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Notes on Monastic Archaeology and the Annals of Ulster, 650-1050

Aidan Macdonald

Archaeologists in Ireland and Celtic Britain as elsewhere are at a serious disadvantage when attempting to study the physical remains, and to reconstruct the physical appearance at any given stage, of the great monasteries of the period prior to the 12th century. Indeed, little has hitherto been done in this field, on a scale large enough to afford more than glimpses and partial answers. But many, perhaps most, such sites are not readily accessible to a detailed analysis by excavation of their groundplan, extent and the nature of their buildings, and the way in which all these developed and changed over the centuries: some are not so accessible at all. Most early ecclesiastical foundations of any local or regional importance continued in use in one way or another into later medieval, often into post-medieval times. They may well continue in use today. And even where from documentary sources or examination on the ground such later occupation cannot be shown to have occurred, or where it appears to be limited to a relatively small area within a larger early complex, successive building and rebuilding, alteration and expansion during the course of the pre-12th century occupation will only have served to obscure or destroy earlier phases of the sequence. In any case, continuing ritual activity at a given site whether in the form of a large monastic cathedral complex or of a small *cillín* graveyard, is likely to include, or fall within, the focal area of the earlier settlement — the area of the major early church or churches, burial ground and probably domestic buildings. Where furthermore such later occupation has stimulated the processes of urbanisation up to modern times, archaeologists may reasonably hope for no more than the scattered fragments of information occasionally afforded by redevelopment sites or other chance discovery. Possibly, we should more reasonably look for nothing at all. A large early ecclesiastical settlement that can be peeled layer by layer, each layer yielding itself intact, is most unlikely ever to be found.

In these circumstances recourse must be had to a systematic examination of those texts that can more or less safely be shown to reflect, more or less accurately, conditions obtaining prior to (or at least uninfluenced by) the introduction of the continental monastic orders during the 12th century. For the present limited exercise, the *Annals of Ulster* have been chosen for the following reasons. Though they are a composite compilation, drawing on various sources over a long timespan, under various editorial priorities and activities (and their attendant problems), they offer what purports to be basic historical information (unlike, say, most saints' lives, or

explicitly religious documents), within a superficially coherent chronological framework. Thus, not only can individual items of archaeological significance be extracted from them and used but also overall developments, which might well not be recoverable by fieldwork or excavation alone, may be apparent that can be assumed to be genuinely historical with reasonable safety.

The edition used here is *Annals of Ulster*, ed. W.M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, 4 vols., Dublin 1887-1901: hereinafter referred to as AU. No account therefore has been taken of possible or actual problems of chronology or provenance posed by individual entries or groups of entries or associated with different MS hands — save only that verse passages have been ignored. Dates given are those of the above edition, uncorrected. Since any attempt at statistical analysis would almost certainly not be of any real use or meaning in the present context, the basic material is usually presented first and then discussed somewhat in the manner of a conventional excavation report. For the spelling of Irish words, except in quotations, the *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*, published by the Royal Irish Academy, have normally been followed. They are cited hereinafter as *Contribb*, with references to the relevant fascicules. Latin words appear in classical rather than medieval guise, for purposes of discussion.

Certain areas of potential archaeological interest have not been dealt with at all here. Place-names have only been discussed where some notice of them seemed necessary to the development of the argument in another context. No attempt has been made to identify 'lost' sites: the present writer does not have the necessary background knowledge or linguistic and literary competence for Ireland and the few Scottish foundations mentioned are mostly sufficiently well known. No attention has been paid to the disappearance from the record of individual houses, whether of men or of women. The writer's concern is entirely with such evidence as may throw light on the physical nature and appearance of the larger monastic settlements, in terms of their buildings, groundplans and overall development, in the period 650-1050.

1. THE CHURCH AND THE MONASTIC BUILDINGS

THE CHURCH

Dairthech. 718 (*Drostan dairtaighe*: possibly of Ardbraccan); 761 (Kildare); 817 (transporting of the floor or foundation of a *dairthech: solaich daurthige:* Lat. *solum: Contribb* S, *sol*); 823 (Bangor); 824 (Magh-Bile burnt *cona derthigib*); 835 (Kildare: see further below); 839 (Armagh burnt *cona dertighibh 7 a doimliacc*); 844 (Clonmacnoise burnt *cona dertaigibh*); 849 (Trevet: see further below); 855 (Lusk); 868 (Armagh burnt *cona derthaigibh*); 873 (monasteries of Leinster burnt with their churches: *cealla cona derthaigibh*); 880 (*dertach Ciannain:* presumably Duleek: see further below); 891 (a great storm blows churches from their sites:

daurthaighi as a lathraigib); 963 (Kildare); 995 (Armagh burnt, including *dertach* and *damliac*); 1002 (Ferns); 1020 (Kildare); 1020 (Glendalough burnt *cona dairtighibh*); 1028 (the church of Slane fell down: *dertach Slane do thuitim*); 1031 (Comber, Co. Down); 1042 (Killeshin: see further below).

This is the commonest term for the church building. It means literally 'oak-house' — 'penitentiary, oratory, prayer-house (originally of wood), the smallest of the sacred edifices used in Ireland; generally fifteen feet long and ten feet broad': secondly, 'prayer-house in general, chapel' (*Contribb* D fasc. 1, *dairthech*). The possible range of size of the *dairthech* and of the church and monastic buildings generally will be discussed later. The belief that the building was originally and (probably) normally of wood, as its etymology indicates, is reinforced by its occasional juxtaposition with *do(i)mliacc* (infra). The *dairthech* may sometimes have had a wooden floor; but the *solaich daurthige* of 817 may equally well have been substantial sleeper-beams to be laid horizontally in a slot dug into the ground and into which the uprights of the frame of the building would be tenoned. Such a method of construction may have been employed in at least some of the churches destroyed in 891, rather than one of uprights sunk directly into post-holes. In a number of instances more than one *dairthech* existed at the same time at the same place. From the contexts, 'church' would seem to be the safest rendering of the term here. The *dairthech* was in use, and very likely being built also, throughout the period under review.

