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The history and provenance of two early medieval crosiers ascribed to Clonmacnoise

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Abstract

The Clonmacnoise crosier, one of finest examples of early medieval metalwork from Ireland, is described, and its history and provenance are thoroughly investigated for the first time. It is argued that the workshop that created it and related material was located at Clonmacnoise and that abbot Tigernach Ua Bráein (d.1088) may have been its commissioner. While there is no basis to the story that it was found, along with another crosier, in Temple Ciarán its iconography nevertheless suggests a link with that building and more generally with Clonmacnoise. A crosier-head with a supposed Clonmacnoise provenance is also discussed, its Clonmacnoise provenance is rejected, and it is proposed that it may have been deliberately broken and repaired in the sixteenth century. An attempt to trace its history has revealed the record of a theft of an Irish crosier-head from the British Museum in the nineteenth century, the fate of which remains unknown.

Introduction

This paper examines the provenance of two early medieval Irish crosiers that have been ascribed to the major ecclesiastical complex of Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly: first, what is generally known as the Clonmacnoise crosier, among the finest pieces of early medieval ecclesiastical metalwork from Ireland; and second, a less well-known crosier-head. Both

were acquired by the Royal Irish Academy in the nineteenth century and are now in the National Museum of Ireland (NMI). Several modern scholarly publications state that these two crosiers were discovered in Temple Ciarán, a shrine-chapel at the site, in the nineteenth century. As there is limited knowledge concerning how Irish crosiers were used, or where they were kept, during the early medieval period, an association with a shrine-chapel, if true, would be particularly significant. This paper scrutinises the literature concerning these two crosiers in order to determine as accurately as possible what is known of their history and provenance.

The Clonmacnoise crosier

The Clonmacnoise crosier (NMI R2988) is one of the best preserved and best known of the surviving early medieval Irish crosiers **[Pl. I]**. Probably dating from the late eleventh century, it has been included in numerous Irish and international publications since the nineteenth century and has been exhibited temporarily in several different countries (Robinson 1863, 46–7, cat. no. 896; Cone 1977, cat. no. 59; Ryan 1983, cat. no. 77). While a number of brief accounts of it have been published over the years (Armstrong 1915, 306–7; Crawford 1923, 169; Raftery 1941, 159; Henry 1970, 101–2; Lucas 1973 116–7; de Paor 1977, 185–6; Ó Floinn 1983, 165–6; Bourke 2014, 314), and a number of facsimiles of it have been made (e.g. Johnson 1893, 54; Metropolitan Museum of Art 1908, 51; Edelstein 1992, 144, cat. no. 252), before now it has not been the subject of a substantial study and its provenance has never been properly scrutinised.

Remarkably, apart from some minor damage and repair, the crosier, which is 97cm tall, is largely complete. Like most of the surviving early Irish crosiers it has a wooden core to which its metal components are nailed. While these components are all of copper alloy, many

of them contain inlays and settings, comprising of silver, copper, niello, glass, and enamel. Its principal elements consist of a head or crook, a shaft, three knops and a ferrule.

The crook was largely cast as one piece, except for a separately made crest and drop plate **[Pl. II]**. This method of crook construction seems to be found primarily in the early medieval kingdom of Mide [Meath] (Murray 2007a, 90, fig. 11). The crook measures 13.5cm high, 15.5cm wide and is a maximum of 3.7cm in thickness. It is decorated on each side with four or five fantastic snake-like creatures forming interlocking figures-of-eight and loops. These creatures are further intertwined by lappets that spring from their heads and bodies forming knotted vegetal-like designs around them. The ornament is laid out in bands of inlaid silver bordered by thinner bands of niello, sections of which have been lost through wear. It has long been recognised that this zoomorphic ornament is heavily indebted to late Viking art, principally the Ringerike style, but also exhibiting some Urnes style influence, and most of the brief discussions of the crosier's decoration have focussed on this aspect (Coffey 1909, 62; Shetelig 1909, 102–4; 1948, 111; Kendrick 1949, 114–5; Moe 1955, 14–7; de Paor and de Paor 1964, 167–8; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 144; de Paor 1979, 45; Fuglesang 1980, 52–3; Ó Floinn 2001, 93; Graham-Campbell 2013, 154; O'Meadhra 2015, 392–4). The frame around the drop is executed in openwork and crowning it is a male human face featuring long sideburns and moustache **[Pl. III]**. Interestingly, a very similar face occurs on a stirrup mount found in Deal, Kent, England (Williams 1995, fig. 7). The original drop plate, which would have been elaborately decorated, has unfortunately been lost. It was replaced at some unknown time by a plain copper-alloy strip over which was fixed a cast copper-alloy figurative plaque. The plaque, which may be a pilgrim's badge, depicts a bishop killing a dragon and has been dated stylistically by Raghnall Ó Floinn (1983, 166) to the fifteenth century. On the underside of the drop is a copper plate featuring *champlevé* enamel forming a double spiral vegetal-like design in blue, green and yellow.

At the base of the crook, positioned at its front, is a small, highly stylized, animal-head **[Pls. II and III]**, while at the back there is a larger animal-head in high relief, which faces downward, and which forms the terminal of the crest **[Pl. II]**. The openwork crest was cast separately and riveted to the main body of the crook. It currently consists of five crouched, forward-facing, dog-like animals in a row; although approximately half of its upper portion has broken away and is now missing.

