

Rachel Moss, 'Permanent expressions of piety: the secular and the sacred in later medieval stone sculpture' in Rachel Moss, Colmán Ó Clabaigh and Salvador Ryan (eds), *Art and devotion in late medieval Ireland* (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2006), pp72–97

### *Introduction*

In 1681, during his tour of Ireland, the English traveller and artist Thomas Dineley visited Quin friary and sketched a tomb located to the south of the altar (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> His sketch shows a typical canopied wall tomb, with a Crucifixion scene at the apex, and two figures depicted on the rear wall of the niche. Today the visitor to Quin may have difficulty in locating this unusual monument. The figures on the rear wall of the niche, which were presumably painted, have long since vanished, and the Crucifixion, interpreted in Dineley's sketch as a continuation of the limestone tomb canopy, was in fact crafted from stucco, and survives in only a fragmentary condition over what is an otherwise relatively plain limestone arch.

The Quin tomb is a good illustration of the now often forgotten multimedia approach to church decoration during the later middle ages. Stone and woodcarving, stucco, paint and coloured glass were often used together to create a unified visual effect. Recesses and sockets in surviving stonework suggest that carved woodwork, such as the misericords at St. Mary's Limerick and timber screens would once have been commonplace, while numerous surviving stone niches and corbels reflect the original integration of free-standing statuary of various materials, now vanished.<sup>2</sup> As at Quin, this integrated approach to the decorative arts sometimes led to the distinction between materials being blurred, so that one material could appear to be another. At Clare abbey for example, vault ribs similar to the stone ribs at Abbeyknockmoy are painted onto the barrel vaulted roof of the chancel complete with mortar joints, providing a convincing pseudo-architectural framework for the figurative paintings on the vault.<sup>3</sup> While painted masonry patterns, formed from orange, red or black mortar joints were also relatively common means of suggesting the use of expensive ashlar blocks in construction, rather than the more economic, indeed inevitable rubble-wall construction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Shirley, (with notes by the Hon. Robert O'Brien, and the Rev. James Graves), 'Extracts from the journal of Thomas Dineley, Esquire, giving some account of his visit to Ireland in the reign of Charles II (Concluded)', *JRSAI*, 7 (1867), 180-1.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Haydn, *Misericords in St. Mary's Cathedral Limerick* (Limerick, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> K. Morton and C. Oldenburg, 'Catalogue of wall paintings' and R. Stalley, 'The abbey in its later Gothic context' in (ed.) C. Manning, *New survey of Clare Island, Vol. IV: the abbey* (Dublin, 2005), pp 66-9, 138-9.

<sup>4</sup> K. Morten, 'Irish medieval wall painting' in *Medieval Ireland; the Barryscourt lectures I-X* (Cork, 2004), pp 334-5.

The circumstances of history have left practically all of the later medieval churches of Ireland, like Quin, in a ruinous or much altered state. As a result, [p. 73] surviving religious imagery is not only temporally separated from its original context but is often physically removed as well. The only form of imagery to have survived on any scale, and in its original location, is stone sculpture, with random survivals of wooden fittings and statuary, metalwork and wall painting so few that it is difficult to ascertain just how representative they might be of what once existed.

This has led imagery carved in stone to be used as one of the main mechanisms for interpreting the visual culture of the later medieval church in Ireland, providing a window to past methods of visual communication and systems of belief. However, as the example at Quin highlights, the stone sculpture that survives more often than not was only one component of a much more complex visual programme, and should not be interpreted in isolation, or be seen as representative of later medieval art as a whole in Ireland. The aim of this paper is to examine the context in which stone sculpture was used in the later medieval church; to consider whether different materials were singled out for specific functions, whether practical or symbolic, and to what extent the choice of iconography found in Irish stone sculpture can be said to be representative of later medieval religious art as a whole.

### **Stone carving in later medieval Ireland**

It should be stated from the outset that in comparison to even some of the more humble contemporary English churches, the use of stone sculpture in Irish churches was sparing. Traditionally, the relative plainness of Irish church architecture and fittings has been attributed to the poverty of the church during the later middle ages. Certainly the procurement of high quality free-stones from western England, common from the late twelfth century, appears to have all but ceased by the mid-fourteenth, with the importation of stone apparently restricted to individual, pre-carved pieces such as tombs and altar retables.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the best-documented [p. 74] example of this is in the early fifteenth century when Joanna de Wffler [sic] brought, at a cost of 20 marks, a stone tomb '*in quo est sculptura*' from Bristol to Athenry in which to inter her husband David Wyder (d. 1408).<sup>6</sup> Coming from an area famed for its cream-coloured freestones, this Bristol tomb would doubtless have presented a stark contrast with the majority of

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<sup>5</sup> D.M. Waterman, 'Somersetshire and other foreign building stone in medieval Ireland, c. 1175-1400', *UJA*, 33 (1970), 63-75.

<sup>6</sup> A. Coleman (ed.), 'Regestum Monasterii Fratrum praedicatorum de Athenry', *Archivium Hibernicum*, 1 (1912), 207. Hereafter 'Athenry Register'.

stone sculpture being produced in Ireland at the time. Almost without exception stone was locally procured, and as a result nearly all of the sculpture of the period is carved from hard dark carboniferous limestone, reflecting the predominant geology of the country. In areas without good local stone sources, the difficulty in procuring good quality freestone is highlighted either by a paucity of sculpture, or in the re-use of stone from earlier features.<sup>7</sup>

Even though stone was locally sourced, quarrying and carving would nonetheless have been a costly business, and would have required skills not readily available in every locality. Unfortunately, the relatively rich documentary sources relating to the commissioning and manufacture of church art that exist in England are not paralleled on this side the Irish Sea.<sup>8</sup> A fifteenth century building record for repairs to St. John's church Dublin certainly indicates that the skills of the mason were valued over those of the carpenter, receiving daily wages of 9d and 5d respectively, but these figures shed only limited light on the cost of more skilled, artistic work.<sup>9</sup>

There is, however, some evidence of the development of ateliers of specialist sculptors during the period, whose influence in certain cases had a quite broad geographical spread, suggesting the specialized nature of the craft.<sup>10</sup> But, despite the specialized nature of the work, unlike contemporary metalwork, the status of the stone carver is not reflected in signed art works. An inscribed plaque once incorporated into the 1402 tomb of Melaghlín O Ceallaigh and Finola O Conchobhair at Abbeyknockmoy recorded the maker as Matthew O Quigley,<sup>11</sup> and the name 'Johanne' carved in raised relief on the rood loft at Clontuskert and window tracery at Portumna is also interpreted by most as a mason's signature. However, it is not really until the sixteenth century and the emergence of the O'Tunney atelier in the south east of the country, that works begin to be signed with any consistency.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> R. Moss, 'Tales from the crypt: the medieval stone of Christ Church' in (ed.) S. Duffy, *Medieval Dublin III* (Dublin, 2002), p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> R. Marks, *Image and devotion in late medieval England* (Gloucestershire, 2004), chapter 9; L.F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540: a documentary history* (Oxford, 1952).

<sup>9</sup> J. Lydon, 'A fifteenth century building account from Dublin', *Irish economic and social history*, 9 (1982), 73-5.

