



'Brotherly love and
ancestral veneration in
early Ireland'

Catherine Swift
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Grave slab and sculpture collections in 2016

700+ Clonmacnoise, Co.
Offaly

120+ Glendalough, Co
Wicklow

[100 Iona Argyll, Scotland]

96 Inishmurray, Co. Sligo

72 St Berrihert's Kyle, Co.
Tipperary

60 High Island, Co. Galway

40+ Tooreen Peakaun, Co.
Tipperary



Irish graveslabs almost invariably marked by cross, though sometimes associated with abstract art



Kildare,
Co. Kildare

Most are still on original find sites and often are affected by modern pilgrimage practices



Stories of the medieval dead

- On another day, when holy Cainnech came to the guesthouse of the church settlement of *Achad Drummato* (Killeigh) on the borders of Leinster, he found there great joy. Cainnech, seeing that, in contrast, the face of the guestmaster was sad, asked him about the cause of his sadness. The guestmaster said, “a wonderful man, full of God’s grace, who used to teach and preach to us as a wise and learned teacher (*magister*), has died. **And thus our community is powerfully sad, singing psalms for three days and they are standing around his body in the very house.**

Codex Salamenticensis “Life of Cainnech” 192, §39

Dated to 8th C by Máire Herbert

in

“The *Vita Columbae* and Irish hagiography: a study of *Vita Cainnechi*” in *Studies in Irish hagiography: saints and scholars* ed. John Carey, M. Herbert & P. Ó Riain (Dublin 2001), 31-40

Marbthech – ‘Death house’

To the abbot of a church:

Latt tíchosca na nochdaine – na digset hi ngén

*Nach-us-ruca demun dúr – i a **marbthech** mbrén.*

Yours the instruction of young people that they go not into evil ? that the hard hearted demon take them not to his evil-smelling **death house**.

‘The Rule of Carthage’ ed. Mac Eclaise, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*
4th series 1910 Jan-June vol xxvii pp.495-517 , p. 500-01

Marbthech = dead man's house/cell?
A purpose built mortuary?



Context: royal dwelling places in the twelfth century– the evidence of *Mesca Ulad* in *Book of Leinster*

The Ulaid came to the mustering at the feast and men from half the townlands in Ulster arrived. Thus they came, each hospitaller with his spouse, each king with his queen, each musician with his instruments, each gallant with his lady... The **sleeping chambers (*cotaltigi*)** were beautiful, ornamented and finely shaped; the beautiful tall **solars (*grianána*)** strewn with fresh rushes and reeds; there were long-houses for the **troop-houses (*slúagthigi*)**, the **cooking houses (*cuchtarthigi*)** were wide and spacious and the **hostel (*bruiden*)** was speckled with a wide door and it was ample, wide and great, having four doors and corners and nooks.

After that the **drinking house (*óltech*)** was set out in order by Conchobar, according to the divisions of kindred, to the ranks and skills..

Houses made of wicker, can be built in
fortnight?



Keening over dead – *caoineadh*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3J>

EiuM eHuw

1) *Tair cucum a Maire boíd do choíniuth frit do rochoím; dirsan dul fri croich dot mac ba mind már, ba masgérat.*

Come to me, loving Mary, that I may keen with you your very dear one. Alas that your son should go to the cross, he who was a great treasure, a beautiful hero.

...(life of Christ)...

65) *Ba deithbir do dúilib Dé muir mas, nem nglas, talam cé ce imro-chloítis a ngné oc coíniud a ngalgaite.*

It would have been fitting for God's elements, the beautiful sea, the blue heaven, the present earth, that they should change their aspect when keening their hero

8th C poem by Blathmac

Keening a royal king

He chanted this lay:

*The howl of Ossar – Ossar,
Conaire's lapdog
[...]
a battle he announced:
enslavement of a people: sack of
the Hostel: mournful are the
champions: men wounded: wind
of terror: hurling of javelins:
trouble of unfair fight: wreck of
houses: Tara waste: a foreign
heritage: like (is) lamenting
Conaire...*



*Gáir Osair. Osar cumoll. Cath ro ndlom. Deórad túathi. Tail
bruidne. Bróncha Fíanna. Fir guíti. Goíth immomuin. Imorchor
sleg. Saeth écomlonn. Ascur tigi. Temair fás. Forba n-anúuil.
Comgne cúiniud Conaire...*

Whitley Stokes, 'The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel' *Revue Celtique* 22, (1901) p 9–61, 165–215, 282–329, 390–437. pp 208-9

High status people particularly deserve keening

Cetmunter no caillech aithirgi dogní gol for laiech nó laithes pennait .l. n-aidche. Mad for cedmuindtir nó for chaillich aithirgi adbaill dí asáit no for fiur muinntiri pennit .xl. n-aidchi. Mad for cleiriuch tuathe .xx. pende. Mad for epscop nó ríq nó anmcarait nó aircindech ard-cathrach .xv. pendi.

A married woman or a penitent nun who makes lamentation over a layman or a laywoman, 50 nights' penance. If it be over a married woman or a penitent nun who dies in childbirth or a man of the family, 40 nights. If over a cleric of the community, 20 nights penance. If over a bishop or a king or a soul-friend or the church governor of a chief-city, 15 days.

E.J.Gwynn 'An Irish penitential', *Ériu* 7 (1914),
170-1



Dysert O'Dea,
Co. Clare

Did a priest remain with dead to say prayers over them?

