FORTS AND FIELDS: A STUDY OF ‘MONASTIC TOWNS’ IN SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CENTURY IRELAND

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Due to the work of Charles Doherty, the phrase ‘monastic town’ is now part of the common parlance of medieval Irish archaeology and settlement studies. This was a phrase which had earlier been used by Ó Corráin to characterise major eighth- and ninth-century churches. Doherty popularised the expression in three articles written in the first half of the 1980s. In these, it was argued that, after ecclesiastical sites adopted a standard format in the seventh and eighth centuries, they became ‘urban’ from the tenth century. His model has been accepted by medieval archaeologists such as Bradley, Edwards and, to some extent, by Ryan. In contrast, Mallory and McNeill have drawn a distinction between early church sites as major centres of resources (which they see as plausible) and the same sites as large centres of population (with which they disagree). Graham has pointed out that there is no known parallel for a theory of urbanisation founded almost entirely on monasticism and argues that the lack of a precise definition of the ‘monastic town’ compromises Doherty’s concept. Elsewhere, Graham has suggested that such ‘proto-towns’ should be viewed in the context of mixed secular and ecclesiastical settlements which he postulates as the norm in early medieval Ireland from the seventh century. More recently, Valante has queried the whole concept of an Irish monastic town on the grounds that she sees no evidence for early ecclesiastical sites being the ‘hub of a redistributive system’, nor for their ‘urban’ status. She defines urban as ‘distinct from a rural settlement where the majority of denizens rely on agricultural production...’ and suggests that in a pre-industrial society, commerce, manufacturing and provision of services are obvious possibilities for a non-farming economic base.

Up until recently, the concept of the Irish monastic town was based almost entirely on documentary material with relatively little archaeological evidence being deployed. Recently, however, Bradley has published a definition of an Irish monastic town in which the criteria for inclusion are as much archaeological as historical, namely settlement complexity with a central core where major church buildings are located, domestic houses and workshops, streets, fairs and trade, enclosure and defence and an important political role for the site. On the other hand, the case study of Clonmacnoise which he provides is still largely dependent on documentary references and for the most part refers to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Archaeological investigation by King and others at Clonmacnoise has produced evidence of settlement at that ecclesiastical centre but evidence of density and date have yet to be published in detail.

In Doherty’s work, the possibility of a seventh-century ‘monastic town’ at Kildare is raised in his analysis of an extract from Cogitosus’s Life of Brigit.

And what words are capable of setting forth the very great beauty of this church and the countless wonders of that monastery which we may call city (civitas) if it is possible to call city that which is enclosed by no circle of walls. However, since innumerable people come together within it and acquiring the name city because of its throns this is a very great metropolitan city (civitas metropolitana); in its suburbs (suburbana), the clear boundaries of which holy Brigit marked out herself, no human foe or charge of enemies is feared. But it is a city of refuge (civitas refugii), the safest among the external suburbs (suburbana) with all their fugitives in all the lands of the Irish.

The specifically ‘urban’ language here is supported in Doherty’s model by analysis of eighth-century canons which he interprets as referring to the presence of a lay population living on the periphery of major monasteries. The ceremonial complex at the centre of the settlement is left relatively free from habitation while the suburbana, known as the ferann foganama in Irish, were service lands, inhabited by monastic tenants. Doherty leaves the question of density of population on these settlements open; pointing out that ‘in the course of time’ major monasteries had a population reflecting all grades of society from serf to noble and that not all who lived within monastic settlements or on monastic property could be classed as ‘religious’. Despite the reference to service lands, the over-all emphasis of Doherty’s work on the urban associations of early ecclesiastical settlements has resulted in his model being interpreted by subsequent commentators such as Ó Corráin, Mtyum, Btiel, Stout and, by inference, Bradley, as indicating the existence of large nucleated and ‘urban’ or ‘proto-urban’ settlements from the seventh or eighth century.

My purpose in this paper is to examine a number of the words and phrases used to describe ecclesiastical settlement in the eighth-century collection of Irish canon law, the Collectio Canonom Hibernensis. I believe that since our current architectural interpretation of larger ecclesiastical sites is so heavily influenced by Doherty’s model, it is important for archaeologists to discuss these documentary sources in detail. A detailed investigation of the words in the Hibernensis, with due regard for their biblical and vernacular counterparts, has led me to three
general conclusions which I would like to contribute to
the debate. Firstly, I do not believe that the textual sources
support the suggestion that Irish ecclesiastical settlements
were ‘urban’ in the sense that they housed large
concentrated populations in the late seventh or eighth
centuries. Rather, they appear to reflect a dispersed
pattern with little or no evidence for nucleation. The
church buildings are surrounded by fields and pasture and
the people associated with the settlement lived in
dwellings spread across the local landscape. Secondly,
there is no single precise translation for the many Latin
words used to describe church-settlements and these were
frequently viewed as synonyms by the Hiberno-Latin
writers. Thirdly, I would argue that the language used to
describe ecclesiastical settlement does not differ from that
pertaining to secular sites and that, in over-all
organisation, the layout of both were probably
comparable.

WORDS AS ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
A major problem in any such enquiry concerns the
difficulties imposed by the various languages involved.
The Hibernensis was written in Latin, a language in
common use throughout Western Europe during the early
Middle Ages as a sacred or cult language. It presented an
amalgam of Christian and indeed of Roman tradition to
its medieval Irish audience and as such, it does not and
cannot reflect a single material culture. The reality which
lies behind the use of specific words in such a ‘cultic’
language thus becomes difficult, if not impossible to
discern. The primary text in early medieval European
culture was the Vulgate Bible; a Latin translation of
Hebrew and Greek sources by St Jerome, who wrote in
the last years of the fourth century. For the archaeologist,
this text concentrates on a Near Eastern culture of the last
millennium before Christ but includes as well a number of
shorter texts written in the Hellenised world of Asia
Minor in the first century of our era. Jerome himself came
from the Roman province of Dalmatia in the western
Balkans. He spent some years as a hermit in Syria and
others as a radical proselytiser among wealthy females in
Rome. Finally, after a scandal caused by the death of a
young noblewoman under the severe ascetic regime
which he had imposed, he retired to Bethlehem. As a
translator, his vocabulary might be presumed to reflect his
diverse experiences. Furthermore, both Jerome himself,
as well as subsequent producers of Latin biblical texts,
were influenced to varying degrees by older translations
of Hebrew texts into Greek and of Greek texts into Latin.
Some of the older biblical texts were produced in North
Africa, others in the huge urban centres of Antioch and
Alexandria. In short, the first step of an archaeologist or
historian who seeks to identify a material reality behind
the use of Latin vocabulary in Hiberno-Latin texts must
be to acknowledge the lack of a uniform usage in Biblical
Latin.

Unlike other countries in north-western Europe,
however, students of medieval Irish documentation have
a great advantage in the huge number and variety of
surviving texts in the vernacular. To an extent
unparalleled in other northern cultures, it is possible to
test the meaning of Latin words and phrases used by
medieval Irish writers by looking at their Old and Middle
Irish counterparts. This is a vitally important resource for
Irish archaeologists, eager to identify the monuments and
settlement types described in our documents. On the other
hand, it is important that we acknowledge certain features
in this data base, as presently constituted, which limits
any attempt to use Irish language sources in this way.

The number of scholars working in the field of
Old Irish is historically very small and the production of
the Dictionary of the Irish Language has involved the
energies of many of the key figures working in the field
between 1913 and 1976. Such men and women were
linguists, interested in the grammatical complexities of
the Irish language and, for the most part, particularly
concerned to elucidate the connections between Irish and
its ancestor Common Celtic and, further back, Indo-
European. As archaeologists, we tend to imagine that the
primary focus of a dictionary is translation, but as least as
important to the Dictionary compilers was the
identification of specific stem classes (for nouns) and the
ancestral pre-verbs which made up the verbal complexes
in Old Irish. English translations were often not their
primary interest and they tended to be taken verbatim
from editions extant at the time the particular section was
being compiled. Many of the translations for material
objects, for example, are drawn from the nineteenth-
century translations of Ancient Irish Laws or the sagas
translated by language scholars at the turn of the century,
men such as Whitley Stokes or Kuno Meyer. Such
translations, one need hardly add, were produced at a time
when the study of Irish medieval archaeology was in its
infancy.

In short, simply adopting the translation of a
given Irish word as listed in the Dictionary is often too
minimalist an approach. Given the tiny numbers of
individuals involved and the very different structure and
aims of Old Irish as an academic discipline, we cannot
assume that Old Irish scholars are going to automatically
provide us with texts which provide a clear cultural
context for the phenomena we see in the field. As Irish
archaeologists wishing to use documentary sources to
illustrate cultural realities, it is our responsibility to
produce our own definitions of words, based on our
understanding of the archaeological record, as well as on
the texts themselves. For the results to be meaningful, it
requires the investigation of all the given instances of a
particular word - in the same way that identifying a bead
or a brooch involves a general overview of an entire
corpus. In settlement terms, this process has begun with
the work by Mallory on the various vernacular terms for
forts but comparative studies of Hiberno-Latin and Old
Irish vocabulary for specific monument types have yet to
be undertaken.
CHURCH LAW COURTS AT THE ENTRANCEWAYS TO ECCLESIASTICAL SETTLEMENTS

For the early Irish, the consequences of the cultural diversity that lay behind their use of Latin as a sacred language was the existence of many words which they interpreted as synonyms. One such word was tabernaculum which in the Vulgate meant either a tent, a dwelling or the specific monument which covered the Ark of the Covenant and was an area of communal worship. In Irish sources, this last meaning appears to have been extended so that the word could be used to describe either a church building or the church-settlement as a whole. A canon from the Hibernensis lists tabernaculum and templum in parallel; in both cases, these are said to be structures which go through a ceremony of dedication. Its vernacular derivation, the Old Irish word tabarnacul, is specified in the Milan glosses as a place in which the faithful would gather and further that it was a consecrated building, comparable with a tempul. Even more specifically, the late tenth-century Saltair na Rann identifies a tabernacul as a tegdais Dé or house of God and as a place where every hour, cries should be raised to God in morning and evening offerings. Such references would seem to imply that many Irish scholars interpreted the word tabernaculum as referring to an actual church building.

Other references in the canons may indicate a definition of tabernaculum as the universal Church or to an ecclesiastical settlement as a whole. Like the priesthood, the tabernaculum was said to be one and indivisible, it should never be despoiled of its property and goods could be placed in the tabernaculum for safekeeping. Elsewhere, deacons are said to be ordained and to serve in a tabernaculum. In the Penitential of Finnian in which a penitent is told of his fate: ‘punishment will not depart from his tabernaculum’. Such rules seem more likely to relate to a settlement than to a specific church building.

