between the 'cross-studded' monasteries of the Uí Néill and the lack of sculpture at major Eóganacht monasteries in Munster.¹⁴⁴ This is certainly a striking pattern¹⁴⁵ and suggests that we may be dealing with one instance where competitive emulation did not operate, possibly because stone crosses with figurative sculpture had become synonymous with Uí Néill authority. More striking still is the almost total lack of such monuments west of the Shannon.¹⁴⁶ The region features some fine twelfth-century high crosses, but if it had ninth- and tenth-century examples they must have been of wood, like the vast majority of its churches in this period (see above).¹⁴⁷

Radiocarbon evidence indicates that there was a considerable fall-off in ringfort occupation during the tenth and eleventh centuries.¹⁴⁸ It has been argued that this indicates major changes in the rural economy, including a greater emphasis on tillage,¹⁴⁹ but the limited number of dates from the west means that this chronology cannot automatically be extended across the country.¹⁵⁰ Ringforts are considerably more numerous in the west, excluding the under-populated areas west of Loughs Corrib, Mask and Conn:¹⁵¹ one possible explanation for this is that these changes were not as thoroughgoing in this part of Ireland, but it is difficult to come to firm conclusions in the current state of knowledge.¹⁵² Silver hoards offer much less equivocal evidence for economic variation in the Viking Age (fig 11). The barter economy of the ninth and tenth centuries extended over much of Leinster, Munster and Ulster, but not west of the Shannon.¹⁵³ The monetary and small ingot economy that developed in the tenth century was

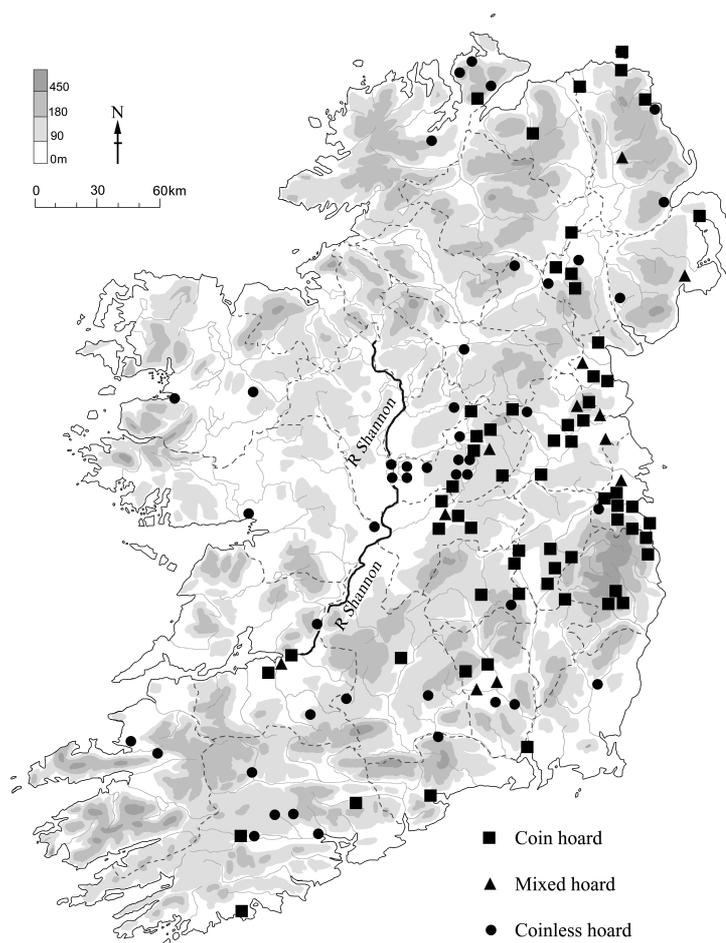


Fig 11. Viking Age silver hoards (after Sheehan 1991, with some changes)

focused overwhelmingly on ecclesiastical as opposed to secular sites,¹⁵⁴ and it is interesting to contrast it with the redistributive economy of the sixth and seventh centuries which may actually have restricted investment in the Church (see above).¹⁵⁵ The churches that benefited most were in Meath, Westmeath, Offaly, Kildare, Wicklow and Dublin,¹⁵⁶ but there are also significant numbers of coin hoards from Munster and east Ulster.¹⁵⁷ Once again, however, Connaught appears to have been totally excluded from this economy.

