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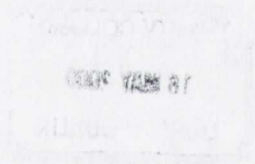
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# **IRISH BOOK SHRINES: A REASSESSMENT**

## **VOLUME I (B)**

By

Paul Anthony Mullarkey

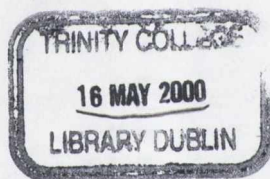


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## CHAPTER FOUR: THE SHRINE OF THE CATHACH

### HISTORY

The history of the Shrine of the Cathach is inextricably linked with the manuscript formerly contained within, the Cathach, which was believed to have been written by St Columba.<sup>1</sup> The earliest known reference to the Cathach's association with Columba is found in the Book of Fenagh, a text which has been dated to the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In the relevant episode, Columba, after the battle of Cúil Dréimne in 561, visits St Caillin of Fenagh, asks for forgiveness and prophesises the arrival of a great abbot to Fenagh. In return he grants, among other things, the Cathach 'which he wrote himself ...', a copy of the Gospels called the *Cethir lebor* and a third of his monastic revenues. He declared that 'those relics would be ensigns of victory and triumph to the monks and people of Caillin until doom ....'<sup>3</sup> It has been proposed that the incident was intended to explain the presence of the shrine at Fenagh. This may have occurred when the Cenél Conaill surrendered hostages to a combined force of Anglo-Normans and their Connacht allies, which included the O'Rourkes, the patrons of Fenagh, at Drumhome in 1242.<sup>4</sup>

An earlier reference to a cathach is cited in the text known as *Aided Muirchertach Meic Erca*.<sup>5</sup> In the relevant section of this text, Muirchertach, king of Tara, while under the spell of the Banshee, Sín, drove his wife, children and friends from his palace of Cleitech on the river Boyne. The Queen went to her confessor, St Cairnech, who cursed the king and took them all under his protection. A translation of the excerpt pertaining to the Misach is provided by O'Curry:

Saint Cairnech then cursed the palace, and blessed a certain place there, after which he departed from it in grief and sadness ... Cairnech blessed them, and he left them gifts, i.e. to the clanns of Conall and Eoghan ... and

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<sup>1</sup> RIA MS 12 R.33. For a bibliography of the manuscript see Alexander (1978, no.4). Dr Bernard Meehan, Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, has expressed the opinion (pers. comm.) that the manuscript is likely to be contemporary with St Columba (ob. 597). The meaning of the term Cathach will be explained and discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 123.

<sup>3</sup> Hennessey and Kelly 1875, 166-8; Macalister 1939, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 123; ALC 1242.

<sup>5</sup> See Nic Dhonnchadha (1964) for critical edition and for a more recent comment Ó Floinn (1995b, 123-4). This text is also discussed in the Misach chapter (pp.292-93).



that victory of battle should be theirs, provided they gave it in a just cause; and that they had these three standards, namely, the Cathach; and the Cloc Phatraic; and the Misach Chairnigh; and that the virtue of all these should be upon any one relic of them against battle; such as St Cairnech left them.<sup>6</sup>

The manuscript in which the passage appears is dated to 1401,<sup>7</sup> but recent research has suggested an eleventh century date for the composition of the text.<sup>8</sup> Ó Floinn also subscribes to an earlier date due to the reference to an Armagh relic, the Bell of St Patrick, as it was enshrined during the abbacy of Domnall mac Amalgada between 1091 and 1105.<sup>9</sup> However, although the Cathach is referred to by name, there is no implied association with St Columba. Lucas and Ó Floinn have provided numerous examples for the use of relics and shrines as battle standards, many of which were named after compounds of the word *cath* which translates as battle.<sup>10</sup>

In 1532 Manus O'Donnell compiled a comprehensive biography of Columba, and included the traditions and rituals associated with the Cathach and its shrine as the O'Donnells were Columba's kinsmen.<sup>11</sup> The traditions linking the manuscript to Columba, his involvement in the battle of Cúil Dréimne, and Columba's subsequent exile to Iona were critically assessed by Lawlor, whose version is employed here.<sup>12</sup> Columba visited his former master, St Finnian of Druim Finn,<sup>13</sup> and borrowed his book/psalter in order to study it. He surreptitiously transcribed the book over a number of nights with the aid

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<sup>6</sup> O'Curry 1861, 599-600. For slightly different readings of this passage see Reeves (1857, 329 n.g); Petrie (1878, 102); Armstrong et. al (1922, 110-112) and Henry (1970, 90). Byrne (1973, 100-103) provides a more comprehensive translation of the tale.

<sup>7</sup> Trinity College Ms H 27; Abbot and Gwynn 1921, 99.

<sup>8</sup> McCone (1990, 147) has examined the political and ecclesiastical background of this text and has cited evidence for dating it to the eleventh century. However, this date has not yet found general acceptance by other scholars in the field.

<sup>9</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 124-5.

<sup>10</sup> DIL; Lucas 1986, 17-20; Ó Floinn 1995b, 124-5. A discussion on the use of book shrines as battle standards will be provided in Chapter 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Betha Colaim Chille*. For the critical edition see O'Kelleher and Schoepperle (1918) and Kenny (1929, 442). For an assessment of Manus as a Renaissance prince, where he is described as a 'scholar, humanist and aesthete' see Bradshaw (1979, 35).

<sup>12</sup> Lawlor 1916, 292-307. He based his account on O'Donnell's *Betha Colaim Chille*.

<sup>13</sup> Lawlor (1916, 312) identifies this site as Dromin, between Ardee and Dunleer, Co Louth.

of a miraculous light which streamed from his fingers. When Finnian discovered the deceit, he confronted Columba and demanded the surrender of the copy. Columba refused, so they journeyed to Tara where they appealed to Diarmait Mac Cerbhaill, king of Ireland, to act as an arbitrator. He consented, and after consideration proclaimed his renowned judgement: 'To every cow her calf - and to every book its copy'. He then instructed the saint to return the transcript, but again Columba resisted and voiced his displeasure with the decision.

At that time, Curnan mac Aedh, son of the king of Connacht, was a hostage from his father at the court of king Diarmait. A dispute arose between Curnan and the son of the steward of Tara at a hurling match, where the latter died after being struck with a hurley by Curnan. He then placed himself under the protection of Columba, who was then present at Tara, but Diarmait Mac Cerbhaill violated Columba's protection, captured Curnan, and put him to death. Columba threatened the king, fled with his attendants and eventually reached Tir Conaill where he incited his cousins to forge an alliance with the king of Connacht and engage in battle. The result was the battle of Cúil Dréimne (561 AD), situated between Sligo and Drumcliffe.<sup>14</sup> The night prior to battle the Archangel Michael appeared to Columba and forecast victory, but admonished him that God was displeased with his role in the battle and that he should exile himself beyond Ireland. Diarmait and his men were vanquished and the Cathach passed into the hands of the O'Donnells. The following year Columba was sentenced to exile by the ecclesiastics gathered at the synod held at Tailtin and subsequently journeyed to Iona in 563.<sup>15</sup>

The shrine was used as a battle talisman in the later medieval period. Manus O'Donnell provides an account of this ritual:

The 'Cathach' for a sooth is the name of that book by reason wherof the battle was fought. And it is covered with silver under gold. And to open it is not lawful. And if it is borne thrice sunwise round the host of the clan of Conall when they go into battle, they come back safe in triumph. And it is in the form a successor or a cleric that is so far as may be without mortal sin, that the Cathach should be borne around the host.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Byrne (1973, 95) specifies the location as 'the foot of Benbulbin at Drumcliff'.

<sup>15</sup> Columba's exile will be reviewed in the discussion section (pp.277-79).

<sup>16</sup> O'Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918, 178, 182-3.



Some of these battles involving the shrine have been chronicled in the annals. The shrine was seized from the O'Donnell's in 1497 but retrieved two years later.

The Cathach of Columbkille was also taken from them; (at the battle of Bealach Buidhe<sup>17</sup> against the MacDermott of Moylurg) and Magroarty, the keeper of it was slain.<sup>18</sup>

And the Cathach of Colum-cille was wrested from them then and its steward (MacRobhartaigh) was slain in that defeat.<sup>19</sup>

O'Donnell marched with an army against Cormac MacDermott, (after ravages), he repaired to O'Donnell, and concluded a perpetual peace .... He (also) returned to him the Cathach ....<sup>20</sup>

And the Cathach, which was for two years before that out of possession of Ua Domhnaill, and other pledges that were for him in Magh-Luirg were restored to him....<sup>21</sup>

A battle took place ... (between the O'Neills and the O'Donnells) ... and Magroarty, who had the custody of the Cathach of St Columbkille (fell in battle).<sup>22</sup>

A covering leaf prefixed to The Book of Fenagh contains the following passages pertaining to the Cathach:

And also should losse the Caagh or Cachboagh: w<sup>ch</sup> yf they lost should be to there ouerthrowes in all Battle or feights whersover for y<sup>e</sup> interpretinge of the name Cachboagh is Victory in Battles.... Also he doth admonish the sept of Conell Gubon, w<sup>ch</sup> is y<sup>e</sup> Odonells to looke well to the Caagh that it should not come to the hands of Englishmen: w<sup>ch</sup> yf yt did it should be to the overthrow and confusion of the sept of Conell Gubon and to the great and to the great honnor of y<sup>e</sup> English etc.<sup>23</sup>

The Book of Fenagh was compiled in 1535 and the insertion is later in date,

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<sup>17</sup> Ballyboy, near Boyle, Co Roscommon.

<sup>18</sup> AFM 1497.

<sup>19</sup> AU 1497.

<sup>20</sup> AFM 1499

<sup>21</sup> AU 1499.

<sup>22</sup> AFM 1567. However the Cathach was not captured, it was later retrieved from the battle field.

<sup>23</sup> Macalister 1939, 8.

probably late sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The warning in the excerpt pertaining to the loss of the shrine may relate to the episode when the Cathach was captured from the O'Donnells in 1497.

This review of the history and traditions of the manuscript and shrine confirms that the first mention occurs in the thirteenth century, when it was associated with St Columba. The next appearance in the historical record is 1497 when it was captured at the battle of Ballyboy. Ó Floinn has traced the movement and location of the shrine from the early tenth century. He has correctly dismissed Reeves, Petrie's and Henry's arguments<sup>25</sup> for seeing the Cathach as been kept respectively at Kilmacrenan, Co Donegal,<sup>26</sup> Tory Island and the monasteries of Inishowen.<sup>27</sup> The other location, first mentioned by Colgan,<sup>28</sup> is Ballymagroarty, in the parish of Drumhome, Co Donegal, and there is also a Ballymagroarty townland in the Templemore parish on the outskirts of Derry.<sup>29</sup> Both have Columban associations. In the early tenth century Cináed Mac Domnaill is recorded as joint abbot of Derry and Drumhome. He was a member of a collateral branch of the Cenél Lugdach, which in turn produced the Mac Robartaigh family, the coarbs of the Cathach. It may have been as early as the mid-thirteenth century when the Cathach was transferred from Derry to Drumhome. The O'Donnells had a policy of planting the former Ua Cannannáin and Ua Máel Doraid lands among themselves, their supporters and the church. The Mac Robartaigh family were probably granted lands at Ballymagroarty in south Donegal by their patrons when the locus of O'Donnell power moved from Kilmacrenan to Assaroe.<sup>30</sup>

So far the evidence presented has shown the presence of the Cathach, and its shrine, in the mid-thirteenth century (Book of Fenagh), in 1532 (the composition of Manus

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup> Reeves 1857, 320; Petrie 1878, 91; Henry 1970, 90.

<sup>26</sup> This site was the inauguration place of the O'Donnells.

<sup>27</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 119-20.

<sup>28</sup> Colgan 1647, 495, n.61.

<sup>29</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, nn.180-1.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 122-3. The MacRobartaigh coarbs and their lineage will be discussed in greater detail in the Inscription and Discussion sections.



O'Donnel's *Betha*) and in 1497, 1499 and 1567 (annal entries). Ó Cochláin has argued that the shrine was brought to Kinsale during the winter campaign of 1601/2, and although this may be possible, there is no record of the shrine's participation in the battle.<sup>31</sup> He has also claimed that Hugh O'Donnel was 'the most likely person to have taken over the custody of the Cathach from the MacRobartaigh prior to his death in 1618 as the coarbs had become impoverished through the ravages of the Plantation and the Confederate war.'<sup>32</sup> As referred to above, the next mention of the shrine is 1647, when Colgan claims to have seen it in the church of Ballymagroarty, parish of Drumhome, Co Donegal. However by 1786 the shrine had disappeared from Drumhome.<sup>33</sup>

### The military career of Daniel O'Donell

The shrine subsequently turned up some 150 years later in a Continental monastery awaiting a claimant. It was formerly in the possession of Daniel O'Donnell, descended from Hugh, brother of Manus, who, as noted above, compiled the *Betha Colaim-Chille*.<sup>34</sup> Daniel was of the Ramelton branch of the O'Donnells but the head of the Larkfield branch was regarded as The O'Donnell by the Irish.<sup>35</sup> He was born in 1665 and commenced his military career when he rallied to the Jacobite cause in the Williamite struggle. He was captain of a company in 1688 and colonel of a regiment by 1689.<sup>36</sup> After the Williamite victory Daniel decided not to return to Donegal, and under the terms of the Treaty of Limerick he took his regiment to France, bringing the Cathach with him.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ó'Cochláin 1968, 162-5. Doherty (1895, 582) states, without any supporting evidence, that the shrine accompanied the Flight of the Earls from Rathmullan in 1607. However Ó'Cochláin (1968, 163) contends that the earls would not have been permitted to appropriate the shrine as the O'Donnells were only the guardians, not the coarbs.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 164. By 1665 there were no recorded members of the MacRobartaigh family in the parish of Drumhome, Co Donegal.

<sup>33</sup> Archdall 1786, 95.

<sup>34</sup> O'Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918.

<sup>35</sup> See Ó'Cochláin (163-6) for the lineage of the relevant O'Donnell family members.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 165-6.

<sup>37</sup> He had a varied and distinguished military career. He arrived in France and was assigned to the Irish Regiment of Marine; was gazetted captain on the 4th of February 1692 and attained the rank of lieutenant colonel on the 20th October 1705. He was commissioned a colonel on 7th August 1708 and was granted a pension on the 2nd April 1712. However his regiment was reformed in February 1715 and he was elevated to a Brigadier on 1st February 1719. He finally retired to St Germain-en-Laye in 1719. Further details of his military career are provided by Ó Cochláin (1968, 167-8).

Ó Cochláin's has proposed a number of reasons for O'Donel taking the Cathach to France. He wanted to continue to employ the shrine as a battle standard and/or wanted to retain it in his possession for safe keeping. Another motivation was that he did not want this renowned relic of his homeland to fall into the hands of the new regime. He repaired and had a silver frame made for the shrine in 1723 and had it emblazoned with the arms which had been confirmed on him by the Herald at the Court of James III in 1709.<sup>38</sup> The frame was designed so as to protect the sides of the shrine and prevent further damage, and to record his interventions.<sup>39</sup> O'Donel then deposited the Cathach in a Continental monastery in accordance with his instructions some time before his death. He died penniless on 7th July 1735 at St Germain-en-Laye.

### Rediscovery

The shrine was located in c.1802 and one report is that Fr Patrick Prendergast, parish priest and last titular Abbot of Cong, learned of its existence while attending a chapter of the Augustinian order in Belgium.<sup>40</sup> He may have come across O'Donel's will which would have indicated the whereabouts of the shrine. On his return to Ireland he informed Niall O'Donnell of Newport, Mayo, of his discovery.<sup>41</sup> Other accounts state that the shrine was located in Paris by Sir Niall's son-in-law, Sir Capel Molyneux, who was there in 1802 during the short peace.<sup>42</sup> Ó Cochláin favoured the Prendergast theory as he considered it unlikely that a protestant gentleman like Molyneux would frequent Catholic institutions.<sup>43</sup> The Cathach was probably in Paris and the news of its location reached

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 168-9.

<sup>39</sup> The inscription on the frame is in latin; a translation is provided by Betham in his pedigree of the O'Donnells (GO Ms. No. 169, p.31): 'While James 3<sup>rd</sup>, King of Great Britain was in exile Daniel O'Donnell a Colonel in the Service of his most Christian Majesty to this hereditary pledge of Saint Columbanus commonly called the Caah restored the silver case which had been much injured by time in the year of our Salvation 1723.' Armstrong (1916, 395-9) supplies the latin inscription along with a description of the frame.

<sup>40</sup> This information was recounted in a letter from George Petrie to John O'Donovan, dated 11th June 1838 (NLI Ms 793, No 475). This letter was included in the Ordnance Survey Letters, county Mayo, 216-7 (typed copies 1926, Bray).

<sup>41</sup> Niall O'Donnell had paid £20,000 for the former abbey lands of Cong in 1780. See Ó Cochláin (1968, n.61) for further information on Fr Prendergast.

<sup>42</sup> This information was propagated by Betham in GO Ms. No. 169 (see n.40) and was followed by Lawlor (1916, 244) and Kenney (1929, 630). Other versions have been cited by O'Donovan (AFM VI, Appendix, 2400), O'Curry (1861, 331) and Petrie (1878, 93).

<sup>43</sup> Ó Cochláin 1968, 171.



Prendergast in Belgium. However since he had returned from Paris, this led to the mistaken belief that the shrine also originated from there.<sup>44</sup>

When Niall O'Donnell learned of the Cathach's locality, and the attached conditions, he formulated a claim with the assistance of Sir William Betham, who, in turn, *provided a false certificate for the sum of £1,000.*<sup>45</sup> *Sir William Betham alleged that the shrine was bequeathed to the O'Donnell's of Newport, but if this were the case there would have been no controversy and the matter would not have been contested.*<sup>46</sup> Daniel O'Donnell's will would most likely have bequeathed the shrine to the Head of the O'Donnells (the Larkfield, not the Newport branch) as its proper guardian. Dr Charles O'Connor also wrote to Betham protesting at the issuing of a false pedigree. In 1815 there was still enmity between the parties as letters were exchanged between Con O'Donnell of the Larkfield branch and Betham regarding the possession of the Cathach.<sup>47</sup>

### **Betham's interventions**

After Sir Niall's death in 1811 his widow, Dame Mary O'Donel, granted a request by Betham to examine the shrine. His reasons may have been to inspect the inscription and include a description of the shrine for his purposes of compiling a pedigree of the O'Donnells.<sup>48</sup> During the examination his curiosity prevailed and he eventually opened the shrine to investigate the contents. When Dame O'Donel learnt of Betham's unsolicited interventions she was enraged and commenced proceedings in chancery against him.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> This information was disclosed in the Petrie / O'Donovan correspondence (see n.40 above). Petrie was disturbed by the situation and argued that the Newport O'Donnells were never the hereditary keepers of the Cathach. Extracts from this letter were later published by J.F. Quinn ('The Cathach of Tirconnell' in *The Western People*, 10th November 1934). Ó'Cochláin (1968, 172) also conveyed this information.

<sup>46</sup> Betham 1826, 189. Captain Lewis O'Donnel of Newcastle, was, according to Ó'Cochláin 'unquestionably the senior'. Sir Niall's branch of the family, the Newport O'Donnells did not achieve seniority until 1853. They were descended from Manus, the Jacobite Colonel, whose legitimacy was never satisfactorily established (Ó'Cochláin 1968, 171-2).

<sup>47</sup> The letters appeared in the Dublin Evening Post on the 29 July and 15 August 1815.

<sup>48</sup> Betham provided a description and a coloured engraving of the shrine in the pedigree (Go Ms No. 169, pp. 30-31).

Betham replied through the same channels.<sup>49</sup>

A portion of Betham's reply to Dame O'Donel's accusations was published in 1874, and it is worth referring to this in detail as it elucidates certain areas of dispute.<sup>50</sup> In the course of his examination he observed a small opening (probably between the lid and sides) and inserted a slender wire in order to probe the interior. Betham expected to find a manuscript in the shrine even though it was reputed to contain corporeal relics of St Columba. He did not progress any further and that afternoon he met a Dodwell Brown outside Trinity College and recounted his investigations. Brown went to Betham's house, also inserted a wire into the shrine and, according to Betham, there and then wanted to open the shrine. Betham advised caution but Brown informed him that he had communicated with Dame O'Donel and she expressed her desire to see the contents of the box, but it was only to be opened in her presence. At this time she was ill and unable to attend, so Betham, who was impatient, decided to open it with nobody present. He proceeded thus: 'taking carefully out and without violence 2 or 3 pins which fastened the lid thereof to its body, and having raised the lid, saw the expected manuscript in a decayed wooden box interior to the metal case, removed the manuscript, examined it and returned it to its former state and closed the lid of the box and replaced the pins in their proper places'.<sup>51</sup> He maintained that the superstitious objections to the opening were removed.

Dame O'Donel's son, Connell, complicated matters by supporting Betham's claims and loaned him £200 to pay his costs of the action. This offer was countered by Dame Mary O'Donel who offered the shrine to Captain Lewis O'Donnell for £300. There is no known documentation on any subsequent events, the Cathach did not change hands, and

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<sup>49</sup> Her Bill of Complaint was filed on the 30th April 1814. Betham replied to her charges on the 9th June 1814. The writer has tried to locate these legal documents but it is believed that they were consumed in the fire in the Four Courts, Dublin, during the Civil War of 1922. I am indebted to Aideen Ireland of the National Archives for her assistance in these matters. The writer has also consulted parts of Betham's extensive correspondence which is held in the RIA, NLI and the Geneological Office (the GO has a collection of c.12,000 letters of Sir William Betham pertaining to heraldic and geneological matters) but as of yet have found no further information concerning the Cathach.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert 1874, 586.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



the legal actions were eventually dropped.<sup>52</sup>

Dame Mary O'Donel died in 1820 and again Betham broached the subject of the re-opening of the shrine. This time the family readily agreed. Betham, as expected, did not refer to his legal proceedings with Dame O'Donel in his published account; however he did indirectly criticise his accuser: 'Regardless of the injunctions and threats of ignorance, which for more than a century had sealed it up ...'.<sup>53</sup> The shrine was brought to Dublin and was re-opened on an unspecified date in the presence of Connell O'Donnell and his brother-in-law, Sir Capel Molyneaux. In his account he included a description and an engraving of the front of the shrine which had previously appeared in the O'Donnell pedigree.<sup>54</sup> As regards the interior of the shrine he described it as '... a rude wooden box, very much decayed, inclosing a Ms. on vellum, ... on one side was a thin piece of board covered with red leather, very like that which eastern Mss. are bound.' He then related his injudicious treatment of the manuscript by steeping it in cold water.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Mayo Ordnance Survey letters**

Ragnall Ó Floinn has drawn attention to a peculiar reference to a *Cochall Choluim Chille* in the Mayo Ordnance Survey letters of 1838.<sup>56</sup> In the late-eighteenth century there is evidence of a relic preserved at Ballycroy, Co Mayo, which was reported by O'Donovan as follows:

There was a relic in Ballycroy ... on which the people were in the habit of swearing, that it was in the possession of two old men of the name Clery and O'Freel, who looked upon themselves as the keepers of it, that it was a box with some gems inserted into the cover, which resembled glass eyes, and that whenever any one perjured himself these eyes turn round to roll like human eyes ... that these two men left Ballycroy and took the Cochall with them, and that no one heard of it nor of anything like it until some years ago Lady O'Donnell got a relic somewhere called the Cathach of Columcille, but that there is no certainty of its being the same, with the

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<sup>52</sup> Ó Cochláin 1968, 172-3.

<sup>53</sup> Betham 1826, 110.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 109-116, pl. VII; GO Ms 169, pp. 30-1.

<sup>55</sup> Betham 1826, 110.

<sup>56</sup> This translates as the 'Cowl of Columcille' (Ó Floinn 1995b, 119).

Cochall taken away by the two old men about 60 years ago before.<sup>57</sup>

Ó Floinn maintains that the relic referred to must have been the Cathach due to the mention of an O'Friel, whose family were erenaghs of Kilmacrenan, and an O'Clery, who held lands at Drumhome, where the shrine was known to have been kept in the later middle ages. This would infer that the shrine would appear to have been brought back to Ireland before 1802 and that by that time it had passed out of the hands of the MacRobertaigh family. However Petrie, in a letter to O'Donovan regarding the Ballycroy relic, cast some doubt on the tradition as recorded in the Ordnance Survey letters:

But I wish to remove an erroneous supposition into which you have been led by your Irris informant, that the Cathach was brought into Mayo by the O'Donnells. This is very far indeed from the fact ....<sup>58</sup>

He then proceeded to relate the later history of the shrine and the military exploits of Daniel O'Donell and assured O'Donovan that these details were related to him personally by the abbot of Cong. Quinn was also under the impression that the Ballycroy relic was never in their possession, his explanation was that the O'Clerys carried with them from Donegal to Mayo such fond remembrance of the battle book that they were able to describe it in detail.<sup>59</sup>

The other interpretation is that the *Cochall Choluim Chille* refers to the saint's cloak which was believed to possess magical powers by protecting the wearer from harm. Manus O'Donnell states that it was preserved at Kilmacrenan: 'in a right worshipful shrine covered with gold and silver. And so it is a high relic of Columcille, working wonders and miracles in Cill mic Nenain to this day'.<sup>60</sup> Is it possible that the shrine containing the saint's cloak was still preserved in the eighteenth century by the O'Clerys and O'Friels? According to Manus it was 'covered with gold and silver' and it is most likely to have had settings applied to the cover which would correspond to the shrine described in the Ordnance Survey letters. Furthermore the O'Friels were erenaghs of Kilmacrenan, which as we have seen above, was the location where the shrine of Columba's cloak was

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<sup>57</sup> Ordnance Survey Letters, Co Mayo, 333-5. Typescript copy (Bray, 1926).

<sup>58</sup> See n.40 for reference to this correspondence.

<sup>59</sup> Quinn 1934. See n.45 for full reference.

<sup>60</sup> O'Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918, 355h. To add to the confusion Ó Floinn (1997b, 150) has demonstrated that in O'Donnell's *Betha* the Cathach is glossed his 'cowl of purity'.



preserved until the sixteenth century. Henry has shown that the O'Donnells maintained close links with north Connacht throughout the sixteenth centuries by way of marriage, war and diplomacy.<sup>61</sup> The O'Clerys were the hereditary historians of the O'Donnells and were ousted from their homelands in Donegal with the onset of the Ulster plantation in 1609.<sup>62</sup> This may have been the period when they first made their appearance in Ballycroy, Co Mayo, and would have presumably conveyed any relics in their keeping.

P.B. Phair has quoted unsourced Betham correspondence indicating that he brought the Cathach to London, along with the shrine of the Book of Dimma and the Misach, in order to present them to the Duke of Sussex for viewing: 'I returned this morning. I exhibited my precious relicts (sic) in London to many of the learned who have unanimously surrendered the palm of honourable antiquity to Ireland'.<sup>63</sup> However this action appeared to have irritated the O'Donnells.<sup>64</sup>

The shrine was deposited in the Royal Dublin Society by Sir Richard O'Donnell, grandson of Niall, in April 1842 and was transferred, with O'Donnell's consent, to the museum of the Royal Irish Academy in May 1843. He requested that the shrine be placed in a case next to the Cross of Cong and stored in a fire-proof safe at night.<sup>65</sup> It was displayed at the great Dublin exhibition of 1853. The shrine was eventually deposited in the NMI along with the Academy's antiquities collection in 1890. It is registered R.2835. One of the loose binding strips were repaired by a silversmith at some time in December 1901.<sup>66</sup> Recent research has shown that the shrine was bequeathed to the Irish Nation in 1970.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1987, 809.

<sup>62</sup> See OS Mayo letters, 335, for the geneology of the Ballycroy branch of the O'Clery's.

<sup>63</sup> Phair 1972, 13; 1962, 75-7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 1972.

<sup>65</sup> PRDS, lxxviii, 60; PRIA, II, 370, 404.

<sup>66</sup> RIA Minute Book volume 24, p 113, dated 2nd December 1901. I wish to thank Dr Bernard Meehan, Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, for bringing this information to my notice.

<sup>67</sup> NMI file IA/76/1997.

## PREVIOUS ACCOUNTS

The following section pertains to publications on the shrine, there has also been an extensive body of work on the manuscript contained within the shrine,<sup>68</sup> and, more recently, on Columban relics in general.<sup>69</sup> Besides the references to the shrine in the Book of Fenagh and the annals,<sup>70</sup> Manus O'Donnell was the first to relay the traditions of the shrine and document its use as a battle talisman. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Colgan and Archdall mentioned the shrine in passing when recording ecclesiastical foundations and associated hagiographical writings.<sup>71</sup> The first general description of the shrine, along with an engraving of the front of the shrine and a translation of the inscription, was published by Sir William Betham.<sup>72</sup> However the description is inaccurate and the engraving was idealised. Wakeman provided a short historical account and description of the shrine while O'Donovan published a brief account of the history of the shrine in his appendix to the Annals of the Four Masters which detailed the genealogy and related affairs of the O'Donnell clan.<sup>73</sup> Reeves, in his comprehensive edition of Adomnán's Life of Columba, included references to the Cathach and was the first to provide dates for the shrine by successfully identifying the persons named in the inscription. However he referred to Betham's account for the description of the shrine.<sup>74</sup> The next account of the shrine, which dealt solely with the traditions and historical sources, was furnished by O'Curry, where he also provided a translation of Manus O'Donnell's passages and the shrine's inscription.<sup>75</sup> Westwood included a brief report on the shrine and recorded some of Betham's interventions.<sup>76</sup> Gilbert's survey included extracts from

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<sup>68</sup> See n.1 for references.

<sup>69</sup> Bannerman 1993; Bourke 1997a,b; Ó Floinn 1995b, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> See pp.216-18 above for references.

<sup>71</sup> Colgan 1647, 495; Archdall 1786, 95.

<sup>72</sup> 1826, 112-16, pl. VII. This description is based on that recorded in the O'Donnell pedigree which Betham had drawn up (GO Ms, No. 169). The lithograph of the front was also produced for the pedigree but in this case it was hand coloured. The pedigree was witnessed at the Office of Arms on the 24th April 1819 but was probably drawn up over a number of years previous to that date.

<sup>73</sup> Wakeman 1848, 162-65; AFM, Vol VI, 2400; Vol IV, 1232-3.

<sup>74</sup> Reeves 1857, 249, 319, 401.

<sup>75</sup> O'Curry 1861, 327-35, 599.

<sup>76</sup> Westwood 1868, 82.



Betham's reply to Dame O'Donel's charges and also included an adequate description of the front of the shrine as well as a concise account of the history.<sup>77</sup> Four years later Margaret Stokes published Petrie's reading of the inscription, as well as a brief description and history, in her edition of his corpus.<sup>78</sup> She included an even more concise account of the shrine in her later publication on Early Christian Art in Ireland.<sup>79</sup>

An excellent, though somewhat neglected account of the shrine, was included in William Doherty's history of Inishowen and Tirconnell. He examined the shrine in detail and provided a full description, an account of the inscription, Betham's interventions and the later history.<sup>80</sup> Westropp included a brief account of the shrine in his guide to the Irish Antiquities collection of the NMI and suggested a date of 'about 1084' for the construction of the initial phase.<sup>81</sup> This was followed five years later by Armstrong's account of the shrine which appeared as an appendix to Lawlor's monograph on the manuscript.<sup>82</sup> This description is the most comprehensive to date and it was also the first to include photographs of all areas of the shrine. Crawford incorporated a brief description of the shrine in his list of Irish shrines and reliquaries.<sup>83</sup> A summary of the historical aspects of the shrine and manuscript as well as the editions of Manus O'Donnell's *Betha* were published by Kenney.<sup>84</sup> Quinn, in a newspaper article, was the first to draw attention to the Mayo Ordnance Survey letters, Petrie's correspondence on the matter and Betham's role in the rediscovery of the shrine.<sup>85</sup> Adolf Mahr included the shrine in his terse discussion on book shrines in his little-known book on Irish handicraft.<sup>86</sup> The next

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<sup>77</sup> Gilbert 1874, 586-7. He also observed that one of the settings on the front had lost its insert since Betham's description.

<sup>78</sup> Petrie 1878, 79.

<sup>79</sup> Stokes 1887, 95-6.

<sup>80</sup> Doherty 1895, 291-304, 580-7.

<sup>81</sup> Westropp 1911, 9.

<sup>82</sup> Armstrong 1916, 390-6.

<sup>83</sup> Crawford 1923, 152-3.

<sup>84</sup> Kenney 1929, nos. 221, 442.

<sup>85</sup> Quinn 1934. See n.45 for full reference.