Oratorium. 788 (*lapideum*, at Armagh); 788 (Cluain-ferta-Mongain); 804 (*nouum*, at Killeigh); 808 (lightning killed a man *in oratorio Nodan*); 815 (Fore); 822 (Gallen); 850 (Clones); 903 (Kells: cf. *templum* (813); *domliac* (919), infra); 1008 (*oratorium Aird Macha . . . plumbo tegitur: damliac mor* in 1020, infra).

The meaning of *oratorium*, in medieval Irish and English usage, has been discussed recently by Radford (1977, 2): its normal meaning in this period is 'church' — a conclusion quite in accordance with the evidence afforded by AU. Radford, quoting Petrie, points out that *oratorium* in AU is sometimes *dairthech* elsewhere. But he further points out that *oratorium* is not necessarily *dairthech*, in AU or elsewhere, suggesting that the *oratorium lapideum* of 788 (AU) is probably the *doimliacc* referred to in 839 (AU). The *oratorium lapideum* of 788 is in fact the first explicit mention of a stone church in AU, apart from the rather problematical place-name Duleek (see further below). It is possible that the *oratorium* (903) and the *domliac* (919) at Kells are one and the same, if the stone building is not a replacement of a wooden structure in the meantime. But it would be reasonable to infer that the *oratorium* at Armagh (1008) was of stone, simply because of the nature of the (presumably) new roofing material, even if it were not explicitly said to be so in 1020. In the other instances cited above, the building material cannot certainly be inferred, for reasons that will be suggested when burnings are discussed later, though the roof of the *oratorium Nodan* (808) was presumably of thatch or shingles (assuming that lightning striking through the roof is what the entry implies). The term seems to have been in commonest use in the first half of the 9th century.

Do(i)mliacc, da(i)mliacc. 839 (Armagh burnt, *cona dertighibh 7 a doimliacc*); 919 (Kells); 919 (Dulane); 995 (Armagh burnt, including *dertach* and *damliac*); 1006 (Kells); 1019 (Durrow); 1020 (Armagh burnt, including *in damliac mor cona tuighi do luaidhe*, 'with its roof of lead'); 1031 (Ardbraccan: see further below); 1050 (Kildare).

Do(i)mliacc is the phrase *do(i)m, da(i)m liacc*, 'a stone house, stone church', formed from *dom, dam* 'house, home,' and *liacc*, usually printed as a compound. It is more frequent in the sense 'church'. (See *Contribb* dodênta-dûus, *dom, dam*). The *oratorium lapideum* of 788 apart, the term does not occur until well into the 9th century; and does not occur significantly until the end of the 10th. The nature of the buildings thus designated is (apart, of course, from the etymology) probably sufficiently attested by the two juxtapositions with *dairthech*, though in both cases the monastery in question is Armagh. Unlike *dairthech, do(i)mliacc* is never used in the plural explicitly; though the occasional use of the phrase *do(i)mliacc mõr* (1006, Kells; 1020, Armagh) might conceivably imply more than one stone church within the monastic enclosure. (The phrase *dertach na damliac* etc., 995 (Armagh), is too vague to be pressed into service in this context).

Duleek, Co. Meath, is *do(i)mliacc* (*Contribb*, loc. cit. supra). It first occurs in AU at 724 (obit of Aldchu of *Doimliagg*): i.e., more than 60 years before the *oratorium lapideum*. The most straightforward explanation of the place-name and its appearance at this juncture is that it reflects the actual presence here of a stone church by the end of the first quarter of the 8th century — a time when such a building would be rare enough (at least in eastern and central Ireland) to be remarkable and therefore to be named as a feature of the local landscape. Duleek lies towards the E coast, SW of Drogheda and S of the Boyne Valley in an area probably easily accessible to Northumbrian influences, introduced perhaps by Irish *Romani*, during the second half of the 7th century or early in the 8th. However, the *dertach Ciannain* of 880, if it is to be given its literal meaning (and if in fact it refers to Duleek), poses a problem that does not admit of a ready solution.

Eclais, eclas. 890 (apparently the church of Cluain-fota: Clonfad, barony of Fartullagh, Co. Westmeath: Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 376); 1006 (Matadhan, King of Ulaid, killed *i n-ecluis Brigte for lar Duin dalethglas:* 'in (the middle of) Downpatrick').

This usage seems to be unusual generally. The meanings of *eclais, eclas* in early Irish are given as 1. 'the Christian church as an institution, whether regarded as a visible organization or a spiritual community of believers'; 2. 'a local church or community of believers; a unit of ecclesiastical organization, especially a monastery'; 3. 'clergy'; 4. 'a church, a building for worship' (*Contribb* E, *eclais, eclas*).

Templum is used once, of Kells: *Ceallach abbas Iae, finita constructione templi*

Cenindsa, reliquit principatum (813). The granting of Kells to Colum Cille (i.e., to his *paruchia*, more especially to Iona) is recorded at 803; and the building of the new monastery there at 806: *constructio nouae ciuitatis Columbae cille hi Ceninnus*. It may be both the *oratorium* of 903 and the *domliac* of 919: the unique use of *templum* could imply that the principal church of the monastery was a stone building from the outset (probably still a rarity in the early 9th century). On the other hand, it need be neither: a wooden church built in 813 might well have been replaced (perhaps more than once) by 903. It was presumably situated at or near the position occupied now by the Church of Ireland parish church, within the area of the present-day graveyard that also contains the round-tower and three of the high crosses. (Meath, 6 in., sheet 17 (revision of 1954-55)).