<sup>10</sup> E. Rae, 'Irish sepulchral monuments of the later middle ages: part I, the Ormond group', *JRSAI*, 100 (1970), 1-38.

<sup>11</sup> W. Fitzgerald, 'Abbey Knockmoy', *JPADMI*, 10 (1917-20), 201-2.

<sup>12</sup> E. Rae, 'Irish sepulchral monuments of the later middle ages: part II, the O'Tunney atelier', *JRSAI*, 101 (1971), 1-39.

[p. 75] *Location of stone carving*

While to the untrained eye of the medieval worshipper the use of stone in the production of fittings or imagery in the church may at times have been difficult to distinguish, it is clear that the choice of the material was seldom random. Distinct patterns of use exist, which suggest a conscious relationship between material and function guided at one level by practical concerns but also by the symbolic properties of the material.

*Portal sculpture*

Perhaps not surprisingly, the church portal provided one of the principal *foci* for stone sculpture during the later middle ages. At its most fundamental level the portal marked the transition from the secular world into the sacred space, the point beyond which fresh air and daylight was exchanged for an altogether more esoteric olfactory and visual experience. But it also had a significant liturgical role, as the location where various ceremonies, including marriage, took place.<sup>13</sup>

As the major visual impact of the portal was external, the use of stone in its decoration was the obvious choice in terms of durability, although there is some evidence that paint was also applied externally.<sup>14</sup> In many of the more modest examples, design addresses aesthetic and practical concerns equally, with moulded hoods designed to send the worst of the rain away from the door opening itself. On the more elaborately decorated examples, the area directly over the portal provides the most common field for sculpture, with disembodied heads a particularly common theme in this location. Fine examples can be seen over the west portal at St. Ruadan's priory, Lorrha (fig. 2) and the north doorway of St. Mary's parish church Callan, both of which represent women dressed in elaborate horned headdresses, assumed to represent patrons.<sup>15</sup> It has been suggested that the square recesses on either side of the Lorrha portal may have accommodated additional heraldic plaques to clearly establish the identity of the lady in question, a feature common to a number of other portals;<sup>16</sup> for example heraldic plaques or devices commemorating the founder or patron were also placed over

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<sup>13</sup> A. Cosgrove, 'Marriage in medieval Ireland' in (ed.) A. Cosgrove, *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), p.26.

<sup>14</sup> C. Hourihane, *Gothic Art in Ireland 1169-1550* (New Haven and London, 2003), p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> E. McKenna, 'Women as patrons of the arts in medieval Ireland' in (ed.) C. Meek, *Women in Renaissance and early medieval Europe* (Dublin, 2000), p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> Hourihane, *Gothic Art*, p. 81.

doorways at Stackallan, and Tullaroan, the latter incorporating a request for prayer for the patrons John Baron Grace Fitzoliver and his wife Noreen Brenagh.<sup>17</sup>

Curiously, the inclusion of overtly religious imagery on portals is relatively unusual. The best examples are to be found on a group of three portals, [p. 76] attributed by some to be the work of a single atelier, at Clonmacnoise cathedral, Clonfert cathedral and Clontuskert priory (fig. 3).<sup>18</sup> The portals at Clonmacnoise and Clonfert both represent insertions into earlier fabric, while the Clontuskert portal appears to represent the culmination of a programme of rebuilding initiated after the fire of 1413.<sup>19</sup>

The west portal at Clontuskert is the most elaborate of the group. Contained within the rectangular hood over the portal are four standing figures and two smaller angels displaying the *Arma Christi*, with a further two angels [p. 77] surmounting the pinnacles of the doorway. The figures represented are St. Michael the archangel, St. John the Baptist, St. Catherine of Alexandria and an unidentified ecclesiastic wearing a mitre and holding a floriated crozier, his right hand raised in benediction. Located in an apparently random arrangement down the sides of the portal are scenes that include a mermaid, griffins, beasts with intertwined necks, interlace and floral motifs.<sup>20</sup>

At Clonfert the inner order of the Romanesque west portal was replaced in the fifteenth century with a single sculpted limestone arch. Set into either side of the hollowed out surface of the arch, and prominently located at eye level, are two anonymous figures. On the north, a tonsured monk, sometimes identified as Petrus O Mordha, the twelfth century Cistercian bishop of Clonfert, and to the south an ecclesiastic with crozier and cap, identified variously as St Brendan, founder of the early Christian monastery at the site, or St. Patrick. A vine sprouts from the monks staff in which, close to the apex of the arch resides a censuring angel.

The identity of the figure sculpture on the north portal at Clonmacnoise cathedral is, superficially at least, less ambiguous. Located under their inscribed names on a separate cornice above are the figures of St. Dominic, St. Patrick and St. Francis. However, it

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<sup>17</sup> The Stackallan doorway is now in the Church of Ireland church at Slane, *JPADMI*, 1 (1888), 465; W. Carrigan, *History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory* (Dublin, 1905), iii, pp 492-4.

<sup>18</sup> H.G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings III* (Dundalk, 1960), p. 158; Hourihane, *Gothic Art*, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> J.A. Twemlow (ed.), *Calendar of Papal Records relating to Great Britain and Ireland, AD 1404-1415* (London, 1904) vi, p. 413. There is no evidence, as some writers have suggested that the rebuilding of the church was completed by 1443.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed description of this portal see Hourihane, *Gothic Art*, pp 72-7.

should be noted that the figures are slightly awkward in their placement and were obviously not originally intended for this location; St [p. 78] Dominic placed against a slightly concave background on a curving stone, very similar to the figures on the archway at Clonfert.

The cornice inscription at Clonmacnoise and one in a similar location at Clontuskert are another feature that set these portals apart. Both are primarily concerned with recording patronage, at Clonmacnoise, that of Dean Odo,<sup>21</sup> and at Clontuskert 'Matthew by the grace of God, Bishop of Clonfert and Patrick O Naughton Canon of this house [who] caused me to be made. Anno Domini 1471'.<sup>22</sup>

### *Windows*

Windows also provided an important focus for the skills of the stonemason. The key focus here was in the carving of tracery patterns, some of which, by the fifteenth and early part of the sixteenth centuries, had become quite elaborate.<sup>23</sup> The provision of tracery was again practical, providing a solid framework within which larger areas could be glazed. Together with the tracery however, it is relatively common to find carvings, in particular, although not exclusively, of disembodied heads. The tradition of carving heads as keystones and hood stops on windows goes back to the thirteenth century in Ireland, although by the later middle ages there is a tendency to individualize through the application of costume. Figures represented include both ecclesiastics and secular men and women, but apart from the occasional angel, it is very unusual to find carvings with explicit religious connotations.

As with the occurrence of disembodied heads over portals, it is tempting to interpret at least some of these carvings as donor 'portraits'. This is particularly the case when one looks at contemporary references relating to the funding of particular parts of church buildings. Portals are seldom singled out for explicit mention, even though we know, as with the example Clonmacnoise cathedral cited above, that new portals were sometimes commissioned as individual pieces, to be inserted into already standing fabric. On the other hand there are a number of references to the sponsoring of windows. Occasionally it appears that it was only the glass that was sponsored as in the case c.1493 when James Lynch Fitzstephen '... at his own cost and charges put up all of the painted glasses in the church of St. Nicholas' [Galway]'.<sup>24</sup> But at Athenry friary

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<sup>21</sup> 'DNS ODO DECANUS CLUAN ME FIERI FECIT'. Dean Odo O Malone of Clonmacnoise died in 1461.

