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Title	Skeuomorphs and spolia: the presence of the past in Irish pre-Romanesque architecture
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Publication date	2007-01-01
Original Citation	Ó CARRAGÁIN, T. 2007. Skeuomorphs and spolia: the presence of the past in Irish pre-Romanesque architecture. In: MOSS, R. (ed.) Making and Meaning in Insular Art. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	http://www.fourcourtspress.ie/product.php?intProductID=620
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Download date	2026-11-06 03:06:22
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/546

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Skeuomorphs and spolia: the presence of the past in Irish pre-Romanesque architecture

TOMÁS Ó CARRAGÁIN

Simplicity and uniformity are the most striking characteristics of the group of 150 or so mortared pre-Romanesque churches in Ireland that are the subject of this paper. A range of evidence, including annalistic and radiocarbon evidence, indicates that they are mainly tenth- to early twelfth-century and in fact the bulk probably belong to the latter half of this period. They are all unicameral with a short length to breadth ratio, trabeate west doorway and usually just one small window in the east and south walls. A good proportion of them also have antae, projections of the side-walls beyond the end-walls which, most agree, are translations into stone of the earthfast corner-posts of wooden churches (figs 1, 3 and 5). It has recently been argued that churches with deep antae are relatively early while those with shallow antae are relatively late.[1] In some areas, most notably east Munster, shallow antae persist into the twelfth century; but across much of the country the most common churches in the eleventh and early twelfth century lack antae altogether. However, these antae-less churches are otherwise very similar to their predecessors, and are also characterized by skeuomorphs of wooden buildings: the gable corbels that project from the end walls of some of them are translations into stone of wooden wall plates that extended beyond the gable to facilitate the attachment of the upright posts and principal barge-boards to the wall-plates. The highly clustered distribution of these churches, combined with the fact that these clusters are characterized by distinct masonry styles, suggests that they were built by locally-based groups of masons.[2] This makes the uniformity of this architecture all the more remarkable.

This conservatism is so striking that most writers who have discussed these buildings at any length have had to address it in one way or another, though not all of them have made a serious attempt to account for it.[3] The most recent contribution to the debate is from O'Keeffe, who states that 'the more conservative these buildings in […] juxtaposition [with contemporary *arts mobiliers*], the more we might consider that conservatism to have been in some way ideologically-charged'.[4] He must surely be correct in this but, naturally enough in a book on Romanesque rather than pre-Romanesque architecture, he does not attempt to elucidate this ideology himself. Champneys, rather unconvincingly, suggested that their form is derived directly from ancient Classical architecture as a result of 'the Irish connection with northern Italy, […] Rome […] as well as southern France'.[5] Petrie put forward a much more plausible theory, namely that their simplicity was due to 'a veneration for some model given to them by their first teachers.' Very little was known about Romano-

1 T. Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry styles and the local organization of church building in early medieval Ireland', *PRIA,* 105C (2005), 99–149; also C. Manning, 'Clonmacnoise cathedral' in H. King (ed.), *Clonmacnoise studies volume 1. Seminar papers 1994* (Dublin, 1998), pp 56–86 at p. 76. **2** T. Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry styles', 134–7. **3** For example M. Stokes, 'Introduction' in E. Dunraven, *Notes on Irish architecture* (London, 1875–7), pp xvii–xxvii; R. Radford, 'The earliest Irish churches', *UJA,* 40 (1977), 1–10. **4** T. O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland: architecture and ideology in the twelfth century* (Dublin, 2003), p. 63. **5** A. Champneys, *Irish ecclesiastical architecture* (London, 1910), p. 37.



1 Glendalough cathedral. View of the pre-Romanesque nave from the southwest. Note the reuse of large blocks from an earlier church especially in the lower courses of the west wall. Note also the reused and enlarged doorway: its uppermost jamb stones were added when it was incorporated into the new church (photo: author).

British churches when he was writing, but he noted that the earliest churches on the Continent were 'like these, small and unadorned,' and also noted that the first church at Glastonbury, 'which was traditionally ascribed to the apostolic age' was believed to be sixty feet long, like the church which Patrick's hagiographers claimed he built at Donaghpatrick.[6] In fact, the most likely explanation for this metrological coincidence is that they are independent 'citations' of Solomon's Temple, which was sixty cubits in length.[7] Nevertheless, while he lacked the hard evidence to substantiate his hunch, Petrie may well have been thinking along the right lines. In order to assess this we need, first of all, to consider whether Irish churches prior to the tenth century were also of this simple form. The admittedly limited sources we have give us little reason to doubt that they were.

CHURCH FORM BEFORE 900

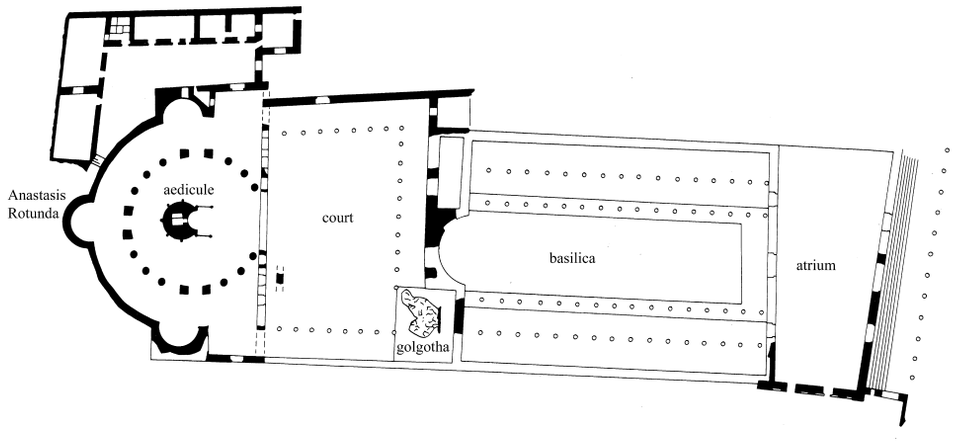
Most of the early churches excavated to date are at minor sites, and do not therefore constitute a representative sample, but their simplicity is striking nonetheless.[8] We must be careful, when using documentary and art-historical sources, not to focus exclusively on areas where they concur with the archaeological and architectural evidence,[9] but it must be