<sup>86</sup> Mahr 1939, 17-18. He also followed Westropp in dating the shrine to 1084.

reference to the shrine was published by Raftery with a brief description which included good quality photographs of the front and back; he also incorporated the shrine in his guide to the Irish Antiquities collection.<sup>87</sup> In 1945 Macalister included the shrine's inscription in his corpus and provided the same translation of the inscription as Reeves and Petrie.<sup>88</sup> Maire MacDermott referred briefly to the Cathach in her publication on the 'Kells' crosier<sup>89</sup> but dealt with the shrine more extensively in her co-authored book on Early Christian Ireland. She drew attention to the Ringerike elements present on the shrine and suggested the presence of an active metalworking centre at Kells which produced the Cathach and sections of the Kells crosier.<sup>90</sup> Ó Cochláin, in a significant paper, elicited a number of obscure sources to compile a comprehensive history of the shrine.<sup>91</sup>

After the De Paor's publication greater attention was paid to the Ringerike elements present on the short sides of the shrine. This was recognised by the inclusion of the shrine in Wilson and Klindt-Jensen's publication on Viking art.<sup>92</sup> Further interest was expressed when a motif piece with decoration which bore a striking resemblance to the side panels of the shrine was excavated from High St, Dublin, in 1967.<sup>93</sup> Henry also discussed the relevance of the motif piece to the shrine, along with a concise description of the latter in her third volume on Irish art.<sup>94</sup> She also took the initiative in formulating and identifying regional schools of metalwork based on style and technique, among these was a school centred at Kells.<sup>95</sup> Farnes, in her analysis of the Irish Urnes style, detected these style traits in the ornament of the short sides while Fuglesang also included the short sides in her evaluation of the Ringerike style.<sup>96</sup> As it was believed that the shrine was only

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<sup>87</sup> Raftery 1941, 155, pls 113-4; ND, 86-87.

<sup>88</sup> Macalister 1945, 38-9.

<sup>89</sup> MacDermott 1955, 107.

<sup>90</sup> De Paor, M and L 1958, 166-7.

<sup>91</sup> Ó'Cochláin 1968, 156-77.

<sup>92</sup> Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 143-5.

<sup>93</sup> Ó'Riordáin 1971, 75-6; See n.184 below for further references.

<sup>94</sup> Henry 1970, 88-92.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>96</sup> Farnes 1974, 50, 179-80; Fuglesang 1980, no.56, 52-4, pl.31.



deposited on loan to the Irish nation it was not included in any of the major travelling exhibitions of Irish treasures during the period 1977-84.<sup>97</sup> This in turn led to its omission from exhibition catalogues with no proper re-evaluation of the shrine since Armstrong's in-depth study of 1916.

In the past twenty years authors have again focused on the shrine's Ringerike-influenced panels, commenting on their relationship with Viking and Insular art and the artefacts excavated from the Viking levels in Dublin city, notably the motif-pieces and the 'Dublin School' of woodcarvings.<sup>98</sup> Hourihane has dealt extensively with the worthwhile, but overlooked subject of the late medieval iconography present on the front face of the shrine.<sup>99</sup> Ó Floinn has further refined and expanded Henry's Cathach group of metalwork and, more recently, has reviewed and put forward some novel suggestions concerning the lacuna in the history of the manuscript and shrine.<sup>100</sup>

### **THE INSCRIPTION [Pl.39]**

The inscription on the base, commences at the top left edge and runs clockwise along three of the four sides; on one short side there are engraved step and chevron motifs [Pl.39]. A number of letters, especially on the right-hand end of LSB, have been lost due to the sheet silver breaking off at the points where the letters were deeply incised.

There have been many accounts dealing with the inscription, the first scholarly study was by Reeves who identified the persons named in the inscription and provided a date for the earlier phase of the shrine.<sup>101</sup> Petrie, O'Curry and Gilbert followed Reeves but failed to furnish the dates for the manufacture of the shrine.<sup>102</sup> Other accounts concur

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<sup>97</sup> Cone (ed.) 1977; Ryan (ed.) 1983a.

<sup>98</sup> Stalley 1977, 188-9; Graham-Campbell 1980, 136; Fuglesang 1980, 52-3, 171-2; Ó Floinn 1983, 58; Ó'Meadhra 1987a, 164-5; Peterson 1987, no. 55, 112; Lang 1988a, 18-25; Edwards 1990, 146-7.

<sup>99</sup> Hourihane 1984, 787-90; 827, 831-3, 339-40, 846-7, 856, 861, 867-8, 889, 893, 919, 927, 958.

<sup>100</sup> Ó Floinn 1987, 180-1; 1995b, 117-26; 1997a, 153.

<sup>101</sup> Reeves 1857, 319-20.

<sup>102</sup> Petrie 1878, 91-3; O'Curry 1861, 331; Gilbert 1874, 585. Margaret Stokes published a detailed drawing of the inscribed plate (with one minor error) in Petrie (1878, Pl. XLII).



with the identification of the persons named and the dates for the shrine, differing only in minor details.<sup>103</sup> The text reads as follows:

..OIT DO ...HBARR UA DOM..ILL LASIN DERNAD IN CUMTAOHS  
(BLANK SIDE)

7 DO SITTRIUC MAC MEIC AEDA DO RIGN. 7 ...M... M.CRO...  
RTAIG DO COMARBA CENANSA LASIN DERNAD

The restored and corrected text of the inscription reads as follows:<sup>104</sup>

+ [OR] IT DO [CHAT] HBARR UA DOMNAILL LASIN DERNAD IN CUMTAOHS  
7 DO SITTRIUC MAC MEIC AEDA DO RIGNE 7 DO [DO] M [NALL] MAC  
RO [BA] ARTAIG DO COMARBA CENANSA LASIN DERNAD

which translates as:

A prayer for Cathbarr Ua Domhnaill by whom this cumdach was made and for Sitric son of Mac Aedha who made it, and for Domhnall Mac Robartaig coarb of Kells by whom it was made.

There are a number of errors present in the inscription: the letter *h* between *c* and *a* in the name *Chathbarr* should not be present and there is an *o* instead of the letter *c* before the *h* in the word *cumtaohsa*.<sup>105</sup>

The obits for some of the persons named in the inscription are referred to in the annals: Cathbarr Ua Domhnaill died in 1106,<sup>106</sup> Domhnall Mac Robartaig became coarb of Kells in 1062<sup>107</sup> and his death in 1098 is also recorded where he is referred to as 'comarba Coluim Chille'.<sup>108</sup> Domnall was most likely the son of Robartach mac

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<sup>103</sup> Armstrong 1916, 391; Kenny 1929, no. 454; Macalister 1945, no. 588a; Henry 1970, 89; Ó Floinn 1995b, n.175. See Michelli (1996, 10, 21-2) who disputes the accepted chronology of the inscription.

<sup>104</sup> The missing, now restored, letters are placed in square brackets.

<sup>105</sup> Bergin in Armstrong (1916, 391); Michelli 1996, 10.

<sup>106</sup> AFM

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> AFM, AU.

Robartaigh, the former holder of the office, who died in 1057.<sup>109</sup>

John Bannerman, in a significant paper on Columban relics and the related ecclesiastical hierarchy, has elucidated many of the confusing appellations given to the holders of these offices.<sup>110</sup> He concludes: 'only an abbot who was the keeper of the *insignia* of a saint could be entitled *comarba* or successor of that saint'.<sup>111</sup> Normally the keeper of relics would be the abbot of the chief monastery founded by the saint. However if the *insignia* were transferred, its abbot became *coarb* of the saint and the monastery became the chief monastery of the saint's *familia* whether or not it was founded by the saint.<sup>112</sup> Therefore since Domnaill is designated 'coarb' in the inscription he would have been the keeper of the Cathach and any additional Columban relics in the possession of the monastery at Kells.

Ragnall Ó Floinn has resolved the relationship between the two commissioners named on the inscription.<sup>113</sup> Although there is no information on the mac Robartaigh genealogies they are generally accepted as of the Cenél Conaill and are most likely descended from the Cenél Lugdach. As previously stated<sup>114</sup> a Cináed mac Domnaill was recorded as joint abbot of Derry and Drumhome (where the shrine was kept in the middle ages) in the early tenth century, and he can be traced to a collateral branch of the Cenél Lugdach.<sup>115</sup> It is possible that the mac Robartaigh also traced their lineage to the Cenél Lugdach through Cinéad mac Domnaill. The Cenél Lugdach were involved in the ecclesiastic politics of Derry in the tenth century and became established in Kells by the next century. Cathbarr Ua Domnaill was head of the Cenél Conaill sept of the Cenél

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<sup>109</sup> Herbert 1988, 92. Domnaill is also recorded in the Kells charters where he is described as *comarba Coluim Chille* in charter no.2, which has been dated to 1073 x 1084 (Mac Niocaill 1990, 156; Herbert 1992, 67-8).

<sup>110</sup> Bannerman 1993, 14-47.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 26. This formula would have *comarba* followed by the saint's name. For example Domnaill Mac Robartaigh was described as *comarba Coluim Chille* in his obit of 1098.

<sup>112</sup> Bannerman 1993, 26. In 849 the Columban relics present at Iona were divided and transferred to Kells and Dunkeld.

<sup>113</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 120-22.

<sup>114</sup> See p.219 above.

<sup>115</sup> Au 921; Ó Floinn 1995b, 120, n.183. For the genealogy of the Ua Domhnaill see O'Brian (1962, 164).



Lugdach who produced the O'Donnell kings of Tír Conaill in the later middle ages.<sup>116</sup>

Michelli has argued that due to mistakes present in the inscription Sitric was most likely illiterate and supplied with a text to copy.<sup>117</sup> She also contends that he used a unique formula for the inscription in that a second commissioner (Domnall Mac Robartaigh) was added at the end, perhaps at a later stage. However, as noted above, Ó Floinn has demonstrated that both commissioners were descended from the Cenél Lugdach and possibly formed a political alliance against the rival claimants to the office of comarba Colmcille. Therefore Michelli's argument fails as both commissioners are primary.<sup>118</sup>

The Cenél Lugdach were, according to the genealogies, of Columba's own kindred, and provided several abbots of Iona from the sixth to eighth centuries. They gained control of the kingship of the Cenél Conaill in the late ninth and early tenth centuries and also provided two abbots of Derry.<sup>119</sup> There are few references to them in the annals until the eleventh century. Cathbarr, king of the Cenél Lugdach, (ob. 1106), had rival claimants such as a Mac meic Gilla Coluim Ua Domnaill who was slain by his own kinsmen in 1100 and was accorded the title king of the Cenél Lugdach.<sup>120</sup>

While Sitric mac meic Aedh is not recorded in the annals there is a reference to a 'Mac Aedha cerd' in one of the charters in the Book of Kells.<sup>121</sup> The relevant portion of the charter is as follows:

An enclosure that Congal Ua Breslen bought, i.e. half of the enclosure of Mac Aedha the cerd i.e. the sureties for its rightful possession against

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<sup>116</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 121.

<sup>117</sup> Michelli 1996, 10.

<sup>118</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 121-2.

<sup>119</sup> For other ecclesiastical positions held by the Cenél Lugdach see Ó Floinn (1995b, 121). The two abbots of Derry were the aforementioned Cináed mac Domnaill; the other was the son of the king, Eichnechán mac Dálaig.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.; AU 1106, 1100; AI 1100.

<sup>121</sup> The charters were first translated by O'Donovan (1846, 140-1) but the most comprehensive publication on the charters has been provided by Mac Niocaill (1963), where he traced seventeenth-century copies of transactions entered onto folios which are now lost from the Book of Kells. This was revised in his recent paper in the Kells commentary volume (1990, 153-65).

himself .... The price paid for it is ... to Fland son of Mac Aedha and an ounce (of silver) for full possession to the vice-superior.<sup>122</sup>

O'Meadhra has investigated this charter entry and, along with Henry, sees no significance in the name Sitric, as the Irish and Vikings adopted each others personal names. King Sitric of Dublin was half-Irish and the name probably became familiar due to the royal usage.<sup>123</sup> O'Meadhra followed Mac Niocaill in dating this charter to 1087 x 1094 which was copied onto the folio during the third quarter of the twelfth century. She suggested that since there is no mention of Sitric, Fland, and not Sitric, was the owner of the property. Either he was dead or had left Kells, and therefore Fland was likely to be a brother or son.

Recent research by Herbert<sup>124</sup> has challenged, on palaeographical and contextual grounds, Mac Niocaill's view that the charters were all copied in the period 1117 x 1133. She has argued that all seven are in different hands and the relevant charter actually dates to 1117 x 1133 rather than 1087 x 1094; this would imply that the enclosure was not in Sitric's hands since he is not mentioned in the charter, so Fland, as O'Meadhra had indicated, was either a brother or son of Sitric. Rather than seeing the charters as expressing the property and succession rights of the church at Kells, Herbert contends that they have no relevance to monastic holdings but do illustrate the practice of property transfers between individuals. The records were enshrined in a venerated book which in itself confers authenticity as well as security.<sup>125</sup>

From the above information the primary phase of the shrine's construction may be dated to between 1062 and 1098. There is, however, some evidence that will slightly modify the dates provided above. Herbert has shown that the Kells charter material provides evidence that Domhnall Mac Robartaig resigned as abbot of Kells some time before his death in 1098, as Ferdornach Ua Clucáin had attained the position of comarba

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<sup>122</sup> Charter no. 5; Mac Niocaill 1990, 158. This charter was entered onto f.7<sup>r</sup>, lines 32-38.

<sup>123</sup> O'Meadhra 1987b, 164-5; Henry 1970, 89. Sitric reigned as king of Dublin from 989-1036 (Clarke 1991, 118).

<sup>124</sup> Herbert 1992, 60-77.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 67.



by 1094.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, even though Herbert did not use this information to restrict the date of the shrine, it should now be revised, solely on the evidence of the inscription, to 1062-94.<sup>127</sup>

## **ICONOGRAPHY**

The figural iconography is confined to the front of the shrine and can be dated to the late medieval period. Although the iconography is relatively straightforward, the lack of inscriptions identifying the figures preclude positive identification. There is no overt iconographic programme on the existing primary phase of the shrine which consists of zoomorphic and foliate motifs. The original front of the shrine would most likely have had some form of figurative iconography, similar, perhaps, to the early eleventh-century front of the Soisceál Molaisse [Pl.24].

There are three arches on the front: two frame individual figures, while the third contains a crucifixion scene [Pl.38]. The central arch is the largest of the three and it encloses a dominating figure with an enlarged right hand raised in blessing, while the left hand holds a small book. He is seated on an elaborate throne with his body placed asymmetrically to one side. There are two possible interpretations for this figure: Christ in Majesty or St Columba. The evidence for identifying this figure as 'Christ in Majesty' will be presented first.

This figure towers above the subsidiary arches on either side of him, this may have been intended to symbolise Christ's victory over his own death by dominating his crucifixion to his left. The right hand is enlarged so as to emphasise the authority of the blessing. He is attended by a pair of censer-bearing angels in the spandrels above the flanking arches. There are, however, difficulties with this proposed identification as 'Christ in Majesty'. In most cases where Christ is portrayed on Irish shrines it is usually in a crucifixion scene, where he is flanked by the Virgin and St John. It would be unusual to

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<sup>126</sup> Herbert 1988, 93.

<sup>127</sup> Since the original draft of this chapter was completed this adjustment of the dating has also been proposed by Ó Floinn (1995b, 120) and Michelli (1997, n.52)

show Christ twice on the same panel unless depicting scenes from his life.<sup>126</sup> Even though the crown of the head is obscured by the inserted setting there is no evidence of a halo [Fig.20].<sup>127</sup> It is worth comparing the Cathach representation with a figure on the side panel on the Domhnach Airgid where the figure is seated on a similar elaborate throne and has his right hand raised in blessing [Pl.70.a].<sup>128</sup> He also displays similar drapery patterns and long wavy hair. Instead of a book he elevates a small processional cross in his left hand, while an engraved figure of a censer-bearer is placed on either side of him. This Domhnach figure has been identified as 'Christ in Majesty' by Ó Floinn, 'Christ enthroned' by Hourihane, whereas Armstrong referred to it as a 'male effigy'.<sup>129</sup> As with the Cathach, there is a crucifixion scene already present on the front of this shrine [Pl.67]. Another comparison can be made with the repoussé image of 'Christ enthroned' present on the reverse of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth.<sup>130</sup> This worn figure is seated on a similar throne, also lacks a halo and has his right hand raised in blessing with his left hand holding a book [Pl.72]. A further example is found on the shrine of the Bearnán Conaill from Inishkeel, Co Donegal, where on the front of the crest, Christ is shown enthroned with his right hand raised in blessing [Pl.83.a]. It is executed in the repoussé technique on sheet silver.<sup>131</sup> These three examples which appear to show Christ enthroned are all relegated to subsidiary positions with respect to the crucifixion scenes, which are displayed in a prominent position on the front. Therefore it is not so unusual to find two depictions of Christ on the one shrine and the evidence presented would imply that the figure represents Christ in Majesty.

Another possibility is that the figure on the Cathach may be intended to represent St Columba, conspicuously displayed on the front, as the psalter preserved inside the shrine

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<sup>126</sup> But see the example on the Domhnach listed below.

<sup>127</sup> Hourihane (1984, 142) has suggested that the elaborate circular setting placed above Christ's head as representing a halo. This is mistaken as this setting is a later addition and may have performed a liturgical function (see p.285 for further discussion). The radiograph of the front has not revealed any trace of a halo.

<sup>128</sup> Hourihane 1984, 795-801.

<sup>129</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, 177; Hourihane 1984, motif W, 927-8; Armstrong and Lawlor 1917-19, 101.

<sup>130</sup> Hourihane 1984, 817.

<sup>131</sup> Hourihane dates the casing to the early fifteenth century (1984, 805-8); Ó Floinn (1995b, 106-9, pl.4.7) has provided a history of the shrine and bell.



was traditionally considered to have been written in his own hand.<sup>132</sup> It may have been intended that the book held by the figure was meant to signify the Cathach. A theological difficulty arises due to the fact that if this is a representation of a local saint it is endowed with greater status, through its size, than the accompanying crucifixion scene. In medieval art in general, there is a hieratic value of images and a saint would never be represented as larger than Christ.<sup>133</sup> However, in Irish late medieval metalwork saints are sometimes shown seated, but never enthroned, and attended by angels censuring.<sup>134</sup> Therefore on balance it is likely that the central figure represents Christ enthroned and not St Columba. The Cathach front is atypical in that it elevates Christ enthroned to a more prominent position than the crucifixion which is allocated a more modest space.

The censuring angels which flank the central arch are uncommon in Irish medieval art.<sup>135</sup> Besides the Cathach, the only other known examples in metalwork are the engraved censer-bearing acolytes attending both Christ enthroned and St Catherine on the side of the Domhnach Airgid [Pl.70.a].<sup>136</sup> Irish examples of censuring angels appear to be ultimately derived from the French-inspired examples found in the transepts of Westminster Abbey, which date to the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>137</sup> Earlier examples of censuring angels flanking crucifixion scenes are also known. For example they appear in a Catalonian Apocalypse which is dated to c.975, and on a stone relief depicting the Deposition from San Domingo Silos, Spain, dated c.1085-1100.<sup>138</sup> The censuring angels present on a portion of a tympanum from the parish church of Issy-les-Moulineaux, Paris,

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<sup>132</sup> For more evidence that this figure may be St Columba see pp. 284-5 below.

<sup>133</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn (pers. comm.).

<sup>134</sup> For example St Patrick is shown seated on the front of the Domhnach Airgid where he is assumed to be presenting the relic (book) to St Mac Cairthinn, patron saint of Clones, Co Monaghan (Ó Floinn 1983, 177) [Pl.67]. Seated saints/ecclesiastics are also depicted on both sides of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth and on the front of the Misach [Pls.71-2,47].

<sup>135</sup> See Hourihane (1984, motif R) for a list of angels in late medieval Irish art.

<sup>136</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.85; Hourihane 1984, 795-801.

<sup>137</sup> Williamson 1987, 345, fig.68; 1995, 202-3, pl.303. In addition see Williamson's catalogue entry for the censuring angels from a canopied tomb formerly in the parish church of All Saints, Sawley, Derbyshire (Ibid., nos. 341-2).

<sup>138</sup> Schiller 1972, pls. 389, 556.

are relevant as they flank Christ in Majesty.<sup>139</sup> Rae has proposed that censuring angels were 'suggestive of absolution'.<sup>140</sup> This may pertain to angels flanking a saint or ecclesiastic but would hardly apply to images of Christ enthroned. There are some pertinent examples depicted in Irish late medieval funerary sculpture: from Ferns cathedral, Co Wexford, there is an effigy of a bishop standing within an elaborate canopy.<sup>141</sup> He is depicted in full ecclesiastical attire, with his eyes closed and stands on a dragon placed beneath his feet, while positioned outside the canopy are two half-length figures of censuring angels. Hunt suggests that this effigy may commemorate John St John who was bishop of the Diocese of Ferns from 1223-43 and that the figure style would support this date.<sup>142</sup> Rae also dates this slab to the mid-thirteenth century but adds that it may also commemorate John St John's successor: Bishop Geoffrey of St John (1254-8).<sup>143</sup> A second effigial slab, from St Brigit's Cathedral, Kildare, also bears a figure of a bishop and has extremely fine carved detail including a censor-bearing angel on either side of the figure's head [Pl. 108.a]. Hunt proposed that this effigy may be John of Taunton, bishop of Kildare (1235-58), which would place these angels soon after the Winchester examples, however the carving may have been executed some years after the bishop's death.<sup>144</sup> On a worn double-tomb slab from Kells, Co Meath, a pair of censuring angels are placed above the crucifixion. Hunt has dated this slab to the second quarter of the fourteenth century.<sup>145</sup> The earliest Irish examples known so far (c.1260), are found above the west doorway of St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny, where the angels are placed in quatrefoils which flank a destroyed central figure, most probably Christ in Majesty or the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>146</sup> They wear long pleated robes with girdles around the waist, have their hands placed to the front and

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<sup>139</sup> Sauerlander (1972, 388, pl.21) has dated these to the 1150's.

<sup>140</sup> Rae 1987, 760.

<sup>141</sup> Hourihane (1984, 96) states that 'examples (of angels censuring) within the study area date from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries' but contradicts this assertion at a later stage: 'angels censuring are rarely found in (Irish) stone sculpture prior to the fifteenth century' (Ibid., 789). Hourihane excluded from his thesis the funerary sculpture previously published by Hunt (1974).

<sup>142</sup> Hunt 1974, no.262, pl.65.

<sup>143</sup> Rae 1987, 760.

<sup>144</sup> Hunt 1974, no.87, pls. 69-70.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., no.188, pl.33.

<sup>146</sup> Hourihane 1984, 335.



large wings extending behind, unfortunately their heads have been defaced [Pl. 109].<sup>147</sup>

The earliest examples of censing angels, from the mid-twelfth century, are found in carved tympani and manuscript illumination and usually flank representations of Christ in Majesty, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the crucifixion. Censing angels appear more frequently in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries where they play a subsidiary role in Irish effigial sculpture. These figures are all erect and not enthroned. No examples of censing angels flanking enthroned saints have been located.

The crucifixion scene in the right arch with the Virgin on Christ's right and St John on his left is a common representation found on fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Irish metalwork.<sup>148</sup> The attitudes of St John and the Virgin on the Cathach differ slightly from other representations in that the Virgin gestures with open hands while St John places his hand beneath his chin as a demonstration of his grief. It is difficult to find an exact parallel for these poses but the attitudes of John and Mary are comparable to 'Christ crucified by the virtues', a miniature found in the *Legendary of the Holy Cross*, Regensburg, dating to c.1271, and on the polychromed crucifixion group with censing angels positioned at the entrance to the choir in Naumberg Cathedral, which is dated to c.1255.<sup>149</sup> According to Hourihane the standing Virgin and St John were introduced into Irish crucifixion iconography by the late-thirteenth century.<sup>150</sup>

One further aspect of the crucifixion scene to consider are the two engraved birds with back-turned heads perched on the arms of the cross. Because of the sketchy nature of the engraving it is difficult to determine the species of bird represented. Armstrong and

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 632.

<sup>148</sup> For example crucifixion scenes are found on the front of the Clogher cross, on the front of the shrine of the Stowe Missal where the figures are separated and placed in distinct panels; on the front of the Domhnach Airgid, with an applied cast figure of Christ and repoussé figures of St John and the Virgin placed in niches on either side; the shrine of the Book of Dimma where the figures are cast separately and then applied; the front of St Conall's bell shrine where the figures are cast and applied and finally the front of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, where there is a mixture of cast and repoussé figures. On this latter shrine the figures of St John and the Virgin are interchanged [Pls. 94.a, 37, 67, 58, 83.a, 71]. See Hourihane (1984, 783-5, 791-3, 795-803, 805-8, 814-8 and motifs Y, U and T) for a list in all media as well as a wide range of crucifix figures and Ó Floinn (1983, nos. 85, 83).

<sup>149</sup> Schiller 1972, pl. 452; Williamson 1995, 181-84, pls. 273-74.

<sup>150</sup> Hourihane 1984, 140.

Hourihane refer to them as 'eagles' and 'eagle-like' but they could also be intended to be doves or peacocks.<sup>151</sup> Both of these latter birds were common symbols for the resurrection in Early Christian funerary iconography, where it was believed that the peacock was immortal and the flesh incorruptible. In addition the loss and renewal of their splendid tail feathers throughout the seasons resulted in the peacock becoming a standard symbol of the Resurrection of Christ. In Early Christian art peacocks are usually found on sarcophagi, for example in San Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, where they are associated with eucharistic symbols such as the chalice and vine.<sup>152</sup> Doves are usually found perched on the horizontal members of a cross, for example, on an early Christian sarcophagus in the Lateran museum.<sup>153</sup> Overall, it is more likely that the birds were intended to be seen as peacocks, where their position on the cross emphasised the resurrection imagery. However the lack of a head crest and the raptorial curved beak leaves their identification open to debate. They may have been intended to represent doves who were also associated with the cross.

Although Early Christian examples have been cited, birds perched on the arms of a cross are also found in Irish early medieval art, but these images are ultimately derived from Early Christian sources. The earliest example is found on a portion of a cross-inscribed slab from Reask, Co Kerry, which probably dates to the sixth or seventh centuries. Although the carving on the slab is rudimentary with little detail, the excavator has suggested that the bird may represent a peacock.<sup>154</sup> From the island of Inishkeel, Co Donegal, there is a recumbent decorated cross-slab with two unusual bird-like figures perched above the arms of the cross. Harbison has dated this slab to the ninth century.<sup>155</sup> A second cross-slab from the same island, also of ninth-century date, displays a swan above each of the arms.<sup>156</sup> Harbison does not propose any iconographic interpretations

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<sup>151</sup> Armstrong 1916, 393; Hourihane 1984, 827.

<sup>152</sup> Beckwith 1986, pls. 99-100.

<sup>153</sup> Gough 1973, 108. In early Christian art the dove typologically prefigured Baptism and the hope of salvation through Christ, as it was reputed to have returned to Noah after the deluge with an olive branch in its beak (Bober 1967, 36-8).

<sup>154</sup> Fanning 1981, 145-7, stone H, fig.31, pl.XI.

<sup>155</sup> Harbison 1986, 65, pl.4.13c.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 64, Pl.4.14b.



for the birds on the above slabs. There are also two birds placed above and below the arms of the cross on the west face of the 'Doorty' cross at Kilfenora, Co Clare, where the upper birds appear to peck at Christ's head [Pl.106.b].<sup>157</sup> A later example, from the fourteenth century, can be seen on a small enamelled plaque, placed to the right of Christ's head on the front of the Domhnach Airgid shrine. This bears the image of a dove or eagle in flight [Pl.67].<sup>158</sup>

The birds which are closest in style to the Cathach examples can be found in an Irish manuscript of late eighth-century date: the Würzburg epistles of St Paul [Pl.106.a].<sup>159</sup> They are depicted perched on the arms of the cross and show the same detailing of plumage but they face Christ rather than turn away like the Cathach examples. Hourihane has proposed that the Cathach crucifixion scene may have been based on a manuscript exemplar, with the engraved birds 'strongly influenced by native traditions'.<sup>160</sup> Since John and Mary are incorporated into the crucifixion scene one of the models would appear to be an early Gothic manuscript. However the goldsmith responsible for the front plate of the Cathach may have drawn on eclectic sources, both native and imported. To conclude: the crucifixion scene appears to have used a variety of sources, while the figures of Christ, John and Mary observe conventional Gothic poses, albeit with some minor idiosyncrasies, the presence of the birds are unusual and are most likely derived from earlier Irish examples.

The figure of the bishop in the left arch may be intended to represent either St Patrick or St Columba. Similar erect figures of ecclesiastics with crosier, mitre and the right-hand raised in blessing are found on the fronts of the Domhnach Airgid and the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth [Pls.67,71]. The repoussé figures on the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth are accompanied by inscriptions, one of who is identified as St Patrick, and wears a mitre, holds a cross staff and has his right hand raised in blessing [Pl.71]. Hourihane states that the figure on the Cathach 'may represent St Patrick' but it is also

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<sup>157</sup> Harbison 1992, no.133; fig.370.

<sup>158</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.85; Hourihane 1984, 827-8.

<sup>159</sup> Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek Cod. M.p.th. f.69; Alexander 1978, no.55, pl.265; Harbison 1986, pl.4.2b.

<sup>160</sup> Hourihane 1984, 789; Prof. Stalley is also of the opinion that birds perched on the cross are out of place in a Gothic context and are most likely the result of native influence from an older model.

likely that it may be Columba since he was associated with the manuscript enclosed within.<sup>161</sup> If the central figure was Columba it would be hard to justify an image of St Patrick on a shrine made to accommodate relics of Columba. On the frontpiece of Manus O'Donnell's *Betha Coluim Chille*, which was compiled in 1532, there is a painted representation of St Columba in full ecclesiastical dress.<sup>162</sup> This portrait is described as 'the most arresting figure illustration met so far in the Irish books of the medieval and renaissance periods' and some fifteenth-century sculptural parallels have been cited.<sup>163</sup> As the crosier held by the figure is turned inwards the authors state that it must represent an abbot, since an outward facing crosier represents a bishop.<sup>164</sup> It is possible, but by no means definite, that this painted representation of St Columba may have been based on the ecclesiastical figure on the front of the Cathach shrine as Manus O'Donnell would have been well aware of the existence of the shrine. However there are considerable differences in style: the Cathach figure is relatively plain and stands in a static, formal pose, whereas the manuscript portrait, as befits the medium, is more vibrant with fine detail and a lavish use of colour. The evidence presented above would conclude that the figure represents St Columba, but this identification may have altered over time. Other late medieval shrines also included figures of saints who are identified by inscriptions, such as the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, or by their actions or attributes, for example the saints depicted on the front of the Domhnach Airgid.

To summarise: the analysis of the iconography of the front plate of the shrine of the Cathach demonstrates that the central figure represents 'Christ in Majesty', although Christ also appears in the crucifixion scene; it does not represent a saint as these are not depicted enthroned and attended by censing angels. The standing ecclesiastic may be intended to be Columba but is unlikely to be St Patrick as he would not be granted such prominence on a Columban shrine.

The overall placement of the figures on the front may be derived from Irish medieval tomb sculpture where the juxtaposition of crucifixion scenes and erect figures is

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<sup>161</sup> Hourihane 1984, 861.

<sup>162</sup> Bodleian Lib., Rawlinson MS B514, f.1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>163</sup> Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1987, 808, pl.32a.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. I have not been able to trace the source of this iconographic feature, Henry does not cite a source.



common. The earliest Irish tomb-sculpture dates from the late-thirteenth to the early-fourteenth centuries, little of which survives, but an influential school of tomb sculpture with attendant weepers developed in Dublin in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>165</sup> A double-tomb slab from Kells, Co Meath, which dates to the second half of the fourteenth century, has a similar arrangement of figures as seen on the Cathach: on the upper half of the slab there is a crucifixion scene with the Virgin Mary, St John and censing angels while below there is a pair of secular figures.<sup>166</sup> There is a comparable juxtaposition of a crucifixion scene and standing saints and angels on the elaborate tomb at St Mary's Abbey, Howth, Co Dublin, which is dated to c.1462.<sup>167</sup>

There are also a number of engraved figures on the front of the shrine which appear to function as space fillers as they do not bear a direct relevance to the other scenes. The beasts include the anthropomorphs placed above the censer-bearing angels [Pl.46] and a winged rampant lion situated where the right arch springs from the centre arch. Other examples of anthropomorphs include a stone carving in Downpatrick cathedral,<sup>168</sup> the anthropomorphic dragon on the side of the casing of the Clogán Óir<sup>169</sup> and a nielloed-silver mount applied to the Mias Tighearnáin where the beasts are described as 'manticoras' [Pl.85.b].<sup>170</sup> The latter depiction has the same unusual feature on the Cathach where one of the anthropomorphs is shown frontally and the other in profile.

Other engraved figures include an ecclesiastic obscured by setting no.4; all that remains is a tonsured head and a hand with a dove hovering above, and a second bird placed between the feet of St Columba and the corner setting. Hourihane proposes that this engraved figure may represent St Francis preaching to the birds.<sup>171</sup> This is a plausible

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<sup>165</sup> Hunt 1974, 57, 105.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., no.188, pl.33..

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., no.50:b, pls. 192-93.

<sup>168</sup> Hourihane 1984, pl.27c.

<sup>169</sup> ibid., no.104/3, 803-5; Ó Floinn 1983, no.90b.