Leviticus 21:1-4

The Lord said also to Moses: Speak to the priests the sons of Aaron, and thou shalt say for them: Let not a priest incur an uncleanness at the death of his citizens. But only for his kin, such as are near in blood: that is to say, for his father and for his mother, and for his son, and for his daughter, for his brother also: And for a maiden sister, who hath had no husband. But not even for the prince of his people shall he do any thing that may make him unclean.

Adomnán's life of Columba III 6:

When St Columba was living in Iona, one of his monks, a Briton dedicated to good works, was taken ill with a bodily affliction and came close to death. But he soon left the monk, for he wished not to see the man die.

Preparing body in shroud

- Irish word *recholl* –only found in texts of later medieval date.

Adomnan's Life of Columba: burial in fine linen cloth

Excavation of female burial in shroud at Ballymacaward, Co. Donegal AD 620-30

Transport of body to the cemetery – apparently by family members

- \$39 Lowly persons carry lowly persons. It is without liability with regard to the church, on whatever [bier] the one who is dead was brought [to the cemetery], **if he arrived in a proper state** and a yearling heifer for penalty-fine between themselves if he was brought [to the cemetery] after those illegal acts;
- **if he did not arrive in a proper state**, it is [three cows of calving age] or a half [of that sum] **to the church** in that case according to the nature of the item of restitution or of half restitution and **bride-price for penalty-fine between themselves** or indeed, with there being a greater penalty-fine between them after death than a yearling heifer or a two-year-old heifer.
- *It is permitted to cut wood on another's property to make a bier to carry a body.*



Fergus Kelly, *Marriage disputes: a fragmentary Old Irish law-text* (Dublin 2014)

Then the king on earth [Flannan's brother] with all his leaders and with many holy men came to holy Flannan so that they might offer reverence to the body of his father, Theodoric, in his own city. The, on the following day, with holy pilgrims and faithful locals, they led the holy body of King Theodoric to the place of burial **with the drumming and calling of pipes and flutes, after the fashion of kings of the West** and when the royal funeral processions were finished, they buried him with honour

Vita S. Flannani ed. W. Heist, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice Salamanticensi*, (Brussels 1965),
262



The nature of the grave



- §38: **One ought not to be buried at the grave of husband or wife:** If one of them has been buried at those places, with knowledge of its illegality, ‘it is a yearling heifer or a two-year-old heifer for penalty-fine in that case, and removal [of the corpse] out of it; if he does not know, he is free from liability but removal [of the corpse] out of it.

BUT *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* [compiled by ? Cú Chuimne of Iona (†747) and Ruben of Dairinis (†725)] in Bk 18.1 – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried in double vaults with their respective wives Sara, Rebecca & Lia. Tobias wished to be buried with his wife.

In contrast, Bk 18.2 quotes Roman synod to say that husband and wife should be buried apart from each other in his or her ancestral grave and states – “every man is cursed who is not buried in the grave of his fathers.” The chapter continues with reference to the bones of Jacob which were returned to his homeland – *revehitur ad terram Chanaan*. In 18.4, St Paul is quoted as saying wives are free after husband’s death and if she is allowed remarry, then of course she must have freedom of burial.

Siblings could be buried in one grave

Collectio Bk XVIII 9 quotes Pope Gregory's Dialogues (Bk II 34) to say that Benedict and his sister were both buried in same grave



Ancestral graves in remote past (time of Patrick? marked by ogham stones

Rockfield, Co. Kerry (now in Adare, Co. Limerick)

1) COILLABBOTAS MAQI CORBI MAQI MOCOIQERAI

2) MAQI RITTE MAQI COLABOT

“**may record the son** (i.e. assuming COILLABBOTAS and COLABOT to be the same person) ...as well as showing an interesting linguistic development within a single generation” – Damian McManus, *A guide to ogam* (Maynooth 1991), 54



Examples of royal ancestral graveyards at church sites in *Baile in Scáil* – The Phantom's Frenzy ed. K. Murray (Irish Texts Society 58, 2004)

- **Congal mac Fergusa Fánat – buried in Clonard +704**
- Fergal, die at battle of Allen- buried in Durrow +710
- Flaithbertach – die **at Armagh** on pilgrimage of a tumour at a monastery +728 (CC)
- **Áed Allán mac Fergaile – buried in Clonmacnoise +734 (CE)**
- Domnall Midi mac Murchada – death of a tumour in Imlech Fía in monastic house at Taitiu+743
- Níall Frossach mac Fergaile – buried in Iona +763
- **Donnchad Midi – buried in Clonard + 770**
- Áed Ingor (Oirdnide) – buried in **Armagh** (died at Áth Dá Fherta in Conaille)+797
- **Conchobor mac Donnchada – buried at Clonard +819**
- Níall Caille mac Áedo – buried in Armagh after being drowned in Calann +833
- **Máel Sechnaill mac Maele Ruanaid – buried at Clonmacnoise +846**
- Áed Finnlíath mac Níall – died at Ráith Adomnae – buried in **Armagh +862/3**
- **Flann Sinna mac Máele Sechnaill – buried in Clonmacnoise + 879**
- Níall Glundub mac Áeda – buried in Kells +916
- Congalach Cerna – buried in Monasterboice +944
- Domnall ua Néill buried at Carn Furbaidi + 956

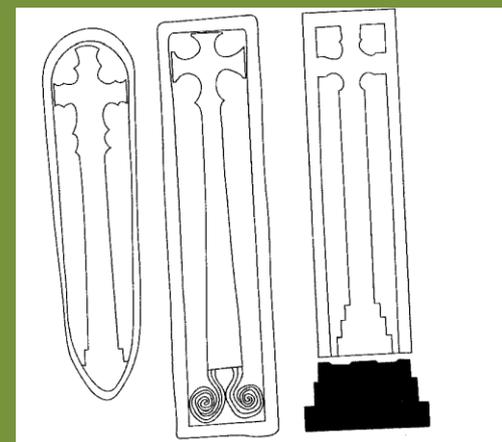
Bidh adha ailithrech uar – bid adba trén ocus truag
Bid adhnacht rig cend a cenn – tic fa Cáemgein issin nglenn
Acallamh na Senorach II2431-2

An abode [Glendalough] will be of pilgrims, an abode of weak and
strong

A burial ground for kings head to head , when Kevin comes to the glen.