CONCLUSION

Most of these patterns are well known, but they have rarely been discussed from the point of view of variation *within* Ireland. Considered together, they indicate that there were significant and recurring differences, especially between the lands east of the Shannon and the lands west of it. They highlight the fact that, even within broadly cohesive socio-economic regions, certain

areas tend to have more abundant resources and tend to be more immediately and profoundly affected by exogenous stimuli.¹⁵⁸ Acknowledging the influence of geography and environment in this does not require us to espouse diffusionism or environmental determinism, as long as the focus of investigation remains on specific historical processes.¹⁵⁹ These east/west regionalisms are hardly surprising, but it is significant that they can be outlined so clearly in the archaeological record, especially given the limited evidence for economic variation in the documentary sources. For instance, Ó Cróinín has commented that the economic growth essential to the social changes of the Viking Age is ‘all but invisible in the historical documents’.¹⁶⁰

Smyth has highlighted the physical diversity of Ireland and the fact that different regions tend to receive foreign influences from different parts of Britain or the Continent.¹⁶¹ He further suggests that there is a relationship between the historical provinces and these different regional orientations. Certainly it could be argued that the patterns outlined here contributed to the formation of subtly distinct subcultures, especially in the case of Connaught. One wonders, for example, whether Connaught’s apparent exclusion from trade with the Continent early in the period was a factor in the relatively late development of a provincial kingdom there.¹⁶² In this regard, it is worth noting again that the ‘small church zone’ corresponds quite well to the boundaries of Connaught (fig 9), even though Zone 2 does not (fig 1). While the provincial divisions were, to some extent, constructs based on political expediency, this evidence raises the possibility that they also objectify minor but long-standing economic and cultural differences.

However, this study has also highlighted the fact that it was rare for material differences between polities to be actively accentuated. Instead, competitive emulation, and perhaps also the overarching ambitions of the stronger kings, meant that neighbouring polities usually chose similar forms of material culture, even when it came to high-investment monuments. Nevertheless, it is possible to recognize how ecclesiastical sculpture and architecture was used to express authority, identity and allegiance, as well as purely religious ideas, by studying the specific contexts in which these monuments were commissioned.¹⁶³ One striking example is Clonmacnoise Cathedral. As Conleth Manning has shown, it was built in 909 by King Flann Sinna of the Uí Néill (879–916) and Abbot Colmán, as the centrepiece of a monumental scheme that also incorporated a number of high crosses.¹⁶⁴ The scheme is rich in cosmological and religious symbolism,¹⁶⁵ but it also (quite literally) cemented the relationship between Clonmacnoise and the Uí Néill and marked the emergence of Flann, through his recent victory over Cormac mac Cuilennáin of Munster, as the most powerful king Ireland had yet seen. Specific agendas can also be recognized in the case of certain other buildings, including the seventh-century basilica at Kildare,¹⁶⁶ the eighth-century stone church at Armagh¹⁶⁷ and the suite of churches erected at Glendalough in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the morphology of these buildings, and their positioning at sites, still has a lot to tell us about the cultural and intellectual milieu that produced them.¹⁶⁹ Most of the regional patterns discussed here were found to be due primarily to environmental and economic factors, and clearly it is essential that such variations are mapped and analysed. However, in doing so we should not lose sight of the fact that monumental architecture can be properly understood only by considering its ideological, and indeed political, context.

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NOTES

1. O'Sullivan 1998, 182.
2. See Cooney (2000, 49; also Jones 1996) on the possibility that this view was sometimes influenced by the modern political imperative to emphasize Ireland's cultural cohesiveness.
3. De Paor and de Paor 1958, 19.
4. For contrary views see Smyth 1993, 402; Smyth 1997, 21; Mitchell and Ryan 1997, 144. It should be noted that, at a later date, Liam de Paor (1967, 142) identified a number of regional groups of Romanesque churches, and later still he urged scholars to abandon 'the illusion that Dark Age Christian culture was, in church matters at least, one and indivisible like the seamless garment of Christ ... every local church had its own culture – even in church matters – and could turn the small common stock of Christian ideas and images to its own purposes and its own meaning' (1987, 144).
5. Lynn 1975, 33.
6. For example, Mytum 1992, 102–3.
7. Henry 1964, 24.
8. *Ibid.*, 21–2.
9. For example, Mytum 1992, 19–20, 135, 139.
10. For example, Hurley 1982, 303.
11. For example, Moore 1984; Harbison 1993; Ó Floinn 1995; Stalley 1997, 118–19; Cronin 1998, 145.
12. Rynne 1988, 161.
13. Rynne 1998, 92. Similarly, while Barrow (1979, 127) makes only the most cursory references to local variation in round tower form Lalor (1999, 133, 167) identifies at least two local groupings and offers an interpretation of one of them.
14. For example, Dunraven 1875; Leask 1955, 17.
15. Harbison 1970, 58, fig 15.
16. In her introduction to Dunraven's work, Stokes (1875, xxvi) hints that he originally intended a more spatial study but that 'the idea of topographical arrangement was abandoned by Lord Dunraven when he perceived that the main interest of the work lay in the fact that ... a series could be presented showing the gradual development of styles; he thus preferred sacrificing the merely local interest attached to the situation of these buildings, to the wider one of giving them a place in the history of Architecture'. Perhaps if he had pursued his original aim the regionalisms outlined here would have been recognized much sooner, but Dunraven and all subsequent writers decided that typology and chronology were paramount.
17. See Stalley 1999, 217–18.
18. Peers 1901; Brown 1925; Fernie 1983, 32.
19. For example, Taylor 1978, 842, 891; Morris 1989, 301–3.
20. Carver 1999, 46.
21. Harbison 1982, 618–19.
22. Ó Carragáin 2002, fig 1. An essential premise of this study is that general patterns discernible from the surviving group broadly reflect early medieval reality (see, for example, Hodder 1991, 132; Carver 2001, 2). Statistics were not employed in the analysis of the patterns that emerged. While statistical tools have been employed in studies characterized by a theoretically sophisticated approach (eg Hodder 1982; Hodder 1991, 134), they are often falsely equated with achieving objectivity (see Shanks and Tilley 1992, 35–6, 57; also Barrett 1981, 214). In the present case tools such as quadrat analysis, nearest neighbour analysis and spatial autocorrelation (see Taylor 1977, 85–170) would do little more than confirm what is already clear: that there are significant patterns in the