6 G. Petrie, *The ecclesiastical architecture of Ireland, anterior to the Norman invasion* (Dublin, 1845), pp 192–7; also P. Harbison, 'Early Irish churches' in H. Lowe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im Früheren Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1982), pp 618–29 at p. 624. For the reference to Donaghpatrick see W. Stokes, *The tripartite life of Patrick, with other documents relating to that saint* (London, 1887), ii, p. 71. **7** 1 Kings 6:2. Swift has already suggested this in the case of the Donaghpatrick church: C. Swift, 'Óenach Tailten, the Blackwater valley and the Uí Néill kings of Tara' in A.P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), pp 109–20 at p. 110. **8** For a review of much of this evidence see Harbison, 'Early Irish churches'. **9** R. Reece, 'Sequence is all or archaeology in a historical period', *Scottish Archaeological Review*, 3 (1984), 113–16; S. Driscoll, 'The relationship between history and

significant that these also usually portray simple architectural forms. An apparent exception is Cogitosus' basilica at Kildare, but there are a number of reasons for this. First, Kildare is the best-documented Frankish-style double house in Ireland, and this accounts for some aspects of this building's layout. Secondly, the church is unusual in an Irish context, in that it was designed to house the corporeal relics of its principal saints (further below). A final reason for its complex layout: indeed the reason why Cogitosus gives it so much attention, is the fact that it was built in conscious emulation of Roman basilicas, as part of Kildare's campaign to be recognized as metropolitan of Ireland.[10] Even so, while its 'many windows' and its two lateral doorways are not paralleled in the later stone churches, this building does not appear to have had any externally-defined subsidiary chambers, notwithstanding its various internal sub-divisions, for its three chapels were 'under the single roof of the cathedral church'.[11] The side chapel (*exedra)* that Adomnán tells us was 'attached to the wall of the church on Iona' may also have been an internal subdivision.[12] A third key text is the seventh-century poem, *De Oratorio,* which describes a unicameral wooden church with 'a single entrance in the western boundary'.[13] Its extensive '*porticum*' could be anything from side-chapel to atrium to chancel, but, as the Kildare text makes clear, it need not have been structurally independent.[14] The one incongruous feature in Herren's translation are its 'four steeples (*pinnas*) at the top'; but Brady has shown that *pinna* is best translated as 'wing, feather or fin' and may, in this instance, refer to decorated finials of the sort translated into stone at sites like Kilmalkedar (fig. 5).[15] It goes without saying that the authors of these texts were not motivated by a desire to record architectural form objectively: to a greater or lesser extent, each of the texts is a creative, cosmological and political endeavour.[16] But this by no means renders them worthless for our purposes. After all, the same is true of the churches on which they are based; and, in the case of Cogitosus, it can be argued that his motivations are closely akin to those of the church's architect.

The art-historical sources, including folio 202v of the Book of Kells (plate 8) and the church-shaped high cross capstones (plate 5),[17] support the general impression from documents and archaeology. A hitherto untapped source is Adomnán's *De locis sanctis* (*c.*680). Far from a being merely a pilgrim's guide this is a remarkable exegetical and cosmological text in which the author is ever conscious of describing, not only a city in Palestine, but also an antetype of heaven.[18] It is therefore all the more interesting to observe the discrepancies between

archaeology: artefacts documents and power' in S. Driscoll and M. Neike (eds), *Power and politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 162–87; S. Tabaczynski, 'The relationship between history and archaeology: elements of the present debate', *Medieval Archaeology,* 37 (1993), 1–14. **10** C. Neuman de Vegvar, '*Romanitas* and Realpolitik in Cogitosus's description of the church of St Brigit, Kildare' in M. Carver (ed.), *The cross goes north: processes of conversion in northern Europe, AD 300–1300* (Suffolk, 2003), pp 153–70. **11** S. Connolly and J.-M. Picard, 'Cogitosus: Life of Saint Brigit', *JRSAI,* 117 (1987), 11–27. **12** R. Sharpe (ed. and trans.), *Adomnán of Iona Life of Columba* (London, 1995), Book 3, pp 19, 370–1; A. MacDonald, 'Notes on monastic archaeology and the Annals of Ulster, 650–1050' in D. Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish antiquity: essays and studies presented to Professor M.J. O'Kelly* (Cork, 1981), pp 304–20 at pp 282–4. **13** M.W. Herren, *The Hisperica Famina 1. The A-Text* (Toronto, 1974), 109. **14** N. Brady, 'De Oratorio: *Hisperica Famina* and church building', *Peritia,* 11 (1997), 327–35; see also É. Ó Carragáin, 'The term *proticus* and *imitatio Romae* in Early Anglo-Saxon England' in H.C. O'Briain, A.M. d'Arcy and J. Scattergood (eds), *Text and gloss: studies in Insular learning and literature presented to Joseph Donovan Pheifer* (Dublin, 1999), pp 13–34. **15** Brady, 'De Oratorio', 333. See also Moss this volume. **16** For example J. O'Reilly, 'Reading the scriptures in the Life of Columba' in C. Bourke (ed.), *Studies in the cult of Saint Columba* (Dublin, 1997), pp 80–106; Neumann de Vegvar '*Romanitas*'; M. Smyth, *Understanding the universe in seventh-century Ireland* (Woodbridge, 1996), p. 115; O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*, pp 67–8. **17** For example H. Leask, *Irish churches and monastic buildings* (Dundalk, 1955), i, p. 47. **18** T. O'Loughlin, *Celtic theology: humanity, world and God in early Irish writings* (London, 2000), pp 78–83, 186–93; C. Heitz, *L'architecture religieuse Carolingienne: les formes et leur fonctions* (Paris, 1980), pp 212–14; C. Heitz, 'The iconography of architectural form' in L.A.S. Butler and R.K. Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon church: papers on history, architecture and archaeology in honour of Dr. H. Taylor* (London, 1986), pp 90–100



2 The Holy Sepulchre complex as dedicated in 335 (after M. Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* [Stroud, 1999]).

Adomnán's plan of the Holy Sepulchre and the complex itself (cf. fig. 2 and plate 6). They remind us that the plan has been filtered through an Insular mind and therefore depicts something in between the Holy Sepulchre as it stood in the seventh century and an Irish cleric's concept of what a sacred site should look like. For example, especially in the Vienna copy, the various chapels are shown, not as integrated components of a single building complex, but as freestanding, unicameral, east-west oriented structures, sometimes (i.e. the church of Calvary and that of the Chalice) with 1:1.5 proportions and just one doorway in their west walls. Even the Constantinian basilica at the east end of the complex is depicted as a simple structure lacking its apse and aisles. Its main eastern doorway and associated portico are not shown (though Adomnán mentions the latter in the text) and instead its western doorways are emphasized suggesting that Adomnán thought of it as conventionally oriented with its altar at the east rather than the west. It is also notable that the basilica does not dwarf the other churches to anything like the extent it should: instead their relationship is roughly akin to that between the principal and subsidiary churches at Irish sites like Clonmacnoise. Krautheimer has observed that Early Medieval depictions of buildings generally 'show the disintegration of the prototype into its single elements, the selective transfer of these parts, and their reshuffling in the copy'.[19] In the present case this process has resulted in a plan which, with the exception of the circular Anastasis, finds clear parallels in Ireland.[20]

