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The Parish in Medieval and Early Modern Ireland

Community, Territory and Building

Elizabeth FitzPatrick and Raymond Gillespie
EDITORS



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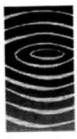
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Church buildings and pastoral care in early medieval Ireland

TOMÁS Ó CARRAGÁIN

The issue of pastoral care in early medieval Ireland has only come to prominence quite recently as part of a major re-evaluation of early ecclesiastical organisation. The overwhelmingly monastic Church described by scholars like Binchy and Ryan[1] has been replaced with one characterised by a degree of functional diversity. Episcopal churches, *túath* churches associated with secular population groups, and minor proprietary churches now feature more prominently in the literature; and the interaction of monasteries with secular society is also better documented.[2] Nonetheless, the extent to which the population at large enjoyed pastoral care remains a controversial subject; and Etchingham in particular is adamant that it was usually restricted to monastic tenants.[3]

Confronted with a dense network of church sites on the ground, many archaeologists have readily taken to the idea that some were involved in pastoral care. Thus, while Henry had accepted the orthodoxy that they had to be eremitic monasteries, Thomas realised that many must have been 'subservient to popular needs'.[4] However, in contrast to the situation in England and on the

1 J. Ryan, *Irish monasticism: origins and early development* (London, 1931); D.A. Binchy, 'Patrick and his biographers, ancient and modern' in *Studia Hibernica*, 2 (1962), 7–173. 2 D. Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches: some aspects of organisation' in D. Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish antiquity: essays and studies presented to Professor M.J. O'Kelly* (Cork, 1981), 327–41; R. Sharpe, 'Some problems concerning the organisation of the church in early medieval Ireland' in *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 230–70; R. Sharpe, 'Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model' in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral care before the parish* (Leicester, 1992), 81–109; T. Charles-Edwards, 'The pastoral role of the church in the early Irish laws' in Blair and Sharpe (eds) *Pastoral care*, 63–80; C. Etchingham, 'The early Irish Church: some observations on pastoral care and dues' in *Ériu*, 42 (1991), 99–118; C. Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland, AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999). 3 Etchingham, this volume; Etchingham, 'The early Irish church', 106–9, 112–13; Etchingham, *Church organisation*, 289, 308, 311, 316; see also Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches', 334; D. Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (Dublin, 1995), 167. For a Scottish perspective see T. Clancy, 'Annat in Scotland and the origins of the parish' in *Innes Review*, 46 (1995), 91–115. 4 F. Henry, 'Early monasteries, beehive huts, and dry-stone houses in the neighbourhood of Caherciveen and Waterville (Co. Kerry)' in *PRIA*, 58C (1957), 45–166: 157; C. Thomas, *The early Christian archaeology of north Britain* (London, 1971), 80; C. Thomas, 'Recognising Christian origins: an archaeological and historical dilemma' in L.A.S. Butler and R.K. Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon Church: papers on history, architecture and archae-*

Continent (see p. 94), the contribution of archaeology to our understanding of the issue has been quite limited. This paper is presented as a preliminary, and inevitably tentative, discussion of the pastoral functions of the surviving group of pre-Romanesque churches.[5] These can be divided into a number of different types[6], but for the purposes of this paper I will first consider the mortared churches as a group, and will then turn to the dry-stone churches which are largely confined to peninsular Kerry (fig. 1). An essential premise of the study is that general patterns discernable from the surviving group broadly reflect the situation in the early medieval period.[7]

CHANGES TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL NETWORK, *c.*900–1100

The dating of the mortared churches is a complex issue and not our principal concern here. Architectural simplicity and a lack of structural timbers mean that the annals provide the best available chronological framework, indicating that almost all mortared churches are tenth- to early twelfth-century.[8] Elsewhere, I have attempted to refine this chronology based on a combination

ology in honour of Dr H. Taylor. CBA Report 60 (London, 1986), 121–5: 124. **5** The information used derives from a country-wide survey which formed the basis for a PhD thesis which was not directly concerned with pastoral care: T. Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches in Ireland: interpreting archaeological regionalisms', unpublished PhD (University College Cork, 2002). The term pre-Romanesque is not without its problems. As a number of writers have pointed out, some of the churches considered here are Romanesque in so far as they are contemporary with Romanesque buildings abroad and make use of 'Roman' forms, most notably the true arch. See, for example, M. Stokes, 'Introduction' in E. Dunraven, *Notes on Irish architecture* (London, 1875), xxv; H. Leask, *Irish churches and monastic buildings*, i (Dundalk, 1955), 79. Recently O'Keeffe has argued that such churches should be seen as belonging to an architectural phase of the late 1000s and early 1100s which he terms the 'First Irish Romanesque', T. O'Keeffe, 'Architectural traditions of the early medieval church in Munster' in M.A. Monk and J. Sheehan (eds), *Early medieval Munster: archaeology, history and society* (Cork, 1998), 112–24: 122; 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), 313–22: 315. This is a valid concept, both from a chronological and an architectural point of view. But, for the purposes of clarity, the term 'Romanesque' is used in its traditional sense here to denote buildings characterised by Hiberno-Romanesque sculpture. **6** P. Harbison, 'Early Irish churches' in H. Lowe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1982), 618–29; Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 24–5. **7** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 64–5. See, for example, I. Hodder, *Reading the past: current approaches to interpretation in archaeology*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 1991), 132; M. Carver, 'Why that? Why there? Why then? The politics of early medieval monumentality' in A. MacGregor and H. Hamerow (eds), *Image and power in early medieval Britain: essays in honour of Rosemary Cramp* (Oxford, 2001), 1–22. **8** See especially C. Manning, 'References to church buildings in the Annals' in Smyth (ed.), *Seanchas*, 37–52: 51. See also A. MacDonald, 'Notes on monastic archaeology and the annals of Ulster, 650–1050' in Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish antiquity*, 304–20: 305–9; Harbison, 'Early Irish churches'; A. Hamlin, 'The study of early Irish churches' in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds), *Ireland and Europe: the early Church* (Stuttgart, 1984), 117–26.

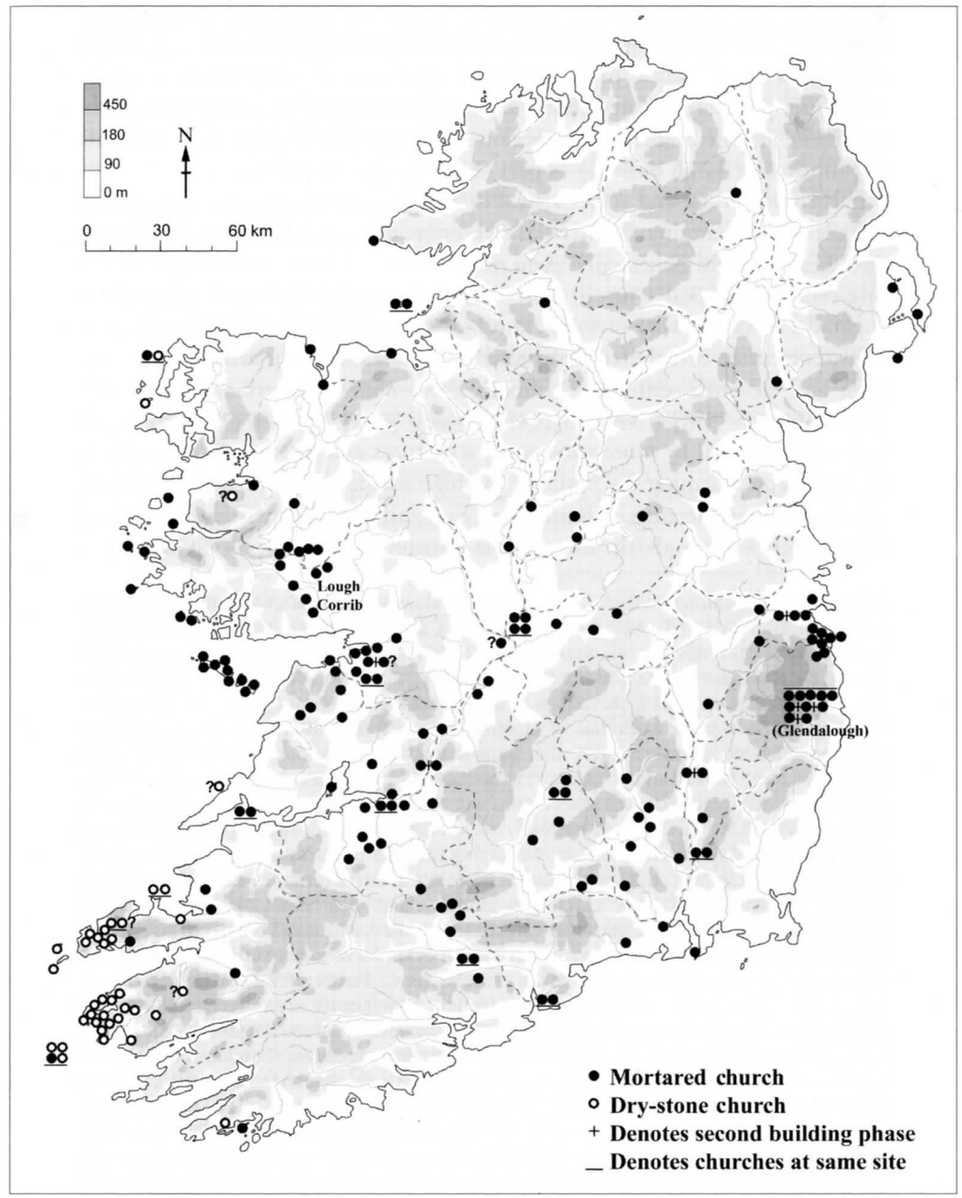


Fig. 1: Distribution of pre-Romanesque churches

of criteria including masonry analysis, formal variation and documentary evidence.[9] This study suggests that a large majority, especially those at sites of only minor or moderate importance, are eleventh- or early twelfth-century, with most probably dating from the mid-eleventh century onwards. On the Continent and in England, this period saw an unprecedented wave of local, non-monastic church building as part of the process of feudalisation.

Large aristocratic and ecclesiastical estates fragmented into the manors and villages of the emerging thegnly class who were anxious to invest in community churches.[10] On the Continent a good proportion of these new buildings were at long-established local church sites.[11] However, in the east and midlands of England a dense network of local churches had not developed prior to this; and excavations often reveal that 'first phase' churches and graveyards belong to the tenth and eleventh centuries.[12] Initially these churches were small and very simple but, especially from *c.*1050, there was a 'great rebuilding' during which they were replaced by more substantial structures and became 'fixed points in the landscape', forming the basis for the high medieval parish system.[13] In the words of Bishop Herman of Ramsbury, 'England [was] being filled everywhere with churches' through 'the most ample liberality of kings and rich men'.[14]

9 Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry styles and the local organisation of church building in early medieval Ireland' in *PRIA*, 105C (2005); see also Ó Carragáin, 'Regional variation in Irish pre-Romanesque architecture' in *Antiquaries Journal*, 85 (2005). **10** S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), 89, 106; G. Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the tenth to the early twelfth century* (Cambridge, 1993), 135. **11** In southern Germany and Switzerland excavation of hundreds of parish churches in recent years has found that a considerable proportion were first built in the seventh century, the period of initial conversion: see S. Burnell and E. James, 'The archaeology of conversion on the continent in the sixth and seventh centuries: some observations and comparisons with Anglo-Saxon England' in R. Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine and the conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999), 83–106: 96. Burnell argues that they were initially proprietary churches reserved primarily for the local aristocracy, only gradually becoming community churches especially after the turn of the millennium: see 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', unpublished DPhil (Oxford, 1988), 247, 534–5. For French examples of local churches founded in the Merovingian period that later became parish churches see C. Treffort, *L'Église Carolingienne et la Mort* (Lyon, 1996), 135–7. **12** J. Blair, 'Introduction: from minster to parish church' in J. Blair (ed.), *Minsters and parish churches: the local church in transition, 950–1200* (Oxford, 1988), 1–20: 7; A. Boddington, *Raunds Furnells: the Anglo-Saxon church and churchyard* (London 1996). See also S. Turner, 'Making a Christian landscape: early medieval Cornwall' in M. Carver (ed.), *The cross goes north: processes of conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300* (Suffolk, 2003), 171–94: 185–9. Cambridge and Rollason have questioned the idea that developments in England essentially involved the disintegration of the pre-Viking *paruchiae*, preferring to see it as an organised royal imposition of a hierarchical system on the sub-diocesan church structure. E. Cambridge and D. Rollason, 'The pastoral organisation of the Anglo-Saxon church: a review of the "Minster Hypothesis"' in *Early Medieval Europe*, 4 (1994), 87–104: 101. **13** Blair 'Introduction', 6–10; J. Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape: social and cultural contexts' in J. Blair and C. Pyrah (eds), *Church archaeology: research directions for the future* (York, 1996), 6–18: 12; R. Gem, 'The English parish church in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries: a great rebuilding' in Blair (ed.), *Minsters and parish churches*, 21–30. **14** Quoted in Gem, 'The English parish church', 21.