The shaft of the crosier has three highly decorative, cast, copper-alloy, barrel-shaped knops, as well as two lengths of undecorated copper-alloy tubing **[Pl. I]**. The tubing was originally sealed vertically by two binding strips, which are now missing. A leather membrane is visible between the wooden core and the metal tubing. The top of the upper knop has been trimmed back to accommodate the base of the crest, indicating that the upper knop has been remounted on the crosier **[Pl. II]**. This knop measures 7.5cm high and is a maximum of 4.5cm in diameter, while the lower knop measures 6.8cm high and is 4.55cm in maximum diameter. The upper and lower knops are decorated with triangular and rectangular, copper and copper-alloy plaques, which are separated by blue glass studs **[Pls I–III]**. The plaques bear interlaced and knotted abstract designs, while the borders between them are decorated with inlaid bands of twisted copper and silver wire. In particular, the copper plaques feature cells, the backs of which are keyed to receive an inlay. It appears that these may have originally been enamelled, or at least that seems to have been what was originally intended, even if never completed.

The middle knop, which measures 8.8cm high and a maximum of 4.2cm in diameter, is plainer than the other two and is inlaid with bands of silver bordered by thinner bands of niello forming a loose knotted design **[Pl. I]**. Below the upper knop, and made separately, is an unusual copper-alloy collar, measuring 4.2cm high and 3.8cm in diameter **[Pls II and III]**. It is decorated with two pairs of affronted animals with crossing front legs, which are

probably best interpreted as lions, as they feature manes and cat-like ears. Their tails form triquetras before engaging with one of the two unattached animal-heads that are set between their hindquarters. Below the lower knop is a very simple ferrule, consisting of a ring and a tapering spike **[Pl. I]**.

Frazer's crosier-head

In contrast to the Clonmacnoise crosier, this crosier-head (NMI 1899:28) is not well-known and in modern scholarship it features mainly on account of its supposed Clonmacnoise connection **[Pl. IV]**. Only around one third of its original crook survives, the rest of it having been somewhat crudely replaced at the end of the late medieval period, contra Overbey (2012, 179–80) who dates the whole piece to around 1100. It is, no doubt, because so little remains of its original early medieval ornament, that it is so poorly published, the main reference being a paper by William Frazer, its one-time owner, who first ascribed it to Clonmacnoise (Frazer 1889), while it has been discussed briefly by others (Allen 1904, 235; Coffey 1909, 63; Crawford 1923, 169; Henry 1970, 100–1; Raftery 1941, 161; Overby 2012, 160, 179–80, figs 108, 120).

Even though so little of the original crosier remains, it bears fine ornament that connects it stylistically and technically with the Clonmacnoise crosier, as has previously been noted (Henry 1970, 101; Ó Floinn 1987, 181). In total, the remains, which measure approximately 16.5cm high, 12.5cm wide and 4cm in thickness, consist of a crook and knop made of brass. XRF analysis has been carried out on the crosier-head by Dr Paul Mullarkey of the National Museum of Ireland and the results are presented in an appendix to this paper. The wooden shaft that protrudes from it appears to be a modern addition, judging by the lack of fixing holes in it. Measuring approximately 20cm long and secured by a single nail at the base of the crook, it had been attached to the crosier by the time Frazer (1889, 206) purchased

it in 1888. However, there is a small portion of wood in the lower section of the crook, and another in the drop, which may be medieval in date. The upper section of the crook and the drop appear to be of early sixteenth-century workmanship and are made of sheet brass decorated with engraved leaf- and dog-tooth patterns. The front of the drop features a naively engraved figure of an ecclesiastic with an applied head in relief featuring a mitre **[Pl. V]**. The figure, who may be identified as a bishop, is heavily stylised and is depicted with his right hand raised in blessing, while he carries a cross-staff in his left.

The original part of the crosier consists of the lower portion of the crook and the knop, both of cast brass and decorated with gilding, as well as inlaid bands of silver bordered with thinner bands of niello in a knotted vegetal-like design **[Pls IV and V]**. There is a groove, approximately 1cm wide, running along the outer curve of the crook that expands into an open slot near the base. This originally accommodated the separately made crest, which is now missing. In a similar manner to the Clonmacnoise crosier, at the base of the crook there is a large openwork knot in relief, which has zoomorphic elements and originally functioned as the crest's terminal. The barrel-shaped knop, which measures 4.15cm high and 3.45 in maximum diameter, has four evenly spaced circular gunmetal settings around its centre, which although now empty, probably originally contained glass studs. Like the crook, the knop is otherwise decorated with inlaid bands of silver bordered by thinner bands of niello in a spiral vegetal-like design.

Reconstructed crook

The crook was broken in half at some time, something that would have been difficult to achieve accidentally. Rather than trying to fasten the two pieces back together, the upper section was reconstructed, probably because the original upper piece had either been carried off or was damaged beyond use. This suggests that the damage was deliberate, something

apparently paralleled in the case of the crosier of the O'Brady's from Kilmore, Co. Cavan and several other early medieval crosiers (Murray 2012, 438–9). As the reconstructed part of the crook may be dated to the early sixteenth century through both technical and stylistic comparison with the Misach from Clonmany, Co. Donegal, which was redecorated in 1534 (Hourihane 2003, 122-4, pl. 150), it seems possible that the crosier was damaged during the Reformation. In 1537/8 several important relics were destroyed, including the Bachall Ísu, as the Annals relate:

> 'They … burned the images, shrines, and relics, of the saints of Ireland and England; they likewise burned the celebrated image of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Trim … and they also burned the staff of Jesus, which was in Dublin, performing miracles, from the time of St. Patrick down to that time, and had been in the hands of Christ while he was among men (AFM 1537).'

As many early medieval Irish crosiers were regarded as relics during the later and post-medieval periods, they were seen by Protestants as objects of superstition. Indeed, another crosier, which had also been reconstructed in the later medieval period, was subsequently broken in exactly the same manner as Frazer's crosier-head, its remnants being found on a *crannóg* near Loughrea, Co. Galway in the mid-nineteenth century (Kinahan 1864, 424; Raftery 1941, 160, pl. 95).

