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6. SCULPTORS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS: A STUDY OF CLONMACNOISE GRAVE-SLABS¹

Catherine Swift

Introduction

The wealth of early medieval archaeology from Clonmacnoise is so outstanding that one wonders to what extent it can be used to interpret the evidence from other Irish ecclesiastical sites that have been considerably less endowed. Clonmacnoise has what may be the earliest example of a great stone church still surviving in Ireland, as well as numerous other buildings, three high crosses, two round towers, important Romanesque sculpture and—the subject of this paper—an enormous collection of grave-slabs (Manning 1994; O'Brien and Sweetman 1997, 89–94). The sheer numbers of grave-slabs involved is phenomenal—approximately 700 slabs or fragments of slabs have now been recorded. This makes it by far the greatest collection of grave-slabs anywhere in Britain and Ireland; it is over six times bigger than, for example, the group of approximately 100 carved stones of various kinds from Iona. What is currently on display in the Clonmacnoise Heritage Centre, therefore, is only a very tiny percentage of an invaluable archaeological resource. The rest of the slabs, which were inaccessible during the period in which this paper was written, have recently been housed by *Dúchas* in a specially constructed building on the site, where they are available for detailed study by scholars.

It is a reflection of the historically small numbers of scholars involved in early medieval Irish archaeology that no published scrutiny of the Clonmacnoise collection has taken place since the days of R.A.S. Macalister. Between Easter 1898 and 1909 he visited the site on three occasions and took rubbings that he then prepared for publication 'in leisure moments' while working in Palestine (Macalister 1909, vi). Forty years later, when he was in his late seventies, Macalister published a revised version of this study in his catalogue of Irish grave-slabs in 1949. These two catalogues, covering some 206 Clonmacnoise stones, replaced an earlier collection by George Petrie of 143 slabs, edited by Margaret Stokes (1872; 1878).

In 1961 an important paper by Father Pádraig Lionard proffered a dating scheme for the various designs found on grave-slabs and pillar-stones throughout Ireland. As evidenced by the illustrations, however, this was designed primarily as an analysis of the published literature, and, while it drew heavily on the Clonmacnoise corpus, it did not provide new data on the stones themselves. In the 1980s a study was made of the Clonmacnoise corpus by Mr Peter Davis for a PhD thesis at the University of Wales, Bangor, and this work forms the basis of the current *Dúchas* catalogue of the Clonmacnoise slabs. Unfortunately, however, the thesis was not submitted, and there the matter rested until the Third International Conference on Insular Art in Belfast in 1994, when this writer and Ragnall Ó Floinn of the National Museum of Ireland, each in ignorance of the other's work, both gave papers on the subject. Our conclusions were based on analyses of Macalister's catalogues rather than on examination of the stones themselves.

Happily, as it happened, a number of our conclusions coincided, although we approached the subject from rather different angles. We queried the validity of using references in the annals to date the slabs as Father Lionard had done, and we suggested that a typological analysis of the slabs was called for. Ragnall Ó Floinn had rather more concrete suggestions than this writer when he proposed a three-fold categorisation of the slabs: Type A, eighth or early ninth century in date and confined to Clonmacnoise and Gallen; Type B, later ninth to tenth century; and Type C, which are as yet undated (Ó Floinn 1995, 254–5).²

This writer disagrees on matters of detail with some of Ó Floinn's conclusions; for example, we do not know enough about Irish grave-slabs in general to talk about styles that are confined to specific sites, and the slab from Tihelly, Co. Offaly, seems an obvious candidate for placing in his Type A class (see also Fanning and Ó hÉailidhe 1980, 19). Such minor disagreement is, however, only a matter of nuance, and it is clear that the next step must be a physical examination of the slabs themselves, preferably by a variety of scholars in order to encourage debate. There is clearly enormous potential for exciting discoveries concerning, among other issues: the details of the designs; whether the craftsmen used templates to aid the laying out of the design on the slab; the epigraphy of the inscriptions; the types of stone used; and their parallels elsewhere, both within Ireland and abroad.

Not having been able to undertake such an examination, one is obviously somewhat constrained, and the conclusions in this paper are therefore based almost entirely on the catalogues by Petrie and Macalister, together with the unpublished *Dúchas* inventory.

The people commemorated on the Clonmacnoise grave-slabs: the documentary evidence

A verse that has long been thought relevant to the subject of the Clonmacnoise grave-slabs is an extract from a poem on Clonmacnoise by Enóg Ó Gilláin, apparently written in the thirteenth or fourteenth century:

*Ataid fhuaisli cloindi Cuind—fan reilig leacaib leargduind
Snaidim no craeb os gach cholaind—agus ainm chaemh cheart oghaim.*

The nobles of Clann Chuinn are [buried] under the brown-sloped cemetery with flagstones; a knot or branch over every body and a fair just name in written form.³

This verse comes from one of at least four poems dealing with the burial of nobles and kings at Clonmacnoise. These are all of different dates. One is attributed to a Clonmacnoise churchman, Máel Pátraic, who is identified as having died in 1027 in a note by the seventeenth-century writer John Colgan (*M. Stokes* 1872, 76–8; *Fraser et al.* 1934, 44–6). A second is the work of the bard Conaing Buidhe Ó Maoilchonaire, writing sometime before 1224 (*M. Stokes* 1872, 79–81; *Best* 1905). And a third is the one already mentioned, by Enóg Ó Gilláin, which refers to a number of the later medieval families of the Roscommon and Galway area, people such as the O'Flynn's, the O'Flahertys, the O'Mulroonys and the MacDermots (*M. Stokes* 1872, 5–7; *MacLysaght* 1972, 148, 145–6, 230, 114–15).

There is also a fourth poem, which is an elegy to a Fergal Ua Ruairc and attributed to Erard Mac Coisse, who died at Clonmacnoise in either 988 or 1023. O'Donovan made the convincing suggestion that this poem should be seen as a later medieval forgery, designed to add to the antiquity of the O'Rourke connection with Clonmacnoise (O'Donovan 1856–7, 345–6). The Mac Coisse poem is written in the language and style of a rather later date than either obituary of its ostensible author (see, most recently, O'Leary 1999, 58), while a reference to *An t-ór dearg so f'or a leacht*, 'The red gold on his tomb' (O'Donovan 1856–7, 347) seems most easily interpreted as the type of inset Gothic lettering often found around the outer edges of later medieval tombstones (see *Hunt* 1974, nos 142a, 144, 148a).

The Máel Pátraic poem, which may be the earliest of the four, appears to be limited to kings who died before the later ninth century. Where these can be identified, they include members of the Uí Briúin Aí of Roscommon; the Cenél nÉogain of Tyrone; the Uí Fhiachrach Aidne of Kilmacduagh, kings of Tethbae in modern Longford; a member of the Cenél Cairpri, possibly from the Granard region; a king of Ind Airthir in County Armagh; another king, who may have been of the Uí Maine in east Galway; and finally Máel

Sechnaill of the Clann Cholmáin of Westmeath, said to be the first Uí Néill high-king who managed to take hostages from south Munster, and who died in 862.

Some of these individuals are also listed elsewhere as having been buried in Clonmacnoise. The tradition of Áed mac Colgen's burial in the midlands as a king of Ind Airthir who had gone to Clonmacnoise on pilgrimage is recorded in entries under the year 610 (*A. Tig.*; *Chron. Scot.*),⁴ while the tenth-century *Baile in Scáil* refers to the burial of the eighth-century Cenél nÉogain king Áed Allán at Clonmacnoise (Meyer 1918, 233). In the same text, as Ó Floinn (1995, 254; Meyer 1918, 234–5) has pointed out, both Máel Sechnaill and his son, Flann Sinna, are recorded as having been buried at Clonmacnoise, while *AFM* under the years 886, 921 and 926 indicates that Máel Sechnaill's wife and his two daughters, Lígach and Muirgal, were also interred on the same site.