Irish society was also undergoing significant changes, though the jury is still out as to whether the term 'feudalisation' is helpful or apposite.[15] Certainly a more powerful form of dynastic, territorially based kingship developed, in which over-kings had the ability to maintain armies, re-grant land, pass judgement on their subjects and impose taxes on them.[16] Tax assessment was no longer based on social units but on new land units: the *trícha cét* and its subdivision, the *baile biatach*.[17] The same period saw a considerable fall-off in ringfort erection and occupation, at least in the east of the country where most radiocarbon-dated examples are situated.[18] Doherty and O'Keeffe see this as a corollary to the establishment of the *trícha cét* divisions, and suggest that the replacement settlements were unenclosed farmsteads, perhaps characterised by a greater emphasis on tillage.[19] It is likely that there was also some genuine nucleation of settlement around major ecclesiastical sites, which often doubled as royal residences,[20] and possibly also at new royal strongholds and settlement

A similar pattern emerges in many other parts of Europe, including for example the area around Florence. See I. Moretti and R. Stopani, *Chiese Romaniche in Val di Pesa e Val di Greve* (Florence, 1972). **15** H.B. Clarke, '1066, 1169, and all that: the tyranny of historical turning points' in J. Devlin and H.B. Clarke (eds), *European encounters: essays in memory of Albert Lovett* (Dublin, 2003), 11–36: 31. **16** Ó Corráin 'Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland' in T.W. Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the pursuit of national independence* (Belfast, 1978), 1–35: 16, 23–6; Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, 274. **17** C. Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland: a review' in H.B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh and R. Ó Floinn (eds), *Ireland and Scandinavia in the early Viking age* (Dublin, 1998), 288–330; see also Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship', 22–5; T. McErlean, 'The Irish townland system of landscape organisation' in T. Reeves-Smyth and F. Hammond (eds), *Landscape archaeology in Ireland*, BAR 116 (Oxford, 1983), 315–39; J. Hogan, 'The *tricha cét* and related land-measures' in *PRIA*, 28C (1929), 148–235; Ó Croinín, *Early medieval Ireland*, 275, has equated these new land divisions with the introduction of shires, hundreds and the burghal hideage in Late Saxon England. The study of tenth- and eleventh-century Irish settlement patterns might also benefit from comparison with Middle Saxon England. This period saw the meteoric rise of certain powerful kingdoms at the expense of others, the imposition of a system of taxation based on land units (as evidenced by the tribal hideage) in order to finance, among other things, military operations, and a concomitant reorganisation of territorial units, many of which were preserved in the land divisions of the Late Saxon period and beyond. See S. Bassett, *The origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989); A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: life and landscape* (Stroud, 1999), 85. Furthermore, this reorganisation was concurrent with a settlement shift dubbed the 'Middle Saxon shuffle'. See R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon achievement: archaeology and the beginnings of English society* (London, 1989), 62–3. **18** C. Lynn, 'The medieval ringfort: an archaeological chimera?' in *Irish Archaeological Research Forum*, 2 (1975), 29–36: 33–5; M. Stout, *The Irish ringfort* (Dublin, 1997), fig. 2; M. Monk, 'Early medieval secular and ecclesiastical settlement in Munster' in M.A. Monk and J. Sheehan (eds), *Early medieval Munster*, 33–52: 48. See also K. D. O'Conor, *The archaeology of medieval rural settlement in Ireland*, Discovery Programme Monograph, 3 (Dublin, 1998), 90. **19** Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', 323–4; O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland*, 26. **20** On churches doubling as political capitals see e.g. B.J. Graham, 'Early medieval Ireland: settlement as an indicator of economic and social transformation, *c.*500–1100 A.D.' in B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot (eds), *An historical geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), 19–57: 26; 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*, BAR International Series, 255 (Oxford, 1985), 63, 68; A. Mac Shamhráin, *Church and polity in pre-Norman Ireland: the case of Glendalough* (Maynooth, 1996); C. Manning 'Some notes of the early

mounds.[21] However, outside the Hiberno-Norse ports the nucleation was, at best, small in scale and confined to high-status sites; and to date, evidence is lacking for the network of lower status agricultural villages which was central to the development of feudalism in core regions of Europe.[22]

The interests of kings and major ecclesiastical sites became ever more closely entwined in this period. MacShamhráin's study shows how (at least in some areas) the territorialisation of kingship went hand in hand with a rationalisation and consolidation of ecclesiastical *paruchiae* that formed the basis for the twelfth-century dioceses. For example, Glendalough relinquished its claims over some churches outside the kingdom of north Leinster but gained authority over more sites within it. Other sites within the kingdom which had owed allegiance to churches like Kildare and Tech Mo Ling may even have been abandoned by the twelfth century.[23] But, in stark contrast to England, there is no evidence to suggest that a large number of new church sites were founded, either by major churches or secular lords. This writer has identified *c.*150 mortared churches at 130 different sites. They represent one of the most significant and at the same time relatively quantifiable, forms of ecclesiastical resource investment undertaken in Ireland during this period; but they clearly do not represent a new network of manorial church sites. Of the 130 sites 100 (77 per cent) have definite evidence, archaeological and/or historical, that they were established before the tenth century. Thirty (23 per cent) cases lack positive evidence for an early foundation date, but in the majority of these the place-name and/or traditional (as opposed to historically attested) dedication suggests they are early foundations. The only archaeologically attested exceptions are at Cashel, Co. Tipperary, and St Peter's, in Hiberno-Norse Waterford. A small amount of stone fabric visible under the chancel of Cashel cathedral may belong to the *c.*1101 cathedral,[24] while the roughly contemporary phase at

history and archaeology of Tullaherin' in *Shadow of the Steeple*, 6 (1998), 19–39: 24. **21** Graham 'Early medieval Ireland': 29; T. O'Keeffe, 'Rural settlement and cultural identity in Gaelic Ireland, 1000–1500' in *Ruralia 1, Pamtky Archeologick Supplementum* 5 (Prague, 1996), 142–53: 145–7; O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland*, 84; see also Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship', 30; P.F. Wallace, 'The origins of Dublin' in B.G. Scott (ed.), *Studies on early Ireland: essays in honour of M.V. Duignan* (Belfast, 1981), 129–43: 139. **22** A. Simms, 'Rural settlement in medieval Ireland: the example of the royal manors of Newcastle Lyons and Esker in south county Dublin' in B.K. Roberts and R.E. Glasscock (eds), *Villages, fields and frontiers*, BAR International Series 185 (Oxford, 1983), 133–52; O'Keeffe, 'Rural settlement'. See, however, C. Doherty, 'Settlement in early Ireland: a review' in T. Barry (ed.), *A history of settlement in Ireland* (London, 2000), 50–80: 56–9. In this regard it should be noted that dispersed settlement also persisted in some areas of Britain, notwithstanding the social changes that were underway. See S. Turner, 'Christianity and the landscape of early medieval south-west Britain', unpublished PhD (University of York, 2003), 265; B. Yorke, *Wessex in the early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), 274; C. Lewis, P. Mitchel-Fox, and C. Dyer, *Village, hamlet and field* (Manchester, 1997), 82. **23** MacShamhráin, *Church and polity*, 211–14, 231. **24** This was exposed during Brian Hodkinson's excavations in and around Cormac's Chapel (pers. comm.). The wooden church and cemetery recently excavated just south of this structure appears to be earlier than it and must therefore be regarded as a royal chapel built before Cashel was give to the Church. The ancient seat of Cashel, with its strong ecclesiastical

St Peter's comprised a stone chancel and wooden nave.[25] The atypical character of both sites makes them exceptions that prove the rule.

This pattern supports Sharpe's assertion that a dense network of local churches was already well established in Ireland before the tenth century and possibly as early as the eighth.[26] Sharpe went on to suggest that, far from expanding, like it did in contemporary England, the Irish ecclesiastical network may have gone into decline by the end of the early medieval period. This was suggested to him by the substantial number of early ecclesiastical sites lacking evidence for twelfth-century activity.[27] This is an important observation, but two caveats need be added. First, it must be emphasised that not all 'early' sites are contemporary and so, at any given time, the network would not have been as dense as it now seems. The impression from many areas is that the early church network was more than adequate for the needs of the secular population as represented by ringfort distribution, but in the absence of a refined chronology we must be cautious about concluding that it was truly comprehensive. For example, excavations at the minor site of Caherlehillan, Co. Kerry, indicate that it was an early foundation that fell out of use in the eighth century (John Sheehan pers. comm.), while nearby Illaunloughan seems to have had an even shorter *floruit* centring on the eighth century.[28] Secondly, the degree of discrepancy between the 'early' network and the parish network seems to vary markedly. In peninsular Kerry, an area which Sharpe focused on in his 1992 paper, there is definite evidence of later ecclesiastical activity at only about 20 per cent of early ecclesiastical settlements.[29] While the actual level of continuity

associations is not typical of the new royal strongholds of the eleventh century. Nonetheless, it is possible that new churches were sometimes built in or near such sites. O'Keeffe apparently envisages this in his 1996 study, 'Rural settlement', 147, fig. 2. If so, they may have been primarily of organic materials at this stage. In general, however, kings involved in *incastellamento* continued to patronise long-established churches. On the Cashel chapel see B. Hodkinson, 'Excavations at Cormac's Chapel, Cashel, 1992, and 1993: a preliminary report' in *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 7 (1994), 167–74. On Cashel's ecclesiastical links see, for example, P. Harbison, 'A high cross base from the Rock of Cashel and a historical reconsideration of the 'Ahenny group' of crosses' in *PRIA*, 93C (1993), 1–20: 19. **25** See M.F. Hurley and S.W.J. McCutcheon, 'St Peter's church and graveyard' in M.F. Hurley, O.M.B. Scully and W.J. McCutcheon (eds), *Late Viking Age and medieval Waterford: excavations, 1986–1992* (Dublin, 1997), 190–227; B. Murtagh, 'The architecture of St Peter's church' in Hurley, Scully and McCutcheon (eds), *Late Viking Age and medieval Waterford*, 228–43. **26** Sharpe, 'Churches and communities', 109; See also Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches', 336. **27** Sharpe, 'Churches and communities', 108–9. See also G.W.S. Barrow, 'Badenoch and Strathspey, 1130–1312' in *Northern Scotland*, 9 (1989), 1–16. This study would seem to suggest a similar situation in parts of Scotland where the number of ecclesiastical place-names is 'far in excess of the total of known parishes.' **28** J. White Marshall and C. Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island: an early medieval monastery in County Kerry* (Dublin, 2005), 127. **29** This estimate is based mainly on evidence in J. Cuppage, *Archaeological survey of the Dingle peninsula* (Ballyferriter, 1986) and A. O'Sullivan and J. Sheehan, *The Iveragh peninsula: an archaeological survey of south Kerry* (Cork, 1996). It only considers enclosed ecclesiastical settlements, omitting miscellaneous sites like isolated cross-slabs or altars. It does not include reuse for casual habitation as at Church Island and Illaunloughan, or clandestine burial as at Reask. Only *c.*30 per cent of late medieval church sites have positive evidence of an early origin, but the actual figure

was probably substantially higher, there does seem to be a significant contrast here with areas such as Kilfenora, Co. Clare where many parishes appear to have had just one church site in both the early and later medieval periods.[30] Differences in archaeological visibility probably accentuate these contrasts. For example, minor sites that fell out of use at an early date may be relatively inconspicuous in Kilfenora due to the lack of an ogham stone or cross-slab tradition in the area and because in this area stone churches were generally confined to major sites.[31] But the contrast may also reflect real regional variations in how the church network developed.