Example of royal graveslab – Domnall Mór Ua Briain +1194



Cross-slabs
identified as
Romanesque at
Hoddom,
Dumfriesshire

Iona



Meelick Co. Mayo



Reconstruction of church settlement, Ferrycarrig, Co. Wexford: contained community of Christian practitioners?



Or visited on regular basis by local community for worship and/or burial?



Pattern on Mac Dara's island, Co. Galway

Collectio canonum Hibernensis 18:3

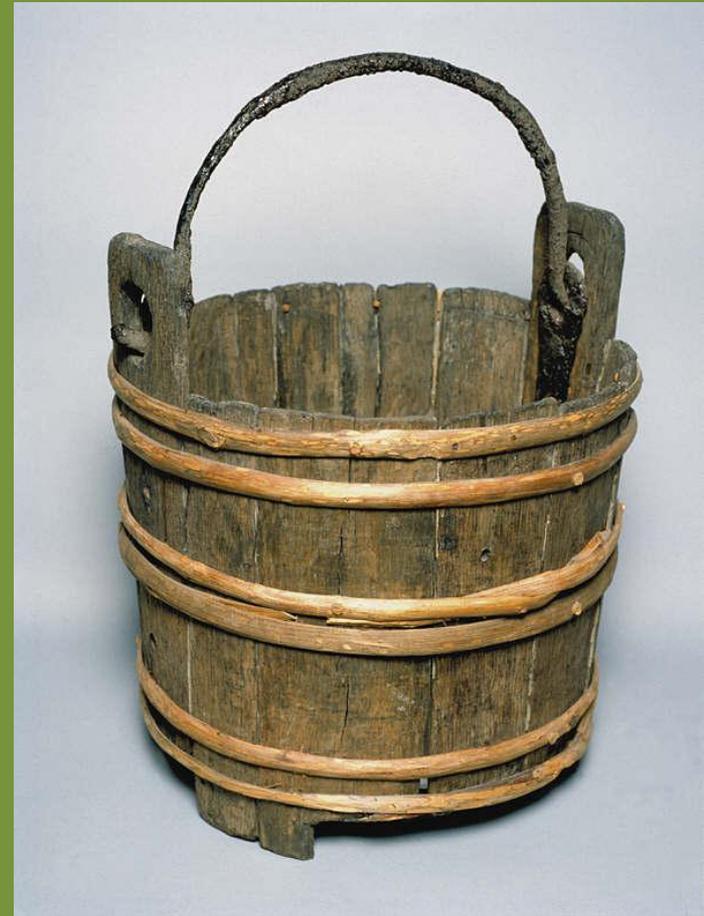
Irish synod decrees: if one is joined to a church, he should be buried in it.



Personal goods left by a monk at his death

“his cloak (worth an 1 ½ oz silver), his mantle worth ½ oz, his complete *caindien* ?, his pillow of down, his hide of the assembly, his..belt, his two shoes, his two leggings, his two gloves, his billhook, his spade, his shovel, his container, his dish, his drinking vessel, his..two-year-old bullock, his pack-animal worth a scruple, his fat salted meat, his hundred loaves of half a bushel, twelve black vessels of ale at the end of the week..

Corpus Iuris Hibernici 574.36ff trans. C. Etchingam,
Church organisation in Ireland AD 650-1000
(Maynooth) 440



Paralleling gifts left by Venerable Bede at his death ?

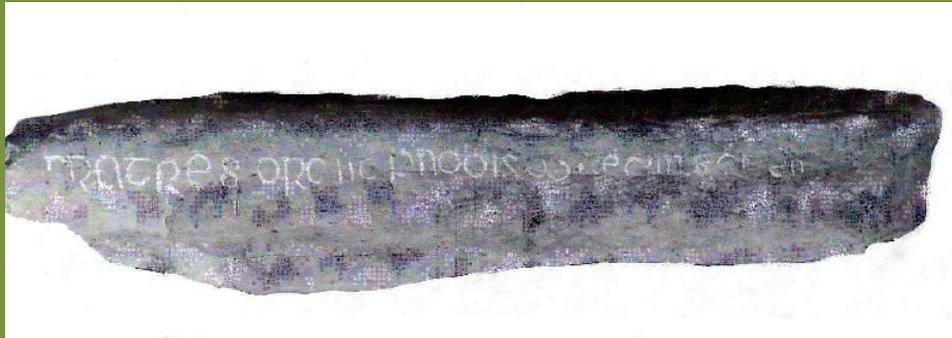
Monks might also bequeath personal ownership of farm animals?

