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# Clerics, Kings and Vikings

Essays on medieval Ireland in Honour of  
DONNCHADA Ó CORRÁIN

Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan  
& John Sheehan

EDITORS



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*Dagfinn Skre*

1. The lines on these maps, for the two periods c.800–850/70 and c.850/70–930, show both the general areas from which the settlers of Kaupang originated and its trading connections.

*James Graham-Campbell*

2. An Irish horse-harness mount from 'Ainsbrook', North Yorkshire (scale 3:2); image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (© MMA).
3. Reverse of the harness mount from 'Ainsbrook', N. Yorks (scale 1:1); image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (© MMA).
4. Enlarged detail of a bird-shaped foreleg and the main animal-head on the 'Ainsbrook' mount; image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (© MMA).

*Raghnall Ó Floinn*

5. The 'Shannon' shrine: front (top) and back (bottom).

*Niamh Whitfield*

6. Silver-gilt fittings from a pair of Anglo-Saxon drinking horns from the Sutton Hoo ship-burial, mounted on plaster of Paris reconstructions of the decayed horns. Note the bird-headed terminals. (By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)
7. Gilt copper-alloy bird-headed terminal from Co. Antrim, probably from a drinking horn, decorated with blue glass, yellow enamel and millefiori. (Courtesy: Ashmolean Museum)

*Con Manning*

8. Old timber building in the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo

*Tomas O Carragain*

9. Cormac's Chapel from the east showing the remnants of the structure that stood between the chapel and the cathedral. This may have been seventeenth century. Note also the pyramidal roof of the north tower and the fact that its uppermost floor lacks windows (photo: Con Brogan, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht).
10. The chamber at the base of the north tower viewed from the doorway at the south showing the now blank niche in the east wall and the window in the north wall (photo: author).
11. The elaborate archway providing access to the north tower. The limestone doorway inserted into the arch is clearly distinguishable from the original sandstone fabric (photo: author).
12. The archway providing access from the upper west chamber to the upper east chamber. The door surround has been removed at some point leaving an irregular aperture on the west side. To the right (south) is one of the pair of niches that flank this archway (photo: author).
13. The east wall of the small chamber over the upper east chamber viewed from the archway illustrated in Plate 12 (photo: author).
14. Interior of the ground floor looking east illustrating the fact that the nave is off-centre (photo: author).

## Abbreviations

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>AClon</i>                   | <i>The annals of Clonmacnoise, being the annals of Ireland from the earliest period to AD1408, translated into English, AD1627, by Conell Mageoghagan</i> , ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin, 1896)                              |
| <i>AConn</i>                   | <i>Annála Connacht: the Annals of Connacht AD1224–1544</i> , ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin, 1944)                                                                                                                        |
| <i>AFM</i>                     | <i>Annála rioghachta Éireann: annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the earliest period to the year 1616</i> , ed. & trans. John O'Donovan (7 vols, Dublin, 1848–51; repr. Dublin 1990)              |
| <i>AI</i>                      | <i>The Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)</i> , ed. & trans. Seán Mac Airt (Dublin, 1951)                                                                                                                         |
| <i>ALC</i>                     | <i>Annals of Loch Cé</i> , ed. W.M. Hennessy (2 vols, RS 54, London, 1871)                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>ALI</i>                     | <i>Ancient laws of Ireland</i> (trans. Eugene O'Curry & John O'Donovan; prepared for press by W.N. Hancock, Thaddeus O'Mahony, Alexander Richey and Robert Atkinson (6 vols, Dublin & London, 1865–1901)                 |
| <i>Anal. Hib.,</i>             | <i>Analecta Hibernica, including the reports of the Irish Manuscripts Commission</i> (Dublin, 1930–)                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Arch. Hib</i>               | <i>Arbivium Hibernicum: or Irish Historical Records</i> (Catholic Record Society of Ireland, Maynooth, 1912–)                                                                                                            |
| <i>ATig</i>                    | 'The Annals of Tigernach' (ed. Whitley Stokes in <i>Revue Celtique</i> , 16 (1895) 374–419; 17 (1896) 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; 18 (1897) 9–59, 150–97, 267–303, repr. Felinfach, 1993, 2 vols)                            |
| <i>ASC</i>                     | <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <i>AU</i>                      | <i>Annála Uladh: Annals of Ulster otherwise Annála Senait, a chronicle of Irish affairs, 431–1131, 1155–1541</i> , ed. & trans. W.M. Hennessy & Bartholomew MacCarthy (4 vols, Dublin, 1887–1901)                        |
| <i>AU</i>                      | <i>The Annals of Ulster (to 1131)</i> , ed. & trans. Seán Mac Airt & Gearóid Mac Niocaill, Dublin, 1983) [all references up to and including 1131 are to this edition unless otherwise stated]                           |
| <i>BB</i>                      | <i>Book of Ballymote</i> facsimile, ed. Robert Atkinson (Dublin, 1887)                                                                                                                                                   |
| Bieler, <i>Patrician texts</i> | <i>The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh</i> , edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by Ludwig Bieler; with a contribution by Fergus Kelly, SLH 10 (Dublin, 1979)                                  |
| <i>BL</i>                      | <i>Book of Leinster formerly Leabar na Núachongbála</i> , ed. R.I. Best, Osborn Bergin, M.A O'Brien & Anne O'Sullivan, 6 vols (Dublin, 1954–83)                                                                          |
| BL MS                          | British Museum Manuscript                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>CAAR</i>                    | <i>Calendar of Archbishop Alen's register c.1172–1534, prepared and edited from the original in the registry of the united dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough and Kildare</i> , ed. Charles McNeill (RSAI, Dublin, 1950) |
| <i>Cal. Carew MSS</i>          | <i>Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts preserved in the Archiepiscopal library at Lambeth</i> , ed. J.S. Brewer and W. Bullen, 6 vols (1867–73).                                                                           |