In our current state of knowledge it would be rash to dismiss the possibility that some churches with complex plans existed in the period AD 600–900, and we can be even less categorical about the preceding period, for which we have virtually no documentary or art-historical sources and just one definite excavated church: a small unicameral example with altar-post and *sacrarium* at Caherlehillan, Co. Kerry.[21] Nonetheless, while there is not space to argue the case at length here,[22] I am of the opinion that the tenth- and eleventh-century churches were broadly similar to earlier Irish churches. I also agree with Thomas, that their form derives ultimately from sub-Roman churches of the fourth and fifth centuries, perhaps especially those of western Britain.[22a] The crucial role of British missionaries in the

at pp 96–9. **19** R. Krautheimer, *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance art* (New York, 1969), p. 126. **20** See further T. Ó Carragáin, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland', *JRSAI,* 133 (2005), 130–75. **21** J. Sheehan, 'A peacock's tale: excavations at Caherlehillan, Iveragh, Ireland' in N. Edwards (ed.), *The archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic churches* (London, forthcoming). **22** See further T. Ó Carragáin, *Early Medieval Churches in Ireland* (Dublin, forthcoming). **22a** C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD500* (London, 1987), pp 152–4.

conversion of the Irish is well documented, and Swift has even argued that a substantial portion of the fifth-century Christian population had emigrated from Britain.[23] This is therefore the most obvious place to look for the models on which these churches were based; and sure enough most of the basic tenets of Irish church design are also characteristic of the small group of churches known from Roman Britain. Some have classic basilican plans with evenly-spaced columns separating side aisles from the nave,[24] but the majority were simple rectangular structures augmented only by an apse.[25] They were about the same size on average (i.e. 116m) as the principal extant churches at major Irish sites, and had very short proportions, indeed even shorter on average than the Irish churches.[26] Like most Late Antique churches, and virtually all pre-Romanesque Irish churches, their principal and often sole doorway was at the centre of the west wall. The earliest of the group are of mortared stone but there is growing evidence that churches were affected by a general move from stone to timber construction in the later fourth and fifth centuries.[27] For example, the shallow stone foundations of the church at Vindolanda had clearly been designed to support timber sill-beams, while at Richborough the only surviving traces of a likely church were masonry post-pads.[28] This trend was probably particularly marked in western Britain, where monumental stone buildings were always rare and certainly, as far as Bede was concerned, stone churches were something 'to which the British were unaccustomed'.[29]

It would appear, therefore, that the extant stone churches were not markedly simpler than their predecessors. What is striking about them is their studied avoidance of architectural innovations subsequent to the arrival of Christianity in Ireland. Already by the Merovingian period such buildings would have looked old-fashioned compared to the cruciform churches at, for example, Winchester and, later, at Jumièges.[30] However, unicameral churches lacking an externally-defined chancel were still quite common at minor continental sites in this period.[31] There are also examples at prestigious monasteries including the Merovingian church dedicated to St Gertrude at Nivelles and the early Carolingian church dedicated to St Benedict at Saint-Riquier.[32] The extant Irish stone churches were dwarfed by their contemporaries abroad but, if we assume that their wooden predecessors were of comparable size, then these were of a respectable scale for the period. For example Clonmacnoise cathedral and Donaghpatrick (see above) were similar in size to the nave of the seventh-century minster at Winchester[33] and the Merovingian monastic church at Jouarre, and they were larger than the churches at Echternach and Romainmôtier.[34] Even

23 C. Swift, *Ogham stones and the earliest Irish Christians* (Maynooth, 1997). **24** For example Flaxengate in Lincoln: C. Colyer and M. Jones, 'Excavations at Lincoln, 2nd interim report: excavations in the lower town, 1972–8', *Antiquaries Journal,* 59 (1979), 50–91; C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London, 1981), pp 168–9, fig. 37. **25** Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp 190–1. **26** Compare Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, fig. 30 with T. Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches in Ireland: interpreting archaeological regionalisms' (PhD, UCC, 2002), pp 231–3. **27** D. Petts, *Christianity in Roman Britain* (Stroud, 2003), p. 85. **28** Petts, *Christianity in Roman Britain*; also Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain,* pp 149–54. **29** *HE*, iii, p. 4. **30** B. Kjolbye-Biddle, 'The 7th-century minster at Winchester interpreted' in Butler and Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon church*, pp 196–209; E. James, 'Archaeology and the Merovingian monastery' in H.B. Clarke, and M. Brennan (eds) *Columbanus and Merovingian monasticism* (Oxford, 1981), pp 33–55 at pp 38–9; also Krautheimer, *Studies*, p. 121. **31** S. Burnell, 'Merovingian to early Carolingian churches and their founder-graves in southern Germany and Switzerland: the impact of Christianity on the Alamans and the Bavarians' (PhD, Merton College Oxford, 1988), pls. 31, 33, 40, 70, 96, 97, 110, 126, 255; A. Dierkens and P. Périn, 'Death and burial in Gaul and Germania, 4th–8th century' in L. Webster and M. Brown (eds) *The transformation of the Roman world, AD 400–900* (London, 1997), pp 79–95, fig. 40; R. Fletcher, *The conversion of Europe: from Paganism to Christianity, 371–1386 AD* (London, 1998), pl. 16; H. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon architecture* (Cambridge, 1978), iii, pp 996–7. **32** James, 'Archaeology and Merovingian monasticism', fig. 2.3; S. Rabe, *Faith, art and politics at Saint-Riquier: the symbolic vision of Angilbert* (Philadelphia, 1995). **33** See Kjolbye-Biddle, 'The 7th-century minster'. **34** J. Hubert, *L'Architecture religieuse du Haut*

the prevalence of timber in Ireland is not as unusual as is commonly assumed, for we know that timber was seen as an acceptable alternative at some quite important sites, even in areas which had experienced a high degree of Romanisation.[35] However, by the tenth century the Irish churches would have looked totally anachronistic to a visitor from mainland Europe, for there is absolutely no hint in them of the transformations that had taken place in the Carolingian and Ottonian periods.

SKEUOMORPHS AND SPOLIA

The uniformity of the tenth- and eleventh-century churches is remarkable. Formally identical buildings served variously as episcopal churches, monastic churches, nunneries, mortuary churches, eremitic and reliquary chapels, as well as *túath* churches with a pastoral role.[36] What little variation there is within the group is usually best explained with reference to chronology rather than regionality. Clearly this form had become synonymous with the idea of a church, and so there could be no straying from it for reasons of function or regional preference. The reification of this box-like form may be one of the reasons why so much creative energy was channelled into the fabric of these churches. A fixation with the materials used in church construction is evident in the documentary sources, and many of the extant examples were built in the cyclopean masonry style.[37] Con Manning has shown that at Glendalough the fabric of an earlier, smaller church was incorporated into the pre-Romanesque cathedral: its pseudo-ashlar masonry was reused in the lower courses, and its doorway was reassembled and enlarged (fig. 1).[38] While this is the only clear case of extensive reuse of materials, i.e. the use of spolia,[39] in a pre-Romanesque church, this is almost certainly because of the late arrival of stone construction in Ireland, and because the conservatism of these buildings meant that, once built, they were rarely replaced before the high medieval period.[40] These stone churches were probably the last of a series of rebuildings, in which the incorporation of materials from earlier 'versions' of the church may have been common. Even the seventh-century basilica at Kildare, the most ambitious church we know of from early medieval Ireland, and which Cogitosus described as 'a new reality in an age old setting', incorporated the door of Brigit's old church, which was miraculously enlarged to fit the new doorway.[41] It seems likely that, in a similar way, the earlier stone church at Glendalough was already intimately associated with St Kevin by the time it was carefully dismantled and incorporated into its larger successor (further below).