Two crosiers from Temple Ciarán?

In several modern publications it has been presented as a fact that these two crosiers were discovered in Temple Ciarán at Clonmacnoise (e.g. Harbison 1992a, 277; Edwards 2002,

243), one stating, for example, that ‘in 1821 two crosiers were discovered at the east end of the building’ (Fitzpatrick and O’Brien 1998, 15). Others state that only one of the crosiers was found there (e.g. Killanin and Duignan 1962, 161; Henry 1970, 101; Harbison 2004, 122). Temple Ciarán is the smallest church surviving at Clonmacnoise, measuring only 3.82 x 2.71m internally, featuring antae, as well as a stone reliquary cist in its north-east corner (Manning 2003, 63–72; Ó Carragáin 2010, 74, 307). It is apparently not only the oldest extant building at Clonmacnoise but is one of the oldest mortared stone buildings in Ireland, a sample of mortar from the building yielding a radiocarbon date of AD 660–980 (Berger 1995, 169; Murphy 2008). This small church, which incorporates the reputed gravesite of St Ciarán, is an example of a type of building known from early medieval Ireland and Scotland, that have been termed shrine-chapels (Ó Carragáin 2003; 2010, 66–85).

It was recorded in August 1684 that a relic of St Ciarán’s hand was kept in Temple Ciarán, which was still roofed at the time (O’Donovan 1857, 447–8), although James Ware (1594–1666) recorded that the relic had been kept in the ‘great Church’ (Harris 1739, 166). An accompanying engraving in Walter Harris’s 1739 edition of Ware’s work depicts rafters still in place on Temple Ciarán, although they were gone, though remembered, by the mid-nineteenth century (O’Donovan 1857, 447 n.2). While the relic of Ciarán’s hand apparently no longer survives, it is possible that it was contained in an arm-shaped reliquary like St Laichtín’s arm from Donoughmore, Co. Cork (Murray 2004). A silver chalice associated with the chapel and dated 1647 is still extant (Ó Háinle and Manning 2003).

As stated at the outset of this paper, a direct association between these crosiers and Temple Ciarán, if such existed, would be very significant. However, as will be demonstrated, no evidence for such a connection exists; the authors above merely followed antiquarian accounts, which contained errors and assumptions. In order to discover the true provenance of the crosiers it is necessary to document the earliest references to them.

The recent histories of the crosiers

The Clonmacnoise crosier and Major Sirr

The Clonmacnoise crosier once belonged to Henry Charles Sirr, the infamous Town Major of Dublin (1764–1841), who amassed a large collection of paintings, shells, and antiquities during his life (Hammond 1942; Kleinman 2009). Seemingly, the earliest publication of this crosier is an illustration of its upper portion in a lithograph along with the thirteenth-century Limoges crosier from Cashel, Co. Tipperary, in *Picturesque Views of the Antiquities of Ireland* by Robert O'Callaghan Newenham (1830, 25, plate) **[Pl. VI]**. Walter Strickland (1913, 168) stated that O'Callaghan Newenham's (1770–1849) illustrations 'first appeared in numbers, each containing eight lithographs … in 1826' before being published in volume format in 1830. Both crosiers were captioned '2 Croziers Dug up 100 Years ago.' No further details of the provenance of the crosier under discussion are given, apart from stating that it was 'in the possession of Major Sirr of Dublin'. The Limoges crosier from Cashel was recorded as having 'belonged to the late Dr Tuite [sic.]' (O'Callaghan Newenham 1830, 25). The caption on the lithograph implies that the Clonmacnoise crosier was found in the early-eighteenth century, which was accepted by Bourke (2014). However, given the crosier's general condition it seems unlikely that it had ever been buried, or, at least, spent any significant time in the soil. Conversely, it is known that the Cashel crosier was 'dug up' in Cashel Cathedral around 1768 and in 1826 it was purchased by George Petrie at the sale of the collection of Doctor Thomas Tuke of 106 St Stephen's Green, Dublin (Nevin 1995, 131; Murray 2007b; 2008).

The Clonmacnoise crosier is next noted in the catalogue of Irish antiquities from the Sirr collection (Anon. 1841, 5), where it is described as an 'Ancient ornamental crozier, which

belonged to the Old Abbots of Clonmacnoise.' This catalogue, and at least two others, accompanied an exhibition of Sirr's collection in the Rotunda, Dublin, following his death in 1841. The impetus for the exhibition of the collection was probably the wish to sell it; Sirr's Irish antiquities were bought by the Royal Irish Academy for its newly expanding museum from his son, the Rev. Joseph D'Arcy Sirr, in 1844 for £350 (PRIA 1844, 548). The exhibition catalogue is the earliest source known to the author that identifies the crosier's original provenance and it is because of this entry that it is sometimes referred to as the 'Crosier of the Abbots of Clonmacnoise'. Also listed in the 1841 catalogue, under number 192, is an object described as 'Bronze ornament of a Crosier' (Anon. 1841, 7) which has been identified by the author in the NMI collections and does not relate to the crosier under discussion (Murray 2012, 431–4).

In addition, there is a list of medieval church treasures and their respective owners in the George Petrie papers in the National Library of Ireland (MS 795). This seems to have been compiled in the early 1840s and it names Major Sirr as the owner of 'St Kieran's Crozier.' Published mid-nineteenth century sources, following its acquisition by the Royal Irish Academy, associate the crosier with Clonmacnoise (e.g. O'Curry 1861, 338; Robinson 1863, 46–7; Westwood 1868, 151, pl. 53, fig. 2). Although Françoise Henry (1970, 101) speculated that Sirr 'might have obtained it directly or indirectly from the family of its hereditary keepers', currently nothing is known about how, and from whom, Sirr acquired the crosier.