<sup>170</sup> Ó Floinn 1994, photo 15; 1998b, 153-4. Although Ó Floinn describes the anthropomorphic animals on the Clogán Óir and the Mias Tighearnáin as 'manticora' this is not the correct term as manticoras are described as having 'a lion's body, human head and scorpion's tail' (Hall 1984, 168).

<sup>171</sup> Hourihane 1984, 118-20, 889. For examples of St Francis in architectural and sculptural contexts see Hourihane (1984, 697).

suggestion but the saint is relegated to a very insignificant position. Ragnall Ó Floinn has suggested that the bird may be a reference to 'Columba', the dove.<sup>172</sup> Placed below the left censuring angel is a figure of a tonsured ecclesiastic holding a chalice. The relevance of this image is unknown but the top corner settings may obscure further scenes which may bear a relationship to this ecclesiastic.<sup>173</sup>

It is likely that the die-stamped border of heraldic beasts on the top and bottom of the front are purely decorative, although Crawford in his paper on bell shrines refers to the opposed lion and griffin on the casing of St Conall's bell as representing 'symbols of good and evil or life and death' [Pls.83-84].<sup>174</sup> Ian Fisher sees the oak leaves on the left and right margins on the front of the Cathach as being symbolic of Derry, as the Irish for oak is *doire* and the monastery of Derry was the first foundation to be established by St Columba.<sup>175</sup> This hypothesis is difficult to prove as naturalistic foliage was a common decorative motif in Irish Gothic art.

## **STYLISTIC ANALYSIS**

### **Primary Phase: Short Sides [Pls.41-42]**

Both of the short sides can be considered together as the layout and design are broadly similar, differing only in the treatment and placement of offshoots and tendrils. Due to the late medieval additions approximately half of the primary decorative scheme was not visible, thus hindering a comprehensive assessment of the ornament. However, in the recent past radiography has been successful in revealing the full extent of the decoration on the sides. Nevertheless, two factors hindered a complete resolution of the details. One end of each panel, the left side of SSA and the right end of SSB, appears to have had the surface filed down, thus obliterating most of the relief details, leaving only the outlines of the ornament. When the late-medieval corners were attached by solder, it was compressed

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<sup>172</sup> Pers. comm.

<sup>173</sup> Recent X-Ray images of the front of the shrine have failed to reveal any further engraved images [Fig. 20].

<sup>174</sup> Crawford 1922, 7. For the symbolism and iconography of the griffin in early medieval art, where it was considered to have carried off the souls of the dead, see Ryan (1993, 156-7) and for examples in Irish late medieval art Hourihane (1984, 84-5).

<sup>175</sup> This information was presented in a paper entitled 'The Cult and Relics of Columba' which was read to the Roscrea Spring Conference 'Relics, Reliquaries and Associated Places' on the 17th April 1993.



into the grooves giving rise to the thick bands which are visible in the radiograph and the accompanying outline sketch [Figs.18-19]. Also revealed by the X-ray is the truncation of the ends of the short sides. Approximately 1.5 cm has been removed from each end, which corresponds to the hinge/junction of the late-medieval corner mount. Thus the sides were originally longer than the dimensions obtained from the measurement of the interior of the shrine and the ends were cut away during the late-medieval refurbishment [Pl.40.a].

With the benefit of the radiographs it can now be seen that each serpent forms a figure-of-eight composition with the tail looping back around where it terminates in front of the snout as a lobed tendril. It appears that the crossing-points of the loops on the left snake of SSA and the right of SSB, may be bound by a ring knot [Figs.18-19]. Further parallels for this new evidence will be discussed below.

The term 'Ringerike' was first applied to the Cathach panels by the De Paors, but Henry, in her assessment of the shrine's earlier phase, did not provide a particular label to the ornament present on the short sides.<sup>176</sup> Farnes studied the shrine in her research on the relationship between Irish art and the Scandinavian Urnes style.<sup>177</sup> She included the shrine in her transitional Ringerike/Urnes style phase in which she defined the characteristic elements as tight foliage offshoots, bifurcated lobed foliage leaves and tight interlace at the crossing points of the bodies.<sup>178</sup> Urnes-style elements present are the use of ribbon-shaped animals of even width arranged in an figure-of-eight loop pattern.<sup>179</sup> Fuglesang's major study on the Ringerike style formulated the compositional elements of the style, and for the Cathach these were defined as animal bodies, without dents or broadenings, interlace points which interrupt the main animal bodies and the groupings of tendrils. She also remarked upon the Urnes style traits, for example the consistent use of two-line widths.<sup>180</sup> O'Meadhra, in her analysis of the motif-pieces from the Waterford city excavations, noted Scandinavian elements in the animal heads present on the short sides of the shrine. These include crested snakes with a pointed snout and a dominant upper

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<sup>176</sup> De Paor, M and L 1958, 166, fig. 33:a; Henry 1970, 91-2.

<sup>177</sup> Farnes 1975, 179-80, cat. no.10.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-4.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 180.

<sup>180</sup> Fuglesang 1980, 52-3.

jaw.<sup>181</sup> The ring-knot which binds one of the crossing points on each side can be compared to the ornament on the Norwegian rune-stone from Vang, where a similar knot binds the upper crossing point.<sup>182</sup>

From the above evidence it is apparent that there are possible Urnes-style elements present on the short sides of the Cathach. However the ribbon-shaped animals of even width arranged in a symmetrical interpenetrating loop pattern can also be found in the Dublin school of wood carving, for example on the sides of the crook handle from Fishamble St,<sup>183</sup> and therefore the composition of the sides of the Cathach may not be as strongly influenced by the Urnes style. Although the side panels are contemporary with the inscription and date to 1062 x 1094 other comparable artefacts will be examined in order to attempt to narrow the date range.

Stylistically one of the closest comparisons for the Cathach sides is the frequently cited bone motif-piece from the High St excavations in Dublin, which was retrieved from a twelfth- to thirteenth-century context [Fig.24.a].<sup>184</sup> Field A1 of the motif piece bears a pair of snakes forming two pear-shaped loops which are similar in some respects to the Cathach beasts. On both the shrine and the motif-piece the bodies are interrupted by tendrils which terminate in the central oval field and the animal-heads have the same forward-pointing eyes and extensive bifurcating head lappets which run parallel with the ribbon-shaped body. There are also noticeable differences.<sup>185</sup> The motif-piece panel is a more symmetrical and balanced composition with less trailing offshoots and appendages whereas the Cathach snakes form intersecting figure-of-eight loops. In the Cathach panels the beast-heads are placed top and bottom where their heads intersect, the motif-piece beasts have their heads situated in the opposite corners of the field. The jaws of the motif-piece snakes are semi-naturalistic, that is both jaws are discernable but with curled extensions. The Cathach beasts have convoluted upper jaws which interlace over and under

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<sup>181</sup> O'Meadhra 1997, 701.

<sup>182</sup> Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, pl. LVII; Fuglesang 1980, no. 60, pl.36b.

<sup>183</sup> Lang 1988a, DW 35.

<sup>184</sup> E71:708. Henry 1970, 92, n.1; Ó'Riordáin 1971, 75, pl. VIII; Lucas 1973b, no.41, pl.6; Farnes 1974, no.4, 170-1; Ó'Meadhra 1979, 44-6; Fuglesang 1980, 195-6; Ó Floinn 1983, no. 74a.

<sup>185</sup> O Meadhra (1987a, 163) also noted some differences.



each other whilst also interweaving with a loose tendril from the centre of the field. These floppy disjointed jaws are also present on the two interlaced bipeds found on panel C3 of the same motif-piece [Fig.24.a]. Even though the double-contoured bodies on this motif-piece panel are wider, the disposition is similar to the Cathach beasts with looped intertwining bodies, but the heads are situated in opposite corners. The Ringerike traits on this motif-piece would include the double-contoured bodies, tight foliated loops and the bifurcating, lobed foliate leaves. Farnes has detected Urnes- style motifs present in panel A1 of this motif-piece: the ribbon-shaped animals of even width arranged in two interpenetrating loops, and the head lappet forming loops around the crossing points of the animal's body.<sup>186</sup> A second motif-piece from the CCP excavations, found in an eleventh-century context, also bears a similar composition of two snakes with bodies composed of parallel strands, each forming a figure-of-eight pattern [Fig.22.a].<sup>187</sup> Both beast-heads have simple curled jaws and they emerge from the field at the lower centre, although the beasts on this motif-piece are eyeless.<sup>188</sup> The Urnes style elements in this motif-piece appear more developed.

An unfinished motif-piece from Fishamble St, Dublin, published by Johnson, has a panel consisting of two interlooping figure-of-eight scrolls running the length of the side.<sup>189</sup> This piece displays Scandinavian Ringerike characteristics which include a shell spiral at one end and foliate and tendril clusters with semi-circular indents and nicks in the outlines, all of which bear comparison with the short side of the Cathach [Fig.24.b]. However, except for a small area above the shell-spiral, the crossing points of the strands lack the distinctive meshing which form rectangular facets and there is a lack of zoomorphic features. In this motif-piece the strands are rounded rather than rectangular and end in simple lobes. Johnson has drawn parallels for the composition of this motif-piece with a wooden box lid, of probable early eleventh century date, from Fishamble St, Dublin, in which Lang observed English Ringerike features.<sup>190</sup> Johnson also compared

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<sup>186</sup> Farnes 1975, 170-71, cat. no.4.

<sup>187</sup> E122:323.

<sup>188</sup> O'Meadhra 1979, 39-40; Farnes 1974, 172-3, cat. no.5, Ó'Riordáin 1976, 136, pl.3; Ó Floinn 1983, no. 74b.

<sup>189</sup> E190:148. Johnson 1993, no.7, 25-7; 1997, 69, fig.1:40.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 25. The box lid has been published by Lang (1988a, 18, DW 28, fig.26).

the rigid and stylised appearance of the foliage on the motif-piece and the continuous chain composition to Southern English and Continental manuscript illumination, but has not provided any parallels.<sup>191</sup> A panel from a trial sketch found in Caedmon's Poems, an Anglo-Saxon manuscript dated to c.1000 AD, bears a crossing double scroll with elongated tendril offshoots.<sup>192</sup> Although this sketched panel is more symmetrical in the disposition of the tendrils, it closely resembles the motif-piece as both examples terminate in a double closed circuit knot. These additions to the manuscript have been dated from the first quarter to the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>193</sup> The above motif-piece has been dated from the late tenth to the early eleventh centuries based on its archaeological context but recent research has cast some doubt on the security of the context.<sup>194</sup> From the above analysis of the motifs and overall composition a date in the first half of the eleventh century would be more appropriate for this motif-piece. Another motif-piece from the same site has a partially completed field on one side which displays a contoured ribbon-shaped beast disposed in a figure-of-eight composition.<sup>195</sup> The head is unfinished but a forehead crest/lappet which runs parallel with the body and a figure-of-eight composition are comparable to the Cathach beasts.<sup>196</sup> Regrettably this motif-piece was retrieved from a disturbed context.

A decorated leather panel, which may be part of a sheath, was retrieved from early twelfth-century levels in the recent Waterford excavations.<sup>197</sup> The ornament, which demonstrates Hiberno-Norse influence, consists of regular interlace which forms two intersecting loops, each composed of two parallel strands. While there are no zoomorphic elements present, the meshed intersecting strands forming rectilinear facets at each end of the panel and the strands terminating in the centre of the field as a notched lobed tendril can be paralleled on the Cathach.

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<sup>191</sup> Johnson 1993, 27.

<sup>192</sup> Oxford Bodleian Lib., MS Junius 11; Temple 1976, no.58.

<sup>193</sup> Fuglesang 1980, no.110, pl.98:b.

<sup>194</sup> Johnson 1997, 69.

<sup>195</sup> E148:1127. Johnson 1993, no.2.

<sup>196</sup> The disposition of the animal on this motif-piece closely resembles the beast in panel D1 of motif-piece E71:708.

<sup>197</sup> E527:1555:47. Hurley 1997, 738-40, Fig. 18;12-6.



Another artefact which may be compared to the side panels is the zoomorphic pattern, executed in silver and niello, which is inlaid into the crook of the Clonmacnoise Crosier [Pl.91.a; Fig.26.a].<sup>198</sup> Some authors have described this design as Ringerike with strong Urnes overtones, which is characterised by the use of two-line widths, with the composition consisting of interpenetrating figure-of-eight loops intertwined with narrow tendrils.<sup>199</sup> Farnes has also cited Urnes style elements such as the lappets forming circular loops around the crossing points of the animal bodies and the upper lip folded over and across the snout, the head type and the fluency of the composition.<sup>200</sup> Another characteristic are the two strands interweaving around each other in an orderly fashion and the inlaying of silver into the copper alloy, rather than a false relief design. The lower end of the field displays an elegant looping composition which has distinct Irish Urnes overtones, especially the lack of nicks and/or indents in the tendrils. One feature of the composition which can be compared to the Cathach is the figure-of eight arrangement of the central animals forming oval loops, with the upper head facing to the right and the lower one placed upside-down facing left. Also comparable are the simple lower jaw, and the bodies composed of two parallel strands. This crosier has been dated to the late eleventh-century.<sup>201</sup>

The Misach book shrine has a number of features in common with the Cathach: the four narrow sides bear designs based on a synthesis of Ringerike and Urnes styles, while the base plate consists of openwork crosses [Pls.48-50]. In addition the overall size and shape of the shrine is quite close to the dimensions of the Cathach. The decoration on the side panels of the Misach are quite crude with the short sides displaying snakes and disembodied heads in an asymmetrical tangled composition forming multiple loops with tendril offshoots. Farnes has included the short sides of the Misach in the same group as the Cathach which is classified as Irish Ringerike with Urnes style elements.<sup>202</sup> Where the animal heads can be discerned there are oval eyes, sprawling lappets, short stubby

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<sup>198</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.77.

<sup>199</sup> Farnes (1974, 195-6, cat. no. 17) has classified the ornament on this crosier as a cross between Irish Ringerike with Urnes style elements and Early Irish Urnes style. Noticeably Fuglesang refers to the crosier but does not include it in her catalogue (1980, 53).

<sup>200</sup> Farnes, *ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.77.

<sup>202</sup> Farnes 1974, 161-4.

lower jaws and tangled upper jaws. The animals on the long sides form regular, repeating figure-of-eight loops with dense clusters of intertwining offshoots forming meshed facets at the junctions and terminations of the loops. The contoured bodies, faceted relief strands, notched lobed tendrils (notably the parallel layering of one notched tendril on top of another), all bear comparison with the Cathach zoomorphs. The primary phase of this shrine has been dated to 1070-1098.<sup>203</sup>

Other artefacts, even though they do not bear similarities to the overall composition of the short sides, will be considered as they have diagnostic motifs and technical features which are comparable. Henry grouped the Cathach with the Inisfallen crosier, the Misach, the bell-shrines of St Mura and from the river Bann, and the collar knop of the British Museum Crosier as a metalwork school centred on Kells.<sup>204</sup> This grouping was defined by foliate and shell spiral motifs in addition to the technique of inlaying niello with wavy silver wire.<sup>205</sup> Ó Floinn further refined this group by using a dominant design feature and the overall finished appearance of the artefact, with less reliance on specific techniques and motifs.<sup>206</sup> The features which he isolated include techniques and motifs such as relief casting and the liberal use of foliate patterns, especially lobed tendrils with a semi-circular indent where the tendril emerges from the stem.<sup>207</sup> He also incorporated a hemispherical gilt bronze boss from Clonmacnoise into the group, and drew attention to the appearance of the notched lobed tendril in certain manuscripts, for example two initials from the TCD *Liber Hymnorum* [Pl.105].<sup>208</sup> Since 1987 Ó Floinn has discovered two more artefacts which can be included in his Cathach group. A stone sundial, located at Kells Church graveyard, which bears a closed foliate link ending in a notched lobed tendril, and a small crest of a bell-shrine from Inchaffray, Perthshire, which also bears an openwork foliate

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<sup>203</sup> See p.313 of the Misach chapter.

<sup>204</sup> Henry 1970, 77, 85-94.

<sup>205</sup> The Cathach beasts lack the distinctive shell-spiral joints.

<sup>206</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 180-1.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. The indented lobed tendril is also present on a motif-piece (E122:18115) from CCP, Dublin, which has been dated on stratigraphical grounds to 1025-1050 [Pl.98.c]. This motif-piece also bears a vertical panel of foliage which is analogous to the foliage found between the ecclesiastic figures on the reliquary known as the Breac Maedog (Ó'Meadhra 1987a, 162; Johnson 1997, fig. 1:37).

<sup>208</sup> TCD MS. E.4.2. Ó Floinn 1987a, 181.



pattern with notched lobes.<sup>209</sup>

Before the above parallels are examined in detail it is worth drawing attention to certain shortcomings present in the groupings put forward by Henry and Ó Floinn. Whereas certain techniques may be indicative of a metalworking centre or school, motifs may not be as easy to trace.<sup>210</sup> Motifs can be assimilated and copied from one medium to another but techniques have to be learned, developed and mastered, and may have been passed on by itinerant goldsmiths. If a novel technique was developed by a goldsmith he may have regarded it as his own intellectual property and did not feel it necessary to divulge the exact method of manufacture. However any competent goldsmith would have been able to unravel a new technique by examination and trial and error in the production process. Some of the less complex techniques may be common to more than one school: for example the technique of inlaying twinned copper and silver wire into grooves is found on the long sides of the Cathach, the crest of the Glankeen bell-shrine and the collar-knop of the Clonmacnoise Crosier, each of which are placed in separate groups by Henry and Ó Floinn. This inlay of twinned copper and silver wires may have been introduced by the original inhabitants of Viking Dublin in the ninth century. It is found on the cross-guard of one of the more elaborate swords and a decorated lead weight from the cemeteries at Kilmainham-Islandbridge.<sup>211</sup> A further technique, the inlaying of wavy silver wire into fields of niello, was used as a criteria by Henry for the Cathach group but she also recognised that it was common to more than one group.<sup>212</sup> It is also found in the Cross of Cong group, where it is used to inlay the eyebrows of the beast-heads gripping the cross, and is also present on a narrow lateral strip at the junction of the crook and collar-knop of the Clonmacnoise Crosier [Pls.93.b,91.a]. From the above it appears that techniques may rigidly define a workshop/school at their inception, but eventually they become common to more than one group. Techniques would have originated from a single workshop or centre and eventually passed on by the production of artefacts. Certain

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<sup>209</sup> Ó Floinn 1997b, 269.

<sup>210</sup> Certain diagnostic motifs are shared by more than one group, for example, the Petrie crucifix (Ó Floinn 1987a, pl.1:g), is placed in the Clonmacnoise Crosier group but bears the lobed tendril motif of the Cathach group and its fine-line ornament would merit a possible inclusion in the St Lachtin's Arm group. The notched lobed tendril also occurs on a motif-piece from CCP, Dublin (see n.207 above).

<sup>211</sup> Boe 1940, 21-22, 51; Ó Floinn 1992, nos.243, 357:c.

<sup>212</sup> Henry 1970, 79-80.

techniques may have been copied or transmitted by way of itinerant metalworkers.

Another consideration in the groupings put forward by Henry and Ó Floinn is the ubiquitous presence of Clonmacnoise as a provenance for a number of artefacts from different schools.<sup>213</sup> From the Clonmacnoise Crosier group the eponymous crosier with the animal interlace on the crook is very similar to the ornament on the short sides of the Cathach, although executed in a different techniques [Pl.91.a; Fig.26.a].<sup>214</sup> Also from Ó Floinn's Cathach group is a gilt-copper alloy boss with false-relief decoration, which was also discovered at Clonmacnoise, while a ringed-pin from Clonmacnoise bears fine line silver and niello ornament of the St Lachtin's arm group.<sup>215</sup> An elaborate hanging-bowl escutcheon from the same locality has a beast-head with bulbous eyes and rounded pricked ears which belong to the cross of Cong group; on the same artefact is a field with angular enamel inlays which are analogous to the enamels on the Cross of Cong and St Manachan's shrine.<sup>216</sup> It may be that the provenances were falsified by antiquarians wishing to increase the value and status of the artefacts, or that Clonmacnoise was involved in commercial activities with other centres due to its own flourishing craft schools and was visited by numerous pilgrims throughout the ages. Another anomaly is the British Museum Crosier, which due to its intricate collar knop is placed in the Cathach group, but the later ferrule with the inlaid silver and niello decoration can be placed in the Clonmacnoise Crosier group.<sup>217</sup> The crosier may have been sent to Clonmacnoise for refurbishment or there may have been an itinerant goldsmith trained in Clonmacnoise who carried out a commission for Kells.

The Inisfallen Crosier, which both Henry and Ó Floinn have included in the Cathach group, will be considered first.<sup>218</sup> The ferrule and collar knop of this crosier

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<sup>213</sup> See Ó Floinn (1995b, 251-59) for the extent of artistic activities and patronage at Clonmacnoise during the medieval period.

<sup>214</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 181.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 180, Pl.I:c; 183, Pl.II:c.

<sup>216</sup> NMI 1941:1147. Illustrated in Lucas (1973a, fig.83). Henry (1965, 104, Pl.29) dated this artefact to the early Christian period.

<sup>217</sup> MacDermott 1955, Pl. XXXIV; Ó Floinn 1987, 181.

<sup>218</sup> Henry 1970, 85-87; Ó Floinn 1987a, 180-181. Neither the Clonmacnoise or Inisfallen Crosiers were included in Fuglesang's study. She stated '... that the formal characteristics are not Scandinavian' (1980, 52).



bear patterns of foliated tendrils arranged in clusters and large shell spirals executed in full relief [Pls.86.b;87.b]. These tendrils have the characteristic semi-circular indent in the lobe and also present is the technique of inlaying silver wire into fields of niello. These fields are situated on the border of the reliquary box on the drop, in the lozenge-shaped panels on the ferrule and on the rectangular framework of the foot. Some of the tendrils end in a simple lobe, similar to those present on the Fishamble St II motif-piece [Fig.24.b].<sup>219</sup> Only the knops and ferrule of the crosier have been cleaned and both sides of the crook retain extensive corrosion deposits, thus making it difficult to determine the exact nature of the zoomorphic decoration. On the crook there appear to be double contoured ribbon-bodied (?)snakes arranged in symmetrical loops, which are similar to the animals on the short sides of the Cathach. A full analysis and examination of the Inisfallen zoomorphs will have to await until the crosier is fully cleaned. The techniques and motifs common to both the crosier and the Cathach include rectilinear relief casting, faceted interlace, niello fields inlaid with silver wire, indented and foliated lobed tendrils and the bound clusters of foliage. Farnes has remarked upon the predominance of Ringerike elements, with no precursors in Irish art, in the cast relief decoration; particularly the centrifugal or diagonal arrangements of foliated tendrils around a circular centre and the dominating shell-spirals.<sup>220</sup> She did not detect any Urnes influences in the decoration. Overall the symmetrical composition with large spirals and undecorated areas provide a vigorous interplay in the composition. Henry has dated the crosier to around the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>221</sup> The evidence presented above, particularly the lack of Urnes style elements, and the comparison with the motif-piece from Fishamble St, which is dated to the early eleventh century, would corroborate Henry's date and place this crosier earlier in date than the Cathach, perhaps a decade on either side of 1050. This evolution of style would only apply if the crosier and the Cathach are from the same groups, there may have been a different sequence of stylistic development in other metalworking schools.

The other three objects in Ó Floinn's Cathach group: the hemispherical boss, the river Bann bell-shrine crest and the panel from St Mura's bell-shrine may be considered

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<sup>219</sup> E190:148. See n.189 above for references.

<sup>220</sup> Farnes 1975, 48.

<sup>221</sup> Henry 1970, 120.

together.<sup>222</sup> Whereas the boss has rectangular faceted interlace and lobed tendrils disposed over the full surface, the foliate patterns found on the bell-shrines are contained within a field and display openwork versions of the notched tendril. St Mura's is the more elaborate as the foliate tendrils intertwine while the river Bann shrine has zig-zag silver wire inlaid into niello fields along the edges of the crest, as well as cast panels covered with gold foil displaying palmette motifs [Pl. 79]. These two artefacts will be referred to later regarding other motifs and techniques which they have in common with the long sides of the Cathach.

On the collar knop of the British Museum Crosier there is an accomplished foliate pattern executed in false relief, with the broad bands inlaid with a profusion of niello into which is placed wavy silver wire.<sup>223</sup> The composition is tightly controlled with little space between the strands; a degree of symmetry is imposed by the central band of alternating triangles and shell spirals [Pl. 89]. Above and below this band, fleshy tendrils originate from the shell spirals where they terminate on either side of inset panels containing zoomorphic designs. One feature that is absent is the semicircular indent on the base of the tendril lobe. This crosier has been the subject of an intensive study by MacDermott and since then the dating of its various phases has been a source of contention, with dates ranging from the ninth to the eleventh centuries.<sup>224</sup> Johnson has used the evidence of the motif-pieces from CCP, Dublin, to date the zoomorphic decoration on the crosier collar knop to the second half of the tenth century, based upon the inset zoomorphic panels.<sup>225</sup> However it is also possible, on the basis of the foliate motif on the vertical binding strip, that the collar knop and binding strip may date to the early eleventh century.

Henry and Marsh-Micheli produced a comprehensive survey of Irish eleventh- and twelfth-century decorated manuscripts which included examples with foliage and animal

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<sup>222</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 180-81.

<sup>223</sup> MacDermott 1955, 98-101.

<sup>224</sup> MacDermott 1955. Johnson (1997, 197-200) has provided an excellent review of the literature pertaining to the dating of this crosier.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 209-10.



decoration.<sup>226</sup> Of particular relevance to the short sides of the Cathach are two initials from the *Liber Hymnorum* which display animals with double-contoured bodies.<sup>227</sup> One of these animals can be compared to the Cathach beasts as they are arranged in a figure-of-eight pattern with lobed tendrils intertwining around the body and bifurcating head and jaw lappets [Pl.105].<sup>228</sup> They also exhibit Urnes style traits such as the two-line width and where the strands intersect they do not fracture or break the outlines of the animal's body but interweave forming an elegant looping composition.<sup>229</sup> In a later publication Henry dated the manuscript to the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>230</sup>

In previous studies of Viking art, Wilson, Farnes and Fuglesang were content to categorise the Irish manifestation of the Ringerike style as all of a relatively late date, that is, well into the third quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>231</sup> Since then the Dublin excavations have provided a wealth of high quality decorated wooden carvings as well as numerous bone and stone motif-pieces which have caused the accepted dating of the Irish Ringerike style to be revised. Lang studied these carvings in great detail and grouped them into the traditional styles of late Viking art, for example Mammen, classic Ringerike and Urnes. He also isolated a Dublin School of wood carvers, centred on the Fishamble Street site which produced up to twenty high quality pieces.<sup>232</sup> This group displays characteristic motifs of foliate tendrils grouped in parallel elements, usually terminating in a volute. Also present are rectilinear facets of tightly-clustered interlace and beast-heads with lappets, moustaches and forward-pointing eyes, all of which could be defined as Ringerike features. The importance of the Dublin material lies in the fact that it can all be securely dated due to the nature of the stratigraphy and the presence of associated coin evidence. These dates

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<sup>226</sup> In particular their group II manuscripts. Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1962, 126-36.

<sup>227</sup> TCD MS. E.4.2.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 129, n.1 for bibliography of the manuscript. Henry (ibid., 133) has cited the Shrine of the Cathach as a parallel for this decoration.

<sup>229</sup> An example of these rectangular facets can be seen on an initial from the other *Liber Hymnorum* (MS. A.2., Library of the Franciscan House of Celtic Studies, Killiney, Dublin) which dates to the early twelfth century (Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1962, pl. VII:b).

<sup>230</sup> Henry 1970, 57.

<sup>231</sup> Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 144; Fuglesang 1980, 54. Farnes (1975, 45) states that 'Irish material which reflected Ringerike style influences cannot be dated before about the middle of the eleventh century'. These opinions were prior to the new artefactual evidence from the Dublin excavations.

<sup>232</sup> Lang 1988a, 20-25.

cluster around the first three decades of the eleventh-century.<sup>233</sup> Rather than the 'Dublin' school receiving influences directly from Scandinavia, Lang tended to regard the foliate elements as stemming from southern English art of the tenth century, along with some slight Scandinavian influences.<sup>234</sup> These English influences are in accordance with the close commercial, political and ecclesiastical links between Dublin and the south and west of England in the tenth and eleventh centuries. These have been the subject of research by Wallace.<sup>235</sup> As Lang demonstrated, this Dublin School-style seems to be more suited to wood and does not appear to manifest itself in contemporary metalwork or manuscripts.<sup>236</sup> Ó Floinn, in defining his Cathach group, also sees the flat rectilinear relief-casting as 'more akin to woodworking and stone-carving techniques'.<sup>237</sup> What we may have on the side panels of the Cathach is a fusion of influences from the earlier Dublin School: rectilinear facets, the parallel grouping of elements in addition to pure Scandinavian Ringerike elements present in the loose foliate tendrils and the zoomorphic head types. The Darwinian evolution of Ringerike followed by Urnes is not as straightforward as Henry, Wilson and Farnes proposed. The Urnes style elements on the Cathach as defined by Farnes appear to be concomitant with the Dublin wood school which had a symmetrical, balanced composition which may be considered quasi-Ringerike. Different schools may have developed at different rates, with gradual advancements in some centres while others mastered and assimilated new styles promptly.

Another aspect to consider is how wide ranging, if any, were the influences from the Dublin School? Was it confined to Dublin and its immediate environs, or did it infiltrate other centres which had commercial or political links with Dublin? Dublin-trained craftsmen and goldsmiths may also have dispersed stylistic influences. The engraved leather panel from Waterford displays Hiberno-Norse decorative elements which can be compared

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 46-7.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 23, 47; Johnson 1997, 91-2.

<sup>235</sup> Wallace 1986, 201-221.

<sup>236</sup> Lang 1988a, 48. However the decorated copper alloy openwork mount (E122:5852) from CCP, Dublin, [Fig.25.c] bears motifs which can be compared to the Dublin School wood carvings. See pp.308 of Misach chapter.

<sup>237</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 181.



to a number of motif-pieces from Dublin.<sup>238</sup> At this stage it is impossible to determine if Waterford developed these Hiberno-Norse motifs from imported Scandinavian models, if they were influenced by links with Dublin or whether there was an independent parallel evolution of artistic motifs.

In the corpus of bone motif-pieces with zoomorphic decoration from the CCP site, roughly contemporary with the wooden carvings, we cannot identify any motifs which can be considered characteristic of the Dublin School. In general the Dublin motif-pieces tend to arrange decoration as discrete panels of zoomorphic and/or geometric patterns. Because of the medium involved, bone, stone and leather, the three-dimensionality of wood carvings cannot be achieved.<sup>239</sup> The motif pieces were not intended to be functional artefacts, but acted as a medium for producing designs ultimately found in metalwork. However motif-pieces E122:323, E71:708, E190:148 and E148:1127 do have large fields extending over a full side which bears some relationship to the Dublin school of wood carving [Figs.22.a,24.a-b]. If there was an exchange of artistic influences between the different ateliers in Dublin it would be expected that some motifs (excluding the basic abstract and geometric forms) to be present in the archaeological record. This question can never be fully resolved until all areas within Dublin pertaining to the craft/workshops areas have been fully investigated.

The above objects that have been cited as having stylistic links with the short sides of the Cathach: the bone motif-pieces, the Misach shrine, the Inisfallen and Clonmacnoise Crosiers, the knop of the British Museum Crosier, the river Bann bell-shrine crest and the Dublin School of wood carving, may have some bearing on the date, but, before this is attempted the range of motifs and zoomorphic decoration present on the long sides should also be examined as these may further narrow the dating evidence.

### **Long Sides [Pls. 44-45; Fig.11]**

Even though the zoomorphs in the panels on LSA belong to the tradition of beasts disposed in panels on tenth- to twelfth-century metalwork (crosiers, reliquaries, motif-pieces, miscellaneous mounts), they have very few exact parallels. However, the panelled

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<sup>238</sup> Particularly E71:708 and E122:323, see nn.183, 186 above.

<sup>239</sup> A small number of wooden artefacts have been re-used as motif-pieces, see Lang 1988a, DW nos.17, 68, 85, 100, 104, 146.

beasts found on the British Museum Crosier do share some features, especially those found in the interstices of the collar knop [Pl.89].<sup>240</sup> They share splayed, curled jaws, lentoid eyes, head lappets which form a continuous strand with a hind-leg and the interlacing of limbs around the neck and torso. The crosier beasts have their anatomical elements arranged in a looser, more angular fashion. This is due to the shape of the panels: cruciform, triangular and lozenge with the limbs disposed along the edges of the frame, whereas the Cathach beasts are restricted to rectangular panels. One apparent difference is the use of hooks to indicate limb joints on the Cathach animals. There are no such devices on the beasts depicted in the collar knop, but they are represented on the profile beasts placed in panels on knops 2 and 3. However the crosier animals have suffered extensive wear which has led to loss of detail. These beasts on knops 2 and 3 also share some of the features outlined above, but in general their bodies and limbs are more naturalistic with less convolutions.<sup>241</sup>

As previously noted, the Inisfallen Crosier has stylistic links with the short sides of the Cathach, in addition to technical features such as niello fields inlaid with wavy silver wire.<sup>242</sup> On all three knops of this crosier there are copper alloy panels covered with gold foil framing animal designs [Pl.88a]. Due to the lack of resolution in the details it is difficult to distinguish the precise disposition of the head, limbs, lappets and other features. Where a specific zoomorphic feature can be discerned it forms a complex pattern: the animals are disjointed with many breaks in the body to facilitate the interlaced limbs. The ribbon-shaped bodies are formed of two uneven widths, the narrower terminating in dense clusters of interlace which fill up the lacunae around the bodies of the animals.