Thus, in Hiberno-Latin texts, tabernaculum appears to have both a general meaning of community and a more specific one, referring to a building designed for Christian worship, something akin to the current connotations of the English word, ‘church’. Armed with this knowledge, we can interpret any of the statements in the Hibernensis in a more precise fashion than has hitherto been the case. An extract dealing with ecclesiastical courts of appeal, for example, specifies that such appeals took place at the porta (gate) or the ostium (door, entranceway) of a tabernaculum or templum:

Moses used to give judgement in the porta of the tabernaculum in order that he might call together a crowd of people and the older men of Israel to the ostium of the tabernaculum. Solomon used to give judgement in the ostium of the tabernaculum. The boy Jesus was found in the templum, arguing within a circle of old men, as we have said above: ‘Rise and go up to the place which the Lord will have chosen.’

Although this has the appearance of a mere summary of biblical citations, this canon is in fact significant for our purposes for details about the porta of the tabernaculum do not, in fact, occur in the Vulgate text at all. There is no reference to Solomon judging ‘in the ostium of the tabernaculum’. Similarly, there is no reference in the Vulgate to Moses making a judgement in the porta of a tabernaculum although there is a description of Moses going into the tabernaculum in order to speak to the Lord, whose presence was indicated to the watching Israelites by a cloud of white smoke in the ostium tabernaculi. Finally, the phrase ‘the place which the Lord God will have chosen’ derives from Deuteronomy rather than the New Testament and there is no mention of any such specification in the account of Jesus consulting with the elders in the temple.

The canon in the Hibernensis thus represents a digest of biblical material which is not an accurate reflection of the Vulgate text but instead an interpretation of that source. The compilers of this collection of biblical citations appear to be reflecting a specific social custom, apparently unknown in Old Testament times, that of making judgements in the entranceways of tabernacula.

Since the authors of the Hibernensis claim that they themselves produced the summaries of biblical citations it seems likely that this custom is an Irish one and indeed, seventh-century hagiography as well as the Hibernensis itself indicates that, for the Irish, two places which ‘the Lord will have chosen’ were Armagh and Rome. In short, the canonists appear to be demanding that church court cases should be brought to judgement at the entranceways of the larger ecclesiastical settlements, such as Armagh.

THE BROAD DIVISIONS IN THE LAYOUT OF IRISH ECCLESIASTICAL SETTLEMENTS

One further reference to tabernaculum in the Hibernensis provides some evidence as to the exact layout of an early Irish ecclesiastical settlement. In the section entitled De oblationibus [On offerings], it is stated that four types of food were to be given to ecclesiastical settlements:

In the law, there were four types of food for the priests; firstly those that Aaron and his sons used to consume in the tabernaculum; secondly, those that the sons of Aaron used to consume in the ostium of the tabernaculum; thirdly, those that either sex used to eat in the atrium and fourthly, those that the whole household used to eat in the ostium with the servants and the purchased people.

As with previous examples, this canon represents an interpretation of the biblical sources rather than a simple paraphrase of information in the Bible. The Old Testament provides us with two descriptions of the
offerings which Aaron and his offspring were to eat are found in Leviticus:

Moses spoke to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left ... And you shall eat (the sacrifice) in the holy place because it is given to you and to your sons from the offerings of the Lord just as I have also commanded ...

You shall eat (it) in the cleanest place, you and your sons and your daughters with you for they are given from the sacrificial animals to you and to your children for the well-being of the children of Israel.  

The remaining share of the flour, Aaron will eat it without yeast, together with his sons and he shall eat it in the atrium of a tabernaculum ... So will the males of the seed of Aaron eat that lawful offering and it is an eternal offering (laid) on your generations from the sacrifices to the Lord....

Both biblical accounts provide for the eating of offerings by Aaron and his sons but in the first, this takes place in the holy place or the cleanest place and in the second, the ceremony takes place in the atrium of a tabernaculum. There seems to be no biblical prototype for a four-fold division into tabernaculum, ostio tabernaculi (gateway of a tabernaculum) atrium and ostio (atrii ? - gateway of an atrium?) as indicated in the Hibernensis canon. This is despite the fact that the canonist specifically cites Lec or the Bible as his source. One possible way of resolving this discrepancy is to suggest that the canonist is using biblical imagery to refer to a layout which is specifically Irish, in much the same way as he implies a biblical ancestry for what appears to have been the Irish practice of holding church law courts at the entrance-ways of ecclesiastical settlements.

That this medieval re-casting does indeed reflect a specific settlement pattern is indicated in yet another canon from Hibernensis which describes the events purported to have taken place when the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments and God is said have placed boundaries between the various groups of people who were present:

In the Law it states: at Mount Sinai, where the law was given, it was ordered (by God) that all the population and the animals should not touch it and He put a boundary between him and Moses and between Moses and Joshua and between Joshua and the elders and between the elders and the general population. In the same place it states: between the tabernaculum and the people of the Levites there was a gap and in the atria there was the household of priests and also between the tabernaculum and the Holy of Holies.

Yet again, this information does not exist in the Vulgate. These hierarchical divisions were not drawn at Mount Sinai by the compiler of the Book of Exodus who merely states that both priests and people were kept outside the boundaries which the Lord laid around the mountain. The final sentence implies the explanation this description of the holy mountain paralleled the normal layout of an Irish ecclesiastical site of the day beyond the tabernaculum in whichever meaning this is used, lay some form of barrier, dividing it from the Levites. Archaeologically, this would seem to indicate either some form of enclosure around a church-building or, alternatively, an enclosure around the settlement as a whole. Hamlin has drawn attention to an incident in Cogitosus’ Life of Brigit where it is stated explicitly that the church at Kildare (ecclesia) was surrounded by an enclosure (castellum) with a millstone functioning as a relic being placed in the entranceway (portus) of this enclosure. The settlement as a whole is termed a monasterium or civitas and, as indicated in the quotation at the beginning of this paper, Cogitosus stresses that, in this case, there were no walls or enclosure surrounding the entire area. The example of Kildare, then, would imply that the barrier between the tabernaculum and the Levites is a barrier around the church building or buildings rather than around a settlement.

In 1964 Kotije pointed out that Jerome, in his commentary on Malachi, had drawn analogies between contemporary churchmen and Levites, particularly with reference to the levying of church tithes. In more recent years, Kotije’s point has been extended to Irish material. According to the Old Testament, Aaron and his sons formed a sub-group of the Levites and more specifically they acted as priests for the entire population of Israel. Other Levites were identified by the Old Testament writers as servants of those that ‘shall stand before the tabernaculum of the testimony’; in other words, people who would fetch and carry on behalf of the priests. This identification of priests as but one group amongst the Levites is mirrored by the careful distinction in Old Irish vernacular law between three different types of ecclesiastical, each with its own hierarchy. These include the professional clerics (gríada ecalsa) from bishop to door-keeper; the scholars of the church (gríada ecnaí from master to pupil; and finally, the grades of those who served the church in an administrative capacity (gríada uird ecalsa), from the temporal administrator of the settlement’s lands (airchimnech) down to men such as cooks, millers or gardeners.

In addition to these three broad categories of clerics, scholars and administrators, twentieth-century investigators have used hagiographical and annalistic sources to identify other groups of inhabitants who are thought to have lived on or close by seventh-and early eighth-century ecclesiastical settlements. Hughes, for example, pointed to the reference to married couples and penitents in the seventh-century text Liber Angeli and she suggested that ecclesiastical sites were also the sites of
schools to which local boys would be sent for their education before returning home to settle down on the family farm and raise children of their own.48 In a detailed analysis of one of the earliest texts in Old Irish, the Cambrail Homily, Stancliffe has pointed to the evidence for a large population of lay penitents who underwent 'blue martyrdom' by becoming residents for a period in an ecclesiastical settlement.49 Using archaeological material, Ryan has outlined the evidence for craftsmen in fine metalwork on such sites.50 Glosses to the law-tract Cithræa Caranactl refer to sons who were placed in bondage to the church implying that at least a proportion of the population attached to ecclesiastical communities were in some sense servile. Doherty has drawn attention to hagiographical references to the same phenomenon.51

There is also the vexed question of the identification of the monaig: a group who were subordinate to the leaders of the ecclesiastical settlement but whose exact status remains a question for debate.52 In the most recent discussion of the term, Etchingham identifies these individuals as having contractual relationships to the church similar to the legal obligations of rent-paying retainers to their secular lords. The church to which monaig were attached were considered the ultimate owner and supplier of land and livestock with which they farmed. Some of these monaig had wives and their sons could inherit property.53 Etchingham has also drawn attention to the extent to which the Irish monach mirrors the use of Hiberno-Latin monachus. Both words can be used to describe either a regular monk or a legal socio/economic and pastoral dependant of the church. He suggests that this dual-meaning bespeaks more than terminological imprecision and follows Charles-Edwards in inferring that the distinction between monk and abbot on the one hand, and monastic tenant and archimnach on the other, was often a subjective one.

It would appear, therefore, that the population attached to an ecclesiastical settlement, whom some Irish commentators referred to as Levites, belonged to a variety of social classes in the seventh and early eighth centuries. The debate on monastic towns is not over whether these people existed but the exact nature of the physical relationship between their dwellings and the central focus represented by the church buildings and associated monuments.

Through an identification of Aaron and his sons as priests and the other Levites as the non-clerical administrative personnel of a church site, the two canons discussed in this section can also provide pertinent information on this problem. Canon XVII:4 states that there were four types of food, the first consumed by the priest and his sons in the tabernaculum, the second by the sons of the priests in the entrance-way of the same structure, the third eaten by both sexes in the atrium and the fourth which was shared out by all members of the extended household including the slaves. The implication behind the canon is that there is a hierarchy of location, composed of church building, atrium and area open to all inhabitants of the settlement, with the church building itself as a focal point.