- distribution of pre-Romanesque church types (ie that their distribution is non-random).
23. See White Marshall and Walsh 1998, 106; also Harbison 1991, 82; Harbison 1999, 194; Ó Carragáin 2003; Ó Carragáin 2005b.
 24. The archaeological surveys of Zone 1 indicate that these buildings occur at a sizable proportion of enclosed settlements and at over 830 other locations (Cuppage 1986, 384; O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996, 382). A trawl through the inventories for other western areas shows that they occur at only about 2 per cent of enclosed sites in west Cork (Power 1992) and Donegal (Lacy 1983), and at an even smaller proportion of sites elsewhere in Cork (Power 1994; Power 1997; Power 2000) and in north Kerry (Toal 1995). They are relatively common in west Galway, though interestingly all of the 65 examples listed in Gosling (1993, 56–74) occur on islands off the coast. Without published inventories it is difficult to assess the situation in Mayo and Clare, but, as it stands, Zone 1 is the only mainland area with a high density of drystone domestic buildings, as well as Type 1 churches.
 25. *Contra* O'Keeffe (1998, 114), who sees them as having 'a clear ancestry in the pre-Christian Iron Age.'
 26. Excavations at the church sites of Church Island (O'Kelly 1958), Illaunloughan (White Marshall and Walsh 1998) and Reask (Fanning 1981), and at the cashel at Loher (O'Flaherty 1986), suggest that at the beginning of the period organic buildings were the norm, but that at some point, perhaps during the eighth and ninth centuries, circular drystone houses become predominant. Artefacts and radiocarbon dates indicate that Caherlehillan (Sheehan 2001) went out of date at a relatively early date and, significantly, it produced no drystone structures whatsoever. In contrast the cashels of Leacanabuaile (Ó Riordáin and Foy 1941), Cahergal (Manning 1991; Manning 1992) and Ballynavenooragh (Gibbons 1998), the promontory fort of Dunbeg (Barry 1981) and the hut complex on Beginish (O'Kelly 1956) produced no clear evidence of earlier wooden structures suggesting, perhaps, that these were relatively late settlements, something which appears to be confirmed by their respective artefact assemblages. There is some evidence for drystone buildings in the prehistoric period (eg Hayden 1994), but the pattern emerging from enclosed sites strongly suggests that they were rare at the beginning of the early medieval period.
 27. See discussion in Ó Carragáin 2002.
 28. See Ó Carragáin 2005b.
 29. The only clear exception is St Flannan's, Killaloe, where the doorway is in the English Romanesque style. Gem (2001) has convincingly argued that this may date to around 1100, making it the earliest instance of Romanesque sculpture in the country.
 30. Henry 1970, 149–51; O'Keeffe 1994, 139.
 31. This belief arises, at least in part, from the fact that only a small number of nave-and-chancel churches lack Romanesque ornamentation (Hare and Hamlin 1986, 322; O'Keeffe 1998, 121, 123; see also Harbison 1999, 322).
 32. Margaret Stokes showed an awareness of this problem of definition as early as 1875 (xxv; see also Leask 1955, 79), but O'Keeffe (1998, 122; 2000, 315; 2003, 280) has addressed it in a much more critical fashion in recent years.
 33. Ó Carragáin 2002, 318–52; Ó Carragáin forthcoming. The possibility of a role for Dublin in the development of the Type 5 church is supported by the recent suggestion (Stalley 2000, 63–9; O'Keeffe 2003, 97–102) that the vaulted crypt of Christ Church, Dublin, dates to the late eleventh century, rather than a century later as is usually assumed.
 34. Leask 1955, 56; see also Leask 1936–9; Thomas 1981, 150; Harbison 1982, 624; Hamlin 1984.
 35. O'Keeffe 1991, 359; O'Keeffe 1998; O'Keeffe 2003, 70–1.
 36. For example, O'Keeffe 1998; Manning 2000.
 37. Manning 2000, 51; MacDonald 1981, 305–9; Harbison 1982; Hamlin 1984. In a few cases the references are to extant Type 2 or Type 3 churches (see, for example, Stokes 1875 xxi; Leask 1955, 69; Harbison 1982, 621; Manning 1998; Manning 2000), and there can be little doubt that the vast majority of tenth- and eleventh-century references are to these church types.
 38. O'Keeffe 1994; O'Keeffe 2003.
 39. See Gem (1988) on the overlap between 'Saxon' and 'Romanesque' architecture in England.
 40. Harbison 1972, 5; see also Harbison 1982, 623; Harbison 1991, 95.
 41. Ní Ghabhláin 1995; Ó Carragáin 2002; Ó Carragáin 2005a.
 42. See further Ó Carragáin 2005a.