If anyone shall commend his soul and body and all that he has to God and his church head, that is the abbot, and if therefore he shall depart to another abbot and commend to him his soul and all that he possesses, to whom shall all these belong? All his goods assuredly belong to the first abbot, if he [the first abbot] did not tacitly approve his second vow during his lifetime; **to the latest abbot, however shall be left his body, clothing, horse and cow or if he be of sufficient distinction, two horses with a chariot and the furnishings of his bed and the vessel from which he used to drink.**



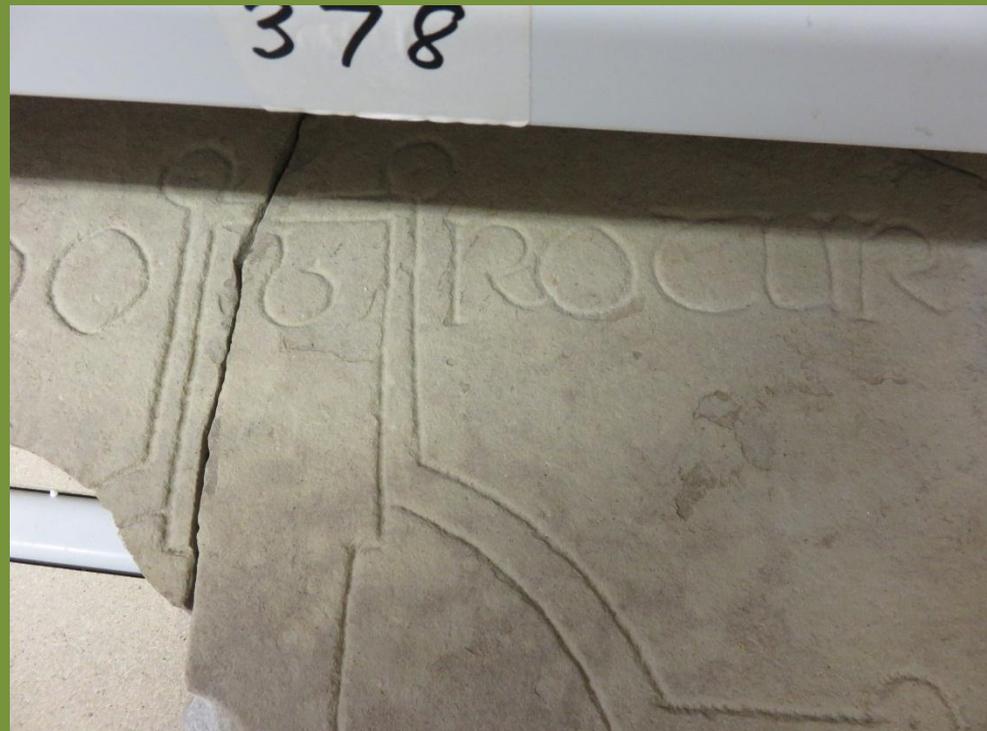
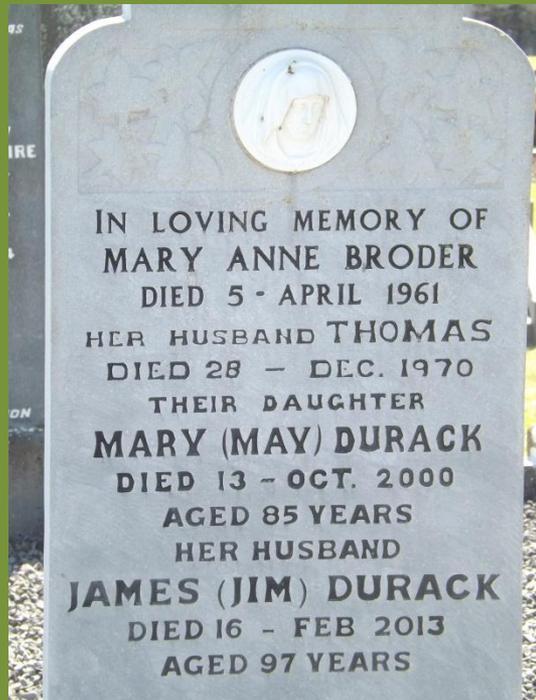
Collectio Canonum Hibernensis XVIII \$6

Some evidence for grave slabs being used as grave markers for monks



Connor, Co. Antrim

Clonmacnoise



Other categories of people attached to church apart from monks and kings..?

- Tuathal saer – Tuathal the builder in stone and wood



Clonmacnoise
, Co. Offaly

Could lay people(who wished it) also be buried at the church?



Monasterboice
Co. Louth

Lay folk had to pay burial fee to church: *pretium sepulchri* or *imnae*

Leviticus 27:2-8 quoted by CCH XV:7

50 shekels for an adult male between 20 and 50; if a woman, 30; for a person between the ages of 5 and 20, if male, 20 shekels, if female, 10; from one month to 5th year, for a male, 5 shekels, for a female, 3. If a pauper, let the priest decide.

Irish commentator identified shekels with local unit screpul. This results in burial fees of approximately the *lóg-n-enech* “price of face” attached to individuals.

A legal fundamental precedes [new] legal obligations: *imnae* precedes base client service, base client service precedes bride-price, bride-price precedes fosterage fee, fosterage fee precedes debts, debts precede a kin’s assets; a kindred’s assets precede *imnae*. CIH 1237-1238

But the bodies of sinners are not welcome in the church

Gregory the Great's Dialogues

quoted at length in
Collectio Canonum Hibernensis 18:8

e.g: Book 4:50 -
Whether the souls receive any benefit, if their bodies be buried in the church.?



What advantages did being buried in a church yard bring the dead in early medieval Ireland?