The next object which can be compared to the Cathach beasts are the zoomorphs on the sides of the Soisceál Molaisse book shrine. Even though there are no exact parallels they are closer in style than the animals on the British Museum Crosier. The general composition of certain animals with backward facing heads placed centrally above spiralled front and hind quarters compare to the Cathach animals [Figs.14-15].<sup>243</sup> Details such

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<sup>240</sup> MacDermott 1955, pl.XX, fig. 6.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., fig. 11, nos. 15 and 16; Johnson 1997, 206-9.

<sup>242</sup> See pp.252-53 above.

<sup>243</sup> In particular the animals depicted on ZP 1,3 and 5 on the long side and ZP 3 on SSB of the Soisceál.



as splayed stubby jaws, curled joints and interlaced lappets, tongues and limbs are common to the animals on both shrines, but there are also many zoomorphs which are peculiar to the Soisceál alone. In general, the Cathach beasts are simpler and more naturalistic, but have the features of extended tongues, tails and lappets, and have no ears.<sup>244</sup>

For the most convincing parallel we have to turn to a bone motif-piece excavated from CCP, Dublin **[Fig.23.b]**.<sup>245</sup> This contains a single beast set into a rectangular panel with a centrally placed backward facing head and the neck and hindlegs curling around to form a figure-of-eight pattern. Although the head is small in relation to the body it shares other features which are found on the symmetrical single profile beasts depicted in panels ZP3 and 4, LSA. For example the splayed clubby jaws, lentoid eye and a head lappet running parallel with the neck until it interlaces with the forward pointing forelegs. The joints are represented by a simple hook. What makes the parallel even more relevant is the fact that the tongue of the animal on the motif-piece terminates in a triquetra knot which is placed between the fore- and hind-legs. The same knot is found in the exact same position on panel ZP4, LSA of the Cathach. This motif-piece has been dated to c.1025.<sup>246</sup> A second motif-piece which shows close parallels in its animal ornament to the Soisceál can also be compared to the beasts on panels ZP3 and 4, LSA, and panel 1 on LSB of the Cathach **[Pl.98.b]**.<sup>247</sup> All show the animal head in the centre of the panel with a symmetrical coiled body arranged in a figure-of-eight position and the limbs, lappets, tongues and tails intertwining with the body. This motif-piece beast bears the characteristics shared by a number of motif-pieces from CCP, Dublin, which have been studied by Johnson.<sup>248</sup>

The next aspect to consider are the foliate panels: AP1, 3 and 4, LSA.<sup>249</sup> Panels

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<sup>244</sup> See pp.117-119 of the Soisceál chapter where these parallels are discussed in more detail.

<sup>245</sup> E122:16264. Johnson 1997, 67, figs. 1.25-1.28

<sup>246</sup> Johnson 1997, 103, n.51.

<sup>247</sup> E122:6566; Johnson 1997, Fig. 1.33.

<sup>248</sup> Johnson 1996, 335-6.

<sup>249</sup> A recent radiograph of the long side of the Cathach has revealed two additional foliate panels which are analogous in decoration to foliate panels 3 and 4 **[Fig.20]**. The radiograph was unable to reveal the details of the panels obscured by corner A, but there appear to be zoomorphic elements present.

3 and 4 bear the same motif with the two palmettes positioned horizontally with their apices facing inwards, which in turn are flanked by two half-palmettes above and below. Panel no.10 \*\*\* has a design of four linked half-palmettes. Parallels for these palmette elements are common among metalwork of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These designs may be incorporated into discrete panels or else found as a strip or frieze. This latter type is present on the upper binding strip on the British Museum Crosier [Pl.90.b].<sup>250</sup> If the Cathach palmettes from panels 3 and 4 are extended into a single length they form a striking parallel with the crosier binding strip. Both versions have a curled tendril at the tip with the volute emphasised by two nicks which form a break in the tendril on either side. Harbison has cited further examples of the half-palmette on two crosiers in his paper on crucifixion plaques.<sup>251</sup> The first is found in a miniature panel positioned along the edge of the drop of the Lismore Crosier.<sup>252</sup> This tiny half-palmette has a simple volute with a single tendril emanating from it. The edge of the tendril is not notched, so this comparison is not as valid as the example from the British Museum Crosier. His second example is found on the crook of an unlocalised crosier in the NMI where there are two foliate panels on the side of the crest.<sup>253</sup> These also differ from the Cathach examples in that they are formed from two volutes, each of which has a single tendril, the overall composition forming a compact figure-of-eight pattern. Again, this does not bear close comparison with panels 3 and 4, but is similar to panel 10 \*\*\*\*\* on the Cathach. At this stage it is worth examining Harbison's basis for his discussion on the palmette motif, the decorated bands on Christ's chasuble on the Clonmacnoise crucifixion plaque [Pl.92.b]. Whereas the foliage on the hem is paralleled by the panels on the unlocalised crosier, the remainder of the panelled decoration is analogous to panels AP1, 3 and 4, LSA on the Cathach [Pl.44]. All three vertical bands contain a frieze of interlocked half-palmettes; the central band is analogous to the three half-palmettes placed horizontally on panel no. 3. The tip of the lower tendril forms a volute which curls back on itself while the same break in the tendril lines are present on either side of the larger volute. This break is also seen in the foliate panels on the sleeves of Christ's chasuble. The right and left bands are also similar to the Cathach panels, but differ in detail. For example

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<sup>250</sup> MacDermott 1955, pl. XXXI, fig. 8.

<sup>251</sup> Harbison 1980, 36.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., pl.11.

<sup>253</sup> ibid., pl.12.



the right band is more angular and disjointed with the tendrils lacking the curl at the tip. The left band is more florid with greater emphasis placed on the nicks along the edge of the tendrils.<sup>254</sup> The date of this crucifixion plaque has been the subject of debate. Johnson has reviewed the literature<sup>255</sup> and has argued for a date ranging from the late tenth to the beginning of the eleventh century on the evidence of the dated artefacts from the Dublin excavations.<sup>256</sup>

Another metalwork comparison which has been already cited in relation to the short sides of the shrine is the crest of a bell-shrine from the river Bann [Pl.79]. While attention has been focused on the openwork crest with the notched, lobed tendrils there are other motifs worthy of consideration.<sup>257</sup> Engraved onto the flat surface of the arch there are three rectangular panels conjoined by two simple knots [Pl.79.a]. The central panel bears a design of dense, four-strand knotwork and flanking this on either side is a panel decorated with interlocking half-palmettes. Unfortunately these are corroded and most of the fine detail is effaced, but a nicked lobed tendril originating from a volute with a back-turned tip can be discerned. From a technical point of view this object has many features in common with the Cathach. The rectangular panels are of copper alloy covered with gold foil, and there are also fields of niello inlaid with silver wire which can be seen bordering the crest and the rectangular panels. These technical and stylistic features securely place this artefact in the Cathach group. One final metalwork example displaying the palmette motif is the plaque from a ?book cover with Irish Urnes-style beasts from Holycross, Co Tipperary [Pl.93.a].<sup>258</sup> The motifs are found in each of the semi-circular terminations of the cross and in two of the vertical panels forming the shaft. These half-palmette motifs are more fully developed with a fleshier, rounder and more compact composition. There are other differences: there is no break in the line of the tendril and the double nick is

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<sup>254</sup> While Harbison cited the loose lobed tendrils between the animals on the short sides of the Cathach as possible comparisons for the crucifixion plaque, he ignored, or was unaware of, the more valid parallels evident on the long sides. This approach is symptomatic in studies of metalwork: the most striking parallels are discussed in detail but the subsidiary motifs, which may have more relevance, are often overlooked.

<sup>255</sup> Johnson 1997, 222-6. However the author overlooked Farnes discussion (1975, 139-45) on Irish foliage decoration where she dated the Clonmacnoise plaque and the upper knop of the British Museum Crosier to the early eleventh century.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>257</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 181.

<sup>258</sup> Henry 1970, 114; Farnes 1975, no.27; Ó Floinn 1987a, 186.

absorbed by the volute, instead of appearing on the tendril. From the above analysis these Holycross motifs are closer to those found on the two crosiers cited by Harbison, and all three artefacts date from the last quarter of the eleventh century to the first quarter of the twelfth century. A parallel which illustrates the later development of the palmette motif is found on the skirts of the applied figures on St Manachan's Shrine and the ivory crosier head from Aghadoe, Co Kerry [Pl.110.b].<sup>259</sup> In these examples the palmette has lost most of the detail and become part of a regular interlace-like pattern based on alternating S-shapes. Ó Floinn has placed the Holycross plaque in Henry's Cross of Cong group, which also includes St Manachan's Shrine and the crosier head from Aghadoe.<sup>260</sup> These late examples of palmette motifs cited above are generally more rounded, compact and fleshy with a tendency towards asymmetry. In contrast the Cathach type are symmetrical on both axes and more elongated with greater detail, such as the notches and breaks in the tendril.

Foliate/palmette motifs are quite rare on the excavated material from Dublin where they are found on two motif-pieces and a decorated wooden toggle. The first motif-piece has been previously referred to as providing a close stylistic link with the side panels of the Cathach.<sup>261</sup> On one end of the object there is a symmetrical foliate design (motif C2) which consists of two nicked tendrils, each stemming from a volute placed at either end of the oval field [Fig.24.a]. These volutes form extensions which curl back and interlace with the opposite member in the centre of the field, while the foliate tip of each tendril forms the base of the opposite volute. The second motif-piece, also referred to above in conjunction with the side panels, has a small unfinished quatrefoil panel comprising four diagonally opposed palmettes with their apices bound by a rectangular knot [Fig.22.a].<sup>262</sup> Each palmette element is formed by two inward-curving arms which frame a truncated cruciform motif. Finally there is a single wooden example consisting of a decorated toggle from Fishamble St, which displays two splayed volute tendrils forming a crude palmette. The apex of the palmette is bound by a ring knot from which stems a

<sup>259</sup> Henry 1970, pls. 44, 46, 89.

<sup>260</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 186; Henry 1970, 106-117.

<sup>261</sup> E71:708, see n.184 above for further references.

<sup>262</sup> E122:323. O'Meadhra 1979, no. 26, motif C1.



similar motif on the opposite side.<sup>263</sup> This artefact was excavated from a level with coins dating to c.1000 AD. The last two examples do not bear any notches or breaks in the tendril, but the composition of two inward facing palmettes is reminiscent of panels AP3 and 4, LSA.

The decorated panels on long side B will not be discussed in detail as the motifs are extremely faint through wear, damage and technique<sup>264</sup> and where the composition can be perceived they are analogous to the decoration on LSA, for example panel PP 2 on LSB can be paralleled by panels ZP 3 and 4 on LSA.

A noteworthy technical feature is the use of hemispherical bosses of silvered copper which are placed in the corners of all the panels on both long sides. These bosses conceal the nail-heads and bosses of similar form and material are also used to adorn the panels on the sides of the Stowe Missal book shrine [Pls.33-34]

Now that a number of artefacts have been examined on the basis of style, individual motifs and technique, with some passing references to dates, it seems best to summarise the information in tabular form (see next page).

From the table it can be seen that overall the artefact with the most features which are comparable to the shrine of the Cathach, both stylistic and technical, is the Inisfallen Crosier (8). This is followed by the relevant portions of the British Museum Crosier (7), the bell-shrine crest from the River Bann and the motif-piece from High St (E71:708), both of which have 6 features. Aside from the Bann shrine<sup>265</sup> there is no independent means of dating these three artefacts except on art-historical, motif or technical comparisons with artefacts which do have an authenticated inscription. However this is a circular argument as the object with which they are compared to is the Shrine of the Cathach. Henry used the developed foliate motifs in illuminated manuscripts to date the British Museum Crosier

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<sup>263</sup> Lang 1988a, DW 29, fig. 31.

<sup>264</sup> These gold panels appear to have been incised with a blunt point rather than impressed over a decorated copper alloy backing plate which is present on LSA.

<sup>265</sup> The commissioner named on the shrine, 'Máel Brigitte' has not been positively identified or his status determined. Micheli (1996, 13-14) suggests dates of either 1000-1025 or sometime before 1117 based on a possible identification, but has urged caution and dates the shrine on stylistic grounds, with an 'earlier date considered more likely' (ibid.).

**TABLE 1: Stylistic parallels for the Shrine of the Cathach**

Artefact	STYLISTIC FEATURES							TECHNIQUES				
	Ringerike snake/ beast	Panels containing zoomorphs	Rectilinear faceted interlace	Foliated tendrill	Semi- circular indent on tendrill	Palmette motif	False/full relief decoration	Niello fields inlaid with silver wire	Silver/ copper wire twist inlay	Gold foil	TOTAL	
British Museum Crosier		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	7	
Innisfallen Crosier	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	8	
Clonmac- noise Crosier	X			X		X		X	X		5	
The Misach	X		X	X	X		X				5	
St Mura's Bell Shrine			X	X	X		X				4	
River Bann Bell Shrine			X	X		X	X	X		X	6	
Motif piece - E71:708	X	X	X	X		X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	6	
Motif piece - E122:323	X		X	X		X	X	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	
Motif piece - E122:18115			X	X	X		X	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	
Motif piece - E198:148			X	X	X		X	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	



collar knop and the Inisfallen Crosier to the mid-eleventh century.<sup>266</sup> From the evidence presented above the Inisfallen crosier has been dated to c.1050 and the relevant portions of the British Museum Crosier from the late tenth century to the first quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>267</sup>

The artefacts which show less points of comparison: the Misach, St Mura's bell-shrine and the Clonmacnoise Crosier, do not possess inscriptions. The only artefacts that can be securely dated by means of stratigraphy are the comparative bone motif-pieces with zoomorphic decoration which are dated to 1025-50.<sup>268</sup> The dating evidence provided by the motif-pieces should not be used exclusively to date the Cathach, as except for E71:708, they have only a restricted range of parallels. The manuscript parallels cited above would favour a date towards the end of the eleventh century as would the decorated leather panel from Waterford which is dated to the early twelfth century. Overall, though, on stylistic grounds, the evidence presented above demonstrates similarities with the Dublin material (wood and motif-pieces) and the Inisfallen and British Museum Crosiers, all of which have been dated from the late-tenth to the mid-eleventh centuries. Therefore, on the evidence presented above the writer would favour a date for the primary phase of the Cathach within the earlier date range of the inscription, between 1062 and the third quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>269</sup>

If it is taken that the primary decoration of the Cathach is the work of a single goldsmith, Sitric, then there is a contrasting approach to the sides. The long sides display the traditional panelled beasts of Irish tenth and eleventh-centuries artefacts, which can be paralleled on Dublin series of motif-pieces, the *Soisceál Molaisse* and a number of crosiers, interspersed with conservative abstract and foliate motifs. The short sides demonstrate a virtuoso approach to the animal ornament. No longer is it confined to discrete panels but fills the entire side and this novel approach was probably influenced by the Dublin school of decorated wood and elements of the Ringerike style. Sitric used the shrine to promote his skills, with the long sides appealing to traditional tastes while the exotic intertwined

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<sup>266</sup> Henry 1970, 119-21.

<sup>267</sup> Johnson 1997, 209-10. See p.254 above.

<sup>268</sup> Johnson 1997, 67-9, 206-9.

<sup>269</sup> See p.283 below for historical evidence which may assist in restricting the date of the shrine.

animals on the short sides demonstrated his range of compositional abilities. The introduction of new techniques such as false-relief casting, the inlaying of silver wire into niello and his mastery of old techniques such as twined silver and copper wire and the cast panels on the long sides also displayed his expertise.<sup>270</sup> A tour-de-force such as this, with his name incorporated in the inscription, acted as an advertisement and may have led to further commissions.

### **Base**

There is little difficulty in finding parallels for the openwork plate [Pl.39]. The composition with L shapes in the corners, T shapes along the straight edges and cruciform openings in the centre are found on the base plate of the Soisceál Molaisse and long sides of the Stowe Missal book shrines [Pls.28,34].<sup>271</sup>

### **Late Medieval Phase**

In this section attention will be focused on the front of the shrine, but the other late medieval additions present on the sides will also be included. Both the technical and stylistic features will be considered as an aid to dating. Before parallels are elicited it is worth drawing attention to the style and composition of the figures on the front [Pl.38]. At first glance the figures appear crude, naive, and ill-proportioned with little detail, the latter feature is due to excess wear on the raised surfaces. Although the right hand of Christ in Majesty is out of proportion to the rest of his body, this is not due to lack of compositional skill as it was a common visual device used to emphasise the authority of the blessing.<sup>272</sup> If Christ enthroned is compared with the other two panels it can be seen that they are centred on a vertical line whereas Christ is placed to the right to allow space for the gesture. If the position of the three figures in the crucifixion scene are observed it can be seen that they form a triangle with Christ's head at the apex. His arms form a second inverted triangle with his head situated in the field where the apices of the two triangles converge. Therefore this field enclosing his head acts as a focus for their grief. However Christ's legs have been unnaturally foreshortened with respect to his upper torso;

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<sup>270</sup> See Appendix two.

<sup>271</sup> The origin and parallels for openwork plates will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>272</sup> For example it can be seen on the adjacent panel containing the ecclesiastic and on the engraved bishop on the front of the Shrine of the Stowe Missal [Pls.38,37].



perhaps it was copied from a manuscript exemplar which portrayed Christ with a pronounced sway of the hips and the knees sharply bent. The goldsmith was unable to convey these features faithfully in the more restricted medium of metal.<sup>273</sup>

Another compositional trait is the juxtaposition of the postures of the angels and anthropomorphs in the spandrels above the flanking arches. Whereas the engraved anthropomorph in the right spandrel has its head in profile, the angel has its head placed frontally. Conversely the angel in the left spandrel has his face shown in profile while the anthropomorph's head is shown frontally. From the above it is apparent that there was an implicit compositional process present in the design and layout of the front of the Cathach.

While considering the stylistic parallels for the shrine the evidence will concentrate on those artefacts which can be dated by inscriptions or other historical circumstances so as to provide a date for the later medieval portions of the shrine. A reliquary which shares a number of features with the Cathach is the Domhnach Airgid.<sup>274</sup> Initially it may appear that the figures on both shrines are similar in style, but this is because they have both suffered wear which has effaced most of the fine detail present on the raised surfaces. The Domhnach displays a more refined style and superior technical skill with greater delicacy in the modelling and detail of the repoussé figures [Pl.67].<sup>275</sup> Immediately apparent is the procedure of placing figures in an architectural framework, although on the Domhnach the arrangement differs by using four separate panels on the front, each with a range of architectural elements. For example the top right panel has three niches with rounded arches, the bottom right contains three niches with pointed arches while the panels on the left contain a combination of single and double niches. There are also affinities in the figure style. On both shrines there is an erect ecclesiastic in a frontal pose with a cross staff in his left hand, the right hand raised in benediction and a low triangular mitre on his head. On the Domhnach, the drapery folds are more naturalistic and developed, with the lower limbs evident beneath the garments. The poses of the figures are not as static as

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<sup>273</sup> For example the crucifixion scene in the *Legendary of the Convent of the Holy Cross, Regensburg* (Schiller 1972, pl.452).

<sup>274</sup> Armstrong and Lawlor 1917-19; Mitchell 1977, 216-7; Ó Floinn 1983, no.85; Hourihane 1984, 795-401.

<sup>275</sup> For example the detailing of the plumage of St Michael and the hatching on the accompanying dragon's body on the front of the shrine.

those on the Cathach [Pl. 70.a]. Similarities also exist between the two Christ enthroned figures. Both are seated on thrones which are decorated with cross-hatching; neither has a halo, but both have similar wavy hair, and each has their right hands raised in blessing. There is a slight contrapposto pose on the Domhnach figure as his knees are positioned to the right. Although not as naturalistic, the drapery of the Cathach figure is more accomplished with multi-linear, deep voluminous folds.

There are many non-figurative details common to both shrines. The cross-hatched thrones which seat the Madonna and child and Christ enthroned on the Domhnach, are similar to the throne on the front of the Cathach [Pls. 67, 38]. This latter throne has beast-head pommels which are not too far removed in style from the dragon impaled by St Michael on the Domhnach, which bear similar gaping, fleshy jaws and large oval eyes but the Cathach beast-head lacks the long ears. Some of the heraldic beasts also display common features. For example the wyverns with scrolling tails found on the front corner binding strips of the Domhnach bear a resemblance to the die-stamped dragons on the front of the Cathach. They both exhibit the same trefoil tail terminals and tubular bodies but the Cathach dragons stand upright and have wings. The undulating tendrils enclosing oak leaves on the Cathach front are comparable to the floriated tail scrolls of the two dragons present on the front lower strip on the short side of the Domhnach [Pl. 70.b].

The juxtaposition of repoussé and engraved figures on the front of the Cathach has previously been commented upon. This device of contrasting decorative techniques is also present on one of the sides of the Domhnach [Pl. 69.a]. In each of the three rectangular panels there is a single repoussé figure with engraved figures in attendance: John the Baptist with an engraved Salome to his left, St Catherine of Alexandria is flanked by an engraved kneeling monk and an acolyte swinging censers, and Christ enthroned is flanked by two engraved censer-bearing acolytes. The engraved figures on the Domhnach are more elegantly drawn with an economy of line. They also form part of the narrative scenes and interact with the repoussé figures whereas on the Cathach the engraved figures function as space fillers.

From the above we can infer that the front of the Cathach has many features, both technical and stylistic, which would place it in the same workshop tradition as the Domhnach. However it does not merit a more definite attribution to the same metalworker



or school due to the differences in the quality of the figural work and the wider range of technical features on the Domhnach.<sup>276</sup> As the Domhnach is dated to c.1350 by inscriptions present on the shrine,<sup>277</sup> the Cathach's front plate should also be assigned a date around the middle of the fourteenth century, possibly a generation after the Domhnach due to the lack of refinement in the repoussé figures. The evidence presented above would favour a date from the middle to the third quarter of the fourteenth century for the front of the Cathach.<sup>278</sup>

A second shrine which may also be compared to the later medieval phases of the Cathach is the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth.<sup>279</sup> This displays many of the characteristics common to Irish late medieval metalwork such as repoussé figures, Gothic architectural elements and the use of die-stamping to produce repeating motifs, for example the heraldic beasts and foliate designs [Pls.71-72]. The crest of this shrine is composed of an openwork border with two dragons (the heads are obscured by solder), each with an undulating foliated tail which extend as far as the centre of the panel. Directly below the crest there is a frieze of confronted wyverns and dragons in separate panels. The tails of these beasts, which terminate in trefoil leaves, are analogous to those found on the Domhnach dragons below Christ's feet and the foliage strips on the margins on the front of the Cathach. Another comparison is the inclusion of engraved and repoussé figures on the reverse of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth. The engraved figures are of the same high quality as those found on the Domhnach, while the repoussé figures, although badly damaged, are of a higher quality than the Cathach figures, but not as accomplished as those on the Domhnach. The engraved and repoussé figures on the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth are placed in separate panels with no interaction between them. The figure of Columba on the front of the Cathach is similar to the engraved bishop on the reverse of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth. They are both placed frontally in a static pose with a low triangular mitre, the left hand raised in blessing and the right hand gripping a crosier. Although there is more detail present in the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth figure, due to the technique and quality of the engraving, there are similarities in the rendering of the vestments as on both

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<sup>276</sup> For example the use of niello, enamel and cast elements.

<sup>277</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no. 85; 1996, 40; Hourihane 1984, 795-801.

<sup>278</sup> Hourihane (1984, 790) dates this phase of the shrine to the second half of the fourteenth century.

<sup>279</sup> Crawford 1923, 92; Ó Floinn 1987a, 186; 1996, 40.

figures the orphreys of the chasuble and amice are decorated with cross-hatching.

The late medieval additions to the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth are dated by an inscription to c.1350-1376,<sup>280</sup> so this provides further evidence for a date in the mid- to late-fourteenth century for the front of the Cathach. The Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth is provenanced to the east Galway region, most likely Athenry, while the late medieval additions to the Domhnach Airgid have been attributed to Drogheda.<sup>281</sup>

Hourihane has studied the Irish later medieval crucifix figures and devised a typology based on the stylistic attributes. The constriction of the rib cage, emaciated midriff and long, voluminous loin cloth of the Cathach figure are features which occur from the fourteenth century onwards.<sup>282</sup> There are no relevant stylistic parallels for the accompanying figures of St John and the Virgin.

**Heraldic beasts:** Parallels for the confronted lion and dragon have previously been cited in relation to the Domhnach Airgid and Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth. In the corners of the bottom strip and the right corner of the top strip there are three die-stamped S-shaped beasts. It is difficult to fully resolve their features due to damage and wear which has obliterated most of the detail. They have a tubular, limbless body with what appears to be a head at each end, gaping fleshy jaws, circular eyes and possibly wings. No convincing parallels have yet been found for these double-headed serpents. A unique modification to the Cathach die-stamped panels is the addition of engraved plant and tree motifs which are situated in between the beasts on the upper and lower strips [Pl.46]. These would have been inserted when the other engravings on the front were accomplished.

A comparison which is of some interest is found on the late medieval additions to the shrine known as the Corp Naomh [Pl.77].<sup>283</sup> Behind the left arm of the crucifix there is a partially obscured rectangular die-stamped silver panel. This bears a confronted dragon

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<sup>280</sup> Ó Floinn 1994, pl.3; 1996, 40; Hourihane (1984, 814-8) dates this shrine from the mid-fourteenth century to 1376.

<sup>281</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 186; 1996, 40.

<sup>282</sup> Hourihane 1984, 142-3.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 808-9; Mitchell 1977, no. 56.



and lion identical in every detail to the heraldic beasts on the upper and lower strips on the front of the Cathach.<sup>284</sup> Both these plaques must have been struck from the same die as the dimensions in both are exactly the same. Unfortunately there is no inscription present on the Corp Naomh to allow a date to be proposed independent of the Cathach.<sup>285</sup> The presence of this plaque does not imply that both shrines were refurbished at the same workshop and/or by the same craftsman. The die used to produce the panel may have been used in different centres, or by the one itinerant metalworker in several different locations. Also the presence of this plaque on the Corp Naomh does not necessarily imply that it should be contemporary with the analogous heraldic beasts on the front of the Cathach. These dies may have been used for many decades after they were first manufactured.<sup>286</sup> Another point to consider is that this plaque may have been re-used or adapted from an earlier shrine or artefact and fitted at a later date. As the plaque is positioned beneath the arm of the crucifix figure, it was most likely mounted onto the wooden core prior to the proposed date of the crucifix, the early-sixteenth century.<sup>287</sup>

Cormac Bourke has compared the beasts on the die-stamped frieze on the cuff and lower margin on the Shrine of St Patrick's Hand to the Cathach beasts.<sup>288</sup> The design, which consists of pairs of confronted lions, griffins and stags along with a single bird, has been dated from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries. Other heraldic beasts are also found on the shrine of the Book of Dimma and the Bearnán Chonaill, but these are dissimilar and are not comparable [Pls.59,83-84].

**Foliate motifs:** Parallels for these are found on the front of the Bearnán Chonaill [Pl.83], but in this instance only a single leaf and acorn is contained within the undulating branch.

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<sup>284</sup> Since this chapter was first completed it has come to my attention that Hourihane (1984, Motif G, 839) had also noted this comparison. Hourihane describes these as 'griffins', but the term dragon is more apt as griffins should have the head, claws and wings of an eagle and the hindquarters of a lion.

<sup>285</sup> Hourihane (1984, 809) dates this phase of the Corp Naomh from the late fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries. The embossed silver strip bearing raised lentoids and the granulated tetrahedra are similar to the mountings which were applied to the Dunvegan cup in 1493 (Ó Floinn 1996, pl.6).

<sup>286</sup> See pp.363-4 for a discussion on this topic.

<sup>287</sup> Hourihane 1984, 809. Mitchell (1977, no. 56) dated the late medieval additions to the fifteenth centuries.

<sup>288</sup> Bourke 1986, 25-7.

The front of this shrine has been dated to the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>289</sup>

**Engraved figures:** There are no direct comparisons for the rampant winged lion whereas the anthropomorphs, which may be described as a dragon with a human head, not a 'manticora', can be seen on the late medieval casing for the Clogán Óir [Pl.85.b].<sup>290</sup> Due to the sketchy nature of the engravings no parallels have yet been found for the St Francis/Columba figure and the ecclesiastic holding a chalice.

The evidence presented above has presented a date for the front of the Cathach shrine from the middle to the third quarter of the fourteenth century. A date has now to be established for the six settings which are present on the front and to ascertain if they are coeval. Since these settings intrude upon, and obscure, the fourteenth-century decorative scheme they can be considered to be later in date. Immediately apparent on the two settings above and below the head of Christ is the liberal use of filigree, particularly the technique of using collared granules. These are analogous to the filigree on the corner frames which also exhibit the same collared granules.

To provide a possible date for these two settings and hence the additional corner frames, other metalwork artefacts which are dated by reliable means, and have similar technical features present need to be examined. One such artefact is the Misach shrine whose late medieval phase is dated by an inscription to 1534 [Pl.47].<sup>291</sup> The late medieval phase is confined to the front which bears die-stamped figures, a crucifix, various settings and filigree strips. The filigree has an abundance of collared granules but these are finer and smaller in scale and form a greater variety of patterns than those present on the Cathach. In addition the setting placed above Christ's head on the Cathach has small glass and pearl settings interspersed with the filigree; similar glass settings are found bordering the large central setting on the front of the Misach. Finally on the collars bordering corner frames C1 and D1 on the Cathach, there are lengths of twisted wire arranged to form triangular fields which enclose collared granules. These can be directly compared to the

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<sup>289</sup> Hourihane 1984, 808.

<sup>290</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no. 90b. Ragnall Ó Floinn has recently suggested (pers. comm.) that the figures may represent sphinxes.

<sup>291</sup> See the chapter on the Misach for full references.



triangular fields on settings nos. 1 and 2 and the lateral filigree strips on the front of the Misach [Fig.13].

Although the Misach provides the closest technical parallels, collared granules are also found on the cruciform setting on the front of the shrine of the Book of Moling, which is dated to 1402<sup>292</sup> and on the large setting on the Corp Naomh, although the filigree on this latter setting is less elaborate and has been dated from the late-fifteenth to the sixteenth-centuries [Pls.60.a,77].<sup>293</sup>

Additional evidence for resolving a date for these later settings may be the black letter epigraphy, representing the sacred monogram IHC, which is found on the base of the applied circular setting (no.5) above the head of Christ in Majesty [Pl.38].<sup>294</sup> According to one source the earliest occurrence of black letter in Irish metalwork is found on the Shrine of the Book of Moling, which was made in 1402.<sup>295</sup> It also appears on the rim of the Kavanagh Charter horn, the brass mounts of which date to the fifteenth century.<sup>296</sup> Black letter inscriptions are also found on the Limerick crosier where an IHC is contained within lozenge-shaped panels on the knop, and on the dedicatory inscription which dates the crosier to 1418,<sup>297</sup> on the Lislaughtin cross which is dated to 1479 [Pl.95] and on the mountings applied to the rim of the Dunvegan cup which are dated to 1493.<sup>298</sup> This form of lettering continued to appear on church plate until the first quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>299</sup> There is also a very faint inscription present on the censer attached to SSA,

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<sup>292</sup> Crawford 1923, 152; Macalistar 1949, no. 567a; Ó Floinn 1994, photo 21.

<sup>293</sup> Hourihane 1984, 809.

<sup>294</sup> see p.64, Vol.II.

<sup>295</sup> Ó Floinn 1981, 273.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Hunt 1952, 13-14, pls.VI-VII,IX; Hourihane 1984, 810-11; Ó Floinn 1996, 37-8.

<sup>298</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.88; 1996, 36-7, pl.6.

<sup>299</sup> For example the De-Burgo-O'Malley chalice which is dated to 1494 (Buckley 1939,14-18, fig.1). See also Ó Floinn 1996, 36; 1981, 273.

which is contemporary with the corner frame to which it is attached.<sup>300</sup> If this lettering was inscribed when these mounts were fabricated, and not later, it would suggest a date ranging from the first decade of the fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century. However the inscriptions present on the Misach and St Caillin's shrine (respectively dated to 1534 and 1536) appear to be a debased version of black letter script whereas the script on the Cathach mount is of a purer form. This evidence would then support a date from the last quarter of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century.

Therefore, from the evidence above, the filigree which is closest in technique and style is the Misach which is dated to 1534, although the filigree on the Cathach is not as refined. The black letter provides a range from the first decade of the fifteenth century up to the mid-sixteenth century. Before a final date is proposed for the settings and mounts, the motifs present on the panels mounted on the corner frames will be examined to see if they can assist in narrowing the date range.