At least four major stages can be identified in the development of the high medieval parish network: (a) the initial establishment of a network by *c.*800; (b) the affects of social change in the tenth and eleventh centuries; (c) the twelfth-century reform; and (d) the impetus provided by the Anglo-Norman colonisation. The impact of each of these developments must have varied substantially across the country.[32] Nonetheless, in many areas a significant number of early sites seem to have gone out of use by the time the parish system was formally established and, given that a substantial (though as yet unquantified) proportion of later medieval churches have early origins, some areas probably experienced an overall reduction in the number of functioning churches. At least in part, this must reflect the need to establish viable units for tithing and administering pastoral care, and it should therefore be seen as a process of rationalisation rather than decline.[33] A crucial question, to which we will

is probably much higher. See M.J. O'Kelly, 'Church Island near Valencia, Co. Kerry' in *PRIA*, 59C (1958), 57–136; J. White Marshall and C. Walsh, 'Illaunloughan, Co. Kerry: an island hermitage' in Monk and Sheehan (eds), *Early medieval Munster*, 102–11: 106; T. Fanning, 'Excavation of an early Christian cemetery and settlement at Reask, Co. Kerry' in *PRIA*, 81C (1981), 67–172. **30** S. Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church, parish and polity: the medieval diocese of Kilfenora, Ireland', unpublished PhD (University of California, Los Angeles, 1995), 133–4, 239; S. Ní Ghabhláin, 'The origin of medieval parishes in Gaelic Ireland: the evidence from Kilfenora' in *JRSAI*, 127 (1996), 37–61: 58. For a similar picture see E. O'Brien, 'Churches of south-east county Dublin, seventh to twelfth century' in G. Mac Niocaill and P.F. Wallace (eds), *Keimelia: studies in medieval archaeology and history in memory of Tom Delany* (Galway, 1988), 504–24. A recent study of Kerrycurrihy, Co. Cork, found that only about 40 per cent of potentially early sites remained in use. See C. Cronin, 'Continuity and change in ecclesiastical settlement: the barony of Kerrycurrihy to *c.*1830', unpublished MA (University College Cork, 2003). **31** Swan lists several sites in the area which were not discussed by Ní Ghabhláin. They are mainly children's burial grounds with no extant evidence for early medieval occupation, but it is possible that some are early church sites. See L. Swan, 'The churches, monasteries and burial grounds of the Burren' in J.W. O'Connell and A. Korff (eds), *The book of the Burren* (Kinvara, 1991), 95–118: 108, 115–16. **32** I am grateful to Dr Edel Bhreathnach for her insights on the development of the ecclesiastical network. See Ó Carragáin, 'Regional variation', on minor regional differences in the early Church network. On differences in the intensity of parochial formation see K.W. Nicholls, 'Rectory, vicarage and parish in the western Irish diocese' in *JRSAI*, 101 (1971), 53–84: 55; A.J. Otway-Ruthven, 'Parochial development in the rural deanery of Skreen' in *JRSAI*, 94 (1964), 112–32. **33** As well as the foundation of new churches, the provision of systematic pastoral care in England may sometimes have involved the abandonment of sites which were 'surplus to requirements'. See Cambridge and Rollason 'Minster hypothesis', 97.

return, is whether it had already begun before the formal establishment of parishes. First, however, we should briefly consider the character and function of ecclesiastical sites in the century or so leading up to the twelfth-century reform.

In the case of tenth- and eleventh-century western Britain, Blair has suggested that proto-parochial churches were developing through the 'privatisation' of long-established cult sites.[34] In Ireland a form of privatisation had taken place by the eighth century, insofar as the temporalities of many church sites were controlled by coarbs who were not usually celibate or in higher orders.[35] However, a clear distinction must be made between the administration of the resources of a church site and its ecclesiastical character or role within society. Coarbal control did not preclude a site from maintaining a vibrant monastic community nor did it prevent a bishop's involvement in the organisation of pastoral ministry;[36] and so functional variation appears to have persisted to a large extent. But Graham has argued that in the later tenth and eleventh centuries major sites in particular became more thoroughly secularised in their character as well as their administration; and certainly the role of some of them as, possibly nucleated, political capitals would suggest some degree of secularisation.[37] It should, however, be remembered that in this specific period major sites were also producing hagiography and investing in reliquaries that sought to glorify their ascetic, monastic origins.[38] Furthermore, the annalistic evidence has led Etchingham to conclude that there was not a radical decline in monasticism, at least not within the parameters of his study.[39] Graham's suggestion that these sites were becoming an 'essentially secular settlement form' is therefore open to question.[40] The situation at local church sites is even harder to gauge. The limited documentary sources for minor sites with extant mortared churches suggest that they varied in function, at least nominally. Some originated as minor family churches, while others, such as Donaghmore, Co. Limerick, and Killeenemer, Co. Cork, were secular *túath* churches. Many more claimed their own *érlam* or founding saint who was usually portrayed as an ascetic, but this cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that they supported a monastic community either in this period or previously.[41] The varied origins

34 Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape', 12. **35** Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches', 338; Sharpe 'Some problems', 266–9. **36** See Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland*, 100. **37** Graham 'Early medieval Ireland', 32–6. **38** Graham argues that their enclosures were becoming analogous to urban defences, but the references to them in this hagiography suggest they retained their symbolic and legal functions to some extent. See, however, Doherty, 'The monastic town', 69–70 on the possibility that the law of sanctuary was slowly being superseded by royal authority. **39** Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland*, 356, 463. The parameters of this study are 650–1000, but Etchingham does note that references to anchorites remained quite common in the eleventh-century annals. **40** Graham 'Early medieval Ireland', 32–35. **41** 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), 267–90: 289–90.

of these sites did not entirely determine their interactions with the secular population.[42] Documentary records relating to the sources and beneficiaries of their dues would be of greater use in assessing this interaction. Here, however, we are primarily concerned with what the architectural evidence can contribute to the debate.

I have suggested elsewhere that around 120 of the 150 mortared churches are mid-eleventh- to early twelfth-century in date.[43] Of the 120, forty-three are subsidiary churches at major complexes or situated on, often remote, islands, leaving under eighty that are the principal churches at mainland sites. This is quite a substantial number, but hardly comparable to the 'general, national activity' which left a substantial proportion of English parish churches with an eleventh- or twelfth-century core.[44] Nor are these plain, unicameral buildings, with their idiosyncratic masonry styles, aesthetically or technologically related to the Late Saxon and Early Romanesque buildings of contemporary England. Instead, they represent the more widespread adoption by modest establishments of a local building technology which had previously been largely confined to top-ranking sites. Furthermore, as the clustered distribution in figure 1 illustrates, this spread was usually confined to areas where building stone and lime for mortar was readily available, especially in the west of the country.[45] Clearly, quarrying and stone transportation was organised on a very *ad hoc* basis compared to contemporary England.[46] Elsewhere I have suggested that it may have taken some time for it to develop to the extent that most local sites could afford to commission a stone church. My impression is that the stock of local stone churches accumulated incrementally and unevenly, and the dearth of earlier fabric in some areas raises the possibility that wood was still seen as an acceptable alternative, possibly until the 'great rebuilding' of the fifteenth century.[47] 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 pre-Romanesque stone churches in some areas was complemented by rebuilding of timber churches elsewhere.

In my opinion, the simplicity of these buildings does not preclude a pastoral role. However, it is primarily for historians to decide whether establishing a more systematic pastoral network was already a major concern for eleventh-century clerics and secular lords.[48] Whatever about this, the various

42 See for example Sharpe, 'Some problems': 270. **43** Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry styles'. **44** R. Morris, 'Churches in York and its hinterland: building patterns and stone sources in the 11th and 12th centuries' in J. Blair (ed.), *Minsters and parish churches*, 191–9: 191. **45** See further Ó Carragáin, 'Regional variation'. **46** For a fuller discussion see Ó Carragáin, 'Habitual masonry styles'. **47** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 251; Ó Carragáin, 'Regional variation'. **48** Empey, for one, would argue that the lack of legal disputes over tithing rights with the arrival of the Anglo-Normans indicates that it was not. See A. Empey, 'The layperson in the parish: the medieval inheritance, 1169–1536' in R. Gillespie and W.G. Neely (eds), *The laity and the Church of Ireland, 1000–2000: all sorts and conditions* (Dublin, 2002), 7–48.

developments mentioned above, including reorganisation of secular landholdings and ecclesiastical *paruchiae*, must have meant a rise in the fortunes of some early sites at the expense of others.[49] If English local churches were an expression of the growing wealth and ambition of the thegnly class and of independence from the fragmenting authority of the minsters,[50] perhaps the Irish ones were an affirmation on the part of these sites of their position within increasingly territorialised *paruchiae*, facilitated no doubt by the general economic prosperity of the period. Certainly the vast majority of the 130 sites with mortared churches remained successful. Only forty-one failed to achieve parochial status and twenty of these are on islands unsuitable for the purpose. Excluding these, 81 per cent (89/110) became parish churches, or in a few cases religious houses; and most of the others were also modified in the later medieval period, indicating that they served as chapels of ease or private chapels.[51] This might be taken as evidence that the network was indeed undergoing some rationalisation by the early twelfth century, for it shows that sites important enough to merit a stone church tended to remain important in the high medieval period. However, it must be emphasised that most of these churches occur at sites whose importance was never in doubt. Even in areas with moderate numbers of stone churches, wooden ones probably remained common at most minor sites, and so later medieval activity at an early site is a more widely applicable indicator of continued use. In most areas, therefore, the stone churches are of limited value in gauging changes to the network during this period.

REGIONAL VARIATION IN THE ELEVENTH-CENTURY ECCLESIASTICAL NETWORK

Stone churches are obviously more useful in this regard in high-density areas, most notably south Dublin/north Wicklow (pp. 102–4 below) and the area comprising southwest Galway and the vicinity of Lough Corrib (fig. 1). In the latter area the easy availability of limestone seems to have encouraged the erection of mortared churches at very minor sites which, elsewhere, usually made do with organic materials. These churches are important in that they suggest some discrepancies between the eleventh-century network and the

49 The lack of evidence for new church sites obviously reflects the density of the existing network and its ability to adapt to these changes. It also supports the conclusion (see above) that only a limited amount of nucleation took place outside of the ports and a few major church sites, for it has been argued that in areas of England where dispersed settlement continued to predominate, churches were more likely to be sited at pre-existing cult foci instead of virgin sites. See Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape', 12; Turner, *Christianity and the landscape*, 269. **50** See for example Blair, 'Introduction', 10–11. **51** Examples of this are Churchfield, Co. Kerry, and Aughinish, Co. Clare. See Cuppage, *Archaeological survey*, 277; Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church, parish and polity'; Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches'.

parish network: an indication that, in this area at least, the reorganisation of the system was not yet complete. Half of the mainland mortared churches at sites that did not achieve parochial status are in this area;[52] and more importantly five of these lack evidence for sustained ecclesiastical reuse. This group represents about three-quarters of the mortared churches at sites that may have fallen out of use in the high medieval period: namely Killeenamunterlane, Killagoola, and Portacarron, Co. Galway and Killursagh and Kilfraochaun, Co. Mayo. Some are on lands owned by the Church in the late medieval period, but none of the published documentary sources suggest that they were functioning churches.[53] While it is possible that some of them continued as chapels, there is no evidence for later alterations to them.[54] It may be that some of them fell out of use when the parish system was properly established. In the case of nearby north Clare, Ní Ghabhláin argues that parish formation took place in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century, based primarily on the ubiquity of Transitional churches there; but Nicholls believes that the process was still ongoing in parts of the west in the latter half of the thirteenth century.[55]

The south Dublin/north Wicklow area features the highest density of mortared churches in the country, but the context in which these were built appears to be slightly different. In this case environmental factors do not provide a ready explanation for the high density: the geology is quite complex and churches are variously built of shale, mica schist, poor calpy limestone and granite.[56] It is particularly remarkable when one considers the high destruction rate of churches in and around Dublin itself. Bradley argues that the Hiberno-Norse port featured twenty or more urban and suburban churches and that most of these were founded in the eleventh century, but virtually none of them have survived.[57] The surviving rural group is discussed at length elsewhere.[58] Here I want to briefly highlight the fact that, in contrast to the other high density area around Lough Corrib and southwest Galway, all of the mainland

52 This excludes the numerous examples off the coast of Galway, including those on Aran. **53** See especially H.T. Knox, *Notes on the early history of the dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry* (Dublin, 1904). See also H.S. Sweetman and G.F. Handcock, *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, 1302–7* (London, 1886). On references to chapels of ease in this source see Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church and community', 72. **54** The extension to Killagoola suggests it was reused as a domestic building some time after it had become ruined. There is a *cillín* nearby, and Kilfraochaun was also used as a burial ground in recent times. **55** Ní Ghabhláin this volume; Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church, parish and polity'; Ní Ghabhláin, 'The origin of medieval parishes', 47; Nicholls, 'Rectory, vicarage and parish'. **56** A good proportion are of granite, often derived from loose blocks and erratics, but this does not appear to have been particularly highly prized as a building stone, for two churches only slightly outside the granite area are built predominantly of other stone types. **57** See J. Bradley, 'The topographical development of Scandinavian Dublin', in F.H.A. Aalen and K. Whelan (eds), *Dublin city and county: from prehistory to present* (Dublin, 1992), 43–56: 48–52. Apart from Christ Church, the only one we know a substantial amount about is St Michael le Pole. See M. Gowan, 'Excavations at the site of the church and tower of St Michael le Pole, Dublin', in S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin II* (Dublin, 2001), 13–52. **58** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 318–42.

churches in the south Dublin/north Wicklow area remained in use in the high medieval period, almost invariably as parish churches.[59] It may be that this high degree of continuity is partly because the process of parish formation was more thoroughgoing in south Dublin/north Wicklow, not least due to the Anglo-Norman influx. The parishes themselves were generally small, while those of the western area were quite variable in size and included some large examples, especially west of the Corrib. But this in itself does not explain why the proportion of parish churches with pre-Norman fabric is far higher in south Dublin/north Wicklow than anywhere else in the country.