Theories of the universe and the after life

In Tenga Bithnua -The Ever-New Tongue
(9th C)– existing in 12th C English
translation

The hidden natures and the mysteries of
the seven heavens [holding clouds, moon,
wind, sun, stars etc]:

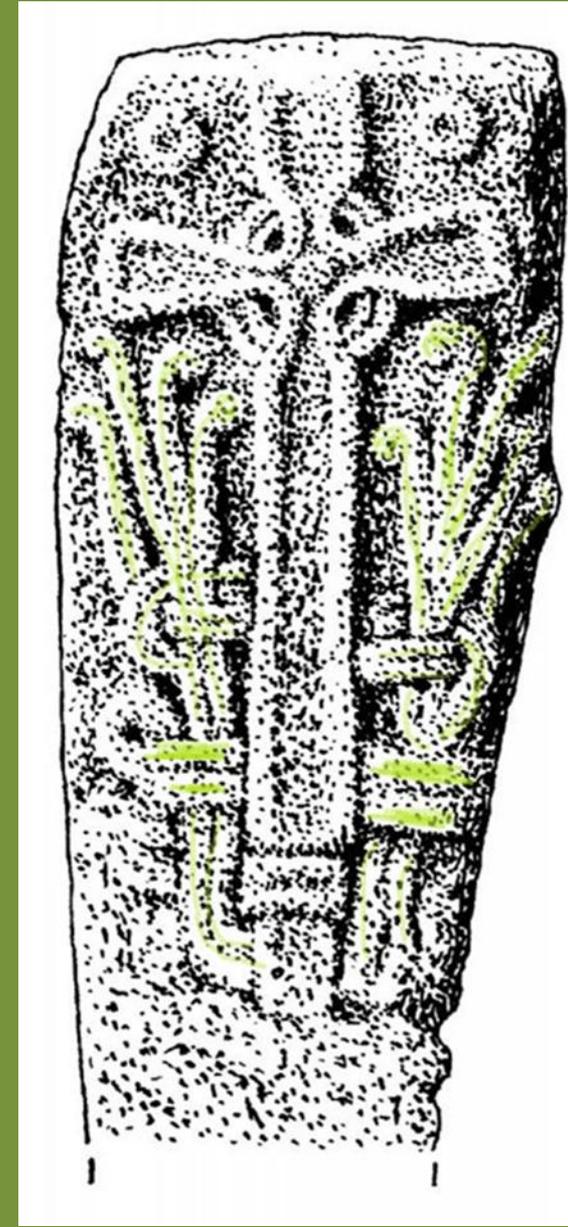
It is in the zones of the seven heavens then
that the **twelve trembling beasts conceal
themselves with the fiery heads above
them** in their celestial bodies who blow the
twelve winds around the world. And in the
same zones sleep **the dragons with breaths
of fire**, pillar-headed dragons with plagues
upon them in their flanks who set in motion
the crackling of the thunders and blow
lightning from the pupils of their eyes.



Moone
Co. Kildare

The tree Nathaben in the land of the Hebrews

Since the beginning of the world until now the sons of men have not found this tree **save only for the day when a tree was sought for crucifying Christ..**it bears seven fruits and changes its blossom seven times a year. Sickness or suffering does not come to anyone who tastes its fruit..the brilliance of the **moon and sun and the shining of the stars shine from its blossoms.** The tree and its blossoms sing 72 kinds of song together when the winds meet them..365 birds with the brightness of snow with golden wings, with gleaming eyes sing many songs in many languages from its branches..



Tell us of the prison which God ordained for the punishment of sinners

“I do not know which are more numerous: all the sand beneath the seas or **all the kinds of beasts that there are to maul souls in hell...** it is a place in which ears heard no voice save woe and fear and melancholy..no look or joy upon a face; a place in which there was no honour nor dignity nor consolation of friends nor gentle voice but abundance of lightning and foul winds and fiery black snow, together with extreme cold. Gnashing of teeth, smothering of faces, oppression of breaths, much coughing, hands beaten in grief, shedding of tears, woe with groans, hearts full of terror, horrible shapes, the infliction of merciless, savage, shameless torments. Burning everywhere, horror everywhere. Wailing in outcry everywhere.



Dysert O’Dea,
Co. Clare

What thing could be more wondrous than the Child to be asleep in the arms of the Virgin?

- He has closed his fist around the seven heavens and earth and hell and the many surrounding seas. **The Child asleep in the arms of the Virgin and yet a trembling upon the angels** and the heavens and the lands with their inhabitants and the whales in the seas and upon the dwellers in hell..such is the beauty and radiance of his face that if all the souls in hell were to gaze upon the radiance of his face, **they would not notice the suffering and punishment and torture of hell.**



Iona

The sinners inhabiting hell according to *Fís Adomnáin* 'Vision of Adamnan'

There is a fiery wall around them which reaches to their chins. There are fiery chains around their waists in the form of serpents. Their faces burn as they are tortured. Those who endure this heavy punishment are the ones who have killed their kin and devastated God's church – pitiless church leaders who have been given charge of the relics of the saints so as to collect gifts and tithes for God but they take that wealth as their own possession rather than bestowing it upon the Lord's guests and the poor



Castledermot, Co.
Kildare

Some sinners make it in: graveslab of Uallach (= possessing pride) at Clonmacnoise

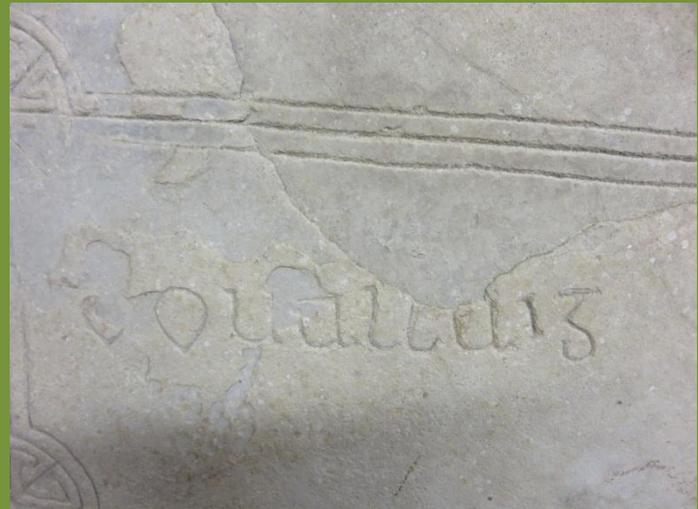
Oroit do Uallaig - A prayer for Uallach

Annals of Inisfallen 934:

Repose of Uallach daughter of Muinechan, poetess of Ireland.