43. Eighty per cent occurred in Zone 2 while 16 per cent occurred in Zone 4.
44. There are also Type 3 churches on Iona (RCAHMS 1982), at St Patrick's Peel on the Isle of Man (Radford 1962, 47; Radford 1977, 3), and possibly also at Glastonbury. Here excavations have revealed a small tenth-century church with short proportions and antae-like projections that has been interpreted as the church dedicated to St John which the *Vita Sancti Dunstani* states was built by St Dunstan to the west of the main church during his 940–57 abbacy (Peers and Clapham 1930; Taylor 1975, 159–60). Dunstan was, of course, the prime mover in the tenth-century monastic reform and other excavated structures attributed to him include a number of extensions to the main church and a rare early example of a rectangular cloister. But it should be remembered that the reformers saw themselves as reviving an ancient tradition and even sought out and re-established long-deserted monasteries. We know that the Irish link with Glastonbury was still strong in the tenth century, with the site apparently being maintained by visiting Irish monks prior to Dunstan's abbacy (Crampton 1976, 242). Indeed Dunstan was educated there during this period and is known to have studied several Irish texts (Hughes 1971, 66; Ó Cróinín 1995, 229). It is therefore tempting to see the antae of this small chapel as a deliberate reference to the Irish roots of the site (Ó Carragáin 2002, 77; see also O'Keeffe 2003, 84–5, who arrived at this conclusion independently).
45. See Jones 1997, 36, 123, 131.
46. For example, Hodder 1982, 23–5; Jones 1997, 155; see also Carver 1998; Cameron 1998, 204–6; Carver 2001.
47. Hodder 1982, 187; see also Jones 1997, 123; Goodby 1998.
48. For example, Byrne 1973, 5, 8, 45; Ó Corráin 1978, 4; Smyth 1982, 6; Ó Corráin 1985; Ó Cróinín 1989, 11–12; Ahlqvist 1988; Ó Corráin 1998, 426; Charles-Edwards 2000, 583; Doherty 2000, 66.
49. See Warren 1969; Byrne 1971, 136; Ó Corráin 1978, 3.
50. See Jones 1997, 52.
51. For example, individuals were not accorded full legal rights outside their home territory (Byrne 1971, 132–3; Charles-Edwards 1976, 52).
52. Byrne 1971, 142–3; MacNeill 1911.
53. Ó Donnabháin 2001, 212–13, 223.
54. See Rees and Rees 1961, 118–45.
55. Byrne 1971, 137; Byrne 1973, 174; Patterson 1994, 38–40.
56. Ó Corráin 1972, 112; see also Byrne 1971, 137; Patterson 1994, 42–4.
57. Byrne 1973, 251; Ó Corráin 1980, 166; Ó Cróinín 1995, 62.
58. See Charles-Edwards 2000, 37, 465.
59. Byrne 1973, 91–2, 236; Simms 1980; see also Ó Corráin 1972, 10.
60. Byrne 1973, 239.
61. It is also implausible given that the Conachta and Uí Fidgente were generally more effective at resisting Dál Cais (ie O'Brien) dominance than the Eóganacht of central Munster where Type 3 churches predominate.
62. In his assessment of regionalisms in Romanesque architecture Stalley (1999, 225–7) cites Normandy as an instance of a local 'school' coinciding with the rise of a well-organized principality, but concludes that this is an exceptional case and that elsewhere 'the link between architecture and political boundaries was not so exact'.
63. Ó Corráin 1978, 7.
64. Etchingham 1993, 152; Mac Shamhráin 1996; Etchingham 1999.
65. Champion and Champion 1986, 63; Bhreathnach 1999, 90. Driscoll (2000, 251) has commented that in Scotland 'the Church provided a particularly effective setting [for monuments designed to legitimize the emerging aristocracy] since it too sought to establish communities which embraced all but were dominated by a few'.
66. Renfrew 1986, 7–8. As Goodby (1998, 179) has pointed out, this is potentially just as illuminating as an accentuation of differences.
67. Geake 1997; Geake 1999, 214.
68. Geake 1999, 214.
69. Laing 1985.
70. For example, Ó Corráin 1974.
71. Ó Corráin 1978, 8, 20; see also Byrne 1973; Aitchison 1994; Patterson 1994.
72. Ó Corráin 1978, 6–7.
73. If so, then any conscious political strategies of material differentiation are more likely to have been aimed at subverting these ambitions and would therefore have operated at a local level. However, convincing archaeological correlates for particular petty-kingdoms are also rare. For example, Buckley (1986; see also Clinton 2001, 21, 39) attempted to equate particular souterrain clusters with particular early medieval territories in Ulster,