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CCD                            | <i>Christ Church deeds</i> , ed. M.J. McEnery & Raymond Refaüssé (Dublin, 2001)                                                                                                                                              |
| CCH                            | Collectio canonum hibernensis, <i>Die irische Kanonensammlung</i> , ed. Herrmann Wassersleben (2nd ed., Leipzig, 1885)                                                                                                       |
| CCR                            | <i>Calendar of the charter rolls</i> , 6 vols (London, 1903–27)                                                                                                                                                              |
| CCSG                           | Corpus Christianorum series graeca (Turnhout, 1977–)                                                                                                                                                                         |
| CCSL                           | Corpus Christianorum series latina (Turnhout, 1953–)                                                                                                                                                                         |
| CCCM                           | Corpus Christianorum continuatio medieualis (Turnhout, 1971–)                                                                                                                                                                |
| CDI                            | <i>Calendar of documents relating to Ireland, 1171–1307</i> , ed. H.S. Sweetman, 5 vols (London, 1875–86),                                                                                                                   |
| Census                         | <i>A census of Ireland, circa 1659</i> , ed. S. Pender (Dublin, 1939; repr. 2002)                                                                                                                                            |
| CGG                            | <i>Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill</i> , ed. & trans. J.H. Todd (RS 48, London, 1867)                                                                                                      |
| CGH                            | <i>Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae</i> i, ed. M.A. O'Brien (Dublin, 1962)                                                                                                                                                     |
| CGSH                           | <i>Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae</i> , ed. P. Ó Riain (Dublin, 1985)                                                                                                                                              |
| Charles-Edwards,               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>Early Christian Ireland</i> | Thomas Charles-Edwards, <i>Early Christian Ireland</i> (Cambridge, 2000)                                                                                                                                                     |
| CIH                            | <i>Corpus iuris hibernici</i> , ed. D.A. Binchy, 6 vols (Dublin, 1978)                                                                                                                                                       |
| CIPRJ                          | <i>Calendar of Irish Patent Rolls of James I</i> [Dublin, 1966]                                                                                                                                                              |
| CJRI                           | <i>Calendar of the justiciary rolls of Ireland</i> , eds, James Mills et al., 3 vols (Dublin, 1905–56),                                                                                                                      |
| CMCS                           | <i>Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies</i> (Leamington Spa, 1981–93, 25 issues; continued as <i>Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies</i> , Aberystwyth, 1993–)                                                                     |
| COD                            | <i>Calendar of Ormond deeds</i> , ed. E. Curtis, 6 vols (Dublin, 1932–43)                                                                                                                                                    |
| CPR                            | <i>Calendar of entries in the papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland</i> , 20 vols (London, Dublin, 1893–).                                                                                                   |
| CS                             | <i>Chronicon Scottorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs from the earliest times to AD1135, with a supplement containing the events from AD1141–50</i> , ed. & trans. W.M. Hennessy (RS 46, London, 1866; repr. Wiesbaden, 1964) |
| CSEL                           | Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866–)                                                                                                                                                                 |
| CSMA                           | <i>Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin with the register of its house at Dunbrody and Annals of Ireland</i> , ed. J.T. Gilbert, 2 vols (London, 1884–6)                                                                  |
| CSPI [etc]                     | <i>Calendar of state papers relating to Ireland 1509–73</i> [etc.], 24 vols (London, 1860–1912)                                                                                                                              |
| DIL                            | Royal Irish Academy, <i>Dictionary of the Irish language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials</i> (Dublin, 1913–75, repr. [in compact ed. with continuous pagination] Dublin, 1983)                                |
| HDGP                           | <i>Historical Dictionary of Gaelic Placenames, Foclóir stairiúil áitainmneacha na Gaeilge</i> , ed. P. Ó Riain, D. Ó Murchadha & K. Murray, ITS (London, 2004–)                                                              |
| HE                             | Venerable Bede, <i>Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum</i>                                                                                                                                                                |
| EH                             | <i>Expugnatio Hibernica: the conquest of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis</i> , eds & trans A.B. Scott & F.X. Martin (Dublin, 1978)                                                                                            |
| EHR                            | <i>English Historical Review</i> (London, 1886–)                                                                                                                                                                             |
| FA                             | <i>Fragmentary Annals of Ireland</i> , ed. J.N. Radner (Dublin, 1978)                                                                                                                                                        |
| Fiant, Hen/Ed/Eliz             | <i>The Irish Fiant of the Tudor Sovereigns</i> , 4 vols (Dublin, 1994); Henry VIII, Edward IV, Elizabeth.                                                                                                                    |
| HBS                            | Henry Bradshaw Society for editing rare liturgical texts (London, 1891–)                                                                                                                                                     |
| IHS                            | <i>Irish Historical Studies: the joint journal of the Irish Historical Society and the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies</i> (Dublin, 1938–)                                                                       |

## ABBREVIATIONS

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|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ITS                          | Irish Texts Society (London, 1899–)                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| JCHAS                        | <i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i> (Cork, 1892–)                                                                                                                                              |
| JGAHS                        | <i>Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society</i> (Galway, 1900–)                                                                                                                                          |
| JKAHS                        | <i>Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society</i> (Kerry, 1968–)                                                                                                                                            |
| JRSAI                        | <i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i> (Dublin, 1849–)                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Knights' fees</i>         | <i>Knights' fees in Counties Carlow, Wexford, and Kilkenny</i> , ed. Eric St J. Brooks (Dublin, 1950)                                                                                                                       |
| LC                           | <i>Lebor na Cert: the Book of Rights</i> , ed. Myles Dillon, ITS 46 (London, 1962) [all references are to this edition unless otherwise stated]                                                                             |
| <i>Lec</i>                   | <i>Book of Lecan: Leabhar Mór Leacáin</i> , facsimile, ed. Kathleen Mulchrone (Dublin, 1937)                                                                                                                                |
| LGÉ                          | <i>Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland</i> , ed. R.A.S. Macalister, 5 vols (London, 1938–56)                                                                                                             |
| LL                           | <i>Book of Leinster</i> , facsimile, ed. Robert Atkinson (Dublin, 1880)                                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>Llanthony cartularies</i> | <i>The Irish cartularies of Llanthony Prima and Secunda</i> , ed. Eric St John Brooks (Dublin, 1953)                                                                                                                        |
| LU                           | <i>Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow</i> , ed. R.I. Best & Osborn Bergin (Dublin, 1929)                                                                                                                                  |
| MD                           | <i>The Metrical Dindsenchas</i> , ed. E.J. Gwynn, 5 vols, Todd Lecture Series 7–12 (1906–35; repr. Dublin, 1991)                                                                                                            |
| MIA                          | <i>Miscellaneous Irish annals (AD1114–1437)</i> , ed. Séamus Ó hÍnnse (Dublin, 1947)                                                                                                                                        |
| MGH                          | Monumenta Germaniae Historica                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| MGHAA                        | MGH Auctores Antiquissimi                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| MGH SRG ns                   | MGH Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum nova series                                                                                                                                                                               |
| MGH SRG us                   | MGH Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum                                                                                                                                                                         |
| MGH SRM                      | MGH Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| MGH SS                       | MGH Scriptores (in folio)                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| MGH LL                       | MGH Leges (in folio)                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| MGH LNG                      | MGH Leges Nationum Germanicarum                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| MGH PL                       | MGH Poetae Latini Medii Aevi                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| MIS                          | Medieval and Modern Irish Series, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies                                                                                                                                                     |
| NA                           | The National Archives (UK)                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| NAI                          | The National Archives of Ireland                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| NHI                          | <i>A new history of Ireland</i> , under the auspices of the RIA, ed. T.W. Moody, T.D. Williams, J.C. Beckett, F.X. Martin, F.J. Byrne, W.E. Vaughan, Art Cosgrove, J.R. Hill & Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 9 vols (Oxford, 1976–2005) |
| NMI                          | The National Museum of Ireland                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| NLI                          | The National Library of Ireland                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| OG                           | <i>Onomasticon Goedelicum: locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae</i> , Edmund Hogan (Dublin, 1910; repr. Dublin, 1994)                                                                                                    |
| PBA                          | <i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i> (London, 1904–)                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PHi                          | <i>Pontificia hibernica. Medieval papal chancery documents concerning Ireland, 640–1261</i> , ed. Maurice P. Sheehy, 2 vols (Dublin, 1962–5)                                                                                |
| PRC                          | <i>The pipe roll of Cloyne. Rotulus pipae Clonensis</i> , ed. Paul MacCotter & Kenneth Nicholls (Cloyne, 1996)                                                                                                              |
| PRIA                         | <i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i> (Dublin, 1836/40–)                                                                                                                                                            |
| RBO                          | <i>The Red Book of Ormond</i> , ed. N.B. White (Dublin, 1932)                                                                                                                                                               |
| RC                           | <i>Revue Celtique</i> (51 vols, Paris & London, 1870–1934)                                                                                                                                                                  |

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| RS     | Rolls Series (Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, 1–99, London 1858–97) |
| RSJB   | <i>Register of the hospital of St John the Baptist, Dublin</i> , ed. Eric St John Brooks (Dublin, 1936)           |
| RSTA   | <i>Register of the abbey of St Thomas the Martyr, Dublin</i> , ed. J.T. Gilbert (RS, London, 1889)                |
| SLH    | Scriptores Latini Hiberniae (Dublin, 1955–)                                                                       |
| TBC-I  | <i>Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I</i> , ed. & trans. C. O’Rahilly (Dublin, 1976)                                   |
| TBC-LL | <i>Táin Bó Cúailnge from the book of Leinster</i> , ed. & trans. C. O’Rahilly (Dublin, 1967)                      |
| TRHS   | <i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i> (London, 1872–)                                               |
| ZCP    | <i>Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie</i> (Halle, 1896–1943, 23 vols; Tübingen, 1953–)                          |

## Relics and recluses revisited: some thoughts on Cormac's Chapel, Cashel

TOMÁS Ó CARRAGÁIN

A few years ago I argued that most of the late eleventh- and twelfth-century double-vaulted churches found at important Irish ecclesiastical sites were, among other things, built to house relics and ascetic monks including one or more recluses.<sup>1</sup> Their stone roofs kept the relics safe from fire, while the chamber between the two vaults was for domestic purposes. It was argued that these churches were a local expression of a European trend, for the institution of reclusion becomes more popular, better-defined and more closely regulated as part of the Gregorian reform movement, and architecturally this development is expressed by an increase in evidence for anchorholds throughout Europe from the later eleventh century.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this is the very period when one might expect to find evidence that a church type was developed in Ireland with this institution in mind. The earliest and simplest of the double-vaulted churches is St Columba's House, Kells (c.1080–94), while Cormac's Chapel, Cashel (c.1134) is by far the most sophisticated.<sup>3</sup> In this latter case, the evidence in favour of these twin functions is relatively equivocal but suggestive nonetheless. In this contribution aspects of this evidence are considered in more detail, leading to some revisions of my previous discussion. No other building expresses so eloquently the overlapping interests of church and 'state' in medieval Ireland. This essay is offered as a modest tribute to Donnchadh Ó Corráin who has made an immense contribution to our understanding of both of these spheres.

