CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The establishment of Tuam as an archdiocesan capital in the twelfth century
Authors	Murray, Griffin
Publication date	2014-01-01
Original Citation	Murray, G. (2014) 'The Establishment of Tuam as an Archdiocesan Capital in the Twelfth Century', in Tierney, A. (ed.), Glimpses of Tuam through the centuries: Proceedings of a seminar 28th September 2013, Tuam: Old Tuam Society, pp. 13-23.
Type of publication	Conference item
Download date	2026-10-13 22:11:28
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/11174

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

GLIMPSES OF TUAM THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Proceedings of a Seminar
28th September 2013

Old Tuam Society

Tuath Thuama go Buan
The Old Tuam Society

Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

The Establishment of Tuam as an Archdiocesan Capital in the Twelfth Century

By Dr. Griffin Murray

Introduction

The early twelfth century was perhaps the most important period in the history and development of Tuam, when it became one of the most important religious centres in Ireland. It is argued in this paper that the official recognition of Tuam as the archdiocesan capital of Connacht at the Synod of Kells in 1152, only confirmed what had been established some decades earlier. Tuam's change in status was not just an administrative one, but a change that was also manifested through an ambitious building programme and artistic patronage that has not only left its mark on the town, but has given Ireland some of its greatest medieval art. It will be argued here that the main driving force behind its change in status was the king of Connacht, Turlough O'Connor, who ruled from 1106 until his death in 1156. O'Connor, through the course of his career, had become the most powerful king in Ireland, a position never before attained by a Connacht king. This brought him great power and wealth, which had huge implications for the province. It will be argued that the Cross of Cong (Figure 1), the Market Cross in Tuam (Figure 5), and other monuments in the town, played a central role in the creation of an archdiocesan capital. This paper also examines the association of the O'Duffys, a prominent ecclesiastical family, with Tuam and discusses their ecclesiastical positions in Connacht. Furthermore, this analysis provides a more secure date for the Market Cross, which has important implications for the study of twelfth-century art in Ireland.

Turlough O'Connor

Turlough O'Connor became King of Connacht in 1106 at the age of 18, after his elder brother Domnall was deposed by the kKing of Munster, Muirchertach O'Brien, the great-grandson of Brian Boru (*AT*, *CS*, *AFM*). The O'Connors were of the Síl Muiredaig, whose lands were in modern-day county Roscommon. O'Connor proved to be a shrewd

Figure 1. The Cross of Cong (© National Museum of Ireland).

politician, a fierce military commander, and a generous patron of the Church. He made frequent use of his fleets and cavalry on military campaigns and built bridges and castles to his strategic advantage. He was involved in conflicts and negotiations with most of Ireland's kings over his long reign and while he never completely dominated the country, he became what the historical sources call 'high king with opposition'. Like Muirchetach O'Brien before him, Turlough O'Connor was heavily involved in Church politics, particularly in Connacht, where, through patronage, he greatly enhanced the status of a number of church sites.

The synods and diocesan structure in Connacht

The synod of Ráith Bressail was held in 1111 under the patronage of Munster king, Muirchertach O'Brien. The synod established twenty-four dioceses; twelve in the southern half of Ireland and a further twelve in the north, a structure that followed the model in England (Dinneen, 1908, 298-9; Gwynn, 1992, 181; Brett, 2006, 32). Armagh and Cashel were made the archdioceses over the northern and southern halves of Ireland respectively, with Armagh holding the primacy.

Colman Etchingham (1999; 2000) has argued at length that a system of diocesan organisation already existed in Ireland and that the reformers did not newly introduce it. Indeed, this seems to have been the case, and it is all the more important to realise this when one considers that the reformers attempted to impose what must have been an artificial division of Ireland into twenty-four dioceses, following the English model. Such a rigid model could not be fully maintained in a country where dioceses had already developed. Etchingham (2000, 19-20) has noted that there are a number of bishops of Connacht recorded in the annals during the tenth and eleventh centuries, but that this bishopric was not fixed to a particular ecclesiastical centre. Connacht was probably not unusual in this regard, as one of the complaints made to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, towards the end of the eleventh century, was that bishops in Ireland were either assigned to places unsuitable to be episcopal seats or were not assigned any fixed seat, diocese, or flock (*ibid*., 14).

While five sees were established in Connacht at Ráith Bressail, it was not given an archdiocese. The diocesan centres were to be located at Tuam, Clonfert, Cong, Killala and Ardcarn (Dinneen, 1908, 298-9), and these were to be under the control of the Archdiocese of Armagh. However, it was felt at the time that the division of these dioceses may not have been satisfactory and so the prelates of Connacht were given the freedom to change them, as long as not more than five dioceses were created (*ibid*., 302-5). Some changes must have taken place subsequently and it is possible that Ardcarn and Cong never functioned as episcopal capitals.

Over forty years after Ráith Bressail, at the synod of Kells in 1152, Tuam and Dublin were also officially made archdiocesan capitals (Dinneen, 1908, 314-5). The original twenty-four dioceses created at Ráith Bressail were increased to thirty-eight, four of which were the archdioceses of Armagh, Cashel, Tuam, and Dublin. At that synod, Tuam's territory was changed to that formerly given to Cong, while Roscommon (later Elphin) was made the episcopal seat of the territory formerly given to Tuam. The dioceses of Clonfert and Killala were retained and the three small dioceses of Kilmacduagh, Achonry, and Mayo were officially established. Indeed, Aubrey Gwynn (1992, 189) commented that the dioceses of Connacht *'were changed more radically during the forty years after Ráith Bressail than anywhere else in twelfth-century Ireland.'* So the picture had changed and by 1152 there were seven dioceses in Connacht. Tuam was the archdiocese, which controlled the bishoprics of Killala, Achonry, Mayo, Roscommon, Clonfert, and Kilmacduagh. What had happened in Connacht in the forty years between the two synods to cause this radical change and to transform Tuam from merely the seat of a bishopric to that of an archbishopric with responsibility for the church affairs of the whole province? This is what is principally examined in this paper.