Pococke's crosier of St Ciarán of Saigir

An Irish crosier is mentioned in the sale catalogue of the collection of Rev. Richard Pococke (1704–65), Protestant Bishop of Ossory and Meath, and well-known travel writer (Ireland 2008). The collection was sold in London in 1766 and the entry reads as follows: 'A silver pastoral staff of St. Kerian [sic.], the first bishop of Ossory' (Anon. 1766, cat. no. 114). This

does not refer to St Ciarán of Clonmacnoise, but to his namesake, St Ciarán of Saigir. Possibly it came from his foundation of Seir Kieran, Co. Offaly, or from Kilkenny, the diocesan seat of Ossory from the twelfth century (Bradley 2015). Based on the evidence presented here it cannot be argued that Pococke's crosier is the Clonmacnoise crosier, but given its association with a St Ciarán this is possible, albeit unlikely.

A more distinct possibility is that Pocoke's crosier is that now in the British Museum (Ireland 2008, 374–5) **[Pl. VII]**. Although ascribed to Kells, Co. Meath (Mac Dermott 1955, 105–6), the provenance of the British Museum (BM) crosier is in fact unknown, having been discovered behind a cupboard in a deceased Catholic solicitor's office in London in 1850 (Stokes 1868, 294). As a larger amount of silver is used in the British Museum crosier than all of the other surviving early medieval Irish crosiers, it is perhaps the most deserving of the description of 'silver pastoral staff' and so could potentially be Pococke's crosier of St Ciarán of Saigir.

Richard Gough (1789, 539), who was Director of the Society of Antiquaries in London, mentions when discussing Clonmacnoise and St Ciarán that 'His crosier was, shewn to the Society of Antiquaries.' However, it seems most likely that the crosier exhibited was that of Ciarán of Saigir from the collection of Richard Pococke, which we know was in London in 1766 for the collection sale. Furthermore, Pococke was a member of the Society of the Antiquaries and is known to have exhibited Irish antiquities from his collection to them. While many of these are recorded in the society's minutes, unfortunately there appears to be no mention of the crosier (Herity 1969).

Confusion over the discoveries in Temple Ciarán

In a manuscript notebook, George Petrie (1790–1866) noted the mention of a crosier of St Ciarán by Richard Gough, although he seemingly gives the incorrect volume and page

number. This notebook, entitled 'Notes on the history of Clonmacnoise,' was bequeathed to the Royal Irish Academy by Margaret Stokes. The passage is quoted here in full, as it appears in the notebook, for it helps to explain the subsequent confusion in the published literature.

> 'The Tomb of St. Ciaran, was searched about 30 years since, in expectation of finding Treasure – when behold – they discovered a rosary of brass wire – a hollow ball of the same metal which opened – a pewter chalice and wine vessel for the altar and some other things which like those already mentioned were of no intrinsic value, but interesting as memorials of the simplicity and poverty of the saint and the religious persons of his times! These curious relics fell into ignorant hands, and were probably not deemed worthy of preservation, but there is reason to believe that the Crozier of St. Ciaran a more valuable remain still exists – It was exhibited to the Soc of Antiquaries in 176_ (RIA MS 12N8, 195).'

St Ciaran's tomb at Clonmacnoise can be confidently identified as Temple Ciarán. Margaret Stokes, who was in possession of Petrie's notebook, used the passage above in her introduction to Petrie's *Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language*. It was Stokes who edited and wrote much of the book, the first volume of which appeared in 1872, six years after Petrie's death (Ní Ghrádaigh 2008). Again, it is worth quoting Stokes in full to see how the confusion arose:

> 'Dr. Petrie, writing in the year 1821, says: "Some thirty years ago, the tomb of St. Ciaran was searched, in the expectation of finding treasure, when a rosary of brass wire was discovered; a hollow ball of the same material, which opened; a chalice and wine vessel for the altar, and the crozier of St. Ciaran, were also found. These curious relics fell into

ignorant hands, and were not, probably, deemed worthy of preservation; but there is reason to believe that the last – mentioned – the crosier of St. Ciaran – still exists. It was exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries about the year 1760" (Petrie 1872, 3).'

Stokes clearly misinterpreted Petrie and presumed that the crosier was also discovered in the tomb at the time it was searched, even though no such account was given. This is not the only example of misinterpretation by Stokes (Bourke 1988, 116–7; 1990). Stokes' version of the discovery was published again in the Earl of Dunraven's (1877, 99–100) *Notes on Irish Architecture*, a book she also edited after the author's death. Her account, of course, is illogical. If the crosier had only been found thirty years before 1821 it could not have been exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries around 1760, as, according to her, it had not yet been discovered.

This inconsistency has not gone unnoticed and unfortunately William Frazer (1889, 210) felt that he could explain it. In an effort to find a provenance for the crosier-head in his possession (that described above), he suggested that there were in fact two crosiers from Clonmacnoise, and that the crosier discovered in Temple Ciarán was his example. Frazer purchased the crosier-head in London in the summer of 1888 at the time of the Irish Exhibition at the Olympia. All that Frazer (1889, 206) was able to find out about it from the vendors was that,

'it had been in their keeping for many years, and was brought by their family originally from Ireland, but its immediate owners were either ignorant how it was obtained, nor would they give the slightest information even as to the district whence they came. They were of Irish race and name, and said they had been long settled in England. All my efforts failing to obtain further information...'