Reiclés likewise occurs once, at 1010: obit of Dunadhach *in reiclesa Coluim Cille i n-ard Macha*. Its etymology is doubtful: Stokes at one time suggested a formation from Lat. *reclusum* 'a recluse's cell'; later he proposed a derivation from *ro-eccles* (< *ecclesia*), 'a large church'. Its meanings are given as, originally, 'an oratory or small church built by an Irish saint for his own use; sometimes used to include the plot or enclosure about it', hence 'a monastic cell, the hut occupied by an Irish monk in a coenobitic settlement, and in general an anchorite's cell'. It is later used generally of a church connected with a monastery or of the monastery or abbey itself — the present instance is quoted in this context; then in the wider sense of a church or chapel in general. *Reiclésach* is 'a recluse or religious coenobite'. (See *Contribb* R, *reiclés, reiclésach*). Since the *reiclés* in question was apparently under the invocation of Colum Cille, it is likely that it contained a church, of whatever size. It is possible that what we are dealing with here is a small eremitical complex, having a chapel and quarters for one or more anchorites and perhaps its own enclosure, lying within the area of the monastic city that was early 11th century Armagh. A similar arrangement, also at Armagh, may underlie the reference at 1011 to the death in an epidemic there of Cennfaeladh of the *Saball* (infra), described as *anmchara toghaidhe*, 'a choice soul-friend (confessor, spiritual director)'. (Anchorites in AU are discussed in more detail later).

Two other churches at Armagh are mentioned: *Toi* and *Saball*, both apparently in the southern half of the settlement. They are mentioned together at 915 and 1020; the *Saball* alone at 1011. *Saball* (Lat. *stabulum*) means 'barn': *Saball Pātraic* is Saul, Co. Down (*Contribb* S, *saball*). The writer has not come across a suggested etymology for *Toi*.

Airdam occurs twice: in 995 Armagh was burned, including *dertach* and *damliac* and *erdamh* ('porch') and *fidnemedh;* in 1006 the great Gospel of Colum Cille was stolen in the night *as ind iardom iartharach in daimliacc moir Cenannsa*, 'out of the western *airdam* of the great stone-church of Kells' (translated 'sacristy' by both Hennessy and *Contribb* I, *iartharach*). *Airdam* is 'variously applied to any extraneous building attached to a larger one, vestibule, porch, etc.'; it seems to be composed of *ar* and *dom, dam* (*Contribb* A, fasc. 1, *airdam*). It is briefly discussed by Radford (1977, 4), who suggests that it may be the equivalent of the *porticus* of middle Saxon minster churches of the 7th to 9th or early 10th centuries: two annexes opening to N and S out of the E end of the nave. The western *airdam* of 1006 at Kells, however, was perhaps something more like a narthex (with a counterpart at the E end ?) — it was hardly an external W porch leading into the church proper, since it seems to have housed an important copy of the Gospels — or the western *airdam* of two or more lying on the same side of the main building, presumably N or S. The entry at 995 seems to suggest that there was more than one *airdam*, either in the same church, or more likely among all or some of the churches. But the wording is too vague to be sure what is meant.

Airnigde occurs in the phrase *na taigi aernaighi* (Armagh, 920), which is translated 'the houses of prayer' by Hennessy, though the genitive sg. and pl. should end in *-e* (*Contribb* A, fasc. 1, *airnigde*). The *taigi aernaighi* are associated with Céli Dé and with sick or lepers (*na taigi aernaighi . . . cona lucht de cheilibh de 7 di lobraibh*). *Tech n-urnaigthe* is translated 'oratory' (*Contribb* T-tnuthaigid, *tech, teg,* II (c)); the context here suggests that they are oratories connected with a leper house or infirmary complex, rather than the churches of the monastery at large.

ROUND-TOWERS

Clocthech, 'bell-house, belfry', occurs twice. In 949 the *clocthech* of Slane was burnt, including an important relic, a bell and a large number of people, the lector among them; and in 1020 Armagh was burnt, including *in cloicthech cona cloccaibh. Clocthech* is, of course, composed of *cloc* 'bell' and *tech* 'house' (*Contribb* C, fasc. 1, *cloc;* T-tnúthaigid, *tech, teg*), and must indicate the original or primary function of the round-tower. The bells were probably kept in the tower; and they may have been hung in some cases. The entry of 949, however, indicates other functions of the round-tower, which the design and appearance of surviving examples tend to confirm: it was also a repository of monastic valuables and a place of refuge in time of danger, not necessarily a safe one. Round-towers are briefly discussed by Radford (1977, 3-4): since, as he observes, the destruction of a *clocthech* is already in question at the middle of the 10th century, they very likely began to be built before 900, or at latest soon after. But, though the inspiration may well be Carolingian, it seems unnecessary to suggest a possible introduction of the idea to Ireland *via* 9th century England. Apart from two surviving examples in Scotland (Abernethy and Brechin) and one in the Isle of Man (St. Patrick's Isle, Peel) — all three within the early Irish cultural province — the freestanding round-tower is an architectural phenomenon peculiar to Ireland in this period. Wooden prototypes moreover, though possible, have yet to be demonstrated archaeologically — indeed, would be extremely difficult so to do, given the nature and proportions of most of the extant stone-built towers. And the writer is not aware that any

known round-tower displays or displayed features that can reasonably be attributed to wood skeuomorphism, like the *antae* and 'butterfly' gable-finials of some of the early stone churches.