- but his conclusions have been criticized by Warner (1986).
74. Ó Carragáin 2002; Ó Carragáin 2005a.
 75. See, for example, Dunraven 1875; Stokes 1878, 49; Champneys 1910, 34; Hughes and Hamlin 1977, 62.
 76. Shanks and Tilley 1992, 144; see also Jones 1997, 114; Gosden and Lock 1998, 3.
 77. See Leroi-Gourhan 1993.
 78. Berger 1992; Berger 1995. Unfortunately the method cannot distinguish between eleventh- and twelfth-century churches because of a plateau in the calibration curve.
 79. See O'Keeffe 1998, 121.
 80. Manning 1998, 76.
 81. Ó Carragáin 2002, 55–9.
 82. Manning 2000, 51; my italics.
 83. See Hodder 1999, 30–65.
 84. See Ó Carragáin 2002; Ó Carragáin 2005a.
 85. Ní Ghabhlaín (1995) has quite convincingly argued that part of the nave of this largely Transitional building is pre-Romanesque, and I noted an *ex situ* pre-Romanesque door lintel lying just north of the chancel (Ó Carragáin 2002, vol 2, 16). It may well be the *damliac* mentioned in the Annals of Inishfallen in 1055. But, while it is an area where antae-less churches predominate, the degree of rebuilding means that we cannot be certain that it lacked antae.
 86. Other Type 2 churches outside Zone 2 include a substantial group in Dublin/Wicklow, an extension to the Type 3 church at Agha, Co Carlow, and one at Ardskeagh, Co Cork, which is otherwise similar to Type 3 churches at nearby Britway and Killeenemer. In the case of Donaghmore, Co Kilkenny, and Killevy, Co Armagh, antae-less churches incorporate pre-Romanesque doorways but are probably totally rebuilt. Most authorities (eg Fitzpatrick *et al* 1998, 18) categorize the antae-less church at Tihilly as pre-Romanesque, but its proportions and the overall character of the masonry is against this. Romanesque churches also tend to negate the Zone 2/Zone 3 dichotomy. For example, with the exception of Glendalough, pre-Romanesque gable-corbels are a Zone 2 phenomenon, but later examples occur at some sites in Zone 3, including Sheepstown, Co Kilkenny, Inishfallen, Co Kerry, and a Transitional church at Clonmacnoise. Similarly, antae are found in a handful of Romanesque churches, including two possible examples in Zone 2: namely Kilnaboy, Co Clare, and possibly also Robeen, Co Mayo (Lavelle 1994, 88), though I have not yet been able to visit this latter.
 87. See Ó Carragáin 2005a.
 88. See Carver 2001.
 89. For example, Hodder 1982, 54–6.
 90. These associations probably varied according to the specific context and depending, for example, on whether the type was predominant or whether, as in Aran, the east midlands and Dublin, both types were present. See Hodder 1982, 202; Hodder 1991, 134; Thomas 1996, 95–8; Marquardt and Crumley 1987; Hodder 1999, 70–1; Cooney 2000, 49.
 91. See Macalister 1928, 249; Ó Carragáin 2002, 71–2.
 92. On the conservatism of Irish culture in the tenth and eleventh centuries see, for example, Bethell 1971, 114–15; Ó Corráin 1978, 6; Ó Cróinín 1995, 229–32; Charles-Edwards 2000, 592.
 93. Ó Carragáin 2002. Incidentally, this is also true of the three main regional groups of Romanesque churches discussed by de Paor (1967, 142).
 94. See Manning 2000, table 1.
 95. Ó Carragáin 2002, 221–7.
 96. See Charles-Edwards 2000, 554; see also Ó Riain 1972; Smyth 1982, 86–90; Ó Riain 1995; see further below.
 97. See Swan 1983, fig 4; Byrne 1984, map 23; Stout 1997, fig 28.
 98. See Charles-Edwards 2000.
 99. See Kinahan 1889, 179, 185, 194; Hammond 1981.
 100. For example, three of the four Clonmacnoise churches are built, wholly or partly, of sandstone from at least 4km away. Kilclonfert and St Mella's, Lemanaghan, occur near, and are built of, localized areas of (?)volcanic rock and sandstone respectively. Four others (Kilteel, Moone, Kells and Dulane) shun limestone in favour of Ordovician shales and sandstones.
 101. Brash (1868, 152) is one of a number of scholars who have commented on the copious use of mortar in these buildings, stating that 'in fact, the walls of our ancient churches may be called compound walls, of masonry and concrete'. It is notable that, with the exception of Dublin/north Wicklow, by far the highest densities of churches are in limestone areas. A scarcity of lime probably encouraged the use of clay instead of mortar at Skeam West in west Cork (see Cotter 1995) and possibly some north-eastern churches (see