The Cross of Cong

It was in 1123 that a relic of the True Cross was brought to Ireland and while here, it was, fittingly, given a great circuit by King Turlough O'Connor. Thereafter, O'Connor obtained a portion of the relic and had it enshrined at Roscommon. The *Chronicon Scotorum* states that in 1123, 'the cross of Christ in Connacht in this year (*Croch Christ i gConnachta in hoc anno*).' The *Annals of Tigernach* are more detailed about the event and record:

Croch Crist a nErenn isin bliadain sin, co tucadh mor-chuairt di la ríg nErenn .i. la Tairrdelbach Húa Concobair, 7 cor' chuindigh ni di d' fhastadh a n-Erinn, 7 ro leced do, 7 do cumdaighedh laís hí a Ros Coman

[Christ's Cross in Ireland in this year, and a great circuit was given to it by the king of Ireland, Toirdelbach Húa Conchobáir, and he asked for some of it to keep in Ireland, and it was granted to him, and it was enshrined by him at Roscommon]

The Cross of Cong is a reliquary-processional cross and the finest piece of Irish twelfth-century metalwork that survives (Figure 1). Principally made of cast copper-alloy plates fixed to a wooden core, it was embellished with gold filigree, silver and niello inlays, and glass and enamel settings (Murray, 2006). It is largely decorated with zoomorphic interlace in the Hiberno-Urnes style, a blending of Irish and late

Viking art. At its centre there is a relic cavity covered by a rock crystal, through which the original relic would have been viewed. The cross bears an inscription in Irish around its edge giving the names of the individuals involved in its creation, which includes Turlough O'Connor. Inscriptions in Latin also declare its function as a reliquary of the True Cross. Therefore, there can be no mistake in equating the Cross of Cong with the references in the annals for 1123. The fact that the year and place of manufacture of the Cross of Cong is known makes it unique amongst surviving pieces of medieval Irish Church metalwork. Indeed, it is the most precisely dated piece of metalwork from early medieval Ireland.

The inscription on the cross has been transcribed (with abbreviations written out) and translated by Prof. Padraig Ó Riain (Ó Riain and Murray, 2005) as follows:

+ HÁC CRUCE CRÚX TEGITUR QUÁ PÁSUS CONDITOR ORBIS /
OR[ÓIT] DO MUREDUCH U DUBTHAIG DO SENÓIR ÉREND /
OR[ÓIT] DO THERRDEL[BUCH] U CHONCHO[BAIR] DO RÍG EREND LASA NDERRNAD IN GRES SA /
OR[ÓIT] DO DOMNULL M[A]C FLANNACÁN U DUB[THAIG] DE IMLIB CONNACHT DO CHOMARBA CHOMMAN ACUS CHIARÁN ICA N[D]ERRNAD IN GRES SA /
OR[ÓIT] DO MAÉL ÍSU M[A]C BRATDAN U ECHA[C]H (?) DORIGNI IN GRES SA/
+ HÁC CRUCE CRÚX TEGITUR QUÁ PASUS CONDITOR ORBIS

[+ By this cross is covered the cross on which the creator of the world suffered /
A prayer for Muiredach Ua Dubthaig senior [ecclesiastic] of Ireland /
A prayer for Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair king of Ireland by whom was made this ornament /
A prayer for Domnall mac Flannacáin Uí Dubthaig from the borders of Connacht, successor of Commán and Ciarán by whom was made this ornament /
A prayer for Máel Ísu mac Bratáin Uí Echach who made this ornament /
+ By this cross is covered the cross on which the creator of the world suffered]

Regardless of whether one feels he was entitled to the claim at this time, it is not surprising to find Turlough O'Connor referred to as the 'king of Ireland', as the *Annals of Tigernach* refer to him as such from this period. The craftsman, Máel Ísu mac Bratáin Uí Echach, is not known from any other historical source, but was probably a member of the ecclesiastical community at Roscommon (Murray 2013; Murray forthcoming). In contrast, the two O'Duffys were senior ecclesiastics in Connacht, are well documented in the annals, and their careers are worthy of further exploration at this point.

The O'Duffys

Muiredach and Domnall O'Duffy belonged to a very important Connacht ecclesiastical family that had many associations with the Augustinian abbey at Cong and so the eventual presence of the cross there should come as no surprise. Flannacán O'Duffy was the first member of the family to reach prominence in the Church. He died in 1097 and was described in his obits variously as the 'red haired erenagh of Roscommon' (*AU*) and 'coarb of Commán and master of (Latin) learning at Tuam' (*AFM*). The family were, like the O'Connors, of the Síl Muiredaigh and Flannacán O'Duffy's obits demonstrate that the family was closely associated with both Roscommon and Tuam from at least the late eleventh century.

Domnall was the minor of the two O'Duffys mentioned in the inscription on the cross, where he is recorded as the coarb of both Roscommon and Clonmacnoise. Roscommon seems to have been a daughter church of Clonmacnoise (Byrne, 2001, 252), and it is possible that he inherited the position of coarb there from his father, Flannacán. However, apart from being coarb of both Roscommon and Clonmacnoise, some modern scholars believed that Domnall was also the Archbishop of Connacht at this time, due to a misreading of the inscription on the Cross of Cong (Ó Riain and Murray, 2005, 21) and also because of confusion regarding his status in his obits in the various annals. It seems that while Domnall became a bishop before his death in 1136/1137, he was not the archbishop of Connacht, as some of the sources claim (Murray, forthcoming). Muiredach O'Duffy is the first to be mentioned in the inscription on the Cross of Cong and it is probably safe to assume that he was the principal person associated with it. This is in agreement with his ecclesiastical position and the inscription describes him as the 'senior of Ireland', a title that reflected his status as the senior ecclesiast of Connacht. It is not known exactly when Muiredach was elected as

archbishop of Connacht, but the absence of any reference to such status in the inscription on the Cross of Cong suggests that he was not yet entitled to it. The first sure mention of Muiredach O'Duffy in the annals is in 1133/1134, when he and Aed O'Hession, the abbot of Tuam, agreed a peace between Connacht and Munster (*AT*; *MIA*: 1134; *AFM*: 1133). At this point the annals describe Muiredach as 'noble-bishop of Ireland' (*uasalespoc na hErenn*) (*AT*), and as 'archbishop of Connacht' (*ardeaspog Connacht*) (*MIA*), indicating that by this time he had been elected to the office.

The Development of Tuam

In 1127 Turlough O'Connor made major improvements at Tuam. In 1126 the newly-built church of Ss. Peter and Paul in Armagh was consecrated (*AU*, *AFM*); the year before the cathedral there had been re-roofed (*AU*, *AFM*). By this time also a new cathedral and round tower may have been erected at Cashel. Therefore, there were major building projects taking place around this time at the two archbishoprics of Ireland. The *Annals of Tigernach* record for the year 1127:

Toirdelbach Hua Conchobair, over king of Ireland, and the successor of S. Iarlaithe surround the common (?) of Tuam from the southern end of Clad in renda to Findmag. Then the king gave an offering of land from himself to the church in perpetuity from Áth mBó to Caill Clumain, that is, the south-western half of the western part of Clúain, to every good cleric of the Síl Muredaig who should dwell in Tuam, and the other half of it, at the guesthouse of Tuam, into the hands of the prior.