Through comparison with the Clonmacnoise crosier, Frazer (1889, 208) speculated a similar provenance for the crosier in his possession and supported his claim by, what we now know to be, a fictitious reference to a crosier being found in Temple Ciarán, concluding that his crosier must have been the latter. In a note added in press he stated:

> 'A few days since Mr. E. Johnston, of Grafton-street, who saw the crozier in London, at the Olympia Exhibition, with the person from whom I purchased it, informed me he stated it was found many years ago at Clonmacnoise, thus confirming my investigation (Frazer 1889, 214).'

This was Edmond Johnson, the goldsmith, who is known for his reproductions of Irish antiquities, amongst them the Clonmacnoise crosier. Johnson had a trade stand at the exhibition and both he and William Frazer served on the Dublin Committee of the exhibition (Anon. 1888, 65, 69). However, the fact that Frazer received this information second hand, and the fact that it conveniently confirmed his theory on the provenance of the crosier, casts suspicion on its validity. Furthermore, if it had been found at Clonmacnoise and the person who sold it to Frazer knew this, why then would they keep this information from him and not from other inquirers? Indeed, its present condition is more suggestive of prolonged use and wear over many centuries, rather than of an object that was buried and rediscovered, which is in accordance with the information given directly to Frazer by the vendor. While it appears that this crosier-head was made by the same workshop as the Clonmacnoise crosier, there is not enough information at present to say any more about its provenance.

Stokes' error coupled with Fraser's attempt to explain her mistake gave rise to the following, which was noted in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* in an

account of a summer excursion to Clonmacnoise in 1907. While discussing Temple Ciarán, Thomas Westropp (1907, 335) stated:

> 'In St. Kieran's grave, at the east end, were found, about 1821, two crosiers, one a beautiful work of bronze, inlaid with silver patterns; the other, partly of the same materials and workmanship…This is believed to be the actual crosier of St. Kieran… They are in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy; but the other antiquities found at the same time have vanished.'

This casual and unreliable account has in turn been referenced by more recent publications. One may conclude that there was never any account of a crosier being found in Temple Ciarán and neither crosier can be directly associated with the shrine-chapel. Based on the evidence presented in this paper so far, the well-known Clonmacnoise crosier appears to be associated with the site, while the provenance of the crosier-head is uncertain.

An Irish crosier knop in the British Museum

There is a crosier-knop in the British Museum that is very similar in style and technique to Frazer's crosier-head **[Pl. VIII]**. This barrel-shaped knop is made of cast copper-alloy and is 5.5cm long and 4.5cm in diameter. It is inlaid with bands of silver edged with niello in a symmetrical knotted vegetal-like design (Stokes 1887, 112; Mahr 1932, pl. 72:3; Ó Floinn 1987, 181). If it were not for the difference in size between the BM knop and the remaining knop on Frazer's crosier-head, one could argue that the two were part of the same crosier. The registration number given for the knop by Joseph Raftery (1941, 158), '93/6/18.25(c)', is incorrect. The knop was later found unnumbered in the British Museum's collection in the 1970s and was registered as 'Old Aquisition 3394' by Barry Ager, who queried in the

museum's catalogue whether it might be 'part of [18]39, 3–12, 1?' The entry under 1839, 3–12, 1 reads:

'Bronze, head of crozier inlaid with gold.
Presented by the Rev J. Bulwer.
Ireland'

This entry was later annotated: 'a portion of this was stolen from the museum [A.W.F]'. Rev. James Bulwer (1794–1879), a collector, naturalist and artist, was from Aylsham, Norfolk. He became curate of Booterstown in Dublin in 1823, before moving back to England in the early 1830s and it is most likely that he acquired the crosier-head whilst in Ireland. The later undated annotation regarding the theft of part of it was made by Augustus Wollaston Franks [A.W.F], who worked in the museum from 1851 to 1897 (Wilson 2002, 385). John Obadiah Westwood (1868, 152) refers to this crosier in the British Museum collection, which he describes as 'the upper part of [a] staff, having a number of small compartments filled with golden interlaced filigree-work.' It is not listed amongst the relevant Irish material in the British Museum by Margaret Stokes (1887, 112). It is quite possible that the knop in the British Museum is the sole remnant of the crosier-head donated by Bulwer. It is clear, however, from the descriptions that the stolen portion was not the crosier-head that was sold to William Frazer, as that crosier is not decorated with gold filigree, nor does it show any signs of having been so decorated.

It appears that the portion of Bulwer's crosier-head was stolen sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century, perhaps in the 1860s or 1870s. Notably there are few recorded thefts from the British Museum in the nineteenth century (Wilson 2002, 113), although one

rare example has an Irish connection. This was the case of an Irishman, Eugene McCarthy, who in 1862 was prosecuted for stealing six books, some of which were of Irish interest, from the reading room of the British Museum in September 1857 (Anon. 1862). However, no connection can be made between McCarthy and the theft of a portion of Bulwer's crosier-head, while the time frame may also be a little early for any potential connection. Unfortunately, the location of the stolen portion is now unknown, and it cannot be identified amongst the Insular crosier-heads in public collections today.

Three crosiers from a Clonmacnoise workshop?

Unfortunately, the circumstances of the acquisition of what is referred to here as the Clonmacnoise crosier by Major Sirr are currently unknown, although there is no reason to doubt its Clonmacnoise provenance. On the other hand, little can be said about the original provenance of the crosier-head bought by Frazer, nor the crosier-knop in the British Museum, which may derive from the Irish crosier-head presented by Bulwer. What can be said though, considering all three objects – the crosier, crosier-head, and crosier-knop – on the basis of the style and techniques they exhibit, is that they were possibly all produced in the same workshop, as has previously been argued by Raghnall Ó Floinn (1987, 181), a workshop that may have been located at Clonmacnoise itself.