<sup>22</sup> 'MATHEU:DEI:GRA: EPS: CLONFERTENS: ET PATRE' ONEACDAVAYN: CANONIE' ETS: DOMINE:FI'FECERT'

<sup>23</sup> H.G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings, III* (Dundalk, 1966), pp 113-131.

<sup>24</sup> M.J. Blake (ed.), 'Account of the Lynch family, and of memorable events of the town of Galway, written in 1815 by John, son of Alexander, Lynch', *JGHAS*, 8 (1912), 89.

Edward Lynch (d.1462), as part of other repairs to the church, was responsible for making new windows '*sculptis et vitratis*'.<sup>25</sup> The joint commissioning of stone tracery and glass [p. 79] would certainly explain the presence of the carvings of a lily in a vase on a mullion of the east window at Creevelea, and a spear on a mullion from Jerpoint, which in isolation make little sense, but viewed as part of a wider iconographic scheme in stained glass are clearly parts of an Annunciation scene and perhaps a Passion scene respectively.<sup>26</sup> The sponsorship of particularly large windows may also be inferred by references to the patronage of east gables as for example at Aghalurcher by Thomas Maguire in 1443 and by Lady Isabella Palmer at the Franciscan friary at Kilkenny some time before her death in 1347.<sup>27</sup>

### *Cloister arcades*

A less public feature to be decorated with stone sculpture during the period was the cloister arcade. A number of Franciscan friaries including Adare and Askeaton incorporate self-contained carved stone images of the patron saint set within their own 'micro-architectural' frame.<sup>28</sup>

The placement of imagery of the patron saint within this contemplative space is wholly appropriate. However, at Jerpoint abbey the lavish display of sculpture that covers the surviving parts of the cloister bases, piers and capitals is less easy to explain. Partially reconstructed in the 1950s, the cloister contains over twenty-five colonettes sculptured with figures that include Apostles, popular European saints, ecclesiastics, knights and aristocratic ladies. These are combined with 'marginalia' that range from dragons to squirrels to monkeys, described by Edwin Rae as 'witticisms of the chisel'.<sup>29</sup> The *raison d'être* of the sculpture here is uncertain, particularly given its setting in a Cistercian context, although the prominent inclusion of aristocratic laity in the scheme suggests that it may have functioned as an elaborate memorial for the benefactors of the abbey.<sup>30</sup> There is certainly some precedent for the commemoration of benefactors in this setting. At Holycross abbey a shield in the cloister arcade inscribed with a crozier

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<sup>25</sup> 'Athenry Register', 211.

<sup>26</sup> Large sections of the east window tracery from Jerpoint, including the two sections of mullion with the spear/ lance carving, are stored in the chapter house at the site.

<sup>27</sup> W.M. Hennessey (ed.), *Annals of Ulster from the earliest times to the year 1541* (Dublin, 1887) iii, p. 161; R. Butler (ed.), *The Annals of Ireland by friar John Clyn and Thaddy Dowling, together with the annals of Ross*, (Dublin, 1849), pp xxvii, 34.

<sup>28</sup> See Ó Clabaigh this volume

<sup>29</sup> E. Rae, 'The Sculpture of the Cloister at Jerpoint Abbey', *JRSAI*, 96 (1966), 59-91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

and Crucifixion above records the patronage of abbot Dionysius O Congail,<sup>31</sup> and at Bective, a sculpture of a kneeling abbot complete with heraldry occupies a cloister pier.

Overt records of the patronage of other parts of church buildings are also recorded through the medium of stone sculpture. The addition of towers to a number of religious houses during the fifteenth century became a point of focus [ p.80] for patrons, partly one suspects due to their prominence in the landscape, but also perhaps because of their association with the commemorative ringing of church bells.<sup>32</sup> Patronage is commemorated again through 'portraits' of the donors heads on corbels, depicted as though literally supporting the towers above them, as at Sligo friary (fig. 4) where angels holding shields, which one presumes were originally painted, flank a male and female head, both with elaborate headdresses. At Hore abbey the identity of the donor is indicated in a more playful manner, a stone shield bearing the arms of the Earl of Ormond carved as if 'hanging' from a stone hook.

The former existence of chantry chapels or private chapels is also occasionally indicated by the presence of sculpture demarcating space. This is perhaps most explicit at Kilcooley abbey where the wall that separates the choir from the sacristy is decorated with a number of apparently unrelated sculptures including a crucifixion, St. Christopher, a pelican and an ecclesiastic. Also prominently displayed are two heraldic shields that have led Roger Stalley to [p. 81] suggest that it may have functioned as the entrance to a private chapel for the Ormonds.<sup>33</sup>

These few examples provide a clear indication of the close relationship between the benefactors, whether secular or ecclesiastic, and the decorative embellishment of the church. While there is little indication of any significant concern on the part of the church authorities to exercise a tight control on this, legislation from provincial synods suggests that there was a desire to insure certain standards with liturgical fittings, including the material from which they were constructed.

### *Altars*

While some evidence has been put forward to suggest the use of wooden altars during the later middle ages, stone was the preferred material for these, the most significant of

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<sup>31</sup> R. Stalley, *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland* (London and New Haven, 1987), pp 113-15.

<sup>32</sup> See for example (ed.) R. Gillespie, *The proctor's accounts of Peter Lewis 1564-5* (Dublin, 1996), pp 16, 28, 109, and in an English context, P. Heath, 'Urban piety in the later middle ages; the evidence of Hull wills' in B. Dobson (ed.), *The church, politics, and patronage in the fifteenth century* (Gloucester, 1984), p. 217.

<sup>33</sup>Stalley, *Cistercian Monasteries*, p. 196.



liturgical fittings.<sup>34</sup> As early as 1186, legislation issued by Archbishop John Comyn prohibited

‘priests from celebrating mass on a wooden table according to the usage of Ireland: and enjoin[ed] that in all monasteries and baptismal churches altars should be made of stone: and if a stone of sufficient size to cover the whole altar cannot be had...a square and polished stone be fixed in the middle of the altar where Christ’s body is consecrated, of a compass broad enough to contain five crosses and also to bear the foot of the largest chalice’.

Only in chapels, chantries and oratories were altars permitted to be wooden, and even here a plate of stone was to be ‘firmly fixed’ in the wood.<sup>35</sup>

Given this decree, the rarity of surviving carved stone altars is surprising. This may be explicable partly through the iconoclastic destruction of altars, or due to the use of altar cloths, which, according to Comyn’s decree were to spread from the upper part of the altar to the ground in front, thus largely obscuring the front of the altar structure. Testamentary evidence suggests that bequests of altar cloths were particularly popular,<sup>36</sup> and it is probable that at least some of these textiles may themselves have incorporated imagery.<sup>37</sup> However, the rare survival of a carved stone high altar at the Dominican friary in Sligo demonstrates that at least some altars did incorporate carved elements. The altar table, [ p. 82] now broken, preserves a partial inscription JOHAN [.....] ME FIE[R]I FECIT and interlaced design incorporating the standard five consecration crosses. The front of the altar is divided into nine, now blank, panels, framed by cusped ogee headed arches with various foliate decorations, including one with a vine.<sup>38</sup> Stylistically very similar to the Sligo frontal are the fragments now incorporated into the reconstructed medieval altar at Rathmore parish church, Co. Meath. The spandrels of these cusped arches are filled with eight shields, six of which bear one or more coats of arms.<sup>39</sup> On each end of the altar there is a panel, at the north end depicting St.