The specifications of the arrangements at Mount Sinai corroborate this explanation. Godly termini or boundaries differentiated between the most sacred place where God himself was situated and the least sacred, which was the place of the vulgus populi (general population); in between there were Moses, Joshua and the elders. In the sentence following this, the tabernaculum is divided from all members of the settlement by an intervallum and in the atria (plural), there was the household of priests. (I cannot make up my mind whether the final phrase in this extract means that there are further priests’ houses between the tabernaculum and the Holy of Holies or whether there is another intervallum between these two areas; the text is ambiguous.) Doherty has drawn attention to other canons which identify areas of ecclesiastical settlement as sanctus, sanctior or sanctissimus (holy, holier, holiest) which again appears to divide the settlement into three. Priests are allowed into the most holy area, crowds of common people into the middle section and even murderers, adulterers and prostitutes are allowed into the outer perimeter.54 (This last may provide further indication that church law courts, who passed judgement on these categories of sinners, were located on the outer perimeter of the ecclesiastical settlement.)

Sources apparently contemporary with this canon suggest that the boundaries between the various locations were visible on the ground. The word terminus is identified in the Hibernonis as a structure which could be demarcated by crosses or other signa and which was marked out by a king, a bishop and the populus acting in unison.55 Alternatively, Adomnán refers in the Vita Columbae to a monument known as a vallum which he indicates divided a monasterium from its surrounding agricultural buildings and fields and this has generally been interpreted as a boundary ditch or wall.56

From the texts, it would seem that the monuments delimiting the area of church-buildings from the atrium or atria and the people of the Levites could be of a variety of different forms. There is little or no reason, therefore, to assume that such boundaries are automatically the standing enclosures visible around many church sites today.57 On the other hand, the canons concur in locating the priests in the intermediate area between the most prestigious and the least prestigious zones of the settlement.58 It is thus worth considering in greater detail the nature of the atrium or atria in which the familia (household/community) of the priests were located.

**ATRIUM AS DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE AND IN SOURCES FROM OUTSIDE IRELAND**

In the Book of Exodus, the atrium around a tabernaculum is given specific measurements: 100 cubits by 50. At later stages, there could be more than one atrium; in Ezekiel, the outer atrium has treasures (gazofilacia) and
pavements and kitchens for those who minister in the tabernaculum.6 In Chronicles, the outer atrium holds storehouses (thesauri) and in Revelations it was reserved for Gentiles while the inner atrium was the place of the Lord.6 Atria are also associated with offerings made to the Lord and in I Kings, a ceremony of dedication of a templum takes place in an atrium.7 The biblical references to atria thus visualise this location as a public area where the ancillary tasks associated with the running of the tabernaculum took place. It was also an area in which outhouses of various kinds were located. These references were widely interpreted by church architects in the late Roman and early medieval worlds. The great churches of the Near East in the fourth to sixth centuries had large atria, surrounding the main church-buildings and divided from the street by rows of ornate columns.8

Something similar was built at Lyons in the fifth century and is described by Sidonius Apollinaris as a stone forest, rising proudly on columns of Aquitanian marble.8 In the church of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, at around the same date, the atrium was a medieval addition, part of the reconstructions which helped to convert a temple to Aphrodite into a Christian basilica.9 In this early period (and in the Eastern rites at a later date), the atrium appears to have had an integral role in the liturgy and was used, for example, as an assembly area for catechumens where they remained apart during the celebration of the Eucharist inside the main church building.6 In Jerusalem, in a part of the complex at Golgotha variously termed an atrium, a platea, a paradiso or a hortus, corpses were laid out before the final rites in the church.6 The biblical descriptions of the Hebraic atrium served as an inspiration for all and each society interpreted the Vulgate evidence in the light of its own cultural milieu.

In western Europe, there appears to be more emphasis on the atrium as a place which was open to the public at large. Atria could be used to shelter long-term guests such as pilgrims; in fifth-century Rome, Pope Symmachus built them complete with fountains and toilets at both St Peter’s and St Paul’s for precisely this reason.4 In Merovingian Gaul, the main purpose of the atrium was as a place of sanctuary.4 At the Synod of Mâcon, in 585, a canon forbids clerics to be present in the atrium sanctum [atrium of wounding?] when criminals are being killed and at Chalon-sur-Seine in the mid seventh century, the atrium is said to be a place where people might assemble on the days of church festivals and where rowdy songs were wont to be sung.5

In short, the biblical evidence is for the atrium as a place where the ancillary activities and particularly the economic activities of the tabernaculum took place. The late Roman and immediate post-Roman sources indicate that an atrium was a place associated with certain liturgical rituals of the church, while texts from western Europe indicate its role as a domicile for passing visitors to an ecclesiastical settlement. The usage in the Hibernensis, which identifies an atrium as a place of habitation, surrounding the tabernaculum is, therefore, in accordance with the general European trend. Further specification of such an atrium comes from examining a word which is used by a number of Irish authors as its synonym.

SYNONYMS FOR ATRIUM IN IRISH SOURCES: PLATEA AND FAITHCHE

In his account of the holy places of Jerusalem, Adomnán uses the word platea to describe what other sources term the atrium of Golgotha. Many of the contexts in which platea is used in Hiberno-Latin documents appear to be directly comparable to the use of atrium in other texts. One such example is Adomnán’s description of offerings made to Columba by the bishop and people of Cúl Rathin:

At the same time, Conall, bishop of Cúl Rathin collected from the people of the plain of Elne almost innumerable gifts and prepared a lodging for the blessed man when, with a large crowd accompanying him, he was returning after the conference of the above-named kings. So when the holy man arrived, the many gifts of the people were presented to him for benediction, laid out in the platea of the monasterium.6

Reeves, analysing Adomnán’s Vita Columbae in 1857, identified the platea of Iona as being within the monastic vallum and suggested that it either surrounded or lay beside the lodgings of the community as well as being in the vicinity of the kitchen, the dining area and the church.6 Here, quoting the same passage as above, has argued for its definition as a courtyard and suggested that the word strato used here implies that it was paved. MacDonald has argued for a similar definition.6 Given the usage of platea in other Hiberno-Latin texts (and in particular, the lack of any other reference to the possibility of paving), I would prefer to follow the primary translation of the Andersons and that of Richard Sharpe and see strato as qualifying xenia. In other words, this text simply refers to the fact that the gifts were laid out and provides no evidence for paving.6

The notion of gifts laid out for the man of God in a platea would appear to have resonances of the description of offerings made to the tabernaculum authorities in the Hibernensis as well as of the description in Leviticus of the offerings made to Aaron and his sons in the atrium tabernaculi discussed above. In his study, MacDonald has also drawn attention to its usage in a variant canon, belonging to one recension of the Hibernensis, which divides the sacred place into two or three separate areas with plateae occupying the intermediate zone:

There should be two or three boundaries around the sacred place, the first, into which we allow no one to enter at all unless of the saints, because laymen do not approach it, nor women, only clerics; the second, into the plateae of which, we
let enter crowds of country people not much
given to villainy; the third, into which we do not
forbid lay murderers (and) adulterers to enter by
permission and custom. From this they are
called, the first most holy, the second, more holy
and the third holy.7

The specification that murderers and adulterers
were allowed to enter the outermost area reminds us of
the specifications for the Gaulish atrium as a place of
sanctuary as well as the Irish evidence that church law
courts were held at the entrance-ways to ecclesiastical
settlement. The tripartite division of occupation parallels
the description of ecclesiastical settlement in the canon
referring to Mount Sinai and indicates an intermediate
area between the holiest part of the settlement and that
open to public access. In the Mount Sinai canon, this area
is termed an atrium in which priests live; here it is a
number of platea into which rural folk are allowed enter.
Yet another canon in the Hibernensis refers to the right of
a cleric to wander freely among the plateae and the
amnronce, the latter a word deriving from the Greek
and meaning ‘the houses of the men’. This indicates that for
the Irish canonist, platea, like atrium, could be an area in
which people lived.7

Although the Hiberno-Latin authors would seem to
use platea and atrium as synonyms, Jerome appears to
make a distinction between the two words in the Vulgate.
Whereas a biblical atrium is a yard attached to a holy
sanctuary, a biblical platea is a place within an area of
habitation where the populace in general could assemble
in public fora.

In the Bible, plateae are frequently associated with
civitates.8 Public assemblies meeting in plateae
could be addressed by figures in authority such as the
king Hezekiah or the scribe Ezra and in times of war,
chariots could rush through the area.4 It appears that it
was an area of open ground, which was not paved, for
there is frequent mention of the mud of the platea, while
in the ‘Heavenly City’ of Revelations, the platea was
miraculously clean, ‘like clear glass’.4 The plunder from
a defeated city could be piled up and burnt in her plateae,
the bones of dead enemies could be hung there and public
mourning could take place there.4 In more peaceful times,
travellers arriving in a strange town would join the old
men and women sitting in the platea in the hopes that
someone would offer them hospitality; children could
play there, a man honoured by the king might parade there,
a righteous man might pray there and a young man
might be accosted by the local prostitute.8 It could also be
the scene of public jurisprudence; Ezra, for example,
gathered men, women and children into the platea before
the Gate of Waters and read to them from the law of
Moses.8

It is possible that these two words - atrium and
platea - became synonymous in Hiberno-Latin because
the land surrounding an Irish church settlement fulfilled
both functions; it was both a site where outbuildings
could be located and it was also an area of open access
which formed a focus for communal activities. Certainly,
the evidence of the Irish vernacular term for platea,
translated in Cormac’s glossary as faithche, would tend
to corroborate such an hypothesis.9 This is a word which
is translated ‘green’ or ‘lawn’ in the Dictionary, drawing
on the English translation provided in the Ancient Laws,10
though this translation appears to owe more to English
village layout than to an early Irish context. The editors of
Beohbroth point out that the faithche was owned more
exclusively than areas which were sechtar faithche
[beyond the faithche]. They draw attention to the fact that
it apparently included areas for both grazing and tillage:
for example, a commentary to Bretha Comaithchea
suggests that if pigs or hens got into the cultivated area of
a faithche they could cause damage.6 In addition, Fergus
Kelly has pointed to evidence that the faithche could be
the location of a pound in which animals could be kept in
distraint if there was a dispute as to their ownership.6 In
an eleventh-century account of the sons of Eochaid
Muigmedon, the water-supply for the community was
located on the faithche.14 The vernacular texts thus supply
us with good evidence for assuming that the faithche
probably contained the ancillary out-houses and
economic units of production which would allow it to be
confused with the term atrium by Irish canonists.

Another reference indicates that the faithche
could act as a habitation area for inhabitants of the
settlement. In the late Old Irish text, Longes Mac
nUisliem, the sons of Usliu were said to have joined the
household following of the king of Scotland and as a
consequence, they ‘assumed mercenary service with him
and placed their houses on the faithche’ [coro-gabsat
amsani acca ocs ro-suidigstar a tige issind faithche].16
In the second canto of Saltair na Rann, there are allusions
to the multitudes of the seeds of Adam who live in the
faithche.16 These references parallel the canon in the
Hibernensis which refers to the atrium or atri as the
place of habitation for the priests of the settlement.