**Acanthus leaves:** These stamped motifs are present on corners A and B. Direct parallels are rare but cast acanthus sprays extend from the arms of the Lislaghtlin processional cross which has been dated by an inscription to 1479 [Pl.95], and on a cross from Sheephouse, Co Meath, which is of similar date.<sup>301</sup> Interspersed among the acanthus leaves on the Cathach panel is a row of raised miniature quatrefoils which are analogous to a border of quatrefoils below the ecclesiastics on the front of St Caillin's shrine, which is dated to 1536 [Pl.66.a].<sup>302</sup>

**Trefoil leaves:** These are present on corner C1 where they are set against a hatched

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<sup>300</sup> In Doherty's comprehensive description of the shrine of the Cathach (1895, 580-82) he states that he had an unidentified expert in epigraphy examine the inscription on the censer. His reading is as follows: AN:CRIS:MD:CUI: which he translates as ANNO CHRISTI MDCVI (1607). This evidence is suspect as Doherty was attempting to justify his hypothesis that the shrine travelled to the continent with the flight of the Earls in 1607. The evidence presented in the history section of this chapter does not support Doherty's argument. His technical observations are also questionable: he states that the letters (on the censer) were '... first cut out of thin silver plate, and soldered onto the surface of the censer with silver solder' (ibid., 580). This would appear to be an unnecessary elaboration, especially the soldering of miniature strips of metal onto a curved surface when it would be much simpler to engrave the characters into the metal. From the writer's examination using magnification the faint lettering that remains is the result of engraving and was not applied as separate strips. Armstrong (1916, 395) also attempted to read the inscription but only produced the letters ME FECIT which does not correspond with Doherty's version.

<sup>301</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.88; Hourihane 1984, 745-8, 750-1.

<sup>302</sup> Ó'Floinn 1996, pl.9



background. A similar foliate motif is found on the crest of the later casing of the Clogán Óir which is dated to the late-fourteenth century<sup>303</sup> and can also be found on the silver and niello borders and on the corner frames on the front of St Caillin's shrine, which dates to 1536.

**Contoured knotwork:** This panel is present on corner C of the shrine. A similar panel is found on the right arm of the Lislaghtlin processional cross which has been dated by an inscription to 1479 [Pl.95]. Comparable knotwork panels are also found on the edge of collet of setting no. 2 and the bottom right binding strip of the Misach, which is dated to 1534 [Pl.47]. Simple two-strand interlace and knotwork motifs, executed in filigree, are present on the bottom flange of the Dunvegan cup, which is dated by an inscription to 1493.<sup>304</sup> A variety of interlace and geometric motifs forms are found on the leather satchel from the Book of Armagh, which also dates to the fifteenth century.<sup>305</sup>

Another technical feature are the narrow silver borders with a step/fret pattern inlaid with niello which are present on corners C and B of the long sides [Pls.44-45]. Similar designs, executed in nielloed silver, can be observed on St Caillin's shrine where they decorate the clips used to retain the edges of the corner binding strips in place [Pls.62,64-65]. They are also found on the front of the Domhnach Airgid where they are used to partially frame the four panels containing repoussé figures [Pl.67]. On corner A of the Cathach the rectangular frame is engraved with a faint pattern consisting of a chevron alternating with a vertical slash. An analogous motif is present on the outer casing of the Clogán Óir where it is situated on the lower curved frame outlining the handle of the bell [Pl.85.a]. The late medieval additions to the Clogán Óir are dated to the late-fourteenth century.<sup>306</sup>

From the above analysis of the filigree settings, corner frames and inset panels on

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<sup>303</sup> Ó Floinn (1983, no. 90b) and Hourihane (1984, 803-5) have dated this shrine to the early-fifteenth century. However based on the close similarities of the head types and the textured engraving to the front of the Shrine of the Stowe Missal and the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, the writer would propose a date in the late fourteenth century.

<sup>304</sup> Ó Floinn 1996, 36-7, pl.6.

<sup>305</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.86; Waterer 1968, pls.VI,VII.

<sup>306</sup> See n.303 for references.

the shrine of the Cathach, comparable motifs and techniques have been discovered on the following artefacts:<sup>307</sup> the Misach has filigree, small glass settings, contoured knotwork; St Caillin's Shrine has die-stamped quatrefoils, silver and niello frames with step motifs, engraved trefoil leaves; Lislaghtlin cross: contoured knotwork, acanthus sprays; Clogán Óir: engraved trefoil leaves and a chevron/slash motif. These artefacts date from the late-fourteenth century (Clogán Óir) to the second quarter of the sixteenth century (1536, St Caillin's shrine). The majority of the parallels relate to the Misach and St Caillins shrine which would indicate a date for the Cathach mounts in the first half of the sixteenth century. However from the analysis of the black letter inscriptions on the Cathach mounts the evidence would favour an earlier date, from the last quarter of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century.

To summarise briefly: from the evidence of the Domhnach Airgid, the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth the front of the Cathach (including the decorated strips with heraldic and foliate designs) should be dated from the middle to the third quarter of the fourteenth century, the four corner frames and the two central mounts should be dated from the last quarter of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century. It is difficult to find parallels for the remaining four settings but the crudeness and lack of filigree would tend to indicate a later date, possibly in the late-sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. They may have been reused from another shrine or artefact.

## **DISCUSSION**

Ó Floinn has probed the early history of the Cathach manuscript and has arrived at an ingenious hypothesis, that the Cathach and the *Soscéla Martain* are one and the same.<sup>308</sup> He has provided the following reasons to support his arguments. The generic term *cathach* has been used for many other relics and is an emblem associated with a number of warrior saints, therefore the manuscript may have been known under a different name before the thirteenth century.<sup>309</sup> The name Cathach cannot be found in texts earlier than the thirteenth century, furthermore there are no earlier records associating it with

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<sup>307</sup> This survey is confined to artefacts which display more than one technical and/or stylistic feature.

<sup>308</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 124-6.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 124-5; Lucas 1986, 17-20.



Columba.<sup>310</sup> It is not referred to in any of the early lives of Columba or in the Irish Life composed in Derry, c. 1150, which makes it unlikely that there was a relic known as the Cathach in Derry at this time. It would be unusual for such an eminent relic to be ignored in all hagiographical and annalistic records prior to the thirteenth century.

In the Irish Life of Columcille, which was composed at Derry, c.1150, there is a passage which recounts how Columba brought back from Tours 'the Gospel which had been on Martin's breast in the grave for a hundred years'.<sup>311</sup> This gospel, the *Soscéla Martain* was one of the principal treasures of the monastery of Derry and was ranked of equal importance with the *Bachall Íosa*, the Staff of Jesus, the principal relic of Armagh.<sup>312</sup> The cult of St Martin was strong in Derry and there are records of a cemetery and well dedicated to the saint.<sup>313</sup> The *Soscéla Martain* was last heard of in 1182, when it was captured by the opposing forces after the battle of Drumbo, Co Antrim, where, significantly, it was used as a cathach.<sup>314</sup>

According to Ó Floinn the *Soscéla Martain* reappeared in the thirteenth century as the Cathach, its name and use as a battle talisman associated with their patron saint suited the needs of the Clann Domnaill more than its earlier relationship with the more remote St Martin of Tours.<sup>315</sup> Its connection with the battle of Cúil Dréimne in Sligo may have been devised due to the military ambitions of the Clann Domhnall at this time. If the tradition of Columba and the battle of Cúil Dréimne is early, then why is there no mention by Adamnán in his Life of St Columba? According to Ó Floinn it appears likely that the above incidents are late inventions as the source is the late medieval AFM. A late sixth- to early seventh-century psalter in Insular script could have been taken, in the thirteenth

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<sup>310</sup> The dating of the text known as the *Aided Muirchertach*, has not been resolved, see n.8 for references.

<sup>311</sup> Herbert 1988, 23, 257.

<sup>312</sup> AU 1166; MIA 1165 (recte 1166). Bourke (1993a, 18) has discussed the importance of the *Bachall Íosa*.

<sup>313</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, n.215.

<sup>314</sup> AU 1182

<sup>315</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 126.

century, as having been a gospel written by St Columba.<sup>316</sup> Who invented these traditions in the thirteenth century? The earliest reference is found in the *Book of Fenagh* which may have been written during the reign of Domnall Óg Ó Domnaill. He broke from convention on his accession in 1258 when he was inaugurated in the church at Raphoe, Co Donegal, and not at the traditional site of Kilmecrenan. This political declaration may have been accompanied by other changes including, perhaps, the invention of the traditions associated with the Cathach outlined above.<sup>317</sup>

Ó Floinn has also acknowledged that there are complications which are difficult to resolve with the above hypothesis. Above all, if the *Aided* is as early as the eleventh century then there was a relic known as the Cathach associated with the Cenél Conaill and Cenél Eógain at that date. The term Cathach became associated with the relic and it possibly derived this name after 1182 when it was used as battler at the skirmish at Drumbo. The transfer of legends pertaining to Martin to Columba is not unique as the Columban federation also subsumed the cult of Cairnech and the associated Misach reliquary by the early seventeenth century.<sup>318</sup> Ó Floinn's hypothesis has not been critically evaluated in the public domain, but it may be possible that the manuscript known as the Cathach was perceived as the *Soscéla Martain* before 1200.<sup>319</sup> To avoid confusion the manuscript will still be referred to as the Cathach throughout this thesis.

Lawlor made a detailed study of Manus O'Donnell's account of the battle of Cúil Dréimne and the subsequent episodes and emerged with the following conclusions.<sup>320</sup> In his compilation of the sources O'Donnell introduced discrepancies and compounded inconsistencies. One example is the Curnan mac Aedh incident, which directly follows King Diarmait's judgement and appears to have been appended from a different source.

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<sup>316</sup> See n.325 for the use of manuscript appellations in the annals and texts. At this stage the manuscript may have been badly deteriorated, with no possibility of recognising the script or contents. Lawlor (1916, 246-7) analysed the present and original dimensions of the manuscript and determined that it was already in a mutilated state before its enshrinement in the eleventh century.

<sup>317</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 125-6.

<sup>318</sup> See Misach chapter pp.328-330 for further information.

<sup>319</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn has informed the writer that his hypothesis has been regarded favourably by Prof. Marie Herbert of UCC and Prof. F.J. Byrne of UCD.

<sup>320</sup> Lawlor 1916, 292-307, based on O'Donnell's *Betha Colaim Chille*, chapters 168-82.



Diarmait's violation of Columba's protection provided an additional motive for the hostilities between Columba and King Diarmait which culminated in the battle.<sup>321</sup> Lawlor suggested that the reason Columba decided to exile himself to Iona was because of the uneasy relations between himself and the ecclesiastical hierarchy allied to the southern Uí Neill, thereby constraining his spiritual ministry.<sup>322</sup>

According to Lawlor, Adomnán did not refer to the incident of the copying of the book as it was not a commendable episode in Columba's career and furthermore Manus O'Donnell did not positively identify the book at the centre of the controversy. Therefore Adomnán suppressed it, and Lawlor contends that because he did not remark upon the events does not necessarily imply that they did not occur.<sup>323</sup> Ó Cochláin has cited two sources that cast doubt on the copying incident, as the earliest evidence for the battle are the annals, which were compiled in the tenth century.<sup>324</sup> His basis for questioning the traditions are that if a copy was made it was a gospel, not a psalter, but the term 'gospel' has, in Irish hagiographical writings, been used to embrace a wide range of ecclesiastical books and it is only on rare occasions that they are identified by name.<sup>325</sup> Furthermore there was no enmity between Columba and Finnian as they held each other in high regard. The battle should be seen as part of the expansion of power of the Northern Uí Neill, and was not instigated by Columba as revenge against king Diarmait. Ó Cochláin has also seen Adomnán's omissions of the copying of the book and the ensuing feud as additional evidence for challenging the traditional narrative. He has asserted that Columba's reason for imposed exile was to act as a pilgrim for Christ.<sup>326</sup> Ó Floinn also questions Adomnán's omission of the supposed links between Columba and the battle but views these

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<sup>321</sup> Lawlor 1916, 299.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 307. MacLennan (1929, 19), whose paper contains many inaccuracies, agreed with Lawlor on this point.

<sup>324</sup> A Tig. Ó Cochláin 1968, 159, nn. 8,9.

<sup>325</sup> Lawlor (1916, 327-8) has shown that the appellations 'gospel' or 'psalter' should not be taken literally. The writer would contend that it is impossible to entangle the true nature of the relationship (if any) between Finnian and Columba from the embellishments of the later hagiographical glosses. The writer finds it unlikely that enmity would have arisen over the copying of a book. Irish ecclesiastics were more than generous with their provision of books to scholars and students and would have encouraged the study of new and revised texts. See Lawlor (*ibid.*) for examples of books identified by name.

<sup>326</sup> Ó Cochláin 1968, 159.

episodes as late inventions and not Adomnán trying to suppress Columba's controversial past deeds.<sup>327</sup>

More recent analysis of the battle and the following episodes by Herbert and Sharpe<sup>328</sup> has cautioned against seeing any link between the battle and Columba's leaving Ireland. However it is possible, on the evidence of the annals, that Columba actively supported his own king against the high king by the act of public prayer.<sup>329</sup> Herbert has, according to Sharpe, satisfactorily resolved the supposed links between the battle, the events at the synod at Tailtin and Columba's decision to enter his pilgrimage.<sup>330</sup> In 561 Columba inspired his kinsmen by public prayer prior to the battle, as noted above they were successful and the high king was defeated.<sup>331</sup> At the Tailtin gathering of the Southern Uí Neill in 562, their vanquished king and overlord may have used his influence to persuade the clergy to act against Columba.<sup>332</sup> Columba's ecclesiastical position was compromised as he could not disregard his family's political interests and was therefore subjected to hostility from their adversaries. His only course of action was to sever the links between his religious and political entanglements by exiling himself from Ireland.<sup>333</sup>

Herbert's hypothesis explains Adomnán's dating of Columba's departure from Ireland by reference to the battle, as Columba's prayers prior to the battle are recorded in the relevant annal entries. It also resolves the connection between Columba's supposed excommunication and his penitential exile. As Columba remained a respected figure in Ireland his 'excommunication' did not lead to a long exile or ostracism by the church. Therefore it is unlikely that Adomnán would have had the need to conceal Columba's involvement in the battle of Cúil Dreimne.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 125. This aspect will be discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>328</sup> Herbert 1988, 27-8; Sharpe 1995, 12-15; Anderson (1991, XXX) has related the traditions of the battle but failed to discuss or analyse them.

<sup>329</sup> Sharpe 1995, 13.

<sup>330</sup> Herbert 1988, 27-8; Sharpe 1995, 13-14.

<sup>331</sup> A Tig.

<sup>332</sup> This synod also functioned as an annual fair (Sharpe 1995, 14).

<sup>333</sup> This course of events was also proposed by Lawlor (1916, 305).

<sup>334</sup> Sharpe 1995, 15.



The enshrinement of the Cathach in the eleventh century may have been part of the Ua Domnaill/mac Robartaigh claim to the office of comarba Columcille.<sup>335</sup> They would have had rival claimants, for example, the Ua Cannannáin/Ua Máel Doraid,<sup>336</sup> who were attempting to gain the kingship of the Cenél Conaill and wrest control of the appointment of abbots of monasteries under their control, such as Iona, Kells and Derry.

Another reason for the enshrinement of the relic at this time may have been due to the threat posed by Domnall mac Lochlainn, king of Cenél Eogáin since 1083, who was actively seeking the high kingship. In 1093 he blinded the Cenél Conaill king, Aed Ua Cannannáin; in 1094 he marched on Meath, and in 1098 he inflicted a crushing defeat on the Cenél Conaill at Fersat Mór.<sup>337</sup> By 1113 he had imposed his own son into the Cenél Conaill kingship and was also responsible for bringing the monastery of Derry under Cenél Eogáin control.<sup>338</sup> In response to these actions the Cenél Conaill may have facilitated the enshrinement of an important relic associated with Derry's founding saint as part of their attempt to retain control of the city.

For an object to be considered worthy of enshrinement it had to attain the status of a relic. The manuscript originally contained within the shrine was traditionally believed to have been either the personal psalter of Columba, the gospels which led to the battle of Cúil Dréimne or the *Soscéla Martain*. However, since the battle above is now believed to be an invention of the thirteenth century, it would not have applied in the eleventh century.

As the Cathach is not a luxurious psalter, gospel book or missal, but a mundane psalter (albeit with significant decorative initials) there is more reason to associate it with a saint or some venerated ecclesiastic.<sup>339</sup> There must have been a strong tradition in the

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<sup>335</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 121-22.

<sup>336</sup> The Ua Cannannáin and the Ua Máel Doraid were of the Cenél Naeda septs who monopolised the kingship of the Cenél Conaill in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Herbert 1988, 92).

<sup>337</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 122; Herbert 1988, 95-6.

<sup>338</sup> Ó Floinn, *ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> The more luxurious manuscripts (for example the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne and Durham Gospels; TCD MS 58; Alexander 1978, no.58; London, BL, Cotton MS Nero D.IV; Alexander 1978, no.9; Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A.II.17; Alexander 1978, no.10) would have been used for display and propaganda purposes during liturgical ceremonies or relevant feast days and would not have been kept sealed in a shrine (see Chapter 1, pp.64-73 for further discussion).

eleventh century that indeed this was a manuscript directly associated with St Martin or Columba and therefore eligible for enshrinement. In the second half of the eleventh century a shrine was commissioned. If there was a pre-eleventh century shrine there are no records of its existence.<sup>340</sup>

From the stylistic analysis of the primary phase of the shrine the evidence has concluded that it should date from 1062 to the third quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>341</sup> The annal entry of 1090 has been used by some scholars in order to determine the date of the shrine, but this conflicts with the date advanced above. The entry reads as follows:

Columb Cille's reliquaries<sup>342</sup> ... the Bell of the Kings, and the Flabellum, and the two Gospels, were brought out of Tyrconnel, together with seven score ounces of silver. And Aengus Ua Domhnalláin was he that brought them from the North.<sup>343</sup>

Henry, in her analysis of the episode, suggested that along with the other named reliquaries, the Cathach and the Misach may have been sent from Donegal to Kells in 1090 along with the silver required to enshrine them.<sup>344</sup> Henry failed to account, or mention, the 'two Gospels' referred to in the entry but proposed that the Shrine of the Cathach may date to 1090. However, she conceded that due to the importance of the manuscript, it could have been enshrined as early as 1062.<sup>345</sup> Henry's views were then incorrectly propagated by subsequent writers who used the annal entry as conclusive evidence for dating the shrine of the Cathach to 1090, even though it was not directly referred to in the annal entry. Farnes, although not citing Henry, stated that 'the donor inscription on the shrine of the Cathach ... gives it an historical date of 1090'.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> See n.316 for Lawlor's assessment of the state of the manuscript prior to enshrinement.

<sup>341</sup> See p.264 above.

<sup>342</sup> According to Ragnall Ó Floinn (pers. comm.; now 1997a, 138) the word *minnaibh* translates as 'badge', 'emblem', 'insignia', 'halidom', or 'sacred object' associated with Columba. 'Relics' or 'reliquaries' are too equivocal to be used as a general term.

<sup>343</sup> A Tig.

<sup>344</sup> Henry 1970, 89-91.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 91. Cormac Bourke (1997b, 172, n.13) has shown that Henry was mistaken in her assumption that there was a passage in AU identifying Kells as the destination of the artefacts; there is no such entry.

<sup>346</sup> Farnes 1975, 54.



Herbert, in her notable study of the ecclesiastical politics of the Columban *familia* was the first to suggest that one of the two gospels referred to in the annal entry was likely to have been the Cathach and that the shrine may have returned north with Domhnall mac Robartaigh, who retired as abbot of Kells in 1094.<sup>347</sup> Ó Floinn developed and expanded Henry's and Herbert's arguments by proposing that both the Cathach and the Misach are likely to have been the two gospels referred to, as the 1090 date for the annal entry corresponds to the dating provided by the inscription (1062-98) on the Shrine of the Cathach; that the Shrine of the Cathach was manufactured at Kells in the late eleventh century and that Ua Domhnalláin was a member of the Kells community.<sup>348</sup>

This entry has also been commented upon by Bannerman who has proposed an elegant explanation for the movement of the Columban reliquaries in 1090. The artefacts were sent from Kells on a circuit of Tír Conaill and the 140 ounces of silver was paid in tribute to *comarba Coluim Chille* from the Cenél Conaill.<sup>349</sup> Ó Floinn now supports this view, as Ua Domhnalláin, who accompanied the material was a Kells official.<sup>350</sup> This would imply that the silver was not used for enshrining reliquaries. On the contrary, it would be more likely that the shrine was manufactured prior to the circuit so as to enhance the prestige of the relic and record the patron and commissioners on the shrine. From the evidence presented above the Cathach may have been on a circuit in Donegal, and the term 'gospel' would have applied if the enshrined manuscript was, at that time, known as the *Soscéla Martain*.

The above demonstrates that there is no established evidence for the enshrinement of Columban relics at Kells in 1090 and therefore this entry should not be used to provide a firm date for the enshrinement of the Cathach, or indeed the Misach. It is difficult to see how both shrines can be regarded as contemporary and manufactured at Kells, when the Misach is clearly an inferior copy executed by a craftsman with lesser abilities than Sitric Mac Meic Aedh.

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<sup>347</sup> Herbert 1988, 92-3.

<sup>348</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 122, 131.

<sup>349</sup> Bannerman 1993, 44.

<sup>350</sup> Ó Floinn 1997a, 156.

Further historical evidence may further limit the date for the manufacture of the shrine. During the long reign of Conchobar Ua Máel Sechnaill (1030-73), king of Tara, Kells appears to have had a period of relative peace, though burnings of the monastery are recorded in 1036, 1040 and 1060.<sup>351</sup> After Máel Sechnaill's death, dynastic strife resulted in the burning of the monastery in 1073 and political instability was reintroduced. Therefore, although it is not possible to establish at this stage, the period of relative peace may have led to the commissioning of the shrine in the period 1062-73, which would correspond with the dates of manufacture cited above.<sup>352</sup>

From the examination, measurement and analysis of the construction of the eleventh-century shrine there are discrepancies present in the remaining portions, as they do not conjoin to form a complete box. This is possible to determine due to the fact that the top of the shrine is hinged, thus allowing examination of the interior [Pl.40.a]. The base plate and long sides determine the dimensions of the eleventh-century shrine. Even though all four sides have their ends concealed by the late medieval additions the original dimensions can be ascertained from examination of the shrine. The dimensions of the top and base are 24 x 18 cm (approx.), the long sides 20 cm in length and the short sides 17 cm in length.<sup>353</sup> This leaves a discrepancy of approximately 4 cm on the long sides, (2 cm at both ends of each side) and 1-1.5 cm in total from each of the short sides. The most likely conclusion is that there were originally four corner mountings fabricated for the eleventh century shrine, but they may have been discarded or irretrievably damaged during the insertion of the late medieval corner pieces.<sup>354</sup> These mounts may have taken the form of broad tubular tripartite pillars which functioned as clamps to secure the straight binding strips in position.<sup>355</sup> Another possibility is that the corner mounts were decorated with gold filigree and may have been damaged due to their delicate nature, attracted the unwelcome attention of a thief or the gold was recycled and used to gild the late medieval

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<sup>351</sup> Herbert 1988, 91-4.

<sup>352</sup> The relationship between Conchobar Ua Máel Sechnaill and the Ua Domnaill requires further research.

<sup>353</sup> Radiography has revealed the full extent of the short sides, and shows that approximately 1.5 cm has been removed from the ends of the short sides [Figs.18-19].

<sup>354</sup> If the shrine was sealed the first point of entry would be the corner binding strips as it allows the top (or bottom) to be removed without undue damage.

<sup>355</sup> As seen on the Misach where the corner tubular pillars range in diameter from 1.3 to 1.5 cm. [Pls.49-50].



additions.

The next stage in the alteration of the shrine occurred around the middle of the fourteenth century when the eleventh-century front of the shrine was removed and replaced with a new gilt-silver repoussé plate. The reason for the refurbishment is unknown, perhaps the O'Donnells (who rose to prominence among the Tir Connel in the thirteenth century) commissioned this phase as propaganda or a political act with a desire to increase their status. However if this were the case it would be expected that a contemporary inscription would record the remodelling of the shrine. The possible candidates for this act would be the O'Donnell chieftains but there are no obvious contenders from an examination of the sources.<sup>356</sup> A more practical reason is that the front of the shrine may have been in need of repair or upgrading and the craftsman may have re-used the metal from the original front to fabricate the new front.<sup>357</sup> A significant reason may have been the advent of the great plague; the consequences of this will be dealt with in the last chapter.<sup>358</sup>

From an assessment of the style and technique of the two central settings, corner mounts and censer, the evidence has concluded that these were manufactured during the last quarter of the fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. Also during these late medieval refurbishments LSA was removed and replaced upside-down. There may be historical reasons for preferring a sixteenth century date for the above mountings. In the section dealing with the history of the shrine we have seen that Manus O'Donnell compiled a biography of St Columba in 1532. This account also relates how the Cathach received its title, and a painted representation of Columba was inserted into the manuscript as a frontpiece. At the time of his research Manus would have been familiar with the shrine since it contained the manuscript reputed to have been written by Columba. His interest in his kinsman may have led him to seek patronage and commission additions to the shrine, but there may have been additional motives. Behind the rock crystal in the lower rectangular setting were textile fragments which were believed to be remains of Columba's

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<sup>356</sup> The possible candidates are: Niall mac Aodha (1342-1343); Aonghus mac Conchobhair (1343-1352); Seoán mac Conchobhair (1352-59, 1362-80); Feidlimidh mac Aodha (1352-56); Cathál Óg Ó Conchobhair Sligigh (1359-62) and Toirdhealbhach an Fhíona mac Néill (New History of Ireland, Vol.IX: Maps, Genealogies, Lists: A Companion to Irish History, Part II).

<sup>357</sup> This aspect is considered in more detail in Chapter 6, pp.364-66.

<sup>358</sup> See pp.370-71 of Chapter 6.



garment and thus a relic.<sup>359</sup> Unfortunately this crystal and associated cloth were missing when the shrine was described by Gilbert in 1874.<sup>360</sup> The textile may have had a more mundane purpose, as the crystal setting may have been loose and the cloth was wedged beneath it so as to secure it in place. The other alternative is that Manus O'Donnell had these elaborate settings made for the shrine with a definite purpose in mind: in the course of his research he may have located some additional fragmentary relics associated with Columba. The front of the shrine would have been an ideal position to display and simultaneously secure these relics, inserted behind rock crystal settings where they could be viewed.<sup>361</sup> If the positions of these two settings are observed it can be seen that they obscure specific areas of the central figure of Christ, noticeably the crown of the head and the lower half of his legs. This might appear to be wanton disregard for the previous decorative scheme but it has to be considered that this is the shrine and not the actual relic. It may be possible that the placement of these two settings had a certain visual significance, the lower setting, originally retaining the textile fragment, is mounted onto the garment of Christ while the uppermost setting may have originally contained fragments of hair as it is placed directly on Christ's head. Although there are no inscriptions identifying the figures on the front of the shrine the evidence presented in the Iconography section has concluded that the central figure is Christ in Majesty. Whereas this may have been the intention of the commissioner/craftsman in the fourteenth century, by the time Manus O'Donnell was compiling his account, it would have suited his needs, or he may have believed, that this figure represented Columba. Therefore these two elaborate settings could be regarded as minor reliquaries with the circular setting also acting as a lid for the hollow D-shaped compartment which may have housed further relics.

The shrine's function as a battler, where it acted as an apotropaic device to instill courage and inspire confidence in the host prior to combat, also needs to be considered. The mounting of two additional settings containing relics on the front of the shrine would

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<sup>359</sup> Betham states that there were 'small bits of cloth supposed to be a relic of the saint's garment' (Gilbert 1874, 587). This evidence is included in Betham's reply to the legal proceedings which Lady O'Donnell instigated against him (see pp.221-224 above). Betham's testimony is believed to have been destroyed in a fire in the Four Courts in 1922.

<sup>360</sup> Gilbert 1874, 587.

<sup>361</sup> In Ireland relics were inserted beneath rock crystal settings on the Cross of Cong (Ó Floinn forthcoming) and the Domhnach Airgid (Ó Floinn 1983, no.85). On the Continent examples include the monstrance reliquary of St Francis of Assisi (Gauthier 1986, no. 82, 138).



have made it an even more potent battle standard.<sup>362</sup> The censer and the sacred monogram IHC on the base of the circular setting may also have functioned in a liturgical performance prior to battle or on circuits. However it would have been expected that the incorporation of additional relics would have been accompanied by an inscription, unless they were commissioned by the same patron who ordered the other additions and preferred to remain anonymous.

Reference has been made to the practice of carrying the shrine around the host prior to battle. However there is no evidence for there ever having been straps or attachments of this nature on the shrine. In O'Donnell's account he refers to the shrine been carried ' ... on the bosom of a comharba or a cleric ... ',<sup>363</sup> so this would indicate that some attachment was used to support it while in this position, unless it was simply clasped to the chest.

To summarise the above: in the sixteenth century Manus O'Donnel (or his patron) may have commissioned additional mountings for the shrine. There are three possible reasons:

- 1) His interest in Columba was enhanced during the period (pre 1532) when he was compiling a life of the saint from known sources and therefore he also decided to have the shrine of Columba's psalter refurbished or repaired.
- 2) He obtained fragmentary relics of the saint and had them mounted onto the front of the shrine in appropriate positions using new settings.
- 3) After O'Donnell's defeat in the battle of Ballyboy, Co Roscommon, in 1497, additional relics were set into the shrine to augment it's apotropaic potency. However, there is no inscription on the shrine or contemporary historical references to support these hypotheses.

The corner mountings, which were also fabricated during the last quarter of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century, may have replaced earlier mounts that were damaged. These corner mounts have imitated portions of the eleventh-century decorative

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<sup>362</sup> This may have been considered necessary after the defeat of the O'Donnells at the battle of Ballyboy, Co. Roscommon, in 1497, when the shrine was taken from them. It remained in the possession of the Mac Dermots for two years (see pp.217-218 above for the annal entries concerning the battle).

<sup>363</sup> Ó Floinn (1995b, 117) who cites Lawlor's translation of O'Donnell's *Betha*. For a slightly different version see O'Kelleher and Schoepperle's translation.

scheme present on the long sides. For example, the lower rectangular panel on corner C of LSB displays contoured knotwork which appears to copy the primary design on the same side [Pl.45].<sup>364</sup> The dimensions of these panels are nearly identical to the earlier inset panels and the gilt-silver may be an attempt to harmonise with the aesthetics of the eleventh-century decoration. The four corner settings may have been reused from another shrine or artefact and may have been inserted so as to form a symmetrical decorative composition.

The next aspect to consider is whether the contents of the shrine were accessible in the eleventh century and in subsequent periods. At present it is impossible to assess the exact form of the shrine in the eleventh century by examination of its present state. There are one, possibly two, binding strips remaining on the front which may date to the eleventh century. If these strips are in their original positions then the top would have been sealed as they grip the sides, but if they were switched around they may belong to the base and there is a possibility that the top could have been opened by a sliding mechanism. This, however, would conflict with the constructional evidence present on the other book shrines, for example the Lough Kinale, the Misach and St Caillin's book shrines were secured by binding strips and nails and the contents were not intended to be accessible. Short side B of the shrine of the Stowe Missal may have been intended to slide across but this cannot be ascertained due to the later modifications of the shrine.<sup>365</sup> There are numerous nail holes along the base of the Cathach for accommodating binding strips and if these pertain to the eleventh-century phase then it is unlikely that the shrine was intended to be opened. With the fabrication of a new top plate in the fourteenth century there would have been an opportunity to examine the contents of the shrine. Some of the original binding strips were probably re-used on the lid, but the eleventh-century corners were probably still in place. The shrine may have been resealed by utilising all the intact binding strips, but except for the two listed above, these were either damaged or omitted during the next period of refurbishment in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries.

The first definite statement referring to the shrine as sealed is in Manus O'Donnell's

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<sup>364</sup> The ninth-century lower cover of the Lindau Gospels [Pl.6] has late medieval mounts which imitate the original scheme of the front (Needham 1978, 25).

<sup>365</sup> See pp.204-205 and Fig.17.a for further information.



account of 1532. In this he affirms '... and to open it is not lawful'.<sup>366</sup> This statement gives the impression that the shrine could be opened (not necessarily with ease), but that this act would be a transgression of the O'Donnell's wishes. If, as suggested, O'Donnell was the person who arranged the commissioning of the additions (including the corner pieces) in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries he did not arrange to have the shrine completely sealed because on all four corners there are tubular pillars for engaging locking pins. If he had intended that the shrine was to remain sealed then a more permanent method for securing the lid should have been used. Only two pins for the locking caps remain in place but when Betham examined the shrine in 1813 he found it was sealed, but removed 'two to three pins' from the corners in order to gain access to the interior.<sup>367</sup>

The next recorded alteration made to the shrine was in 1723 when Brigadier General Daniel O'Donel had it repaired and a silver casing fabricated to protect the shrine. The rectangular binding strips on the front which obscure portions of the sixteenth century corner mounts are likely to date from this period.<sup>368</sup> He also had a new wooden interior made for the shrine as the nails to hold these in place pierce the sixteenth century additions along the sides. There also arises the contentious nature of the of the two brass hinges inserted into the top edge of LSA. If these were commissioned by Brigadier Daniel O'Donel it would imply that he intended the contents of the shrine to be accessible, but this would have been contrary to the wishes of the O'Donnell clan. If the hinges were in place when Betham examined the shrine (1811-14), surely he would have remarked on this fact in his reply to the Bill of Complaint issued against him by Dame Mary O'Donnell, as this would have been evidence in his favour for the interior of the shrine having been accessible. Perhaps Betham had the hinges made after he opened the side or it is possible they were inserted at a later date since the contents were now deemed accessible.