Annals of Ulster 1067:

Aed ua Conchobuir.. was killed by the Conmaicne ..i.e. by Aed son of Art **Uallach** ua Ruairc



- There are others with streams of fire in the orifices of their faces, with nails driven through their tongues or into their heads. They are the folk given to grasping and refusal, lacking charity and the love of God, thieves and perjurers and traitors and slanderers and ravagers and raiders, unjust judges and troublemakers, witches and satirists, relapsed brigands and scholars who teach heresy.

Respite on islands in the sea of fire

- Another company there, on islands .. A silver wall surrounds them made up of the garments and the alms which they have given away. These are the **folk who offer charity without stint but in other respects lead lax lives** concerned with fleshly things..their alms help them until the Day of Judgement and after Judgement, they are conveyed to the haven of life.

Waters of black rivers and black lakes

- Mournful and wretched are the wailings which the sinners utter in those waters for it is an increase of torment which they obtain there. Those who are in that torment are dishonest artisans and comb-makers and merchants, the unjust judges of the Jews and faithless kings, crooked sinful superiors of communities, adulterous women and the go-betweens who seduce them into wickedness and satirists.

This is what Adomnan preached

This is what Elijah is accustomed to preach to the souls of the righteous beneath the tree of life in Paradise. When Elijah opens his book to preach, the souls of the righteous come to him from every side in the shapes of white birds..he relates to them the rewards of the righteous, the delightfulness and the pleasures of the kingdom of heaven and they are joyful then.

“The language in which I speak to you is that in which the angels speak and every rank in heaven. And sea-creatures and beasts and cattle and birds and serpents and demons understand it and all will speak it at the Judgement.”

The Ever-New Tongue



But dead sinners can be helped by the living

Collectio 15.1 – Of the four ways in which the living can help the dead:

Origenes says; the souls of the dead can be freed in four ways – either by **offerings of the priests** or bishops to God or by the **prayer** of holy people or by the **alms** of Christians or by the **fasting** of their relatives.

Collectio 15:3 “of the sacrifice [of the Mass] for the dead”

- Summarising *Pope Gregory the Great – Dialogues* II: 23 – “of certain Nuns absolved after their death”.



references to Masses for the Dead in Stowe Missal & liturgical fragment from St Gall

Fís Adomnáin -Adomnán's Vision

All of the people who do not reach that stronghold [of heaven] in their lives but are destined to dwell there after the Judgement of Doomsday, they exist in a fleeting, unstable state: their dwelling places are in the mountains and in hills, in marshes and bogs until Doomsday comes.

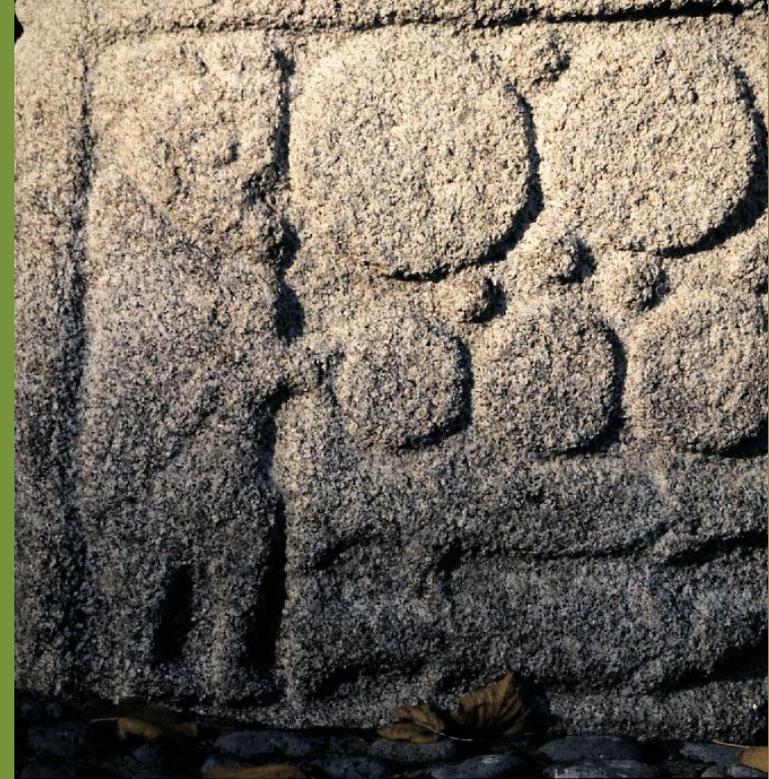
Helps explain cross pillars in remote locations?