Moyen Âge en France (Paris, 1952); James, 'Archaeology and Merovingian monasticism', p. 44. **35** For example C. Ahrens, *Frühe Holzkirchen in nördlichen Europa* (Hamburg, 1981); C. Bonnet, 'Les églises en bois du haut Moyen-Age d'après les reserches archéologiques' in N. Gauthier and H. Galinié (eds), *Grégoire de Tours et l'Espace Gaulois* (Tours, 1997), pp 217–36; also R. Gem, 'Towards an iconography of Anglo-Saxon architecture' in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 46 (1983), 1–18 at 13; Ó Carragáin, *Early Medieval churches in Ireland* (forthcoming). **36** T. Ó Carragáin, 'Church buildings and pastoral care in early medieval Ireland' in R. Gillespie, S. Duffy and E FitzPatrick (eds), *The parish in medieval and post-medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), 91–123. **37** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches in Ireland', pp 229–31; Ó Carragáin 'Habitual masonry', 101–3; O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*, pp 65–7. **38** C. Manning, 'A puzzle in stone: the cathedral at Glendalough', *Archaeology Ireland,* 16:2 (2002), 18–21. **39** On the use of the term spolia for materials reused from earlier buildings see T. Raff, 'Spolia – building material or bearer of meaning?', *Daidalos,* 58 (1995), 64–72. **40** Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry styles', 142. The original doorway of Temple Molaise, Inishmurray, was reused when it was extended westwards, but in this case we cannot be absolutely certain that this took place in the pre-Romanesque period: see J. O'Sullivan and T. Ó Carragáin, *The sacred landscape of Inishmurray, Co. Sligo: survey and excavations, 1997–2000* (Dublin, forthcoming). The doorway of the late eleventh-century barrel-vaulted church of St Kevin's Glendalough also belongs to an earlier building. **41** Connolly and Picard, 'Cogitosus', 26.

The use of spolia from Classical buildings is one of the defining traits of Early Christian architecture in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, Parsons has argued that virtually all Early and Middle Saxon churches were built of stone salvaged from Roman buildings.[42] The obvious practical benefits of this practice in no way diminish its symbolic significance. Hansen has argued that, while the eclectic aesthetic of these buildings is far-removed from that of the classical architecture which they quarry, spolia nonetheless represented the adoption of the *insigniae* of the empire on behalf of Christianity.[43] In the case of the Irish churches the use of salvage served to maintain continuity not with the age of empire but with the age of saints.

This was also true of their extreme formal conservatism, and the use of skeuomorphs when they were eventually translated to stone. We must dismiss any suggestion that this conservatism is the result of ignorance or a lack of expertise. While Ireland was relatively insular in the tenth and eleventh centuries compared to the preceding period,[44] major sites maintained close links with continental monasteries[45] and would have been well aware of what was being built abroad. The relatively limited resources of Irish kings may account for the modest scale of these churches, but it does not explain their conservatism. High kings such as Flann Sinna of Clann Cholmáin (879–916) and Brian Boru (976–1014) would certainly have had the resources to add a chancel, engaged towers or even transepts to some of their churches had they so wished. Instead they prioritized authenticity and the emulation of buildings from an earlier age over architectural innovation.

AUTHENTICITY VERSUS INNOVATION

A good deal of archaeological writing is concerned with why things change: why particular innovations are developed or adopted and what this tells us about the society in question. This is a natural consequence of the fact that archaeology is usually written within a post-Enlightenment framework in which human progress is understood as inexorable and entirely positive.[46] Because phenomena that stay the same, or change very little, over long periods do not fit neatly into this meta-narrative of progress, they often receive relatively little attention, or are subject to negative value-judgments, especially within the context of 'nationalist archaeologies' like that of Ireland.[47] It is notable in this regard that, in contrast to the attention lavished on round towers, the subject of three scholarly books within the last few years alone,[48] pre-Romanesque churches have been relatively neglected.

42 D. Parsons, 'Review and prospect: the stone industry in Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval England' in D. Parsons (ed.), *Stone quarrying and building in England, AD 43–1525* (Chichester, 1990), pp 1–16 at p. 5. **43** M.F. Hansen, *The eloquence of appropriation: prolegomena to an understanding of spolia in Early Christian Rome* (Rome, 2003), p. 276. **44** K. Hughes, 'Irish monks and learning' in *Los Monjes y los Estudios. IV Semana de Estudios Monasticos, Poblet 1961* (Poblet, 1963), p. 75; D. Bethell, 'English monks and Irish reform in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', *Historical Studies,* 8 (1971), 111–35, 114–15; D. Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland' in T.W. Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the pursuit of national independence* (Belfast, 1978), pp 1–35 at p. 6; D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (Dublin, 1995), pp 229–32; T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 592. **45** A. Gwynn, *The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th centuries* (Dublin, 1992), pp 1–16; D. Ó Riain-Raedel, 'Irish Benedictine monasteries on the Continent' in M. Browne and C. Ó Clabaigh (eds), *The Irish Benedictines: a history* (Dublin, 2005), pp 25–63; K. Hughes, *The Church in early Irish society* (London, 1966), p. 255. **46** M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Social theory and archaeology* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 155–65; B. Trigger, *A history of archaeological thought* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 55–8; C. Fredengren, *Crannogs* (Dublin, 2002), p. 21. **47** M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Re-constructing archaeology* (London, 1987), p. 54; Trigger, *A history of archaeological thought*; J. O'Sullivan, 'Nationalists, archaeologists and the myth of the Golden Age' in M.A. Monk and J. Sheehan (eds), *Early medieval Munster: archaeology, history and society* (Cork 1998), pp 178–89. **48** B. Lalor, *The Irish round tower: origins*

For Harbison they are indicative of 'centuries-old atrophy',[49] while Macalister attempted to explain them away altogether by asserting, on no evidence whatsoever, that compared to the vanished wooden churches 'those in stone […] would probably have seemed to their contemporaries mere trivialities'.[50] This was manifestly not the case. These churches are the result of substantial investment in a society where, in material terms, authority was expressed most clearly in the ecclesiastical rather than the secular sphere.[51] We therefore have the right to assume that their conservatism was the result of a conscious social strategy, especially given that alternative models were readily available.

Furthermore, the fact that the form of these buildings remained fixed, by and large, does not mean that their social significance was also immutable. In order to understand the way in which these buildings helped to structure society over time we need to focus on the tension between continuity and change within a tradition. This has been discussed by Fredengren, who draws especially on the work of the economist Geoffrey Hodgson.[52] She argues that, while a practice such as the building and use of a crannog or, in this case, a church, might have been perceived as a reiteration of an already existing idea, the very act of copying changed its meaning. Reiteration contains within itself the process of change, not least because the social environment in which the copy is produced may have changed. Where the social context has changed markedly, then an understanding of this disconnect is all the more important, and there is often cause to suspect that it represents the manipulation of the past for political ends.