Other kings, while different from the named individuals in the Máel Pátraic poem, represent the same dynasties mentioned therein. In *Chron. Scot.* under the year 938, Domnall, king of the Uí Fhiachrach Aidne, is said to be buried there, as, in 982, was Áed Ua Dubda of the Uí Fhiachrach Muirsce.⁵ In *A. Tig.* under the year 1167 Derbail, daughter of Domnall Ua Máel Sechlainn, died on pilgrimage at Clonmacnoise. In 1072 there is the story of the removal of Conchobar Ua Máel Sechlainn's head to Kincora by Toirdelbach Ua Briain and its return to Clonmacnoise two days later, together with two rings of gold. There is also, of course, the two burials of the Ua Conchobair high-kings: Toirdelbach by St Ciarán's altar, and his son Ruairí 'by the north side of the altar in the great church [*tempul mór*]' (*A. Tig.* 1156; *AFM* 1198). In short, there is clear evidence, in tenth-century and later texts, of the burial of some high-ranking secular dynasts at Clonmacnoise. Traditions of earlier secular dynasts are also recorded, but there are no contemporary sources to confirm these later accounts.

The eighth-century vernacular law tract *Córus Bésgnai* makes it clear, however, that the laity could be buried on ecclesiastical land should they so desire and upon payment of the requisite fee. This burial fee is further identified as being the honour price of the lay grade to which the dead person belonged, from small farmer to king (Binchy 1978, 532.1–11; Etchingham 1999a, 244–5, 272–3). In the eighth-century *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* the charge to be paid is identified as the *pretium sepulchri* (price of burial), distinct from a *sedatium communionis*, a separate payment to the priest who provided the *viaticum* (deathbed Eucharist). In *Córus Bésgnai* it is further stipulated that, if someone increased the value of the portion he inherited from his kin, he was also entitled to grant an *imnae*, or endowment, to a church, provided that such a grant did not diminish the kin assets. Although the evidence is not conclusive, it appears likely that such a grant involved an automatic right to burial within the ecclesiastical settlement (Etchingham 1999a, 271–88). In the case of ecclesiastics and/or the ecclesiastical tenantry known as *manaig*, similar provisions were made (Etchingham 1999a, 439–44).

Elizabeth O'Brien has noted that in the *Collectio* there is reference to the fact that many dead are said to be buried 'among evil people'. She infers from this statement that at least some Irish Christians were at this point still being buried outside church grounds in kin cemeteries and were being threatened by the church authorities with non-recognition of their graves (O'Brien 1992, 135; Wasserschleben 1885, 208–9). These kin cemeteries could be situated on much earlier, prehistoric monuments and were not necessarily in the vicinity of church settlements (Mount 1995; O'Brien 1998, 217; 2000).

In other words, there is ample provision in both Latin and Old Irish legal sources for burial of ecclesiastics in church settlements, together with a proportion of the lay population, in the eighth century, although lay burial in non-ecclesiastical sites also appears possible at this date. Churchyard burials were paid for by both the lay and ecclesiastics by way of a charge on the estate of the deceased that was due to the church authorities, and

this charge varied depending on the status and income of the deceased. There are also contemporary references in late ninth- and tenth-century sources that identify royal burials as having taken place at the church settlement of Clonmacnoise, as well as poems (which, where datable, are apparently of eleventh-century date or later) that refer to Clonmacnoise as the burial-place of important lay families, particularly the ruling families of Connacht and the north midlands (see also Bhreathnach in this volume, 97–104).

These documentary sources have been interpreted as indicating that many of the stone sculptures that we currently call grave-slabs represent, at least in part, the memorial stones marking lay burial. Other slabs have been associated with ecclesiastics whose death dates have been recorded in the annals between the seventh and the thirteenth century AD. It has, therefore, been argued that one can use the dates of these obituaries, both secular and ecclesiastical, to date a number of these monuments and thus provide the basis of a possible chronology (M. Stokes 1872, 12–14; Macalister 1909, 96; Lionard 1961,⁶ 137–69; Ó Floinn 1995, 251–4). In 1995, however, it was argued that this association between named figures in the annals and the occurrence of similar Old Irish personal names on the slabs was a correlation for which little justification can be offered (Swift 1995). The names involved are common ones in Old Irish, and the case for identification is weak, particularly when, as is almost invariably the case, the names on the stone slabs are inscribed without patronymics. Nor do we have anything like a full record of the obituaries for the ecclesiastical community at Clonmacnoise in our annals (see Swift 1995, 247). Furthermore, even if we assume that we possess the complete record of royal burials in Clonmacnoise, it is statistically improbable that accidents of survival have ensured that the burial slabs of the relatively few secular nobles whose names we know are all available to us today. Although there is documentary evidence for the burial of both ecclesiastics and laity on church settlements from the eighth century, the assumption that the monuments we currently call grave-slabs represent memorials to both secular and ecclesiastical figures needs to be examined more closely.

The evidence of the inscriptions

How do the above conclusions compare with the evidence of the inscriptions on the slabs themselves? Unfortunately, the small number of Clonmacnoise slabs that are inscribed are very stereotyped, thus minimising the amount of information they convey. The following arguments are, therefore, based on a study of the slabs from all sites published by Macalister in 1949.

The slabs are of two basic types: one that gives a personal name, and another where the name is prefaced by the words *oráit do X* or *oráit ar X*, 'A prayer for X' (on many of the latter the inscriptions are carved in abbreviated forms, so that one reads *or* with a suspension stroke above.) A very small number of Irish slabs do, however, contain details other than the personal name of the individual being commemorated. Among these are two that refer explicitly to kings (*ri*), although in neither case does the stone survive. If we accept the testimonies of the nineteenth-century antiquarians (Macalister 1949, nos 798, 930), neither slab was ornamented with a cross, but instead they appear to have been entirely plain. Furthermore, the slabs are extremely unusual in that each gives a community name: *hu Mane* (Uí Maine) on one slab, and *Ele* (Éle) on the other. Not only are these stones exceptional in referring to the commemorated man as a king; they are also entirely different in style from the majority of grave-slabs. To assume, therefore, that a high percentage of the surviving monuments, ornamented with crosses of varying degrees of complexity but without community affiliations or titles, also commemorate kings is allowing the documentary sources to dominate our interpretation of these monuments.

Of the other slabs where the person being commemorated is further identified, four refer

to explicitly clerical personnel: three commemorate bishops, and a fourth a priest (Macalister 1949, nos 620, 640, 897, 899). In his edition of *Uraicecht na Ríar*, Liam Breatnach has pointed out that the inhabitants of ecclesiastical settlements are grouped into three major classes in the vernacular texts: the *gráda ecalsa*, or clerics (men such as bishops, priests, deacons, lectors, exorcists); the *gráda uird ecalsa*, or service personnel (men such as *airchinnig* (administrators), millers, gardeners, cooks, stewards and door-keepers); and the *gráda ecnai*, or scholarly grades (Breatnach 1987, 84–5; see also Etchingham 1999a, 383–5). These four slabs thus commemorate members of the *gráda ecalsa* as they are defined in the vernacular law texts.