Finally, faithche is also used of an open space
which could be used for communal activities as in the
word platea. In the sagas, the faithche is depicted as an
area on which visitors would congregate before being
admitted to the inner buildings of a settlement.6 Warriors
or visiting dignitaries might leave their chariots there,
troops might camp there and battles might take place,
youths might play their games there and the ruler of a
settlement might leave his dog to defend it while he was
entertaining guests inside.16 In a late Middle Irish tale, a
youth is said to have drunk mead from a green goblet in
a building on the faithche.16 In addition to the buildings,
the fields and the animal pens, one might also find features
such as open grass-land, trees, pillar-stones, stone crosses
and pools of water while there are legal references to the
possibility of finding deer within its confines.16 It was
also an area in which some form of legal activity took
place: in his comments on Cináid sàirraith, Thurneseyn
cites an early eleventh-century description of legal fasting
against an opponent which took place on the opponent’s faithche."

The faithche thus fulfills the criteria of being both a place of ancillary buildings attached to the main settlement as established for the Hiberno-Latin atrium and a place of communal activity as in platea. If this is so, one should perhaps envisage this feature as a relatively large area and possibly one which did not always possess clear man-made boundaries. A reference in the text of Bechbretha states that:

"the extent of a lawful faithche in Irish law is as far as the sound of a bell or the crowing of a cock reaches."

An alternative is a gloss which occurs at least twice and which states: faithche i. na ceithri guirt is nesa don bai5li [faithche, that is the four fields nearest the settlement]. References in Adomnán’s late seventh-century Vita Columbae indicate that though the focus of Columba’s early community was located on Iona, the place of the penitents attached to this community was at Muirboc Már, on the island of Hinba." Since we have already seen that penitents represented a distinctive group among the population of an ecclesiastical centre, the implication of these references would appear to be that the buildings located in a settlement’s faithche could be quite widely dispersed.

The contexts in which faithche is used raise another question in regard to early Irish church settlements. The vast majority of the references to faithche associate this feature with secular fortresses, while the law-tract Di Cetharslicht Aithgabala makes it clear that a faithche was found around all settlements of prestige, be they secular or ecclesiastical:

"He who has taken distressing from the faithche of a privileged dignitary - if he did not know it was the faithche of a privileged dignitary and did not find a competent person from whom he could ask - it is not recoverable from him."

Privileged dignitaries or nemed persons around whose faithche could be found included kings, lords, clerics and poets.” The important implication of this for our purposes is that an ecclesiastical settlement was organised on the same basis as a secular one. It has already been noted that the description of the houses of royal mercenaries located on the faithche of a king in Longes mac nislienn appears to parallel the description of priests’ households in an atrium tabernaculi in the canons. If this inference is correct, it implies that we should be thinking of both ecclesiastical and secular settlements as being made up of a central focus, surrounded by an ill-defined area in which one might find agricultural buildings, domestic animals and fields of cereal crops, as well as trees, grass or pools of water. Not surprisingly, given what it contained, there are also implications that this area could be relatively large. In it was found the place of occupation of what might be called the professional classes attached to the settlement: clerics in the case of ecclesiastical settlements, warriors in the case of royal sites. This area was open to the public with the exception that, in the case of church settlements, the criminals who had sought sanctuary at the site were excluded. Legal cases were also heard in this general area and offerings were made to rulers here.

CIVITAS AS A TERM FOR EARLY IRISH ECCLESIASTICAL SITES

These conclusions are strongly supported if we examine one final Hiberno-Latin term, civitas. This is a word which occurs relatively infrequently in the Hibernensis but which MacDonald has identified as a term that was fashionable among the compilers of the Annals of Ulster between the eighth and tenth centuries, as a term meaning the ecclesiastical settlement as a whole.” Civitas is one of the most common words for a settlement unit in both classical and vulgar Latin and as such, the connotations of this word vary widely. In its pre-Christian meaning, it is identified in dictionaries of classical Latin as an assembly of citizens, governed by their own laws and including the surrounding area under their control. As the Roman empire spread into new areas, the territorial boundaries of such civitates, the types of settlement found within them and the degree of independence which they enjoyed were all subject to diverse interpretations: Jones has pointed out, for example, that a Swiss mountain valley with scattered dwellings could qualify as a Roman civitas provided that people met periodically to elect magistrates and vote laws.”

In the Vulgate, Jerome appears to have distinguished a number of different types of civitates. At the lower end of scale, there was the simple civitas such as Bethlehem as described in the Book of Ruth. Köhler has defined this as a Bauerndorf or farming village, limited in size by the need of every inhabitant to have access to the fields.” Then there were the civitates regales, such as Gabaon which McClure has identified as a royal centre, ‘which had an undefined authority over a substantial area.” A third category were the civitates of the Levites cum suburbanis suis and the apparently associated civitates refugii. Ó Corráin has argued that ecclesiastical writers in Ireland identified many of the major church sites with the levitical cities of the Old Testament but treated them as civitates refugii.”

The usage of civitas in the Hibernensis in general makes it relatively certain that, in an Irish context, the word was thought to refer to the same type of settlement as those already depicted. The commentary to Bretha Comaithechesa about bens escaping into the faithche is paralleled in the Hibernensis by a canon explaining that if bens escaped from a civitas into the surrounding fora, payment was due to the owners of the land.” In the Hibernensis, plateae are also found associated with civitates as well as with tabernaculum,
temple, atrium and suburbana:

Every civitas of refuge is laid out with its suburbana. (b) In like manner, every civitas was given to the priests with its suburbana 15,000 of length and 10,000 of width, for feeding the flocks of the priests. (c) In like manner, Ezechiel, measuring the civitas at a certain time, measures 1000 paces but at another time, 1000 paces to the east, (or so it says) and so forth. (d) In like manner, the temple of Solomon had an enclosure around it in which he who would do wrong would perish. (e) In like manner, the tabernaculum of Moses had an atrium around it. (f) In like manner, Ezechiel: I see an angel having a reed in [his] hand in order that he might measure the civitas in its circumference and its plateae outside. (g) In like manner in Revelations, The angel came in order to measure the civitas and its plateae. (h) In like manner in Zacharia: When they had returned from Babylon, they built a templem and its enclosure around [it] and so forth.190

In this extract, it is implied not only that the tabernaculum corresponds to a temple, a link which has been noted above (in the section on church-law courts), but that it also parallels the civitas which is here associated with plateae and with suburbana belonging to the priests. The reference to a thousand paces can be linked to a statement in the Old Irish ‘Monastery of Tallaght’ in which a cleric ‘made much of going the thousand paces or more to visit the tenantry’ and to the suggestion in the later tract on maigen digona (area around a house under a householder’s protection) that a thousand paces was the normal precinct of a bishop or a hermit.191 Whatever about a bishop’s residence, it is difficult to believe that Middle Irish lawyers envisaged a hermit residing at the centre of a nucleated settlement of at least a kilometre’s diameter. Elsewhere, indeed, when discussing secular dwellings, the authors of this text specifies that the maigen digona can be measured with spear-casts: from one spear-cast for an ordinary bòaire (strong farmer) to sixty-four spear-casts for an over-king.192 Again, this hardly seems a useful method of measurement in a built-up environment.

A flowery description of what appears to be a civitas is found in the Hisperica Fama, dated to the mid seventh century by Herren. Here again, the civitas is surrounded by pastures, enclosures and the houses of peasants rather than the streets, fortified defences and the semi-industrialised craftsmen favoured by proponents of the early ‘monastic town’:

...innumerable flocks of cattle wander along sandy paths and the kine press into their enclosures. Thongs of sheep ascend the square folds, the hairy swine go to their familiar swineherds, the hostlers fasten iron hobbles to the horses’ legs. Countless numbers of peasants cast off the accustomed bond of labour from their limbs and rest in their comfortable houses of dry covering; therefore let us approach the protective walls of the civitas to request suitable hospitality from its kind inhabitants.193

Finally, one should also note a canon in the Hibernensis which identifies a civitas with the type of legal assembly which was held outside the ecclesiastical settlements elsewhere known as tabernacula: ‘every accused man shall be brought to the door of the civitas and he shall be punished in the presence of witnesses.’194 In other words, legal activities took place at the janum of the civitas, just as they did at the porta or the ostium of the tabernaculum.

To summarize, a civitas and its suburbana can, in some Hiberno-Latin sources, provide an exact parallel for the type of settlement identified by the words tabernaculum and atrium/platea as outlined above. When Cogitosus described Kildare as a civitas, he was describing a location in which the church building was surrounded by dwellings of the resident clergy and, at a further remove, by the other, subordinate, members of the settlement. These houses were, however, all located within an area of agricultural buildings, fields, trees, ponds and pastures and there is no evidence of a more clustered environment of the type envisaged for the tenth and eleventh-century ‘monastic towns’.

SECULAR CIVITATES IN EARLY IRELAND

Just as the words platea and atrium appear to represent the area of open ground and dwelling areas surrounding all high-status settlements, both ecclesiastical and secular, the use of the word civitas in non-legal sources also indicates that this word was not confined to church sites. In seventh-century Patrician hagiography, the word could refer to such diverse settlements as Tara, Armagh, Slane and Sletty.195 In the Vita Prima of Saint Brigit, the saint went to plead for her father at the gateway (porte) of the civitas in which the king of the Laigin lived.196 In what appears to be an early genealogical tract describing the kings of Leinster, it is stated that the royal Leinster site of Dún Ailinne was a civitas regalis:

Art Mess Talmann, his family without issue - it is by him the rampart of Ailenn was constructed which afterwards was a royal civitas.197

In the Annals of Ulster, civitas is used to describe a number of ecclesiastical sites such as Ard Breccan, Slane, Finndubrach Ace, Cell Delca and Cell Dumai Glinn, but it is also used to describe the site of the royal assembly at Tailtiu or Teltown.198 A particularly interesting reference to civitas in both royal and ecclesiastical contexts is also to be found in the Vita Tertia, a Latin life of Patrick written by an Irishman at...
some point prior to 1135:

Then Patrick came to Conall son of Niall and Conall received him with great joy and he baptised him. And he offered him his home (domus) and the whole dwelling-place (habitaculum) and he said to him: 'Make for yourself a civitas from this habitaculum and I will make for myself another habitaculum in front of the gates of your civitas'. And [thus] Patrick made there the civitas which is today called Domnach Pátraic and Patrick sketched with his staff the habitaculum for Conall; this is Ráth Airthir."