With reference to the Hiberno-Ringerike decoration on the head of the crosier, Ó Floinn (2001, 93) and James Graham-Campbell (2013, 154) consider that it probably relates to the 'Dublin school' of woodcarving, while Uaininn O'Meadhra (2015, 393), suggests that 'Clonmacnoise employed Dublin-trained artisans'. In terms of metalwork, the zoomorphic decoration on the head of the crosier is also comparable with that on the shrine of the *Cathach*, which was made some time between 1062 and 1094, probably in Kells, Co. Meath,

and which also exhibits strong stylistic links with Dublin (Mullarkey 2014, 302). The Clonmacnoise crosier also features two techniques that are only found elsewhere together on the tenth-century crosier found near Prosperous, Co. Kildare, which I have argued was of Dublin manufacture (Murray in press). These are the chased copper-alloy plaques on its knops and the presence of enamel decoration. This may imply that elements of the Clonmacnoise crosier were based on, or copied from, an older crosier, like that found near Prosperous, and which was possibly of tenth-century manufacture.

While a Dublin workshop may have produced the Clonmacnoise crosier, there is evidence that there was also a significant workshop operating at Clonmacnoise in the eleventh century. Contemporary evidence is the discovery of what has been interpreted as a goldsmith's hoard on the grounds of St Ciaran's National School at Clonmacnoise, dated to the last decade of the eleventh century and containing thirty Hiberno-Scandinavian coins, part of a twisted gold finger ring, and a copper-alloy ingot (Ó Floinn and King 1998). The coins could well be evidence of a connection with Dublin around the time that the crosier was made. An inscription on the shrine of the Lorrha (Stowe) Missal, dated 1026–1033, records how it had been made by 'Donnchadh Ua Taccain of the community of Cluain [i.e. Clonmacnoise]' (Ó Floinn 1987, 179; Ó Riain 1991; Ó Floinn 1998, 96–7; Mullarkey 2014, 301–2), indicating the presence of an accomplished workshop at the site in the earlier part of the century. Notably the figural iconography on the shrine bears a resemblance to that of a crucifixion plaque found near Clonmacnoise (Harbison 1980; Murray 2013). Other notable stray finds of metalwork from Clonmacnoise dating from the eleventh and early twelfth centuries include an important silver kite-brooch (Somerville 1993; current location unknown), a hanging-bowl mount (Murray 2014, 284–5), a gilt bronze boss, and two decorative disc-headed pins (Ó Floinn 1987, 180, 183, pls Ic, IIc). The two pins may be the most relevant to our discussion, as the first of these (NMI P633) has a knotted design on the

shaft consisting of inlaid silver bordered by niello, while the other pin (BM 1913,0710.6) features a blue glass stud and ornament on its shaft that was also originally inlaid with metal.

Nine seasons of rescue excavations at the north-western part of the new graveyard at Clonmacnoise, east of the main monastic enclosure, were carried out by Heather King from 1990 to 1998 (King 1992; 2009). Substantial evidence for settlement dating from the seventh to the twelfth centuries was uncovered and features including round houses, pits, wells, corn-drying kilns, a roadway, and a possible landing area were identified. It appears to have been an area of significant craftworking and evidence for metalworking was ubiquitous. Significant numbers of crucibles and crucible fragments were found, including one 'with a bead of gold still adhering to the inner surface' (King 1992). Other relevant finds include fragments of clay moulds, a stone ingot mould, furnace material and furnace bottoms, *tuyère* fragments, as well as trial/motif-pieces of bone, bronze binding and decorative strips, and offcuts of undecorated and decorated bronze.

Two areas within the new graveyard were identified as sites where the working of copper alloy was carried out. This included the monitoring and partial excavation of a modern grave on the southern side of the new graveyard, which produced evidence for a deep layer of burnt clay and charcoal, as well as a collection of crucibles, moulds, and scrap copper alloy. The other site was within the main area of excavation and consisted of a small hearth that was surrounded by burnt clay containing charcoal and many broken crucibles and moulds. Also, of relevance was the recovery of copper-alloy objects decorated with enamel and evidence for glass working (King 2009). In the absence of full publication and detailed chronology of the excavation, we do not know whether any of this activity dates from the late eleventh century, but this seems possible.

Lions at Clonmacnoise

The two pairs of confronted lions on the Clonmacnoise crosier located below the uppermost knop are conspicuous and unique within the surviving corpus of Insular crosiers **[Pls II and III]**. As will be seen, their presence on the crosier may represent an iconographic link with Clonmacnoise and St Ciarán. The very presence of a decorative collar below the upper knop is unusual and only occurs on one other crosier, associated with Durrow, also in Offaly (Bourke 1997, 179–82). Like other aspects of the Clonmacnoise crosier, the lions may be based on iconography from an older crosier. They are reminiscent, for instance, of the prominent griffins which occur on an eighth- or ninth-century Insular crosier-knop from a pagan burial at Setnes in Norway (Murray 2015a, 115–6, pl. 4).

Significantly, confronted lions with entwined legs may be seen prominently on a section of shaft from a high cross that had been reused in the building of Temple Ciarán (Manning 1998, 66, ill. 7) and which has been dated to the late eighth to early ninth century (Hicks 1980, 26–9; 1993, 174, 177–8) **[Pl. IX]**. Most lions in high cross sculpture are found in scenes with Daniel or David, but at Clonmacnoise they are particularly prominent in their own right. Apart from the cross fragment from Temple Ciarán, they also occur on the Cross of the Scriptures, the North Cross and possibly also on the South Cross, while three lions dominate a decorative pillar stone (Harbison 1992b, 53–7, figs 142–3, 147, 150, 153, 164, 166).