MONASTIC BUILDINGS

The abbot's house. Occisio Dunchon principis Telcha leiss . . . i tigh abaid Telcha liss (808: Tullylish, Co. Down); *tene di nim forsa foruth n-abbadh inardd Machae, conidroloiscc* (822); . . . *iar n-orcain in taighi abath i n-Druim inasclaind* (912: Dromiskin: referred to as the 'refectory', *proindtech,* at 911: see further below); 915 (*les:* Armagh burnt *cosind lius abbaid* etc.); 975 (erenagh of Nendrum burned *in sua domu*); 992 (king of Luighne killed *i taigh abbaid Domnaigh Patraic*: Donaghpatrick, Co. Meath). *Tech* is straightforward enough, as also is *domus. Forad,* translated 'mansion', by Hennessy, is defined as, primarily, 'a mound or platform, probably in most cases of earth, used as a seat or stand for spectators, but also as a post of outlook; it varied in size and shape, being often large enough to accommodate a number of persons, but sometimes apparently intended for only one; it may in some cases have been circular . . .' It was often associated with an *óenach* site or princely residence. It also seems to have been used to mean a part or the whole of a rampart. Then, by transference, it meant a fort, residence or place of meeting (common in this sense in poetry): the present instance is given here. (See *Contribb* fochratae-futhu, *forad*). It seems likely that what is implied by the use of the term in the present context is one or more buildings, forming the abbot's quarters, having its own enclosure (whether of earth or some other material) and situated (probably) within the main *vallum monasterii*. It is conceivable that the residential complex of a major abbot might have included a ceremonial mound but unlikely that defence was a consideration. The idea of enclosure is more explicit in the use of *les* at 915. *Les* is, primarily, 'the space about a dwelling-house or houses enclosed by a bank or rampart', including the enclosure around monastic buildings: the present instance is quoted here; then, it is sometimes 'the bank or rampart itself' (*Contribb* L, 2 *les*). Compare *Les oiged* (*infra*).

TECH MÓR

It is recorded, at 963, that most of the clerics of Kildare were ransomed after the monastery had been plundered by Norsemen: *.i. lan in taigi moir sanc(t) Brigti, 7 lan in derthaigi, issed do ruagell Niall diib dia argat fesin.* What seems pretty clear from the context is that the *tech mór* ('great house'; 'principal building': *Contribb* T-tnúthaigid, *tech, teg*) of Brigit, at least in this instance, is not a church, as Thomas thinks (1971, 39-40) in his discussion of a passage in the Tripartite Life of Patrick. Adamnán's *magna domus* etc. of a much earlier period is briefly discussed by the Andersons (Anderson and Anderson, 1961, 113): it is a domestic building, whatever its precise function or functions. We are very likely dealing here with a large communal building of no highly specialized function, curvilinear or rectilinear in ground plan, which served a variety of purposes, regularly or on an *ad hoc* basis, in the daily routine of the monastery. The term may indicate that it was regarded as the principal domestic building of the monastic layout.

Proindtech. 911 (abbot of Dromiskin and the royal heir of the Conailli burnt to death *i prainntigh Droma inasclainn*); 970 (man killed by Norsemen *i n-dorus in proinntighi:* monastery not specified: Armagh?). *Proindtech* is made up of *proind* (Lat. *prandium*), 'meal, refection' and *tech:* 'eating-house, dining-hall'; generally 'of the refectory of a monastery' (*Contribb* N-O-P, *proind, proindtech*). The refectory may often, or usually, have stood by itself. It was pointed out above, however, that the killing said at 911 to have been *i prainntigh*, is referred to at 912 by the phrase *iar n-orcain in taighi abath.* There may simply be confusion in one entry or the other; but the interesting possibility remains that the apparent contradiction actually reflects the fact that the abbot's quarters and the refectory formed one building, or were adjacent to each other in a range of buildings under the one roof.

Cucann, 'kitchen', occurs once: at 915 (Armagh burnt *cusin chucin* etc.). The word is a borrowing of Lat. *coquina* (*Contribb* C, fasc. 3, *cucann*). The context (*.i. a leith deiscertach cosin toi 7 cosint saboll 7 cusin chucin 7 cosind lius abbaid h-uile*) suggests that it was a separate building — a wise precaution if so where accidental fire was a serious hazard (see further below).

Les oiged. 1003 (obit of Eochaid Ua Flannacáin *airchinnech lis oeigedh 7 Cluana Fiacna*, apparently *l.o.* of Armagh); 1016 (obit of Flannacán mac Conaing, *fosairchinnech arda Macha,* and of Muirghes *airchinnech Lis oeighedh*). This is the 'guest-house': *oigi* means 'stranger, esp. one receiving hospitality, a guest, visitor,' compare *tech n-oiged* (*Contribb* N-O-P, *oigi*). The fact that its head is described as *airchinnech,* 'erenagh', on both occasions and that the office is equal with, or greater than the superiority of another monastery at 1003 (Clonfeacle, Co. Tyrone) suggests a fairly large establishment, very likely having its own church or churches. It may have lain outside the *vallum monasterii* proper. The significance of *les* as indicating enclosure has been discussed above: the combination of *les* and *airchinnech* here will be discussed further below.

'Houses' generally are mentioned at 911 (*taighi ili do loscadh irrait airdd Macha per incuriam*); and at 920 (the Dublin Norse plunder Armagh, but spare the monastic buildings and community, *nisi paucis in ea* (i.e., the monastery) *tectis exaustis per incuriam*). But these references are not detailed enough to say anything more about the nature or function of the buildings than can be said about their burning (infra).

SIZE OF BUILDINGS

The size and scale of individual churches and domestic buildings, in terms of groundplan and elevation, probably varied greatly both within the same monastery and as between houses of differing importance and wealth. A few entries, however,

show pretty clearly that these structures were sometimes fairly substantial. At 849 the church of Trevet was burned by the king of Cianachta with 260 men inside (. . . *7 corolscsad* (sic) *leis derthach Treoit 7 tri xxit dec di doinibh ann*). At 969 Monasterboice and Dunleer were plundered by the Uí Néill overking and 350 people burned in one house (*orcain Mainistrech 7 Lainne leire la Domnall, la righ nErend, ubi in una domu, .cccl. accensi sunt*). At 1031 Ardbraccan was plundered by the Dublin Norse, 200 men being burnt in the *do(i)mliacc* (*Ard mBrecain do argain do Gallaib Atha Cliath. Da cet duine do loscadh isin daimliac* . . .). At 1042, it is not entirely clear what the annalist had in mind. The text reads: *Glenn Uissen do loscadh do mac Mail na mbó, 7 in dairrtech do brisiudh, 7 cet duine do marbad, 7 .iiii. cet do breith eisti* . . . Hennessy translates: 'Glenn-Uissen was burned by the son of Mael-na-mbo, and the oratory was broken, and 100 men were slain, and 400 taken out of it . . .' At first reading, it might be thought that the 100 men were killed in, and the 400 taken from, the church. But *eisti* is *a* 'out of, from', with the 3 sg. feminine form of the suffixed pronoun; while *dairthech* is neuter, later masculine. While it is possible that it actually was the church which suffered in this way, it is safer to assume that the annalist was thinking of the monastery as a whole (Killeshin, Co. Laois) and, therefore, of a feminine noun like *cell*. The assumption would perhaps be strengthened by the fact that Killeshin was attacked in revenge for the burning of Ferns by Donnchad, son of Brian.