Another stone that may belong in the same category is the unadorned grave-slab from Clonmacnoise transcribed by Petrie in 1822 as *or(áit) do Chorbriu Chnumm* (M. Stokes 1872, 47). Here the name is supplemented by an epithet ('Cairpre the Crooked'), thus rendering it more specific, while the dative form following the preposition *do*, as well as the lenition of the following initial, make this a perfectly regular late Old Irish inscription. It seems reasonable to assume that this is the memorial of Bishop Cairpre Crom, whose death is recorded in 904. Such an interpretation is further strengthened by the fact that Petrie stated that the cross ornamenting this slab, which is now lost, 'was in its form and ornamental detail exactly the same as that of Suib(i)ne mac Máele-Umai' (Petrie 1845, 325; M. Stokes 1872, 47). It thus provides an important addendum to Ó Floinn's list of three Type B slabs that can be linked to identifiable figures in the documentary record (Ó Floinn 1995, 254).

Of the stones showing titles, a fifth, from Temple Breacan in County Galway, commemorates a leader of a community identified merely as *ap* (Macalister 1949, no. 539). As Etchingham (1994) has pointed out, the leaders of early medieval ecclesiastical communities could hold various titles: clerical titles such as that of bishop, administrative titles such as that of *airchinnech* or monastic titles such as that of abbot. The title *ap* or *ab* (the Irish spelling could vary here), or *abbas* in Latin sources, can be used of all such leaders indiscriminately. It is, therefore, impossible to say precisely whether Tomas *ap* of Temple Breacan, Co. Galway, the man commemorated on this slab, was a member of the *gráda ecalsa* or of the *gráda uird ecalsa*: he could have been a lay administrator, a cleric, an abbot or any combination of these.

Two more slabs refer to the individual's personal background: Coscrach is identified as a *Laignech*, or Leinsterman, while Móenach is entitled *aite*, or foster-father (Macalister 1949, nos 891, 887). This does not help us in identifying the social class to which these people belonged. Nor do the two slabs referring to women, one of which is from Clonmacnoise (Macalister 1949, nos 589, 633). Such a woman may have taken the vows of a *monachus* (see Wasserschleben 1885, 161; Etchingham 1999a, 282–3); alternatively, she may have been the wife of an ecclesiastic of any category or a secular woman.

Finally, there are two slabs where the inscription includes the name of the individual being commemorated, together with his patronymic. Both of these slabs are found at Clonmacnoise, and they commemorate Suib(i)ne mac Maelae-hUmai and Odrán ua Eolais. The additional detail provided by their patronymics makes it reasonable to assume that these are the men recorded as having died in Clonmacnoise in 892 and 995 respectively (M. Stokes 1872, 39–40; Macalister 1949, nos. 776, 704; Ó Floinn 1995, 254). The obituary for Suibne in *AU* 891, *AFM* 887, identifies him as 'the most learned doctor of learning amongst the Irish', while Odrán is recorded in his death notice, *AFM* 994, as a *scribmidh* (scribe) of Clonmacnoise. This implies that both of these men belonged to the scholarly hierarchy of the church otherwise known as the *gráda ecnai*.

Thus we can identify five clergymen, including three bishops, commemorated on the grave-slabs, in addition to other individuals who may or may not have been part of the personnel of an ecclesiastical settlement. There is also a further possible identification of a

bishop and two possible identifications of ecclesiastical scholars if we can accept that the coincidence of patronymic, or epithet, and location allows us to make the link between monument and recorded death notice. This implies that a number of prominent churchmen (a category about which the later medieval poems are entirely silent) are commemorated on these grave-slabs.

Further corroboration for this suggestion lies in the names on many of the slabs. Among the people commemorated in the inscriptions from Clonmacnoise are Marcus (79),⁷ Stefan (108), Thomas (277, 570), Benedict (298), Daniel (364), Martin (590)—names that derive from the international Christian tradition and that are not used by the medieval Irish laity. There are also names that begin with the element *máel*, a word often meaning 'tonsured', followed by the name of a famous saint; these include four instances of Máel Ciáráin (151, 181, 266, 332), two of Máel Muire (20, 324), three of Máel Brigte (289, 348, 350), three of Máel Michéil (318, 327, 476) and two of Máel Pátraic (199, 351). In addition, two names beginning with *gilla* are listed—a word meaning 'servant' that became common in the Norse period: Gilla-Giarain [*sic*] (326), 'servant of Ciarán', and Gillu Christ (328). It seems plausible to interpret these various names as belonging to churchmen rather than to secular warriors.

It has been argued elsewhere that the testimony of the slabs themselves as monuments commemorating ecclesiastics is strengthened further if one considers the name forms used in the inscriptions (Swift 1999). As already mentioned, the vast majority of inscriptions bear only the name of the commemorand, without referring to his patronymic (the name of his father) or his community affiliation. When this naming formula is compared with those found in the annal entries of the *Annals of Ulster* for the period AD 600–900, the most likely group to have been commemorated without patronymics is ecclesiastical personnel. Within this broad categorisation, the obituaries without patronymics are most commonly associated with membership of the *gráda ecalsa*, or clerical grades. This would agree with the very small number of slabs that indicate the role of the commemorand—where five of eleven possible examples of slabs commemorating ecclesiastics commemorate members of the *gráda ecalsa* and a sixth commemorates an *ap*.

The role of Tuathal Saer

In addition to the grave-slabs identified as commemorating churchmen, there is a Clonmacnoise stone inscribed *ór(aít) do Thuathal Saer*.⁸ This word *saer* has been translated in the *Dictionary of the Irish language* as meaning an artificer or general craftsman, later restricted to workers in wood, carpenters and masons (*DIL*, S 11). Such men would normally be thought to belong to a secular milieu, although it is possible that some were affiliated to the *gráda uird ecalsa*, or service personnel, of an ecclesiastical settlement. In fact, Douglas Mac Lean (1995, 125) has argued that the word describes the 'craftsmen who created the distinctive sculptured stone crosses of early medieval Ireland and Scottish Dál Riata'. In support of this suggestion he cites inscriptions from twelfth-/thirteenth-century Irish crosses (Delgany and Tuam), as well as two late fifteenth-century crosses from Oronsay priory. One of the Oronsay inscriptions is found on the west arcade of the cloister and reads *Maelsechlaind Saer O Cuind fecit istud opus*, 'Máel-Sechlainn Saer Ó Cuinn made this work', while the second, on the upper surface of a cross-base, reads *Maelsechlaind Saer [O Cuin]n fecit istam cruce[m]*, 'Máel-Sechlainn Saer Ó Cuinn made this cross'. In the case of the two Irish crosses, the inscriptions merely ask for a prayer for the *saer*.

That a *saer* could attain prominence within the hierarchy of an ecclesiastical settlement is indicated by the obituary of Máel Brigde Ua Brolcháin, *prímsaer Erenn*, 'chief *saer* of Ireland', in *AU* 1029. He belonged to the prominent ecclesiastical dynasty of the Uí Bhrólcháin, who were active in the higher echelons of both Armagh and Derry from the

eleventh to the thirteenth century, while his son, Máel Brigde *mac in tsair*, 'son of the *saer*', died as bishop of Kildare in 1097 (Ní Bhrolcháin 1986, 44; Herbert 1988, 109–23; Etchingham 2000–1, 13–14, 23). Of course, St Ciarán himself is also *mac in tsair* 'son of the *saer*', in his Middle Irish life (W. Stokes 1890, 120) and in his obituary in the annals in 549 (AFM; *A. Tig; Chron. Scot.*) (or *filius artificis*, *AI; AU*).

The most specific text dealing with the roles and duties of a *saer* is a Middle Irish (tenth- to twelfth-century) commentary on the earlier law text *Uraicecht Becc*.⁹ This text has never been translated in the modern period, but there is a diplomatic transcription of the manuscript in the *Corpus iuris Hibernici* (Binchy 1978, 1612.27–1613.8). The subject at issue is the honour price of the *saer*, and it is made clear that this could vary depending on the skills that the *saer* deployed. These skills were arranged in a hierarchy, at the pinnacle of which was the ability to build churches in either wood or stone. Almost on the same level of importance was the ability to build cookhouses and mills and the skill of *ibronacht* 'yew-working', each of which was classified as worth six cows in honour price. Slightly less valued were the arts of constructing ships and currachs, drinking vessels, and large vats of oak, each of which was classified as a 'four-cow' skill. Lower again was the knowledge required to create causeways, paving, souterrains, wheeled vehicles, wattle houses, shields and hurdle bridges: each of these was classified as a 'two-cow' skill.