The tension between authenticity and innovation is, of course, a central feature of medieval art and culture in general.[53] As Hansen has observed, 'imitation of […] the authority of the past, as well as the model or exemplum, was crucial within early Christianity.[54] Indeed, as a pedagogical system it governed the entire thinking of the era.' Thus, for Augustine, *imitatio* was 'so much a part of the arts that, if it is removed, nearly all of them are destroyed. For masters exhibit themselves to be imitated, and this is what they call teaching'.[55] This view of learning is evident in the work of, for example Maximus Confessor (*c.*580–662), who falsely credits most of his original observations to the Church Fathers so that his writings would be underscored by their authority.[56] Similarly, the Hibernensis (*c.*700) fabricates biblical precedent for the concentric enclosures surrounding major Irish church sites: it falsely states that in Exodus there are three enclosures around Mt Sinai when in fact there is only one.[57] As noted already in relation to spolia, architecture was an important way of creating links between the present and golden ages of the past. For example, Markus argues that this impulse was the driving force behind the development of the cult of relics in the fourth century: martyrs' graves started to become important in this

and architecture explored (Dublin, 1999); R. Stalley, *Irish round towers* (Dublin, 2000); T. O'Keeffe, *Ireland's round towers* (Stroud, 2004). **49** P. Harbison, 'The otherness of Irish art in the twelfth century' in C. Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland coming: Irish art from the Early Christian to the late Gothic period and its European context* (Princeton, 2001), pp 103–21 at p. 103. **50** R.A.S. Macalister, *The archaeology of Ireland* (London, 1928), p. 240. **51** T. Ó Carragáin, 'Regional variation in Irish pre-Romanesque architecture', *Antiquaries Journal,* 85 (2005), 23–56; also Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry', 102–3. **52** Fredengren, *Crannogs*, p. 21; G.M. Hodgson, *Economics and institutions* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1988), especially pp 138–40; also Hansen, *The eloquence of appropriation*, p. 276. **53** For example U. Eco, *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages* (London, 1986); see also C.R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon art: a new perspective* (Oxford, 1982). **54** Hansen, *The eloquence of appropriation,* p. 271. **55** R.C. Taliaferro (trans.), *On music. The fathers of the Church: writings of Saint Augustine II* (New York, 1947), p. 178. **56** See for example J.D. Madden, 'The authenticity of early definitions of will (*thelêsis*)', in F. Heinzer and C. Schönborn (eds), *Maximus Confessor. Actes du symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980* (Fribourg-en-Suisse, 1982), pp 61–79. **57** C. Swift, 'Forts and fields: a study of "monastic towns" in seventh and eighth-century Ireland' *Journal of Irish Archaeology,* 9 (1998), 105–25.

period because they linked the newly-triumphant Church with its glorious, persecuted past.[58] Paradoxically, the cult of relics was, of course, one of the factors, also including liturgical developments and imperial patronage, which led to the transformation of the Early Christian basilica in Carolingian and Ottonian Europe. England did not participate fully in these developments, and the conservatism of its tenth- and early-eleventh-century churches in particular provides a striking parallel for the situation in contemporary Ireland.

Even at prestigious English sites, it was often decided to refurbish old churches or build new ones that drew primarily on earlier English architecture for inspiration.[59] Of course this still meant much more complex churches than in Ireland, for already in the eighth and ninth centuries most English churches had chancels, and some were cruciform in plan and had towers at the crossing. The early Carolingian influences evident in some of this architecture were perpetuated in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but what is remarkable is the very limited degree of influence from contemporary architecture on the Continent. Richard Gem emphazises that this 'low-key attitude to architecture' was not due to economic constraints.[60] Prestige royal projects like the New Minster at Winchester could certainly have been built in the contemporary continental manner had their patrons so desired. Rather it relates to the particular social role of architecture at the time: not to proclaim the wealth of the elite but to assert that their legitimacy 'rested upon a continuity of authority which had been supported by the Church for over three centuries.' At a more local level, the new stone churches built at manorial sites, especially during the eleventh century, are also interesting in the present context for many of them are characterized by skeuomorphic references to wooden predecessors.[61]

THE USES OF THE PAST IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Societies' relationships with the past involves 'remembering' it in a structured way, but also 'forgetting' aspects of it that are not useful or even unpalatable in the present.[62] There is growing evidence that only a small minority of Irish churches developed at pre-Christian cult centres,[63] but it is interesting to note, in this regard, that even these seem to have deliberately played down their pagan origins. Armagh seems to be a case in point,[64] though

58 R.A. Markus, 'How on earth could places become holy? Origins of the Christian idea of holy places' *Journal of Early Christian studies,* 2:3 (1994), 257–71. **59** For example H.M. Taylor, 'Tenth-century church building in England and on the Continent' in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth-century studies: essays in commemoration of the millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London, 1975), pp 141–68 at p. 167; R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon achievement: archaeology and the beginnings of English society* (London, 1989), pp 164, 178–80; H. Gittos, 'Architecture and liturgy in England, *c.*1000: problems and possibilities' in N. Hiscock (ed.), *The mantle of white churches: architecture, liturgy and art around the millennium* (Tourhout, 2003), pp 91–106 at p. 93. **60** R. Gem, 'Tenth-century architecture in England', *Settimane de studio del centro italiano di studi sill'alto medioevo,* 38 (1991), 803–36 at 833–4. **61** W. Rodwell, 'Anglo-Saxon church building: aspects of design and construction' in Butler and Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, pp 156–75. **62** V. Cummings, 'Building from memory: remembering the past at Neolithic monuments in western Britain' in H. Williams (ed.), *Archaeologies of remembrance: death and memory in past societies* (London, 2003), pp 25–44; H. Williams, 'Remembering and forgetting the medieval dead', in H. Williams (ed.), *Archaeologies of remembrance: death and memory in past societies* (London, 2003), pp 227–54. **63** T. Ó Carragáin, 'A landscape converted: archaeology and early Church organization on Iveragh and Dingle, Ireland' in M. Carver (ed.), *The cross goes north: processes of conversion in northern Europe, AD 300–1300* (Suffolk, 2003), pp 127–52; Ó Carragáin, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics'. **64** Contrast N.B. Aitchison, *Armagh and the royal centres in Early Medieval Ireland: monuments, cosmology, and the past* (Woodbridge, Newbridge, 1994), p. 183 and R. Warner, 'Two pagan idols – remarkable new discoveries', *Archaeology Ireland* 17:1 (2003), 24–7 with L. Bieler (ed. and trans.), *The patrician texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979) and Stokes, *Tripartite life* [see notes 77 and 81].