A few other entries, while not giving exact figures, point in the same direction. At 835 the abbot of Armagh and 'Patrick's congregation' were attacked and captured in the church of Kildare by Feidhlimidh, King of Cashel (*gabail in dairthige i Cill dara for Forindan abbaid n-aerdd Machae, co samadh Patraic olchena, la Feidlimidh co cath 7 indnu, 7 ro gabta i cact co n-anhumaloit friu*). At 880 the church of Duleek (*dertach Ciannain*) was plundered by Norsemen and 'its full of people taken out of it' (*a lan di dhoinibh do brith ass*). At 919 the church of Kells was attacked by Norsemen and great numbers martyred there (*domliac Cenannsa do brisiuth o Gentibh 7 sochaidhe martrai ann*). And at 963 the number of clerics ransomed after Kildare had been plundered by Norsemen is expressed as 'the full of the great house of St Bridget, and the full of the oratory' (*lan in taigi moir sanc(t) Brigti 7 lan in derthaigi:* Hennessy's translation). Neither the entries giving actual figures, however, nor those merely suggesting large numbers, indicate anything more precise than buildings significantly larger than the well-preserved therefore well-known, *clochāin* of the W coast and its islands.

BUILDING MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION

With due caution, something may be inferred about the nature of buildings and building materials from the frequent recording of (especially) natural or accidental disasters, particularly those caused by fire. Here, only those entries which seem to be clear and straightforward and which do not say that the damage was deliberately caused, are set out. 671 (burning of Armagh and Tihelly); 671 (burning of 'Bangor

of the Britons' — *Benncha*ir *Brittonum*); 672 (burning of Magh-luinge); 689 (burning of Armagh); 709 (burning of Kildare); 722 (burning of Clonmacnoise); 730 (burning of Coleraine); 748 (burning of Clonfert; and of Kilmore, Co. Monaghan, or ? Kilmore, Co. Armagh: Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 394, 39); 749 (burning of Fore; and of Donaghpatrick); 754 (burning of Clonmacnoise); 755 (burning of Bangor); 774 (burning of Armagh; of Kildare; of Glendalough); 774 (burning of Ennisboyne); 777 (burning of Clonmacnoise); 778 (burning of Kildare; of Clonmore, Co. Carlow; of Kildalkey); 779 (burning of Cloonburren; of Balla); 782 (burning of Armagh and of Mayo); 782 (wind destroyed Clonbroney: *uentus magnus 7 ualidissimus distruxit monasterium cluana Bronaigh*); 783 (burning of Trim); 787 (burning of Derry); 788 (burning of Clonard); 788 (burning of Inishkeen, Co. Monaghan); 789 (burning of Aughrim); 804 (burning of Killeigh, *cum oratorio nouo*); 805 (burning of Terryglass); 815 (burning of Clonmacnoise *de media ex maiore parte*); 815 (burning of the *oratorium* of Fore); 817 (burning of Clonmacnoise *tertia ex parte sui*); 822 ('fire from heaven fell on the Abbot's mansion in Ard-Macha, and burned it': *tene di nim forsa foruth n-abbadh i n-ardd Machae, conidroloiscc:* Hennessy's translation); 823 (burning of Roscommon *magna ex parte*); 833 (burning of Clonmacnoise *de media ex maiore parte*); 834 (burning of Clonmacnoise *tertia parte sui*); 839 (burning of Armagh *cona dertighibh 7 a doimliacc*); 891 (a great wind carried away churches and houses from their sites: *uentus magnus in feria Martini . . . 7 coruc na daurthaighi as a lathraigib, 7 na taighi olcena*); 911 (many houses burned in the *Ráth* of Armagh through carelessness: *taighi ili do loscadh irrait airdd Macha per incuriam*); 915 (the southern half of Armagh burnt by lightning, including the *Toi* and the *Saball*, the kitchen and the abbot's house: *Ard Macha do loscadh diait . . . .i. a leith deiscertach, cosin toi 7 cosint saboll 7 cusin chucin 7 cosind lius abbaid h-uile*); 919 (burning of the *do(i)mliacc* of Dulane, possibly by Norsemen); 977 (Cork destroyed by fire: *Corcach mor Muman do arcain la daigidh*); 995 (lightning struck Armagh, causing widespread fire: *tene diait do ghabail aird Macha, co na farcaibh dertach na damliac na h-erdamh na fidnemedh ann cen loscadh*); 997 (burning of Armagh *de media parte*); 1016 (burning of Downpatrick; and of Clonmacnoise, Clonfert and Kells); 1017 (burning of Glendalough *ex maiore parte*); 1019 (Kildare completely burned by lightning: *Ceall dara uile do loscadh do theinidh diaitt*); 1020 (Kildare burnt *cona dairtigh;* Glendalough all burnt *cona dairtighibh;* burning of Clonard, Clonmacnoise and Swords, *tertia parte*); 1020 (Armagh entirely burned, including the great *do(i)mliacc* with its lead roof, the belfry, the *Saball* and the *Toi* (*Ard Macha uile do leir do loscadh .i. in damliac mor cona tuighi do luaidhe, 7 in cloicthech cona cloccaibh, 7 in Saball 7 in Toai* . . .); 1027 (burning of Dunkeld); 1031 (burning of Kildare 'through the negligence of a wicked woman': *tria anfaitces drochmna*); 1040 (burning of Kildare; of Kells; of Downpatrick 'and many churches besides': *7 ilchealla archena*); 1050 (burning of Kildare, *co na daimliag*).