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<sup>34</sup> P. Harbison, ‘A medieval carved wooden altar-support (?) from St. Patrick’s Well, Clonmel’, *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1995), 175-6. An ‘*altare lignum*’ is mentioned as one of the gifts to the friary at Athenry; ‘Athenry Register’, 208.

<sup>35</sup> The Latin text of this and the other decrees survives in an 18th century transcription in the so-called *Novum Registrum* at Christ Church cathedral Dublin. The Latin version is published in A. Gwynn, ‘Provincial and Diocesan Decrees of the Diocese of Dublin During the Anglo-Norman Period’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 11 (1944), 39-44. This translation into English is taken from R. Mant, *History of the Church of Ireland* ( Dublin, 1840 ), i, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup> M. Murphy, ‘The High Cost of Dying; an Analysis of Pro Anima Bequest in Medieval Dublin’ in W.J. Shiels and D. Wood (eds), *The Church and Wealth* (Oxford, 1987), p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> See for example G. Powell and J. Wilson, ‘The Chipping Campden altar hangings’, *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society*, 115 (1997), 223-43.

<sup>38</sup> H.S. Crawford, ‘The carved altar and mural monuments in Sligo Abbey’, *JRSAI*, 51 (1921), 17-31.

<sup>39</sup> H.G. Leask, ‘Rathmore Church’, *JRSAI*, 63 (1933), 153-166.

Lawrence flanked by censing angels, and on the south end the figures of two male ecclesiastics, one with a crozier and one with a cross headed staff, and an abbess. Prior to the reconstruction of the altar these end panels had been interpreted as part of a tomb. It is possible that other *ex situ* fragments of altars may exist but are equally misinterpreted.

In many cases large stained glass windows would have served the function of altar retable, however, there is some evidence to suggest the importation, probably from the fourteenth century, of alabaster retables from England. An inquisition held before Nicholas Comyn, mayor of Limerick in 1537 records 'a [re]table of alabaster' found at the high altar of the friary of St. Augustine in Limerick,<sup>40</sup> and the unusual style and iconography of sculpture at Ennis friary and at St. John's Tralee has been attributed to the influence of alabaster imports.<sup>41</sup> A sole example of what may have been a stone retable of native manufacture, although perhaps copying an imported model, is preserved at Strade friary (fig. 5). Divided into three panels, the slab depicts a Pietà flanked on either side by kneeling donors.<sup>42</sup>

### *Sedilia and piscinae*

With the introduction of the Sarum rite to Ireland in the late twelfth century, provision was made for a 'lavatory of stone or wood to be hollow, so that post communion washings may pass to the earth' and for sedilia for officiating clergy.<sup>43</sup> By the fifteenth century a large number of piscinae were being constructed of [ p. 83] stone, and generally formed an intrinsic part of the church structure. Carved ornament on these liturgical fittings is most commonly abstract, comprising elaborate mouldings and sometimes the use of foliate motifs. Exceptions to this are found at Rosserk friary where the double piscina arch is adorned with angels, one holding a hammer and the other three nails and a small carving of a round tower, while the piscina at Holycross abbey (fig. 7) incorporates a small figure of a monk in prayer located at the apex of the piscina arch. At St. Patrick's church, Trim there is an unusual example of a partially free-standing, pillar piscina (fig. 6). Carved on four sides of the octagonal pedestal are angels bearing the heraldry of James Butler, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Ormond, the Royal arms, and those of

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<sup>40</sup> P. Fitzgerald, *The history, topography and antiquities of the city and county of Limerick* (Dublin, 1826-7), ii, p. 568.

<sup>41</sup> J. Hunt, 'The influence of alabaster carvings on medieval sculpture in Ennis Friary', *NMAJ*, 17(1975), 35-41; P. Harbison, 'Some medieval sculpture in Kerry', *JKAHS*, 6 (1973), 14-16. For surviving fragments of alabaster preserved in Ireland see J. Hunt and P. Harbison, 'Medieval English alabasters in Ireland', *Studies*, 65 (1976), 310-21.

<sup>42</sup> J. Hunt, *Irish medieval figure sculpture 1200-1600* (Dublin, 1974), i, p.202, ii, pl. 256.

<sup>43</sup> Gwynn, 'Provincial decrees', 41.

Richard Plantagent, Duke of York. On the rim of the octagonal basin are creatures including a manticora, the fox and the goose, taken it would appear from the moralizing tales of the Bestiary.<sup>44</sup>

Often located adjacent to piscinae in the south wall of the choir are stone sedilia. The production of sedilia from stone is commonplace in England during this period, but not so on continental Europe, suggesting an obvious source of influence for their design.<sup>45</sup> At Holycross abbey (fig. 7), one of the most elaborate surviving Irish sedilia is surmounted by an elaborate vaulted canopy, replete with miniature rib vault on its underside. Carved decoration, apart from a single angel on one of the jambs, consists largely of spiky foliate pinnacles [p. 84] which frame shields bearing the Royal arms and the heraldry of the Butler and Fitzgerald families.<sup>46</sup> Other examples of stone carved sedilia at Ballylarkin, and Dunsany, incorporate miniature designs for window tracery as a major component of their decoration, reflecting a common European trend in the use of architectural drawings as a form of decoration.<sup>47</sup>

### Fonts

Although from the late twelfth century all churches were to possess a stone font, by the 1453 synod of Cashel this was obviously not the case. A decree issued in that year reiterated the necessity for every church to have a font of stone, the provision of which was the responsibility of the parishioners.<sup>48</sup> A number of sculpted stone fonts survive from the period, displaying a relatively wide range of sculpted decoration. A group found in the eastern part of the country is the most impressive, displaying a range of figurative carving. As with contemporary fonts in England, figurative scenes are [p. 85] drawn principally from the Scriptures and from works of popular devotion such as the *Hours of the Blessed Virgin*, the *Mirror of Human Salvation* and the *Golden Legend*.<sup>49</sup> Scenes illustrated include the Annunciation on the Crickstown font, the Flight into Egypt at Clonard, the Crucifixion and particularly appropriate, the Baptism of Christ at Rathmore, Drogheda and Clonard. Also common are representations of the Apostles, with all twelve represented on [p. 86] fonts at Crickstown, Dunsany (fig. 8), Kilcarne, and

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<sup>44</sup> H. Roe, *Medieval fonts of Meath* (Meath, 1968), pp 101-5.

<sup>45</sup> F. Bond, *The chancel of English churches* (London, 1911), p. 203.

<sup>46</sup> Stalley, *Cistercian Monasteries*, p. 200.