Aitchison has argued that one pre-Christian monument was preserved there quite deliberately: a stone circle destroyed in the nineteenth century was skirted by a notable kink in the outer ecclesiastical enclosure, almost as if those laying out the site wished to emphasize its sanctity by excluding this pagan monument.[65] Certainly, where pre-Christian monuments are referred to in the hagiography they are usually invested with negative associations in order to emphasize discontinuities with the pagan past. For example in *The Expulsion of Mochuda from Rahan* the saint orders Satan to: 'Be off […] into the standing stone to the south of the church, and do no harm there to any one, except to those come to attack the church'.[66]

When it came to the Age of Saints the emphasis was, of course, on creating continuity. This had always been the case, but what I want to emphasize here is that it was particularly important in the tenth and eleventh centuries when the stone churches were built. The radical changes that Irish society was undergoing in this period are well known, so all that is needed here is to list some of them: the establishment of the Hiberno-Norse ports and with them a silver economy, not least at major church sites;[67] the development of a more powerful form of dynastic, territorially-based kingship in which over-kings had the ability to maintain armies, re-grant land and impose taxes;[68] and the abandonment of many ringforts in favour of unenclosed settlement, along with some nucleation around elite sites, especially churches.[69] The disparity between these societal changes and the studied conservatism of the architecture can only be understood in the context of the scholarly and intellectual climate of the time. Irish scholars of this period now generally wrote in Irish rather than Latin, and relied, to a great extent, on texts that had been amassed during the seventh and eighth centuries rather than drawing on new stimuli from abroad.[70] Furthermore, contemporary societal change was largely obscured, except in a few sources like the annals, by what Ó Corráin has called the 'self-conscious antiquarianism of Ireland's learned class'.[71] While some scholars have concluded that 'what interested them […] seems not to have been the present, but the past',[72] these texts were really about the structured transformation of the past in order to affirm the contemporary political order.[73] 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 an all-Ireland assembly.[74] In the ecclesiastical sphere saints whose very existence sometimes had little basis in historical fact were provided with detailed hagiographies designed to bolster the authority of their successors over subsidiary churches. Herbert concludes that in this hagiography 'contemporary ideology

65 Aitchison, *Armagh and the royal centres,* p. 222. **66** C. Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn* (Oxford, 1922), ii, p. 294. For Anglo-Saxon parallels see S. Semple, 'A fear of the past: the place of the prehistoric burial mound in the ideology of middle and later Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology,* 30 (1998), 1, 109–26. See also N. Roymans, 'The cultural biography of urnfields and the long-term history of a mythical landscape', *Archaeological Dialogues* 2:1 (1995), 2–38 at 18–19, 33. **67** J. Sheehan, 'Social and economic integration in Viking-Age Ireland: the evidence of the hoards', in J. Hines (ed.), *Land sea and home: Viking-period settlement in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2004), pp 177–88. **68** For example Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship', pp 16, 23–6. **69** M. Stout, *The Irish ringfort* (Dublin, 1997), fig. 2; M. Monk, 'Early Medieval secular and ecclesiastical settlement in Munster' in M. Monk and J. Sheehan (eds), *Early Medieval Munster: archaeology, history and society* (Cork), pp 33–52 at p. 48; T. O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland: an archaeology* (Stroud, 2000), pp 26, 84. **70** Hughes, 'Irish monks and learning', 75; J. O'Reilly, 'The Hiberno-Latin tradition of the evangelists and the Gospels of Mael Brigte', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 290–309; Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland,* p. 231; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 592. **71** Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship', p. 6. **72** Bethel, 'English monks and Irish reform', 111. **73** See P.J. Geary, *Phantoms of remembrance: memory and oblivion at the end of the first millennium* (Princeton, 1994), pp 24–9. **74** For example Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship', pp 8, 20.

is articulated in the guise of narrative about a former era, and an invented past encodes information complementary to that provided by mainstream historical documentation'.[75]

ARCHITECTURE AND MEMORY[76]

The conservatism of the stone churches makes perfect sense in this context: like contemporary scholarship they made the past continuous with the present and in so doing they made it more difficult to question the emerging power structures. In the hagiography the saint usually builds his own church or, in a few cases, has it built for him by the mythical master craftsman, the Gobán Saer.[77] For example, in the Irish *Life of Maedoc*[78] the saint 'consecrated and blessed the place (i.e. Rossinver), together with a number of angels and high saints around to give it a perpetual blessing. He built a strong and ample wooden church (*duirrtheach*), and a fair-built quadrangular canonical church (*ecclas caomh-cumhdaighte, cetaruillech, cánonta*) in preparation for his resurrection'.[79] Similarly the Latin *Life of Moling* tells of how the saint caused a sea wave to transport a great oak up the river Barrow to St Mullin's for the building of his church and that 'some of that wood is still in use in the house of God (i.e. the church) down to the present day'.[80] In a few cases the hagiography depicts the local king working in concert with the saint on the erection of his church. For example, the Irish *Life of Colman Ela* states that 'no one ever laid a stone of the church (*tempall*), or of the stone enclosure, or of the causeway (of Lynally), without Duinecha being with him (i.e. Colman), and Cuineda (also) serving him manfully'.[81] Duinecha and Cuineda were heirs of *Fir Cell*, the kingdom in which Lynally was situated, and the stone church which the hagiographer had in mind must surely be the large pre-Romanesque building which still stands at the site (fig. 3).[82] The act of rebuilding these churches in stone effectively enshrined their hallowed form by making it immutable. At a time when power relations were in a state of flux, it affirmed the authority of the saints' successors and, quite literally, cemented their association with their secular patrons. Thus the erection, in 909,[83] of the *damliac* of Clonmacnoise by Abbot Colmán and King Flann of Clann Cholmáin represented a renewal of the covenant between ecclesiastical and secular authority that, according to hagiography,[84] had been established through the collaboration of St Ciarán and King Diarmait mac Cerbaill in the erection of the first building of the monastery. Indeed one, or perhaps simultaneously both, of these building projects are probably depicted on the Cross of the Scriptures which Flann and Colmán erected immediately west of their *damliac* (Stalley, this volume, fig. 4).[85] Clearly these churches were