We know of only two Irish grants of an indulgence to individuals because of their support for an recluse, and in both cases the recluses in question resided at sites with double-vaulted churches, namely St Doulagh's, Co. Dublin and Cashel.<sup>4</sup> The Cashel reference, of 1508, specifies that the recluse resided in a cell adjacent to the cathedral. This might well describe an anchorhold in Cormac's Chapel occupying one of the upper chambers. Before it was dismantled by the OPW in 1991, the small irregular space, delimited at the south by the chancel and north tower of the chapel

<sup>1</sup> T. Ó Carragáin, *Churches in early medieval Ireland: architecture, ritual and memory* (New Haven & London, 2010), pp 254–91. On the idea that the upper vaults of these churches were to keep relics safe from fire see R. Gem 'Saint Flannán's oratory at Killaloe: a Romanesque building of c.1100 and the patronage of King Muirchertach Ua Briain' in D. Bracken & D. Ó Riain-Raedel (eds) *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century: reform and renewal* (Dublin, 2006), pp 74–105 at p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 264–5; on the importance of the institution of reclusion to the Gregorian reform movement see H. Leyser, *Hermits and the new monasticism: a study of religious communities in western Europe, 1000–1150* (London, 1984); T. Licence, *Hermits and recluses in English society, 950–1200* (Oxford, 2011). While the latter source highlights the ephemeral character of anchorholds at some local parish churches in England, there is evidence for substantial stone structures at more important sites comparable in status to most of the Irish sites that feature double-vaulted churches. <sup>3</sup> On the date of St Columba's see Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 282–5. On the date of Cormac's Chapel see R. Stalley, 'Design and function: the construction and decoration of Cormac's Chapel at Cashel' in Bracken & Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 162–75 at pp 164–6. <sup>4</sup> C. Ó Clabaigh, 'Hermits and anchorites in late medieval Ireland' in Liz Herbert McAvoy (ed.), *Anchoritic traditions of medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp 153–77 at p. 164.

and at the north by the south wall of the cathedral, was occupied by a multi-storey structure. I previously argued that this was a late medieval extension of the putative anchorhold within the chapel, for it could be accessed from the chapel's north tower and at first floor level it incorporated a window inserted into the south wall of the cathedral that allowed those within to see the cathedral's high altar. Squints like this are a common feature of anchorholds throughout Europe. Closer inspection of the small amount of surviving fabric and of photographs pre-dating its demolition, however, shows that, while some pieces of medieval carved stone were reused in it, this structure was probably post medieval in date. Furthermore, its construction involved the insertion of a door at ground level in the east wall of the north tower of Cormac's Chapel (now entirely removed by the OPW). This effectively deconsecrated the small space at the bottom of the north tower, the original function of which we shall consider presently. Roger Stalley may well be correct to suggest the demolished building was one of the structures which, according to the late seventeenth-century chapter minutes, abutted the cathedral.<sup>5</sup> This does not, however, diminish the possibility that Cormac's Chapel itself had in earlier centuries housed recluses, including the one mentioned in 1508.

I also suggested that one or more of the wooden floors of the north tower of the chapel formed part of the anchorhold. Throughout Europe anchorholds are commonly found in church towers and, for symbolic reasons, they have a marked tendency to occur at the north side of churches. In the Irish context, the cell attached to the north wall of the chancel of the double-vaulted church of St Kevin's House, Glendalough, may well have been a supplementary anchorhold.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Cashel, however, the evidence is not so compelling. The unusually large and elaborate original archway providing access from the nave to the tiny space at the bottom of the north tower suggests that this chamber must have had a special function, though its interior is appropriately plain. There is a deep niche in the east wall into which the seventeenth-century (?) door was inserted (above). Following OPW restoration, this niche is now blank, but it may well have been pierced by a small east window like those that occupy similar niches in the east wall of the chamber above the nave (below). If so, its position suggests that it illuminated an altar. The niche has a flat (but rebuilt) base some distance from the original floor level that could have functioned as an altar. Some recluses were priests so one sometimes finds altars in *reclusoria*, especially where, as here, it was not possible for the recluse to participate fully in the mass because the main altar was not visible from inside their cell. In England and on the Continent, some anchorholds attached to churches at ground level had a small window opening to the exterior for food and other necessities, and to facilitate communication with the outside world.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding their voluntary enclosure, medieval

<sup>5</sup> Roger Stalley pers. comm. St John Seymour, archdeacon of Cashel and Emly, published an article on the chapter minutes, incorporating some direct quotes, before they were destroyed when the Public Record Office was set on fire in 1922: J. Seymour, 'The chapter-books of Cashel Cathedral', *JRSAI*, 40 (1910), 329–39. In 1698, according to Seymour (p. 338), 'workmen engaged on the cathedral were to put up the doors from the body of the church to Cormac's Chapel'. This may well refer to the demolished structure. In the same year directions were given to re-roof what Seymour (p. 331) describes as 'the passage leading from the choir to the chapter house'. It is possible that this is another reference to the demolished structure, but Seymour dismissed this because an entry of 1661 (which he did not quote directly) apparently indicated that the chapter house and the chapel were 'quite distinct and separate' (p. 331). He suggests instead that the chapter house was accessed via the blocked up door in the *north* wall of the choir. This is, perhaps, the most likely arrangement for as we shall see there are indications that there was a building in this area. While it is possible that the upper chamber of Cormac's Chapel was originally used as a chapter house by the Benedictine community, it seems likely that a separate one was built for the community of secular canons that was established at Cashel by the thirteenth century (below at note 17). <sup>6</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 271–3. <sup>7</sup> R. Clay, *The hermits and anchorites of England* (London, 1914), pp 134, 136; A.K. Warren,

anchorites were not expected to live in utter silence and separation. Sometimes two or three recluses lived at close quarters to one another and they usually had one or more servants to prepare their food. It was also common for people to seek out anchorites for advice on spiritual or even temporal matters and to ask for prayers, blessings and cures.<sup>8</sup> Usually such interactions were restricted to particular days and particular hours in the day. In this case, there is a small window in the north wall of the tower, just below the putlog holes for the timbers of the first floor (Plate 10). However, given that the ground floor probably functioned as a chapel, it seems unlikely that this window was used for food, and it also seems too high to have been for communication. Instead, whether they resided in the north tower or elsewhere in the chapel (below), the food for our putative recluse may have been delivered via the south tower staircase.