- Waterman 1967). One wonders if it also encouraged the use of drystone construction in peninsular Kerry.
102. Ó Carragáin 2005a.
 103. A scarcity of wood may also have encouraged the use of stone, though it should be noted that even the Burren had some woodland throughout the medieval period (O'Connell and Korff 1991; see also Edwards 1990, 52).
 104. A purely political explanation does not stand up to scrutiny either. While Thomond and Connaught were politically more important in the eleventh century than they had been previously, there is a marked paucity of mortared churches in the home territories of their ruling dynasties, the O'Briens and the Uí Briúin Aí, though there is a significant cluster in the area controlled by the Hiberno-Norse port of Limerick.
 105. See Gem 1988; Blair 1988.
 106. Morris 1988, 191.
 107. See, for example, Sharpe 1992; Charles-Edwards 1992; Etchingham 1999; Empey 2002.
 108. See especially Mac Shamhráin 1996, 211–14, 231. See also Ó Carragáin 2005b. On developments in the secular sphere see, for example, Ó Corráin 1978, 16, 23–6; Graham 1993; O'Keeffe 1996; Doherty 1998; O'Keeffe 2000, 26.
 109. Ó Carragáin 2005b.
 110. Ó Carragáin 2005a.
 111. See, for example, Jope 1964; Morris 1989, 195, 301–4, 311–13; Parsons 1990, 9.
 112. While wooden churches remained an acceptable option for some quite important sites, it seems unlikely that there was a wooden alternative to the round tower. On this possibility see Hamlin 1985.
 113. Ó Carragáin 2005b.
 114. See especially O'Keeffe 1994.
 115. O'Keeffe 2005. The paucity of both pre-Romanesque and Romanesque churches in Ulster is particularly striking. Compare fig 1 with O'Keeffe 2003, fig 5. The igneous rock of the north-eastern counties may have inhibited the erection of churches at relatively minor sites there, but this is less likely in the case of the schist and gneiss areas of the north west (see Cotter 1992, 1). It may be that there was a strong cultural preference for wood in Ulster. It seems also to have been favoured for souterrain construction in Cavan and Fermanagh in particular (Clinton 2001, 34). See further note 159 below.
 116. See Ní Ghabhláin 1995.
 117. This estimate is based on some fieldwork as well as the entries in Cuppage 1986 and O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996.
 118. Blair 1996, 13.
 119. A similar pattern is evident in the secular sphere: contrast the modest number of twelfth- and thirteenth-century stone castles in Ireland, most of which were built for feudal magnates, with the exponential growth in castle building for a much wider section of society from *c* 1400.
 120. Ó Carragáin 2005b.
 121. In some cases where only one dimension is known the area has been estimated by assuming the church was of average proportions. The small size of churches on island sites off the west coast is explained by their isolation, though arguably this does not hold for the Aran Islands given their size, their strategic importance for mainland powers (see Westropp 1910, 178; Byrne 1958; Bhreathnach 1999, 85) and the importance of Enda's monastery (see Kenney 1929, 373–4; Bhreathnach 1999, 88–9). Nonetheless, the main concern here is with mainland sites. The east/west division highlighted here is just the most significant of the regional variations in church area. For example, the churches in east Cork tend to be larger than those further east. This seems to have affected their later building histories for, while the east Cork churches often became naves of later medieval parish churches (eg Britway, Killeenemer, Coole), it was more common for those further east to become chancels (eg Kilsheelan, Kilcash, Sheestown, Clara, Kilbarrymeadan, Ardmore). For some reason, this building sequence is not usually found in Clare and Connaught, despite the fact that churches in this area are particularly small. Instead they became (eg Temple MacDuagh, Temple Chaomháin), or more usually were incorporated into, the naves of later medieval churches. In the case of Ross Hill Abbey this may simply have involved extending it to the east, but it was more common for the church to be widened as well as lengthened by demolishing a side wall (eg Noughaval, Oughtmama, Killinny, Drumacoo, Killursagh, Killeelig More, Castleturvin).
 122. The nave of Oughtmama is now quite large but only the eastern two-thirds of its north wall is original. The original doorway was reused when the church was widened and extended westwards.