75 M. Herbert, 'Sea-divided gaels? Constructing relationships between Irish and Scots *c.*800–1169' in B. Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300: Insular responses to medieval European change* (Cambridge, 1999), pp 87–97 at p. 88. **76** I discuss the usefulness of the concept of social memory to an understanding of pre-Romanesque churches in Ireland at greater length elsewhere: T. Ó Carragáin, *Eary Medieval churches in Ireland* (Dublin, forthcoming). **77** C. Plummer, *Vitae Santorum Hibernia* (Oxford, 1910), i, pp 219, 243–4; ii, pp 187–8, 254–5; Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn,* i, pp 10, 104, 111, 186, 207, 237, 293, 317; Stokes, *Tripartite life*, p. 111; W. Stokes, *Lives of the saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford, 1890), pp 224, 286. In these instances it is pretty clear from the wording and/or the context that the saint is erecting a church building, as opposed to founding a church settlement. **78** This has recently been dated to the sixteenth century. R. Gillespie, 'A sixteenth-century saint's life: the second Irish life of St Maedoc', *Breifne*, 10:40 (2004), 147–56. **79** Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn,* i, p. 235; ii, pp 228–9 with amendments. **80** Plummer, *Vitae Santorum Hiberniae* , ii, p. 194. **81** Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn,* i, p. 172; ii, p. 166; also Stokes, *Tripartite life,* p. 71 **82** Ó Carragáin, *Early Medieval churches in Ireland* (forthcoming). **83** AFM; Manning, 'Clonmacnoise cathedral'. **84** R.A.S. Macalister, *The Latin and Irish lives of Ciarán* (London, 1921), pp 91, 151, 212. **85** B. Brandt-Förster, *Das irische Hoch-kreuz. Ursprung – Entwicklung – Gestalt*



3 Pre-Romanesque church at Lynally, Co. Offaly: probably the church referred to in the Irish Life of Colmán Ela (photo: author).

conceived, not as entirely new structures but rather as new versions of buildings erected centuries earlier, in much the same way that Chinese and Japanese temples are perceived as ancient despite the fact that they are periodically entirely rebuilt.[86]

The hagiography also hints at another key reason why churches before 900 had remained very simple, and why this simplicity was maintained in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Where the place of the saint's burial is indicated, it is usually in the cemetery outside the church he had built.[87] There is also a clear dichotomy between congregational church and principal reliquary focus in the archaeological record: even the minority of sites that translated the relics of their saint usually housed them in a diminutive shrine chapel at the gravesite.[88] This is important because it means that the Irish congregational churches were not usually the focus for corporeal relic-cults. Doubtless, they did contain some relics: for example 'the altar of Ciarán, with its relics' mentioned in 1143 may well be the high altar of Flann and Colmán's *damliac*;[89] but hagiography makes clear that Ciarán's primary relics were in his shrine chapel in the cemetery.[90] In contrast, some of the most important churches in southern Europe were erected over martyrs' graves while many others both there and also in Francia and England, had the remains of founders and other saints translated into them.[91] As mentioned already, this was one of the factors that spurred

(Stuttgart, 1978); C. Doherty, 'The monastic town in Early Medieval Ireland' in H.B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds), *The comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe* (Oxford, 1985), pp 45–75 at p. 65. **86** K. Tange and N. Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese architecture* (Cambridge, MA, 1965); A. Stille, *The future of the past* (New York, 2002); also E. Lip, *Chinese temples and deities* (Singapore, 1981), p. 41. **87** For example Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona,* Book 3, p. 23; Plummer, *Bethada Náem nÉrenn,* i, p. 17; T. Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*: the patron-saint of an Irish church', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds), *Local saints and local churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), pp 266–90 at p. 289. **88** P. Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland: the monuments and the people* (London, 1991), pp 148–51; Ó Carragáin, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics'. **89** AFM; R. Ó Floinn, 'Clonmacnoise: art and patronage in the Early Medieval period' in C. Bourke (ed.), *From the isles of the north: Early Medieval art in Ireland and Britain* (Belfast, 1995), pp 251–60, 256. Note that the tract on the consecration of churches in the *Leabhar Breac* makes no mention of placing relics in the altar. T. Olden, 'On an early Irish tract in the *Leabhar Breac* describing the mode of consecrating a church', *Cambridge Camden Society Transactions*, 4 (1900), 98–104. **90** Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae,* i, pp 248–9; Macalister, *The Latin and Irish lives of Ciarán,* p. 97. **91** For example A. Angenendt, '*In porticu ecclesiae sepultus.* Ein Beispiel von himmlisch-erdischer Spiegelung' in H. Keller and N. Staubach (eds), *Iconologia Sacra. Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung der Religions- und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas. Festschrift fuer Karl Hauck zum 75 Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1994), pp 68–80; M. Dunn, *The emergence of monasticism: from the desert Fathers to the early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), p. 168; J. Crook, *The architectural setting of the cult of saints in the Early*



4 Eleventh-century freestanding belfry next to sixth-century basilica of St Appolinare in Classe just outside Ravenna (photo: author).

architectural innovation as ever more elaborate churches were built over these graves, along with increasingly sophisticated solutions to the problem of accessing their contents without disrupting the liturgy.[92] However, in Ireland the principal church was not a *memoria* built to provide a suitably impressive setting for the saint's primary relics; rather, it can itself be viewed as a secondary relic of the saint, having originally been built by him. In this regard they are like the crosiers and bells which were clearly seen as secondary relics though they were not made until long after the saints with which they were associated had died.[93] Peter Harbison has suggested that relics were kept outside in the cemetery because of the simplicity and modest size of Irish churches,[94] but it seems unlikely that such an important decision was determined by mundane space management issues. I have argued elsewhere that the Irish had clear symbolic and social motivations to maintain the link between relics and the cemetery,[95] and the evidence discussed here suggests they had equally compelling reasons to keep their congregational churches simple.

Apart from the use of mortared stone, the one significant architectural innovation of this period was the arrival of the belfry in the form of round towers. Because these are freestanding, unlike the westwork, transeptal and crossing towers which one finds in France and Germany, some scholars have posited a direct formal link with Italy, especially Ravenna, where there are several round, freestanding campanile.[96] However, there are problems with this theory, not least the fact that most of the Ravenna belfries are eleventh-century or later.[97] One issue that has not been considered in the course of this debate is the reason why

Christian West (Oxford, 2000), pp 68–134; C. Thomas, *Bede, archaeology, and the cult of relics.* Jarrow Lecture 1973 (Jarrow, 1973), pp 8–10; M. Biddle, 'The cult of relics in Anglo-Saxon England' in Butler and Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon Church,* pp 1–31 at p. 11; D. Rollason, *Saints and relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp 34–44. **92** A. Grabar, 'Christian architecture East and West', *Archaeology,* 2 (1949), 95–104; E. Dyggve, *History of Salonatian Christianity* (Oslo, 1951); R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine architecture 4th edition* (4th ed. New Haven, 1986); Crook, *The architectural setting.* **93** G. Murray, this volume. **94** Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland,* p. 148. **95** Ó Carragáin, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics'. **96** M. Stokes, *Early Christian architecture in Ireland* (London, 1878), pp 64–75; F. Henry, *Irish art during the Viking invasions, 800–1020 AD* (London, 1967), p. 53; H. McDonnell, 'Margaret Stokes and the Irish round tower: a reappraisal', *UJA,* 57 (1994), 70–80. **97** Stalley, 'Irish round towers', p. 35; R. Stalley, 'Sex, symbol and myth: some observations on the Irish round towers' in Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland, coming,* pp 27–48 at p. 44; also C. McClendon, 'Church building in northern Italy around the year 1000: a reappraisal' in Hiscock (ed.), *The mantle of white churches,* pp 221–32 at p. 223.