It is clear that the author of this text sees civitas not only as a suitable description for the ecclesiastical site of Domnach Pátraic but also for the dwelling associated with a royal ancestor, Conall mac Néill. This dwelling could also be known as a ráth. Interestingly, if the most commonly accepted identifications for Domnach Pátraic and Ráth Airthir are accepted these two separate civitates lie barely one field apart with little room between them for even one urban conurbation, let alone two.

It is also worth pointing out that in his Collectanea, the seventh-century hagiographer Tirechán makes a direct translation of civitas as a placename element, in which he equates it with a les." Once again, this is a word which can be used in relation to both ecclesiastical and secular sites. An early eighth-century Patrickian text lists a les as one element in an estate given to Patrick, together with a wood, a plain, meadow and a herb-garden and a bishop is said to have lived and received offerings in a les in the late Old Irish text, Beith Breiite." In what may be the vernacular equivalent of the dictum by Columbanus that no-one should pass the vallum of the monastery, the late Old Irish rite of Ailbe of Emly states that a monk is not allowed go beyond the les without the permission of his abbot. The Annals of Ulster in an entry for 916 refers to the les of the abbot which was burnt along with other parts of the settlement at Armagh."

Most commonly, however, the word les is used to describe secular sites. Many of the most diagnostic references have recently been collected together by Mallory. From the saga material added in his article, a les is an enclosed area surrounding the most important house and its immediate domestic appurtenances; one of the most specific citations from Mallory’s catalogue is the account in Fled Bricrend which tells how Bricriu and his wife fell from their house into the domestic refuse-heap in the middle of the les. Bricriu’s house is a rigtech (royal house) and his wife is a rigan or queen but although a les also surrounds a royal house in Tain Bó Darrada, in the eighth-century legal text, Crith Gablach a les is one of the possessions of the bóaire, (a strong farmer without noble status) and in Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó, it is associated with the brígu or hosteller. Like faihche, therefore, a les is a settlement form which might be inhabited by a variety of social classes.

Other references to the les indicate that while only a few might be resident within it, it was normally a place in which one might meet a wide variety of people, it was the focus of many military attacks, it had an entrance which could be shut, its entrance-way was a place in which one might meet guests and trees might grow by its entrance.

These last three references indicate that the area surrounding a les was comparable in both form and function with a faihche. Unfortunately I have not, as yet, managed to trace examples where both faihche and les are used in conjunction but there are at least two cases where a faihche is said in one text to surround a site which is identified as a les in another. In the Irish translation of Nennius’ Historia Brittonum, Lebor Bretnach, the Irish author translated the phrase in pavimento... civitatis by faihche osin chathraíte. For what it is worth, there is also a reference in the Irish Gospel of Thomas where do-chenel or subordinate folk are said to live around a ráth in which lived a king’s family; ráth is often taken to be a synonym of les and is used in the Vita Tertia extract quoted above as a vernacular equivalent to civitas. It may be that this reference to the surrounding do-chenel should be seen as a parallel to the houses of priests in the atrium of an ecclesiastical settlement and those of warriors in the faihche of a royal site.

If a les with its surrounding area is a vernacular equivalent of civitas, as Tirechán’s seventh-century text suggests, the implication is that the core of a civitas at this time could be viewed as being essentially the home of a single household. The exact numbers dwelling within such a homestead are unclear; as yet we know little of the living arrangements for such social categories as slaves, cottiers, fosterlings and so forth. It does appear, however, that we should be thinking of a population of a civitas in terms of multiples of ten rather than multiples of a hundred. Subordinates of the settlement’s owner might live in the vicinity of his les/ráthicivitas but there is no evidence that they live in a densely clustered or ‘urban’ environment. Since the Latin word civitas is one of the key elements in the development of the theory of the early Irish ‘monastic town’ it is useful to see the non-urban associations of at least one of its vernacular equivalents.

**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD**

This paper has been limited to examining the textual evidence and in particular the semantic ranges of words which can be shown to exist in seventh and early eighth-century documentation. Some of the conclusions, however, are comparable with observations which have already been made by scholars in other fields and, in particular, by archaeologists. For example, Hamlin and Lynn have argued strongly for viewing secular and ecclesiastical settlements as being essentially similar in
overall appearance during the seventh and eighth centuries. Mallory and McNeill believe that ring-forts could only have provided homes for a minority of the population and that we must see them rather as nuclei of a greater number of buildings, both for agricultural and domestic use. Pollen evidence from Iona suggests that corn was grown on the island which is in agreement both with Reeve’s analysis of the topographical evidence of Adomnan’s *Vita Columbae* and with the suggestion made here that the settlement was surrounded by an open-plan area containing domestic outbuildings, animal pens and fields under tillage. 

In his article on the ‘monastic town’ Doherty states clearly that his aim is to identify the structure of Irish ecclesiastical sites from documentary evidence but he does make occasional reference to archaeological material. Since at least some of this material has been dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, it is worth outlining this matter in detail. He begins by suggesting that some early churches took over pagan cult centres or lands possessed by such cult centres whilst others were established on virgin territory and still others in secular settlements. The evidence for this is almost entirely non-archaeological, being based on hagiographical references and *claustra*-placenames, but he refers to Hughes’ statements about the existence of some early church sites within two miles or more of large hill-top enclosures which he interprets as pagan sanctuaries. He also makes the point that the evidence of archaeological survey has not produced any observable difference between what might be presumed to be diocesan churches and monasteries.

He then goes on to state that on the basis of archaeological and literary evidence the seventh and eighth centuries were a period of reorganisation within Irish churches when a standard plan was imposed on such sites. These changes consisted of the development of sites where wooden churches and domestic buildings might be replaced by stone, special graves might be elaborated, enclosure walls would be either built or elaborated and substantial areas of paving would be laid down to provide working surfaces or streets or courtyards. As evidence of this, he cites O’Kelly’s excavation of Church Island, Fanning’s excavation of Reask, the investigations of the RCAHMS at Iona and Thomas’ overview of developments within the early church in Britain and Ireland.

At Reask, the excavator admitted frankly that the oratory, enclosure wall and paving (the items relevant to the standard plan) could not be closely dated to any period between the seventh century and the twelfth. At Church Island, the only clear-cut dating evidence cited by O’Kelly for either the initial or later phase was the existence of a slab (without context) inscribed with ogam. O’Kelly suggested this slab might be as late as the eighth century but subsequent analysis of the language of the inscription suggests a late sixth or early seventh-century date. A section of one of the outer enclosure walls at Iona has been identified as of probable seventh-century date (see discussion below) but while some material from within the enclosure is of a similar period, the Royal Commission authors summarised their conclusions with the sentence “the general arrangement appears to have been a random one with working areas and hearths interspersed among the buildings.”

The pages of Thomas’ work cited by Doherty are entitled ‘Cemeteries and chapels’ and distinguish enclosed cemeteries, sometimes including pre-Christian burials, from what Thomas terms ‘developed cemeteries’ with oratories, internal divisions, and associated huts. Thomas was writing in an era prior to the wide-spread application of absolute dating techniques based on physical data and his dating categories are consequently extremely broad. In his discussion of cemeteries and chapels, for example, special graves are accorded potential dates from the Iron Age to the seventh century. He argues for the existence of early wooden churches in Ireland largely from literary sources of varying date, together with the evidence from Church Island and an unpublished excavation which identified a potential wooden precursor beneath the stone church at Ardagh in Co. Longford though neither provided clear dating evidence. His third piece of evidence was another wooden structure beneath the south church at Derry in Co. Down which may or may not have been ecclesiastical. The limited nature of the excavations at both Ardagh and Derry could not be expected to have provided evidence for the layout of an Irish ecclesiastical site in its entirety and Thomas makes no such claim. Furthermore, Hamlin suggested in 1976 that the evidence for timber-bonding in the ruins of the south church at Derry might suggest, on parallels with England, a late eleventh-century date for that building. This would have obvious implications for the date of the earlier material. Thomas did conclude that the Irish material, together with that from other parts of the British Isles, indicated the replacement of wooden churches by stone ones in the late seventh and eighth centuries and that small dwellings for the isolated brethren who manned them were probably added at the same time but such conclusions represent a theoretical model rather than a factual assessment of the evidence.

The archaeological evidence cited by Doherty does not, therefore, substantiate his identification of a standard plan which was imposed on all Irish ecclesiastical sites in the course of the seventh or eighth centuries. The existence of ‘streets’ on these sites might imply a degree of urbanisation but examining the references in detail, such a description would appear to be exaggerated. At Reask, only fragments of a path linking the inner enclosure wall to the oratory door were found. Similarly, the cobbling at Iona, cited by Doherty, which is associated with a sherd of E-ware, was apparently a working area rather than a ‘street’ or ‘courtyard’ for three clay-moulds were found upon it. At Church Island, some paving was identified leading from the northern entranceway to the enclosure through to the doorway of
the oratory along the inner side of the enclosure wall. This enclosure wall was apparently a later development on the site, built of water-rolled stones of all sizes and dimensions - 'whatever came to hand' in the excavator’s words. It seems reasonable to infer that the flagged pathway was of similar standard. It does not appear, therefore, that one can reasonably interpret the evidence from these three sites as implying the existence of 'streets' or 'courtyards' in Irish ecclesiastical settlements of the seventh or eighth centuries.

Doherty then goes on to discuss the evidence of the Hibernensis and argues that one can detect in it:

the creation of an idealized form, a schema, which allowed a monastic site to have a holy of holies at the core, around which were areas of sanctuary that decreased in importance the further they were from the centre. This schema allowed for a priestly elite at the centre with the laity on the periphery. It also imposed a pattern upon church sites in Ireland that is evident, at least superficially, in the surviving remains.

The nature of these surviving remains is not specified. Doherty subsequently suggests that by c.900, a qualitative change had been introduced into the elaboration of the ceremonial complex. Purely sacred areas had been clearly defined before this but the beginning of the tenth century marks the point at which:

- public buildings and monuments - stone churches, round towers, high crosses, open spaces and the abbot’s residence - dominate the rest of the settlement. It is not just a matter of scale - there had been a very large wooden church at Kildare in the seventh century and no doubt such churches existed elsewhere at all periods - it is the appearance of the complete repertoire of public monuments and buildings.
- On the outskirts of the complex lay the defined market-place, testimony of the commercial growth of the settlement. It is from this point that one might, with confidence, begin to use the word 'urban'.