There is a cluster of eight townlands to the west of Tuam that contain the word *Clúain*. These are Cloonascragh, Cloondarone, Cloonfush, Cloonkeen North, Cloonkeen South, Cloonmore, Cloontooa and Garracloon (Figure 2). These are situated between Tuam and the river Clare approximately 4km away, where there was an important fording point at Claretuam providing access to the west and south, and which was defended by a castle in the later medieval period. That this was the location of a strategic fording point on a major route way in the past is reflected by the fact that it is still the crossing point of the modern N17 road. Many of these townlands are divided from each other by stretches of bog, and those to the west, flanking the river, before modern drainage took place, were separated from the others both by bog and by a lake (Figure 2). It is argued here that it was this area of land, consisting of the modern townlands of Cloonmore, Common, Killeelaun, Kilmore and Cloonfush, which was granted by O'Connor and that Áth mBo (the ford of the cows), should be identified as Claretuam. The presence of the placename elements of *Clúain* (meadow) and *Cill* (church), in a distinct area of land adjacent to a strategic fording point providing access to Tuam is convincing in itself, let alone the fact that in Cloonfush there is an early medieval church site known as Temple Jarlath (Alcock *et al.*, 1999, 303, no.3344). This church site was reputedly founded by St. Jarlath before Tuam (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 377). It is of particular note that half of these lands were to be reserved for clerics from the Síl Muiredaig, his own people, which is of course a reference

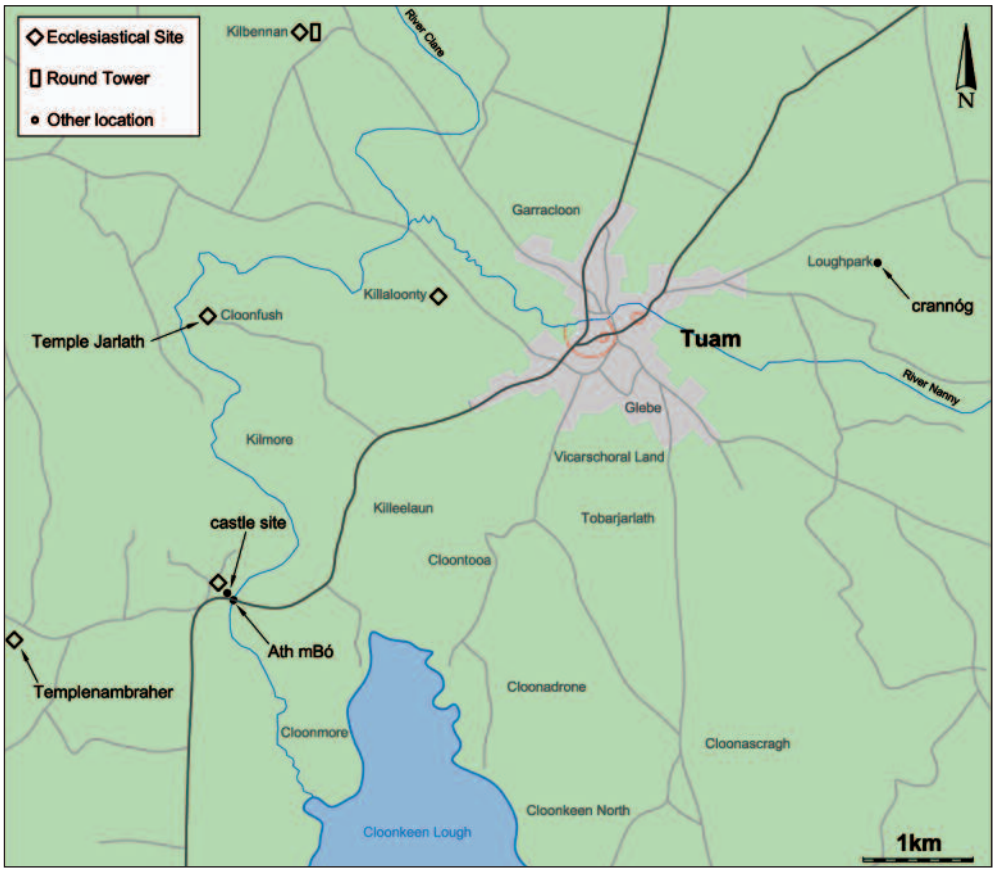

Figure 2. Map of Tuam area before modern drainage and showing the location of *Áth mBó* at modern Claretuam (Map: Hugh Kavanagh).