The shrine was evidently used for a number of functions, primarily as a battle talisman, incidents of which have been recorded above. Ó Cochlain has related some of the more recent traditions associated with the Cathach, including its role in the inauguration

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<sup>366</sup> O'Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918, 182-3.

<sup>367</sup> Gilbert 1874, 586. In Betham's published account he states that 'the box was fixed to the body with four thick pins ... which were so contrived as to be moveable,' (1826, 116).

<sup>368</sup> See p.221 above.

of the O'Donnell Chieftain: 'Here he swore upon the Cathach, Held aloft the willow wand'.<sup>369</sup>

There is convincing evidence for Kells as the place of manufacture for the eleventh-century shrine.<sup>370</sup> The first reason is the presence of the inscription on the base plate of the shrine. A discussion on the protagonists has been provided in the Inscription section. Domhnall Mac Robertaigh was coarb of Kells between 1062-94 and Ó Floinn has traced the ancestry of the second commissioner, Cathbarr Ua Domnaill, and suggested that the enshrinement of the Cathach was an element in their claims to the office of comarba Colmcille, which, at this time, was centred at Kells. As discussed<sup>371</sup> Sitric Mac Meic Aedh is not recorded in the annals but there is a reference to a 'Mac Aedha Cerd' in the charters entered into the Book of Kells which detail the transfer of property rights between individuals. This also points to Kells as the home of a Mac Aedha family of craftsmen as the Book of Kells was kept at the monastery until the sixteenth century. Stylistic features characteristic of a metalwork school centred on Kells, based on design features, overall appearance and techniques have been formulated by Henry and evaluated and expanded by Ó Floinn.

Although the evidence overwhelmingly favours Kells as the place of manufacture for the shrine a second provenance which should also be considered is Dublin. Since the excavations in the core of the medieval town (1962 to the present day), metalworking evidence in the form of crucibles, moulds, ingots, unfinished artefacts and motif-pieces have been retrieved from sealed, datable contexts.<sup>372</sup> Reference has already been made to the motif-piece from High St (E71:708) which bears a striking resemblance to the side panels of the shrine [Fig.24.a], a motif-piece from CCP which bears a lobed tendril with the characteristic semi-circular indent and two further examples from Fishamble St which display similar compositions [Pl.98.c; Fig.24.b].<sup>373</sup> The panelled animal ornament on

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<sup>369</sup> Ó'Cochlain 1968, 159-60.

<sup>370</sup> Ó Floinn goes as far as to state that 'Given the fact that the Shrine of the Cathach was made at Kells ...'(1995b, 122).

<sup>371</sup> See pp.233-34 above.

<sup>372</sup> See O'Meadhra (1987b, 50-53) for a summary of the metalworking evidence excavated prior to 1986.

<sup>373</sup> E122:18115, E190:148, E148:1127.



the long sides of the Cathach also has relevant parallels with the CCP motif-pieces. Possible influences from the Dublin School of wood-carving have also been cited. The stylistic evidence amassed for the Soisceál Molaisse has also considered Dublin to be a likely candidate for the manufacture of the shrine.<sup>374</sup> In addition the technique of inlaying twinned silver and copper wires, which is found on the long sides of the Cathach, may have been introduced into Dublin by Viking immigrants in the ninth century.

While the inscription and charters demonstrate that the patrons and commissioners were directly associated with Kells and that there was a Mac Aedh family who held property rights there, but this does not necessarily imply that the shrine was manufactured there. How do we account for the Dublin motif-pieces with design, compositional and motifs similar to both the long and short sides of the shrine? It may be due to fashion as both Kells and Dublin were centres of trade, commerce and industrial activity during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>375</sup> However there are no historical references to Dublin as an artistic centre or, as yet, evidence for political alliances between Kells and Dublin in the eleventh century.<sup>376</sup> The commissioners of the shrine may have sought expertise outside Kells and Dublin would have been a thriving manufacturing centre at this time. The maker recorded on the inscription on the shrine, Sitric Mac Aedh, may have had a workshop or been trained/apprenticed in Dublin after which he travelled to Kells, perhaps with a stock of motif-pieces. Alternatively he may have carried out his commission in Dublin and moved to Kells at a later stage in order to carry out further work for the monastery.<sup>377</sup> This metalworking evidence accrued for Dublin cannot be used as a valid criterion until potential workshop /craft sites at Kells have also been excavated and recorded. It is known from the charter entry that there was an enclosure of unknown function present at Kells in the twelfth century. Since it belonged to 'Mac Aedha cerd' it would have been utilised for some form of craft activity. However on balance, from the evidence presented above Kells would appear to be the most likely centre for the

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<sup>374</sup> See pp.141-44 in the relevant chapter.

<sup>375</sup> See Herbert (1988, 105) for a summary of the economic activities pertaining to Kells.

<sup>376</sup> O'Meadhra 1987b, 164.

<sup>377</sup> Since some of the artefacts from the Cathach school are dated prior to the shrine of the Cathach (the Inisfallen crosier to c.1050 and the collar knop of the British Museum crosier from the late tenth to the early eleventh century) this argument requires further research. The other possibility is that the artefacts were fabricated at Dublin, and not at Kells.

manufacture of the shrine.

This topic leads on to the question of workshop organisation and the number of craftsmen involved in the fabrication of the shrine.<sup>378</sup> From the surviving portions of the eleventh century shrine there appear to be two distinct styles: the panels of more traditional zoomorphs and abstract motifs on the long sides (as seen on the *Soiscéal Molaise*, a group of tenth-to eleventh-century crosiers, and a group of motif-pieces from CCP)<sup>379</sup> combined with the more exotic Irish Ringerike composition on the short sides. The loss of the front of the shrine is regrettable as this would have been reserved for Sitric's finest work, but he utilised the sides of the shrine as an advertisement for his range of technical and stylistic talents. As discussed previously there are technical differences between the two long sides: one has stamped foils, the other pressed foil. Perhaps the incised foils were completed in haste, giving rise to the unfinished appearance, or were executed by a less technically competent craftsman.

The fourteenth-century additions to the lid could have been executed by a single craftsman, who used die-stamped motifs to good effect to achieve the repeating pattern along the borders. The repoussé work is of good quality with consideration been given to the compositional aspects of the figures. From comparisons made with the *Domhnach Airgid*, which was probably made in Drogheda, and the *Dunvegan Cup* which was associated with the Maguires of Fermanagh, these later alterations to the *Cathach* may have been carried out in a workshop in the north east of the country.<sup>380</sup> A locality close to Donegal town, or in another centre under the control of the O'Donnells, is tentatively suggested for the late fifteenth to sixteenth-century phase.

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<sup>378</sup> See pp.361-3 of Chapter 6 for a general discussion on this topic.

<sup>379</sup> See Johnson (1997, 208-10) for a discussion on these pieces.

<sup>380</sup> Ó Floinn 1996, 35-37.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE MISACH

### HISTORY

The first known reference to a shrine named the *Míosach* is recorded in Mac Cártaigh's Book for the year 1166 (Recte 1165).<sup>1</sup> In this episode, Muirchertach mac Lochlainn captured and blinded Eochaidh mac Duinn Shléibhe, king of Ulaidh, and carried him off to Muirchertach's crannóg at Inis Aonaigh (Lough Enagh, Co Derry). Muirchertach was slain in revenge for his treacherous actions. These exploits were in violation of the protection of St Patrick's coarb and of the enlisted relics. The relevant section of the passage reads as follows: '... in violation of the protection of Patrick's coarb, the Bachall Íosa, Clog an Udhachta, Soisgéala Mártin, Míosach Cairnigh, the three shrines in Teampall na Sgrín, together with the relics of the north of Ireland'.<sup>2</sup> Since the Misach was recorded alongside the acclaimed Crosier and Bell of St Patrick and the Gospels of St Martin it must have attained significant status.

A further reference to a *Misach Cairnig* is cited in the text known as the *Aided Muirchertach Meic Erca*.<sup>3</sup> In the relevant episode Muirchertach, king of Tara, while under the spell of Sín, a Banshee, drove his wife, children and friends from his palace of Cleitech, on the river Boyne. As a consequence his wife, the queen, went to her confessor, St Cairnech, who took them all under his protection. A translation of the passage pertaining to the Misach reads as follows:

Saint Cairnech then cursed the palace, and blessed a certain place there, after which he departed from it in grief and sadness ... Cairnech blessed them, and he left them gifts, i.e. to the clanns of Conall and Eoghan ... and that victory of battle should be theirs, provided they gave it in a just cause; and that they had these three standards, namely, the Cathach; and the Cloc Phatraic; and the Misach Chairnigh; and that the virtue of all these should be upon any one relic of them against battle; such as St Cairnech left them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MAI. This entry was brought to my attention by Ragnall Ó Floinn. Lucas (1986, 27) cited the entry but was unaware of reference to the Misach.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See pp.327-28 below where this episode is discussed in more detail.

<sup>3</sup> See Nic Dhonnchadha (1964) for critical edition and for a more recent comment, Ó Floinn (1995b, 123-4).

<sup>4</sup> O'Curry 1861, 599-600. For slightly different readings of this passage see Reeves (1857, 329, n.g); Petrie (1878, 102); Armstrong et. al (1922, 110-112) and Henry (1970, 90).

The manuscript in which the passage appears is dated to 1401<sup>5</sup> but recent research has suggested an eleventh century date for the composition of the original text.<sup>6</sup> Ó Floinn also favours the earlier date due to the reference to an Armagh relic, the Bell of St Patrick, as it was enshrined during the abbacy of Domnall mac Amalgada between 1091 and 1105.<sup>7</sup> From the above two passages we can see that from the mid-twelfth century and possibly the eleventh century, a shrine known as the Misach was associated with St Cairnech. Furthermore it was ranked alongside the major relics and shrines of that period and from the latter passage it can be seen that it was also used as a battle standard.

The next stage in the history of the shrine is the recording of Brian Ó'Muirgheasa on the inscription, who had it refurbished in 1534. The Ó'Muirgheasas were *erenaghs* who had influential ties with the church in Derry and specifically with the parishes of Clonmany and Clonca in the Inishowen peninsula, Co Donegal. The earliest reference to a member of this family as an *erenagh* is Niall Ó'Muirgheasa whose obit is 1516.<sup>8</sup> They were active in ecclesiastical matters and held various titles from at least the late fourteenth century as a David O'Moryson is referred to as of the chapter of Derry in 1397. Other family members are listed as rectors of Clonmany in 1417, 1426 and 1455, and they provided six canons of Derry between 1397 and 1538.<sup>9</sup> In 1609, Donogh O'Morreessen was a juror at an Inquisition held in Lifford, which was then in the parish of Clonmany, Co Donegal. Amongst other items it was deemed that:

... Donnogh O'Morreessen, who is the abbot's corbe, and the busshop Derrié's herenagh of those three quarters... that the other three quarters of the said sixe quarters church land were given by the O'Dogherties and O'Donnells to Collumkill ... together with the said other third quarter, beinge free, were given to the ancestors of the said Donogh O'Morreessen, who in those daies were servants to Columkills ... and that in the said parishe are sixe gortes of glebe, whereof three gortes belonge to the viccar, and thother fower

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<sup>5</sup> Trinity College Ms.H.27; Abbot and Gwynn 1921, 99.

<sup>6</sup> McCone (1990, 147) has examined the political and ecclesiastical background of this text and has cited evidence for dating it to the eleventh century.

<sup>7</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 124-5.

<sup>8</sup> AFM; Ó Floinn 1995b, 128.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, nn.226, 229. For additional references to this genealogy see Bonner (1991, 117-9).



(three?) gortes to the keeper of the missagh or ornaments left by Columkill.<sup>10</sup>

This entry from the Ulster Inquisition reveals that the Ó'Muirgheasa still retained possession of the shrine in 1609. During the remainder of the seventeenth, and for the first half of the eighteenth centuries, it is likely that the Misach was still preserved in the neighbourhood of Clonmany as it was purchased sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century by a Rev. Mr Barnard in the vicinity of Fahan.<sup>11</sup> Petrie states that due to the abolition of church tenures, the Ó'Muirgheasa were reduced to poverty and had to sell the shrine.<sup>12</sup> Two Barnards have been proposed as the purchaser of the Misach: either Dr William Barnard, Bishop of Derry (d.1768), or his son Dr Thomas Barnard, Dean of Derry, later ordained as Bishop of Killaloe and Kilfenora in 1780. Lawlor<sup>13</sup> suggests that Vallencey's 'Rev. Mr.Barnard' had to be Thomas, who received his D.D. from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1761, and was henceforth known as Dr Barnard. Therefore, he would have had possession of the Misach as Mr Barnard from at least 1760.

After Dr Thomas Barnard's death in 1806, the Misach, along with his library, was offered for sale in Dublin. There were no buyers, so the auctioneer, Mr Vallance, acquired it and eventually it passed on to his successor Mr Jones.<sup>14</sup> At this stage Sir William Betham intervened and purchased the Misach. He received the shrine in a dismantled and deteriorated state. According to his published account there was one long side missing, the front was badly tarnished, and the back and interior of the shrine were broken into pieces.<sup>15</sup> Betham had the shrine cleaned and restored before he exhibited it, along with the shrines of the Cathach and the Book of Dimma, in the presence of the Duke of Sussex in London in 1826. The next record of the shrine is when it was offered for sale along with the first auction of

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<sup>10</sup> Reeves 1850, 45-6; Petrie 1878, 103; Doherty 1895, 307-10; Ó Floinn 1995b, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Vallencey 1783, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Petrie 1878, 103.

<sup>13</sup> In Armstrong et. al 1922, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Probably Thomas Jones, bookseller and auctioneer of Eustace Street, London (Phair 1962,77).

<sup>15</sup> Betham 1826, 213, 217-9. Bethams restoration of the shrine shall be dealt with more fully in the discussion section, pp.332-334.

Betham's manuscripts by Evans of London in 1830.<sup>16</sup> It was not sold, and was eventually purchased for £20 by a bookseller named Rodd.

Rodd was aware that he had an important Irish antiquity on his hands, so he informed J.H. Todd of the Royal Irish Academy. While in London Todd examined the shrine and recognised it as the Misach. He related this fact to the Academy and Lord Adare interceded and purchased it from Rodd for the sum of twenty-five guineas. In 1843 Lord Adare presented the Misach to the College of St Columba, Rathfarnham, Co Dublin.<sup>17</sup>

The Misach was lent to the Academy where it was exhibited along with St Patrick's Bell and Shrine, and the Shrine of St Lachtin's Arm in June 1853. In 1862 it was included in the Great Exhibition in London along with other major Irish antiquities.<sup>18</sup> It was also loaned to the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland for exhibition on the 23 May 1922. E.C.R. Armstrong, along with Henry Crawford, examined the shrine thoroughly in September of that year, and their results were published in the subsequent volume of the JRSAL.<sup>19</sup> The Misach remained in the care of St Columba's College until 1984, when it was deposited in the NMI on long-term loan for the 'Treasury' exhibition. As a reciprocal gesture the NMI presented a replica of the shrine, which was made in 1933, to St Columba's College.

## **PREVIOUS ACCOUNTS**

The first reference to the shrine as a distinct artefact is a brief mention by Charles

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<sup>16</sup> Phair 1962, 77. Other accounts of this episode of the shrine's history provide a different set of circumstances. The confusion may have been inadvertently perpetuated by Reeves (1850, 46) who states that (the Misach passed) '... to Sir W. Betham, and from him to the late Duke of Sussex; at whose sale it was bought by Mr. Rodd ...'. Todd (1853, 466), followed by Armstrong (et. al 1922, 106) mistakenly took this to mean that the shrine was sold at the auction of the Duke of Sussex, whereas Reeves was referring to the Betham sale of 1830. Phair cites unsourced correspondence of Betham's (14 June 1826) which indicates that he exhibited the three shrines in London. He also specifies that the shrine had a reserve price of fourteen guineas when it was offered for sale by Evans.

<sup>17</sup> Todd 1850-53, 466. Petrie's account on the Misach is related in a letter to Lord Adare dated 8th August 1843; (Stokes, W. 1868, 291-3).

<sup>18</sup> It was confused with the shrine of the Cathach and described as the 'Shrine of the Psalter of St Columba' (Smith 1863, 48, no.901).

<sup>19</sup> Armstrong et. al 1922.



Vallency in Volume IV of his *Collectanea*.<sup>20</sup> In this account he referred to Barnard's possession of the shrine and described it as '... a precious box, set with stones; called in Irish, Meeshac ... This is ornamented with a crucifix and the twelve apostles'.<sup>21</sup> Sometime after 1806 Sir William Betham purchased the Misach, had it cleaned and repaired, and later published his account, along with a lithograph of the front in his *Antiquarian Researches*.<sup>22</sup> He provided a variable description, the front was described in detail, but there was only a cursory mention of the sides and base. He also attempted to tackle the etymology of the word 'Meeshac' and from his reading of the inscription provided a date of 503 AD, instead of 1534, even confidently asserting that he '... could scarcely credit the accuracy of my vision ...'.<sup>23</sup> A detailed reference to the Misach can be found in a published letter from Petrie to Lord Adare.<sup>24</sup> In this letter he attributed the Misach as a relic of St Columba and cited the reference to the shrine in the *Death of Muirchertaig Mac Erca* text. Petrie also amended Betham's reading of the inscription to 1523/24 by correctly identifying the Brian O'Muirguissan (named on the shrine) with the O'Morreens referred to in the Lifford Inquisition of 1609.<sup>25</sup> Reeves, in his edition of the Acts of Archbishop Colton, also referred to the Lifford Inquisition and provided a brief history of the shrine and its hereditary keepers.<sup>26</sup> In addition he correctly read the inscription on the front and commented on the ornament of the shrine.<sup>27</sup> This information on the Misach was also communicated in his edition of Adomnán's *Life of St Columba*.<sup>28</sup> Todd recounted Vallency's, Betham's and Petrie's accounts of the Misach at the time of its exhibition in the Royal Irish Academy in 1853.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Vallency 1783, 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Betham 1826, 213-220, Pl.IX.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>24</sup> Dated the 8th of August 1843 and published in Stokes, W. 1868, 291-3.

<sup>25</sup> Stokes 1868, 291-3. However, in undated correspondence Petrie revised the date of the shrine to 1533 (*ibid.*, 293).

<sup>26</sup> Reeves 1850, 45-6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Reeves 1857, 328-9.

<sup>29</sup> Todd 1850-53, 464-7.

In 1861 Eugene O'Curry published the original text, along with a translation of the 'Death of Muirchertaig MacErca', emphasising the reference to the Misach.<sup>30</sup> Margaret Stokes provided an illustration of the inscription of the front of the shrine, reviewed the history, and a brief two line description in her edition of Petrie's *Christian Inscriptions*.<sup>31</sup> A neglected publication which considered in great detail with the sites and antiquities of the Inishowen peninsula was produced by W.J.Doherty in 1895. This comprehensive account includes a genealogy of the O'Morrison's, the etymology and inscription of the Misach, as well as furnishing Betham's description and illustration on the shrine.<sup>32</sup>

The next published reference to the Misach was included in a concise article by Andrew Spence on the antiquities of Fahan. Although the Misach is only allocated five lines of text, the author was the first to publish a near complete photographic record of the shrine, including the front, back and three sides.<sup>33</sup> Henry Crawford briefly mentioned the Misach in his article on the crosses and slabs of the Inishowen peninsula.<sup>34</sup> In 1922 Crawford was also involved in the most comprehensive study of the shrine to date, along with contributions from Armstrong and Lawlor.<sup>35</sup> This account includes a survey of the literature on the shrine, an adequate description (along with photographs) of all the components and a detailed historical study by Lawlor, who argued that the shrine was foremost a Columban relic and was not associated with St Cairnech.<sup>36</sup> A year later Crawford was again involved, when he provided a brief note and an adequate bibliography on the Misach in his valuable list of Irish shrines and reliquaries.<sup>37</sup> In 1927, Henry Morris, in his account on the etymology of the place-name 'Tor Inis' suggested that the word 'Misach' should be translated as 'a thing connected with or identified with altars'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> O Curry 1861, 599-600.

<sup>31</sup> Petrie 1878, 102-3. Some years later, she included the Misach in her list of book shrines in her *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (1887, 73).

<sup>32</sup> Doherty 1895, 305-15.

<sup>33</sup> Spence 1911, 24-30.

<sup>34</sup> Crawford 1915, 194.

<sup>35</sup> Armstrong et al. 1922.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-12.

<sup>37</sup> Crawford 1923, 153.

<sup>38</sup> Morris 1927, 49.



There was a dearth of published material on shrines and relics in the 1930's, except for a concise note and a reproduction of Betham's lithograph of the Misach in Harry P. Swan's *Guide to the Inishowen peninsula*.<sup>39</sup> Volume II of *Christian Art in Ancient Ireland* has a brief entry on the Misach, along with photographs of the front and two of the sides; the reader was referred to Armstrong's paper for a full description.<sup>40</sup> Macalister dealt with the shrine's inscription in his corpus, and his keen eye observed the partially obscured letters between the arms of Christ and the upper binding strip of the shrine.<sup>41</sup>

As with the Cathach, little attention had been paid to the Scandinavian stylistic elements present on the sides of the Misach. The de Paors were the first to comment on this aspect where the sides were compared with the more renowned Cathach. The decoration was classed as 'Ringerike' and these elements in the shrine were dated to the third quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>42</sup> It was again referred to, in context with the shrine of the Cathach, by Wilson in his co-publication on Viking Art where he unjustly described it as a 'second-rate piece'.<sup>43</sup> Françoise Henry briefly discussed the history of the shrine including its connection with the shrine of the Cathach through the Mac Erca text.<sup>44</sup> In her concise description she asserted that three of the sides were original and not reconstructed, as argued by Armstrong and Crawford in 1922.<sup>45</sup> She compared the sides of the Misach stylistically with the British Museum and Inisfallen crosiers, but surprisingly did not place it within her 'Cathach' metalwork group.<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Farnes appears to have been the first to draw attention to the Urnes style elements implicit in the design of the sides.<sup>47</sup> More recent publications have tended to dwell on the Ringerike/Urnes style elements of the sides, with little attention paid to the later medieval phases. Fuglesang provided the most detailed description of the side

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<sup>39</sup> Swan 1938, 160.

<sup>40</sup> Raftery 1941, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Macalister 1945, 117. Margaret Stokes earlier drawing (1887, 73) of the inscription omitted these letters. This drawing was later reproduced in Armstrong et. al (1922, 107).

<sup>42</sup> De Paor, M and L. 1958, 166-167.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 143.

<sup>44</sup> Henry 1970, 92-3.

<sup>45</sup> Armstrong et. al 1922, 106.

<sup>46</sup> Henry 1970, 77, 90, 92-3.

<sup>47</sup> Farnes 1975, 181, no.11.

panels so far<sup>48</sup> while Peterson incorporated all three sides in one description.<sup>49</sup> Ragnall Ó Floinn included the Misach in his expanded 'Cathach' group in his re-assessment of Henry's metalwork groups and accompanying stylistic motifs.<sup>50</sup>

## THE INSCRIPTION

This is engraved onto three rectangular silver strips attached to the front of the shine; one strip along the upper edge and a further two on the lower edge, separated by setting no. 7 [Pl.47]. The inscription on the upper strip is laid out so as to accommodate the attached crucifix. The lettering is a mixture of Gothic and Gaelic script and the text is in Irish. A cross-hatched background is used to highlight the script. The inscription commences at the upper left, where the initial B is partially obscured by setting no. 1, and reads from left to right where it continues on the lower right strip. In the lower strips the script is placed upside-down in relation to the observer.

Nearly all previous authors have provided the same reading and translation, except for Betham whose date of 503<sup>51</sup> was commented upon acerbically by George Petrie, who described the error as '... only of a thousand years.'<sup>52</sup> Petrie's first reading in 1843 was also in error, he proposed a date of 1523/4 which was out by ten years.<sup>53</sup> This was later corrected in Margaret Stoke's edition of his *Christian Inscriptions*.<sup>54</sup>

Reeves, Todd, Armstrong and Crawford, Macalistar and Ó Floinn<sup>55</sup> have all read the inscription as:

BRIAN MAC BR [IAIN] I MUIRGIUSSA D

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<sup>48</sup> Fuglesang 1980, 53, 172-3.

<sup>49</sup> Peterson 1987, 123, no.57.

<sup>50</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 180-1.

<sup>51</sup> Betham 1826, 217.

<sup>52</sup> Petrie 1843, in Stokes, W. 1868, 292.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Petrie 1878, 103.

<sup>55</sup> Reeves 1850, 46; 1857, 328; Todd 1850-3, 465; Armstrong et. al 1922, 107; Ó Floinn in unpublished notes on file in the NMI.



which translates as:

'Brian son of Brian Ua Muirgiussan covered me A.D. 1534.'

The inscription is straightforward in that a date is provided for the re-covering (and repair) of the shrine. There are no other secular or ecclesiastical dignitaries mentioned, so the expense of the refurbishment may have been borne by the erenaghs at that time. The annals do not record a Brian Ua Muirgiussan, but in 1516 the AFM refer to the death of a 'Nial O'Muirghesa, erenagh'.<sup>56</sup>

### **ICONOGRAPHY**

The figural iconography is confined to the front of the shrine where the layout appears somewhat arbitrary and does not seem to be based upon any known iconographical scheme [Pl.47]. For example, the seated Virgin and child panels flank the crucifix figure; this arrangement is most likely due to the constraints imposed by the sizes and layout of the die-stamped panels.

Various identifications have been proposed for the triad of ecclesiastics and the subsidiary panels along the short edges. Betham stated that the latter panels represent the four evangelists and the 'twelve figures which have been mistaken for the apostles'.<sup>57</sup> He described the left figure of the triad as 'female, treading on a dragon' and the central figure as a 'bearded bishop or priest'.<sup>58</sup> Armstrong was more forthright and suggested that the figure with the medallion on the chest may be St Catherine, the middle figure an abbot and the seated ecclesiastic a bishop.<sup>59</sup>

From a numerical consideration twelve figures would appear to imply the apostles but the twelve figures are on four identical plates, each bearing three figures. If these were intended to represent the twelve apostles, or even four groups of the same three apostles,

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<sup>56</sup> For the genealogy of the O'Muirghesa and their ecclesiastical associations and titles see pp.293-4.

<sup>57</sup> Betham 1826, 215-7.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Armstrong et. al 1922, 106.

some attributes would be present in order to distinguish them from one another. Identification of apostles are usually determined by one or more characteristics: (1) Objects held or positioned adjacent to the apostle which refer to the apostle's occupation before conversion. (2) Instruments of martyrdom. (3) Objects associated with their spiritual life. (4) Physical features and characteristics.

The apostles most commonly portrayed on fifteenth- to sixteenth-century sepulchral monuments in Ireland were saints Peter, Paul and Andrew depicted with, respectively, keys and in certain instances a beard, a sword, a balding head and a saltire cross.<sup>60</sup> A rare depiction in metalwork of the twelve apostles and their attributes can be found engraved on the back plate of the shrine of the Bearnán Conaill bell, which is associated with Inishkeel, an Island off the west coast of Donegal [Pl.83.b]. These figures are dated to the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>61</sup> Since there are no apostolic attributes portrayed on the four stamped Misach panels the identification of these figures as apostles appears unlikely. However, there are significant characteristics and features depicted in the panels which may resolve some of the difficulties.

The central figure has a tonsure and ?beard, wears a chasuble, amice and alb, and holds a crosier while blessing with the other hand. From these attributes the most likely candidate is an abbot or saint. The seated figure on the right has a mitre, cross-staff and wears a chasuble, dalmatic, alb and amice. He also has his left hand raised in blessing. Therefore, he most likely represents a bishop or saint. The left figure has a circular medallion and a rectangular object (?book or shrine) on her/his chest, while holding a cross-staff in the right hand which impales a supine quadruped. The curious arrangement of the drapery may indicate that this figure is kneeling, but this posture would be inappropriate if she was simultaneously impaling a beast. Each figure has a prominent cross on their chest, on the chasuble of the central and right-hand figures and on the medallion of the left figure. There are no halos present. However, this does not appear to be an essential endowment as the Virgin does not possess one, while the Christ child has a cross above his head. Identified

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<sup>60</sup> See Rae (1970, 15-16, appendix 35-7) for a list of iconographical features associated with the apostles and saints. Male (1913, 311) has published a table of attributes common to the apostles during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in France. Hourihane (1984, 688-719) provided a more recent iconographic catalogue of stone carvings.

<sup>61</sup> Hourihane 1984, 805-8, pl.161-2; Ó Floinn has commented on the historical aspects of the shrine and illustrates the engraved figures (1996, fig.4.8).



saints do not always exhibit halos on late medieval metalwork, for example, Christ in majesty and the Virgin and St John on the front of the shrine of the Cathach, Catherine of Alexandria, saints Peter, Paul, Patrick and Brigit on the Domhnach Airgid, and St Benen, Patrick and others on the front of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth [Pls.38,67,71].

It is not possible to positively identify the three figures but they may have been intended to represent saints: Patrick (the seated bishop), Brigit (figure with medallion) and Columba (the central figure).<sup>62</sup> The evidence to justify that the left figure is female is that it is the only one of the three depicted without facial hair. The cross medallion may represent the wheel, which was the instrument of martyrdom for St Catherine of Alexandria. Alternatively, the figure may represent St Michael impaling the dragon with a cross-staff. However, the absence of wings would tend to preclude St Michael, who is also seen on the fronts of the Domhnach Airgid, the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, on the Cashel Crosier head, and on the crest of the shrine of the Bearnán Conaill bell (where he is named by an accompanying inscription) [Pls.67,71,83].<sup>63</sup> A more likely representation is St Margaret of Antioch, the virgin martyr and patron saint of child birth, whose attributes are usually a cross-staff, a palm and dragon trampled beneath her feet.<sup>64</sup> Although the front-quarters of the beast are obscured it may have been intended to be a dragon, impaled through the mouth by her cross-staff. Hourihane has included three examples of St Margaret in his iconographic survey and a similar image can be seen on the Limerick Crozier, executed in gilt-silver with a background of translucent enamel.<sup>65</sup> She is depicted with a cross staff in her right hand which impales a dragon beneath her feet and holds a large book in her left hand.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the rectangular object on the midriff of the Misach figure may be intended to be a book. An adjacent panel on the same crosier shows St Catherine of Alexandria with a wheel and sword. It may be possible that the Misach figure is a conflation of these two saints, Catherine and

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<sup>62</sup> Hourihane tentatively identifies these figures as St Brigit on the left, St Columcille on the right and St Patrick in the centre (1984, 882, 887, 904). However he does not refer to the tonsure present on the central figure or the impaled beast beneath the left figure.

<sup>63</sup> The Domhnach Airgid, Bearnán Conaill and Cashel depictions are surveyed, along with other examples of St Michael in Irish medieval art by Roe (1976, 255; pls.43, 48) and Hourihane (1984, 126-7, 709-13, 901-2). The Bearnán Conaill is particularly a fine example and is executed in repoussé gilt-silver. For a colour reproduction see Ó Floinn (1994, pl.16).

<sup>64</sup> Hall 1984, 198.

<sup>65</sup> Hourihane 1984, 124.

<sup>66</sup> Hunt 1952, 16, pl. XVIII.

Margaret, shown holding the attributes of both, but on balance the image is more likely to represent St Margaret of Antioch.<sup>67</sup>

A shrine which is very similar to the Misach in decoration, technique and layout, is the book shrine of St Caillin. This is dated to 1536 by an inscription present on the front and reverse of the shrine [Pl.62].<sup>68</sup> On the front of this shrine there are also four sets of die-stamped panels arranged in quadrants around a cross. Each panel displays three similar male figures, placed in niches, with attributes of books, crosiers and small processional crosses. All have long hair and beards but do not possess halos. Hourihane has tentatively identified these three figures as saints Martin, Laurence and Stephen on the basis that the cross staff held by the central figure may refer to St Martin's eagerness to commit to battle with the enemy armed only with a cross.<sup>69</sup>

Groups of die-stamped panels depicting ecclesiastics are also found on the front and the sides of the fifteenth-century Cross of Clogher [Pl.94]. The figures remain unidentified except for the groupings on the lateral arms which have been described as saints Patrick, Columba, and Brigit.<sup>70</sup> These do not help to resolve the iconographical problems of the Misach but do show that repetitive images of ecclesiastics, especially on metalwork, were possibly utilised to convey the authority and prestige of the church as well as fulfilling a decorative function. Dies were used for producing the stamped figural panels on late medieval metalwork as the images were easy to reproduce once the original die had been manufactured.