This description opens with a reference to Herity’s article on the physical development of Irish monastic sites prior to the year 1000 and would seem to refer in particular to Herity’s analysis of the site of Clonmacnoise. (In that article, Clonmacnoise is the only site where a firm chronological date for the layout of a particular settlement is given.) Herity suggests that the erection of the Cross of the Scriptures in 908 introduced a new canon of sitting in that the cross was sited at the centre of a new open space to the west of the cathedral. To the southwest of this open space, the round tower was later built and this was ‘...probably close to the monks’ cells’...’ These suggestions have now been superseded by King’s excavation which produced evidence for an earlier wooden structure, possibly a cross, at the same location as the later Cross of the Scriptures. Six medieval burials were found in the immediate vicinity and above these, an occupation layer with hearths, stake-holes, charcoal and animal bones. In any event, even without taking King’s excavation into account, the postulated layout of a single site seems a fragile basis on which to assert that a qualitative change took place on all Irish sites around the beginning of the tenth century.

Though the existence of ‘defined market-places’ are seen here as part of the tenth-century development of ecclesiastical sites, elsewhere Doherty refers to the existence of market-places at monasteries from the late eighth century onwards. This conclusion derives from the entry in the Annals of Ulster in AD 800 which records the death of a local king in circio fercie of Mac Culininn at Lusk in Co. Dublin. This reference appears to be to an öenach (and is understood as such by Doherty) but it is clear that an öenach is not, of itself, evidence for urbanism. A detailed analysis of the best-documented early öenach, that of Tailtiu or Teltown in Co. Meath, makes it quite clear that the site used for the öenach was open ground, probably demarcated by prehistoric monuments. The legal and hagiographical references indicate that the Teltown öenach was celebrated on royal land and on the outer reaches of an area surrounding the twin foci of the royal site of Rath Airthir and the ecclesiastical site of Donaghpatrick. Thus, the existence of a ‘defined market-place’ in the tenth-century ‘urban’ phase in Doherty’s interpretation of the development of ‘monastic towns’ derives primarily from literary rather than archaeological evidence while analysis of textual material from other sites indicate that even where an öenach may have been held under ecclesiastical patronage in the seventh or eighth centuries, there is no reason to suppose that this implies a heavily built-up environment.

Apart from Doherty’s own references to archaeological material, the most influential archaeological contribution to the model of the ‘monastic town’ has been that of Swan. From an analysis of early Ordnance Survey maps, supplemented by aerial photography and field-work, Swan has identified over six hundred enclosures surrounding ecclesiastical sites. These frequently consist of a double enclosure: a large outer enclosure and a smaller inner enclosure. The identifiably ecclesiastical features, such as round towers, high crosses, burial grounds and church ruins, are normally found within the inner enclosure. In dimensions, the vast majority of inner enclosures fall between 100 and 200m in diameter while in the majority of cases, the diameter of the outer enclosures are between 300 and 500m. Where the boundaries to these enclosures have been examined on the ground, Swan has described them as massive in both width and height and in the size of the stones which form the lower courses of the enclosure walls. Within or just outside the outer enclosures, to the
east, at the sites of Armagh, Downpatrick, Glendalough and Kells can be found crosses which are associated with market activity. The earliest of these crosses appear to be ninth century in date but the identification of the area around the cross as a market in each case is based on considerably later sources.14

The dating of these enclosures has not been clearly established though some may date to the seventh or eighth centuries. Swan refers to the fact that the majority are associated with saints thought to have been active in the fifth and early sixth centuries. He also makes the point that where a cross has been identified on a boundary, one can assume that the boundary must have been present when the cross was erected. (This would presumably mean that an inner enclosure at Armagh and an outer enclosure at Kells were both in existence at some point in the ninth century.) Elsewhere he points to the fact that the most common place-name elements associated with these structures are pre-Norman in date.15

Excavation, much of it published after both Doherty and Swan had written, provides some evidence for the layout of some of the larger Irish ecclesiastical settlements in the seventh and eighth centuries. At Armagh, twigs and branches at the base of a massive ditch encircling the hill gave a calibrated radiocarbon date (at two standard deviations) of AD 130-600 but there is evidence that this ditch had been filled in by the end of the eighth century at the latest and, once filled, had had two non-Christian burials inserted within it. Lynn and McDowell have suggested that it is likely the hill was enclosed by a series of earthworks during the Viking ages and that it would be wrong to assume that this enclosure necessarily represents that surrounding the early medieval ecclesiastical centre. At Tullylish, Co. Down, a massive ditch of 5m width and 3.6m depth was dated to the seventh century through radiocarbon dating while another was dug in the ninth century to replace the first after it had silted up. Either or both of these ditches may represent part of the boundary of an early ecclesiastical enclosure. On Iona, a complex series of earthworks enclosing the ecclesiastical site has been identified through field and geophysical survey. These have been interpreted as two successive enclosures with overlapping periods of use. One section of the earlier enclosure was excavated and produced a V-shaped ditch in which peat and brushwood provided radiocarbon dates focusing on the late sixth and early seventh centuries.16 On the basis of this excavated evidence, it would seem reasonable to infer that larger outer enclosures were an identifiable feature of Irish ecclesiastical sites in the seventh and eighth century though as yet we have only one clear-cut example and that is from the Scottish site of Iona. The contemporary existence of inner enclosures also appears probable though this has not yet been demonstrated conclusively.

The early excavation of the ecclesiastical site at Nendrum appears to show a tripartite division of an ecclesiastical site sub-divided by substantial enclosure walls. On a terrace on the west side of the middle enclosure, a number of rectangular house platforms were found, one of which was interpreted as bronze-worker’s workshop. A rectangular building in the same area was interpreted as a school-house on the basis of approximately thirty stone tablets with inscribed designs. Three of these stones have traces of lettering and four iron styluses were also found. Other artefacts from the same area included discs of slate interpreted as gaming counters and bone beads. In and around these platforms and the so-called ‘school-house’, large amounts of midden material were found but no hint of this was interpreted as building material brought in to level the terrace. Piled up against the outer wall of the middle terrace was a large heap of refuse made up of animal bone, shells, slag and other debris.18

Interpreting this material according to the model derived from the documentary sources, the possibility is raised that the middle terrace represents part or all of the atrium which has been identified as including the area where the priests and other ecclesiastics lived.19 If so, Nendrum would add a new dimension to that model in the indications that metal-working and stone-working both took place in this same area. The evidence for dating this material is extremely tenuous but the existence of what appears to be a botched attempt at ring-chain ornament, together with other features of the stones from the ‘school-house’, tends to suggest that much of this occupation may have post-dated the seventh to eighth-century horizon which is of interest here. The widespread occurrence of souterrain ware, a stone-fragment with Norse runes, and a coin dated to c. AD 930 from other parts of the site would also lead one to infer a relatively late date for much of this occupation.20 One should note, however, that subsequent work has also identified a single sherd of E-ware from the settlement.21

There is excavated material indicating habitation as well as early burials outside the presumed inner enclosure at Armagh in Scotch Street. This occupational phase is represented by hundreds of chips of amber, waste from the manufacture of glass beads, crucible fragments for bronze-melting and hundreds of pieces of cut lignite as well as many post-holes, gullies, stake-holes and pits. This evidence has been subdivided into two phases: ninth century for the amber, glass and metal-working and a tenth to eleventh-century phase for the lignite and jet-working. The amount of material might suggest a heavily industrialised site in some part of Armagh but other areas close to the presumed inner enclosure, imply that open ground continued to exist until the end of the Middle Ages.22 At Kilpatrick, Co. Meath, limited excavation within the area of an outer enclosure measuring some 88m x 100m, produced evidence for the foundation trench of at least one circular hut, as well as grain seeds, rotary querns, animal bone, charcoal and, in the general area of the hut, a fragment of a penannular brooch. Other structures within the larger enclosure included evidence for grain-drying kilns and iron-working and some sherds of E-ware were also found. On Iona at least one building
within the larger enclosure was identified as standing within its own fenced enclosure but there was also scattered evidence for post-holes and other occupational debris.44 While little of this excavated material has a clear seventh to eighth-century date, the suggestion that scattered habitation, interspersed with outhouses and areas of open ground, occurred in the area between the postulated inner core and an outer enclosure wall would appear to accord with the limited evidence outlined here.

At Clonmacnoise, the excavations in the new graveyard have produced evidence for an eighth to tenth-century layer with remains of a round-house, a rectangular structure surrounded by a gravelled yard with a wooden gate and a large hearth to the north of the structure. Below this were found stake-holes, burnt spreads and pits containing habitational refuse.45 Evidence for craft activities, including bronze-working, iron-working, leather-working and the manufacture of jet ornaments, is cited by Bradley and E-ware has been found amongst the excavated finds. There is no clear evidence of an inner enclosure but Bradley suggests that this waterfront material must lie outside the ecclesiastical core, possibly in an eastern trian corresponding to the AFM reference of 1082.46 It may be that at Clonmacnoise, the physical confines of the site produced a greater degree of nucleation than has so far been identified on other sites but this is, as yet, impossible to state categorically. Clearly, when the evidence from the new graveyard is published in detail, it will add crucial information to the debate on the existence and date of the ‘monastic town’.

A major problem in identifying the reality or otherwise of seventh or eighth century ‘monastic towns’ is the lack of large-scale modern excavation covering a substantial percentage of the area encapsulated by the outer enclosures. To date, however, and without detailing the many small-scale excavations which have occurred on ecclesiastical sites in the last ten years, there does not appear to be good evidence for postulating a densely built-up environment within large, outer ecclesiastical enclosures in the seventh and eighth centuries. The existence of such large outer enclosure boundaries has been identified almost entirely through survey and we have little firm archaeological evidence for the internal layout of Irish ecclesiastical settlements in the seventh and eighth centuries or even for the ninth and tenth. Pace Doherty, there seems no good reason to describe such paving as exists, particularly that found on the small western sites, as either ‘streets’ or ‘courtyards’. Trade and craft activity are both observable but there is no evidence, apart, perhaps, from Clonmacnoise, that such material dominates the archaeological record of large sections of the area demarcated by the outer enclosure walls. On the whole, the limited evidence of the archaeological record would appear to correspond reasonably well with the documentary evidence for individual central foci in the seventh and eighth centuries, each surrounded by an open-plan area of mixed agriculture and scattered dwellings. To this one should add that archaeology would also indicate that the outer perimeter of this open-plan area was probably demarcated on many sites by a large enclosure wall and that craft-working in various media probably took place between the (postulated) inner ecclesiastical core of the settlement and the outer enclosure boundaries.47

CONCLUSIONS

In a review of Doherty’s work on the ‘monastic town’, Graham once wrote that only the reference to civitas in the documentation has allowed people to speak of bustling towns in Ireland prior to the tenth century.48 Belief in the existence of somewhat ill-defined pre-tenth century towns, however, has been a feature of much of the discussion of seventh and eighth-century ecclesiastical settlement since Doherty’s work was published. This is despite the fact, as mentioned above, that Doherty’s model explicitly refers to the development of ‘urban’ settlement only from the tenth century. This confusion has arisen from Doherty’s use of seventh and eighth-century texts which are laced with what appears to be ‘urban’ terminology at various key points in his work.