123. Even at Kilmacduagh, one of the most important sites west of the Shannon, the principal church is less than 80m². The churches of other important western sites (eg Roscam and Tuam) do not survive, but nor do those of the most important sites in Munster/south-west Leinster (eg Cork, Cloyne, Emly, Lismore, Kilkenny and Limerick). It seems likely that these latter were even larger than the extant churches in the area.
124. See Davies (1987) on Wales, and Smith (1990, 343) on Brittany. See also Geary 1994, 168–9.
125. See, for example, Stout 1997, fig 28. It must be borne in mind that not all early sites were in use contemporaneously.
126. See Ó Carragáin 2003. The drystone building method obviously limits church size, but the important point is that this did not discourage its widespread use in this particular area. It may be that the principal churches at the three regionally important sites in the area were relatively large buildings of wood or mortared stone. See Ó Carragáin 2005b on the varying character and functions of sites in this area.
127. See Carver (2001, 15) for a continental example of radically different models of ecclesiastical organization coinciding with different societies operating on different economic scales.
128. See Sharpe 1984, 241–2.
129. A few of the Connaught churches occur at sites which did not remain in use in the later medieval period. This suggests that reorganization was still ongoing in the area when they were built (Ó Carragáin 2005b). It is possible that the process had progressed further in Munster/west Leinster, and that the relatively large churches in that area occur at sites which had benefited from it. However, it must be emphasized that stone churches were simply not common enough for us to be able to map the eleventh-century network accurately (ibid).
130. Apart from studying site density, ecclesiastical enclosures may be a particularly useful variable because, unlike mortared churches, they appear to be characteristic of the vast majority of sites. Within a given area their diameters are broadly indicative of a site's importance, but cannot be used as a rigid index of status. Nor do they appear to express specific cultural connections. For example, Tullylease and Mayo, two sites with well-attested Anglo-Saxon links that appear to have been expressed in sculpture (see Leask 1938; Hawkes 2001; though see also Henderon and Okasha 1992), have typically Irish curvilinear enclosures (see Swan 1983, 272; Power 2000). However, there do seem to be significant regional differences in enclosure form. For example, even in the west, average enclosure diameter varies markedly from 37m in peninsular Kerry (see Cuppage 1986; O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996) to 81m in west Galway (see Gosling 1993), while those in north Kerry are much larger again (Toal 1995). Writing of the English Church, Blair (1996, 13) has commented that 'we are barely starting to perceive the rich texture of local and chronological patterns'. Clearly this statement holds true for Ireland also.
131. Bateson 1973, 31–6. This impression still holds, despite Warner's (1976, 274) identification of an early Roman brooch in the Galway Bay area.
132. Campbell 1996a, 80; though see Wooding 1996, 45, 82.
133. Campbell 1996a, 83–4; Campbell 1996b; see also Thomas 1988; 1990. See Doherty (1980, 74, 79) on the fact that foreign merchants could only be protected by royal proclamation. He also discusses the reciprocal arrangements between kings and their followers (ibid, 74). Most of what is given by the king is in the form of luxury items and military equipment, while the tribute he receives comprises mainly farm produce.
134. Campbell 1996a, 87. Doherty (1980, 72) suggests that kings may have retained a claim on altar plate that they had commissioned for a church.
135. Campbell 1996a, 88. Herren and Brown (2002) have suggested that the relative dearth of ecclesiastical art in Ireland prior to this was because of the prevalence of Pelagianism there, but this suggestion has been criticized by Bonner (2002). Peter Brown (2002, 10–14) convincingly shows that a centre-versus-periphery model is not really appropriate when studying the cultural and intellectual relationships between Ireland and Britain on the one hand and the Mediterranean on the other; in this regard at least, early medieval Europe was characterized by interconnected but 'loosely spread constellations of centers'. Nonetheless, Wallerstein's centre-versus-periphery framework is useful for understanding the asymmetrical economic links under consideration here (Wallerstein 1974;