Dooghmakeon, Co. Mayo

Fasting of relatives in honour of the dead

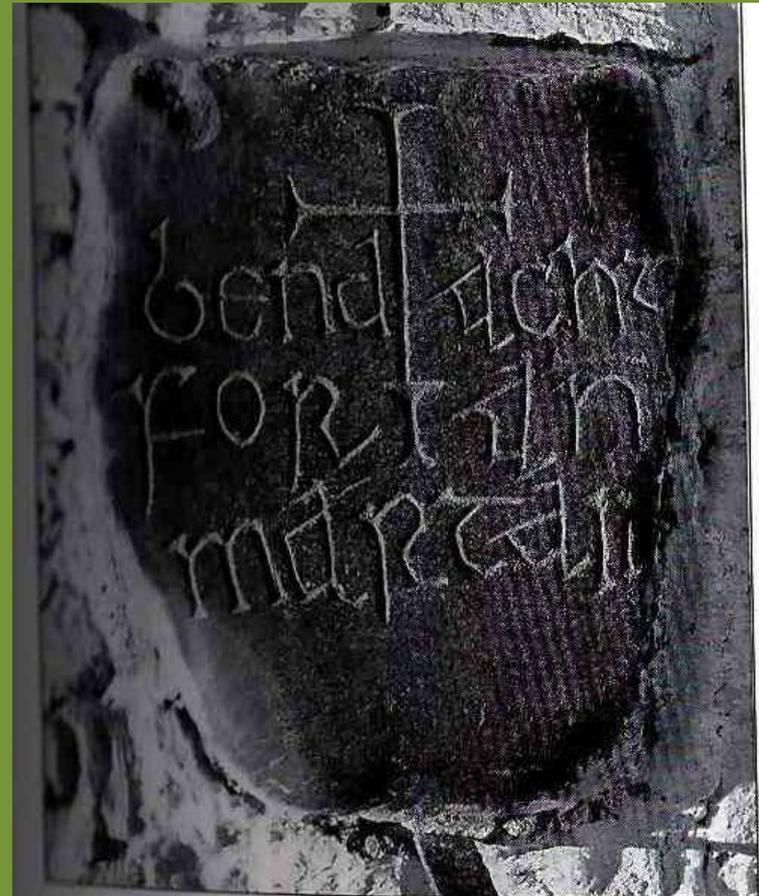
This helps to confirm that the *sechtbairgen* involving seven loaves, which Professor Kelly speculated in his book might symbolise the Eucharist and which took place on the seventh day and the *fled chrólige*, feast of death-living, celebrated at the end of a month, both probably originated in Christian ceremonies marking stages in the gradual purification of the soul of the deceased.