<sup>47</sup> J. Bugslag, "Architectural drafting and the 'gothicization' of the gothic cathedral" in (ed.) M. Reeve, *Reading Gothic architecture* (New York, forthcoming)

<sup>48</sup> M.J. Burrows, 'Fifteenth Century Irish Provincial Legislation and Pastoral Care' in W.J. Shiels and D. Wood (eds), *The Churches, Ireland and the Irish* (Oxford, 1989), p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> Roe, *Medieval fonts*, p. 17.

Drogheda.<sup>50</sup> Roe has pointed out that the inclusion of the Apostles, as joint authors of the Creed, was appropriate for a font, however the occasional inclusion of other saints, such as St. Margaret of Antioch, St. Catherine of Alexandria and the St. Michael are not so easily explained in the liturgical context of these furnishings. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that fonts were provided by parishioners, many also incorporate prominent heraldry. This is usually borne on shields supported by angels and in a number of cases mixed with angels bearing the *Arma Christi*.

### *Tomb sculpture*

Patronage of the church fabric and furnishings during the later medieval period was of course, not without motive. The desire to benefit one's soul was paramount, and concern for a fitting burial place and the prayers of those left behind was certainly one of the driving forces behind ecclesiastical benefaction.

Burial within the church was a key concern during the later middle ages, with keen competition for positioning close to the main altar. This prime place was [p. 87] often reserved for bishops or for particularly significant benefactors of the church, in particular founder patrons.<sup>51</sup> Indeed in some cases the foundation of a church may have come about as a direct result of the dynastic requirement for a fitting place of burial, a point stressed in the annalistic references to the foundations of a number of friaries. Thus in 1420 the Earl of Desmond founded a Franciscan friary at Askeaton and 'erected a tomb in it for himself and descendants',<sup>52</sup> and in 1464 the earl of Kildare and his wife Joan founded the friary of the same order at Adare and 'erected a tomb for themselves in it'.<sup>53</sup>

The tomb became a statement of both piety and of social or dynastic importance leading to the development of monuments that vied for prominence within the existing structure of the church. It is thus not surprising that it is in the field of tomb sculpture that we see some of the most accomplished examples of stone carving in later medieval Ireland.

Medieval tombs were first and foremost personal monuments, created to commemorate an individual or individuals. This function was transmitted in a number

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<sup>50</sup> Roe, *Medieval fonts*, pp 49-55, 37-45, 61-6; H. Roe, 'Two decorated fonts in Drogheda, Co. Louth', *JCLAHS*, 18 (1976), 255-63.

<sup>51</sup> S. Fry, *Burial in medieval Ireland, 900-1500* (Dublin, 1999), pp 169-70.

<sup>52</sup> J. O'Donovan (ed.), *Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (Dublin 1854, repr., New York, 1966), iv, p. 843.

<sup>53</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters*, iv, p. 1035.

of ways, but most commonly through the inclusion of life-sized effigies either of secular men in armour, clerics in full regalia, or ladies in high status dress, often accompanied by heraldic devices and inscriptions which left the viewer in little doubt as to the identity and social standing of the deceased. In this aspect the Irish tombs were similar to tombs being created across Europe.

On the sides of the tombs, often mixed with heraldry were 'weeper' figures. These figures derived from the European tradition of including images of mourning family and friends of the deceased and incorporated imagery that reflected contemporary liturgical, processional and burial customs.<sup>54</sup> The personalized nature of the 'weepers' together with regional variations in liturgy and burial customs produced a wide variety of characters inhabiting the sides of chest tombs. This variety is not however, so evident in Irish tomb sculpture.

Instead, as on the tomb of Pierce Fitz Óg Butler (d. 1526) at Kilcooley (fig. 9), most commonly the sides of tombs are filled with Apostles, or a limited number of popular European saints such as Ss. Margaret of Antioch, Catherine of Alexandria, Michael, Francis and Dominic. Occasionally, devotional scenes such as Christ displaying the five wounds or the Mass of saint Gregory are depicted,<sup>55</sup> and by the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Crucifixions begin to feature more prominently on the end slabs of tombs, particularly in the Pale. Indeed given the personal nature of the monuments, the homogeneity of saints and apostles depicted is quite remarkable. There is little deviation from the [p.88] favoured choice of European saints and Apostles with the rare exceptions of one-off appearances from St. Apollonia on the Purcell tomb at St. Werburgh's Dublin and Ss. Denis and Louis at Kilconnell, Co. Galway.<sup>56</sup>

Very few examples of native saints on Irish tombs can be identified with absolute certainty through associated inscriptions; Ss. Carthage and Patrick on the McCragh tomb at Lismore, St. Patrick on the Rice tomb in Waterford cathedral and St. Brigid on the tomb of an unidentified patron at Cashel cathedral.<sup>57</sup> Of course, the apparent lack of Irish saints may be partly due to the problem of recognition. The visual depiction of Apostles and European saints had a long tradition and had developed a strong visual language of their own. Evidence for visual representations of Irish saints before the

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<sup>54</sup> A. Martindale, 'Patrons and minders: the intrusion of the secular into sacred spaces in the later middle ages' in D. Wood (ed), *The Church and the Arts* (Oxford, 1992), 168-178.

<sup>55</sup> M. Phelan, 'Irish Sculpture Portraying the Five Wounds of Our Saviour' in E. Rynne (ed.), *Irish Figures from the Past* (Dublin, 1987), pp 242-8.

<sup>56</sup> Hunt, *Irish Medieval Sculpture*, pp 142-3, 150-1, pls. 205, 257

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 232, 234, 222, pls. 337, 272, 323.

Anglo-Norman conquest is scant. In the late twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis mentions that 'all representations of St. Kevin throughout Ireland have a blackbird in the outstretched hand',<sup>58</sup> but most Irish saints in later medieval art are depicted as clerics or nuns, identified only when their name is written adjacent to them. A good example of this difficulty is demonstrated by representations of St. Patrick. Of the numerous medieval carvings of ecclesiastics in bishops' or archbishops' dress said to represent the saint in Ireland, only three [p. 89] are associated with an inscribed identification. Of these, one is represented holding a triple cross staff, one with a single cross staff and one with an in-turned crozier, and so are of little help in establishing a typology for the depiction for the saint.<sup>59</sup> It is feasible therefore that at least some of the relatively numerous images of anonymous clerics may have been intended to represent specific Irish saints.

### *Discussion*

The location of stone sculpture within the later medieval church appears to have been used as a means of signaling the liturgically significant parts of the church, acting as a form of spatial demarcation within the building. However, unlike the earlier medieval period, by the late middle ages this demarcation extended beyond the traditional liturgical delineation to encompass a distinctive secular social presence in the form of donor portraits, heraldry and tombs not previously manifest.

The explicit combination of sacred and secular imagery in the sacred space appears incongruous. Its apparently ready acceptance may reflect some of the more secular activities that took place in church buildings, which were after all, maintained at the expense of parishioners. At Archbishop Minot's council at Kilkenny in 1366 a decree was passed that prohibited all secular business such as the hearing of law-suits, holding of fairs or erection of secular buildings within the churches or cemeteries of the Dublin diocese- a reflection of quite how secularized the sacred space had become.<sup>60</sup> In general there appears to have been less of a firm distinction made between religious and secular subjects, a trend also noted in the mingling of the sacred and the secular in liturgical drama of the period.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Gerald of Wales, The History and Topography of Ireland*, (trans.) J. O'Meara, (London, 1982), pp 78-9.