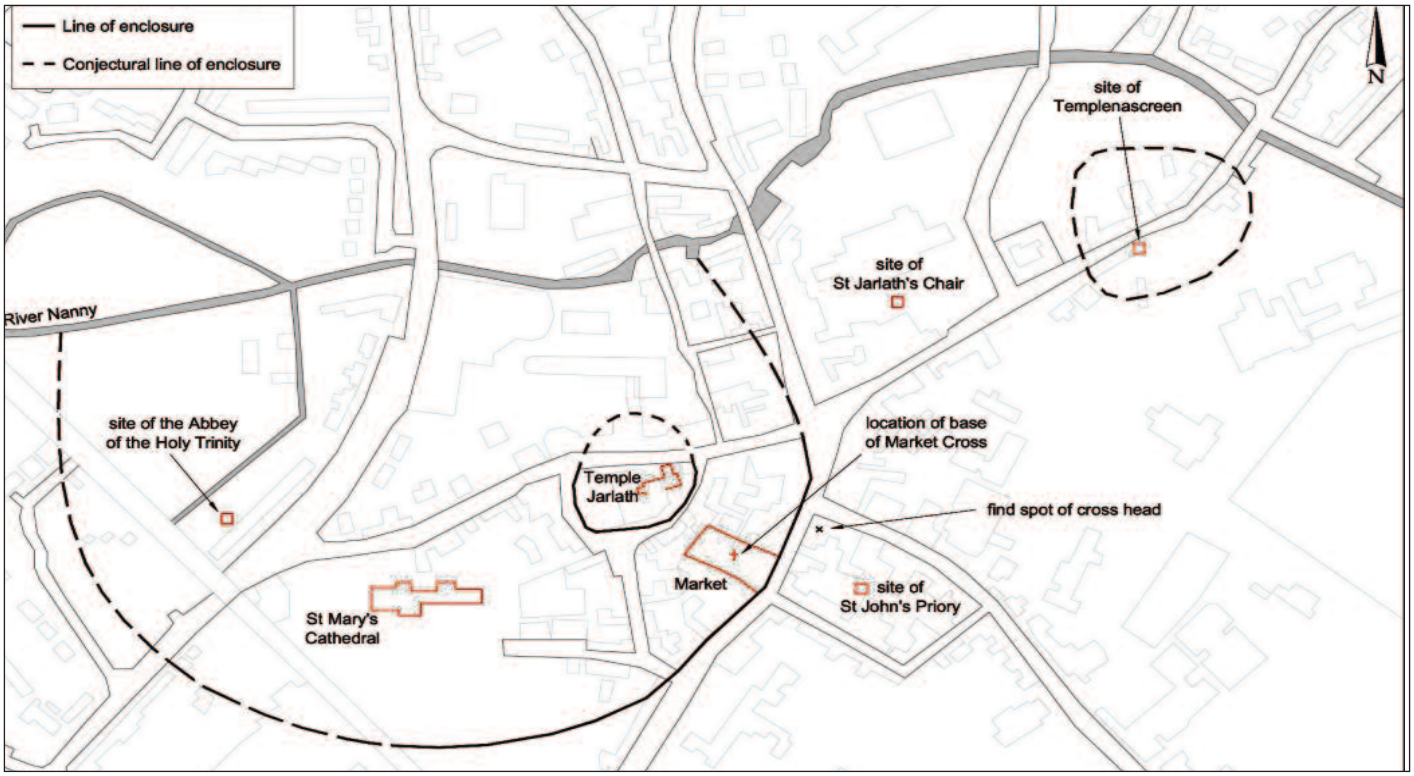

Figure 3. The ecclesiastical features of medieval Tuam in relation to the modern town (Map: Hugh Kavanagh).

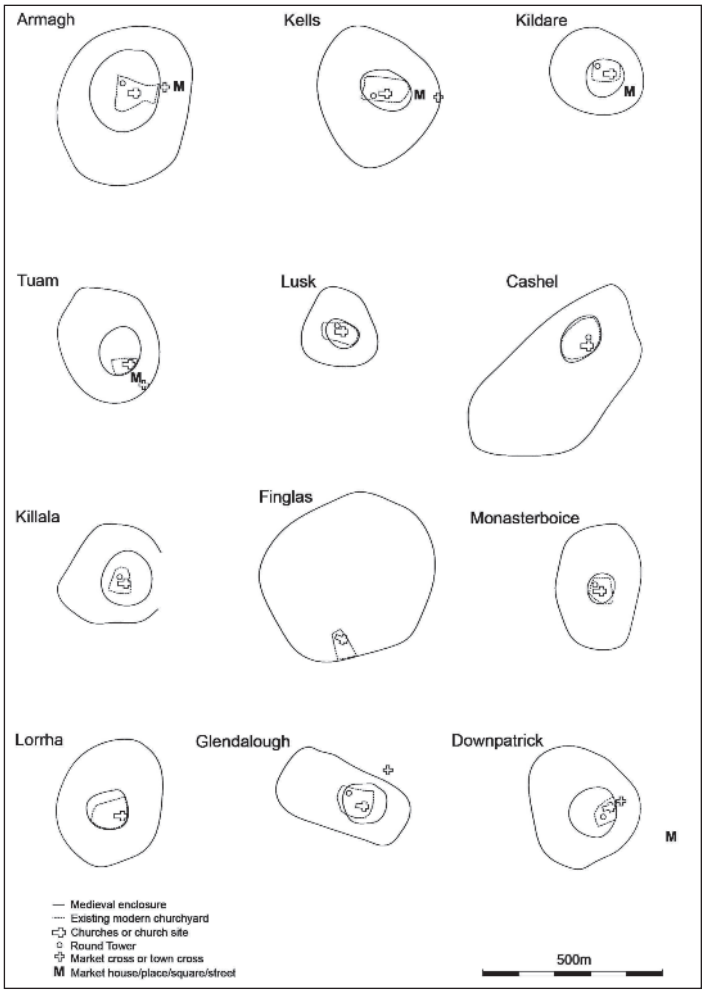

Figure 4. Plans of the general layouts of Irish ecclesiastical sites (based on Swan (1985) with minor alterations).

to the O'Duffys. It seems likely that this was a move by O'Connor to give the O'Duffys a power base at Tuam, thus giving them and the prior of the guesthouse control of a fording point on an important route way that was one of the main arteries into Tuam.

This suggests a connection with pilgrimage and the control and support of pilgrim traffic. If the relic of the True Cross was kept at Tuam it would have substantially increased the pilgrim traffic to the site resulting in a greater demand for accommodation and food. The land granted to the prior of the guesthouse would have helped to support such a growing demand, while the land granted to the O'Duffys may have helped support their keepership of the relic.

Apart from the granting of lands, one is also told that O'Connor and the successor (coarb) of St. Jarlath 'surround[ed] the common (?) of Tuam.' This appears to indicate that they erected some form of ecclesiastical enclosure. A section of what may be this enclosure can still be observed in a field between the cathedral and Vicar Street (Figure 3). This bank is still visible in the field running in an arc in a WSW/ENE direction. A small section of this enclosure was excavated by Jim Higgins in 1992 and a short report was published in the *The Great Tuam Annual* (Higgins and Büchner, 1993), where he dates it to the early medieval period. Higgins discovered that the enclosure consisted of a stone-faced bank

Figure 5. Market Cross at Tuam, comprising the base and shaft of one cross and the head of another (© National Monuments Service).

and a U-shaped ditch and that the ground on the inside of the bank, which is noticeably higher, was built up by activity in the medieval period. Although not mentioned by Higgins, this curving bank and ditch is on the same line as the curved portion of Vicar Street, from its junction with the Mall to the Market Square. The curving street pattern of Vicar Street respects this early medieval ecclesiastical boundary, in the same way that Church Lane respects what was the inner, and probably the older, curving boundary around Temple Jarlath. It seems quite possible that the boundary represented by the surviving section of bank and the curved portion of Vicar Street, was the enclosure erected by O'Connor and the coarb in 1127. The case for this is strengthened when we look at the positions of the twelfth century crosses at Tuam, a number of which were found or located in close proximity to the eastern section of this boundary.

The Crosses

High crosses were also used to mark the boundaries of ecclesiastical sites in Ireland and often occur in conjunction with enclosures (Swan, 1985, 99) (Figure 4). Thus, it is perhaps no coincidence that the

Figure 6. Base of Market Cross at Tuam drawn by George Petrie (after Petrie 1845, 313).

remains of four twelfth-century high crosses survive at Tuam, the most well-known and impressive being the Market Cross (Figure 5). The base and shaft of this sandstone cross belong together, while the head is clearly from a separate monument; the original head apparently does not survive. Both the base and shaft are predominantly decorated with panels of zoomorphic ornament in the Hiberno-Urnes style. As Roger Stalley (1991, 168) has commented, the Market Cross 'was, in effect, an attempt to reproduce the Cross of Cong on a gigantic scale in stone.'