In some of the foregoing instances, perhaps especially in the earlier part of the period when entries provide less detail, the burnings may have been deliberately caused. A significant number, however,must have been accidental; and some are explicitly stated to have been so, or to have been the result of natural disasters. It seems reasonable to suppose therefore that many, if not most, of the buildings of a monastery were of wood. (Cf. the entries for Clonmacnoise 815 + 817, 833 + 834; for Armagh, 995 + 997; for Kildare, 1019 + 1020). Indeed, the entries of 782 (Clonbroney) and 891 suggest that they may sometimes have been of fairly light construction or at least so constructed that they could be uprooted given sufficient force (with sleeper-beam foundations?). The frequent references to the total or partial destruction of a monastery by fire suggest, too, that occupation may have been fairly, though perhaps not uniformly, dense at times. However, it should be borne in mind that buildings with stone walls, but having roofs of thatch or shingles and, it may be, some vertical timber framing, could as easily have been ruined or rendered useless by fire as wooden ones: the instances cited above contain a number of explicit references to stone buildings.

2. THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY: SPECIALISED GROUPS

There are some indications of specialised groups within the larger monastic community, whose existence, if they had their own (especially enclosed) quarters, might be expected to have had a significant effect on the overall ground plan.

ANCHORITES

699 (obit of Aedh, anchorite *o Sleibtiu* (Sleaty)); 730 (obit of Echaid *anchoritae airdd Machae*); 732 (obit of Dochuma Bolggan *ancorita airdd Machae*); 735 (obit of Dublittir, *uir sapiens 7 anchorita Insole uaccae albae* (presumably Inchbofin, Co. Westmeath; or Inishbofin, Co. Galway)); 744 (obit of Conghus *anchorita Cluana tibrinne*); 747 (obit of Dodimóc *anchoritae, abbatis Cluana irairdd 7 Cille daro*); 747 (obit of Cúán *anchoirita o Lilcach* (Lully)); 751 (obit of Cilléne *anchoritae Iae*); 751 (obit of Osbran *anchorite 7 episcopi Cluana creamha* (Clooncraff)); 755 (obit of Ailgal *ancorita Cluana Cormaic*); 756 (obit of Fidhmuine *ancoritae Rathin* (Rahan)); 756 (*Cuidghal ancorita, Aildobur abbas Muccirt, mortui sunt*); 773 (obit of Imraithech *glinne Cloitighe, anchorita*); 775 (*quies Colmain fhinn ancoritae*); 779 (*congressio senodorum nepotum Neill Laginentiumque in opido Temro, ubi fuerunt ancoritae 7 scribe multi, quibus dux erat Dublitter*); 782 (obit of Suairlech *ancorita celibris Liss moer*); 786 (obit of Aldchú *ancorita Ratho oinbo*); 790 (obit of Dínertach, *ancorita*); 795 (*scribae 7 episcopi 7 ancoritae, dormierunt*); 795 (obit of Clothcú, *episcopus 7 ancorita Cluana iraird*); 800 (obit of Nindidh, *ancorita*); 806 (obit of Elarius, *ancorita et scriba Locha creae* (Monaincha)); 810 (obit of Dimmán of Araidh, *Muminensis ancorita*); 811 (obit of Flann *abbas Finnglaise,*

scriba et anchorita et episcopus; of Echaidh *episcopus et ancorita prinnceps Tamlachta;* of Nuadha *episcopus et ancorita, abbas airrd Machae*); 813 (obit of Feidilmidh *abbas Cille Moinni et moer Breg o phatraic ancorita precipuus scribaque optimus*); 814 (obit of Maelcanaigh *ancorita Lugmaidh*); 816 (*mors Dathail episcopi, scribae et ancoritae*); 820 (obit of Cennfaeladh, *scriba et episcopus et ancorita, abb Atho truim*); 821 (obit of Euchu *ancorita et episcopus, abbas Lugmaid*); 822 (obit of Sechnasach of Loch-Cendin *episcopus et ancorita*); 824 (obit of Diarmait *anchorita et religionis doctor totius Hiberniae*); 827 (*martre Temhnen anchorat*, probably at the hands of Norsemen, on the coast of Ard Cianachta); 835 (obit of Forbasach *episcopus et ancorita Luscan*); 836 (obit of Flaithroa *abbas monistrech Buti, episcopus et ancorita*); 837 (obit of Dochutu *sanctus episcopus et ancorita Slane*); 838 (obit of Maelgaimridh *scriba optimus et ancorita, abbas Benncair*); 839 (obit of Joseph, *episcopus et scriba optimus et ancorita, abbas Cluana auis et aliarum ciuitatum*); 842 (*Cumsudh mac Derero et Moinaigh mac Sothchadaigh, duo episcopi et duo ancorite, in una nocte mortui sunt i n-disirt Diarmata*); 842 (*Donnacan mac Maeletuile, scriba et ancorita, in Italia quieuit*); 842 (obit of Colgu *ancorita*); 844 (obit of Gormghal, *episcopus et ancorita Lainne leire* (Dunleer)); 846 (*Feidhlimidh (.i. mac Crimtain), rex Muman, optimus Scotorum, pausauit scriba et ancorita*); 847 (obit of Fínsnechta of Luibnech, *anchorita, et rex Connacht antea*); 848 (obit of Onchú *episcopus et ancorita Slane*); 851 (obit of Forindán, abbot of Armagh, *scriba et episcopus et anchorita*); 855 (obit of Suibhne, *scriba et anchorita, abbas Liss moer*); 857 (obit of Cumsuth, *episcopus et ancorita, princeps Cluana irairdd*); 861 (obit of Finan of Cluain Caín (Clonkeen, Co. Louth), *episcopus et anchorita*); 861 (obit of Muirghes *ancorita aird Macha*); 863 (obit of Áedgen Britt, *episcopus Cille daro, et scriba et anchorita*); 866 (obit of Coscrach of Tech Taille (Tihelly), *scriba et ancorita*); 866 (obit of Cormac, *scriba et episcopus et ancorita*); 869 (obit of Suairlech Indeidhnen (? Inan, p. of Killyon, Co. Meath: Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 37), *episcopus et ancorita et abbas Cluana irairdd, optimus doctor relegionis totius Hiberniae*); 869 (obit of Máelodhor, *ancorita abbas Daiminse*); 869 (obit of Comgan Fota *ancorita Tamhlactae daltae Maeleruain*); 869 (obit of Condla *ancorita Droma cara airde Ciannachta* (Drumcar)); 870 (obit of Colgu, *sacerdos et ancorita, abbas Cluana conaire Tommaen*); 871 (obit of Gnia, *princeps Doimliacc, ancorita et episcopus et scriba optimus*); 880 (obit of Crunnmáel of Cluain Caín, *episcopus et ancorita*); 890 (obit of Suibhne, *ancorita et scriba optimus Cluana macc U Nois*); 892 (obit of Mochta, *episcopus ancorita et scriba optimus aird Macha:* probably the Mochta captured by Norsemen at 878, there called *fer leghinn*); 902 (obit of Ceallach, *anchorita et episcopus aird Machae*); 907 (obit of Cormac, *ancorita princeps Droma moir* (Dromore, Co. Down)); 928 (obit of Céile, abbot of Bangor, *scriba et anchorita et apostolicus doctor totius Hibernie:* cf. 927); 929 (obit of Flann of Fore, *episcopus et ancorita*); 930 (obit of Maeleoin, *episcopus et ancorita Atho truim*); 935 (obit of Joseph, abbot of Armagh, *episcopus et sapiens et ancorita*); 951 (obit