The principles behind this hierarchy are also visible in the original text, the *Uraicecht Becc*, which places the *saer* who can build wooden churches or mills or the man who does yew carving on a par with the lowest rank of nobility, the *aire déso*, 'lord of vassals'. The *saer* who builds wheeled vehicles, on the other hand, is on a par only with the second rank of *bóaire*, 'strong farmer/commoner', while the *saer* who works in leather is equivalent to a *fer midboth*, or lower grade of freeman (Binchy 1978, 1615.22–1616.30; Mac Neill 1923, 279–80). The Middle Irish commentary and the original *Uraicecht Becc* text agree that if a *saer* has skills in more than one area his honour price should be increased.

The list of skills outlined above makes it clear that the *saer* would be a valuable member of any settlement, both secular and ecclesiastical. It is interesting, however, that his most prestigious skills were identified as those required to build churches. *Páirc Mac Lean*, there is no conclusive evidence that the *saer* was involved in the erection of high crosses: the fifteenth-century Oronsay inscription on the cross-base, which incorporates the word *fecit*, may well be a translation of the Irish formula *las ndernad*, 'by whom was made', which refers not to the craftsman but to the patron (Macalister 1949, 24, 31). *Crossa* are listed among the lowest grade (two-cow) skills of the *saer* in the Middle Irish text, but, although one can translate this word as 'crosses', it is most unlikely that the creation of high crosses was considered on a par with the creation of shields, causeways or hurdle bridges, which are the other two-cow skills with which it is compared. It seems more likely from its low position in the list that *cross* in this case should be understood in its alternative meaning as a technical term for part of a door frame (*DIL*, C 549).

Tuathal Saer, whose memorial survives at Clonmacnoise, I would thus identify as a member of an independent caste of artisans working in stone and wood whose products would have been required by both secular and ecclesiastical settlements. If he attained the highest qualification in his profession, he would have been able to build churches, but there is nothing in his memorial to imply that he did so. At the very least, the choice of a grave-slab ornamented with a cross and situated in the burial-ground of Clonmacnoise makes it likely that he was a committed Christian whose family was prepared to pay the price for his burial in a particularly prestigious ecclesiastical graveyard.

Grave-slabs as evidence for ecclesiastical land-holdings: the model of Islay¹⁰

Having looked at the documentary sources and the evidence of the slabs in so far as we

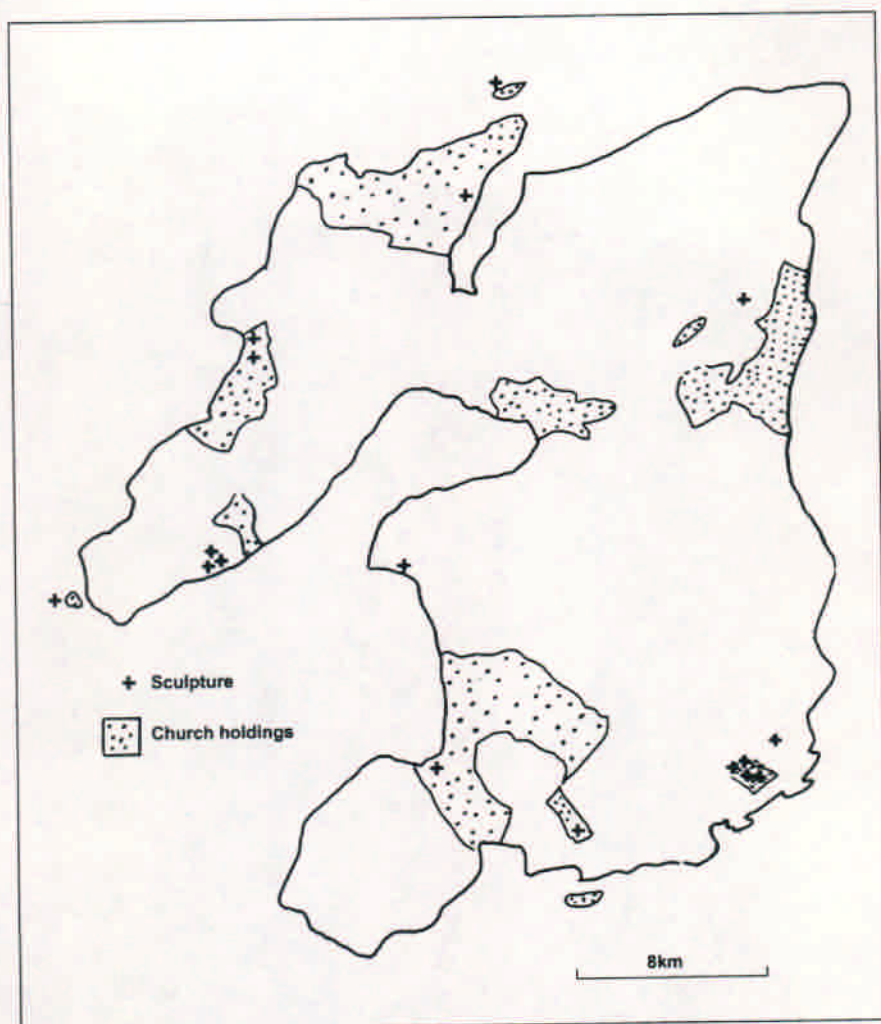
know them from the published catalogues, we now turn to a third possible avenue of investigation: the comparison of the Clonmacnoise grave-slabs with sculpture studied elsewhere. The most obvious candidate for this type of investigation is Iona, which has a collection of over one hundred carved stones and which was the subject of a detailed investigation by Ian Fisher for the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland in 1982 (RCAHMS 1982, 180–219). Furthermore, the region around Iona has also been studied in depth by the same institution, enabling some suggestions to be made about the impact of the Iona school of carving on the surrounding area. This is particularly relevant to analysis of the Clonmacnoise stones because they too can be paralleled in smaller collections from other localities in the Irish midlands.

Many of the cross forms carved on the Iona slabs show clear parallels with those found at Clonmacnoise—most notably in the case of the group designated as ‘ringed crosses’ by Lionard (1961, 120; RCAHMS 1982, 15–16, 184–9). Some of the Iona slabs also use the formulae *orait do* and *orait ar* (nos 6:14, 6:31, 6:37, 6:47), and there are three inscriptions (on nos 6:45 and 6:46) in which an expanded version is found: *oroit ar anmain X*, ‘pray for the soul of X’. For the most part, the Iona slabs are carved from local stone and would thus appear to have been carved on the island itself.

In the late 1980s this writer undertook a case study of the large and fertile Hebridean island of Islay between Iona and Ireland in the context of an examination of the Irish ecclesiastical connections with Scotland (Swift 1987). The best parallels for Irish material in Islay were found among the sculptured stones, but the overwhelming influence on these stones was southward from Iona rather than northward from the Irish mainland. The most obvious illustration of this link is the high cross at Kildalton, which has been compared on numerous occasions with crosses at Iona, but another example is the non-figural ornament on the free-standing cross at Kilnave (RCAHMS 1982, 17–18; 1984, 208–11). There are also a number of parallels between the grave-slabs of Islay and their counterparts on Iona, although the Islay stones are almost uniformly of a simple type, with few ornate cross forms and no inscriptions. Furthermore, not all of the minor Islay sculptures are necessarily grave-slabs; some, such as the disc-shaped Kilchoman 2, with ornament on both faces, seem to have been designed to stand upright. In terms of chronology, current scholarship would date both Islay high crosses to the end of the eighth or the ninth century (Stevenson 1959, 54–5; RCAHMS 1982, 17–19; 1984, 28–9; Mac Lean 1986; O’Kelly 1993). The grave-slabs are thought to belong roughly to the period between the late eighth and the tenth century.