The prevalence of lions on Clonmacnoise sculpture has been noted by both Carola Hicks (1980, 9–12; 1993, 175, 177) and Nancy Edwards (1998, 106, 113–4) and lions occur prominently on related sculpture from Banagher, Co. Offaly, and at Bealin, Co. Westmeath (Harbison 1992b, 25–7, figs 65–66, 70). In the *Physiologus*, a text which appears to have been known in Ireland since the eighth century (Henderson 1996, 3, 5), the lion represents the

Resurrection, as it was believed that a young lion cub was born dead but came to life three days after birth (Ferguson 1958, 8; Hicks 1980, 9; 1993, 108). Thus, there may also be an association with St Ciarán, who is said to have come back to life to converse with St Kevin three days after his death (Macalister 1921, 97; Ó Riain 2018, 27). Tomás Ó Carragáin (2010, 73–4, 156–8), who identifies the place of Ciarán's reputed resurrection as Temple Ciarán, has also discussed the symbolism surrounding the reuse of material in early medieval churches. Even though it could not be seen, the inclusion of the fragment of the cross featuring the lions in the fabric of Temple Ciarán may well have been of symbolic significance. The cross could have been associated with Ciarán's resting place as suggested by Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh (2015, 222), but might have been damaged in one of the Viking raids on Clonmacnoise in the early ninth century, such as that in 845, which saw its churches burned (AU 845). While the cross fragment in Temple Ciarán was not visible to the maker of the crosier in the late eleventh century, the iconography could have been copied, as suggested, from an older crosier, or from another work of art at the site.

The staff of St Ciarán

Ciarán's staff, or *bachall*, is mentioned in relation to two miracles in his Life (Macalister 1921, 76, 83), which Pádraig Ó Riain (2018, 10, 18) dates to the twelfth century, while it is stated in the annals for 1130 that Ciarán appeared with his staff to Gillacomhgain, the thief who plundered the altar at Clonmacnoise, in order to prevent him from leaving Ireland (AFM, CS, AC). An earlier reference in the annals notes that after Feidhlimidh mac Crimthainn had plundered the *termon* lands of Ciarán in 844, the saint appeared to him when he was in his bed and thrust his *bachall* into his belly so that he received an internal wound and eventually died (AFM 844; AC 844; CS 846; Lucas 1986, 32).

The earliest mention of a staff of St Ciarán as a physical object is seemingly an entry in the annals for 930, which records that 'the crozier of Ciarán, i.e. the Oraineach' was lost in Lough Gara, Co. Sligo, with twelve men, but was said to have been recovered immediately (AFM 930; CS 931). Interestingly, the Clonmacnoise crosier itself appears to be based in part on a tenth-century example, perhaps to give the impression of antiquity. The *Oraineach* or 'face of gold' is mentioned in the annals again in the mid-twelfth century in relation to Clonmacnoise (AFM 1143; AC 1139), although Ó Floinn (1998, 94–5) interprets this as a different object. I have discussed elsewhere how crosiers as symbols of the office of the *coarb* or abbot were also regarded as the relics of the early saints, even though most surviving examples were made centuries after the lifetimes of the saints in question (Murray 2017, 168–70).

What may be a direct reference to the Clonmacnoise crosier is the entry in the annals for the Battle of Corann in 1087 between the Connachta and the Conmaicne in which we are told that 'Cormac Ua Cillín, chief vice-abbot of Síl Muiredaigh' stood before the Connacht army 'with the staff of Ciaran (*mada [maide] Ciaran*) in his hand' (CS 1087; Lucas 1986, 18; Kehnel 1997, 127, 142–3). The use of a crosier to give an army support through the intercession of a saint was not uncommon (Lucas 1986, 17–20). Cormac Ua Cillín, who died in 1106, was probably the vice-abbot of Roscommon, as well as being the guestmaster (*airchinnech tige aiged*) of Clonmacnoise (Kehnel 1997, 277). Tigernach Ua Bráein was the abbot of Clonmacnoise and Roscommon (d.1088; AFM; CS; AU 1088) at the time of the battle of Corann in 1087. Notably, this is the first recorded connection between Clonmacnoise and Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, who was to later retire to Clonmacnoise following his blinding and who eventually died there in 1118 after receiving communion wine from the *Fraechan Chiaráin* (MIA). Ruaidrí's more famous son Toirrdelbach was later a great patron of the monastery (see Ó Floinn 1998, 97; Murray 2014).

Although the Clonmacnoise crosier was recorded in the Sirr catalogue as the crosier 'of the Old Abbots of Clonmacnoise', the reference to it in the papers of George Petrie associated it with St Ciarán. Indeed, given the crosier's preservation into the nineteenth century, one would expect such an association, as many early medieval crosiers were still revered as relics of the saints into the post-medieval period, which facilitated their preservation. If, therefore, the account of St Ciarán's staff at the Battle of Corann in 1087 can be linked with the Clonmacnoise crosier, it could well have been Tigernach Ua Bráein who commissioned the crosier, as his term of office as abbot coincides with the dating of the crosier on stylistic grounds to the late eleventh century (Kehnel 1997, 127, 143, 264). Tigernach Ua Bráein was one of the annalists who contributed to what are now known eponymously as the *Annals of Tigernach* (Walsh 1940; Charles-Edwards 2004; Ó Murchadha 2009). Indeed, in his obit in the *Annals of the Four Masters* (1088) he is noted a 'a paragon of learning and history (*suí légind ocus senchusa*)' and is recorded as having died in *imdhaidh Chiaráin*, which can be identified as Temple Ciarán (see Ó Carragáin 2010, 74). Such an abbot is a likely candidate for the commissioning of the Clonmacnoise crosier, a major piece of church metalwork that overtly references the past.