of Cele, *clam 7 ancorita*).

All the entries relating to anchorites in AU, 650-1050, have been presented here *in extenso* and (more or less) *verbatim* in the belief that the discussion will be easier to follow. All or any of the entries could refer to individuals living solitary lives of varying degrees of ascetic severity, within, at some remove, or quite apart from, a monastic community. Some read most naturally in that light: e.g., those of 773 (?), 775, 790, 800, 827, 842 (Colgu), 847 and 951. The number of entries, on the other hand, which describe an anchorite as 'of X', where X is usually an attested or well-known monastery, is sufficiently large to warrant the suggestion that the *anchorita* is frequently (for a period at least) a monastic official: e.g., 730, 732, 735, 744 (?), 751 (Iona), 755 (?), 756 (Rahan), 756 (*ancorita Muccirt?*), 782, 786 (?), 814, 861 (Armagh), 869 (Tallaght), 869 (Drumcar). In many cases, furthermore, a man seems to be anchorite of and abbot or (and) other official of a monastery: e.g., 747 (Clonard and Kildare: perhaps abbot only of both), 751 (Clooncraff), 795 (Clonard), 806, 835, 837, 844, 848, 869 (Clonard), 869 (Devenish), 890, 892, 902, 907, 930. If this be so, a significant number of other entries, in which the wording is ambiguous, may similarly indicate offices held in plurality: e.g., 811 (Finglas), 811 (Tallaght), 811 (Armagh), 813, 816, 820, 821, 822, 836, 838, 839, 851, 855, 857, 861 (Clonkeen), 863, 866 (Tihelly), 866 (Cormac), 870, 871, 880, 928, 929, 935. In no case is an entry informative enough or its construction explicit enough to permit firm conclusions to be drawn. It will be noticed, however, that the three rough categories proposed here show a chronological development from anchorites simply 'of X', through the suggested tenure of two offices only (as a rule) in plurality, to the more ambiguous situation where two, three or even more offices seem to be held by the same individual.

Anchorites must indeed have started as private individuals leading their own spiritual lives as hermits. The first notice of an anchorite in the period under review is at 699, where the dead man (Aedh) is merely described as *o Sleibtiu* (Sleaty): cf. 747 (Lully). It has been suggested above that there is evidence here for the continuation of this basic practice. It may well have outlasted the period of proposed 'institutional' eremitism (which seems to belong mainly to the 8th and 9th centuries); though, after the death of Cele, surely a solitary, in 951, there is no further notice of an anchorite in any capacity for a century anyway. Even allowing, however, for a loose honorific use of such terms as *anchorita, sapiens, scriba,* in some instances, the suspicion remains with the writer that, from the end of the first quarter of the 8th century until at least the end of the first quarter of the 10th, *anchorita* in AU usually means a monastic official having overall responsibility for those members of a community living a life of more advanced ascetic discipline, whether in groups or individually, whether within or outwith the main monastic enclosure. *Abbas* and *episcopus*, at least, can scarcely be used honorifically, even allowing for very loose usage. And the idiosyncratic character of the early Irish church notwithstanding, the overwhelming impression is gained that many, if not most, of these men enjoyed careers too public (and perhaps too lucrative) for hermits pure and simple. Conversely, they could not have exercised (other) high monastic office, or the functions of episcopal orders, efficiently or accessibly had they been pursuing the eremitic life continuously or even seasonally. Though it is beyond the period in question by over a century and probably does not represent a continuation of the phenomenon suggested here, it may not be irrelevant to draw attention at this point to the *dísertach* at Iona, mentioned at 1164 in company with the *sacart mor,* the *fer léiginn,* the *cenn na Ceile nDe* and *maithi muinnteri Ia arcena.* A site called *Cladh* ('graveyard') *an Dìseirt* lies a short distance to NE of the N side of the surviving *vallum* at Iona, with *Port an Dìseirt* on the shore just to SE of it.