The distribution of the Islay stones is particularly interesting in that, of the seventeen early stones that survive, eleven are found on later medieval church or chapel sites (Ill. 1). Of these later medieval holdings, one is linked to the church authorities at Derry (Cowan 1967, 99), but a large number are identified in the sixteenth-century ‘Fermes of Islay’ as being under the direct control of what, by that date, was the combined Benedictine abbey and bishopric of the Isles, based on Iona. A detailed analysis of the history of these churches suggests that a number of these later medieval sites represent ecclesiastical lands that probably came under the jurisdiction of authorities based on Iona in the pre-twelfth-century period (Swift 1987, 282–91). As at Iona, the geology of the Islay stones indicates that the carving took place locally, implying that the present distribution reflects the medieval reality. Stone carving on Islay can thus be seen as a local reflection of the cultural influence of Iona on its hinterland. The ornate carving of Kildalton, and to a lesser extent Kilnave, may imply professional craftsmen travelling from the mother church; the simpler grave-slabs may indicate local men working within a regional tradition fostered by the cultural focus of the southern Hebrides.

The fact that the Islay sculpture was produced from local stone on sites that are later documented as parish church sites or parochial chapels may seem to imply the existence of



III. 1—Sculptured stones from Islay in relation to church holdings.

a parochial or proto-parochial system at the time the stones were carved. If this were the case, the iconographical parallels between the sculpture of Iona and Islay would seem to suggest that the head of any diocesan structure was based on Iona, where bishops are known in the late seventh century and again in the tenth, although the area of their jurisdiction is not known (Ní Dhonnchadha 1982, 180, 191; *AU* 713; *Chron. Scot.* 964, 966; Gleeson and Mac Airt 1958, §290).

Alternatively, it may be that these early medieval land-holdings on Islay functioned purely as agricultural estates owing food renders to the ecclesiastical settlement on Iona. There is documentary evidence for such estates in Adomnán's seventh-century life of Columba, where he refers to a robber who attempts to steal from Iona's seal farm (Anderson 1991, 74–5), while by the late eighth century the *equonimus*, or steward, who looked after Iona's estates was important enough to have his obituary listed in *AU* 782. Furthermore, the excavations at Iona have revealed large amounts of agricultural produce, including cattle, horse, sheep, pig and possibly geese, while red deer, roe deer and seal were also found (Barber 1981, 315; Reece 1981, 38–46). Given the size of the island, these are unlikely to have all been living on Iona itself, while the bone specialists have stressed the choice cuts of both cattle and deer represented in the surviving material. Together with the paucity of hooves and other less productive parts, this may imply that they arrived on the site as food

renders of butchered carcasses.

The suggestion that Islay church sites may have given agricultural renders to Iona is supported by the topographical location of the sculptured stone sites on Islay. It is one of the most fertile islands in the southern Hebrides (Darling and Boyd 1974, 41), and Kildalton, Nave Island, Laggan and Orsay—all sites with early medieval stonework that are also later holdings of Iona—are situated on good agricultural land close to the sea (Macaulay Institute 1981). Moreover, we know that the ecclesiastical holding of Nereabolls owed '60 ells of coloured cloth or 8d for each ell' to Derry in the later sixteenth century (Cowan 1967, 99). Sixteenth-century rentals also survive from Islay, indicating that secular holdings paid dues consisting of various agricultural products, as well as providing men to service the lord's household (Smith 1895, 478).

The provision of agricultural food-rent, cloth and labour services have much in common with the requirements demanded for the sustenance of a local priest in the eighth-century *Riagail Pátraic* (Etchingham 1999a, 252–7), as well as the demands made on secular clients in the Old Irish law tracts (Thurneysen 1923, 335–64; Kelly 1997, 318, 423, 461). That demands for agricultural produce could be made by both secular and ecclesiastical lords is explicitly indicated by a prescription in Old Irish law that, among the cattle that could not be distrained by an enraged debtor, was the *bó ciss flatha nó ecalsa*, the 'cow designated for the lord's or the church's levy' (Binchy 1978, 38.19–21; Etchingham 1999a, 222). Since the exactions of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities on their tenants could be similar in early medieval Ireland, it seems reasonable to postulate that the renders demanded of ecclesiastical tenantry on Islay would have been similar to those demanded of their secular counterparts.

It appears, in fact, that the distinction between local parochial centres and agricultural estates is not one that should be drawn for the early medieval period. The stipulations of *Riagail Pátraic* can be understood as allowing for local production of agricultural goods for the benefit of the local episcopal authority, while in return a priest or priests would be provided who would live on the holding for at least part of the year and offer pastoral care to the local community. Whether the local renders were entirely consumed by the local priest or a percentage was sent to the bishop and/or the great ecclesiastical settlement of the region is unknown, but the latter seems probable.

It would seem, therefore, that the land-holdings of the great churches were represented by units of land inhabited by people of various social strata (see Swift 1998; Etchingham 1999a, 417–18) but all owing some form of allegiance to their ecclesiastical overlord. Such allegiance was symbolised by, among other things, renders of agricultural produce. These renders could be used to provide for a local priest and a location in which he could say Mass and bury the dead of his flock, provided they were prepared to pay the requisite fees.

As for the bulk of the secular population, in the surrounding and interspersed land units not controlled by ecclesiastical authorities, we know that they had the choice of being buried in church land, although we do not know what percentage of the population took up this option. Laymen and -women could choose to place themselves under ecclesiastical overlordship (including the purchase of a place within the church burial-ground), but there were no constraints to enforce such a choice. Those individuals who so decided were perceived as ex-laymen, or *athlaích*. This word has been defined as denoting members of the local secular population who chose to redeem the sins committed in the course of their lives spent as warriors or as other secular professionals. This redemption consisted of living out their days in a 'paramonastic' lifestyle, along with their wives and households (Etchingham 1999b). A Clonmacnoise example of such an *athlaích* is provided by the figure of Erard Mac Coisse, *príméces Góidhel*, 'chief poet of the Gael', who died there *in penitentia* according to *A. Tig.* 990.

In attempting to decide the extent to which grave-slabs may have functioned as memorials for the secular nobility, it is important to avoid the danger of making anachronistic assumptions about the percentage of the population that may have been exposed to Christian practices on a frequent basis. Like the inhabitants of eighth-century villages in Northumbria (Colgrave 1940, 184–7; Whitelock 1942, 388, 802), many Irishmen and -women may have been exposed to ecclesiastical teaching only sporadically and infrequently during most of their lives (Etchingam 1991). It is impossible to be certain whether they or their kin would choose under such circumstances to pay the price of burial in an ecclesiastical centre, but it seems reasonable to assume that many would have seen it as an expense that could be justified only by the wealthy or the particularly pious.

The evidence of the Islay stones is not conclusive in this regard, but the concentration of surviving stones on what appear to have been ecclesiastical estates of Iona, together with the relative paucity of recovered grave-slabs, seems to imply that only a minority of the island's medieval population were commemorated in this fashion. That minority seems likely to have been numbered among the ecclesiastical clients, or *manaig*, of Iona, that is, the inhabitants of ecclesiastical land who lived under a greater or lesser degree of church discipline (Etchingam 1999a, 290–454). As a parallel to Clonmacnoise, therefore, the Iona/Islay model is one that supports the deduction made to date, namely, that the Clonmacnoise slabs appear likely to be monuments that, for the most part, commemorate professional or 'committed' Christians rather than the population at large.