The wider political circumstances in the later eleventh century was the dominance of Ireland by Toirrdelbach Ua Briain (r1072–86) and his son Muirchertach (r1086–1119). These Munster kings brought most of Ireland under their control and I argue that they created the political context in which significant religious objects decorated in the Hiberno-Ringerike and subsequent Hiberno-Urnes style were created. Toirrdelbach ruled Dublin directly from 1072, eventually appointing Muirchertach as the king of Dublin from 1075, which, in the words of Donnchadh Ó Corráin (1972, 138), meant that 'Turlough absolutely controlled the city and its resources'. He also had control of Munster, Leinster, and Meath, and 'dealt summarily with opposition from Connacht' (Ó Corráin 1972, 142). I have argued elsewhere

that the popularisation of Viking art styles across Ireland, and at native Irish sites in particular, only occurred from the mid-eleventh century, which was a time when Irish kings first began to directly rule over Dublin and the other Hiberno-Scandinavian towns (Murray 2015b). I suggest that this new political reality resulted in the acceptance of Scandinavian influence in the decoration of Ireland's most sacred religious objects, while it may also have helped to open up access to precious metals and assisted with the movement of craftsmen and the exchange of styles and techniques across Ireland. Toirrdelbach Ua Briain's domination of Dublin from 1072 and Mide [Meath] from the following year provided the political background that enabled an object such as the Clonmacnoise crosier, with its strong artistic links to Dublin, to be created.

Conclusions

The accounts of the discovery of crosiers in Temple Ciarán are fictitious. At present the only crosier that can be ascribed to Clonmacnoise is the impressive example from the Sirr collection, which is said to be from Clonmacnoise and displays iconographic and technical links with the site. The suggestion that there were two contemporary crosiers from Clonmacnoise is not that fanciful, given the size and complexity of the *civitas* and its various offices as outlined by Annette Kehnel (1997). Nevertheless, the supposed association of the crosier-head that once belonged to William Frazer with Clonmacnoise has been shown to be highly dubious and, unfortunately, for now little more can be said about its original provenance, though on stylistic grounds it may well have been made at Clonmacnoise. Like other early medieval crosiers, it seems to have been subject to a deliberate attack, possibly during the Reformation. The examination of the recent history of these two crosiers has raised questions, not only about their provenance, but about the provenance of two other

examples in the British Museum, including the magnificent example which has previously been attributed to Kells, while the theft of a portion of an Irish crosier from the British Museum in the late-nineteenth century has been highlighted. The Clonmacnoise crosier is one of the most impressive and best preserved of the surviving early medieval crosiers in Europe. It was made in a workshop, probably based at Clonmacnoise, that excelled in the technique of inlaying metal, and which may have produced at least two other crosiers around the same time.

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Appendix

XRF Analysis of Crosier-head NMI1899:28

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Methodology

The analysis was carried out using a Spectro Midex EDXRF (energy dispersive x-ray fluorescence) spectrometer using a molybdenum anode. The diameter of the tube collimator and the measurement spot size is 0.7mm and the distance from the sample surface varies from 2–5mm. The operating conditions for the X-ray tube were 45kV and 0.6mA at normal air pressure. Sample counting time was 180 seconds livetime. The principal elements analysed were copper, tin, lead, zinc, silver, gold, arsenic, antimony, and mercury.

The components were analysed within the sample chamber and the measurement spot, which is indicated by a laser, was viewed on an adjacent monitor screen, thus allowing for accurate position of the sample sites. There was no sample preparation, such as polishing or abrasion of the surface, as it would have resulted in unacceptable damage. Results are affected by the surface conditions of the object, such as curvature, indentations, pitting and the presence of contaminants, surface dirt and corrosion products. However, the crosier-head is reasonably clean, having recently been on display in the museum, while its general condition indicates that it has not spent any significant time in the ground.

Terminology

A nomenclature for the copper alloys, following the terminology proposed by Justine Bayley,

has been used here (Bayley and Butcher 2004, 14–15). This is contingent on the various amounts of tin, zinc and lead present in the alloy. Copper/tin alloys are called bronzes and copper/zinc alloys are brasses, depending on the relative proportions of the alloying elements. Gunmetal is defined as a bronze with a low percentage of zinc. Leaded alloys are those that contain more than 8% lead, which has been added to affect the working properties of the alloy. If the lead value is below 4%, it is more likely to be a contaminant rather than an intentional addition.

Results and comment

The following components were analysed: the original crook section, the later medieval crook reconstructed section, the knop, the inlaid silver and niello on the crook and knop, and one of the annular mounts on the knop. The results in percentages are tabulated below **[Table 1]**. Notably the original section of crook and the knop are of brass and consist of a very similar alloy, consisting approximately of 84% copper, 10% zinc, 3.5% lead and around 1.5% tin. Furthermore, the silver and niello inlay on each of these components are of a similar composition, the silver being of a reasonably high purity. A gilt area on the bronze/gunmetal annular mount on the knop contains mercury, indicating that the fire gilding method was used. These results are consistent with the analysis of other early medieval artefacts from Ireland, which overall demonstrate a change from the use of bronze to brass in the Viking-age (Mullarkey 2015). Notably, the later reconstructed section of the crook, which is made of sheet metal, has a much higher quantity of zinc present than the original crook and knop.

Table 1 Results of XRF analyses of the crosier-head NMI 1899:28.

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