There is some evidence to suggest that the origins of this contrast between the ecclesiastical network in south Dublin/north Wicklow on the one hand and that in parts of Galway on the other, lie in the period before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. In particular, it must be significant that the south Dublin/north Wicklow group closely corresponds to the heartland of *Dyflinarskíri*, the Hiberno-Norse hinterland of Dublin.[60] Unlike most of the urban churches they all occur at pre-Viking foundations, and therefore, as elsewhere in the country, they represent continued use of a pre-extant network. This seems to contrast with Scandinavian-controlled areas of England where such a dense network does not appear to have existed previously.[61] But in other respects the eleventh- and early twelfth-century Church in *Dyflinarskíri* was slightly different from that elsewhere in Ireland, not least because of the influence that

59 The two sites not listed as parish churches in the Census of Ireland Index (1861) are Killegar and Kilcroney, Co. Wicklow. Archaeological and documentary evidence attests to the continued ecclesiastical use of both. See, for example, Sweetman and Handcock, *Calendar of documents*; L. Price, *The place-names of Co. Wicklow. V: the barony of Rathdown* (Dublin, 1957), 290, 312–13; Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches'. **60** The extent of *Dyflinarskíri*, the lands controlled and/or settled by the Hiberno-Norse of Dublin, has been the subject of considerable debate. Smyth and Bradley argue that, as well as incorporating modern-day Co. Dublin, it extended south along the littoral as far as Arklow near the modern border between Wicklow and Wexford. But while they may have had some influence in this area, Etchingham found little evidence for Hiberno-Norse settlement in mid and south Co. Wicklow, except in the hinterlands of the ports at Arklow and Wicklow. Clarke notes that the kings of Brega remained a force to be reckoned with, and may have limited Hiberno-Norse settlement north of the Liffey. In this regard it is significant that the clearest historical, onomastic and archaeological evidence (especially in the form of the Rathdown slabs) is from south Dublin and north Wicklow where these churches are also concentrated. Obviously this discussion is not concerned with the seven early churches at Glendalough. See A.P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: towards a historical geography of early Irish civilisation, A.D. 500–1600* (Dublin, 1982), 44, 149 and J. Bradley, 'The interpretation of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland' in J. Bradley (ed.), *Settlement and society in medieval Ireland: studies presented to F.X. Martin* (Kilkenny, 1988), 49–78: 57–9; C. Etchingham, 'Evidence of Scandinavian settlement in Wicklow' in K. Hannigan and W. Nolan (eds), *Wicklow history and society: interdisciplinary studies on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1994), 113–38: 132–3; H.B. Clarke, 'Conversion, church and cathedral: the diocese of Dublin to 1152' in J. Kelly and D. Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), 19–50: 37. **61** There the widespread occurrence of Viking Age sculpture at sites with no earlier insular sculpture suggests a process of secular church foundation similar to that more clearly documented in southern England. See R. Bailey, *England's earliest sculptors* (Toronto, 1996).

Canterbury exerted over it. The Dublin bishops did not yet control all the sites in the area; and Glendalough in particular remained a major force there.[62] But, from the latter half of the eleventh century, there were attempts to create a territorial diocese coterminous with *Dyflinarskíri*. Parish-formation was essential to the creation of a workable diocese;[63] and Doherty interprets a reference to the imposition of a reforming cleric on the monastery of Clondalkin by Bishop Patrick in 1076, as an instance of this determination to create a parochial system.[64] In light of this, one wonders whether some of the mortared churches in the area are a manifestation of this process at less important sites – a programme of renewal undertaken in tandem with church foundation in the port itself.[65] If so, it would appear that the Dublin bishops were not too prescriptive when it came to architectural form. While some churches, like those with chancels at Killiney and Palmerstown, represent new forms, probably transmitted from England through the port,[66] others are unicameral antae-less churches: the most common type in most areas of Ireland during the later eleventh century. Clearly, the more minor sites in *Dyflinarskíri* were happy to utilise local building expertise. Nonetheless, this regional contrast in the parochial status of sites at which mortared churches occur suggests that developments in the ecclesiastical network towards the end of the early medieval period did not affect all areas of the country equally.[67]

SIZE, FORM AND FUNCTION

The buildings themselves can contribute a great deal to the development of the debate about pastoral care before the parish. O'Keeffe has suggested that the absence of an eastern cell in the vast majority of eleventh-century churches makes them 'unlikely candidates for parish or proto-parish churches'.[68] Certainly, by this time most local churches abroad were bicameral, and some also had apses.[69] More importantly, the role of the eastern cell was changing in

62 See MacShamhráin, *Church and polity*, 212–13. **63** C. Doherty, 'Cluain Dolcáin: a brief note' in Smyth (ed.) *Seanchas*, 182–8: 187–8; S. Kinsella, 'From Hiberno-Norse to Anglo-Norman, *c.*1030–1300' in K. Milne (ed.), *Christ Church cathedral, Dublin: a history* (Dublin, 2000), 25–52: 37, 42. **64** Doherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland', 314; Doherty, 'Cluain Dolcáin'. Clondalkin had strong links with Glendalough, and it is interesting to note that these did not stop the bishop of Dublin from interfering in its affairs. **65** This suggestion echoes Ní Ghabhláin's argument for seeing the Transitional churches of Kilfenora as a reflex of parish formation in this part of Clare. See Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church, parish and polity'; Ní Ghabhláin, 'The origin of medieval parishes', 47. **66** Tadhg O'Keeffe, this volume; Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 318–52. Another nave-and-chancel church at Clondalkin was excavated by Rynne. He suggested an eleventh-century date on architectural rather than stratigraphic grounds, but the lack of a west doorway makes this uncertain. See E. Rynne, 'Excavation of a church-site at Clondalkin, Co. Dublin' in *JRSAI*, 97 (1967), 29–37. **67** One wonders whether other evidence of this will emerge, for example in the rate and extent of ringfort abandonment. **68** O'Keeffe, this volume. **69** On early unicameral churches (*saalkirche*) on the continent, see for example Burnell,

the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Before this, the altar normally stood at the east end of the nave while the eastern cell essentially functioned as a presbytery where the clergy would sit. Increasingly, however, altars were being moved into the eastern cell.[70] This new arrangement was in tune with the emphasis among reformers on the differentiation of the clergy from the laity.[71] However, it was not solely a function of the pastoral role of these churches. Rather, it primarily reflected broader theological and liturgical developments, especially the ongoing debate about what would later be defined as transubstantiation.[72] Nonetheless, as O'Keeffe suggests, the absence of this layout in new churches in most parts of Ireland makes the idea of a sweeping systemisation of pastoral care, along the lines experienced in parts of England and the Continent, seem unlikely.

The unique mix of unicameral and bicameral churches in *Dyflinarskíri* is best understood as a reflex of the early stages of parish formation at a time when, even in England, there was still 'considerable uncertainty as to the best form of accommodation for parish worship'.[73] Elsewhere in Ireland virtually all churches were still plain unicameral structures; and there is no documentary evidence to suggest that parish formation had begun in earnest. However, it must be stressed that their unicameral plan in no way diminishes the possibility, indeed the likelihood, that some of these mortared churches had a pastoral role. The limited formal variation now discernible in this group primarily relates to chronological or regional differences rather than differences in function.[74] Thus, while on purely architectural grounds we should conclude that the barn-like *damliac* at Clonmacnoise is an unlikely candidate for a post-Carolingian episcopal-monastic church, we know this is what it was.[75] Formally identical buildings served variously as major episcopal and monastic churches, nunneries, mortuary churches, eremitic and reliquary chapels as well as *túath* churches with a pastoral role.[76] In the context of this remarkable

Merovingian to early Carolingian, 189. **70** H. Taylor, 'The position of the altar in early Anglo-Saxon churches' in *Antiquaries Journal*, 53 (1973), 52–8; D. Parsons, '*Sacrarium*: ablution drains in early medieval churches' in Butler and Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, 105–20; Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, 66; C.F. Davidson, 'Change and change back: the development of English parish church chancels' in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *Continuity and change in Christian worship* (Woodbridge, 1999), 65–77: 75–6. **71** P. Barnwell, 'The laity, the clergy and the divine presence: the use of space in smaller churches of the eleventh and twelfth centuries' in *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 157 (2004) 41–60: 55. **72** I am grateful to Roger Stalley and Richard Gem for discussing their ideas on this subject with me. See especially H. de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: Eucharistie et l'Église au moyen age* (Paris, 1944); F. Cross and E. Livingstone, *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1997); E. Mazza, *The celebration of the Eucharist: the origin of the rite and the development of its interpretation* (Collegeville, 1999); Barnwell, 'The laity', 55. **73** Barnwell, 'The laity', 55. **74** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 241. **75** C. Manning, 'Clonmacnoise cathedral' in H. King (ed.), *Clonmacnoise Studies 1: seminar papers 1994* (Dublin, 1998), 56–86: 72–3. **76** Even in areas with much greater architectural complexity and variety, there is rarely an exact relationship between form and function. Instances of form following function have been noted in Anglo-Saxon architecture. See R. Gem, 'Towards an iconography of Anglo-Saxon architecture' in *Journal of the Warburg and*

homogeneity,[77] in which even major churches show no *outward* sign of responding to developments like the transubstantiation debate, it would have been precocious for local pastoral churches to adopt the bicameral form. Nonetheless, these churches could have functioned much like any early medieval pastoral church in which the altar stood between the congregation to the west and a presbytery to the east (see above); and, sure enough, window position hints that altars were often sited some distance from the east wall.[78] Essentially the same arrangement was still current in bicameral churches like Raunds in Northamptonshire until its altar was moved into an eastern cell at the beginning of the twelfth century.[79] Even at this stage, Irish clerics who remained attached to the unicameral plan could, in theory, have responded to the need to increase the sense of mystery surrounding the Eucharist simply by moving the altar eastwards and by adding more substantial screens between the altar and the congregation like those proposed by Barnwell in the case of the mid-twelfth-century unicameral church at Upton, Northampton.[80] No evidence for such changes in layout is now evident in the standing fabric; indeed no trace survives of any of the internal partitions that we know characterised some Irish churches from at least the seventh century.[81] Because of this, overall area is the most useful variable when considering the possibility that some of them had a pastoral role.

In my opinion, too much has been made of the relatively small size of these churches. Macalister[82] went so far as to say that most were non-congregational, while Harbison[83] suggested that their size had, like the use of skeuomorphs, become symbolic of the hallowed ascetic origins of Irish sites. This is plausible in the case of the tiny shrine chapels that were erected to house relics at some major sites, and perhaps also the principal churches at certain island pilgrimage sites. However, viewed in its local context, it becomes clear that a building like Clonmacnoise cathedral would not have been perceived as small.[84] At

Courtauld Institutes, 46 (1983), 1–18: 9; Fernie remarks of the minsters, monasteries and cathedrals of pre-Viking Kent and Essex that there is a 'lack of any clear variation paralleling differences in function.' E. Fernie, *The architecture of the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1983), 40, 94. For a similar observation about some pilgrimage churches on the continent see R. Ousterhout, '*Loca Sancta* and the architectural response to pilgrimage' in R. Ousterhout (ed.), *The blessings of pilgrimage*, Illinois Byzantine Studies, 1 (Chicago, 1990), 108–24: 108. **77** This homogeneity merits further consideration elsewhere. See Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches'; see also T. O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*. **78** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 92. For a Scottish example of an altar in this position see P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: the excavation of a monastic town, 1984–91* (Stroud, 1997), fig. 4.13. **79** See Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*; On early unicameral churches (*saalkirche*) on the continent see for example Burnell, *Merovingian to early Carolingian*, 189. **80** Barnwell, 'The laity', 52. **81** See S. Connolly and J.M. Picard, 'Cogitosus: Life of Saint Brigit' in *JRSAI*, 117 (1987), 11–27. **82** R.A.S. Macalister, *Ancient Ireland: a study in the lessons of archaeology and history* (London, 1935), 247. **83** Harbison, 'Early Irish churches', 624. **84** Incidentally, *pace* Macalister and Lucas, there is no reason to believe that stone churches were any smaller than their wooden counterparts, especially given that they were erected at a time when many ecclesiastical sites were expanding significantly. Macalister, *Ancient Ireland*; A.T. Lucas, 'The plundering and burning of churches in Ireland, 7th

*c.*200m² this building is dwarfed by the great continental and, to a lesser extent, Anglo-Saxon churches of the day.[85] But this surely reflects the relatively modest resources available and the fact that its patron, king Flann Sinna of Clann Cholmáin (879–916), though styled king of Ireland, did not have the authority to mobilise these resources as effectively as some of his contemporaries overseas. It should be remembered that later Irish churches are also relatively small. Even the Dublin cathedrals are, in terms of scale, more akin to some out-sized parish churches on the continent than to their actual counterparts, though no one would suggest a symbolic motivation in this case.