The contoured niches placed above the heads on the front of the Misach may be intended to represent a more elaborate architectural scheme, such as the Irish mensa tomb sculpture of the period 1450-1550. Perhaps the figures on the front of the shrine are acting as 'weepers' for Donagh O'Morreessen, who is referred to in the inscription, but this is

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<sup>67</sup> Hunt 1952, 16, pls. XVII-XVIII, Hourihane 1984, 898-9, pl.165:c.

<sup>68</sup> Ó Floinn 1996, pl.9; Raftery (1941, 164) mistakenly read the inscription as 1436 while Hourihane has read it as 1526 (1984, 793-5). Recent examination of the shrine by the writer and Ragnall Ó Floinn has confirmed the date to be 1536.

<sup>69</sup> Hourihane 1984, 899-900. Hourihane also suggested the possibility that the twelve figures may be the apostles (*ibid.*, 794).

<sup>70</sup> Hourihane 1984, 783-5; Ó Floinn 1994, pl.15.



unlikely as he is not commemorated or referred to as dead. A parallel for the disembodied heads placed in the niches is found on an early fourteenth century effigial slab from Newtown Jerpoint, Co Kilkenny. This has a full-length figure of a bishop carved in low relief. On either side of his head there is a disembodied head placed under a small niche [Pl.108.b.].<sup>71</sup> A second related example, which Harbison has dated from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries, is present on an effigial slab from Ardfert friary, Co Kerry.<sup>72</sup> This slab depicts the disembodied head of an ecclesiastic placed in a ogee canopy which is flanked by three miniature heads placed in the cusps of the moulding. Although differing in style, these are the only Irish examples so far discovered which relate to the panel on the Misach. Harbison suggests that the Ardfert slab is unfinished and that the smaller disembodied heads may represent angels.<sup>73</sup> The disembodied heads may be derived from Romanesque doorways, chancel arches, and blind arcades decorated with human heads, such as those found at Dysert O'Dea and Clonfert.<sup>74</sup> Disembodied heads placed in foiled recesses can be seen on a small number of English medieval seals, for example on the seal of Robert Stichill, bishop of Durham 1261-74, where they are situated on either side of a standing bishop.<sup>75</sup> However the heads on the seals are placed at waist rather than head height. The disembodied heads may originally derive from late antique and early medieval devices in which two figures flank an enthroned emperor, for example the renowned miniature of the enthroned Emperor Lothar, from his eponymous gospel book.<sup>76</sup> On the Misach the heads flanking the bishop are most likely deacons, as buttresses to his authority.

The seated Virgin and Child is very common in late medieval Irish art and has a long ancestry, with the first known depiction in an Insular manuscript appearing on f.7 of the Book of Kells.<sup>77</sup> However, a representation more comparable to the Misach can be seen on the end panel of St Cuthbert's coffin, of late seventh century date, where both the Virgin and

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<sup>71</sup> Hunt 1974, no. 165. Hourihane (1984, 91-3, 428-78) has listed 135 examples of late medieval heads which appear in architectural contexts such as capitals, doorways, windows and string courses.

<sup>72</sup> Harbison 1973, 12-13, pl.3:b.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Henry 1970, pls. 73, 83; O'Keefe 1995, 261.

<sup>75</sup> Heslop 1987, no.278. For further examples see nos. 280-81, 283.

<sup>76</sup> Lothar Gospels, MS.lat. 266, f1<sup>v</sup>, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale; Dodwell 1994, pl. 62.

<sup>77</sup> TCD MS 58; See Werner (1972) for a detailed discussion on the origin of the Kells miniature.

child face the viewer.<sup>78</sup> The version on the Misach is highly stylised, but does not show any novel or unusual iconographic features, except for the latin cross placed above the head of the Christ child, and the raised hand of the Virgin.<sup>79</sup> Other examples of elaborate crowns are to be found on the column figure of the Virgin and child from St Lorenz, Nuremberg, dated 1310-60, and the metalwork crowns attached to ivory statuettes from the Paris region [Pl.101.b].<sup>80</sup> There is also a large foliate crown on the engraved figure of the Virgin on the front of the Stowe Missal shrine [Pl.37]. Other examples of the seated Virgin and child in metalwork are to be found on the front of the Domhnach Airgid shrine, the crest of the shrine of the Bearnán Conaill bell, on the Limerick mitre and crosier, the shrine of the True Cross, Holycross, and on the front of the Arthur Cross [Pls.67,83-83,101.a].<sup>81</sup>

The two pairs of flanking figures along the short edges of the front may be evangelists, prophets, saints, or purely decorative. The horseshoe-shaped moulding around the head may be an intentional halo (or hood), but may also represent hair. However, the hair on the other die-stamped figures is denoted by short, vertical down-strokes and not a plain moulding. The vertical lines on the neck may be intended to represent a beard and the three raised bosses a neck ornament. Due to the austerity of these figures it is not possible to elicit any further meaning.<sup>82</sup>

The crucifixion figure is problematic in that the underlying detail is hidden by the covering of sheet silver. The restrained posture of the uncrossed legs, flat crown(?) and the head lolling slightly to one side would place the figure in Ó Floinn's late Romanesque group, but the slight contrapposto pose, deeply-pleated loin-cloth and the emaciated midriff could also apply to the later crucifix figures of the Gothic mainstream.<sup>83</sup> Hourihane, who has studied the later medieval crucifix figures and regards them as based upon English and

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<sup>78</sup> Werner 1972, pl.2; Henderson 1987, 154-5, pl.222.

<sup>79</sup> For a comprehensive list of the Virgin in Irish medieval art see Bradley (1988).

<sup>80</sup> Schiller 1972, 108-9; pl.282; Examples of these statuettes are known from Saint-Denis, Paris, (Gaborit-Chopin 1978, no.142, pls.158, 160).

<sup>81</sup> Ó Floinn 1994, pls. 12, 16; Hourihane 1984, 916-9, 922, pls.145:a, 164:d, 151:a; Hunt 1955, pl.IX,a.

<sup>82</sup> Hourihane has described this figure as hooded, and 'fully vested and wearing a chausable and dalmatic'(1984, 861).

<sup>83</sup> Ó Floinn 1987b, 182.



Continental models, dates the Misach figure to the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries due to the inclined head, short loincloth and hollow stomach.<sup>84</sup>

There is no overt iconography on the short sides, the beast heads stemming from the central escutcheon on short side B may, however, have some significance. They could be seen to be acting as guardians for the ringed cross, and what it symbolises, Christ's victory over death. The interlocked beasts in the right field and one of the two serpentine zoomorphs on the left face away from the cross, while one lone serpent coils in towards one of the beast heads of the escutcheon. These zoomorphs might be seen as malevolent beings, repelled by the protectors of the cross. Robert Stevenson has cited examples of bird-heads and engraved beasts on the Monymusk reliquary, Hunterston brooch and some Pictish sculpture, looking in towards cross motifs. He has seen these creatures to be in the act of 'guarding (the cross) rather than reverencing it'.<sup>85</sup> Of course this is far removed in space and time from the Misach beasts and it is therefore speculative to suggest a direct association. It is more probably that the panels are purely decorative, following a tradition of beast heads projecting from medallions, as found on the side panels of the Lough Kinale book shrine [Pl.54].

## **STYLISTIC ANALYSIS**

### **Base [Pl.48]**

The base plate of the Misach has cruciform, L- and T-shaped apertures, but except for a short length on the long side, does not exhibit the square apertures. Even though the Misach base plate is a nineteenth century copy it represents the original form as it appears to have been cast from portions of the actual fragmented base.<sup>86</sup>

### **Short Sides [Pl.49; Fig.21]**

As both sides exhibit similar zoomorphic ornament they will be considered together. The loose, ribbon-like beasts on the openwork plates of SSA and on the left field of SSB, along with the interlocked beasts on SSB, do not find any close parallels in contemporary

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<sup>84</sup> Hourihane 1984, 137-44. Hourihane mistakenly describes the Misach figure as 'cast in bronze' with no reference to the silver sheet (*ibid.*, 959).

<sup>85</sup> Stevenson 1983, 473-4.

<sup>86</sup> The origins and parallels for the openwork plates are discussed in Chapter 6, see pp.349-53 below.

metalwork, sculpture or manuscripts where the animal ornament is more emphatically delineated and the anatomical features easier to distinguish. Elizabeth Farnes, in her study of the Irish Urnes style, has included the short sides of the Misach in her group I which is classified as Irish Ringerike with Urnes style elements.<sup>87</sup> She defined these Ringerike elements as 'foliated tendril clusters, bifurcated lobed tendrils, the type of animal head and the interlacing of the tendrils at the crossing points' and the Urnes style components as 'ribbon-shaped animals of even width and the loop composition of the animals'.<sup>88</sup>

One medium that does provide some parallels are the bone motif-pieces from the Dublin City excavations. A panel from the renowned motif-piece from High Street, bears two opposed looping bipeds which, although there are differences with the Misach zoomorph, share one characteristic detail, the limp, flaccid jaws which loop around each other in a haphazard manner [Fig.24.a].<sup>89</sup> This feature is seen on three of the serpentine beasts on SSB. A second panel on the same motif-piece is similar to the zoomorphs on SSA as it depicts has two ribbon-shaped animals with their heads and tails at one end forming a pear-shaped loop and an extended head lappet.<sup>90</sup> Another parallel is found on a second motif-piece from High Street, which depicts a snake disposed in a single loop with the head and tail at one end.<sup>91</sup> This may be compared to the single zoomorph in the right field of SSA as the body forms the same oval-shaped loop with the head lappet interlacing around the body before terminating in the central oval field. This Misach zoomorph has, however, short, stubby jaws unlike the wide curling type of the beast on the motif-piece.

There are also convincing parallels with the 'Dublin School' of decorated wooden artefacts, which has been isolated and discussed by James Lang.<sup>92</sup> This school is characterised by various stylistic traits, the most significant being the parallel grouping of

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<sup>87</sup> See Farnes (1975, 161-4, no. 11) for the chronology of her classification.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>89</sup> E71:708. Ó'Riordáin 1971, 75; Lucas 1973b, no.41; Farnes 1975, no.4, 170-71; O'Meadhra 1979, no.32, panel C3; Ó'Floinn 1983, no.74a.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., panel C3.

<sup>91</sup> E71:3318. Lucas 1973b, no.45; O'Meadhra 1979, no.35, panel A1. Farnes (1975, no.2, 167-8) has categorised the animal on this motif-piece as Early Irish Urnes style.

<sup>92</sup> Lang 1988a, 20-25.



tendrils, sometimes tightly woven by transverse strands, and ending in simple volutes. These features are exemplified by the cocks' comb mount, an awl with a beast-head handle and the crook handle.<sup>93</sup> The interlocked beasts in the right field of SSB display this parallel grouping of tendrils, especially in the dense interwoven lappets and jaws which can be compared to the crest of the cocks-comb mount. Below the interlocked beasts on SSB there is a distinct pointed oval (an 'eye') surrounded by a median incised strand which terminates in a volute. This motif is analogous to the eye carved on the beast-headed awl.<sup>94</sup>

As stated above, metalwork parallels for the intertwined beasts are scarce, but a damaged copper alloy mount of uncertain function which was retrieved from the CCP excavations has comparable ornament **[Fig.25.c]**.<sup>95</sup> The mount has crude, openwork zoomorphic decoration along the sides, intertwined with foliate motifs in a linear, flowing composition. The ribbon strands are median incised with keying which would have retained either silver and/or niello inlay which is now lost. A complex pattern consisting of a backward pointed eye and long interlacing jaws extends around the sides. This composition can be compared to the ribbon-like beasts on the short sides of the Misach. The eye and tendril motif, found below the interlocked beasts in the right field on SSB, is paralleled by the sub-palmette foliate motif with tendril offshoots on the undamaged side of the CCP mount.

Henry compared the decoration on the sides of the Misach to the zoomorphic motifs on the Inisfallen and British Museum crosiers. There may be some slight similarities, but overall this is not a valid analogy.<sup>96</sup> However, she was correct in citing parallels with the sides of the Shrine of the Cathach.<sup>97</sup> As there is no provision made for a strap attachment on the Cathach, this allows the complete side free to incorporate zoomorphic ornament, unlike the Misach which is divided by the central escutcheon. The zoomorphs on the short sides of the Misach have similar anatomical features to the Cathach animals. These include the foliated tendrils and the looping jaws and lappets, along with the tight clusters of ribbon

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., DW nos.33-35.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., fig.28.

<sup>95</sup> E122:5852; O'Meadhra 1987b, 50-51.

<sup>96</sup> Henry 1970, 93.

<sup>97</sup> For the overall comparison of the two shrines see pp.249-50 of the Cathach chapter.

interlace on SSB. The parallel ribbon strands, which are prevalent on the Cathach, are represented to a lesser extent by the median incised strands found on the bodies of the Misach beasts. Here the similarities end: the Cathach beasts are much more accomplished and elegant, with close attention to detail, especially the minor strands looping around the bodies. In comparison the Misach zoomorphs are coarse with little differentiation made between the bodies and offshoots giving an impression that the sides were completed in haste or by a less competent metalworker. There are also differences in technique: the Cathach sides are cast in false relief, the wide ribbon strands are inlaid with niello and wavy silver wire, and the background is gilt. These techniques form a contrast between the inlaid relief zoomorphs and the gilt background, thus allowing them to be more clearly discerned. In comparison the sides of the Misach are cast in openwork with no relief; however the ribbon strands were inlaid with niello and silver which would have produced a contrast between the zoomorphs and the subsidiary elements.

### **Beast-head escutcheons [Pls.49,51]**

These may be classified into two types: (A) those with the forehead higher than the snout, with the snout composed of half-palmette sprays along the length of the head. The ratio of the length to the width of the head is approximately 2:1, and perforated lugs extend laterally from the cheeks. (B) The snout and forehead are of similar height and the ratio of the length to width of the head is approximately 1:1, imparting a rather squat appearance. There are no lateral lugs and the snout is formed from a simple volute. Type A is found on SSA and the right side of the escutcheon on SSB, while type B is represented by the left head on SSB. Both types have hemispherical bulbous eyes. These are placed close together on either side of the central moulding on type A and on the outermost edge of the brow in type B.

The majority of the parallels that can be elicited correspond to type A. The Irish horn-reliquary from Tongres, Belgium, features these type of beast-heads where an example is found terminating an applied moulding on the curved surface of the horn.<sup>98</sup> This beast-head is constructed from two pairs of palmette sprays with enlarged circular nostrils which act as attachment lugs. The forehead is raised above the snout and two bosses represent the eyes. It is difficult to resolve all the details but as the moustache extends laterally from the head

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<sup>98</sup> Ryan 1988b, 133, 137, pl.3.



it may be compared to the left beast head on SSA of the Misach. Other parallels for these animal heads constructed from half-palmette sprays include the downward-facing heads on the upper section of the Glankeen Bell-Shrine,<sup>99</sup> the heads on the crests of St Mura's and St Senan's bell-shrines<sup>100</sup> and on the crests of the Lismore, British Museum, Durrow and an unlocalised crosier crook [Pls.92.a;89;91.b].<sup>101</sup> The beast heads at the base and socket of the Cross of Cong have also been cited as a parallel,<sup>102</sup> but as these are more naturalistic with pricked ears and little foliate ornament they do not conform to type A. Another form of beast head with naturalistic features is found terminating a central rib on the gable end of St Manachan's shrine [Pl.73]. However, it does exhibit the lateral interlaced moustaches as seen on the left beast head escutcheon on SSA. Comparisons for type B are rarer, but on St Manachan's shrine a similar beast-head with a broad face and low relief features is situated above the carrying handle [Pl.73].

The escutcheon in the form of a ringed-cross on SSB can also be seen in a modified version on the narrow sides of St Patrick's Bell Shrine [Pl.81.a]. These consist of a ringed-cross with four cast interlace panels in the quadrants and a central cuboid mount to which a penannular ring is attached. A possible origin for this type of escutcheon may be seen on the end panels of the late-eighth century Lough Kinale book-shrine [Pl.55]. These comprise an annular ring with a projecting beast-head on each of the cardinal points. The rectangular slots in the centre held a separate swivel attachment for engaging a carrying strap.

### Long Sides

These sides exhibit Ringerike and Urnes style motifs as defined by Farnes<sup>103</sup> and the presence of ribbon-shaped animals of even width in an undulating figure-of-eight composition would place these sides closer to the Urnes style than the short sides where the composition is asymmetrical. However, Farnes and Fuglesang have omitted the long sides of the Misach from their respective studies on Viking art.<sup>104</sup> The tightly meshed symmetrical looping

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<sup>99</sup> Henry 1970, pl.18; Ó Floinn 1994, pl.17.

<sup>100</sup> Raftery 1941, pl.81; Ó Floinn 1983, 187.

<sup>101</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, 183; Mahr 1932, pls. 72.1, 72.4, 75.1; Ryan 1988b, pl.26.

<sup>102</sup> Ryan 1988b, 137.

<sup>103</sup> See p.307 above.

<sup>104</sup> Farnes 1975; Fuglesang 1980.

composition on the Misach long sides is present on the early eleventh-century wooden crook from Fishamble St.<sup>105</sup> Panel C3 from the High St motif-piece displays two ribbon-shaped animals with contoured bodies in a double figure-of-eight composition [Fig.24.a].<sup>106</sup> A panel on a second motif-piece from CCP is closer in form to the long sides as it displays two ribbon-shaped animals in a double figure-of-eight composition, but in this example the even line width is maintained without the interruption of tendrils or offshoots [Fig.22.a].<sup>107</sup> A metalwork example of this regular figure-of-eight looping ribbons can be seen on the side of the Shrine of the Book of Dimma [Pl.59.a].<sup>108</sup> Though not as tightly constructed as the Misach sides it does terminate at the undamaged end in a ?beast/snake head with the tail placed directly below, as seen on the long sides of the Misach.

Henry included the Misach in her metalwork group centred on Kells which also incorporated the Cathach, Inisfallen crosier, portions of the British Museum Crosier, and the River Bann and St Mura's bell-shrines. The criteria were based upon foliate motifs, shell spirals and zig-zag silver inlays in niello.<sup>109</sup> Only the foliate motifs pertain to the Misach, although there was originally silver and niello inlay in the grooves. Ó Floinn further refined this group by using a dominant design feature and the overall finished appearance of the artefact, with less reliance on specific techniques and motifs.<sup>110</sup> The features which he isolated include techniques and motifs such as relief casting to display foliate and/or zoomorphic motifs and the liberal use of foliate patterns, especially lobed tendrils with a semi-circular indent where the tendril emerges from the stem.<sup>111</sup> As he has demonstrated, this is present on the foot/tail of the zoomorph in the lower left corner on the long sides of the Misach but it can also be found on a motif-piece from CCP, Dublin [Pl.98.c].<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Lang 1988a, 46, DW 35.

<sup>106</sup> See n.89 above for references.

<sup>107</sup> E122:323. Farnes 1975, no.5, 172-3; O'Meadhra 1979, no.26, panel A3; Ó Floinn 1983, no.74:b.

<sup>108</sup> Ó Floinn 1982, 35.

<sup>109</sup> Henry 1970, 77, 121.

<sup>110</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 180-1.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> E122:18115. This has been dated on stratigraphical grounds to 1025-1050. This motif-piece also bears a vertical panel of foliate which is analogous to the foliate found between the ecclesiastic figures on the Breac Maedhóg (Ó'Meadhra 1987a, 162; Johnson 1997, fig.1:37) [Pl.75.b].



## Summary

From the range of the parallels elicited above for the primary phase of the Misach an attempt will be made to establish a date by reference to the dates provided by the artefacts previously cited. The High St bone motif-piece was found out of context in a thirteenth-century level,<sup>113</sup> while motif piece E71:3318 is dated from the late eleventh to the early twelfth centuries on stylistic comparisons<sup>114</sup> so these are of no assistance in resolving the date. The 'Dublin-School' wood carvings are all securely dated by coin association in sealed strata: DW 33 is dated before 1025, DW 34 to the first third of the eleventh century and DW 35 to the first two decades of the eleventh century.<sup>115</sup> The shrine of the Cathach has been dated to 1062-1098 on the basis of the inscription on the reverse, and on stylistic grounds from 1062 to the third quarter of the eleventh century,<sup>116</sup> while the zoomorphic copper alloy mount from CCP is dated to the late eleventh century.<sup>117</sup> The primary mounts on the Tongres Horn are dated from the late eleventh to the early twelfth century on stylistic grounds,<sup>118</sup> and the Shrine of St Patrick's Bell is dated to c.1100 by an inscription on the base plate.<sup>119</sup>

From the above information there are a cluster of dates ranging from 1062 x 1100<sup>120</sup> with the mean value placed around the last four decades of the eleventh century. Very few of the published accounts suggest a date for the primary phase of the Misach: Armstrong dates it to 'the eleventh century',<sup>121</sup> Henry was more specific, and from her table dated it to between 1085-1110,<sup>122</sup> while Fuglesang, who described the sides as Ringerike with Urnes

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<sup>113</sup> See n.89 above for references.

<sup>114</sup> Lucas 1973b, no.45; O'Meadra 1979, no.35, 46-7.

<sup>115</sup> Lang 1988a, 46.

<sup>116</sup> See p.264 of the Cathach chapter.

<sup>117</sup> Debbie Caulfield (Pers comm.) provided the date from the excavation context.

<sup>118</sup> Ryan 1988b, 137.

<sup>119</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, 167-69.

<sup>120</sup> Disregarding the dates of the Dublin wood which are too early, but do provide antecedents for some of the motifs.

<sup>121</sup> Armstrong et. al 1922, 108-9.

<sup>122</sup> Henry 1970, 120.

style elements, provided no date.<sup>123</sup> Only Farnes and Peterson suggested a fixed date of 1090 which is based upon the entry in the *Annals of Tigernach*.<sup>124</sup> Taking all the above evidence into consideration, the primary phase of the Misach appears to lie within the period 1070-1098.

### **Late Medieval phase**

This phase is confined to the front of the shrine and the edges of the binding strips. It may seem futile to search for stylistic parallels when the front is firmly dated by the inscription to 1534, but it does not necessarily imply that all of the components (stamped panels, binding-strips and settings) are contemporary with the inscription. The following section will elicit comparisons and summarise the results, independent of the inscription, for each group of components.

### **Die-Stamped Plates**

These enigmatic skeletal figures depicted on the panels have been previously described in the following terms: 'the design and workmanship are utterly barbarous'<sup>125</sup> and 'the delineation of the figures is contemptible'.<sup>126</sup> Nowadays, with aesthetic judgements tempered by our familiarity and exposure to modern art, which is not dependant on naturalistic portrayal, these figures can be seen to exhibit an appealing primitive naivety in comparison to the more conventional and formalised Gothic images, such as the scenes on the fronts of the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, the Domhnach Airgid and the shrine of the Cathach [Pls.71,67,38].

This emaciated figure style is quite rare in Irish late medieval metalwork, and appears to be confined to a small range of die-stamped figural panels. The style depicts the figures with wire-like limbs, narrow tapering heads, large lentoid-shaped eyes and the nose and eyes formed by a single line. The drapery on the Misach figures is composed of contoured tubular folds and the background of the panels are usually cross-hatched. One artefact which has die-

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<sup>123</sup> Fuglesang 1980, 53.

<sup>124</sup> Farnes 1974, 50; Peterson 1987, 123. This annal entry has been considered in detail in the Cathach chapter (see pp.281-82).

<sup>125</sup> Petrie 1843, in Stokes, W. (1868, 293).

<sup>126</sup> Armstrong et. al 1922, 107-8.



stamped panels with emaciated figures is the shaft of the Arthur Cross [Pl.101.a]. There are three separate scenes, each repeated three times which have been identified as The Birth of Christ, The Birth of John the Baptist and The Flight into Egypt.<sup>127</sup> Damage and wear has caused a loss of fine detail but the expressionless faces with lentoid eyes, short mouth, and nose and eyebrows formed by a single line are very similar to the Misach figures. However, the workmanship of the Arthur Cross figures is cruder, especially if the drapery patterns and the degree of portraiture is compared to the Misach. The scenes on the cross are framed by elaborate Gothic canopies and niches. Without examining the Arthur cross at first hand it is presumptuous to draw any firm conclusions, but the lack of detail and crudeness of these figures may be due to the use of a worn die to strike the sheets.

While the cross is dated to 1625 by an inscription on the base, Hunt proposed, on iconographic and stylistic grounds, that the stamped panels on the shaft should be dated earlier.<sup>128</sup> His hypothesis is based on two observations: firstly, that the settings on the cross are closely comparable to those on the Limerick mitre, which is dated to 1418,<sup>129</sup> and that one particular basse-taille enamel setting bears an heraldic device which was revoked in 1406. Secondly, that the craftsman took castings and/or impressions from an earlier artefact embellished with repoussé work and used them to decorate the cross. The latter hypothesis is untenable because in order to take a direct impression from a repoussé artefact, some force would be required which would have inflicted damage to the thin sheet metal. An alternative explanation, which Hunt overlooked, is that the craftsman may have had a set of archaic dies in his possession with which he used to stamp the panels. This is not an unusual occurrence as the fronts of the Cathach and the Corp Naomh shrines bear identical die-struck silver panels of a confronted wyvern and griffin [Pls.46,77]. John Cherry has provided examples of figure patterns and moulds that were used over a long time span by goldsmiths specialising in the manufacture of spoons.<sup>130</sup>

Another object which bears die-stamped figural scenes, not of the emaciated figure

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<sup>127</sup> Hunt 1955, 85; Hourihane 1984, 821.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>129</sup> Hunt 1952, 13.

<sup>130</sup> Cherry 1992, 40-43. See pp.363-64, Chapter 6, where the use of moulds and dies are considered in detail.

style, is the Cross of Clogher, which is dated from the early to mid-fifteenth century [Pl.94].<sup>131</sup> The relevant silver panels are present on the front and sides of the cross but many are now missing, those that remain have suffered damage and wear, leaving some panels as bare outlines.<sup>132</sup> The front of the shaft has three registers separated by plain mouldings, each of which contains six panels. These appear to be struck from two separate dies, each with three vertical figures, as the same sequence of six figures is repeated in each of the registers. The sides of the shaft also bear a sequence of vertical figures, but because of the width only one die was used to produce the stamped decoration. The six figures, proceeding from left to right and from top to bottom are:<sup>133</sup>

A) A bishop wearing a mitre and chasuble with the right arm extended. B) Haloed figure with V-shaped folds on the lower half of his garment wearing a torc or collar and a small goatee beard. C) A smaller version of bishop A. D) Ecclesiastic wearing a mitre. Two triangular shapes (birds? attributes) are placed on either side of his head. E) Figure with a long garment and a cross staff over the left shoulder. F) Unidentified figure, who is smaller in scale, with the left hand on the midriff and the possible outline of a ?halo.

There are no feet shown on any of the figures. Figure B bears a striking resemblance to the four haloed figures on the lateral panels on the front of the Misach. It has the same ?torc, beard, drapery patterns and proportions, with the right arm extended outwards. More significant is the fact that the dimensions of the Clogher and Misach panels are near exact, taking into account the settings which hinder a full dimensional analysis of the Misach panels. Therefore the same die may have been used to strike both sets of panels. This is a second example of two analogous die-stamped panels appearing on two artefacts of different date.<sup>134</sup>

On the front of the arms of the cross there are two panels depicting a figure of a bishop flanked by two saints which Hourihane has identified as saints Patrick, Columba and

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<sup>131</sup> Hourihane 1984, 783-5; Ó Floinn 1994, pl.15.

<sup>132</sup> The Clogher cross is housed in the Monaghan County Museum. It was only possible to examine the cross through the display case, but the NMI has an excellent replica which was examined in detail by the author.

<sup>133</sup> Hourihane, whose identifications and interpretations differ slightly from the evidence presented below, has described these as 'religious figures' (1984, 784, 912-3).

<sup>134</sup> Either the Cross of Clogher should be dated to the sixteenth century or the dies used to strike the Misach panels were manufactured in the early fifteenth century. The examples of the Cathach and Corp Naomh have previously been cited.



Brigit.<sup>135</sup> St Columba appears to be placed in a niche and wears a long flowing chasuble, a mitre, and holds a crosier with a prominent drop and collar knop in his left hand. The left figure, St Patrick, has a halo and both arms extended while the left hand grips a crosier or staff. There are nested V-folds present on his garment. The right figure, St Brigit, also has a halo and her extended right hand grips the frame of the panel. All three figures have pointed feet and exhibit less wear than the other figures on the cross. These three upright figures recall the triad of ecclesiastics on the front of the Misach. However in contrast they exhibit a well-rounded figure style with broader shoulders but with less detail in the drapery patterns.

The source of the emaciated figure style is unknown but the origin may lie in lead alloy pilgrims' souvenirs, consisting of badges and ampullae, which became commonplace from the early thirteenth century onwards. These portray various images and emblems, some of which were executed in a simple linear fashion, due to the mass production techniques involved. The badges were produced in England and the Continent, and may have directly influenced Irish metalworkers who tried to emulate this new type of artefact. One example depicts an enthroned Madonna with the Christ Child seated on her lap at an angle.<sup>136</sup> Although the detailing and finish on the badge is of a higher standard, the Virgin has the same trefoil crown and the characteristic feature, which is also present on the Misach Virgin, of the lower legs merging with the pleats of her tunic.<sup>137</sup>

Similar in style and technique to the pilgrims badges are the ampullae, some of which have been subject to a detailed examination by Brian Spencer.<sup>138</sup> These originated in the last quarter of the twelfth century and were associated with the cult of St Thomas à Becket at Canterbury where they were used as containers for miraculous water associated with the shrine of the saint. They were worn around the neck as proof of pilgrimage and would also have served as apotropaic devices and talismans. In time, these ampullae became more technically accomplished and by the fourteenth century the castings were of higher relief with

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<sup>135</sup> Hourihane 1984, 784.

<sup>136</sup> Illustrated in Kelly, D. (1995, 201, fig.7)

<sup>137</sup> See Van Beuningen (1993, nos.481-505) for comparable badges depicting the enthroned Madonna and Child. No.485 is a particularly good example of the emaciated figure style, the torso and limbs are composed of wire-like elements.

<sup>138</sup> Spencer 1987, 218-21.

finer detail.<sup>139</sup> Closer to home, ampullae have been excavated from the medieval layers of Dublin with two examples from Canterbury and one from Worcester, all of which date to the early thirteenth century.<sup>140</sup> In addition a pilgrim's badge from Rome depicting Saints Peter and Paul, dating to c.1200, was excavated from High Street **[Pl.100.a]**.<sup>141</sup> Although these do not bear the emaciated, multi-linear style they do demonstrate that these ampullae and badges were known in Dublin in the thirteenth century and would have become more widespread throughout the later medieval period. The Worcester and Canterbury ampullae utilise cross-hatching to infill some of the motifs.<sup>142</sup> The hoard of 2,061 lead alloy tokens excavated from Winetavern Street, Dublin, and dated to 1279, bear eighteen different motifs consisting of human and animal designs.<sup>143</sup> The simple yet elegant fine line composition with abundant cross hatching relate these tokens to the decoration found on the pilgrim badges and ampullae.

Another source for the emaciated figure style, closely related to the pilgrim badges and souvenirs, are seal matrices. A close parallel for the triad of ecclesiastics on the front of the Misach can be observed on the seal matrix of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Tuam **[Pl.100.b]**.<sup>144</sup> This copper alloy matrix depicts three male busts, identified as the Trinity, placed in niches.<sup>145</sup> The oval-shaped heads, cap-like hair and prominent ears and noses correspond to the abbot and the two disembodied heads on the front of the Misach. However unlike the lentoid eyes of the Misach figures the eyes on the matrix are spherical. Armstrong has dated this matrix to the thirteenth century.<sup>146</sup>

A second seal matrix, of John Mothell, bishop of Limerick, depicts a seated bishop

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<sup>139</sup> For example see the multi-linear emaciated figures in Spencer (1987, nos.45, 46, 52).

<sup>140</sup> Spencer 1988, 33-43.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-7.

<sup>142</sup> Spencer 1988, figs 1, 7.

<sup>143</sup> Dolley and Seaby 1971, 446-8; Lucas 1973b, no.115, pl.14; Ó Ríordáin 1998, 19-21.

<sup>144</sup> Armstrong 1913, 88-90, fig.68. For a more recent discussion on Irish medieval seals see Stalley (1987, 223-56), where he has surveyed the Irish Cistercian seals.

<sup>145</sup> Armstrong 1913, 89.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.



with his right hand raised in benediction and the left hand holding a cross staff.<sup>147</sup> This figure has a similar triangular mitre, cruciform orphrey on the chasuble and cross-staff as the Misach bishop. The figure style on the matrix is more rounded with less detail, the head, torso and legs are formed from disparate elements with little sense of realistic bodily proportions. This schematic rendering of the body can be seen on the Misach Virgin and Child while the background to the figure bears the familiar cross hatching. This seal matrix has been dated to 1426-58, the period when John Mothell was in office as bishop of Limerick.<sup>148</sup>

The source of the cross-hatched background may derive from the textured background to translucent enamels, which functioned as a keyed surface to retain the enamel, and to highlight the plain engraved figures or scenes. These enamels are commonplace in English Gothic metalwork and are present on the mounts for the Savernake horn (1325-50) and on numerous devotional triptychs and items of jewellery.<sup>149</sup> This cross-hatched background can be seen closer to home on the translucent enamel plaques set into the knop of the Limerick Crosier, which dates to 1418.<sup>150</sup> Diagonal hatching, which is infilled with cruciform motifs, has been used on the Floreffe Triptych, an elaborate cross-reliquary in the Louvre, Paris. In this example there was no requirement for enamelling, as the textured background acted as a striking contrast to the small cast figures, which were set into architectural canopies.<sup>151</sup> It is likely that the hatched background to the Misach figures ultimately derived from the elaborate enamelled and textured surfaces present on Gothic metalwork, and later taken up by seals and the mass-produced pilgrims' badges and souvenirs.