The base of the cross was discovered in the old market place or shambles in the early nineteenth century (Figures 3, 6) (Lewis, 1837, 646; O'Neill, 1857, 4). One section of its shaft had been moved to the grounds of St. Mary's Cathedral, east of the cathedral itself, while another portion of the shaft was recovered from the 'kitchen chimney' of Mall House, which was built in 1782 (Harbison, 1992, 175; Claffey, 2009, 12, 18, map 11). In 1853 these remaining sections of the cross, along with the head of what is clearly another cross, were brought to Dublin and fitted together for the Great Exhibition (O'Neill, 1857, 4; McEnchroe-Williams, 2001, 145). This configuration was re-erected in the Market Square in 1874 and remained there until 1992, when it was moved inside the south transept of St. Mary's Cathedral (Figure 5) (Harbison, 1994, 105; Claffey, 2009, 12).

The fragmentary inscription on the base of the cross was transcribed and translated by George Petrie (1878, 77-8) in the nineteenth century when it survived in somewhat better condition than today (Figure 6). His reading is as follows:

[OROIT] DO U OSSIN: DOND ABBAID:
LA(SA)N DERN(AD)
[A prayer for O'Hossin, for the abbot, by whom was made]

OR[OIT] DO THOIRDELBUCH U
CHONCHOBUIR DONT..UR…
…(I)ARLATH(E)…S INDE(RN)AD IN SAE….
[A prayer for Turlough O'Conor for the …
… Jarlath, by whom was made this…]

Two individuals are certain in this inscription, the king, Turlough O'Conor, and the abbot, Aed O'Hession. However, there is a third section of the inscription that records an ecclesiast, who seems to have been described as the successor of Jarlath. Unfortunately, the section of the inscription recording the name of the individual in question does not survive. This may have repeated a prayer for Aed O'Hession, who, as abbot, could be described as the successor of Jarlath, although there are no precedents for a repetitive inscription like that in this period. In that case, it probably referred to another ecclesiast at Tuam, yet one who could also be described as a successor of Jarlath. A logical conclusion is that this section of the inscription asked for a prayer for the Bishop of Tuam, but who was this individual if it was not Aed O'Hession? The most likely candidate is Muiredach O'Duffy who we know was described as Archbishop of Connacht in 1133/34. This makes sense given the fact that two almost identical pairs of ecclesiasts are depicted on the base of the cross (Figure 6). It is argued here that the figure on the left, in each case, represents Aed O'Hession, the abbot of the monastery, and that the figure on the right represents Muiredach O'Duffy, the bishop, or indeed archbishop, who is distinguished by the fact that he carries a spiral-headed crosier.

Figure 7. Shaft of high cross in the cathedral, 'St Jarlath's Cross', Tuam (© National Monuments Service).

There is the shaft of another high cross in St. Mary's cathedral bearing an inscription, which was first recorded as being there in the seventeenth century (Figure 7) (Ware, 1739, 604; Lynch, 1944, 213). It is probably this cross that was marked as 'St Jarlath's Cross (Part of)' on an 1839 Ordnance Survey map, when it was located at the external north-west corner of the cathedral (Claffey, 2009, map 11). Two inscriptions occur on this cross shaft, which were transcribed and translated by Petrie (1878, 76) as follows:

OR[OIT] DO CHOMARBA IARLATHE DO AED
U OSSIN (LAS)IN DERNAD IN CHROSSA
[Pray for the successor of Iarlath, for Aed O Oissin,
by whom this cross was made]

OR[OIT] DON RIG DO THURDELBUCH U
CHONCHOBAIR
OR[OIT] DONT HAER DO GILLU CR(IST)
UTHUATHAIL
[Pray for the King, for Turdelbach, descendent of
Conchobar
Pray for the artizan (saer), for Gillachrist,
descendant of Tuathal]

The inscriptions on these two crosses are undeniable physical proof of O'Connor's patronage of Tuam in co-ordination with its abbot and coarb, Aed O'Hession. While the ornament on 'St Jarlath's Cross' may be a little more difficult to date stylistically, it is probably safe enough to say that the Tuam Market Cross must date to around the time of the manufacture of the Cross of Cong, *i.e*. 1123, given the similarity between the zoomorphic ornament. The two inscribed crosses at Tuam have been dated by Roger Stalley (1981, 160) to between 1128 and 1156, although he also suggested that 'St Jarlath's Cross' may date from 'about 1128-30 and the market cross a few years later.' These dates are based on the dates of the reign of Turlough O'Connor (1106-1156), which are well established, as well as the dates that O'Hession held office at Tuam, which are not.

O'Hession died around 1160 and is recorded in his obits as 'archbishop of Connacht' and 'archbishop of Tuam' (*AT*; *AU*, *AFM*: 1161; *AI*: 1160; *MIA*: 1159), a position that he held from at least 1152, when Tuam was officially made an archdiocese, but probably since 1150, when Muiredach O'Duffy died. It may be kept in mind that O'Hession is not recorded as an archbishop in either of the inscriptions at Tuam; rather he is described as both coarb and the abbot. However, despite the dates given by previous