The entry relating to Castledermot at 842 (above) is interesting. The monastery was apparently founded in 812 (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 31), during the period of the ascetic revival associated with the Céli Dé and St Maelruain of Tallaght. Its original name, moreover, has the element O Ir *dísert* (*Contribb*, degra-dodelbtha) implying, surely, an eremitical bias. It may have been intended as an association of anchorites, whether living individually or severally. Both men referred to here were in episcopal orders and so it is possible that there were more than one organized group of anchorites within the community.

SRUITHI etc.

A number of other entries point, more or less definitely, to the existence in some monasteries of distinct groups, possibly the same as or similar to those postulated above, and having their own head. At 767 there occurs the obit of Ua Miannaigh, *abbas sruithi Cluana mic Nois*. This is translated by Hennessy 'most learned abbot of Clonmacnoise'. The word in question is *sruith*, as adjective, 'old, senior, venerable, to be revered, honoured, esteemed'; as substantive (masculine) 'elder, ancestor, reverend person, sage' etc. — an *i*-stem. The superlative is *sruithem* (see *Contribb* S). If therefore *sruithi* in this quotation were emended to *sruithe* (genitive pl.), Ua Miannaigh could be an abbot 'of seniors' in Clonmacnoise. And indeed we have, at 810, the obit of Tuathgal, *abbas sruithe Cluana* (i.e., Clonmacnoise) — similarly rendered by Hennessy 'a most wise abbot of Cluain'. It may be observed, though too much weight cannot be placed on the observation, that the obits of abbots of Clonmacnoise are also entered at 769 and 770; and at 813. But the suspicion that distinct sub-communities of *sruithi* are referred to in both instances is strengthened by the entry at 796 of the obit of Condal, *abatissa tighe sruithe Cille daro,* where Hennessy explains *tech sruithe* as 'house of seniors' (footnote). *Sruithi* are further mentioned at 985, when Iona was plundered by Danes, who killed the abbot and 15 seniors (*in apaidh 7 xu. uiros do sruithibh na cille*); and at 1014, when (after Clontarf) the abbot of Armagh went to Swords *co sruithibh 7 co minnaibh*, to take charge of the body of Brian Boru. In both these

latter cases, however, the term may mean no more than older, therefore senior, members of the community at large.

It was noticed earlier that on two occasions, 1003 and 1016, the head of the guest establishment at Armagh — the *les oiged* — is called *airchinnech*. Here, at least, the complex seems to have had its own enclosure, or sub-enclosure; and such is very likely to have been the case elsewhere. Specialised groups had their own quarters within their own clearly defined boundaries, inside or outside the *vallum monasterii*. This was probably so in the case of the Céli Dé of Armagh (920), who appear to have run a leper house or infirmary at the time (see above). It may well have been the case also with students: Maelpetair, *fer leighinn 7 toisech macleighinn aird Macha,* was killed at 1042. In this last instance, however, it is worth noting that, although *scribae* are mentioned (frequently) between 696 and 1005, *fir léighinn* from 878, and *sapientes* etc. (fairly frequently) from 660, there is no mention of a school, scriptorium or library as a separate building or complex. (Cf. Hughes, 1966, 136: 'The high rank of the *scriba,* or *suí* (sage, *sapiens*), is indicated in the secular as well as in the ecclesiastical laws. His presence indicates a school of Latin learning . . .'). Craftsmen probably had their own quarters too, perhaps grouped according to occupation and outside the main monastic enclosure. They are mentioned only once explicitly, at 1029, where the obit is entered of Maelbrigte Ua Brolcháin, *primshaer Erenn.* (He is not actually said to be attached to a church, but, given his family name, he probably was).

A few other entries may point in the same general direction, though there is certainly nothing conclusive about their evidence and simple coincidence, later editing or politics may be the truth — alone or in combination. At 774, the obits of two abbots of Louth are entered together without comment (*Donngal . . . abbas Lugmaidh, 7 Fianchu abbas Lughmaidh*). Similarly, at 786, the obits are entered together of the abbot and two bishops of Kildare (*Muiredach . . . abbas Cille daro, Lomthuili episcopus Cille daro, Sneidbran episcopus chille daro*); at 874, the obits of two bishops of Kildare, who held individually the abbacy of another house (*Robartach . . . episcopus Cille daro, et scriba optimus, et princeps Cille achaidh, et Lachtnan . . . episcopus Cille daro et princeps Fernann*); at 876, the obits of two abbots of Clonmacnoise (*Eugan et Maeltuile . . . duo abbates Cluana macc U Nois, in pace dormierunt*); and at 964, the obits of two abbots of Terryglass (*Iosep 7 Dunchadh abbaid thire dha ghlas*). In no case is there any additional comment from the annalist(s).

Bede, describing the great Welsh monastery of Bangor-is-coed at the time of the battle of Chester (616), says: '*Erant autem plurimi eorum (sacerdotes) de monasterio Bancor, in quo tantus fertur fuisse numerus monachorum, ut, cum in VII portiones esset cum praepositis sibi rectoribus monasterium diuisum, nulla harum portio minus quam CCCtos homines haberet, qui omnes de labore manuum suarum uiuere solebant*' (Plummer, 1896 (1969), 1, 84 = *H.E.* ii, 2). The passage refers, admittedly, to an earlier period than that under discussion here, to a

different country, and is reported by an English writer long afterwards. But the (probably diverse) origins of monasticism in the Celtic-speaking lands must have been substantially the same: would the organization described by Bede for Bangor-is-coed in the early 7th century have been that unfamiliar to St Pachomius and his successors, at Tabennisi, Canopus and elsewhere, in 4th-century Egypt?

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References have been used as sparingly as possible. It has been thought of more interest to let AU speak for themselves in the main, even to the extent that the information thus obtained is incomplete or misleading in the light of other sources.

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