5 Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry. Note the Romanesque doorway, the otherwise plain façade and the skeuomorphic antae, bargeboards and finial (photo: author).

the Ravenna campanile were built as independent structures: namely in order to avoid interference with the fabric of the revered Early Christian basilicas (along with the centrally-planned church of St Vitale) for which most of them were built (fig. 4).[98] This unique group of basilicas had come to represent a glorious imperial and Christian past, and were therefore the most influential models for later churches in the Emilia Romagna region.[99] Even during the Romanesque period the influence of the Early Christian basilica was particularly strong there, and most new churches were single-tower, asymmetrical compositions whose campanile were often semi or fully independent.[1] It remains possible that the first Irish round tower was inspired by a lost exemplar from this region, but the identification of such a model would not in itself explain its enormous appeal, to the extent that it became ubiquitous at major Irish church sites. To account for this it is, perhaps, best to view the similarities between the belfries of these two regions as the result of parallel but largely independent responses to similar preoccupations with the past.

In Ireland, we finally start to see real change in church form during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. These developments might seem to undermine the argument put forward above, given that this was also a key period in the composition and compilation of the hagiography to which I have been referring.[2] However, this apparent contradiction is resolved when we consider which churches at a given site were most affected by Romanesque building technology, as distinct from Romanesque decoration. Amongst the earliest are the barrel-vaulted churches at Kells, Killaloe and Glendalough, some of which are also multi-cameral and have engaged belfries. These were all subsidiary churches, probably designed as successors to the diminutive reliquary chapels mentioned above.[3] Cormac Mac Carthaigh's royal chapel at Cashel is much grander than these but is formally descended from them, and was also functionally subsidiary to the cathedral built three decades earlier by Muirchertach Ó Briain. Most later churches with engaged belfries were

98 G. Bovini, *Ravenna; art and history* (Ravenna, 1980). **99** A. McLean, 'Romanesque architecture in Italy' in R. Toman (ed.), *Romanesque: architecture, sculpture, painting* (Cologne, 1997), pp 74–117 at pp 74–8. **1** P. Belloi and E. Colombini, *Itinerario Romanico illustrato; visita guidata al Romanico della Provincia di Modena* (Modena, 1999), pp 21, 29; R. Budriesi, *Viaggio nelle pievi dell Provincia di Ravenna* (Ravenna, 1999); see also R. Stalley, *Early medieval architecture* (Oxford, 1999), pp 129, 223. For a more general statement on the historicism of Romanesque and Gothic architecture in Italy as compared to northern Europe see M. Trachtenberg, 'Gothic/Italian "Gothic": toward a redefinition', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* 50 (1991), 22–37; see also D. Kinney, 'Roman architectural spolia' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* 145 (2001), 138–50 at 146 who notes that 'the use of architectural spolia tended to accompany the retention of the wooden-roofed early Christian basilica as an architectural design.' **2** R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish saints' lives* (Oxford, 1991), pp 25–34. **3** Ó Carragáin, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics'.

also subsidiary buildings (e.g. Temple Finghin, Clonmacnoise and St Mary's, Ferns). In contrast, with the exceptions of Rahan and Ardmore, the principal churches at these sites are distinguished from their pre-Romanesque predecessors only in the application of low-relief sculptural embellishment to their apertures and, on occasion, some blind arcading.[4] In most cases the only significant formal difference is the presence of a (sometimes vaulted) chancel, which represents a minimal response to the liturgical and theological developments of the day, especially the evolving doctrine of transubstantiation.[5] For obvious reasons, things were very different in the Hiberno-Norse ports and the newly-founded Cistercian monasteries: to a greater or lesser extent, the principal churches at these sites employ the full language of Romanesque architecture.[6]

The example of Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry will serve to illustrate the general pattern at the older sites (fig. 5). In fact this is slightly more elaborate than most of this group insofar as it originally had a corbelled stone roof[7] and blind arcading with scalloped capitals at the interior. The overall impression, however, is of adherence to tradition: its west façade is blank except for skeuomorphic features (antae and skeuomorphs of wooden barge boards and finial) and its Romanesque doorway. Indeed, from the exterior, it was originally distinguishable from unicameral pre-Romanesque churches only by the presence of this doorway and a small altar niche at the east.[8] Any suggestion that this conservatism is simply a reflection of the relative peripherality of the site must be dismissed given the striking similarities between its sculpture and that of Cormac's Chapel. Indeed, the parallels are so close that Richard Gem has convincingly argued that its chief mason was sent by Cormac Mac Carthaig himself to the local king Mathgamain Ua Conchobuir as a diplomatic gesture.[9] If so, then it must have been made clear to him that his new commission should be much closer in form to a traditional *damliac* than to the royal chapel he had recently worked on at Cashel. During the twelfth century Kilmalkedar and sites like it were jostling for position within the new ecclesiastical hierarchy, and some managed to attain episcopal status (e.g. Glendalough, Clonmacnoise, Roscrea). Like contemporary hagiography and ecclesiastical metalwork,[10] the would-be cathedrals that they built (or refurbished) made clear that their claims in this regard were founded on the authority of the original evangelizers of these newly-formalized bishoprics. The sparing use of certain facets of Romanesque architecture in these churches only serves to emphazise the fact that the overriding concern of those who commissioned them was to remain faithful to the lineage of structures, at their respective sites, believed to have its origin in a simple wooden edifice built by the saint himself.

4 The conservatism of these buildings has previously been highlighted by Tadhg O'Keeffe in particular; T. O'Keeffe 'Romanesque as metaphor: architecture and reform in early twelfth-century Ireland' in A.P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas: studies in early and medieval Irish archaeology, history and literature in honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), pp 313–322 at pp 317–18. **5** Ó Carragáin, 'Church buildings and pastoral care'. **6** A. Clapham, 'Some minor Irish cathedrals' in *Papers by Sir Alfred Clapham with a memoir and bibliography, Antiquaries Journal* memorial volume 106 (1952), 16–39 at 28–30; R. Stalley, *The Cistercian monasteries of Ireland* (Oxford, 1987); R. Stalley, 'The construction of the medieval cathedral, *c.*1030–1250' in K. Milne (ed.), *Christ Church cathedral, Dublin: a history* (Dublin, 2000), pp 53–74; O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*, pp 96–122. **7** This mortared stone roof has since collapsed and its original form is not entirely clear because the edges of the gable have been rebuilt to accommodate its wooden replacement. It was clearly not barrel vaulted, but it may have been similar to the pointed, essentially corbelled roofs erected over the barrel vaults of churches like Cormac's Chapel and St Flannan's Killaloe. **8** Even the presence of a corbelled roof of mortared stone would not have seemed so unusual, given the prevalence of dry-stone churches of Gallarus type in this particular part of Kerry. The altar niche was replaced by a chancel not long after the church was originally built. **9** R. Gem, 'The Insular reception of Romanesque', in M. Thurlby (ed.), *Romanesque architecture in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, forthcoming). **10** G. Murray, this volume.