<sup>59</sup> P. Harbison, 'Representations of St. Patrick' in A. MacShamhráin (ed.), *The Island of St. Patrick; church and ruling dynasties in Fingal and Meath, 400-1148* (Dublin, 2004), pp 89-105.

<sup>60</sup> Gwynn, 'Provincial decrees', 104-6.

<sup>61</sup> Burrows, 'Provincial Legislation', p. 66.; A. Gwynn, 'The Origins of the Anglo-Irish Theatre', *Studies*, 28 (1939), 260-74.

However, the manner in which donors were represented is somewhat surprising. Almost without exception, whether in the form of a tomb effigy, or a donor 'portrait', secular figures depicted in stone sculpture are shown dressed in aristocratic finery. Men are shown either in military attire, ecclesiastical vestments or less frequently high class civilian costume, while women are shown dressed in the highest quality of fabrics, and sporting elaborate headdresses.<sup>62</sup> Cadaver effigies, a popular means of expressing humility in death in contemporary England, are extremely rare.<sup>63</sup> Even images of donors kneeling, or dressed in more humble attire as on both the tomb and retable at Strade (fig. 5), are the exception rather than the rule.

This is particularly remarkable when one looks at the attitude of the church to elaborate costume. Contemporary English sermons suggested that the [p.90] purpose of fashionable clothing is no longer a 'necessity of nature' but is rather 'to excite lust in men as women' who are 'well compared to a painted sepulchre in which lies a foul corpse'.<sup>64</sup> Large headdresses in particular seem to have come under attack, with horned headdresses drawing inevitable comparisons with the horns of the devil.<sup>65</sup> In a fifteenth century poem from the primatial register of John Swayne, Archbishop Armagh, the poet blames the pride of women's headdresses for destroying 'this land' and prays that

'God that berreth the crowne of thornes/  
Destroy the pryde of women's hornes/  
For His dere Passione./And let never har long tails/  
That beth the Devyll of Hell  
his flaylys/ Be cause of our confusion'<sup>66</sup>

William of Stranton's early fifteenth century visions at St. Patrick's purgatory describes the tormented souls in similar attire.<sup>67</sup>

When compared with stone sculpture elsewhere, whether England or the Continent, the range of religious subjects depicted in stone is also remarkably narrow, with images of Christ, the Apostles, a narrow range of popular European saints and patron saints featured consistently in both architectural and tomb sculpture.<sup>68</sup> Particularly

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<sup>62</sup> Hunt, *Irish Medieval Sculpture*; E. Wincott Heckett, 'The Margaret Fitzgerald Tomb Effigy: A Late Medieval Headdress and Gown in St. Canice's cathedral, Kilkenny', in (eds.) D.G. Koslin and J.E. Snyder, *Encountering medieval textiles and dress: Objects, texts, images* (New York, 2003), pp 209-22.

<sup>63</sup> H. Roe, 'Cadaver Effigial Monuments in Ireland', *JRSAI*, 99 (1969), 1-19.

<sup>64</sup> John Rylands Library, Manchester, MS lat. 367, fol. 25b, quoted in M.D. Anderson, *History and imagery in British churches* (1971), p. 144.

<sup>65</sup> For further sermons on the evils of fashion see G.R. Owst, *Literature and pulpit in medieval England* (Oxford, 1966), pp 390-414.

<sup>66</sup> S.D. Seymour, 'Three Medieval Poems from Kilkenny', *PRIA*, 31 (1933), 209.

<sup>67</sup> R. Easting (ed.), *St. Patrick's purgatory* (Oxford, 1991), pp 78-117.

<sup>68</sup> For a summary of iconographical and hagiographical subjects on Irish tombs see Hunt, *Irish Medieval Sculpture*, i, pp 245-59 and in architectural sculpture C.P. Hourihane, 'The iconography of religious art in Ireland 1250-1550' (Ph.D, University of London, 1984), pp 656-68, 682-738.



conspicuous by their absence are images of local saints. This is especially surprising given the evidence both of strong personal devotion to native saints, and the efforts on the part church to promote the cults of Irish saints during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>69</sup>

### *Function of Imagery*

Eamon Duffy has described lay piety of the late middle ages in England as 'a Christianity rooted in concrete, nourished by the sight of images and the touch of relics'.<sup>70</sup> There can be little doubt that the large-scale public imagery used to adorn the entrances and interiors of churches paid a pivotal role in the lay piety of the late middle ages in Ireland too. This is particularly true when one considers the relative dearth of imagery in secular life. While there is a growing [p.91] body of evidence to suggest that the upper echelons of society would have had access to imagery, both religious and secular, in a domestic setting,<sup>71</sup> for the greater proportion of the population the church may well have provided the only regular access to imagery, with perhaps the exception of mass-produced indulgence cards or pilgrimage souvenirs.<sup>72</sup> Imagery in the church therefore provided a powerful tool for communication, but how was this tool actually used, and were different materials deployed for different functions?

As no two viewers were the same, so the experience of viewing the same image would differ considerably depending on both their visual and textual literacy and indeed their personal piety. Images depicting Christ's Passion might for example excite devotion in one viewer familiar with the scenes and their theological significance; to another unfamiliar with the gospels they might tell the story at its most basic level, while to another, it might recall the events already familiar, and perhaps serve as a catalyst for reflection. With so little contemporary commentary on individual responses to religious imagery it is impossible to state with certainty how imagery was perceived, however, an analysis of the imagery used in different media and some documentary evidence does give some insight into the function of imagery in later medieval Ireland.

### *Devotional Images*

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<sup>69</sup> Burrows, 'Provincial Legislation', pp 61-2.

<sup>70</sup> E. Duffy, 'Late Medieval Religion' in R. Marks and P. Williamson (eds), *Gothic Art for England 1400-1547* (London, 2003), 57.

<sup>71</sup> K. Morton, 'Medieval Wall Paintings at Ardmullivan', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook 2002*, 18 (Dublin, 2001), 104-107.

<sup>72</sup> M. Aston, 'The Use of Images' in R. Marks and P. Williamson (eds), *Gothic art for England 1400-1547* (London, 2003), p. 69.



By far the greatest number of direct references to imagery in medieval Irish historical sources refers to the use of images as the focus of devotion. Images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and various saints to whom chapels and altars were dedicated are referred to with relative frequency in testamentary and benefaction records, and in the annals. The large number of such images that must once have existed can also be inferred by the 1453 decree at the synod of Cashel that each parish church should possess three images, a cross, an image of Blessed Virgin and an image of the patron saint.<sup>73</sup> It is with reference to devotional practice too that we find the most frequent mention of images of native saints. We must assume that parish churches and altars dedicated to native saints would have incorporated images, and they are also documented as providing a focal point for devotion at local places of pilgrimage. Images of Ss Gobnat, Mo Cheallóg and Natalis were incorporated into the stations on pattern days at Ballyvourney, Ballyhale and Toberadaun respectively, while at St. Patrick's Purgatory images of St. Patrick, St. Avioge and St. Volusius were recorded by Bishop Spottiswood in 1632.<sup>74</sup>

[p. 92] In many cases such was the success of this visual method of arousing devotion that the distinction between the image itself and what it represented was lost, and images became cult objects of pilgrimage and veneration in their own right. This phenomenon appears to have been particularly common with images of the Virgin Mary. Our Lady of Trim is perhaps the best documented, credited miracles both in 1412, and again in 1444 when it 'restored sight of a blind man, speech to a dumb man and the use of his feet to a cripple, [and] stretched out the hand of a person to whose side it had been fastened',<sup>75</sup> while the image of Mary at Kilmore in Co. Roscommon was credited with speaking in 1391.<sup>76</sup> Images of more obscure European saints are also recorded, for example in 1435 the Augustinian house at Rathkeale sought indulgences from the Pope towards the repair of the house which had become impoverished despite the devotion of a 'venerable image of St. Radegund'.<sup>77</sup>

The levels of devotion to cult images can be traced through specific bequests to images in wills, such as the bequest of a robe to the image of the Virgin in the parish church at

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<sup>73</sup> D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae A.D. 446-1717* (London, 1737), iii, 565§3, 570 §94; J. Begley, *The diocese of Limerick, ancient and medieval* (Dublin, 1906), pp 289-94.