If the north tower formed part of the anchorhold, communication could have been facilitated within the nave of the chapel, perhaps through an opening with retractable cover in the door. But what is our evidence for this doorway? In the late medieval period, a new door surround (of limestone rather than sandstone) was inserted into the archway.<sup>9</sup> The late medieval door has since been replaced by a modern gate, but the position of the original blocked up boltholes indicate that it must have hung at the 'outside' of the portal and opened into the nave. If this replaced a twelfth-century doorway it probably had a tympanum like the three original doorways that survive on the ground floor. One has to wonder, however, why it was necessary to insert a new doorway in the late medieval period if there was a fine twelfth-century one in place already. In the absence of a clear motivation for replacing one doorway with another, the balance of probability tips towards the idea that the portal was originally a door-less archway providing access to a side chapel. If so, this space could not have served as part of our putative anchorhold, and it becomes less likely that the first and second floors of the north tower did either. While the surviving fabric precludes a definitive judgment on this, I am now inclined to doubt my previous suggestion.<sup>10</sup>

This leaves us with two questions: is there another space within the chapel that might have served as an anchorhold; and what special function did the space at the base of the north tower have to justify such an elaborate archway? Looking at these in turn, unlike its counterparts in the other double-vaulted churches, the chamber above the nave seems somewhat large for an anchorhold. The high quality stonework in parts of this chamber and the fine spiral staircase (the earliest in Ireland) that provided access to it indicates that it must have had an important function. One idea is that it was a royal council chamber, while another, perhaps more likely, suggestion is that it was used by a small community of Benedictine monks based at Cashel. This community may have been affiliated with, and founded from, either one of the German Schottenkloster, such as that at Regensburg, or an English Benedictine community such as that at Winchester where Máel Ísu Ua hAinmire (†1135), bishop of Waterford and archbishop of Cashel (c.1111), had been trained.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, at Regensburg there was a strong tradition of Irish recluses supported by

*Anchorites and their patrons in medieval England* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 31. <sup>8</sup> Clay, *Hermits*, pp 128–40, 146–66; Warren, *Anchorites*, pp 97–8; Licence, *Hermits*, pp 105–10, 150–72. <sup>9</sup> The punch dressing of the stones and the pyramidal chamfer stop at the base of the west jamb suggests a late medieval (rather than a post medieval) date for this doorway. I am grateful to Roger Stalley for discussion about its date. <sup>10</sup> It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the late medieval doorway was inserted in order to allow this space to form part of a reorganized anchorhold, but it is equally possible that it was being converted into a sacristy. <sup>11</sup> On the possibility that it served as a council chamber see Stalley, 'Design and function' at p. 168. For the most comprehensive discussions of the suggestive but inconclusive evidence that there was a community of German Benedictines at Cashel see D. Ó Riain-Radel, 'Cashel and Germany: the documentary evidence' in Bracken &

cenobites, while recluses were also maintained by English Benedictine communities such as that which served as the cathedral chapter at Durham.<sup>12</sup> Stalley states that 'the lack of garderobes and original fireplaces implies that it was not intended for domestic occupation,' but we should hesitate before dismissing this possibility considering that we have no stone domestic buildings with garderobes or chimneys from Ireland at this time.<sup>13</sup> While Benedictines on the Continent are associated with grander accommodation, some of their counterparts in Ireland were apparently happy to make do with more modest buildings. The best-documented candidate for a daughter house of one of the Schottenkloster in Ireland is St Mary's Priory in Rosscarbery, which seems to have been established in the 1140s.<sup>14</sup> The surviving masonry of the church is consistent with a twelfth-century date, but it is notable that this appears to have been an unassuming building even by Irish standards.<sup>15</sup> In any case, we need not envisage that the monastic community at Cashel was confined to the chapel itself. At Armagh, Kells and Glendalough churches housing recluses appear to have been focal buildings of small ascetic complexes that may also have incorporated freestanding domestic buildings, not necessarily built of stone.<sup>16</sup> If there was a similar arrangement at Cashel, the chamber over the nave could have been reserved for relatively solemn functions. One possibility is that it was a chapter house for the Benedictine community which, following the practice at centres such as Winchester, may for some decades have served as the cathedral's chapter.<sup>17</sup> The monastic (as well as royal) character of the church is expressed in a tract, apparently compiled during the reign of Cormac Mac Carthaig: in one version the king is inaugurated in Cormac's Chapel, but in another the building is called the 'church of monks' (*a teampall manach*).<sup>18</sup>

A more likely candidate for an anchorhold is the small, though high-vaulted, chamber over the chancel. It is accessed via a plain opening at the centre of the wall separating it from the larger chamber. The cut stones surrounding the western side of this opening were removed at some

Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 176–217; and D. Ó Riain-Radel, 'Irish Benedictine monasteries on the Continent' in M. Browne & C. Ó Clabaigh (eds), *The Irish Benedictines: a history* (Dublin 2005), pp 25–63 at pp 59–61. On the idea that the Benedictine community at Cashel had English rather than German origins see E. Bhreathnach 'Benedictine influence in Ireland in the late eleventh and early twelfth century: a reflection', *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies*, 1 (2012), 63–91. <sup>12</sup> P. Breatnach, *Die Regensburger Schottenlegende: Libellus de fundatione ecclesie Consecrati Petri* (Munich, 1977), 207, 215, 220; P. Breatnach, 'The origins of the Irish monastic tradition at Ratisbon, Regensburg', *Celtica*, 13 (1980), 58–77 at p. 67; R. Clay, *The hermits and anchorites of England* (London, 1914), p. 80. <sup>13</sup> Stalley, 'Design and function', p. 168. <sup>14</sup> D. Ó Riain, 'New light on the history of St Mary's Priory, Rosscarbery', *JCHAS*, 113 (2008), 56–68. As Harbison has emphasized, medieval Irish Benedictine houses did not cultivate a unified approach to architecture; the small group of extant Benedictine buildings is notable for its diversity. P. Harbison, 'Early Irish monastic arts and the architecture of the Benedictines in Ireland' in Browne & Ó Clabaigh (eds), *The Irish Benedictines: a history*, pp 63–77 at p. 76. <sup>15</sup> In places its masonry comprises large roughly coursed blocks which are quite well fitted, though a significant number of spalls are also evident. One rarely finds these characteristics in late medieval churches in this area, which tend to be characterized by random rubble masonry with an even greater number of spalls. At the same time, the fitting of blocks is not as careful as one finds in some (but by no means all) pre-Romanesque churches. The masonry is similar, for example, to that of the twelfth-century phase of Molana Abbey on the Cork-Waterford border. <sup>16</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 266–7 (and notes), p. 270. <sup>17</sup> For the idea that the Benedictine community served as the cathedral's chapter see E. Bhreathnach 'Benedictine influence in Ireland in the late eleventh and early twelfth century: a reflection' *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies*, 1 (2012), 63–91. If this is correct, this role was transferred to a community of secular canons by the thirteenth century. In 1230, a charter of archbishop Marianus Ua Briain was confirmed in a *domo capitulari*, perhaps a separate chapter house built for this latter community. For this reference see R. Stalley 'Architecture and meaning: the Gothic cathedral at Cashel' in R. Stalley (ed.), *Reconstructions of the Gothic Past* (Bray, forthcoming). See also Note 5 above. <sup>18</sup> Quoted in E. Bhreathnach 'Tara and Cashel: manifestations of the centre of the cosmos in the north and the south' (Toronto, forthcoming).

point.<sup>19</sup> As a result, we cannot say for certain that a door separated the two chambers, but this seems likely; indeed these stones may well have been removed (in the post medieval period?) in order to break the division between the chambers. The floor level of the east chamber is a good deal lower than that of the west chamber, so there is a flight of six steps leading down from this doorway. An offset and beam-holes show that the original wooden floor was a good deal higher than the modern gravel floor. The chamber is lit by a pair of oculi at quite a low level and a round-headed window high in the gable. Notwithstanding their easterly position, the form and arrangement of these windows does not suggest a liturgical function for this space, and there is no evidence in the masonry that an altar stood below the oculi. A wooden altar which was freestanding or attached to the wooden floor would leave no trace, and it should be remembered that the altar in the ground floor altar niche is illuminated by a pair of side windows (of round-headed rather than circular form) rather than the more typical single east window. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that this chamber was as a chapel, though we should not rule out the possibility of occasional liturgical use. There is an offset in the east gable immediately below the level of the upper window, and the impression of a plank in the plaster of the north wall at this level; these features are clearly a by-product of the construction of the vault and this chamber did not have an upper wooden floor.<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, a stronger case could be made that the western chamber incorporated two small altars, though not chapels as such. To either side of the opening in its east wall discussed above are deep round-arched niches, each pierced by a small round-headed window (Plate 12). When the original wooden floor was in place, their flat bases would have been the right height to have served as small altars, though they are currently quite uneven. If these are 'altar niches' they were probably for private masses by individual priests, and I am not wedded to this interpretation of them.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, given the opening at the centre of its east wall and the small size of these possible altars, it is unlikely that the chamber as a whole served as a congregational liturgical space.

