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NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY IN THE ANNALS OF ULSTER, 650–1050

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1. The terms used for the church settlement.

At the risk of begging questions of precise nature and function(s) with regard to pre-twelfth century Irish ecclesiastical settlements, the term 'monastery' is employed here as a convenient shorthand for purposes of translation.

A. *Ecclesia*

- 667: Navigatio Columbani episcopi [cum] reliquis sanctorum ad insolam uaccae albae, in qua fundavit aecclesiam...
- 672: Mailrubai fundavit aecclesiam Aporcroosan.
- 684: Saxones campum Bragh uastant, ⁊ aecclesias plurimas, in mense Iuni.
- 702: Bellum campi Culind in airddnepotumn-Echdaigh, inter Ultu et Britones, ubifilius Radhgainn cecidit, [adversarius] aecclesiarum Dei. Ulaith uictores erant.
- 779: Fuga Ruadrach a Ochtur ochae, ⁊ Coirpri mic Laidhghnein, cum duobus generibus Laginentium. Donnchad persecutus est eos cum suis sociis, uastavitque ⁊ combussit fines eorum ⁊ aeclesias.

The contexts of these entries suggest that ecclesia is being used of the church settlement generally, rather than of the church building specifically – though admittedly there is an element of ambiguity, perhaps most obvious at 667, 672. This denotation does not seem to be extended to Irish *eclais*, either within the period covered by the above entries or later. At 1020 in the case of 'Amalgaid i comarbus Patraic, doreir tuaithi ⁊ *eclaisi*' *eclais* probably denotes the clergy and tuath the laity, as the translation indicates. See also years 890, where *eclais* is probably used, and 1006, where it is certainly used of the church building.

B. *Monasterium*

- 686: Mors Os se ni episcopi monostarii Finntin filii Finnguine.
- 712: Filia Ossu in monasterio lid moritur.

These are the only two entries using *monasterium*. The term, it seems, did not gain wide currency, at least among the annalists of AU. *Monasterium lid* is, in any case, not an Irish foundation, being, apparently, Whitby in Yorkshire.

C. *Civitas*

- 715: Pascha commutaturin Eoa civitate.

- 781: ...Cormac mac Bresail abbas airdd Breccain y aliarum ciuitatum... perierunt.
- 783: Aduentus relinquiarum filii Eire ad ciuitatem Tailten.
- 806: Constructio nouae ciuitatis Columbae cille hi Ceninnus.
- 824: Colman filius Ailello, abbas Slane et aliarum ciuitatum in Francia et in Hibernia, periit.
- 834: ...Bresal mac Cormaic princeps Cille dumai glinn et aliarum civitatum, moriuntur.
- 837: Tigemach mac Aedha abbas Finndubrach abae et aliarum ciuitatum, dormierunt.
- 839: Joseph Roiss moer, episcopus et scriba optimus et ancorita, abbas Cluana auis et aliarum ciuitatum, dormiuit.
- 881: Muircertach mac Neill, abbas daire Calcaigh et aliarum ciuitatum, pausauit.
- 887: Cathroiniudh for Flann mac Maelsechnaill re n-Gallaib, du itorchair ... Donncath mac Maeleduin princeps Cille delca et aliarum civitatum.
- 900: Tipraiti mac Nuadat, aircinnech Condaire et aliarum ciuitatum .i. Lainne Ela 7 lathraigh Briuin.
- 1010: Flaithbertach .H. Ceithinan comerba Tigernaigh, (seanoir 7 sui espuc, do guin o feraib Breifne, 7 postea in civitate sua mortuus est).

This term must refer to the whole settlement and the context usually makes it quite clear that it does so. The translation ‘church’ offered at 806 is, therefore, somewhat misleading: cf. the reference to the completion of the church (*templum*) of Kells, specifically, at 813. ‘Church’ is also the rendering at 824, 834, 837 and 839. It seems to be used exclusively of church settlement: cf. the mention of *opidurn Temro* at 779.