<sup>74</sup> C. MacLeod, 'Some mediaeval wooden figure sculptures in Ireland (*continued*), statues of Irish saints', *JRSAI*, 76 (1946), 155-7.

<sup>75</sup> A.M. Freeman (ed.), *Annals of Connaught*, (Dublin, 1944), p. 415; W.M. Hennessy (ed.), *Annals of Ulster*, (Dublin, 1887), iii, p. 63.

<sup>76</sup> *Annals of Ulster*, iii, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Calendar of Papal Records, viii, 603.

Lusk in 1472,<sup>78</sup> or requests to be buried close to them, such as that by Peter Lynch in 1554 'to be buried before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in my parish church of Lethercor'.<sup>79</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that images of local saints in particular were used to solemnize activities associated with more temporal concerns. Until its destruction in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a wooden statue of St. MacDara, kept on St. MacDara's Island off the coast of Galway was used for swearing oaths,<sup>80</sup> as too was the image of St. Ibar on Beg Eire island off the coast of Wexford.<sup>81</sup>

Almost always these objects are simply referred to as 'images' with no explicit reference to material. However, evidence from various sources suggests that, as in England, for the most part these devotional images were three-dimensional statues, constructed of wood, and often covered with precious metal and 'jewels' in a manner similar to surviving reliquaries of the period.<sup>82</sup> The accounts of monies realized from the sale of some of the possessions of suppressed Irish monasteries in 1539 would seem to support this, with a whole section dedicated to monies raised from the sale of 'jewels and ornaments found on profane images'.<sup>83</sup> In light of this, and the fact that iconoclasts particularly targeted images of 'profane worship', it is perhaps not surprising that only a small number of medieval devotional statues have survived.<sup>84</sup>

[p. 93] This is not to say that stone was never used for this function. The fragments of free-standing Pietàs at Ennis friary and Kilmurray Ibrickan, Co. Clare are the most compelling examples,<sup>85</sup> while the self-contained images of SS Francis and Dominic found in the cloisters of their respective orders may also have served this function, but these

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<sup>78</sup> H.F. Berry (ed.), *Register of Wills and Inventories for the Diocese of Dublin in the Time of Archbishops Tregury and Walton, 1457-1483* (Dublin, 1898), p. 52.

<sup>79</sup> O. Curran, *History of the Diocese of Meath 1860-1993* (Mullingar, 1995), iii, p. 1138.

<sup>80</sup> J. Hardiman (ed.), *A choreographical description of west or h-lar Connaught* (Dublin 1846), p. 98.

<sup>81</sup> P. Hore, *History of Wexford*, (Dublin, 1906) v, p.364.

<sup>82</sup> P. Lindley, 'Image and Idol' in R. Deacon and P. Lindley(eds), *Image and idol; medieval sculpture* (London, 2001), pp 29-37.

<sup>83</sup> Some of these 'ornaments' may have been *ex votos*. C. McNeill, 'Accounts of sums raised by the sales of chattels of some suppressed Irish monasteries', *JRSAI*, 12 (1922), 13-6.

<sup>84</sup> A catalogue of these was the subject of a recent, unpublished masters dissertation, J. Cochrane, 'Medieval Irish Wooden Figure Sculpture' (M.Litt., TCD, 2004). See also C. MacLeod, 'Mediaeval wooden figure sculptures in Ireland. Mediaeval Madonnas of the West', *JRSAI*, 74 (1944), 167-82; C. MacLeod, 'Mediaeval wooden figure sculptures in Ireland: the Kilcorban St. Catherine and Calvary figures', *JRSAI*, 75 (1945), 195-203. C. MacLeod, 'Mediaeval figure sculpture in Ireland (*continued*). Statues in the Holy Ghost Hospital, Waterford', *JRSAI* Vol. 76 (1946), 89-100; C. MacLeod, 'Some mediaeval wooden figure sculptures in Ireland (*continued*), statues of Irish saints', *JRSAI*, 76 (1946), 155-70. C. MacLeod, 'Some late mediaeval wood sculptures in Ireland', *JRSAI*, 77 (1947), 53-62.

<sup>85</sup> J. Hunt, 'The influence of alabaster carvings on medieval sculpture in Ennis friary', *NMAJ*, 17(1975), 38 (with appendix by P. Harbison on the Pietà from Kilmurray Brickane), 39-41; P. Harbison, 'The Ennis Pietà fragment', *The Other Clare*, 8 (1984), 13-14.

would appear to be the exception rather than the rule. Rather than falling into the category of 'cult images' these may have been intended to provide a focus for contemplation and an interiorized religious experience.<sup>86</sup>

### *Didactic function*

A popular interpretation placed on much imagery from the middle ages is that it was produced to act as a text book for the illiterate, depicting an easily 'readable' form of the scriptures for the uneducated public.<sup>87</sup> To be most effective, images with this purpose needed to be clearly legible, and, to fulfill a truly didactic function effectively, needed to present a series of images, clearly related to one another, so that a narrative could actually be deciphered rather than simply recalled.

Narrative scenes in Irish medieval art generally are rare. References to images that may possibly have served a didactic function do occur, but tend refer to media which have long since been destroyed. In his account of works to Christ Church cathedral Dublin in 1564, the proctor, Peter Lewis describes the boards that filled the arch behind the rood 'wher the story of the passion was peyntyd',<sup>88</sup> while the reference to 'the chapel of Christ judging' in the south west corner of the choir of St. Nicholas' church Galway implies an illustration of the Last Judgment, probably either painted or in glass.<sup>89</sup> The painted *tabulem* (retable?) imported from Flanders by William Butler and Agnes Bonater for the friary at Athenry is also described as having contained narrative imagery.<sup>90</sup>

The technical expertise and scale required to carve complex narrative scenes in hard carboniferous limestone doubtless explains why so few of this type of image survive in medieval Irish churches. The exceptional examples of the panels depicting scenes leading up to the Passion now built into the Creagh tomb at [p. 94] Ennis (fig. 10), and the Assumption scene at St. John's Tralee appear to reflect unusual examples of the copying of imported alabaster carvings rather than a standard practice.