Thus, while doubt has been cast over the idea that the north tower formed part of it, there is still some mileage in the theory that Cormac's Chapel incorporated an anchorhold. Another, complementary, theory is that it had a reliquary function. It may have housed the famous Psalter of Cashel, as I have previously argued,<sup>22</sup> and perhaps also some of the other relics that Cashel must

<sup>19</sup> They were removed in antiquity rather than as part of the OPW restoration on the chapel (Aighleann O'Saughnessy pers comm.). They are clearly missing (though in some cases 'restored' with dashed lines) in the OPW drawing reproduced in C. Manning, *Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary* (Dublin, 2000), p. 17. <sup>20</sup> The same goes for similar offsets (at different levels) in the gables of the larger west chamber, though in this case a series of limestone corbels attest to the insertion of a wooden floor just below the level of the offset in the western gable. Like the fireplace inserted into the west wall and the two windows inserted into the south wall, these corbels must be either contemporary with or later than the removal of the original wooden floor. This was at a significantly higher level than the present gravel floor, and the corbels would have been too low for the lower space to function if this floor was still in place. <sup>21</sup> As Roger Stalley has pointed out to me, the niches resemble *arcosolia*, arched burial niches whose flat bases often functioned as memorial altars. While *arcosolia* are most commonly associated with early catacombs, they have a long subsequent history extending to the Romanesque period and beyond. See for example W. Levin, 'The canopy of holiness at the misericordia in Florence and its sources', *Southeastern College Art Conference Review*, 15.3 (2008), 309–25 at p. 316. Indeed, the larger niche at the exterior of the north wall of Cormac's Chapel, generally agreed to be the tomb of Cormac McCarthy (e.g. Stalley, 'Design and function', p. 167), takes the form of an *arcosolium*. As Stalley comments, 'that can hardly have been the function' of the pair of niches in the upper chamber. After all they are too small to have been for a complete body and this chamber is an unlikely location for inhumations. The similarity is nevertheless worth mentioning in light of the possibility that housing relics was one of the functions of the chapel (below). Most *arcosolia* were for holy and/or high status individuals. <sup>22</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, p. 289.

have possessed. When Cashel was granted to the Church in 1101, it was 'as an offering to St Patrick and the Lord' (CS); but if, as one might expect, it was given Patrician relics we have no information about them.<sup>23</sup> Though they do not appear to be mentioned in twelfth-century documentary sources, it seems likely that Cashel also acquired universal relics. We know that Tuam and Dublin, the two other newly established archiepiscopal centres, had universal relics including fragments of the true cross, and were commissioning magnificent reliquaries for them around this time (further below).<sup>24</sup> Armagh, of course, already had important universal relics, including relics of Peter and Paul and the *Bachal Ísu* (Staff of Christ). Of the four sites, Cashel had the greatest challenge when it came to establishing its archiepiscopal, and for that matter its ecclesiastical, credentials. Not far from Cashel, and closely associated with it, is the Cistercian abbey of Holy Cross, which was founded c.1180 by Domnall Ua Briain, king of Thomond, probably on the site of an earlier establishment, *Cell Uactairlamudni*. Flanagan has suggested that its titular relic had been acquired in order to emulate 'the prestige that the Ua Conchobair kings derived from their association with the portion of the True Cross enshrined in the Cross of Cong [in 1123]'.<sup>25</sup> Originally, however, the principal purpose of this latter relic was to bolster the position of Tuam within the emerging episcopal hierarchy. At some unknown date it was moved from Tuam to Cong, raising the possibility that the Holy Cross relic followed a similar path from archiepiscopal centre to monastery. As Griffin Murray has pointed out to me, this possibility is supported by the fact that there is a small cross-decorated plaque from Holy Cross, which may have formed the back of a true cross reliquary of Byzantine type known as a Staurothek. He has shown that it is the work of high-king Toirdelbach Ua Conchobair's (c.1120–56) chief craftsman, Máel Ísu mac Bratáin Uí Echach, who also produced the Cross of Cong and the large reliquary discussed below that may have housed Dublin's principal relics.<sup>26</sup> The possibility that it was made for Cashel is supported by the fact that another item probably by the same craftsman – a decorated stick pin – was found in the space between Cormac's Chapel and the Gothic cathedral.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the handle of a decorated bell from the first half of the twelfth century was found in one of the upper chambers of Cormac's Chapel.<sup>28</sup>

One might assume that Cashel's relics were kept in its cathedral church, which had probably been built around 1101 and was sited under the east end of the present cathedral. In France and

<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested that one of the relics incorporated into the drop of the Lismore crosier (pre-1113) was part of the *Bachal Ísu*; and it is worth noting that oaths had been sworn on the *Bachal Ísu* at both Cashel and Lismore in 1093 (*AI*). R. Ó Floinn, 'Bishops, liturgy and reform: some archaeological and art historical evidence' in Bracken & Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 218–38 at pp 219–20. We might speculate that in 1101, or later in the twelfth century, Cashel was also granted a portion of this relic, which had the distinction of being both Patrician and universal. It should, however, be noted that at least one of the relics in the Lismore crosier is a post medieval insertion. G. Murray, 'The Cross of Cong and church metalwork from Romanesque Ireland', 3 vols, unpublished PhD thesis, University College Cork, 2007, iii, Catalogue No. C4. <sup>24</sup> On the Cross of Cong, the shrine made in 1123 to house Tuam's relic of the true cross, see G. Murray, *The Cross of Cong* (forthcoming). <sup>25</sup> M.T. Flanagan, *The transformation of the Irish church in the twelfth century* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 224, also pp 132–3. <sup>26</sup> Murray, 'The Cross of Cong', i, p. 325; Murray, *The Cross of Cong* (forthcoming). <sup>27</sup> On this piece see Murray, 'The Cross of Cong', vol. 1, pp 221, 325; Murray, *The Cross of Cong* (forthcoming). <sup>28</sup> J. Sheehan, 'A bronze bell-crest from the Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 30 (1988), 3–13. This artefact was found *ex situ* in a heap of material removed from the floors of the upper chambers. Some of this material had been introduced in the nineteenth century to raise the floor levels. While the bell handle could have been brought into the chapel at that time, it could equally have been there already, incorporated by accident, or even deliberately buried, in the later medieval floor surface that must either have accumulated over time, or else have been deliberately laid, within the chambers after the original wooden floors were removed.

England there is a centripetal trend in the placement of relics from the late eleventh century: relics that had previously been dispersed at altars in different parts of the church were being grouped together in an elaborate chevet.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, considering its close links with Canterbury, it seems likely that Dublin's most important relics were kept at the east end of Christ Church Cathedral. At other important Irish sites, however, it was decided to perpetuate the age-old Irish separation between the principal liturgical space and the principal reliquary focus, usually by maintaining or rebuilding shrine chapels. For example, at Tuam there was a reliquary chapel called Temple-na-Scrín.<sup>30</sup> I have suggested that Cormac Mac Carthaig may have wished to associate Cormac's Chapel with his ancestor, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, the ninth-century king-bishop who is listed as a saint in the mid-twelfth-century *Martyrology of Gorman* and who reputedly composed the Psalter of Cashel.<sup>31</sup> The chapel was built over an early medieval wooden church and cemetery and Edel Bhreathnach has highlighted documentary evidence suggesting that the latter incorporated a royal grave plot or tomb.<sup>32</sup> It would, however, be stretching the evidence to suggest that the chapel was believed to mark the grave of Cormac mac Cuilennáin, for no documentary source tells us where this was; it could just as easily have been at Emly as at Cashel. The theory that the chapel had a reliquary function does not, however, necessitate such an argument. Some shrine chapels, such as Temple Ciarán, Clonmacnoise, had probably been constructed over the grave of the site's founder, but some of the early Romanesque examples were not. For example, though it probably housed his relics, St Columba's House, Kells, a double-vaulted church, was obviously not built over Columba's grave, for this was on Iona. Similarly, though it seems to have been conceived as a shrine chapel, there is some doubt that St Kevin's House was on the site of the saint's grave.<sup>33</sup> In any case the division between principal liturgical space and reliquary focus was not confined to sites that possessed the grave and corporeal relics of their saint. Armagh lacked the bones of Patrick and therefore had no shrine chapel dedicated to him; but it appears that from 1126 its relics of Peter and Paul were kept some distance from the cathedral in a new complex called Reicléis Petair agus Póil which, given its name (from *reclusum*), must have been operated by ascetics.<sup>34</sup> An annalistic reference raises the possibility that prior to 1126 these relics were housed, at least on occasion, in the cathedral (*damliac mór*) which, like that at Cashel, was dedicated to St Patrick (*AU* 1033; see further below).<sup>35</sup> Perhaps in a similar way some of the relics acquired by Cashel c.1101–34 were transferred from the cathedral to Cormac's Chapel. Even before this, Cashel had been laid out according to this traditional centrifugal principal with a round tower and high cross separate from the cathedral.