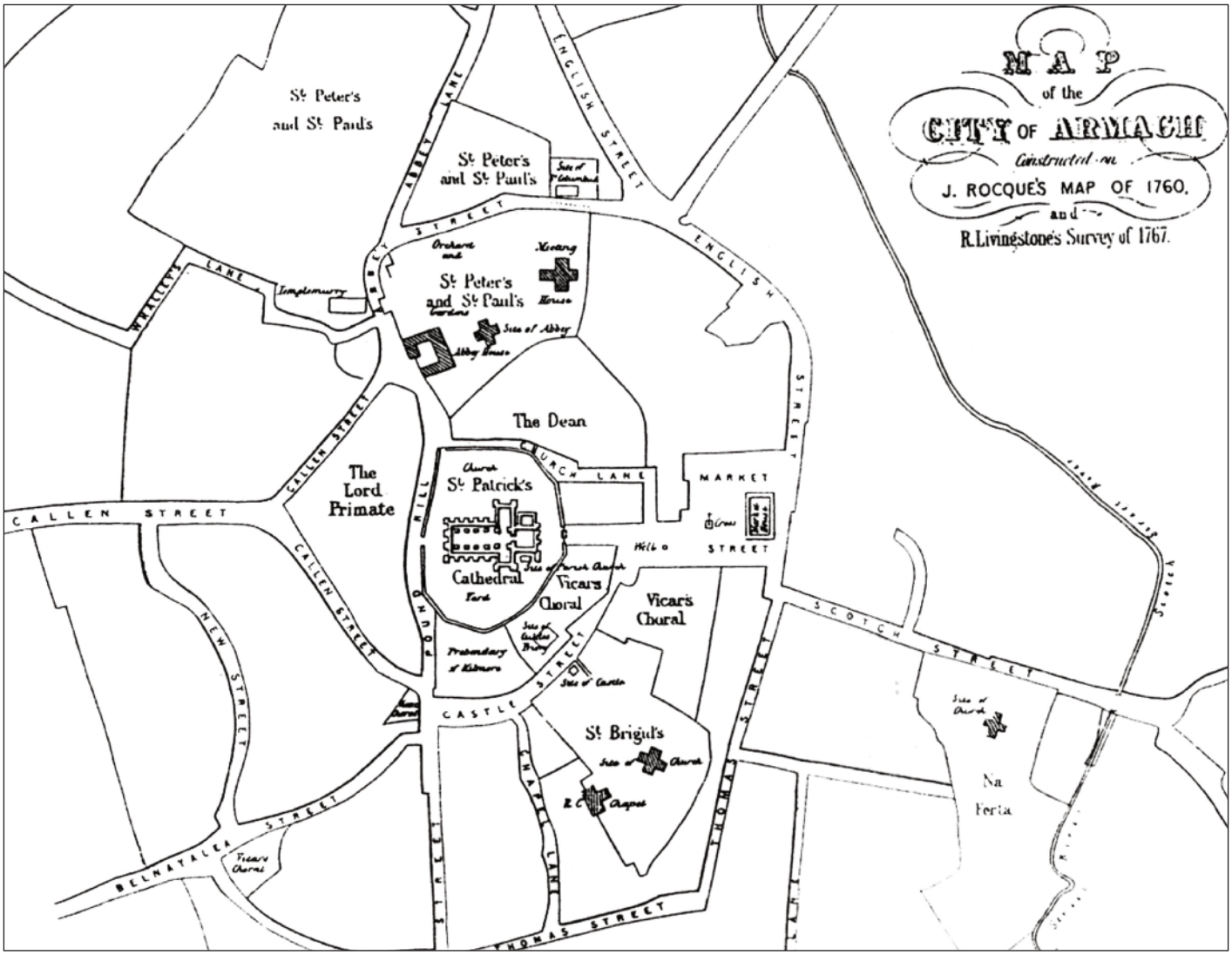

Figure 8. Rocque's map of Armagh 1760.

authors, the year in which he first held the office of coarb in Tuam is unknown. One might consider it to have begun when his predecessor, Muirgheas O'Nioc, died in 1128. However, his obit in the annals reads: 'Muirgheas O'Nioc, successor of Iarlath of Tuaim-da-ghualann for a time, died on Inis-an-Ghoill' (*AU*, *AFM*). This entry seems to suggest that, at the time of his death, O'Nioc was no longer coarb of Tuam, but was in retirement at the island monastery of Inchagoill on Lough Corrib, where he was also apparently buried (Wilde, 1867, 148). While O'Hession is only first mentioned as coarb in the annals in 1133/1134 (*AT*; *MIA*: 1134; *AFM*: 1133), it seems likely that he held this position from some time before 1128. Indeed, it seems most likely that the coarb who built the enclosure around Tuam with Turlough O'Connor in 1127 was Aed O'Hession, and that the Market Cross and possibly 'St Jarlath's Cross', which bear their names as commissioners, were erected at that time as part of the same scheme and served as ecclesiastical markers in conjunction with that boundary.

Building an Archdiocesan Capital

A similar layout to that at Tuam may be seen at Armagh, Kells, and Downpatrick (Figure 4). At these three sites there is an eastern cross, located either in front of, or at the entrance to, the ecclesiastical enclosure, which also became the site of a market place (Swan, 1985, 99). The arrangement is identical to that at Tuam and while any of these sites may have acted as a model, it is difficult not to think that it was the layout of Armagh (Figure 8) the archdiocese that was being replicated at Tuam, which was aspiring to such status itself.

As well as its surviving Market Cross, there are numerous crosses on record from Armagh (Henry, 1967, 42). In addition to the Market Cross and 'St Jarlath's Cross' at Tuam, there are the fragments of another two crosses surviving. One of these is the elaborate cross head now attached to the Market Cross, but which clearly comes from a separate monument (Figure 5) (Stalley, 1981, 132, pls 3, 4; Harbison, 1992, 175-6, cat. no. 217, figures 612, 613). According to the Ordnance Survey Letters

Figure 9. Head of cross from the corner of Vicar Street and the Dublin Road, Tuam (Photo: Jennifer Ní Ghrádaigh).

(Galway vol. 1, 47), this cross head 'was a long time used as a market cross in the Town, being set up at the market house gate, and was removed here by the mob to mark the grave of Bishop Sing [Archbishop Edward Synge d. 1741], who was well liked by them.' Its position outside the eastern end of the cathedral at that time is depicted on an 1839 Ordnance Survey map (Claffey, 2009, map 11). Another cross head was discovered in 1926 while digging the foundations of what is now AIB bank, on the corner of Vicar Street and the Dublin Road, which is also close to the original line of the ecclesiastical enclosure (Figures 3, 9) (Harbison, 1992, 177-8, cat. no. 219, figure 618; Claffey, 2009, 12). On the basis of their decoration, these two fragments can also be dated to the twelfth century and were possibly also part of the 1127 scheme.

Another similarity is the original position of Temple-na-scrín to the east of the main ecclesiastical complex (Figure 3). It seems to have been located north-east of the present Catholic cathedral and south of Bishop Street (Alcock *et al.,* 1999, cat. no. 3488-9, 332-3). This was in a similar position to Ferta Martyrum at Armagh (Figure 8), which may have also been known as Temple-na-scrín (1165 *MIA*; MacDonald, 1999, 265). It also seems that both Temple-na-scrín at Tuam and Ferta Martyrum at Armagh were located within their own enclosures. Furthermore, there is a record of a 'chapel of Saint Bridget' located south of the cathedral at Tuam (Alcock *et al.,* 1999, cat. no. 3486, 332), just as there was at Armagh (MacDonald, 1999, 262) (Figures 3, 8). It is not suggested here that all of the building work at Tuam was completed under Turlough O'Connor's patronage alone. Indeed, there is mention of his son Ruadhri as patron of three new churches at Tuam in 1172 (*AT, AFM*). However, it is argued that there was a building plan in place for Tuam from at least 1127, the purpose of which was to emulate Armagh as an archdiocesan capital.