### *Recall*

In his writings on the use of religious art, St. Bonaventure suggested that together with the two functions of religious art discussed above it was useful 'on account of the

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<sup>86</sup> Marks, *Image and devotion*, p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> L.G. Duggan, 'Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?', *Word and Image*, 5:3 (1989), 227-251.

<sup>88</sup> R. Gillespie (ed.), *The Proctor's Accounts of Peter Lewis, 1564-5* (Dublin, 1996), p. 39.

<sup>89</sup> J. McErlean, 'Notes on the Pictorial Map of Galway (continued): The index to the map', *JGHAS*, 4 (1906), 144.

<sup>90</sup>'Athenry Register', 209.

transitory nature of memory, because those things which are only heard fall into oblivion more easily than those things which are seen'.<sup>91</sup>

The predominant imagery in later medieval Irish stone sculpture would seem to suggest its deliberate selection for this mnemonic function. Patronage of the church was closely aligned to the concern for salvation and a swifter passage through the after world, aided by the prayers of the clergy and congregations whose churches had benefited from the departed soul's munificence. The more visible the reminder of the individual's generosity, the more likely it was that they would be remembered in the prayers of the community. The depiction of patrons in their worldly finery, though hardly expressive of their humility in life, or in the [p. 95] face of death, would have instilled a certain sense of honour in the viewer's mind, akin to that instilled by the images of saints nearby, encouraging viewer to remember them in their prayers.

The apparently narrow selection of religious iconography can also be at least partially explained within this context. Religious imagery carved in stone almost inevitably draws not directly from the gospels, but rather from the oral tradition of prayer. Could the placement of Apostles as weeper figures around the sides of tombs be a prompt to the living to pray for the souls of the departed? The text and imagery of the James Rice and Katherina Brown tomb at Waterford cathedral would certainly suggest this. The tomb bears the inscription

'...You who stand here and consider that what I am you will be, I was what you are, I beg you pray for me that when it is your fate to pass through the gate of death our Christ who has come to redeem the lost lest the redeemed are damned, will have pity'.<sup>92</sup>

Except for the omission of St. Paul, the Apostles on this tomb are depicted not as they occur in the gospel, but in the sequence of the order of the litany of the saints in the Roman missal, the same sequence used in the Creed at this period and were thus an illustration of the spoken prayer.<sup>93</sup>

The use of imagery such as Christ displaying the five wounds corresponds to the popularity of the cult expressed contemporaneously through the medium of bardic poetry,<sup>94</sup> while other imagery may have been selected not just to recall popular prayers but prayers that were associated with indulgences. Indulgence images of the Mass of St.

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<sup>91</sup> Translation taken from C. Garside Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts* (London and New Haven, 1966), p.91.

<sup>92</sup> Hunt, *Irish Medieval Sculpture*, i, p. 235.

<sup>93</sup> E. Rae, 'The Rice Monument in Waterford Cathedral', *PRIA*, 69C (1970), 8.

<sup>94</sup> S. Ryan, 'Reign of blood: devotion to the wounds of Christ in late medieval Ireland' in J. Augusteijn and M. A. Lyons (eds), *Irish history: a research yearbook* (Dublin, 2002), pp 137-149.

Gregory appear with some frequency in 15<sup>th</sup> century English prayer books,<sup>95</sup> and depictions of the *Arma Christi* which occur on doorways, liturgical fittings and tombs may have had their source in small printed sheets issued as pardons to those who would 'pyteously behoild these Armys Christi'.<sup>96</sup> The universality of this imagery would have made it instantly recognisable to a wide audience, thus making the iconography of essentially private monuments such as tombs accessible to the widest possible audience.

This concern with universality may also explain the apparent lack of native saints depicted in the medium of stone. As demonstrated above, the few, labelled examples of local saints are depicted in a homogeneous way, either in episcopal or archiepiscopal garb. To a local audience one must assume such images were [p. 96] allocated a specific identity, however the universal manner of depiction may also have served as a useful means of recalling personal devotion to any indigenous saint and not simply that prescribed by a monument's patron.

The selection of stone over other materials for this mnemonic function was an obvious one. Although references to the use of specific materials in contemporary sources for religious art are rare, where stone is specifically mentioned, it tends to be singled out in a particular way. Specific reference to the use of stone in the manufacture of tombs will often occur in the context of the establishment of a family or dynastic tomb, where the provision of the tomb for both its patron, but also his or her descendants is referenced. This implication of aspirational posterity for such monuments, and by association patrons' memory, is perhaps most explicitly stated in the *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaig* with the request that the great hero Donnchad O Briain be buried in 'a *permanent* and worthy tomb' [my italics].<sup>97</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The later medieval church in Ireland was adorned using a range of media and a much broader *corpus* of imagery than has survived to the present day. An analysis of the predominant imagery carved in stone suggests that the material was singled out for its durable qualities and for use as a mnemonic device to ensure that financial generosity to the church during life was not forgotten in death. The prominence of this imagery now is perhaps a little misleading, painting a picture of two worlds, the secular and the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 142

<sup>96</sup> F. Lewis, 'Rewarding devotion: indulgences and the promotion of images' in D. Wood (ed.), *The Church and the Arts* (Oxford, 1992), pp 179-94; Roe, 'Fonts at Drogheda', 256.

<sup>97</sup> S. Hayes O'Grady (ed. and trans.), *Caithréim Thoirdhealbhaig* (London, 1929), ii, p.107

sacred, occupying the same space, with little obvious distinction drawn between the two. One only needs to return to the example of the tomb sketched by Dineley at Quin, to realise that often carved stone provided a mere foundation or framework for a much more complex range of more explicitly religious imagery. Stone sculpture is just one aspect of a much richer church interior now lost, evoked by this anonymous sixteenth century description of Holycross abbey ;

[p. 97] 'The true church of the Lord's cross, with its stone monuments and coffins and hosts of angels in reverence, a house full of books and light and music and psalms.

A sanctuary inviolable hung with gold and variegated tapestry, a bright castle with carved doorways, a house full of books and light and the music of psalms. The Lord's Cross is our treasure, every stone of its wall being marble: the wood of it has surpassed all others: I marvel at its wood-work.

'Tis a castle with many a fair story: in it can meet all the men of Eire; its wondrousness has exalted God's glory; 'tis a fairy like abode of virgins and saints'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> L. McKenna (ed. and trans.), *Aithdioghluim dana : a miscellany of Irish bardic poetry, historical and religious, including the historical poems of the Duanaire in the Yellow book of Lecan* (Dublin, 1939-40), ii, pp 202-203.

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3. Detail of the west doorway at Clontuskert. (photo: Edwin Rae © Triarc, Irish Art Research Centre)
4. North-western tower corbel, Sligo friary. (photo: Edwin Rae © Triarc, Irish Art Research Centre)
5. Altar retable, Strade friary (photo: the author)
6. Pillar piscine, St. Patrick's church, Trim. (photo: Edwin Rae © Triarc, Irish Art Research Centre)
7. Sedilia and piscine, Holycross abbey (photo: the author)
8. Font, Dunsany parish church. (photo: Edwin Rae © Triarc, Irish Art Research Centre)
9. Tomb of Piers Fitz Og Butler, Kilcooley abbey. (photo: the author)
10. Panel from the Creagh tomb, Ennis friary (photo: the author)