Clonmacnoise-type sculpture on Clonmacnoise estates

In the case of the Iona/Islay model just cited, the Columban holdings on Islay were identified both by high crosses and by grave-slab sculpture. In the case of Clonmacnoise a clear parallel can be established regarding the Bealin high cross. Scholarly debate in the early 1980s has not affected Henry's identification of common motifs on this cross with the North Cross at Clonmacnoise or her dating of it to c. 800 (Henry 1930; Hicks 1980, 26–9; Edwards 1990, 164; 1998). This dating derives from an inscription, now unfortunately unreadable, that Henry transcribed as *Oroit ar Thuathgall las ndearnath in chros sa*, 'Pray for Tuathgall who caused this cross to be made'. Edwards (1998, 115) also cites Kenneth Jackson's opinion that the palaeography is of similar date, although unfortunately no basis for this judgement is recorded. In 1986 Higgitt indicated that the norm for sculptural inscriptions in Britain and Ireland was to specify the royal patron and/or the highest-ranking ecclesiastic of the area, and this would support Henry's guess that the Tuathgall in question was the leader of the seniors of Clonmacnoise who died in 811. Subsequent work, notably by Edwards in 1998, has further corroborated Henry's original suggestion by outlining in detail the way in which the non-figural art on the cross can also be linked to stonework from Clonmacnoise.

Today, the Bealin cross is set in a modern plinth in the adjacent townland of Twyford. It was moved from a location beside a well at Twyford House in the nineteenth century, and O'Donovan, in the Ordnance Survey letters of 1837, mentioned a disused graveyard in the same area (Walsh 1957, 8). Both Twyford and Bealin currently form part of the parish of Ballyloughloe, which was recorded in 1424–7 as *Lochluacha*, in 1431–3 as *Lochlua*, and in 1438–42 as *Lochluatha* (Costello 1909, 143). It is also recorded as *Baile Locha Luatha* in AFM 1475, and *Ballyloghluaha* in *A. Clon.* 1234. This area is probably also that mentioned in the 1302–7 papal taxation list as *Loghloch*—a rectory of Clonmacnoise (Sweetman and Handcock 1886, 216). Thus, the Bealin cross is inscribed with the name of an early ninth-century Clonmacnoise churchman, is associated stylistically with sculpture in Clonmacnoise, and is found in a later medieval holding of that settlement. There seems good reason to assume that the cross can be associated with a pre-Norman estate of the

ecclesiastical settlement at Clonmacnoise.

This is not to say that this writer necessarily agrees with the identification of the Bealin/Twyford cross site with that of Ísel Ciaráin, an identification put forward in 1969 by Cox and recently endorsed by Ó Floinn (1995, 253) and Kehnel (1997, 70). The arguments in its favour depend heavily on the value of modern local traditions of the presence of an early church (deriving no doubt from the existence of both cross and graveyard), a well dedicated to St Ciarán and a river nearby known as Ballaghkieran, or 'the way of Ciarán', a nineteenth-century custom of doing stations at the cross (Cox 1969), and the low-lying nature of both Twyford and Ísel. These do not appear to be conclusive points, as indeed Cox (1969, 13) himself acknowledged; there is much low-lying ground in the middle stretches of the Shannon basin, and Ciarán's cult was widespread in the region. Rather stronger evidence is provided by the fact that, according to the Middle Irish life of Ciarán, the site was donated to Clonmacnoise by a king of Tethbae 'for God and for Ciarán', while, according to genealogies on folio 50a in the 'Book of Ballymote', it was a joint donation by the kings of Tethba and of Mide (Cox 1969, 7-8; W. Stokes 1890, 128; Dobbs 1938, 248-9). This certainly seems to imply that Ísel lay to the north of Clonmacnoise, but the changes over time in the boundaries of Tethbae are still to be fully elucidated (Walsh 1985, 15-19).

Whether Ísel Ciaráin is located at Twyford, however, it is extremely important, as it is one of the few examples of an estate linked to Clonmacnoise in the pre-Norman period of which some documentary details survive. According to *AFM* 1031, Ísel Ciaráin was associated with the name of Conn na mBocht, 'the person responsible for the Céli Dé and anchorites at Clonmacnoise' (Ó Cuív 1986, 109). In 1072 (*A. Clon.* 1069) the Ua Máel Sechlainn 'over-cessed' the Meic Cuinn na mBocht, who inhabited the site, to the point where a steward was killed and land had to be given in compensation. In *Chron. Scot.* 1089, however, the site was purchased by the Meic Cuinn na mBocht from the ruler of Clonmacnoise and the Ua Máel Sechlainn king. In other words, Ísel was a land unit or estate occupied by a dynasty that owed some form of render to the local ruler, who, together with the leader of Clonmacnoise, retained some form of rights over the land. Both secular and ecclesiastical authorities could, however, be subsequently bought out by the occupants.

The Meic Cuinn na mBocht provide a classic example of a hereditary ecclesiastical dynasty, who, because of their later eleventh-century importance, have had their genealogy, stretching back to the eighth century, included in the corpus of Clonmacnoise annals (Reeves 1864, 138-9; Grabowski and Dumville 1984, 176-80; Kehnel 1997, 136-9). The man who bought out the Ísel estate, Cormac mac Cuinn na mBocht, also began the work of repairing the roof shingles and the walls of the 'great church' at Clonmacnoise (*A. Clon.* 1100), although this may have taken place after he became *tanaiste abad* or possibly *comarba Ciaráin* between 1100 and 1103. His father (grandfather?), Conn na mBocht, is recorded as having donated twenty cows to a herd at Ísel for the benefit of the 'poor' (*boicht*) of Clonmacnoise (*AFM* 1031). Such references seem to imply that agricultural activity took place on the estate and that renders of service and possibly of wood and building materials were offered to the church authorities at Clonmacnoise. This would accord with the tradition recorded in the Middle Irish life of Ciaráin that tillage also took place at Ísel in St Ciarán's time (W. Stokes 1890, 128). Given the discussion of Tuathal Saer above, it may also be worth noting that another son of Conn, Máel-Ciaráin, paid for two *clocháns*, 'paved ways', at Clonmacnoise, both of which terminated at named *crossa* (*AFM* 1070).

Other references to Ísel in the Irish life of Ciaráin indicate that there were also ecclesiastical monuments and personnel on the estate. Ciarán's brothers, who were said to have lived with him there, were identified as *uasalsacairt* (noble priests), and there were also

bráithre (brothers) and *cléirig* (clerics) in the settlement (W. Stokes 1890, 119, 128–9). In the Latin life edited by Plummer, Ísel is described as a *cella*. The elder brother, Lucoll, is termed an *abbas*, while the younger, Odrán, was a *prior*, and Ciarán himself the *magister hospitum*, or guest-master (Plummer 1910, vol. 1, 209). There is also a later description of Ísel as the 'hospitall of St Queran' in *A. Clon.* 1087. In a couplet in *AFM* 1031, Conn na mBocht is said to have possessed a *cill* at Ísel (Kehnel 1997, 136 fn. 19). More importantly for our purposes, the Irish life specifies that relics of the two brothers are kept in the *reilic* (graveyard) at Ísel (W. Stokes 1890, 119). Since we have seen that sculpture of Clonmacnoise style can be associated with a probable Clonmacnoise estate at Twyford, it seems reasonable to assume that the grave-slabs in the Ísel graveyard would also have shown Clonmacnoise influence.