Though none are very large in European terms, Irish pre-Romanesque churches vary considerably in size. Obviously, there is not a simple correlation between church area and the degree to which a site was involved in pastoral care. Area is influenced by a range of factors including the size of the resident community, the number of pilgrims it attracted and, perhaps more importantly, prestige and patronage.[86] For example, Clonmacnoise cathedral was not solely a new liturgical space but also a political statement marking the recent victory of Clann Cholmáin in battle and reinforcing their association with the site.[87] Generally speaking there seems to be a direct, though obviously not exact, relationship between the size of the principal church at a particular site and the status of that site. To illustrate the point, let us consider the areas of the six

to 16th century' in E. Rynne (ed.) *North Munster studies: essays in commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney* (Limerick, 1967), 172–229: 206. This is supported by the published archaeological record except in the case of Illaunloughan where, as discussed below, a sod-walled church was replaced by a smaller dry-stone one. See White Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan' and White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*, 37–53. **85** See for example H.M. Taylor, 'Tenth-century church building in England and on the Continent' in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth-century studies* (Chichester, 1975), 141–168. It is comparable in size to some major pre-Carolingian churches including the nave of the seventh-century minster at Winchester. See B. Kjolbye-Biddle, 'The 7th century minster at Winchester interpreted' in Butler and Morris (eds), *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, 196–209. **86** Annalistic entries give us some indication of the capacity of certain churches, though usually at times of trouble when people were resorting to them for sanctuary. In 850 the *dairtech* at Trevet was burned with 260 people in it and Manning has concluded that it therefore 'must have been close to the size of Clonmacnoise cathedral to have held such numbers.' See Manning, 'References to church buildings'. This seems unlikely however, for Trevet was a middle-ranking site at best. If we accept Boddington's method of calculating *maximum* capacity (discussed below), Trevet could have been less than 100m², while conversely Clonmacnoise cathedral could have held over 500 people. In all likelihood, Trevet was somewhat larger than this and Clonmacnoise cathedral probably never held so many even when used as a sanctuary, but there are hints that Boddington's guide is not too far off the mark. No references indicating capacity pertain to surviving churches but in 1031 200 were burned in the *damliac* of Ardbraccan, a site situated near Kells and a subsidiary of it. Another nearby subsidiary of Kells is Dulane. The three sites are linked in the 967 obit of one Maelfinnen who was coarb of Ultan of Ardbraccan and Cairnech of Dulane as well as bishop of Kells. M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: the history and hagiography of the monastic familia of Columba* (Dublin, 1988), 82, 89; A. Gwynn, and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses, Ireland* (London, 1970), 35. It is therefore interesting to note that (using Boddington's guide) Dulane could just about have accommodated two hundred people. **87** See especially the definitive study of this building by Manning, 'Clonmacnoise cathedral'.

surviving principal churches that were mentioned in the annals before *c.*1050.[88] Of these Ardfert (61.2m²) Tuamgraney (67.7m²) and Dulane (probably 68.9m²) are at quite important sites. Significantly, though, they are on average less than half the size of the three at top-ranking sites, namely Glendalough (131.56m²), Lorrha (129.9m²) and Clonmacnoise (200.9m²).[89]

But the size of a church must also bear some relationship to its function. In this regard it is interesting to note that the size discrepancy between Ireland and England is not nearly as marked below the level of the major monastic church or cathedral. According to Morris, tenth-century English naves average just 20–30m², while naves of 60–80m² became typical from the later eleventh century.[90] In Ireland churches which later achieved parish status average 59m² and only 26 per cent are less than 40m². Thus they are, for example, the same size on average as the three multi-cameral churches at Killiney, Palmerstown and St Peters, Waterford which O'Keeffe[91] has quite rightly labelled 'Hiberno-Scandinavian parish churches' (average total area: 60m²). Significantly, mainland churches that later became chapels or fell out of use are substantially smaller: 29m² on average with only two greater than 40m².[92] Some of these could only accommodate a tiny congregation but others are not so small that a pastoral role can be dismissed out of hand. They are, after all, on average almost twice as large as mortared churches on island sites (16.6m²) which, given their isolation, are unlikely to have served substantial secular communities. My aim here is not to suggest that most pre-Romanesque churches were built with pastoral care in mind, but rather to point out that they cannot be used as evidence that pastoral provision was minimal or non-existent. However, these general observations tell us little about how it was administered in a particular area. In an attempt to address this issue, the rest of this paper focuses on the dry-stone churches of peninsular Kerry.

88 See Manning, 'References to church buildings', 48. **89** Such a relationship has been noted in other contexts including pre-Viking Durham. See E. Cambridge, 'The early Church in Co. Durham: a reassessment' in *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 87 (1984), 65–85: 75. **90** R. Morris, *Churches in the landscape* (London, 1989), 287. **91** O'Keeffe, this volume. **92** At *c.*55m², Longfordpass, Co. Tipperary, is the largest church not to have achieved parish status; and it is no coincidence that it is also the only such site for which a substantial amount of early history survives. Its decline is the result of an unusual set of circumstances, and it can therefore be seen as the exception which proves the rule. It was probably an early episcopal foundation and is mentioned in the 'Martyrology of Aengus' and three saints' lives, as well as a number of secular texts. See F.J. Byrne, 'Derrynaflan: the historical context' in *JRSAI*, 110 (1980), 116–26; C. Manning, 'Daire Mór identified' in *Peritia*, 11 (1997), 359–69. But it was eclipsed by nearby Liathmore possibly because the latter was favoured by the ascendant O'Briens. While it continued to function as an ecclesiastical site until at least the twelfth century, it was an outlying portion of Kilcooly parish in the high medieval period, and its monastic past was forgotten until recently. See K. Nicholls, 'A charter of John, Lord of Ireland, in favour of Mathew Ua Hénni, Archbishop of Cashel' in *Peritia*, 2 (1983), 273–4.

FUNCTIONAL VARIETY IN PENINSULAR KERRY

In 1970 Peter Harbison acted, in his own words, as devil's advocate and argued that dry-stone churches could be a twelfth-century phenomenon.[93] However, more recently he has moderated his views considerably, especially in the light of two excavations.[94] First, extensive use of radiocarbon dating on Illaunloughan leaves little doubt that its dry-stone church dates to the middle rather than the end of the early medieval period.[95] Second, a possible outlier of the main group on the summit of Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo, produced a radiocarbon date of 'between 430 and 890'.[96] A number of factors are against the possibility that dry-stone churches developed earlier than, say, the eighth century, including the fact that they were usually preceded by churches of organic materials.[97] It seems likely that there was a significant 'overlap' in the erection, and especially the use, of dry-stone and mortared churches. Nonetheless, it may be that dry-stone churches were being built in peninsular Kerry a century or two before mortared churches became common elsewhere in the country.[98] Even more important in the present context is the fact that, in peninsular Kerry, the dry-stone church became the standard type even at minor sites, apparently to a greater extent than mortared churches in either south Dublin/north Wicklow or southwest Galway and the area around Lough Corrib. This, coupled with a generally high level of archaeological visibility, means that peninsular Kerry offers a unique opportunity to study the relationships between sites of different function and status.

It has recently been argued, on archaeological and historical grounds, that there were three sites of regional importance in the area of peninsular Kerry

93 P. Harbison, 'How old is Gallarus oratory?' in *Medieval Archaeology*, 14 (1970), 34–59. **94** P. Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland: the monuments and the people* (London, 1991), 82; P. Harbison, *The golden age of Irish art* (London, 1999), 194. **95** White Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan', 106. **96** Quote from Harbison, *The golden* age, 194. See G. Walsh, 'Preliminary report on the archaeological excavations on the summit of Croagh Patrick' in *Cathair na Mart*, 14 (1994), 1–10. **97** See O'Kelly, 'Church Island'; Fanning, 'Excavation of an early Christian cemetery'; White Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan', and *Illaunloughan Island*. **98** Their recurring association with early cross-slabs, clochauns and stone shrines supports this idea. This point has been made by both Petrie and O'Keeffe and it is one which Harbison has always acknowledged. See G. Petrie, *The ecclesiastical architecture of Ireland*, 2nd edition (Dublin, 1845), 133; T. O'Keeffe, 'Architectural traditions of the early medieval church in Munster' in Monk and Sheehan (eds), *Early Medieval Munster*, 112–24; Harbison 'How old' 43–4, 46, 58. Dry-stone churches do share some features with the mortared types, including finials, stepped sills, inclining jambs, and plinths, though the latter are somewhat different in form. Features commonly found in mortared churches, but not in dry-stone churches, include gable-headed windows, and interior doorway rebates. Furthermore, only one dry-stone church, Gallarus, features a round-headed window, though this is by far the most common window type in mortared churches. Dry-stone churches also have markedly shorter proportions. These differences might also be taken as evidence that the types did not develop contemporaneously. In this regard, it should be noted that their distributions are not entirely discreet. Peninsular Kerry features two mortared churches, a density equal to or greater than most areas in the south-west.

west of the mountains: namely Kilmalkedar on Dingle and Inis Úasal and Skellig Michael on Iveragh.[99] The final identification may seem surprising but, viewed in its local context Skellig Michael emerges as a significant monastic centre that enjoyed greater resource investment and documentary coverage than any other site in the area. At all three sites, the main church was rebuilt in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries,[1] but there were at least three additional dry-stone churches on Skellig Michael, and probably two at Kilmalkedar.[2] Significantly, these constitute all of the definite supplementary churches in this western area.[3] A number of factors favoured the erection of multiple churches at important sites, but here I will briefly consider the main liturgical factor.[4] The eighth and ninth centuries in particular saw a dramatic increase in the number of masses celebrated at sites throughout Europe; and also in the number of monks who were ordained as priests.[5] Many of these masses were said in private and were specialised, with some marking saint's feast-days, others said for penitential purposes and still others for votive purposes especially for the newly baptised, the sick and the dead. Feast-day masses were celebrated in Ireland from an early date,[6] and some have argued that the Irish helped popularise votive masses on the Continent.[7] Although private, these masses were seen as apotropaeic actions that contributed to the spiritual well-being of the community as a whole and therefore remained notionally, though not physically, communal.[8] Therefore a multiplicity of altars became one of the defining traits of an important church site.[9] This often meant multiple churches,[10] but from the Carolingian period onwards, the favoured solution on

99 T. Ó Carragáin, 'A landscape converted: archaeology and early Church organisation on Iveragh and Dingle, Ireland' in Carver (ed.), *The cross goes north*, 127–52. 1 One wonders whether the principal churches at Kilmalkedar and Inis Úasal were relatively large structures of wood or mortared stone. The main church on Skellig Michael seems to incorporate some early mortared fabric. See R. Berger, '14C dating mortar in Ireland' in *Radiocarbon*, 34: 3 (1992), 880–89; R. Berger, 'Radiocarbon dating of early medieval Irish monuments' in *PRIA*, 95C (1995), 159–74. 2 See Cuppage, *Archaeological survey*. 3 Another occurs on Illauntannig off the north coast of Dingle. The subsidiary role of these churches at relatively important sites is confirmed by the fact that this small group includes the three smallest extant churches. At Killabuonia a subsidiary site, situated *c*.450m from the main terrace, also features a church, while another possible subsidiary church occurs at Killemlagh. The dry-stone church on Inishglora, Co. Mayo, also appears to be a subsidiary church. 4 For full discussion see Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 233–44. 5 M. Dunn, *The emergence of monasticism: from the desert fathers to the early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000), 189–90. 6 J. Stevenson, 'Introduction' to the 2nd edition of F.E. Warren, *The liturgy and ritual of the Celtic Church* (Woodbridge, 1987), lxi. 7 See for example A. Angenendt, 'Missa Specialis: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Entstehung der Privat-Messen' in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 17 (1983), 153–221: 181–91, 212–21; F.S. Paxton, *Christianising death* (London, 1990), 98, 100, 204. 8 A. Haeussling, *Moenchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier: eine Studie ueber die Messe in der Abendländischen Klosterliturgie des fruehen Mittelalters und zur Geschichte der Messhäufigkeit* (Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 58, Muenster Westfalen, 1973), 249, 252, 319. 9 A. Haeussling, 'Motives for the frequency of the Eucharist' in *Concilium*, 152 (1982), 25–30. 10 See for example E. James, 'Archaeology and the Merovingian monastery' in H.B. Clarke, and M. Brennan (eds), *Columbanus and Merovingian monasticism*, BAR International Series 113 (Oxford, 1981), 33–55: 41, 44.

the Continent was the elaboration of church plans to allow for the provision of several altars under one roof. In Ireland, however, single-altar churches remained the norm, and so at important sites several small churches were erected. The presence of four churches on Skellig Michael supports its identification as a significant cenobitic site rather than a minor hermitage. These indoor altars may have been supplemented by two or three outdoor dry-stone altars. In the case of one dry-stone altar, we can be confident of an early date because it is partly overlain by one of the churches,[11] while another was found to be coeval with the surrounding paving and apparently with another of the churches.[12] This multiplicity of altars provides a context for the legend, recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis about a hollowed-out stone which stood outside the (main?) church on the island in which 'there is found every morning through the merits of the saints of the place as much wine as is necessary for the celebration of as many masses as there are priests to say mass on that day.'[13] Therefore, the historical sources for the site complement the archaeological evidence for a liturgy based on the idea of multiple private masses, sometimes being celebrated concurrently.