As argued in detail by Tony Claffey (2003), there is strong evidence to suggest that the Corpus Missal, a twelfth century Irish illuminated manuscript now in Corpus Christi College, Oxford (MS. 282), was produced in Tuam for use there. It is also decorated in the Hiberno-Urnes style that is such a feature of both the Cross of Cong and the Market Cross. The production of illuminated manuscripts may have also been part of the scheme to endow Tuam with the trappings of an archdiocesan centre.

The Significance of the Relic of the True Cross for Connacht

The acquisition of a relic of the True Cross by Turlough O'Connor for Connacht was a major event, reflected by the fact that it received mention in the annals. The True Cross was the most important and cherished of all Christian relics. It is argued here that the acquisition of this relic and its enshrinement in what is now known as the Cross of Cong was an important contributory factor in the establishment of an archdiocesan capital in Connacht at Tuam (Figure 1). Indeed, the possession of important relics seems to have been a prerequisite for a church that wished to claim such status.

There are records of relics of St. Jarlath from this period that, no doubt, were kept at Tuam. St. Jarlath's chair is mentioned in the annals in the early twelfth century (*AT*: 1135), as was the Cathach ('battler') of St. Jarlath (1134 *AT*, *CS*). According to Ware (1739, 603), Temple-na-scrín housed the corporeal relics of the saint. While the date of the foundation of Temple-na-scrín is unknown (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 369), the fact that it was not contained within the same enclosure as the cathedral, but seems to have been located some distance away in its own enclosure, links it with some of the surviving shrine-chapels built in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as St. Kevin's, Glendalough, St. Mochta's, Louth, and St. Columba's, Kells (Ó Carragáin, 2010, 255-91).

While Tuam seems to have possessed a number of relics in the early twelfth century, principally those of its founding saint, unlike Armagh and Dublin it seems to have lacked relics of international importance. Armagh, as the most important church in Ireland, had a number of relics that confirmed and maintained its status. Although it did not possess the corporeal relics of its founding saint, it did possess two associative relics of his, the Bachall Ísu and St. Patrick's Bell. The shrine for this bell was made around 1100 and was commissioned by Turlough O'Connor's contemporary, King Domnall O'Lochlainn (Ó Floinn, 1983; Bourke, 1993, 43). The Bachall Ísu, or Staff of Jesus, was the principal relic of Armagh because it was a relic of Christ as well as of Patrick. It was first recorded in 789 (*AU*, *AFM*) and was mentioned numerous times in the annals up to the sixteenth century when it was destroyed during the Reformation (Bourke, 1993, 18).

Armagh also had the relics of Ss. Peter and Paul, as well as those of Stephen and Laurence, which it was recorded, were obtained in Rome (Lucas, 1986, 12). Indeed, a new church for these relics was constructed in Armagh in 1126 (*AU*, *AFM*), a year before Turlough O'Connor's work at Tuam. These relics were also very important to Armagh and had been used as part of its campaign to be recognised, at home and abroad, as the metropolitan diocese of Ireland (Doherty, 1984, 92-3; Ó Carragáin, 2003, 133). Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, which was to officially achieve archdiocesan status along with Tuam in 1152, possessed a relic of the True Cross and a relic of St. Peter's staff, along with several other important relics (Ó Floinn, 2006, 95).

It seems most likely that the Cross of Cong was in Tuam by 1127, following its selection as the seat of the archbishop of Connacht (Figure 1). It would have been particularly important for Tuam to possess a prestigious relic while it was in the process of establishing itself as an archdiocesan centre. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the Cross of Cong, like Armagh's principal relic the Bachall Ísu, not only contained a relic of Christ, but was also designed to be portable. We know that the Bachall Ísu accompanied the Archbishops of Armagh during the period and so would have functioned, at least partially, as one of the insignia of their office; it seems likely that the Cross of Cong fulfilled a similar function. Indeed, in the first decade of the twelfth century the Archbishop of Canterbury complained that the Bishop of Dublin was having a cross borne in front of him in procession, when such an honour was reserved for Archbishops (Flanagan, 1989, 22-3). It seems likely that, on occasion, the Cross of Cong, which is both a reliquary and a processional cross, accompanied the Archbishops of Connacht during the period. This honour was, no doubt, bestowed upon Muiredach O'Duffy and later on Aed O'Hession, both of whom were archbishops of Connacht during the reign of Turlough O'Connor.

Given that the relic of the True Cross seems to have been the most important relic associated with the archbishopric of Tuam in the twelfth century, it is perhaps surprising that there are no more references to it in the annals after its enshrinement in 1123. This may imply that the cross was removed from Tuam to Cong at an early stage, perhaps for its safety during the Anglo-Norman advances in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. There was, for instance, an Anglo-Norman raid on Tuam in 1177 (Stalley, 1981, 128; *AU*, *AFM*). Indeed, once relegated to Cong it probably never returned to Tuam due to changing political and ecclesiastical circumstances, and it seems to have lost its status as Tuam's most important relic. It is likely that the O'Duffys were the hereditary keepers of the cross from the time of its manufacture and throughout the medieval period. The fact that the O'Duffy family was very closely associated with the abbey at Cong throughout the medieval period may explain why the cross was moved to that location.

Conclusion

Patronage of the Church was one of the main ways in which a king in early medieval Ireland displayed his wealth and power. Therefore, it was crucial for O'Connor that the Church in Connacht was both strong and self-governing. The official recognition of an archdiocese for Connacht at Tuam by the Synod of Kells was not something that happened overnight, but had been worked on for decades before then. Undoubtedly, the acquisition of a relic of the True Cross for Connacht and its enshrinement in a processional cross associated with Muiredach O'Duffy (Figure 1), a person who was later named as the archbishop of Connacht, played a significant role in this.

The 1127 annalistic reference is unique in terms of the career of O'Connor and expresses his personal interest in Tuam. Indeed, he was also to establish an Augustinian priory or hospital there around 1140

(Gwynn and Hadcock, 1970, 197). The building of an enclosure, the erection of a number of high crosses, the granting of lands, and the linkage he seems to have established between it and the O'Duffys, all point to the selection of Tuam by O'Connor as the archdiocesan centre for Connacht by 1127. The likelihood that the layout of the enclosure with its crosses was modelled on Armagh strengthens this view.