The current study, based on seventh and eighth-century Hiberno-Latin sources, concludes that a number of Latin words which had distinct and separate meanings in other cultures were used as synonyms by the Irish writers. One such word was civitas which in both its Latin form and in its vernacular equivalent, ‘fes’, can be used to describe both secular and ecclesiastical sites. Civitas also parallels the word tabernaclum on those occasions when tabernaclum is used in its wider sense of church settlement rather than simply church-building.

These settlements appear to have been organised, at least on a conceptual level, with the most prestigious sector at the centre. On ecclesiastical sites, this central focus included the church-building: on secular sites, it was the location for the domestic dwelling of the most important inhabitant. The divisions between the various areas were generally marked by physical monuments but these boundaries were not inevitably enclosing walls: Cogitosus refers to the open nature of the site at Kildare and there are references to crosses and other signs which could mark the different zones of settlement. Those scholars who seek to clarify the physical reality of a ‘monastic town’ have tended to interpret these facts as implying nucleated settlements based around a central core, with evidence for domestic houses, workshops, defensive enclosures and substantial trading activity.

I would agree that outside the central focus of both ecclesiastical and secular sites was an area in which were located the dwellings of the subordinate members of the settlement: priests’ dwellings on ecclesiastical sites and the houses of professional warriors on secular sites. This area was termed an atrium, a platea or suburbana in Hiberno-Latin sources and a faihche in Old Irish. I suggest that, in the case of church sites, other social
classes associated with churches as well as their respective families, also lived in this area. I am here referring to groups such as the gráda ecnait (scholars of the church), the penitents, the gráda urd ecalsa (the administrators of the church’s lands and those concerned with the provisioning of the settlement) and the monaig (monks and/or legal dependants).

In addition to the houses of such subordinates, the area around the central focus could also include agricultural outbuildings, pens for animals, fields for both cereal crops and pasture, grass, pools and trees. It was also the arena for a number of public ceremonies, including the holding of judicial assemblies, which could involve both the inhabitants of the settlement and visitors to the site. Despite the use on occasion of words such as *suburbana* to describe this area, there seems to be no evidence for nucleated settlement within it and the buildings appear to be relatively widely scattered. In a penumbra, beyond the dwellings of the priests and at a further remove from the prestigious core of the settlement, appear to have been the houses of lowest status. In religious communities these people on the outskirts were claimed to be part of the wider grouping known as Levites or churchmen despite the fact that they included slaves and other such subordinate members of society. In this paper, I have concentrated on evidence for such people on the ecclesiastical sites but the reference to the king’s bonded servants in the *civitas* of the Laigin king in the *Vita Prima S. Brigidae* and the *do-chenel* of the Irish Gospel of St Thomas, both imply that subordinate social groups also lived on the perimeter of royal sites. One of the major conclusions of this paper is thus that an approach which sees ecclesiastical sites as being organised in a fundamentally different way from secular sites of equal prestige appears flawed. The other would be that the use of the word *civitas* does not appear to have urban connotations in Hiberno-Latin documents of the seventh and eighth centuries and that instead of ‘monastic towns’, we should be talking of the forts and fields of the early Irish church.

NOTES

1 Preliminary drafts of this paper were given at the Ninth Irish Conference of Medievalists (Dublin June 1995), the Postgraduate History Seminar, Trinity College (March 1996) and the Medieval History Seminar, U.C.D (February 1996). To all those who commented on those occasions, I would like to express my thanks. In particular, I would also like to thank Dr Colmán Ó Cléirigh and the editor for their kindness in reading and commenting on previous drafts.


9 Et quis sermo explicet potest maxime decorem huius aeclesiae et immemoria illius monasterii civitatis quam dicimus miracula si fex est dici civitas dum nullo murorum ambitu circumdatur? Conveniethus tamen in ea populis immemorabilibus, dum civitae de convento in se multorum nomen accepit, maxima haec civitas et metropolitana est: in cuius suburbanis quae sanco certo limite designavit Brigida nullus carnalis adversarius nec concursus timetur hostium sed civitas est refugi tuisitima de foris suburbanis in tota Scotiae terra cum suis omnibus fugitivis. This paragraph has been edited by Jean-Michel Picard from the pre-eleventh-century manuscripts of Cogitosus’ *Life*, together with the translation above, and it is this which is printed in Doherty, ‘Monastic town’, 55-56.


11 Idem, 59.

12 Idem 55-6.


14 Edited by H. Wasserschleben, Die irische Kanonensammlung (Leipzig 1883), hereafter Hibernensis.


19 The word developed other meanings in later medieval Latin, including that part of the altar in which the Eucharist was stored in its pyx, a place where relics were kept or the seat of an abbot in the choir; see Du Cange, Glossarium medii et infirmae Latinitatis, 10 vols (Graz 1954), viii 3.

20 For examples of references in the Hibernensis to the word in its biblical meanings see: Hibernensis 38 (XII:16), quoting Ier 35:6-10; Hibernensis 100 (XXIX:5), quoting los 7:24-25; Hibernensis 194 (XLVI:37), based on Nm 5:17; Hibernensis 42 (XIV:6) based on Ex 27:21, 40:32, Nm 17:7, Apc 15:5; Hibernensis 174 (XLI:1), based on Hbr 9:6-8; Hibernensis 174 (XLIV:2) based on Ex 27:12-18; Hibernensis 175 (XLIV:4) based on Ex 27:12-18, Ezr 4:13; Hibernensis 176 (XLIV:6) based on Nm 1:50-53.

21 Hibernensis 230 (LXIII:2) for Biblical parallels see Ex 40:9-10, 1 Ezr 6:16-17 (domus Dei), III Rg 8:62-64.


23 The Saltair na Rann; a collection of early Middle Irish Poems, ed. W. Stokes (Oxford 1883), 61 (L4206), 64 (LL 4402-3). A reference to Noah in his tabernacul in Sex aetas mundi is a mere translation of the Old Testament text: Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow, ed. R.I. Best & O. Bergin (Dublin 1929), 4:114. Tempul denotes specific church buildings within a named ecclesiastical settlement from the mid-eleventh century and a sizeable number of placenames incorporating this word appear to denote the principal church of Anglo-Norman parishes; see D. Flanagan, ‘The Christian impact on early Ireland: place-names evidence’ in Irland und Europa: Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter (Irland and Europe: The early Church) eds. P. Ní Chathain & M. Richter (Dublin 1984), 25-51. 40. One should also note that the word tabernaculum is used on at least two occasions by Adomnan to describe the body of Columba of Iona, see M.O. Anderson, Adamnan’s Life of Columbo (Oxford 1991), 226, 232 (III:23).

24 Hibernensis 136 (XXXVII:21), 168 (XLII:21), 102 (XXX:1). Canon XXX:1 is discussed in D. O’Corráin, L. Breathnach & A. Breen, ‘The laws of the Irish’, Peritia iii (1984), 382-420, 415-6. There is a saying quoted in the Hibernensis 157 (XL:14) and attributed to Isidore to the effect that just as the church is made up of both saints and sinners, so varii species constituitor tabernaculum. This is excluded from the following discussion as it cannot be shown to belong either to the Vulgate or to specifically Irish sources.

25 Hibernensis 20 (III:2).

26 L. Bieler, The Irish penitentials (Scriptores Latinii Hiberniae v, Dublin 1963); 80-81, (§22). Bieler suggests, id. 3-4, that the text must have been compiled prior to AD 591 on the grounds that the Penitential of Columbanus was strongly influenced by Finnian’s work although Columbanus does not acknowledge it. Bieler’s interpretation presupposes that the provisions in the two texts were not widespread in early Ireland.

27 Moyes judicabat in tabernacul, ut convocaret multis innumeros populi et seniores Israel ad aestum tabernacul. Salomon in ostio tabernaculi judicabat: Puer Jesus in templo inter chorum venum dispensat inventus est ut supra scriptissimus: Surse et ascendite ad locum quem elegist Dominus: Hibernensis 63 (XXI:4).

28 Ex 33:8-10. Moses is identified as someone who judged the Israelites in Ex 18:13-26; see also O Corráin et al., ‘Laws of the Irish’, 392.


30...brevem pleramque ac consonam de ingenti silva scriptorurn in unus voluminis textum expositionem degessi: [out of an enormous mass of scripturae I have brought into the compass of a single volume, an exposition of them which is brief, clear and harmonious] in Hibernensis 1 (Præct); trans. from M. Sheehy, ‘The Bible and the Collectio Canum Hibernis’ in Irland und die Christenheit, ed. P. Ní Chathain & M. Richter (Stuttgart 1987), 277-283, 277.


32 In lege quatuor cibi sacredorum erat; primum Aaron tantum et filii ejus comedebant in tabernaculo, secondum filii Aaron tantum manducabant in ostio tabernaculi, tertium uterque sexus manducabant in atri, quartum enim in ostio familia tota manducabat cum vernaculis et empticis. In Hibernensis 51.
(XVII:4).

33 Locutioque est Moses ad Aaron et ad Eleazar atque ibbamor filios eis qui residui erant ... comedidit autem in loco sancto quod datum est tibi et filias tuas de oblationibus Domini scitum praeceptum est nihilo ... editis in loco mundissimo tu et fili tui ac filiae tuae tecum tibi enim ac liberis tuis reposuit sunt de hastis salutaribus filiarum Israel' in Lv 10:1-14 and 14.

34 Reliquam aetatem partem similae comediet Aaron cum filiis suis abhace fermento et comediet in loco sancto atrii tabernaculi ... manus tuntam stirpis Aaron comedient illud legisnam ac sanctaorum est in generationibus vestris de sacrificiis Domini ... in Lv 6:14-16, 18.

35 Sheehy, "Bible and Collectio", 278 identifies the normal meaning of Lex in the canons as "mostly the Old Testament" and particularly the Pentateuch but also the New Testament at times.