Obviously Skellig Michael was not built with pastoral care in mind. A pastoral role seems likely in the case of Kilmalkedar and Inis Úasal, at least within their own *termon* lands,[14] but their main congregational churches do not survive. However, a case can be made that some of the churches at minor sites were congregational. In contrast to the mortared churches, only a small proportion of dry-stone churches occur at sites that survived into the high medieval period; and they must therefore predate the rationalisation of the network and the onset of parish formation. Nonetheless, Sharpe argues forcefully that this early network amounted to 'one of the most comprehensive pastoral organisations in northern Europe'.[15] No attempt is made here to evaluate the documentary evidence for or against this proposition; but it does seem to find some support in the archaeological record, notwithstanding the fact that these sites were not all contemporary. Indeed, such a dense distribution of sites would seem to support the model of a diverse Church in which some sites were more concerned with pastoral provision than others. There is a broad correlation between the distribution of secular and ecclesiastical sites. For example, on the Dingle peninsula the highest concentrations of both are south and west of the mountains. However, there are areas where their

11 T. Ó Carragáin, 'Leachta as indicators of ritual practice: the evidence of Iveragh and Dingle, Co. Kerry', unpublished MA (University of York, 1998), 31, 76–9. 12 A. Lynch, 'Sceillig Mhichíl, Sceilg Rock Great: early Christian monastic site' in I. Bennett (ed.), *Excavations 1987: summary accounts of archaeological excavations in Ireland* (Dublin, 1988), 17–18. 13 J.J. O'Meara (ed.), *The history and topography of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis* (Mountrath, 1982), 80. The phrase 'saints of the place' should be seen as a reference to the saints to whom the altars were dedicated. See Haeussling, *Moenchskonvent und Eucharistiefeier*, 220. 14 For the likely extent of their *termon* lands see Ó Carragáin, 'A landscape converted'. 15 Sharpe, 'Churches and communities', 90–1.

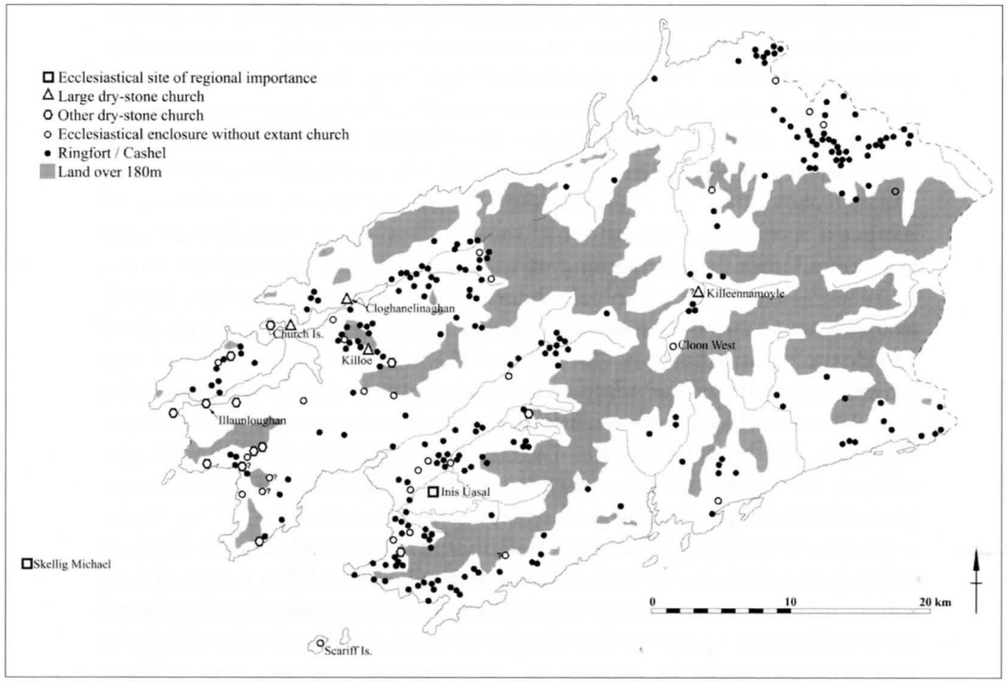


Fig. 2: Early medieval settlement on the Iveragh peninsula (based largely on information in A. O'Sullivan and J. Sheehan, *The Iveragh peninsula: an archaeological survey of south Kerry*, Cork, 1996)

distributions appear to diverge. The most marked discrepancy is in southern Iveragh (fig. 2). Here, secular sites are common but there is only one definite early ecclesiastical site. The opposite is true at the west end of the Iveragh peninsula, especially west of a line from Church Island to Scariff where remarkably, even when Skellig Michael and isolated cross-slabs are excluded, ecclesiastical settlements are as common as ringforts with eighteen instances of each. The general consensus is that ringforts were a settlement type restricted to better-off farmers, and so they are not representative of the secular population as a whole. The number of secular households in the area is therefore likely to have been substantially higher than eighteen. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that all eighteen churches were primarily concerned with providing pastoral care to the secular population. Clearly these church sites varied considerably in function. The question is can archaeology help us to distinguish between them?

The small size of the dry-stone churches, averaging just 11.8m² in internal area, has led a number of scholars to suggest that masses and other sacraments were performed in the open air at an outdoor altar. In such a scenario the church

would have been little more than a *secretarium*, the early medieval equivalent of a sacristy.[16] Another possibility is that the church acted as a *sanctuarium*, i.e. the equivalent of the sanctuary area at the east end of large churches where the mass was performed.[17] If either theory is accepted, it might further be argued that, unlike late medieval parish churches,[18] there should be no correlation between church area and congregation size. However, it seems likely that a site primarily concerned with pastoral provision would have articulated this identity by investing more in its church than in other ritual foci (see below for a possible example). Furthermore, the law tracts show that, as in the high medieval period, such a church could expect to be supported by its community;[19] and so a site's role in this regard must have affected the amount of resources and labour available to it. In any case, this writer is not convinced that these structures were conceived of as sacristies or sanctuaries. While it may often have been expedient for part of the congregation to stand outside, there is no reason to believe that these sites were actually laid out with this in mind.[20] It seems more likely that sites with unfeasibly small churches anticipated substantial congregations only on occasions such as the feastdays of their saints. In particular the 'oratory as sanctuary' idea falsely implies that it was normal practice in large churches for the mass to be hidden from the view of the congregation. As already mentioned, little evidence survives for the partitions within Irish churches, but elsewhere in Europe they were usually only waist-high and even the most substantial were designed to give the congregation a clear view of the celebrant and host,

16 F. Henry, *Irish art in the early Christian period* (London, 1940), 25–7; H. Leask, *Irish churches and monastic buildings*, i (Dundalk, 1955), 59; O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 127. On the *secretarium* see T. Sternberg, *Orientalium more secutus. Räeume und institutionen der caritas des 5. bis 7. Jahrhunderts in Gallien* (Muenster, 1991), 54–59. **17** See R.A.S. Macalister, *The archaeology of Ireland* (London, 1928); R.A.S. Macalister, *Ancient Ireland* (London), 247; J. Ryan, *Irish monasticism: origins and early development* (Dublin, 1931), 288; M.J. O'Kelly, *Archaeological survey and excavation of St Vogue's church, enclosure and other monuments at Carnsore, Co. Wexford* (Dublin, 1975), 21; L. Bitel, *Isle of the saints: monastic settlement and Christian community in early Ireland* (Cork, 1990), 71. J.W. Hunwicke, 'Kerry and Stowe revisited' in *PRIA*, 102C (2002), 1–19. This learned article attempts to use the commentary on the mass in the Stowe Missal to illuminate liturgical practice in and around the dry-stone churches of peninsular Kerry. It is somewhat ironic that the missal is associated with Lorrha, Co. Tipperary which features the third largest pre-Romanesque church in the country. **18** Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church, parish and polity', 187–236; C. Bond, 'Church and parish in Norman Worcestershire' in Blair (ed.), *Minster and parish churches*, 119–58: 119, 141–4. **19** Charles-Edwards, 'The pastoral role of the church', 70; Etchingham 'The early Irish Church', 101–2, 107, 110–13. **20** The state of grace necessary to take communion meant that most people did so infrequently. See for example D. Hurst (ed.), *Bedae Opera, Pars II* (Turnhout, 1960), 520; R.E. McLaughlin, 'The word eclipsed?: preaching in the early middle ages' in *Traditio*, 46 (1991), 77–122. It may be that only those communicating went into the church while others stayed outside. This distinction may help to explain the incident in the Life of Columba in which part of the mass, including the Gospel, took place outside, after which the saint and a select group entered the church to celebrate the Eucharist. This did not take place on Iona where the whole community normally heard mass inside the church, but on Hinba, a dependency of Iona which is known to have housed a group of penitents. See R. Sharpe (ed. and trans.), *Adomnán of Iona: Life of Columba* (London, 1995), 219, 368–9.

something which is taken for granted in the early Roman and Byzantine rites.[21] In the case of the dry-stone churches, the results of excavations to date argue against the possibility that they performed other key functions including, for example, a burial or reliquary function.[22] Most were clearly not congregational, but there is no reason to doubt that the largest ones were, and it is therefore possible that they were used for the provision of basic pastoral services.[23]

It must be emphasised again that there is no direct and universal relationship between the size of a building and the number of people it accommodated: this is something that is culturally determined.[24] However, in this case enough information is known about the cultural context of the buildings to make such estimates useful in formulating theories about them. It is suggested here that, to a greater or lesser extent, the size of a dry-stone church was a product of its function.[25] This is strongly supported by the huge variation within the group, with the largest (24m²) being over five times the internal area of the smallest (4.5m²). Obviously competitive emulation or disproportionate patronage by higher secular or ecclesiastical powers could result in larger-than-required churches at particular sites, but this is equally true of late medieval parish churches.[26] Andrew Boddington has suggested that a church of modest size could accommodate three people per square metre; and I have found this

21 T. Klauser, *A short history of the Western liturgy* (Oxford, 1979), 66, 98; T.F. Mathews, *The early churches of Constantinople: architecture and liturgy* (Philadelphia, 1971), 162–71; J. Dodds, *Architecture and ideology in early medieval Spain* (Philadelphia, 1990). For an excellent discussion of the arrangement at Kildare and its European analogues see C. Neuman de Vegvar, 'Romanitas and Realpolitik in Cogitosus's description of the church of St Brigit, Kildare' in Carver (ed.), *The cross goes north*, 153–70. **22** Thomas, 'Recognising Christian origins', 124, once suggested that some were martyrial buildings built over founders graves but the five examples excavated to date suggest that, unlike the mortared shrine chapels at major sites, they had no significant burial or reliquary function. See O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 62; Fanning, 'Excavation of an early Christian cemetery', 79–84; Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan', 104–6; Lynch, 'Sceillig Mhichíl', 18; John Sheehan (pers. comm.) on Caherlehillan. In this area, reliquary shrines are invariably outside in the cemetery. While the phase 2 churches at Church Island, Reask and Illaunloughan partially covered a number of burials, there is nothing to suggest they were special graves. Significantly the excavated churches are quite representative in that they span almost the full size range (e.g. Illaunloughan and Church Island) and occur at both minor (e.g. Reask) and important (Skellig Michael) sites. **23** The early medieval outdoor altars associated with pilgrimage routes in peninsular Kerry underscore the impression that there was no taboo in the area about lay participation in the Eucharist. See Ó Carragáin, 'A landscape converted', 131, note 7, 133, note 8, figs. 9.3 and 9.5a. **24** M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Re-constructing archaeology: theory and practice*, 2nd edition (London, 1992). See also I. Hodder, *Symbols in action: ethnoarchaeological studies of material culture* (Cambridge, 1982), 193–4 on the relationship between settlement size and population. **25** It is important to avoid establishing a false dichotomy between the function of a building and its symbolic meaning. Hodder shows that, far from being contradictory, these are interdependent and equally vital. Hodder, *Reading the past*, 130, 188. See also S. Jones, *The archaeology of ethnicity: constructing identities in the past and present* (London, 1997), 119. **26** See Ní Ghabhláin, 'Church, parish and polity', 212–13. On competitive emulation see C. Renfrew, 'Introduction: peer polity interaction and socio-political change' in C. Renfrew and J.F. Cherry (eds), *Peer polity interaction and socio-political change* (Cambridge, 1986), 1–18: 7–9.