Let me take this opportunity to comment briefly on the layout of the complex as a whole. In Fig. 283 of my 2010 book, the south-west corner of the 1101 cathedral is shown as a dashed line.<sup>36</sup> This is an estimation based on Brian Hodkinson's preliminary un-illustrated report on his excavations in and around Cormac's Chapel.<sup>37</sup> According to this the 1101 cathedral was 'on a slightly different alignment from the overlying wall' of the Gothic cathedral and it 'projects 0.4–0.5m out from the overlying wall.' The Phase 3/4 burials associated with, and therefore aligned on, this build-

<sup>29</sup> A. Erlande-Brandenburg, 'L'autel des reliques, et la sanctuarisation du chevet', *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 11 (2005), 183–8 at 183. <sup>30</sup> G. Murray, 'The Cross of Cong', i, pp 317–18; Murray *The Cross of Cong* (forthcoming). <sup>31</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, p. 289. <sup>32</sup> E. Bhreathnach 'Tara and Cashel: manifestations of the centre of the cosmos in the north and the south' (Toronto, forthcoming). <sup>33</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, p. 274. <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 220–1. <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 65, 220. <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286. <sup>37</sup> This report is available at <http://homepage.eircom.net/~dunamase/Dunamase.html>. A summary report with some illustrations was published in 1994: B. Hodkinson, 'Excavations at Cormac's Chapel, Cashel, 1992 and 1993: a preliminary report', *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 7 (1994), 167–74.

ing were 'east-north-east west-north-west [...] and were] more or less parallel with the chancel of Cormac's Chapel.' This burial alignment is confirmed by unpublished plans of the excavations seen by the author. The plans, however, seem to suggest that the foundations of the 1101 cathedral are on an intermediary alignment between that of the cathedral and the chapel. It is hard to know how to interpret this slight disparity. A 2m long stretch of foundations does not provide a good basis on which to estimate the alignment of a building, given that foundations are not laid out as exactly as the walls they support. Cumulatively, the alignment of the Phase 3/4 burials associated with the building should probably carry more weight in this regard. Thus, the original cathedral appears to have diverged somewhat from the true east-west of the Gothic cathedral, though my approximate 2010 depiction probably exaggerates this a little. It would not be surprising if Cormac's Chapel was on a broadly similar alignment to the 1101 cathedral; indeed, given their proximity and similar date a major discrepancy in their alignments would require explanation. In general, in early medieval Ireland later churches tend to be more exactly aligned east-west than their predecessors, though it is possible that some preserved another alignment for symbolic purposes.<sup>38</sup> If we accept that the two buildings were on a broadly similar alignment this has implications for our understanding of the layout of the site as a whole. It suggests that the round tower was north of the cathedral rather than north-west of it, though its doorway could still have been aligned on that of the cathedral as Stalley and Tadhg O'Keeffe suggested.<sup>39</sup> Stalley's suggestion that the high cross was originally positioned so that it was aligned with both the door of the cathedral and the north door of Cormac's Chapel also remains a possibility.<sup>40</sup> Instead of being on the axis of the Gothic cathedral, however, the high cross would have stood south of this axis near what would later be the junction of the Gothic cathedral's choir and south transept. In previous accounts that assumed an east-west oriented cathedral, a picture was painted of a large open area centred on the cathedral and high cross with the chapel on one side and the round tower on the other. This view needs to be modified somewhat if we accept that the original cathedral was closer in alignment to the chapel. On the one hand the round tower is now a bit marginalized (though no more so than at sites such as Kilmacduagh), while on the other hand the area delimited by the chapel and the cathedral is more cramped. The north tower of the chapel may have impinged a little on the space in front of the cathedral and may have detracted from the impact of its façade. It should of course be remembered that other buildings and monuments (such as the second high cross from the site) may have formed part of this scheme. There might, for example, have been a building between the cathedral and the round tower.<sup>41</sup> As Stalley has pointed out, this is supported by the absence of windows in the eastern portion of the north wall of the thirteenth-century cathedral choir.<sup>42</sup>

Returning to Cormac's Chapel, an alternative interpretation of the space at the bottom of the north tower is that it sometimes housed relics.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps, as Leask suggested, one or more of the

<sup>38</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 68–9, 111. <sup>39</sup> R. Stalley, 'The original site of St Patrick's Cross, Cashel' *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 27 (1985), 8–10; O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*, pp 136–7. <sup>40</sup> Stalley, 'The original site', 8–10. <sup>41</sup> Part of what appears to be the base of a small ninth-century 'high' cross was found in 1991 in the wall of the structure between the chapel and cathedral (above). This may still have been standing in the twelfth century but we have no idea where. P. Harbison, 'A high cross base from the Rock of Cashel and a historical reconsideration of the "Ahenny group" of crosses', *PRIA*, 93C (1993), 1–20. <sup>42</sup> R. Stalley, 'Architecture and meaning: the Gothic cathedral at Cashel' in R. Stalley (ed.), *Reconstructions of the Gothic Past* (Bray, forthcoming). <sup>43</sup> In England, there is documentary evidence that relics, including for example relics of the true cross, were kept in *reclusoria*. Clay, *Hermits*, pp 112–13; Warren, *Anchorites*, pp 111–12.

upper floors of the tower acted as a treasury, in which case relics may occasionally have been displayed on the ground floor altar.<sup>44</sup> This possibility is supported by Cormac Bourke's research. He draws attention to a number of Irish sources in which the term *pyramis*, literally 'pyramid,' is used to denote a saint's reliquary shrine. In at least one case the shrine is clearly outdoors and this could be a reference to something like the tent-shaped shrines found at sites such as Illaunloughan, Co. Kerry. As Bourke points out, the only true stone pyramid from medieval Ireland is that forming the roof of the north tower of Cormac's Chapel. He suggests that 'if the [reliquary] connotations of the word *pyramis* are acknowledged, and were appreciated by the architects of Cormac's Chapel, it may be that a major function of the north tower as a repository for relics was signalled by its roof.'<sup>45</sup> Given the likelihood that earlier double-vaulted churches at Kells, Glendalough and Killaloe had a reliquary function, this may already have been clear to well-travelled individuals from the overall form of the building, but the pyramid may well have underscored the point.<sup>46</sup> I am less inclined than O'Keeffe to believe that housing relics was one of the main functions of Ireland's freestanding round towers; where they occur shrine chapels were more important in this regard.<sup>47</sup> This particular tower is different, however, not only because of its pyramidal roof and the fact that it is attached to a reliquary building type, but also because, unlike the south tower of the chapel and the free-standing round towers, it lacks windows in its uppermost floor and so was clearly not a belfry.