D. ***Cathair***

- 778: ...Moinan mac Cormaic abbas cathrach F ursi i Francia... defuncti sunt.
- 844: Dunadh di Gallaibh ... for loch Ri, corortadar Connachta 7 Midhe, 7 coro loscaiset Cluain mic Nois cona dertaigibh, 7 Cluaen ferta Brendain, 7 Tir da glass, 7 Lothra 7 alaile cathracha.

These are the only two entries using cathair. It clearly refers to the church settlement as a whole and appears in that sense only. *Cathair Fursi* is presumably Peronne, as a note indicates.

E. ***Cell***

- 831: Orggain Mucshnama 7 Lughmaidh 7 Oa Meith 7 Droma mic Ublae, 7 alanaile ceall. Orggain Duimliacc 7 fini Ciannactai cona chellaibh huilibh o genntibh.
- 832: Cathroiniudh for muintir Cille daro inna cill, re Cellach mac Brain, ubi iugulati sunt multi in feria Iohannis in autumno. Iugulatio muinntire cluana mic U Nois, 7 loscudh a termuinn corici dorus a cille, la Feidhlimidh righ Caisil. Fon oen cumai muinnter Dermaighi co dorus a cille.
- 834: Loscadh Mungairit 7 alanaile cheall Irmumen o gentibh.

- 835: Ceall dara do orgain do gentibh o Inbir deaae, ⁊ rolloscad a leath na cille.
- 836: Ro slatsat iarum in di longais sin magh Lipi ⁊ magh mBregh etir cealla ⁊ dune ⁊ treba.
- 836: Celia locha Eirne n-uile, im chluain Eoais ⁊ Daiminis, do dilguinn o Genntibh.
- 838: Fecht di ghallaibh for loch Ecdhach, corortadar tuatha ⁊ cella tuaiscert Erenn ass.
- 840: Longport oc Linn duachaill asarorta tuatha ⁊ cealla Tethbai. Longport oc Duiblinn as rorta Laigin ⁊ Oi Neill etir tuatha ⁊ cealla, corice sliabh Bladhma.
- 849: Cinaedh mac Conaing rex Ciannachtae du frithtuidecht Mael sechnaill anneurt gall, co r'indridh Ou Neill o shinaind co muir etir cella ⁊ tuatha...
- 863: Muiredach mac Neill, abb Lughmaigh, ⁊ alanaile cell, moritur.
- 873: Slogad la hAedh mac Neill co Laighniu, corosaragat cell Ausili, ⁊ alaile cealla do loscadh co na derthaigibh.
- 913: Indredh deiscirt Bregh ⁊ deiscirt Ciannachta a Flaunn mac Maelsechnaill. Ceallaili do sharugud leis.
- 914: Tormach mar meinic do ghentibh do thiachtain oc Loch da-chaech beos, ⁊ indred tuath ⁊ ceall Muman h-uadhibh.
- 920: Indredh aird Macha hi .iiii. id. Nouembris o Gallaibh Atha cliath .i. o GothbrithOa Imhair cum suo exercitu .i. h-isint sathum ria feil Martain, ⁊ na taigi aemaighi do anacal lais cona lucht de cheilibh de ⁊ di lobraidh, y in ceall olcheana, nisi paucis in ea tectis exaustis per incuriam.
- 938: Slogad la Donnchad i m-Breagha, ⁊ Finnabair aba do arcain, ⁊ in sacart do marbad for lar na cille, ⁊ alaile olchena.
- 945: Cluain mic Nois do orcain do ghallaibh Atha cliath, ⁊ cella fer Midhe olcena.
- 950: Gothfrith mac Sitriuc co n-Gallaibh Atha cliath do orcain Cenannsa ⁊ domnaigh Patraic, ⁊ Aird Breccain ⁊ Tuileain y Cille Scire ⁊ alailiu cealla olchena.
- 970: Slogad la Domnall. H. Neill cofiru Midhe, co ro ortan-ule cella ⁊ dune...
- 985:1 Coluim cille do arcain do Danaraibh aidhchi notlaic, co ro maxbsat in apaidh ⁊ .xu. uiros do sruithibh na cille.
- 1011: Slogad la Brian i magh Muirteimhne, co tuc ogshoere do chellaib Patraic do'nt shluagad sin.
- 1040: Ceall dara uile do loscadh im fheil Micheil. Ceanannus do loscadh. Dun da lethglas do loscadh ⁊ ilchealla archena.
- 1045: Airchinnech Lethglinne do marbad a n-dorus na cille.