Skellig Michael 3	4.53
Skellig Michael 4	5.36
Illauntannig 2	5.39
?Reencaheragh	6.21
Feaghmann W	6.33
Kildreelig	6.92
Loher	7.03
Illaunloughan	7.04
Reask	8.16
Kilkeaveragh	8.64
Skellig Michael 2	8.94
Ballywiheen	9.36
Killabuonia 2	9.86
Inishtooskert	10
Kilfountan	11.81
Templecashel	12
Inishvickillane	12.2
Beginish	12.42
Illauntannig 1	12.54
Killabuonia 1	13.3
Gallarus	14.65
Cappanagroun	14.72
Temple Geal	14.74
Kilmalkedar	14.92
Lateevemore	15.24
Church Is.	21.56
Cloghanelinaghan	21.84
?Killeennamoyle	22.04
Killoe	24

Average: 11.78

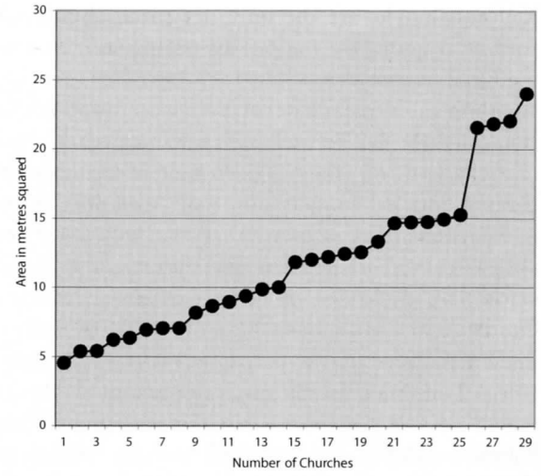


Fig. 3: Interior areas of dry-stone churches in peninsular Kerry

appropriate for maximum estimates.[27] Taking the altar area into account, the smallest church could only have accommodated about five people.[28] As figure 3 illustrates, most of the others are evenly spread between 4.5m² and 15m², with almost every metre-squared interval being represented at least twice. But there is then a leap of over 6m² between Lateevemore and the largest four churches. Lateevemore could have accommodated up to thirty people and therefore might have been congregational; but the case is stronger for the largest four for they could have held a maximum of between 48 and 54 people and could quite comfortably have housed 30 or so. These are again quite similar in size, possibly an indication that anything much larger was deemed unstable.

We cannot know for certain the particular functions of these four churches but it is worth exploring the possibility that they had a pastoral role.[29] All four

27 Boddington, *Raunds Furnells*, 64, 66. See also Morris, *Churches in the landscape*, 288–9. **28** Boddington suggests that the easternmost two metres must be set aside for the priest and a freestanding altar but one-and-a-half metres would probably suffice if the altar was built against the east wall. That this was common in small Irish churches (though possibly not the larger ones) is supported both by archaeology and by the tract on the Mass in the eighth-century Stowe Missal which suggests that the priest normally faced east. For the archaeology see T. Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 92–3. For the Stowe Missal evidence see É. Ó Carragáin, 'The meeting of Saint Paul and Saint Anthony: visual and literary uses of a Eucharistic motif' in Mac Niocaill and Wallace (eds), *Keimelia*, 1–58: 8–9. **29** It is impossible to determine whether this putative pastoral ministry was available to the laity at large or was restricted to tenants on their own, presumably modest, estates as Etchingham (this volume) would envisage. Their relationship to the three sites of regional importance (Inis Úasal, Kilmalkedar and Skellig Michael) is also difficult to establish. They are not on lands which belonged to the Church in the later medieval period and

are on Iveragh, and significantly, Cloghanelinaghan and the likely example at Killeennamoyle, are the only dry-stone churches situated in modern graveyards and among the few on this peninsula at sites with evidence for high or late medieval ecclesiastical reuse.[30] Arguably their distribution and siting also supports the possibility that they were involved in pastoral provision (fig. 2). For example, Killoe and Killeennamoyle are situated in significant ringfort clusters, and the latter in particular is strategically located at the junction of three valleys in the mountainous central portion of the peninsula. In contrast to Killeennamoyle, Cloon West, the only other church site in the vicinity, is sited high up in a sparsely populated valley. Killeennamoyle achieved parish status and, in the absence of later remains, it is even possible that the dry-stone church remained in use into the high medieval period. Sixteenth-century documents refer to the parish as *Túath Chlann Uí Shé*. These were the main Corco Dhuibhne family on Iveragh, and this name may refer to the area to which they were confined in the later medieval period.[31] Their hereditary rights to the church may explain why the O'Sullivans demoted it in favour of a new parish centre at Templenoe in the mid-fifteenth century.[32]

Church Island also appears to have had close links with a local secular power, and in this case the results of the excavation conducted there allow us to consider its development in greater depth (fig. 4, pl. 1). I want to conclude this essay by comparing Church Island with another excavated site, Illaunloughan (fig. 5). Neither of these two sites produced sixth- or seventh-century Continental pottery but it would appear that both were in existence by the end of the seventh century. The earliest dateable feature from Church Island is a slab inscribed with a cross-of-arcs design which may well be seventh-century, while radiocarbon dates suggest Illaunloughan was founded in the latter half of the seventh century.[33] At first glance they are very similar. Both are tiny islands in Valentia harbour, delimited by a stone enclosure and featuring a succession of organic to stone buildings and an outdoor reliquary shrine. There is also evidence that both benefited from interaction with secular society. But divergences in the way their resources were invested suggest significant differences in the nature of these interactions.

they may also have been outside the termon lands of these three major sites in the early medieval period. See P. McCotter, 'The see-lands of the diocese of Ardfert: an essay in reconstruction' in *Peritia*, 14 (2000), 161–204; Ó Carragáin, 'A landscape converted.' However, it remains possible that they were within the wider *paruchia* of one of these major sites which may therefore have been involved in sustaining their pastoral ministry in return for food renders. For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between Iona and minor churches on Islay see C. Swift, 'Sculptors and their customers: a study of Clonmacnoise grave-slabs' in H. King (ed.), *Clonmacnoise Studies, 2* (Dublin, 2004), 105–124: 112–14. **30** See O'Sullivan and Sheehan, *The Iveragh peninsula*, 272. Skellig Michael probably continued to function in some capacity, and there is also a possible dry-stone church on the periphery of the parish centre of Killemlagh. **31** B. Ó Cíobháin, *Toponomia Hibernia*, 4 (Dublin, 1985), lxxi. **32** Ibid., lxii, lxx, lxxi. **33** White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*, 11.



Pl. 1: Dry-stone church, Church Island, Iveragh – one of the largest extant examples

The usual characterisation of Illaunloughan as a remote hermitage is somewhat misleading.[34] In fact, even after twelve hundred years of erosion, it is still possible to walk to it at certain low tides. Furthermore, we can assume that the narrow sound in which is it located was an important route into Valentia harbour, as it still is today. Excavations revealed that its occupants received plentiful supplies of domesticated animals and processed grain, and that they produced high status metalwork such as ornamented penannular brooches.[35] Initially the ritual elements of the site comprised a sod-built church 12m² internally and a cemetery including the rock-cut special graves of the island's holy men. Changing requirements led to the church being replaced by a much smaller dry-stone one, just over 7m² internally; and, probably in the late

34 Henry 'Early monasteries'; Thomas, *The early Christian archaeology*; M. Herity, 'Les premiers ermitages at monasteres en Irlande, 400–700' in *Cahiers de Civilisation Mediéval*, 36 (1993), 219–61. **35** White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*, 19–21, 67–80. While this is not an activity normally associated with hermits, it should be noted that Cuthbert, who was known for his asceticism, possessed a fine pectoral cross. Note also the following from Aldred's colophon in the Lindisfarne Gospels: '... and Billfrith, *the anchorite*, forged the ornaments which are on the outside, and adorned it with gold and gems and gilt-silver, pure metal ...' See G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells: the insular gospel books 650–800* (London, 1987), 112. Emphasis added.

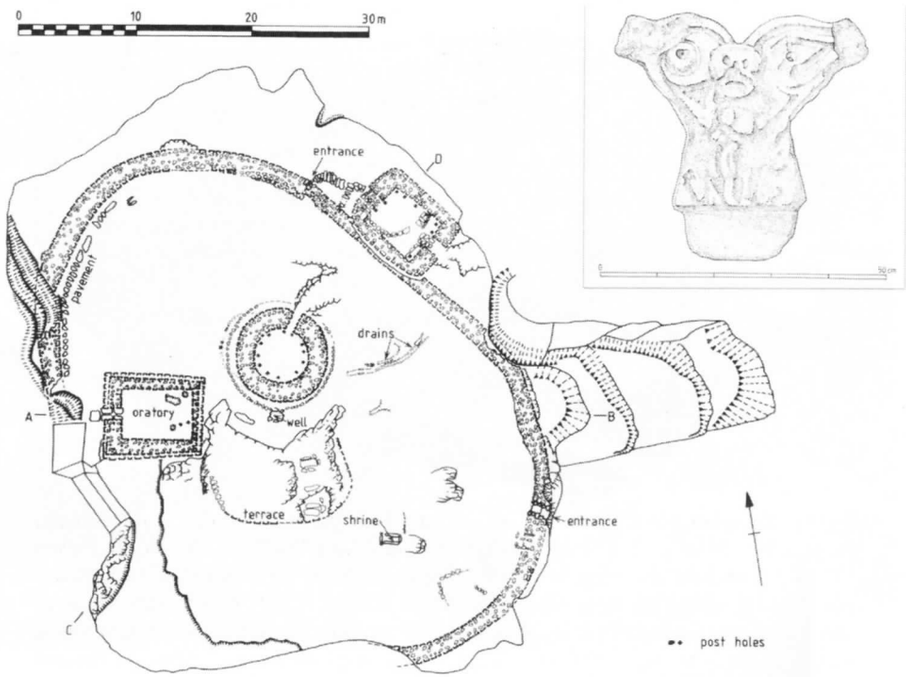


Fig. 4: Church Island, Iveragh, showing successive churches, peripheral corner-post shrine and finial from Phase II church (after O'Sullivan and Sheehan, *The Iveragh peninsula*: figs 151 and 152)

eighth century,[36] the bodies in the special graves were translated into an impressive gable shrine. This was built directly over the original graves on a stone-revetted platform, 9m x 7.6m and 1.5m high, complete with a western entrance-feature and carefully paved upper surface. Five privileged males were later buried *ad sanctos* at its east end. The shrine was by far the most prominent feature on the island, dwarfing the adjacent church and covered with a liberal scattering of conspicuous white quartz pebbles. It says a lot about the priorities of this community that one of the smallest extant churches stands next to this, the largest and most elaborate outdoor shrine known from any Irish site. The AD 1020–35 Hiberno-Norse coin found on the upper surface of the shrine[37] is emblematic of its role as the community's principal means of generating revenue.

Church Island was no more isolated than Illaunloughan. It produced remains of livestock and grain[38] and even today it can easily be reached on foot from

36 White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*, 37. 37 White Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan', 108. 38 O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 130–1.