Grave-slabs commemorate prayers for the dead



Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly



Lismore, Co. Waterford

Addendum: the question of recumbent versus upright graveslabs



Inishcealtra Co. Clare



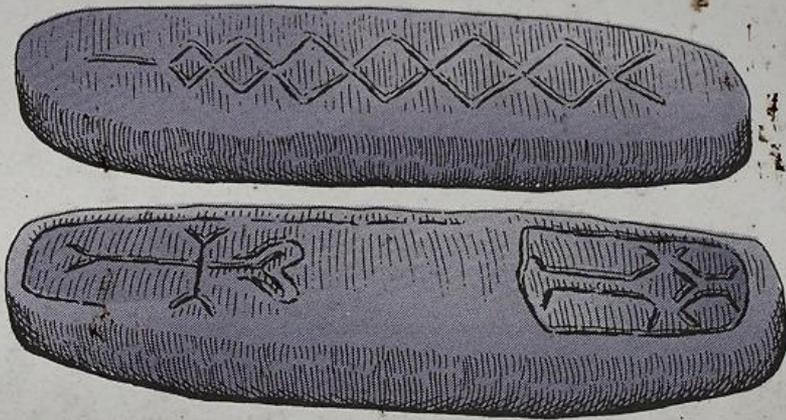
Iona

Clonmacnoise



RECUMBENT v UPRIGHT
grave-slabs

Castledermot, Co.
Kildare

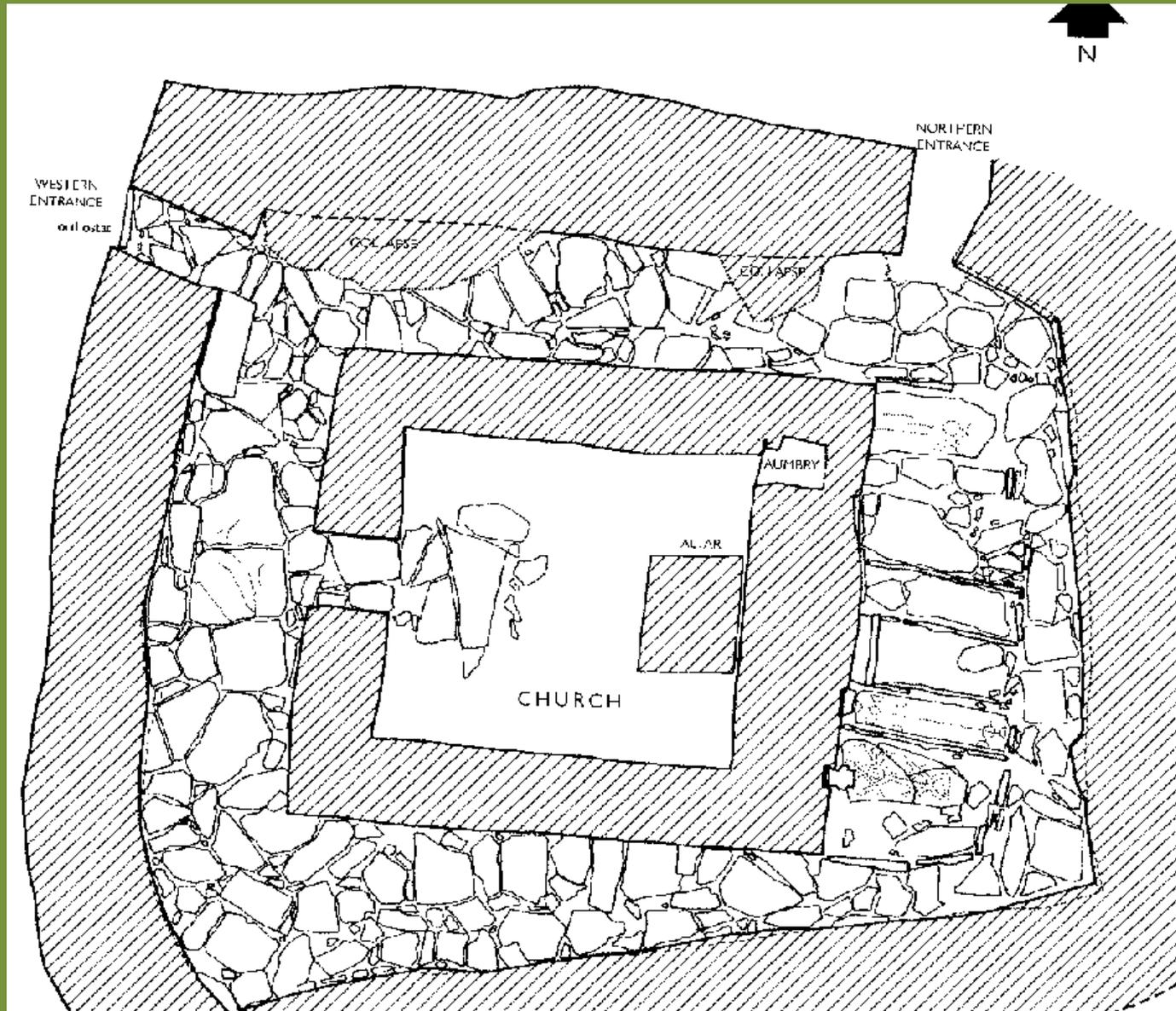


Castledermot has the only example in Ireland of a
hog-back, a Scandinavian-type grave marker.
*I nDíseart Diarmada atá an t-aon sampla in Éirinn de
mhucaís, chloch uaigh de chineál Lochlannach.*

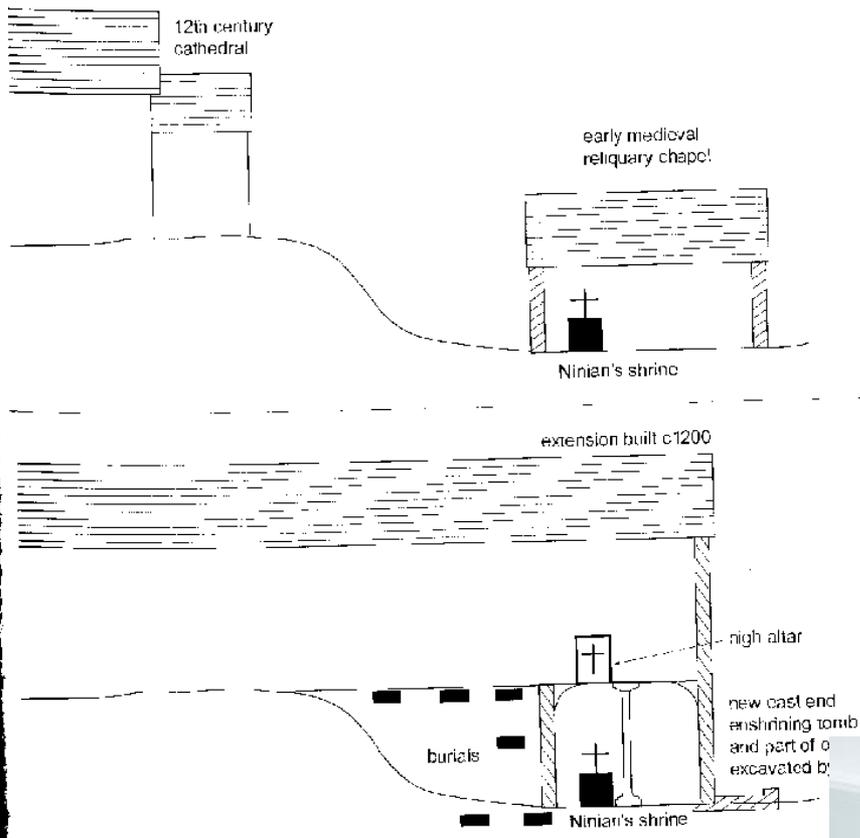
KILLALOE, Co.Clare – in runes and
ogam A BLESSING ON
THORGRIM *who raised this cross*



High Island, Co. Galway – Jenny White
Marshall & Grellan O'Rourke



Chris Lowe, Bishops Graves, Whithorn



St Andrew's Sarcophagus



Meigle, Perthshire

Conclusions

- That the passing of the dead was marked by singing, both psalms (in the case of professed religious) and secular songs
- that in medieval Ireland there are ancestral graveyards and Christian graveyards (as Elizabeth O'Brien has argued elsewhere)
- That in the case of royalty, we can see the development in the eighth and ninth centuries of ancestral graveyards at Christian churches or (royal mausolea in international terms)
- That professed religious would normally be buried in Christian graveyards as their Christian *familia* had replaced their secular *muintir*
- That penitent laypeople could be buried in Christian graveyards but their souls had to be rescued from Hell by prayers, votive Masses offerings to the church and fasting especially in the first month
- That elite burials, at eastern end of church buildings, may have been in stone-build graves with decoration on individual slabs and that the distinction of recumbent versus upright is meaningless in such a context.