Cell is invariably translated 'church'. But in all cases it may be as plausibly rendered 'monastery' as 'church'; and in some cases the context demands that it be so rendered: 863, 873, 920 (as is in fact said in a footnote), 985. In other cases it is more naturally rendered 'church settlement' than, more ambiguously, 'church': 831, 834, 836 (bis), 945, 950,1040, where more or less well-known foundations are also mentioned by name. At 836(1) and 970, *cell* appears in the same context as *dún*, a term surely denoting here enclosed, if not actually fortified, secular habitation sites; and the phrase (*etir*) *tuatha ⁊ cella* etc. (838, 840, 849, 914) suggests that cell is here being used in the extended sense 'church lands' i.e. 'lands belonging to a clerical kindred based on a cell', as distinct from tuath 'lands belonging to a secular

kindred'. (Mr K.W. Nicholls has pointed out to the writer that this is the normal meaning of the phrase in later medieval contexts).

If all this be so, alternative translations may reasonably be offered in certain instances that significantly shift the topographical emphasis of the entry in question. At 832, *inna cill* seems more likely to mean 'in their monastery' than 'in their church', a meaning which makes more sense of the context. Similarly, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn may more reasonably be credited with the burning of the termon-lands of Clonmacnoise and Durrow 'to the gateway of the monastery', stopping short of devastating the settlement within the *vallum monasterii*: else, why scruple over burning down the church, if even this inner area of sanctuary had already been violated, as presumably it had, following the published translation? At 835, 'half the monastery' is more likely to have been burned than 'half the church', in a general sack of Kildare. At 938, *for lar na cille* surely means 'in the middle of the monastery', not 'on the floor of the church'. And at 1045, the erenagh of Leighlin was probably killed 'in the gateway of the monastery', rather than 'in the church door'. Sometimes admittedly, 'church settlement' as a whole may have been implicit in 'church' in the mind of the translator; but the consistent use of 'church' alone and without further qualification is at best ambiguous. At worst it is misleading, where not actually wrong.

Generally, the various terms used seem to fall into a loose but recognizable pattern of development. Ecclesia is the earliest usage, from 667 to 779 overall, with *monasterium* an occasional variant (686 and 712: in the latter instance the foundation in question is Northumbrian). It seems therefore relevant to compare the phrase *fines eorum 7 aeclesias* at 779 with the (later) vernacular *etir tuatha 7 cella* etc. Civitas then becomes the common term in the middle period, as it were, from 715 to 1010 overall; and it may here be relevant to compare the phrase *et aliarum civitatum* with *7 alanaile cell*, though the respective contexts are usually different. *Cathair* occurs twice within this phase, at 778 and 844; at the former date used of a continental foundation, at the latter appearing in the summary phrase *7 alaile cathracha*. It seems to be an occasional vernacular equivalent of civitas. *Cell* appears first at 831 and eventually comes to be the normal term employed – probably, as has been argued here, for the ecclesiastical settlement as a whole rather than for the church in particular. Though there is considerable overlapping and though, obviously, no precise definition is possible, it looks as if the three main terms, *ecclesia*, *civitas*, *cell*, each enjoyed a period of fashion, during which it was the common currency, before yielding gradually to its successor. (For what they are worth, the relevant figures of incidence for each main term, with regard to its inclusive chronological range, are: ecclesia, five in total with one overlapping with *civitas*; *ciuitas*, twelve in total, one overlapping with *ecclesia* and seven with *cell*; *cell*, twenty-two in total, with nineteen overlapping with *civitas*). No possible reasons are proposed here to try to account for this apparent pattern of development, beyond the observation that the first two terms are Latin, the third Irish: cf. also the relative chronological positions of *monasterium* and *cathair*.