- see also Simms 1988; Champion 1989; Shaw and Jameson 1999; Barrett *et al* 2000). One possible factor in the demise of this trade was the development of *wic* sites in southern England.
136. Michael Ryan, pers comm.
137. See, for example, Griffiths 1992, 10; Mytum 1992, 7; Wooding 1996, iii, 48–9, 54, 81, 94.
138. The relationship between these areas was not markedly asymmetrical, in economic, social or political terms in the manner of that between Ireland and continental Europe (see Campbell 1996a; Campbell 1996b); therefore a centre-versus-periphery framework is not appropriate in this instance (see Wallerstein 1974).
139. Hughes 1958, 269.
140. *Ibid*; though see Hamlin 1997, 57.
141. Ó Corráin 1972, 108–10.
142. Charles-Edwards 2000, 592.
143. Stalley 1997, 135.
144. Harbison 1993, 19.
145. The pillar stone at Kilnaruane in west Cork is the only example of early figurative high cross carving in Cork, Kerry or Limerick. Some of the plain Kerry crosses (including Tonaknock and Killiney) may be early, but they are not comparable to the scriptural crosses. *Pace* Hurley (1982, 303), there were several important monasteries in the area which could surely have commissioned stone crosses had they wished to do so, and the fine Romanesque sculpture in the area shows that environmental constraints were not a significant factor.
146. Here I am following Harbison (1992, 384) in assigning the crosses at Emlagh, Co Roscommon, to the twelfth-century group. The Shannon appears to act as the boundary of the high cross zone along its entire length, an impression reinforced by the common occurrence of crosses at sites near its eastern bank. There are, however, a number in Fermanagh and three at Drumcliff, Co Sligo. See also Hawkes (2001) on a substantial cross-head at Mayo.
147. See Cronin 1998 on the twelfth-century crosses. See Kelly 1991 on the wooden prototypes of Irish high crosses.
148. Stout 1997.
149. O’Keeffe 1996; Doherty 1998; Monk 1998.
150. O’Conor 1998, 90.
151. See fig 11 in Stout 1997; fig 41 in Stout and Stout 1997.
152. Arguably, the relatively high density in the hinterland of Limerick and neighbouring Uí Fidgente is against this theory, for one would expect the port to be at the forefront of these changes. Some argue that ringforts were still being built in Gaelic areas in the high medieval period (Barrett and Graham 1975; see also Graham 1993, 47). In contrast, Stout (1997, 106) seems to favour an environmental explanation for the differences in density, linking the smaller numbers in low-lying Leinster to the fact that ringforts are primarily a hillside settlement type.
153. See Ó Floinn 1998, 161.
154. Sheehan 2004.
155. Coins were insignificant in bullion terms and are therefore likely to have been used as money (Kenny 1987, 518; see also Gerriets 1985, 133; *pace* Dolley and Ingold 1961, 260). Eighty-nine per cent of coin hoards were found at church sites (Sheehan 2004). It may be that ecclesiastical authority, and especially the law of sanctuary, provided a relatively stable context in which a monetary economy could operate.
156. Kenny 1987; Ó Floinn 1998, 161.
157. The rise of the O’Briens ensured that the Shannon basin also remained strategically important (see Ó Corráin 1972, 110, 119–24, 143).
158. For example, Bradley and Chapman 1986, 129.
159. See Champion 1989, 9–10; Andrews 1984. The influence of these factors is obvious in various contexts including, for example, the architecture of early medieval Scotland (Driscoll 2000, 240), that of medieval and post-medieval England (Clifton-Taylor 1987) and in Native American architecture (eg Cameron 1998). In his overview of regional patterning throughout Irish history, Andrews (1984, 19; see also Smyth 1993, 400–1; Smyth 1997, 19) emphasizes that the variations he observes were not ‘‘caused’’ by geography in any simple sense ... [but that] emerging from this intricate pattern we can distinguish at least two broad regional themes that no historian can ignore. One of them is the tendency for the north to stand aloof from the rest of the country; the other ... is the gap between the east of Ireland and the west.’ The decision of most northern churches to shun mortared stone construction (see note 115 above) is echoed in the distinctive material culture which one finds there in, for example, the Early Neolithic, the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (see Raftery 1994, figs 143, 144; Waddell 1998,

- figs 99, 116). The east/west division is also prefigured in some prehistoric material culture, not least the continued erection of megalithic tombs in the west during the Early Bronze Age. Obviously it is also paralleled in the division between Anglo-Norman and Gaelic areas in the later medieval period, which also finds expression in ecclesiastical architecture (see Leask 1960a, 75–6; Leask 1960b, 4–5). For modern parallels for these patterns see, for example, Whelan 1988.
160. Ó Cróinín 1995, 274; see also Kenny 1997, 116.
161. Smyth 1993, 400–2; Smyth 1997; see also Carroll 1999, 7–10.
162. Clearly, however, the exclusion of the province from the Viking Age silver economy did not prevent it from participating in the societal changes under way at the end of the period. For example, there are references to new, taxable land divisions (*tricha céit*) in western areas such as north Clare (see Hogan 1929, 225–6, 228), and some of the best-documented pre-Norman royal fortifications were built by Turlough O'Connor of Connaught (see Graham 1993, 38; Ó Cróinín 1995, 282–4; O'Conor 1998).
163. For example, Harbison 1993; Manning 1998; see also Driscoll 1988; Driscoll 2000; Ó Floinn 1995.
164. Manning 1998, 73; see also King 1997. This had been suspected by some previous scholars (eg Petrie 1845; Brash 1868, 70; Herity 1984, 278; Doherty 1985, 65; Bradley 1998, 49) but questioned by others (eg Clapham 1952, 16–18; Hare and Hamlin 1986, 131, and, apparently, Harbison 1982, 620).
165. Ó Carragáin 2002, 191–204; Ó Carragáin forthcoming.
166. Neuman de Vegvar 2003.
167. Ó Carragáin 2002, 170–5; Ó Carragáin forthcoming.
168. See above; Ó Carragáin 2002, 342–9; Ó Carragáin forthcoming.
169. Ó Carragáin 2002, 208–64; Ó Carragáin forthcoming.

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