One can conclude that the creation of an archdiocesan capital in twelfth-century Ireland was not merely something that was political or administrative, but also something material. For Tuam to credibly claim such status, it not only had to physically look like an archdiocesan capital and have prestige relics, but it also had to have all the trimmings in terms of fine metalwork, manuscripts and stone sculpture. Tuam reached great heights in the early twelfth century and its rich archaeology is a reflection of both Church politics at the time and the royal patronage of Turlough O'Connor, the most powerful king in Ireland.

Abbreviations

AFM: O'Donovan, J. ed. 1856, *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*. 7 vols. Dublin.
AI: Mac Airt, S. ed. 1944, *The Annals of Inisfallen MS. Rawlinson B. 503*. Dublin.
AT: Stokes, W. ed. 1895-7, reprinted 1993, *The Annals of Tigernach*. 2 vols. Felinfach.
AU: Hennessy, W.M. and MacCarthy, B. 1887-1901, *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: a chronicle of Irish affairs from A.D. 431 to A.D. 1540*. 4 vols. Dublin.
CS: Hennessy, W.M. ed. 1866, *Chronicon Scotorum, RS 46*. London.
MIA: Ó hInnse, S. ed. 1947, *Miscellaneous Irish Annals (A.D. 1114-1437)*. Dublin.

Bibliography

Alcock, O., de hÓra, K. and Gosling, P. 1999, *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway Volume II: North Galway*. Dublin.
Bourke, C. 1993, *Patrick: The Archaeology of a Saint*. Belfast.
Brett, M. 2006, 'Canterbury's perspective on church reform and Ireland, 1070-1115', in D. Bracken and D. Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the Twelfth Century: Reform and Renewal*. Dublin, pp. 13-35.
Byrne, F.J. 2001, *Irish Kings and High Kings*. 2nd ed. Dublin.
Claffey, J.A. 2003, 'A very puzzling Irish missal.' *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* **55**, 1-12.
Claffey, J.A. 2009, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas No. 20: Tuam*. Dublin.
Dinneen, P.S., ed. 1908, *The History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating, D.D., Part III, Containing the Second Book of the History*. London.
Doherty, C. 1984, 'The use of relics in early Ireland', in P. Ni Chathain and M. Richter (eds), *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church*. Stuttgart, pp. 89-101.
Etchingham, C. 1999, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650 to 1000*. Maynooth.
Etchingham, C. 2000, 'Episcopal hierarchy in Connacht and Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair.' *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* **52**, 13-29.
Flanagan, M.T. 1989, *Irish Society, Anglo-Norman Settlers, Angevin Kingship: Interactions in Ireland in the Late Twelfth Century*. Oxford.
Gwynn, A. 1992, *The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th centuries*. Dublin.
Gwynn, A. and Hadcock, R. N. 1970, *Medieval Religious Houses Ireland*. Blackrock.
Harbison, P. 1992, *The High Crosses of Ireland, an Iconographical and Photographic Survey*. 3 vols. Bonn.
Harbison, P. 1994, *Irish High Crosses with the figure sculptures explained*. Drogheda.
Henry, F. 1967, *Irish Art during the Viking Invasions (800 - 1020 A.D.)*. New York.
Higgins J. and Büchner, D. 1993, 'Excavations near St. Mary's Cathedral.' *The Great Tuam Annual 4*.
Lewis, S. 1837, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*. 2 vols. London.
Lucas, A.T. 1986, 'The social role of relics and reliquaries in ancient Ireland.' *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* **116**, 5-37.
Lynch, J. 1944, *De Praesulibus Hiberniae* (J. F. O'Doherty, ed.), **2**. Dublin.
MacDonald, A. 1999, 'Reicles in the Irish Annals to AD 1200.' *Peritia* **13**, 259-75.
McEnchroe-Williams, M. 2001, 'Constructing the market cross at Tuam: the role of cultural patriotism in the study of Irish high crosses', in C. Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and its European Context*. Princeton, pp. 141-60.
Murray, G. 2006, 'The Cross of Cong and some aspects of goldsmithing in pre-Norman Ireland.' *Historical Metallurgy* **40:1**, 49-67.
Murray, G. 2013, 'The Makers of Church Metalwork in Early Medieval Ireland: Their Identity and Status', in J. Hawkes (ed.), *Making Histories: Proceedings of the Sixth International Insular Art Conference*. Donnington, pp. 162-73.
Murray, G. forthcoming, *The Cross of Cong: a masterpiece of medieval Irish art*. Dublin.
Ó Carragáin, T. 2003, 'The architectural setting of the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland.' *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* **133**, 130-76.
Ó Carragáin, T. 2010, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual and Memory*. New Haven & London.
Ó Floinn, R. 1983, 'Iron Bell of St. Patrick and its Shrine', in M. Ryan (ed.), *Treasures of Ireland: Irish Art 3000 B.C. – 1500 A.D.* Dublin, pp. 167-8
Ó Floinn, R. 2006, 'The foundation relics of Christ Church cathedral and the origins of the diocese of Dublin', in S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin VII: Proceedings of the Friends of Medieval Dublin Symposium 2005*. Dublin, pp. 89-102.
O'Neill, H. 1857, *Illustrations of the Most Interesting of the Sculptured Crosses of Ancient Ireland: Drawn to Scale and Lithographed by Henry O'Neill*. London.
Ó Riain, P. and Murray, G. 2005, 'The Cross of Cong – some recent discoveries.' *Archaeology Ireland* **19:1**, 18-21.
Petrie, G. 1845, 'The ecclesiastical architecture of Ireland, anterior to the Anglo-Norman invasion; comprising an essay on the origin and uses of the round towers of Ireland.' *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* **20**, 1-521.
Petrie, G. 1878, *Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language. Chiefly Collected and Drawn by George Petrie, LL.D.; and Edited by M. Stokes* **2**. Dublin.
Stalley, R. 1981, reprinted 1994, 'The Romanesque Sculpture of Tuam', in R. Stalley (ed.), *Ireland and Europe in the Middle Ages: Selected Essays on Architecture and Sculpture*. London, pp. 127-63.
Stalley, R. 1991, 'The Romanesque style in Ireland', in M. Ryan (ed.), *Irish Archaeology Illustrated*. Dublin, pp. 167-9.
Swan, L. 1985, 'Monastic proto-towns in early medieval Ireland: the evidence of aerial photography, plan analysis and survey', in H.B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds), *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe: Ireland, Wales, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Russia from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*. Oxford, pp. 77-102.
Ware, J. 1739, *The Whole Works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland: Revised and Improved*, **1**. Dublin.
Wilde, W.R. 1867, *Lough Corrib: Its Shores and Islands*. Dublin.