36 An alternative possibility lies in the suggestion, made by D. O' Corráin, that discrepancies between the Vulgate and the Irish canons are due to the use, by the latter, of lost talmudic or exegetical texts; D. O' Corráin, "Irish vernacular law and the Old Testament" in Irisch und die Christenheit, ed. P. Ni Chatháin & M. Richter (Stuttgart 1987), 284-307, 301.

37 Lex: Mons Sina. in quo lex dabatur, jubetur, ne tangere illum omnis populi et pecora, et possit terminum inter se et Mosyen et inter Mosyen et Jesum et inter Jesum et seniores et vulgus populi. Igu: Inter tabernaculum et populum tribus Levi intervallum jubi et in atris familia sacerdotum et inter tabernaculum et sancta sanctuariorum. In Hibernensis 176 (XLIV:6).

38 Ex 19:23-24. I would like to thank Thomas Charles-Edwards who pointed out this discrepancy to me.


41 For evidence of the priestly role of Aaron and his sons see Nm 3:3, 3:7-25, 8:19, 22, 10:8, 18:6-7 and in the Hibernensis, 3-4 (I:3), 12-13 (II 2), 14 (II:6), 15 (II:11), 16 (II:14), 17-18 (II:18); see also discussion in O' Corráin et al., "Laws of the Irish", 394-397.

42 See Nm 18:3, Ps 135:1-2.


46 Ryan, "Fine metalworking" passim.


51 Hibernensis, 175 (XLIV:3).

52 Anderson, Adomnán's life, 136 (II 29), 220 (III 23); A.D.S. Macdonald, "Aspects of the monastery and monastic life in Adomnán's life of Columba", Peritus iii (1984), 271-302, 280. In addition, Adomnán also refers to certain places within the septum monasterii (enclosure of the monastery) which are frequent by angels (I 3), which is interpreted by Macdonald as a reference to sanctuary, ibid., 281. The importance of a vallum in dividing holy places from agricultural land has been mooted by a number of recent authorities, using the evidence of archaeological field work: L. Swan, "Enclosed ecclesiastical sites and their relevance to settlement patterns of the first millennium", in T. Reeves-Smyth and F. Hammond (eds.), Landscape archaeology in Ireland (Britain Archaeological Reports, British series, cxvi, 1983), 264-94; L. Swan, "Monastic proto-towns in early medieval Ireland: the evidence of aerial photography and plan analysis" in The comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe, ed. H.B. Clarke & A. Simms, 2 vols (BAR International series, 255, Oxford 1985), i 77-102; Edwards, Archaeology of early medieval Ireland, 106-110; Graham, "Early medieval settlement", 33.

53 C. Swift, "Celtic monasticism - a discipline's search for romance?", Trowel v (1994), 21-26 and see discussion in penultimate section of this paper.

54 Bitel, Isle of saints, 74-8, 81 refers to the 'huts of lay dependants clustering outside the vallum of the ecclesiastical enclosure' but cites no evidence for this view. Doherty, "Some aspects", 302 refers to the outlying areas known as suburrana in which the subordinate members of the settlement lived.

55 Ez 40:17, Ez 46:20-21. For translation of gazophylacium as treasury, see Cabrol & Leclercq, Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne, VII (1924), 721-2.

56 I Par 28:12, Ape 11:2, Ez 10:3, 43:5.

57 Ps 95:8, 99:4, 115:19, 134:2; Is 1:2, III Rg 8:63-4.

58 See descriptions in Cabrol & Leclercq, Dictionnaire


See H. Vincent & F.M. Abel, Jerusalem: recherches de topographie d’archéologie et d’histoire, 2 vols in 4 (Paris 1914), tii (Jerusalem Nouvelle), 224-6, 238. The reference to corpses stems from Adomnan’s De locis sanctis, ed. D. Meehan (Scriptores Latinorum Hiberniae iii, Dublin 1958), 48 (V 2) although Adomnan himself calls the area a platea. See discussion below.


Concilia Galliae A. 511 - A. 695, ed. C. de Clercq (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina cxviiia, Turnhout 1963), 4:18-19 (Concilium Aureliani AD 511 §1); 137:134 (Concilium Aureliani AD 541 §21); 243:184 (Concilium Maticiense AD 585 §9). Doherty, ‘Some aspects’, 302, has argued that valla divided an Irish site into areas of sanctuary and it is worth noting that the Hibernensis quotes a version of the first of these Gaulish canons under the heading Sinodus Aureliani: Hibernensis 97 (XXVIII.11).

De Clercq, Concilia Galliae, 247:304 (Concilium Maticiense AD 585 §19); 307:119 (Concilium Cabilonense AD 647-53 §19).


W. Reeves, The life of St Columba. founder of Hs (Dublin 1957), 357, 360.


Anderson, Adomnán’s Life, 91; R. Sharpe, Adomnán of Iona: life of St Columba (Harmondsworth 1995), 152.

For attempts to identify ecclesiastical platea through survey of visible monuments, see Herity, ‘High Island’, 14-17; id., ‘The layout of Irish monasteries’, 108-9; id., ‘The buildings and layout of early Irish monasteries before the year 1000’, Monastic Studies xiv (1983), 247-279, 260-270. Bétel, Isle of the saints, 76 defines platea as ‘a transitional area between the most sacred space of church and the rest of the enclosure’ which was similar to a square or courtyard in appearance but cites no evidence for this view.

V. Duo vel tres termini circa locum sanctum debeat fieri, primus, in quem praeter sanctorum nullum introire permittamus omnis, quia in eum laici non accedunt, nec mulieres, nisi clerici; secundus, in cuius plateas plebium rusticorum catervas non multa requiae deditas introire sinistus; tertius, in quem laicos hemicidias, adulteros permissione et consuetudine intrare non vetamus. Inde vocatur primus sanctissimus, secundus sanctior; tertius sanctus. In Hibernensis 175 (XLIV.5, fn); trans. from MacDonald, ‘Aspects of the monastery’, 296. An alternative version of this same canon merely draws the distinction between those areas into which laymen and women can enter versus those which are limited to the priests: Quattor terminos circa locum sanctum posuit, primum in quo laici et mulieres intrant, alterius, in quem clerici tantum ventiant. Primus vocatur sanctus. secundus sanctior. tertius sanctissimus, see id.

Hibernensis 28 (Xc).

II Ezr 8:16; Dn 9:25; Ier 5:1, 7:17,34, 44:6, Mc 6:56.


II Sm 22:43; Is 10:6; Mi 7:10; Za 9:3; Ape 21:21.

Dt 13:16; II Sm 21:12; Is 15:3; Am 5:16. For references to corpses (which may or may not have been ritually exposed) in the plateae, see also Is 5:25; Ape 11:8.

Icd 19:15; Za 8; Est 6:9; Mt 6:5; Prv 7:8.

II Ezr 8:13-3.


F. Kelly, Early Irish Farming (Early Irish law series iv, Dublin 1997), 369-70 and Dictionary as in above reference.

reference.

110 Annals of Ulster, sub annis 782, 784, 825, 835, 838, 887. See also Annals of Tigernach sub ann. 716 where Iona is described as a civitas.

111 L. Bieler, Four Latin lives of St. Patrick (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae viii, Dublin 1971), 149-50, Deinde usque Patricius ad Canonum filium Neit et susceptum eum Canonum quod magno et baptizavit eum; et obstitit Patricio dominum saum et omne habitaculum et dixi ei: ‘Fac ti ciuitatem de hoc habitaculo et ego faciam mihi alium habitaculum pro foribus ciuitatis tuae’.

112 Ita fecit ibi Patricius ciuitatem quae non dicitur Domnach Patraic. Et depinxit Patricius habitaculum Conalio de baculo suo, hic est Rath Airthir. Dating of the text is discussed on pages 25-6.


114 Bieler, Patrician texts, 134-2 (§13.3.1) I use here the spelling of the head-word in the Dictionary but in later Middle Irish it can also be spelt lios, lis and leas.

115 Bieler, Patrician texts 174-6-7 (§11.2); Ô hAodha, Bethu Brígite, 7:210-215 (§22).


117 MacAirt & MacNicolall, 364: Ad Macha do lóiscidi dait i quint k1. Mai. . a leith deiscéirteach cosin Toi? cosain Saball? cuin chuc hain cosain luis uaid hulie [Ard Macha was burned by lightning on the fifth of the Kalends of May (27 April), i.e. the southern part of it with the Toi (?) and the barn and the kitchen and the whole of the abbots's les].


119 Best & Bergin, Lebor na hUidre, 255:8370-8380.


126 Lebor Bretnach: the Irish version of the Historia Brittonum


127 J. Carney, The poems of Blathmac son of Cu Brethain (Dublin 1964), 92-4 (§10, §13). The Irish Gospel of Thomas is dated by Carney to the seventh or eighth centuries, ibid., xxviii.


130 Doherty, ‘Monastic town’, 59, 47, 52-3; see also K. Hughes, Early Christian Ireland: introduction to the sources (London, 74-5).


133 Royal Commission, Iona, 13.

134 Thomas, North Britain, 62, 68-9, 74; A. Hamlin, The archaeology of early Christianity in the north of Ireland, unpublished Ph.D thesis, (Queen’s University Belfast, 134.

135 Thomas, North Britain, 68; for further criticism of Thomas’ model see Swift, ‘Celtic monasticism’, 21-2.

136 Fanning, ‘Reask’, 76-9; Royal Commission, Iona, 41; O’Kelly, ‘Church Island’, 76.


141 Swift, ‘Óenach Táilten’, 5-12.

142 Swan, ‘Enclosed ecclesiastical site’, 270; Swan, ‘Monastic proto-town’, 77-8, 97-9. Note, however, that on the plans of Armagh and Downpatrick provided on page 98 in this last article, the market cross appears at the gateway of the inner enclosure.


‘Tullvlish: around an early church’ in ibid. 55-6; Royal Commission, Iona, 12, 36-9.


15 See Mallory and MacNeill, 206 who suggest this independently.

16 Lawlor, Nendrum, 70-1, 160-2, Pl. II, XII.

17 Edwards, Archaeology, 107.


22 The reconstruction drawings by Hamlin of an eighth-century Irish ecclesiastical settlement and by Mallory and MacNeill of Nendrum indicate that some archaeologists already interpret the larger ecclesiastical enclosures as areas of agricultural exploitation; Hamlin, ‘The archaeology of the Irish church’, 298; Mallory and MacNeill, 206. To my knowledge, however, the case has not yet been argued in print.