Another possibility is that some relics were displayed at certain times, or even kept on a semi-permanent basis, in the niche for the high altar. While there is a notable absence of evidence that Irish altars were consecrated with relics in the early medieval period, there is some evidence that relics were occasionally displayed on the altars of large congregational churches: in 1033, blood dripped from the shrine of Peter and Paul on Patrick's altar at Armagh (*AU*), most likely a reference to the high (and only?) altar of the main congregational church at the site (the *damliac mór*).<sup>48</sup> Within reliquary churches, altars were an obvious place to display both translated remains and associative relics, though it seems that these altars were not generally built directly over the reputed graves of the saints.<sup>49</sup> The twelfth-century Latin Life of St Flannan states that the shrine containing his corporeal relics was placed 'upon the altar,' a likely reference to the altar of the double vaulted church of St Flannan's, Killaloe, which may well be the saint's shrine chapel.<sup>50</sup> We know that the high altar of Cormac's Chapel was of a stone four-prop table altar because the bases of three of the props are extant. The other surviving Romanesque altars from Ireland were of masonry or had stone frontals. While wooden table altars may have been common, excavation and documentary evidence suggests that at least some of these were of the single-prop variety.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the unusual four-prop arrangement was chosen at Cashel because it allowed one or more large reliquaries to be displayed under the altar. The sixteen foundation relics of Dublin were apparently stored in a single casket (*capsa*) which, during the episcopacy of Gréne (1121–61), was placed within what must have been quite a large shrine (*scrinio*).<sup>52</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn has suggested that this

44 H. Leask, *Irish churches and monastic buildings, volume 1* (Dundalk, 1955), p. 116. 45 C. Bourke, 'Muirchú, archaeology and the cult of relics' (forthcoming). 46 The point may have been emphasized further if the south tower also had a pyramidal roof. The uppermost courses of this appear to have been rebuilt at some point. 47 T. O'Keeffe, *Ireland's round towers* (Stroud, 2004), p. 94. 48 See Ó Carragáin *Churches*, pp 190–1; for a discussion of the association between shrines and altars in Romanesque Ireland see also G. Murray, 'Altars in Ireland, 1050–1200: a survey', *Journal of Irish Archaeology*, 19 (2010), 71–82 at 79–80. 49 Ó Carragáin *Churches*, p. 191. 50 W. Heist (ed.), *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae: Ex Codice Olim Salmanticensi Nunc Bruxellensi* (Brussels, 1965), p. 300. 51 The only early medieval Irish reference that I am aware of to a four-prop altar is in the *Vita Prima* of St Brigit. For discussion see Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, p. 189. 52 R. Ó Floinn,

enshrinement took place on the centenary of the founding of the see of Dublin, which would make it contemporary with the construction of Cormac's Chapel (c.1128–36). Murray has pointed out that two early twelfth-century metal figures – one of them from Thomas Street, Dublin – are very similar to, though larger than, those attached to the Lemanaghan shrine, and he concludes that they must have come from a larger shrine, quite possibly that commissioned by Gréne.<sup>53</sup> One can well imagine a similar shrine occupying the space under the altar of Cormac's Chapel. This possibility is supported by the fact that this is the only surviving Irish Romanesque altar that is raised up from the ground on quite a high and carefully built plinth, and the only one apart from Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry, which is accommodated in its own altar niche. This niche is a prominent feature of the exterior of the building, where it is given its own diminutive gable. Thus, the importance of the altar, and perhaps the relics stored on or below it, was emphasized even to those standing outside the church. Considering that the Lemanaghan shrine is clearly modelled on the Ark of the Covenant, it may be significant that the nave, chancel and altar niche of Cormac's Chapel echo the threefold hierarchy of sanctity evident in descriptions of Solomon's Temple.<sup>54</sup>

No paper on Cormac's Chapel would be complete without a consideration of its most perplexing feature: the fact that the axis of the nave is a good deal north of that of the chancel. At the south, the outermost order of the chancel arch lines up with the inner face of the wall of the nave and with the eastern jamb of the modest doorway giving access to the south tower with its spiral staircase. In contrast, there is a substantial stretch of blank wall between the chancel arch and the more elaborate archway into the base of the north tower. While some have suggested that this was due to a change of plan or simply a mistake in laying out the chapel, O'Keeffe rightly insists that we should give Cormac Mac Carthaig and his builders the benefit of the doubt by assuming that this 'misalignment' was planned from the outset.<sup>55</sup> In light of the discussion above, one wonders whether it was necessary to create additional space at the north-east of the nave in order to facilitate the activities associated with the north tower. If we still envisage that it may have formed part of an anchorhold, then the additional space would have ensured that those wishing to consult with the recluse did not encroach disrespectfully upon the space immediately in front of the chancel arch. If, as seems more likely, relics were displayed in this side chapel on certain feastdays, then the additional space would, just as effectively, have kept queuing pilgrims to one side of the arch. Any encroachment on the space in front of the chancel arch by someone whose attention was not focused solely on the high altar would have been unacceptable in the early twelfth century. Chancel arches leading to externally defined chancels were a new feature in Irish architecture at this time, expressing a heightened concern with the idea that Christ became fully present on the altar.<sup>56</sup> The additional space would also have facilitated occasional processions of relics from the north tower

'The foundation relics of Christ Church Cathedral and the origins of the diocese of Dublin' in S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin VII* (Dublin, 2006), pp 89–103 at pp 93–6. <sup>53</sup> Murray, *The Cross of Cong* (forthcoming). <sup>54</sup> On the link between the Lemanaghan shrine and the Ark of the Covenant see T. Ó Carragáin, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland,' *JRSAL*, 133 (2003), 130–76 at 172, note 135; Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 76–7; Bourke, 'Muirchú'. For other possible Solomonic allusions in the design of Cormac's Chapel see D. Ó Riain-Raedel, 'Wie beim deutschen Kaiser: Sakraltopographie und Krönungskirche in Cashel/Ireland' in C. Ehlers (ed.), *Places of power / Orte der herrschaft / Lieux de pouvoir* (Göttingen, 2007), pp 313–71. <sup>55</sup> T. O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland: architecture and ideology in the twelfth century* (Dublin, 2003), pp 150–1. Leask suggested there was a change in plan. Leask, *Irish Churches*, p. 116. Stalley discusses a number of possibilities, including the idea that there was a mistake in laying out the chapel. R. Stalley, 'Design and function,' at p. 171. <sup>56</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 192–7.

to the cathedral. As O'Keeffe has pointed out, some support for the idea of a procession along this route is provided by the fact that it would have been punctuated by two of the chapel's most elaborate archways: that at the base of the north tower and the even grander external portal at the west end of the north wall.<sup>57</sup>

Placing the nave off-centre was, however, a drastic solution to a practical space management problem. After all, there was nothing to stop the builders from making the nave equally wide on the south side of the chancel arch, thereby maintaining the symmetry of the building. The arrangement they chose has a profound effect on one's experience of the chapel: it is the first thing one is struck by on entering and it is so unusual, indeed jarring, that it is hard to imagine a community or congregation growing so accustomed to it over time that they cease to notice it. We must assume that this effect was what the architect(s) and patron intended: they may, for practical purposes, have needed to create additional space on the north side of the nave; but it was, I would suggest, just as important to them, for symbolic purposes, to draw attention to this space and to the elaborate archway leading to the north tower. John Mitchell has pointed out that in some important churches a decision was made to highlight the sacredness of a particular cult focus or other feature by compromising the symmetry of the church as a whole. This was a way of signaling the exceptional importance of the feature by implying that it cannot be subordinated to the dictates of conventional design. For example, in the great sixth-century octagonal church of San Vitale in Ravenna the entrance hall has been dragged around from its natural alignment on the axis of the high altar in order to draw attention to a second axis focused on the martyrial altar of San Vitale.<sup>58</sup> I have suggested that this may help to explain the positioning of Temple Ciarán, Clonmacnoise, an early shrine chapel that appears to have been operated by ascetics including recluses. It is in an apparently arbitrary and off-axial position within what was in other respects, in the Irish context, an unusually symmetrical monumental scheme incorporating the cathedral and three high crosses.<sup>59</sup> The unusual ground plan of Cormac's Chapel seems to be an even clearer example of this phenomenon.