Thus the documentary evidence for Ísel accords with the archaeological evidence from Islay and Iona, namely, that outlying estates could be the location for ecclesiastical-style burials while providing agricultural renders to the major church. The case of Ísel shows that these outlying estates could be occupied by both local clergy—the *uasalsacairt* and the *clerig*—and by non-clerical personnel, such as the *bráithre*. Ísel also provides a concrete example of the dispersal of a major ecclesiastical dynasty across a local landscape. This can be seen as strengthening the argument that one should not necessarily see major church office-holders of important church settlements living within a nucleated 'monastic town' (Swift 1998). Instead, the ecclesiastical leaders who commanded their own agricultural estates were in a position to use the resources thus gained in the pursuit of prestigious careers in the local mother church.

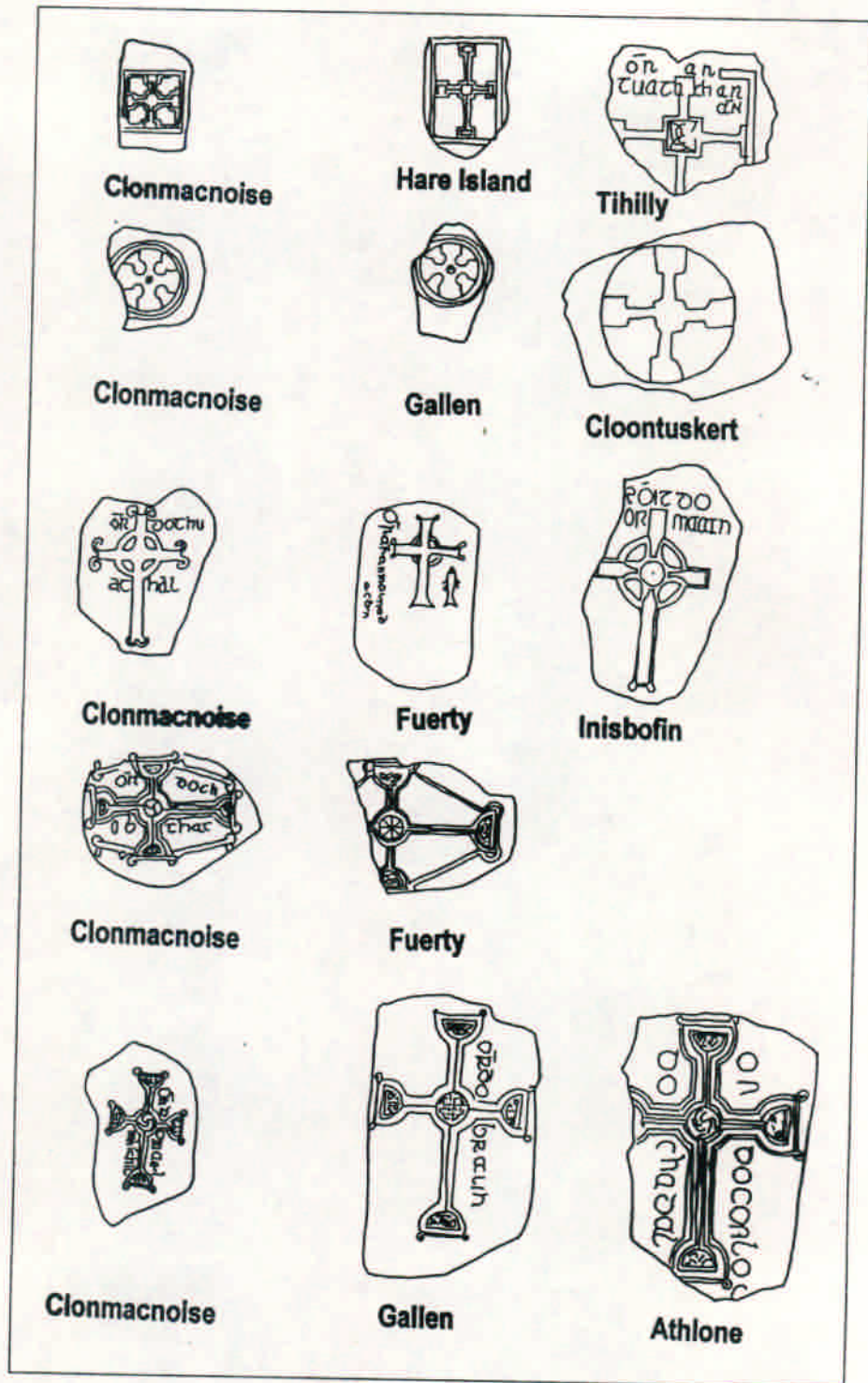
The role of Clonmacnoise-style grave-slabs in the Shannon basin

In addition to the very large collection of grave-slabs at Clonmacnoise itself, grave-slabs of similar type have been found at a number of sites in the surrounding area (Ill. 2; and see, for example, Ó Floinn's (1995, 255) map for Type B slabs). The vast number of slabs found at Clonmacnoise in comparison to those from other sites provides reasonable grounds for suggesting that Clonmacnoise was the centre of grave-slab production in this area.

Of the sites on which these Clonmacnoise-style grave-slabs are located, Lemanaghan, with twelve surviving slabs (O'Brien and Sweetman 1997, 104), is the estate said to have been given to Clonmacnoise 'to be held free from and without any charge in the world' by the seventh-century Diarmait son of Áed Sláine, in gratitude for Ciarán's help in securing victory at the battle of Carn Conaill (*A. Clon.* 642). It was on this occasion that Diarmait is said to have proclaimed that he would be buried at Clonmacnoise (*A. Tig.* 642; *Chron. Scot.* 646; *AFM* 645).

Hare Island, with a slab drawn by Petrie (M. Stokes 1872, 45), is the modern equivalent of *Inis Aingin*, identified in the lives of Ciarán as the possession of a (British) priest, Daniel, who donated the site 'to God and to St Ciarán'. *Bráithre*, or brothers, also lived there (W. Stokes 1890, 129; Plummer 1910, vol. 1, 210). Ecclesiastical artefacts on the island are implied by the reference in the Irish life in which Ciarán is said to have left *mind* and *comartha* (venerated objects and tokens) when he departed; these were said to include his gospel book and his bell (W. Stokes 1890, 130). In the annals, *Inis Aingin* is said to have been profaned when a man was wounded during a synod held there, attended by the seniors and bishop of Clonmacnoise and graced by the shrine of Ciarán (*scrín Ciaráin*) in 894 (*AFM* 894; *Chron. Scot.* 899). Thus both Lemanaghan and Hare Island were estates of Clonmacnoise, while Hare Island is clearly associated with both priests and the non-clerical *bráithre* and probably contained a church to hold the relics mentioned in the Irish life.

Given these two examples where grave-slabs can be closely associated with Clonmacnoise estates, there seems good reason to identify a high proportion of other grave-slab sites in the



Ill. 2—Clonmacnoise-style slabs.

locality as probable Clonmacnoise church holdings. As in the Hebrides, there appears to be a pattern of craftsmen trained in the major ecclesiastical settlement but producing wares that could be found on subordinate estates. The documentary material from the Irish midlands makes it clear that these estates could be manned by both clerical and non-clerical personnel. However, without study of the stone types used in creating the grave-slabs, it is impossible

to tell whether midland sculptors travelled to the estates and carved local stones there (as suggested for the Hebrides) or whether they were in a position to import expensive sandstone from outside the area for their patrons.