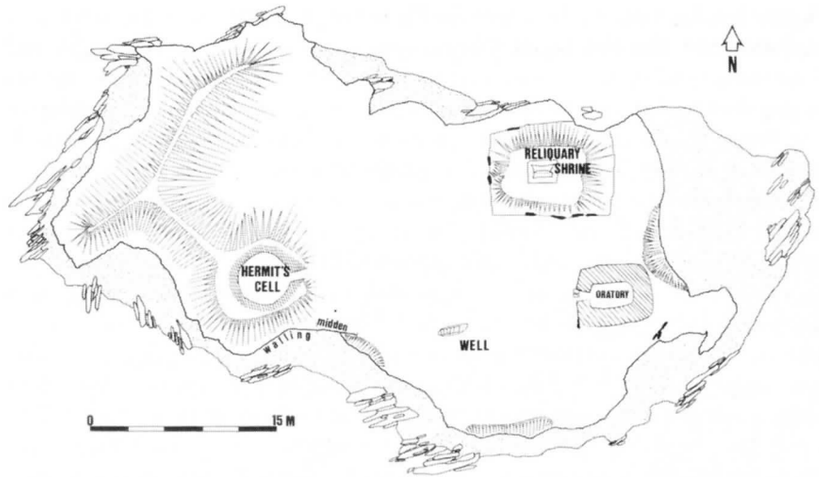


Fig. 5: Pre-excavation plan of Illaunloughan, Iveragh, showing dry-stone church, large gable shrine and severely eroded enclosure (after OPW). The layout shown here is essentially the same as that during the second main phase of occupation identified in the excavation. See White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*, fig. 29. Except for the surviving section of the enclosure, which is seventh-century, the structures shown here were built in the eighth century, and occupation continued into the ninth century.



Pl. 2: Dry-stone church, Loher, Iveragh – one of the smallest extant examples

Beginish at low tide. At about 6m² the Phase I organic church on Church Island was only half the size of its Illaunloughan counterpart and Ó Corráin and Thomas may be correct in interpreting this phase as eremitical.[39] But here too requirements seem to have changed markedly, for the size and workmanship of the Phase II dry-stone church suggests it may have been congregational. It could comfortably have accommodated more than four times as many people as its phase two counterpart on Illaunloughan. Furthermore, unusual care was taken in its design and construction: it is the only dry-stone church built primarily of stone imported from an appreciable distance (*c.*1.5km) away,[40] one of only three with a second window, and one of two known to have been decorated with a butterfly finial (fig. 4).[41] The corner-post shrine to the south-east is on the same orientation as this second church, and may be roughly contemporary with it.[42] The sculpture on some of the Scottish corner-post shrines suggests they are mid-eighth to early ninth century in date.[43] This raises the possibility that on Iveragh corner-post shrines and gable shrines represent roughly contemporary, but alternative ways of enshrining corporeal relics.[44] But the contrast between these two examples is just as marked as between the churches, for the Church Island shrine is a modest, inconspicuous structure built into a hollow in a relatively peripheral part of the site.

39 O'Kelly, 'Church Island'; Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches', 339–40; C. Thomas, 'Cellular meanings, monastic beginnings' in *Emania*, 13 (1995), 51–67: 62. **40** O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 61, 118. **41** Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 158. *Pace* Harbison, 'How old', 55–7, the finial does not support the possibility that this church is twelfth-century. It depicts a man flanked by animal heads of a type found in eighth-century metalwork. See Henry, 'Early monasteries', 152; O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 128. The down-turned mouth and large head of the man are like those of the Athlone plaque Christ, while his apparently sideways-pointing feet recall the St Matthew portrait in the Book of Durrow, folio 21v. The sharp upturn of the arms at the elbow suggests an *orans* position like that in the Arrest of Christ, Book of Kells, folio 114r, and in folio 2v, where Christ reaches out to touch an animal head to either side of him. As Ó Carragáin has shown, these images refer to the Canticle of Habakkuk which states that Christ will make himself known 'in the middle of two animals'. Patristic commentaries gave these animals a range of meanings including the Old and New Testaments and God the Father and the Holy Spirit. It has been argued that the visual representations also had a liturgical resonance for their audience, recalling the assistants who flanked the priest during mass. See É. Ó Carragáin, *'Traditio evangeliorum'* and *'susentatio'*: the relevance of liturgical ceremonies to the Book of Kells' in F. O'Mahony (ed.), *The Book of Kells: proceedings of a conference at Trinity College Dublin, 6–9 September 1992* (Aldershot, 1994), 398–436: 422, 424, 435. We cannot know whether the Church Island sculptor envisaged this reading, but it does seem fitting given the *orans* position of the central figure, and the fact that the finial was positioned above the entrance to the main liturgical space on the island. The finial itself is clearly a skeuomorph of wooden examples that characterised some churches from at least *c.*AD 800 given their depiction in the Book of Kells (Folio 202v) and on high cross capstones. It may, therefore, have been conceived of as a way of signalling the sacredness of the building, for it creates a visual link between this distinctive local building method and the wider Irish architectural tradition. **42** It produced no human remains, due partly to acid soil conditions but mainly to disturbance. O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 89, 115. **43** C. Thomas, 'Sculptured stones and crosses from St Ninian's Isle and Papil' in A. Small, C. Thomas and D. Wilson (eds), *St Ninian's Isle and its treasures* (London, 1973), 8–44; C. Thomas, 'Form and function' in S. Foster (ed.), *The St Andrews sarcophagus: a Pictish masterpiece and its international connections* (Dublin, 1998), 84–96: 94–5. **44** Ó Carragáin, 'A landscape converted'.

It is suggested here that these contrasts are indicative of significant differences in the character of these sites. White Marshall and Walsh make a convincing case that Illaunloughan was monastic.[45] Certainly it appears to have been closer in character to a conventional monastery than most other minor sites in the vicinity including Church Island. Significantly, the Illaunloughan enclosure pre-dated most if not all of the domestic buildings and was therefore 'a primary feature',[46] while that at Church Island was the 'last work of improvement done during the [early medieval] occupation of the island'.[47] Clearly, signalling the sacredness of the site and its symbolic separation from the profane world was not as high a priority in the latter case. Furthermore, osteological analysis suggests that the cemetery on Illaunloughan was exclusively male and therefore, one might argue, monastic.[48] It appears that only one of the Church Island burials was properly examined but, significantly, this turned out to be female.[49] The Illaunloughan churches must have been designed for its resident community, and it is surely no coincidence that three organic circular houses were replaced by a single dry-stone example at the same time that indoor liturgical space on the island was almost halved with the erection of the tiny dry-stone church. In contrast, the contemporary gable shrine was clearly intended to broadcast the sanctity of the island's holy men to the wider world. The Church Island dry-stone church (pl. 1) was capable of accommodating more people than could ever have lived on the island; and other evidence also points to this site having strong secular associations. The slim documentary record suggests that, for a considerable part of the early medieval period, secular power in the region was centred immediately adjacent to Church Island at Ballycarbery.[50] The land here is the richest on the peninsula, and the area features impressive cashels at Leacanabuile, Cahergal and Caher-na-Cath. Church Island itself occurs in Ballycarbery West townland. It must be seen as significant in this regard that the cross-slab from the site features an ogham inscription commemorating one BECCDIN MACI RITTECC of the *Uí Ráthach*, a prominent group whose name is preserved in the barony name, Iveragh.[51] It is clearly an addition to the monument, possibly dating to the

45 White Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan'; White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*. **46** White Marshall and Walsh, 'Illaunloughan', 109. **47** O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 77. **48** White Marshall and Walsh, *Illaunloughan Island*, 84. The Irish laws stipulate that a monk must be buried at 'the church of which he is a *monachus*'. See Etchingham, *Church organisation*, 56, 438–9. A number of British monasteries, including Wearmouth and Ripon, have produced evidence of separate cemeteries for monks and lay people. See R. Cramp, 'Excavations at the Saxon monastic sites of Wearmouth and Jarrow, Co. Durham; an interim report' in *Medieval Archaeology*, 13 (1969), 21–66; R.A. Hall and M. Whyman, 'Settlement and monasticism at Ripon, North Yorkshire, from the seventh to eleventh centuries AD' in *Medieval Archaeology*, 40 (1996), 62–150. In the case of Illaunloughan it seems likely that some of the burials are of secular individuals wishing to be buried *ad sanctos*. **49** See O'Kelly, 'Church Island', 61, 91–3, 117, 132–3. **50** J. O'Donovan, *Leabhar na g-Ceart* (Dublin, 1847), 47; See also T.J. Barrington, *Discovering Kerry: its history, heritage and topography* (Dublin, 1976), 26. **51** M.J. O'Kelly and S. Kavanagh, 'A new ogham stone from County Kerry' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and*

eighth century,[52] and it is tempting to see it as marking the beginning of the second phase in the site's development during which its relationship with the local elite became ever more important.[53] As noted above, this is a development that was paralleled at sites throughout the country at about this time,[54] though only rarely can it be inferred from the material record. It would be overstretching the evidence to conclude that Church Island was run by an ecclesiastical lineage[55] of the *Uí Ráthach* and provided them and their dependants with pastoral care.[56] But it would be equally remiss not to seek reasons for the subtly different strategies pursued by these two ostensibly similar sites.

CONCLUSION

It would appear that differences like those identified in this comparison between Church Island and Illaunloughan are all we can usually expect when distinguishing between sites in terms of function, as distinct from status or regional variation. This is because churches generally followed the same basic 'grammar' when it came to site layout.[57] Even monuments that are often seen as quintessentially monastic may not always signal monasticism in its primary sense. An obvious example is the round tower that was erected at Cashel, probably at its transition from royal to archiepiscopal centre.[58] It might be concluded that there is a disconnect here between this broad morphological homogeneity and the new model of organisation that implies functional variety.

Archaeological Society, 59 (1954), 50–53; D. McManus, *A guide to ogham* (Maynooth, 1991), 70. **52** Henry 'Early monasteries', 159–60; McManus, *A guide*, 80, 172 note 29. **53** This is a relatively rare example of an ogham inscription added to a cross-slab. For a recent discussion of crosses added to ogham stones see G. Longden, 'Iconoclasm belief and memory in early medieval Wales' in H. Williams (ed.), *Archaeologies of remembrance: death and memory in past societies* (Cardiff, 2003), 171–92. **54** Ó Corráin, 'The early Irish churches', 338; Sharpe 'Some problems', 266–9. **55** See Charles-Edwards, '*Érlam*', 289. **56** It is even possible that the Church Island shrine, like its more illustrious Scottish cousin the St Andrews Sarcophagus, was intended for an important secular individual rather than the relics of a founding saint. See Foster (ed.), *The St Andrews sarcophagus*; see also R. Ó Floinn, 'Insignia Columbae I' in C. Bourke (ed.), *Studies in the cult of Saint Columba* (Dublin, 1997), 136–61: 160. One clear instance of this is the translation of King Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair in 1207 as part of a campaign to have him canonised. See Manning, 'Clonmacnoise Cathedral', 78. On secular benefactors being commemorated as saints in Anglo-Saxon England see J. Blair, 'A saint for every minster?' in Thacker and Sharpe (eds), *Local saints and local churches*, 455–94: 459–60. **57** Doherty, 'The monastic town', 45–75: 52–3; A. Hamlin, 'The early Irish Church: problems of identification' in N. Edwards and A. Lane (eds), *The early Church in Wales and the West* (Cardiff, 1992), 138–44: 142–4. This is one of the few primarily archaeological papers which takes full cognisance of the fact that, in most cases, site function cannot be determined simply on the basis of the presence or absence of particular monument types. For a similar observation on church sites in south-west England see Turner, *Christianity and the landscape*, 269, 245–50. **58** Indeed, seen in the European context, it would be peculiar if belfries in Ireland occurred only at strictly monastic sites. See Ó Carragáin, 'Pre-Romanesque churches', 257–64. On the possible secular functions of round towers see T. O'Keeffe, *Medieval Ireland*, 132.

But this depends on how we conceptualise this variety. In fact the documentary sources do complement the archaeology insofar as they are not usually concerned with making clear-cut functional distinctions between sites. To quote Etchingham, 'The extent to which ... [a monastic or specifically clerical element] predominates, even to the exclusion of others, may vary from church to church, but designations of churches are generally undifferentiated and terminology which is arguably of a distinctively 'monastic' kind is, in fact, most unusual.'[59] Clearly, sites that combined a range of functions were much more common than those that were purely monastic or purely pastoral. This is particularly true after the office of coarb became firmly established from *c.*700, the period to which much of our quantifiable archaeology belongs. We must therefore guard against placing these sites in excessively rigid, preconceived categories. The differences between them are usually differences in emphasis; and so the challenge for archaeologists is to distinguish between sites on the basis of nuances like those discussed above.

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59 Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland*, 457.