In conclusion, I have argued that Cormac's Chapel may have housed relics in the eastern altar niche and/or in one or more of the floors of the north tower, and that the chamber over the chancel may have been a *reclitorium* while that over the nave may have been for the use of a small coenobitic community. I readily concede that these arguments are somewhat speculative. They would, indeed, be difficult to sustain were it not for the somewhat firmer evidence relating to some of the other double-vaulted churches and, arising from this, the assumption that this church type was developed with a particular range of functions in mind. Nevertheless, it is important that we continue to develop new ideas, and indeed new epistemologies,<sup>60</sup> to interrogate the fabric of Cormac's Chapel, for though it is well known there are many aspects of this building that are not well understood. The suggestions put forward here are not meant to undermine the usual interpretation that this is a royal chapel. In the case of most of the other Irish double-vaulted churches there is evidence that they were also commissioned by kings,<sup>61</sup> and it is notable that in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England *reclatoria* are commonly attested within or adjoining royal free chapels.<sup>62</sup> A tract probably commissioned by Cormac Mac Carthaig, mentioned above, states that

<sup>57</sup> O'Keeffe, *Romanesque Ireland*, p. 151. <sup>58</sup> J. Mitchell, 'The asymmetry of sanctity' in L. Golden (ed.), *Raising the eyebrow: John Onians and world art studies* (Oxford, 2001), pp 209–22. <sup>59</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 68–9. <sup>60</sup> See T. O'Keeffe, 'Wheels of words, networks of knowledge: Romanesque scholarship and Cormac's Chapel,' in Bracken & Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century*, pp 257–69. <sup>61</sup> Gem, 'Saint Flannán's oratory', pp 83–9; Ó Carragáin, *Churches*, pp 246–8, 259, 281, 282–5. <sup>62</sup> Clay, *Hermits*, p. 77.

after selection the king-elect of Munster 'should be brought to the Stone of Cotraide in Cormac's great church and there proclaimed king'.<sup>63</sup> As Bhreathnach has shown, the wording makes clear that the author envisaged this ancient inauguration stone inside Cormac's Chapel. Assuming this is not a literary flight of fancy – and given that there was a similar arrangement at Scone in Perthshire, for example, there is no particular reason to suspect this – the two locations I have already discussed in relation to relics also suggest themselves as appropriate for the stone. The space under the high altar would have provided a grand and spacious setting for the stone and the ceremonies associated with it; if these required the king-elect to sit or place his foot on the stone it could have been carried forward temporarily from the altar niche to the chancel. Alternatively, if the stone was at the base of the north tower, its role in rituals might have prompted the addition of processional space immediately to the south, while its symbolic importance might have prompted the misalignment of the nave to the chancel. As Patrick Gleeson has pointed out, this latter possibility is supported by the fact that a ninth-century text, *The Exile of Conall Corc*, locates the inauguration stone in front of (that is, west of) the church at Cashel, which is presumably a reference to the wooden church excavated under the chancel of Cormac's Chapel.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Cormac may have designed his chapel to perpetuate, or perhaps to reinstate, a much older arrangement of monuments. Relics, of course, played a crucial role in inauguration ceremonies across Europe. They also feature prominently in some Irish accounts of inauguration and Elizabeth FitzPatrick argues that they were 'probably used more extensively in Irish royal ritual than the written records reveal'.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the likely presence of an inauguration stone in the chapel supports the possibility that it also housed relics. While this was a royal chapel, first and foremost, for its medieval audiences the two additional and complementary functions tentatively suggested for it here would have enhanced its prestige and that of its patron, Cormac Mac Carthaig.

### *Acknowledgments*

I am grateful to Aighleann O'Shaughnessy of the Office of Public Works for facilitating access to the upper chambers of the chapel and for information about the recent alterations to the building; Brian Hodgkinson for sight of unpublished plans of his excavations; Roger Stalley, Griffin Murray, Edel Bhreathnach and Cormac Bourke for letting me read and refer to forthcoming publications; and Roger Stalley, Griffin Murray, Jennifer Ní Ghrádaigh and Patrick Gleeson for commenting on the paper and for discussion. The remaining errors and the views expressed are my own.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in E. Bhreathnach, 'Tara and Cashel: manifestations of the centre of the cosmos in the north and the south' (Toronto, forthcoming). <sup>64</sup> P. Gleeson, 'Kingship and architecture in eleventh and twelfth -century Cashel', *Church Archaeology*, 15 (2011), 17–32. <sup>65</sup> E. FitzPatrick, *Royal inauguration in Gaelic Ireland c.1100–1600* (Woodbridge, 2004), p. 177.

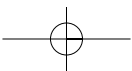
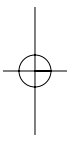
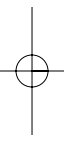




Plate 9. Cormac's Chapel from the east showing the remnants of the structure that stood between the chapel and the cathedral. This may have been seventeenth century. Note also the pyramidal roof of the north tower and the fact that its uppermost floor lacks windows (photo: Con Brogan, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht).



Plate 10 The chamber at the base of the north tower viewed from the doorway at the south showing the now blank niche in the east wall and the window in the north wall (photo: author).

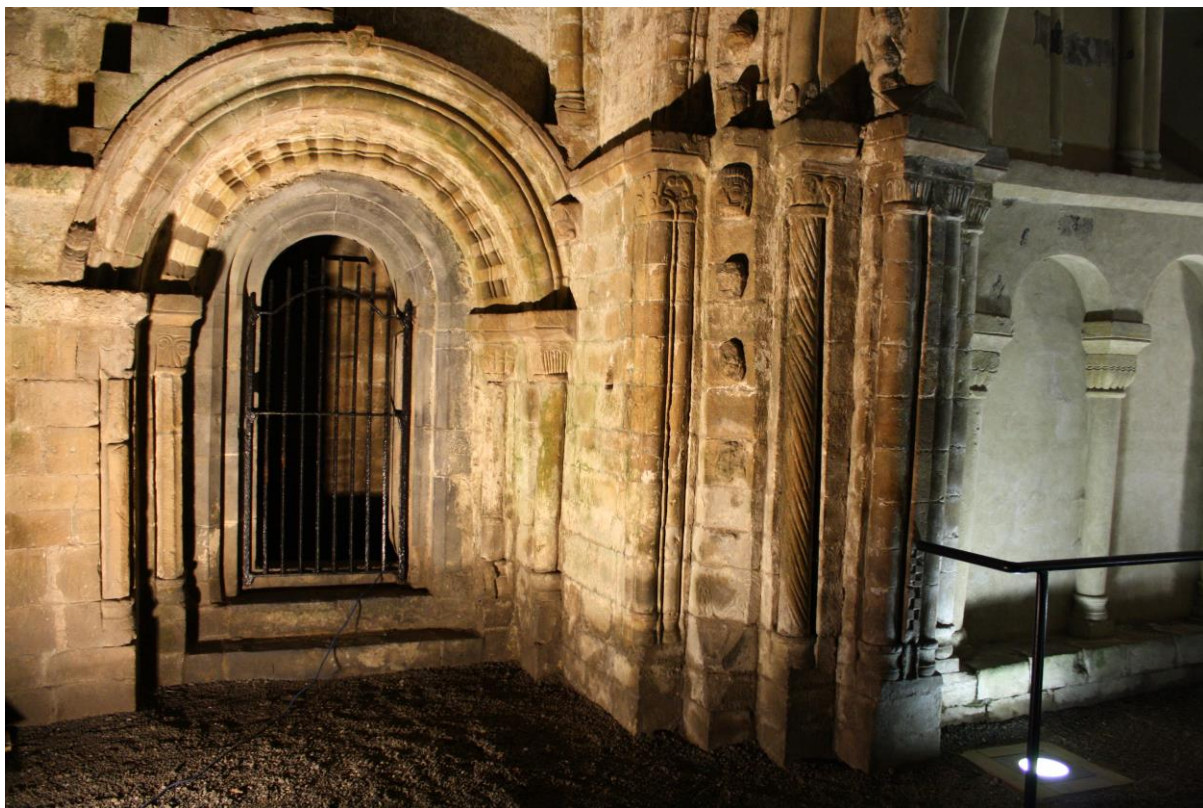


Plate 11 The elaborate archway providing access to the north tower. The limestone doorway inserted into the arch is clearly distinguishable from the original sandstone fabric (photo: author).



Plate 12 The archway providing access from the upper west chamber to the upper east chamber. The door surround has been removed at some point leaving an irregular aperture on the west side. To the right (south) is one of the pair of niches that flank this archway (photo: author).



Plate 13 The east wall of the small chamber over the upper east chamber viewed from the archway illustrated in Figure 4 (photo: author).



Plate 14 Interior of the ground floor looking east illustrating the fact that the nave is off-centre (photo: author).