It is also worth noting that, at least in the case of Lemanaghan, the estate was said to have derived from a royal gift and resulted in burial rights for the donor not on the estate but in the graveyard of Clonmacnoise itself. Among these midland sites with Clonmacnoise-style grave-slabs one can observe the same general tendency to record individual names without patronymics that is visible in the grave-slab corpus as a whole. For what it is worth, John O'Donovan notes a grave-slab, now lost, at Hare Island that he read as *orait ar Tuathal hua hUarain* (O'Flanagan 1933, 5; *AFM* 894 fn. x). Fanning and Ó hÉailidhe (1980, 11) have pointed out that George Petrie's drawing, which gives the reading *Ór ar Tuathcharan*, is earlier and more complete than O'Donovan's sketch in the 1830s and that the latter does not even agree with what he published in his later edition of the *Annals of the Four Masters*. Even if O'Donovan is right, however, we have seen that the use of a patronymic does not necessarily reflect the burial of a secular noble and that, in two instances of slabs from Clonmacnoise, we find *gráda eonai*, or ecclesiastical scholars, with patronymics on their grave-slabs. Given our dependence on nineteenth-century catalogues, one cannot, of course, be dogmatic on this point, but to date there is no clear evidence of royal burial on any of the midlands sites with Clonmacnoise-style grave-slabs. If any members of the lay population were so buried, they appear not only to have been interred in an ecclesiastical rather than a kin cemetery but also to have adopted the prevalent fashion among the professional clerics for being commemorated without patronymics. Such laymen, if they existed, seem to accord best with the category of penitential 'ex-laymen', or *athlaich*, the 'committed' Christians who decided to retire in perpetuity to ecclesiastical settlements in redemption of their sins.

Conclusions

In 1995 Ó Floinn identified one of the key elements in his paper as 'royal burial and its implications for the dating of the large number of memorial slabs preserved at Clonmacnoise' (Ó Floinn 1995, 251). In that paper he specified two slabs that might be so described: that of Ailill aue Dunchatho, whom he identified as an Uí Fhiachrach Muirisce king of Connacht who died in 764, and a lost slab dedicated to Dubcenn mac Tadgan, who may have ruled Tethbae in the mid-tenth century (Ó Floinn 1995, 252, 254). For reasons specified elsewhere (Swift 1999) the writer is not convinced of the first identification, but, even if we accept both, the existence of two royal grave-slabs is a statistically inadequate means of identifying the role of the seven hundred or so slabs from Clonmacnoise. If we were also to consider the rather more numerous attestations of royal burial on the site that are found in the documentary evidence, we would be adopting a similar methodology to that of Petrie, Macalister and Lionard. As already stated, however, the argument that the slabs record individuals identifiable from annalistic obituaries appears to be a weak one, given the common occurrence of many of the names found on slabs in the Old Irish period. The later medieval bardic poems, which also refer to the burial of kings and nobles at Clonmacnoise, are written in a very different historical context and can be shown, on occasion, to represent a type of antiquarian rewriting of historical events.

In this paper it has been argued that concentration to date on the documentary evidence for noble burials at Clonmacnoise has led scholars to minimise the considerable evidence suggesting that grave-slabs were frequently used to commemorate churchmen. The naming formula used on the majority of slabs (i.e. personal names without patronymics) is typical of that found among ecclesiastics in general and clerics in particular. This accords with the evidence of the tiny number of slabs where the title of the man commemorated is given, although one must also bear in mind the somewhat anomalous example of Tuathal Saer. The

style of names recorded, many of which derive from an international Christian culture rather than native forms or which describe the individuals as 'tonsured one' or 'servant' of a saint, also suggests ecclesiastics rather than secular warriors.

It has also been suggested that in two case studies, of the southern Hebrides and the middle Shannon basin, there is good reason to interpret small collections of grave-slabs as the location of ecclesiastical estates owing allegiance to the major church settlements of the region: Iona, on the one hand, and Clonmacnoise, on the other. These estates appear to have been manned by both clerical and non-clerical personnel and to have owed agricultural renders to their mother church. In return, the occupants of these estates had access to trained craftsmen who could produce high crosses such as Kildalton or Bealin but also grave-slabs for their local graveyards. Such graveyards appear to have been used for local ecclesiastics or for penitent laymen who were prepared to pay burial dues for the privilege of being buried in consecrated ground. Royal patrons, in contrast, could demand burial rights at the mother church itself, at least in those instances where they were prepared to grant estates such as Lemanaghan to the church authorities. In some cases the estates in which the slabs were located were the homes of ecclesiastical dynasties that could provide office-holders to the major churches. Even after estates had been donated to the church, royal overlords could demand taxes from their inhabitants, but the potential also existed, in the case of powerful local dynasties such as the Meic Cuinn na mBocht, to create ecclesiastical settlements free of any form of render.

It is generally accepted that examination of the figural art and iconography of the high crosses can provide us with important insights into the nature of Christian ideology and tradition in the early Irish church. Although Irish grave-slabs have not been studied to the same extent as other forms of sculpture, the care and technical skill with which so many were produced are important indicators of the status of ecclesiastics in Irish society. If, as argued above, they marked the graves of professional or 'committed' Christians, produced by sculptors trained in the major ecclesiastical houses, their existence would have provided important visual testimony to the presence of a highly honoured cultural elite. The wealth necessary to generate this concrete manifestation of ecclesiastical status was created through those ever-present evils with which all societies are plagued: death and taxes.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mr Paul McMahan for granting access to the *Dúchas* catalogue of Clonmacnoise stones, which includes a number of slabs discovered only in the 1950s and the 1980s.

Notes

1. The writer is grateful to Dr Colmán Etchingham of NUI Maynooth for detailed discussion of the ideas in this paper.
2. Ó Floinn's paper has been reprinted in *Clonmacnoise Studies, volume 1* (see King 1998, 87-118).
3. In the translation of this verse provided by Margaret Stokes (1872, 5) the last phrase of this verse is translated: 'a fair, just, Ogham name'. See, however, *ogam* (c) in *DIL*, O 113, ll 24-35, where the word is identified as having the meaning 'written language', as opposed to spoken language (*gaedhelg*) in the later grammatical tracts; see also, D. McManus, *A guide to ogam* (Maynooth, 1991), 156.
4. This entry is unlikely to be contemporary, as it is isolated within the corpus of early Clonmacnoise annals, which concentrates almost exclusively on the deaths of its ecclesiastical leaders (Swift 1995, 247).
5. In Swift 1999, 111-12, as part of an argument against the identification of one particular memorial made in Ó Floinn 1995, 252, it was stated that no member of this family was

- known to be buried in Clonmacnoise; this should clearly now be emended, although Ó Floinn's identification of an eighth-century Uí Fhiachrach Muirsce king at Clonmacnoise remains doubtful for other reasons cited in the same article.
6. In fact this list was drawn up by Françoise Henry—see Lionard 1961, 95 fn. 1.
 7. These numbers refer to the current *Dúchas* catalogue of Clonmacnoise slabs.
 8. This is listed in the current *Dúchas* catalogue as CLN 00302 and is said there to have been first identified by Macalister in his 1949 catalogue, but this appears to be a mistake. The stone is currently on display in the Clonmacnoise Visitor Centre.
 9. See Breatnach 1996, 119, for a discussion of the precise date of *Uraicecht Becc*.
 10. This section represents a summary account of some of the main conclusions of an unpublished MPhil thesis that the writer submitted to the University of Durham in 1987. I will deal with the arguments outlined here in greater detail in a forthcoming article in the *Scottish Historical Review*.

References

Abbreviations

- A. Clon. = D. Murphy (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise* (Dublin, 1896; reprinted Felinfach, Wales, 1993).
- AFM = J. O'Donovan (ed.), *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann/Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (7 vols, Dublin, 1856).
- AI = S. Mac Airt (ed.), *The Annals of Inisfallen* (Dublin, 1951).
- A. Tig. = W. Stokes (ed.), *The Annals of Tigernach* (Dublin, 1895–6; reprinted Felinfach, Wales, 1993).
- AU = S. Mac Airt and G. MacNiocaill (eds), *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* (Dublin, 1983).
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