The pilgrim badges, the ampullae and the tokens excavated from Dublin are of thirteenth century date and display some of the features of this style, but are not directly comparable to the Misach. However the seal matrices have implications for the date of the stamped panels on the front of the Misach. The thirteenth-century seal matrix from Tuam,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 46, fig.35.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> For the Savernake horn see Alexander and Binski (1987, no. 581) and nos. 583-85 (ibid.) for the triptychs, which date from 1325-1370.

<sup>150</sup> Hunt 1952, pls. XVI-XXI.

<sup>151</sup> Gauthier 1986, no. 88, 150.

although it lacks the cross hatching, is closest in style to the figures on the Misach. This style continued into the fifteenth century, somewhat modified, as seen on the seal of John Mothell. The characteristics of the style are most probably the result of the mass production of images on badges, ampullae, tokens where fine detail and naturalistic proportions were not considered of primary importance.

While the pilgrim badges, ampullae and seal matrices were most likely cast in stone or metal moulds,<sup>152</sup> the tokens were produced by stamping or impressing with an engraved die. Dies were used for producing multiple images and motifs, such as the heraldic beasts and frieze of oak leaves found on the edges of the shrine of the Cathach [Pl.38]. The craftsmen who engraved the dies would most likely have been goldsmiths who manufactured matrices in precious metal as a profitable sideline.<sup>153</sup> For less prestigious seals, matrices were also produced in bronze and lead, and appear to have been made by specialist seal makers called *sigillarius* or *factor sigillorum*.<sup>154</sup>

The dies used on the Misach may have been manufactured prior to 1534. The evidence has shown that identical stamped panels are to be found on the fronts of the Cathach and Corp Naomh shrines and on the Misach and the Cross of Clogher. The Cross of Clogher has been dated to the early- to mid-fifteenth century on the basis of iconography and style,<sup>155</sup> but the dies used may have been inherited and possibly manufactured as early as the late fourteenth century. Consequently this would indicate that the dies used to stamp the panels on the short edges of the Misach were manufactured in the first half of the fifteenth century, or possibly even in the fourteenth century.

The last artefact with which we can compare the die-stamped plates on the Misach to is the book shrine of St Caillin, now housed in St Mel's Cathedral, Longford.<sup>156</sup> This shrine has many features in common with the Misach, technical as well as stylistic. The front is

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<sup>152</sup> See Spencer (1987, no.451) for an example of a stone mould for casting pilgrim badges.

<sup>153</sup> The term *selers* was used to describe the makers/engravers of seal matrices in thirteenth-century London and York (Campbell 1991, 119-20, 148-50). Homer (1991, 78) has suggested that the moulds for pilgrim badges may have been cut by seal engravers.

<sup>154</sup> Heslop 1987, 115.

<sup>155</sup> Hourihane 1984, 783-5; Ó Floinn 1994, pl.15.

<sup>156</sup> See Raftery (1941, 164) and Hourihane (1984, 793-4) for further references.



divided into quadrants by a narrow strip of foliate and geometric ornament, interspersed with glass and rock crystal settings [Pl.62]. Each of the quadrants bear a die-stamped sheet which depicts three figures, either ecclesiastics or saints.<sup>157</sup> These sheets are bordered by strips of elegant foliate and figural ornament, executed in nielloed silver [Pl.66]. The die-stamped figures stand beneath triangular niches with columns articulating each field. All three have identical facial features and hair-style and hold a small book up to their chest with the left hand. The central and right-hand figures grip a cross-staff (or ?sword) and small crosier respectively, while the left figure places his hand on his midriff. A meandering foliate scroll is present in the two outermost panels.

It is evident that these four panels were each struck from the same die as minute details correspond in all the figures. While not indicating a direct stylistic link with the Misach, the configuration of three ecclesiastics standing beneath an arcade derives from the same tradition. The resemblance with the Misach is even more striking when the position of the crucifix figure is observed: on the edge of the upper binding strip with the feet resting directly upon the central setting. The corner binding clamps bear engraved foliate decoration, again, comparable to the Misach. An inscription around the edges of the front and back of the shrine date it to 1536, which is within two years of the late medieval refurbishing of the Misach.<sup>158</sup>

Attention has been drawn to the prevalence of figures placed beneath niches on late medieval metalwork and a relationship posited with Irish tomb sculpture.<sup>159</sup> A tenuous parallel for the Misach figures, allowing for differences in media, may be seen on the southern end of the Plunkett double tomb at Rathmore, Co Meath, where three saints, Brigid, Patrick and Thomas, are placed beneath ogee niches.<sup>160</sup> There is little similarity in the figural style, but the crosiers which saints Brigid and Patrick hold have crocketed volutes, which are also present on the crosier held by the Misach abbot. In addition, two of the three

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<sup>157</sup> Hourihane (1984, 794) posits saints Martin, Laurence and Stephen.

<sup>158</sup> Murphy (1892, 152; 1888-91, 444) read the inscription on the shrine as 1526. Raftery (1941, 164) and Macalister (1945, 9) challenged this reading, claimed that an extra 'C' was included in the inscription and that the date should be adjusted to 1426. Hourihane (1984, 795) has dated the shrine to 1526. However, a detailed examination of the shrine's inscription by the writer and Ragnall Ó Floinn, in May 1994, has confirmed the date as 1536.

<sup>159</sup> See pp.303-4 above.

<sup>160</sup> Hunt 1974, no. 200:c, pl.196.

figures have their hands raised in blessing. The deep tubular folds on the chasuble of the Misach abbot are paralleled on the St Thomas figure, but appear stiff and unnatural. The Rathmore tomb is dated to 1471.<sup>161</sup> A tomb-end from Tobar na Molt, Co Kerry, which Harbison has dated to the sixteenth century, has three ecclesiastics standing under cusped niches.<sup>162</sup> Although worn, these figures with their static poses and attributes closely resemble the Misach figures.

An origin for the ecclesiastics on the fronts of the Misach and St Caillin's shrine might be suggested by the enigmatic figures attached to St Manachan's shrine and the Breac Maedhóg.<sup>163</sup> These figures all hold various attributes: swords, books, crosiers, but so far there has been no positive identifications as to who they represent. The St Manachan figures are individually attached to the shrine and do not appear to form any specific groupings, but there is no doubt that they are contemporary with, and made for the shrine.<sup>164</sup> The prominent ears, bulbous lentoid eyes and emaciated arms of the figures on St Manachan's shrine can be seen on the Misach figures, notably the abbot, but this may be a tenuous stylistic link as a result of influences from earlier shrines. It may also indicate that the original late-eleventh century front of the Misach had groups of figures, either individually placed or integrated into an architectural scheme, comparable to those on St Manachan's shrine.

The finely cast figures on the Breac Maedhóg are grouped in threes and have strips of foliage, knotwork, and anthropomorphic beasts separating them. Unfortunately damage to the edges of the panels has removed portions of an inscription and disrupted the evidence for the original mounting scheme.<sup>165</sup> It has not yet been demonstrated that these figures were made for attachment to the Breac; from the haphazard positions and damage it appears likely that these panels were re-used and mounted onto the shrine at a later date. However the panel on the gable end of the shrine depicting 'David as Harpist', which is executed in the same

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>162</sup> Harbison 1973, 21-3; pl.8:a.

<sup>163</sup> Henry 1970, pls.34-7.

<sup>164</sup> Bourke 1988, 119.

<sup>165</sup> To my knowledge nobody has made a detailed examination of the fragmentary inscriptions above the figures. It may be possible to restore some of the letters which may assist in the identification of some of the figures.



figure style, appears to be in a primary position [Pl.74.b]. If the edges of the panels on the Breac are examined it can be seen that there are plain flanges which would have been concealed by either binding strips or narrow ornamental friezes.

The front of St Caillin's shrine may provide an indication of the original layout of the Breac Maedhóg figural plaques, that is placed in quadrants and retained by narrow strips of ornament interspersed with settings. There is a portion of a fifth plaque on the Breac which may have been positioned on one of the sides. While it is premature to imply a direct stylistic link between St Caillin's and the Breac shrines, there are some striking parallels. The St Caillin figures all have high foreheads with long flowing hair and the two outermost panels have meandering foliate tendrils which may be atrophied renditions of the foliate strips placed between some of the Breac Maedhóg male figures. An even more arresting parallel for the Breac figures are to be seen on the corner clamps of St Caillin's shrine. These are in the form of finely modelled human heads with the same high foreheads and long flowing beard and hair, and can be compared to the heads of the two flanking figures on the bottom right panel on the Breac Maedhóg [Pls.62-3,75].<sup>166</sup>

The relationship between the figures may be more than just stylistic. Dr Charles Doherty, who has carried out research into St Maedoc and Ferns, has established from hagiographical sources that the Uí Ruairc's of Breiffne had possession of the Breac Maedhóg at Kells in the twelfth century.<sup>167</sup> The Uí Ruairc's held extensive territories from Drumcliffe in Sligo to Kells in the midlands. Herbert has shown that Tigernán Ua Ruairc's (1122-1172) political ambitions led to the conquest of Kells, and furthermore he is referred to in the charters entered into the Book of Kells.<sup>168</sup> As Brian Ua Ruairc is recorded on the inscription (1536) on the reverse of St Caillin's Shrine, the compelling stylistic parallels between the figures on the Breac and St Caillin's shrine would indicate that the Breac was still a revered shrine of the Uí Ruairc and was emulated in the sixteenth century when St Caillins shrine was fabricated.

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<sup>166</sup> Similar heads, although more worn and lacking beards, can be seen on the corner clamps of the Domhnach Airgid (Hourihane 1984, 853) [Pls.69a,70].

<sup>167</sup> This information was provided in a talk in the NMI on 18 February 1998, entitled **The cult of St Maedóc: the background to the Breac Maedhóg**. Sharpe (1991, 395-6) has dated the Life of St Maedóc from the late eleventh to the early twelfth centuries.

<sup>168</sup> Herbert 1988, 95-7; 1994, 67, 712.

The Misach figures may be based upon, or copy, the shrine's original late-eleventh century front which may have exhibited cast ecclesiastical figures placed within an architectural scheme.<sup>169</sup> However some of the iconographical figures, notably Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch were only introduced in the Gothic period. The late medieval craftsman tried to imitate these cast figures, but in a more economical way by using the ubiquitous, cheaper, and less labour intensive method of die-stamping.

## Settings

A technical trait employed on all eight settings and the lateral filigree strips is the liberal use of coiled granules, that is, a single granule surrounded by single or multiple coils of twisted wire. These are found on other shrines of the late medieval period, for example, on the corner binding strips and the two large central settings on the front of the Cathach [Pl.38]. A date from the last quarter of the fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries has been proposed for the Cathach settings on the basis of style, and the presence of Black Letter script on the reverse of one of the settings.<sup>170</sup> Another book shrine where they are used, but only in one setting, is the Shrine of the Book of Moling which is dated to 1402 on the basis of an inscription beneath the central setting [Pl.60.a].<sup>171</sup>

A second technical feature, which is found on the edges of settings nos. 1, 2 and 7, are clusters of granules formed into tetrahedral shapes. Similar clusters are present on the edges of the central horizontal moulding on the elaborate Dunvegan cup. According to the inscription this object was commissioned by the Maguires of Fermanagh in 1493 and is now housed in Dunvegan Castle, Isle of Skye.<sup>172</sup> A vertical row of large, granulated tetrahedra are present along the left edge of the front of the Corp Naomh shrine [Pl.77]. The edges of the large setting on this shrine bear a variant of the coiled granule, the twisted wire extends into a straight length after it curves around the granule, forming a comma shape. Unfortunately there is no way of independently dating the late medieval mounts on the Corp

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<sup>169</sup> The influences may also stem from the Continent where there are many examples of shrines, reliquary caskets and portable altars with erect figures of ecclesiastics and saints placed in architectural settings (Lasko 1994, pls. 113-4, 186, 283, 306, 335, 344, 349).

<sup>170</sup> See Cathach chapter, pp.274-5.

<sup>171</sup> Ó Floinn 1994, pl. 21.

<sup>172</sup> Ó Floinn 1991, 193; 1996, 36-7, Pl.6.



## Crucifix Figure

The style and typology of this figure is difficult to assess as all the original features and details are concealed by the applied silver sheet. A small area round the head and left hand, where the sheet is abraded, shows the underlying copper alloy figure. The restrained disposition of the uncrossed legs, the flat halo/crown and the head drooping slightly to one side would place the figure in Ó Floinn's late Romanesque group,<sup>174</sup> but the slight contrapposto pose, loin-cloth with tubular drapery, and emaciated midriff could also apply to crucifix figures of the late Gothic period. Hourihane has studied the typology of the later medieval crucifix figures, and the constriction of the rib cage and emaciated midriff are features which occur from the mid-fourteenth century, while the naturalistic anatomical portrayal of Christ's suffering, as found on the figure on the Domhnach Airgid, are dated from the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century [Pl.67].<sup>175</sup> The prevalence for shorter loin-cloths were re-introduced in the fifteenth century.<sup>176</sup> From Hourihane's typological and stylistic assessment the figure should date from the mid-fourteenth to the late fifteenth century, but in his section dealing with the Misach he has stated that 'The representation of Christ ... is contemporary with the four other panels' which he dates to 1534.<sup>177</sup> Taking the above assessment into consideration, the evidence would concur with Raftery's opinion that the figure on the front of the Misach is earlier than the 1534 refurbishment, but was covered in silver at that time and may date from the mid-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth century.<sup>178</sup>

## Binding Strips

The engraved decoration on the silver sheets covering the binding strips comprise foliate, geometric and knotwork motifs. Geometric and interlaced ornament can be seen on the edges of the corner pieces on the Cathach shrine which are dated from the last quarter of

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<sup>173</sup> Hourihane (1984, 808-9) has dated the crucifix on the shrine to the early sixteenth century.

<sup>174</sup> Ó Floinn 1987b, 182.

<sup>175</sup> Hourihane 1984, 142-3.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 791.

<sup>178</sup> Raftery 1941, 164.

the fifteenth to the early sixteenth-centuries.<sup>179</sup> The closest parallels, however, are to be found on the corner binding strips of St Caillin's shrine. The reinforced ends bear a step pattern which is comparable to binding strip no. 8 of the Misach, while the upper surfaces proper bear engraved foliate ornament which is extremely close in style to that on binding strip no. 7 of the Misach.

### Summary

The relevant artefacts which can be dated by inscription and have been cited as parallels for the late medieval ornament on the Misach are: St Caillin's Shrine, the figures on the die stamped plates, engraved ornament and the general layout of the front.<sup>180</sup> St Caillins shrine is dated to 1536 by an inscription on the edges and back of the shrine. The Arthur Cross exhibits die stamped plates which bear the emaciated figure style.<sup>181</sup> The primary settings on the cross are dated to c.1400-1420 on the basis of comparisons with the Limerick Mitre.<sup>182</sup> The Shrine of the Cathach which has comparable engraved ornament and settings, is dated to from the last quarter of the fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. The Domhnach Airgid has a similar crucifix figure and the front divided into quadrants, each with a repoussé plaque depicting ecclesiastics. The late medieval portions of this shrine are dated to c.1350.<sup>183</sup>

The late medieval front of the Misach is not all of one period, the eight settings intrude upon, and obscure the die-stamped panels. Previous authors have remarked upon this. Armstrong and Crawford proposed that the panels are contemporary with the inscription, while the eight settings were attached in the seventeenth century.<sup>184</sup> Raftery stated that the crucifix was covered in silver '... probably at the time the fourteenth-century repairs were made' and that the front was finally covered in 1534, while Hourihane has dated all of the

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<sup>179</sup> See Cathach chapter, pp.274-5.

<sup>180</sup> This shrine was subject to a detailed examination in the NMI by the writer in May 1994.

<sup>181</sup> Hunt 1955, 86-87.

<sup>182</sup> Hunt 1955, 85-6; Hourihane 1984, 821.

<sup>183</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, 176-7; 1996, 40.

<sup>184</sup> Armstrong et. al 1922, 109.



settings to the seventeenth century.<sup>185</sup>

In attempting to resolve the different phases of the Misach the portions that can be securely dated will be considered first, the upper and dedicatory strips inscribed with the date 1534. As a corollary, the engraved sheet covering the binding strips on the short sides are of the same date, because the irregular cross-hatching used as a background for the decoration is identical to the hatching used to highlight the plain lettering of the inscription. Consequently, setting no. 2 has a step pattern on the outer edge and contoured wide band interlace on the collets [Pl.52] which are paralleled on binding strips nos. 2, 6, 8 and 4 respectively. Therefore the inscribed strips, binding strips and settings should all be dated to 1534. The crucifix figure may have already been in place on the front of the shrine, but in its original copper alloy form, as it was covered in sheet silver (as were the binding strips) to harmonise with the refurbishment of 1534. However the inscription on the upper plates is laid out so as to accommodate the earlier crucifix figure; the inscription on the lower plate accommodates setting no.7 which is further evidence that these settings should also be dated to 1534.

To summarise: Sometime in the early-to mid-fifteenth century the front of the Misach was refurbished by applying die-stamped plates and a copper-alloy crucifix. There may also have been some settings attached to decorated strips, an inscription around the edges and/or a frieze of heraldic beasts.<sup>186</sup> The settings may have been reused from another shrine or artefact. In 1534 the inscribed plates were attached and laid out so as to accommodate the earlier crucifix figure. The eight settings and the central band of filigree were attached and the binding strips and crucifix figure covered in sheet silver to harmonise with the new decorative scheme. The sides and base were left unrestored but would probably have been cleaned.

However the above hypothesis poses certain difficulties regarding the date of the components. The longevity and mobility of dies may imply that the craftsman had archaic dies in his possession in 1534 when he refurbished the front. As a consequence the stamped panels were no longer fashionable so he had no reservations in partially obscuring them with

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<sup>185</sup> Raftery 1941, 164; Hourihane 1984, 791.

<sup>186</sup> Die-stamped plates decorated with heraldic beasts can be seen on the front of the Shrine of the Cathach [Pl.38].

settings. This could intimate that the front is all of one date, 1534. A full scientific analysis of all the silver components on the front may resolve these difficulties. If the results show that the silver alloy used in the die-stamped plates, crucifix figure, inscribed and binding strips has the same composition, then it is likely that they are of the same date. If the results establish a difference in the alloys used between the die-stamped sheets and the remainder of the panels then there is a possibility that these are from different periods. The evidence presented above would contend that there are two late medieval phases on the Misach, the initial refurbishment occurring during the late-fourteenth to early-fifteenth centuries and the secondary alterations of 1534.

## DISCUSSION

Unlike the other three eleventh-century book shrines so far discussed which have inscriptions pertaining to their eleventh-century phase, there is no trace of an inscription on the openwork base plate of the Misach.<sup>187</sup> A lost inscription may well have provided the names of the goldsmith, and the ecclesiastical and secular patrons which in turn, might have indicated what ecclesiastical centre was involved and, possibly, where the shrine was made. Therefore, the only information relating to the shrine are the references provided in the annals and the texts, which will be examined below.

The next factor to consider is the shrine's associations with Cairnech, patron saint of Dulane, Co Meath. Ó Floinn was the first to notice the reference to a *Miosach Cairnigh* in Mac Cárthaigh's Book under the year 1166 (recte 1165).<sup>188</sup> The thrust of this large and complex entry is that the kings who ruled the territories of Ulaidh (Eochaidh mac Duinnsleíbhe) and Oileach (Muirchertach mac Lochlainn) formed a treaty by swearing an oath on their respective relics, along with other lesser kings and their relics. This treaty was violated after Eochaidh mac Duinnsleíbhe's son was captured, blinded and incarcerated by a member of Muirchertach's party. As a consequence of these actions Muirchertach was

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<sup>187</sup> There may have been an inscription on the original base plate of the Misach (now missing, presumed destroyed). A corroded or abraded inscription would probably not have been taken up by the mould when the damaged portions were used to fabricate a new plate. Betham may not have scrutinised the base for traces of an inscription as he was certain that he had deciphered a sixth-century inscription on the front of the shrine (1826, 213).

<sup>188</sup> See p.292 above for references and the relevant text of the annal entry.



slain.<sup>189</sup> Two of the localities referred to in this entry are associated with the hinterland of Derry: Camus Comhghaill (Camus Macosquin, Co Derry) and Inis Aonaigh (Lough Enagh) which is the crannóg where Eochaidh was kept prisoner, just outside Derry. In this context the *Miosach Cairnigh* is referred to, along with the *Soscéla Martain* (the Gospels of St Martin) as the two major relics of Derry, while the *Bachall Íosa* and the *Clog an Udhachta* (St Patrick's Bell), which were also listed, were the primary relics of Armagh. Therefore, at this time, the Misach was considered to be an important relic of the northern church and was associated with Cairnech from at least the mid-twelfth century. Since it was ranked alongside the acclaimed crosier and bell of St Patrick it must have attained significant status.

As previously noted the next reference to Cairnech is the *Aided Muirchertach Meic Erca* text where the shrine was given to the Cenél Conaill and the Cenél Eógain by the saint to function as a battle standard. This text has been variously dated to the eleventh or fourteenth centuries.<sup>190</sup> Therefore Cairnech has been associated with the Misach in the twelfth century (the annal entry), and in the eleventh/fourteenth centuries (the *Aided* text).

Cairnech's principal church in Donegal was at Cloneigh, near Lifford, with a second foundation at Donaghmore which is also in Donegal, yet he has been referred to as the patron saint of Dulane, Co Meath. Ó Floinn has drawn attention to this anomaly and established that there are characteristics common to both saints.<sup>191</sup> The Dulane cult is the earlier as Cairnech is mentioned in the *Senchas Mór* as an associate of St Patrick, he is also referred to in the *Féilire Oengusso*.<sup>192</sup> Both saints are non-Irish in origin, are associated with Erc, and have successors called Casán and Masán.<sup>193</sup> Confirmation that the Dulane saint and the saint associated with the Misach in Donegal are the same person, are the references to the Cenél Conaill and Eógain alongside the Misach in *Aided Muirchertach Meic Erca*, which is set in Meath.

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<sup>189</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 129; Bannerman (1993, 38) has stated that the Cenél Eógain deliberately abandoned Muirchertach so as to bring about his death after he had 'dishonoured' both *comarba Pátraic* and *comarba Coluim Chille*.

<sup>190</sup> See pp.292-93 above for references to the *Aided Muirchertach*.

<sup>191</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 130.

<sup>192</sup> Stokes, W. (ed.) 1905, 124. For further information on Cairnech see Nic Dhonnchadha 1964, xv.

<sup>193</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 130.

How did the cult of Cairnech of Dulane become incorporated into the Donegal tradition? The clerical family of the Uí Uchtáin were originally associated with Dulane but moved two miles to Kells. Maelfinnén mac Uchtáin, who was described as successor of Ultán and Cairnech (that is, abbot of Ardraccan and Dulane) at his death in 969, became bishop of Kells at some time during the mid-tenth century.<sup>194</sup> This family also provided two abbots and two *fir léiginn*<sup>195</sup> of Kells in the early eleventh century. Herbert has suggested that it was probably during Maelfinnén's bishopric when the Uí Uchtáin clan transferred their allegiance to the more prestigious centre of Kells.<sup>196</sup> Their presence in Kells was probably due to the desire of the Clann Cholmáin kings to counter the increasing power of Armagh. By 1034 the family were actively involved in the promotion of the cult of relics as Maicnia Ua Uchtáin, *fer léigind* of Kells, was drowned on his way from Scotland with the Cuilebad of Columcille and three shrines of St Patrick.<sup>197</sup> This evidence shows that the cult of Cairnech was attached to that of Columba of Kells and that one of his relics was brought north sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century when the authority of Kells waned and Derry gained the ascendancy.<sup>198</sup>

This transfer of power from Kells to Derry was promulgated at a later stage by two texts which associate Cairnech with his maternal aunt, Erc, wife of Muiredach mac Eoghain.<sup>199</sup> In the Book of Mac Fírbis, Cairnech is placed at *Ros Ailigh* (near Aileach, Co Donegal) and blesses a church for Erc at an unidentified place called *Cell Erca*. The second text, the Book of Fenagh, recounts how Erc granted Cairnech lands at *Druim Lighean*, Drumleen townland in Clonleigh parish, Co Donegal.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> AU; Ó Floinn 1995b, n.244.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 130. The title *fir léiginn* literally means 'man of learning' but in ecclesiastical terms it referred to a professor in the monastic school. Nic Aongusa (1990/1, 7, 13-14) has outlined the duties and responsibilities of the post. Herbert (1988, 98) has defined the title as 'lector'.

<sup>196</sup> Herbert 1988, 89-90.

<sup>197</sup> AU 1034; Ó Floinn 1995b, 130.

<sup>198</sup> Herbert 1988, 108, 110-12. Bannerman (1993, 35-42) has charted the rise of Derry in the twelfth century and suggests that the Annals of Ulster demonstrate a Derry bias from 1150 onwards. The Irish Life of Columba was also written there in the period 1150-60. Both Herbert and Bannerman (ibid.) concur that the increase in fortunes for Derry in the mid-twelfth century was due to the rise of the Mac Lochlainns of the Cenél Eogain in attaining kingship.

<sup>199</sup> See Ó Riain (1985, 90) for Cairnech's genealogy.

<sup>200</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 130.



These texts would appear to reflect the transference of the rights and properties of Cairnech of Dulane to Kells and then henceforth to Derry by Cairnech leaving his Misach to *comarba Columcille*. By 1609, when the Inquisition was held at Lifford, the Misach had become dissociated from Cairnech and was referred to as 'the Missach or ornaments left by Columkille'.<sup>201</sup> The Derry provenance was now fully established, as the hereditary keepers, the Ó'Muirgheasa, were at this time erenaghs to the Bishop of Derry and coarbs of the abbot of Derry, as well as holding other ecclesiastical offices.<sup>202</sup>

Another contentious aspect of the shrine is the etymology of the word *misach*. There are two opinions: Petrie<sup>203</sup> concurred with O'Donovan's interpretation as a calender. Todd and O'Curry<sup>204</sup> also suggested calendar, Betham was the first to propose 'a precious jewel or altar', while Margaret Stokes stated that it 'literally means "monthly"'.<sup>205</sup> Crawford rejected calendar and claimed 'that the word was now understood to mean a dish or altar, derived from *mias*', before he finally decided upon 'altar ornament'.<sup>206</sup> In 1922 Lawlor was tentative, with a view that '"ornaments" a rendering which it cannot bear' but was not entirely convinced that it translated as calendar.<sup>207</sup> Morris confidently defined *misach* as 'a thing connected with or identified with the altar (*mias*) or altars'.<sup>208</sup> Ó Floinn has concurred with the general opinion that *misach* derives from the word *mí* (month) and means a calendar.<sup>209</sup>

If the word translates as 'calendar', which could also refer to a computistical table appended to a gospel or missal, it is likely that it may have been the personal property of a saint. Furthermore, if it achieved that status of a relic it may have been considered worthy

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<sup>201</sup> Reeves 1850, 46.

<sup>202</sup> For a list of these offices see p.293 above.

<sup>203</sup> Petrie stated O'Donovan's view in a letter to Lord Adare dated the 8th August 1843. This letter is published in Stokes, W. (1868, 292).

<sup>204</sup> Todd 1850-53, 464; O'Curry 1861, 336.

<sup>205</sup> Betham 1826, 214; Petrie 1878, 102.

<sup>206</sup> Crawford 1915, 194.

<sup>207</sup> Lawlor in Armstrong et al. 1922, 110, 112.

<sup>208</sup> Morris 1927, 50.

<sup>209</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 126, n.220.

of enshrinement.<sup>210</sup> Conversely, if the word translates as 'altar/altar ornaments' or 'dish' then this provides a wide range of possibilities which could include chalices, patens, candlesticks, or even a gospel book as this would have adorned the altar during certain sections of the liturgy. However, there are no surviving, or records of, enshrined chalices or patens. If these were enshrined we would expect the shrine to follow the form of the object, as with surviving bell-shrines and crosiers, and not to be accommodated in a rectangular box. One class of artefact which would correspond to a rectangular box and also make some sense of the translation is a portable altar, some of which were considered as relics.<sup>211</sup> Surviving examples, such as the Anglo-Saxon portable altar housed in the Musée de Cluny, Paris, and the portable altars of Bishop Werl and Bégon III, have an upper surface of porphyry bordered by decorative plates.<sup>212</sup> The shape of the Misach would indeed hold such an artefact, or fragments of, but it would be expected that a portion of the original porphyry would be exposed if it was intended to use the altar for its primary purpose. Taking the above concerns into consideration the evidence presented above would favour calendar as the meaning of the word *misach*, as these would have been common personal possessions of ecclesiastics and saints. Also, the size and shape of the Misach is very similar to the shrine of the Cathach which contained the psalter traditionally associated with St Columba. The alternative, 'altar/ornament dish' may not be totally incorrect as the word 'ornaments' is first used in the account of the 1609 Lifford Inquisition as 'missagh or ornaments left by Columkill'.<sup>213</sup> A possibility that has so far been overlooked is that the above phrase could imply both a calendar and altar ornaments, that is, the Misach is the calendar enshrined within an elaborate container which in turn is referred to as 'ornaments'. Furthermore, this ornamental shrine may have been displayed upon an altar on certain occasions.

In the *Aided* text it was stated that the Misach was given by Cairnech to the Cenél Conaill and Cenél Eógain to function as a battle standard. The more illustrious shrine of the Cathach was also used for this purpose where its exploits were recorded by Manus O'Donnel

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<sup>210</sup> For example the Calendar of St Willibrord. Ó'Crónín (1984, 28-36) has cogently argued for an Irish provenance for this calendar, while Backhouse (1991, no.123) proposed Ecternacht without citing Ó'Crónín's hypothesis.

<sup>211</sup> Ó Floinn (1995b, n.220) independently reached the same conclusion as the writer, but has also provides references to Irish early medieval portable altars associated with saints Patrick and Ciarán.

<sup>212</sup> Webster 1984, no.76; Lasko 1994, pls. 160-1.

<sup>213</sup> Reeves 1850, 45.



in 1532 in his *Betha Coluim Cille*.<sup>214</sup> Examples of the use of relics and shrines as battle standards, which were named after compounds of the word *cath*, have been published in the recent past.<sup>215</sup>

In the section on style a late eleventh century date was proposed for the short sides, the beast-head escutcheons and long side A. The excessive wear present on the projecting 'feet' of the corner binding elements, along with the original copper alloy surface beneath the modern gilding on the straight binding strips, would also indicate a date in the eleventh-century for these components.

In order to determine the original state and appearance of the shrine before any modern intervention took place, Betham's account needs to be examined in detail. The relevant passages, quoted at length, are as follows:

... it had all the appearance of having long been in a damp place, or buried in the earth. The rich tracery work of the settings, and the chased silver plating, were not perceptible, from the thick coating which covered its surface.<sup>216</sup>

The sides ... have been inlaid with silver, and enamelled, very similar to the Caah' ... a vacancy was left on one of the sides for the insertion of the Ms. ... it was very injudiciously and violently opened, much injured and possibly its contents demolished. The wooden case ... was cut from a solid piece of yew, and hollowed out so as to form a case for a book, open on one side,... The open side had been filled up with a piece of oak, and the whole closed up with a brass plate, like that which covered the other side.<sup>217</sup>

(They) ... commenced their operations at the back, and after breaking the brass plate across ... cut away the box and broke it to pieces in such a manner, that I found it impossible to restore it. Under the centre setting, was a small square of vellum, on which was a seal of wax ....<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> O'Kelleher and Schoepperle 1918, 182-3.

<sup>215</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 124-5. Lucas (1986, 17-20) provided additional examples of relics and shrines used as battle standards. A general discussion on the use of book shrines as battle standards will be provided in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

<sup>216</sup> Betham 1826, 213.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-218.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

To summarise the above passages: when Betham received the shrine the front was heavily tarnished but he was able to observe niello ('enamelled') and silver inlaid into the sides. There was one long side missing, or damaged beyond repair, and the base plate was broken into pieces. This may have occurred during an attempt to lever the back off by wedging a chisel underneath the binding strips, and, as a consequence the weaker base plate fractured before the more robust binding strips. The wooden core was cut from a solid piece of yew, in some places one and a half inches thick, and a piece of oak filled the open side. Betham also removed the central setting to examine a piece of wax placed beneath the crystal.

Betham obtained possession of the Misach some time after 1806. The details of the vicissitudes of the shrine are unknown until 1843 when it was donated to St Columbas college by Lord Adare. Betham probably had the shrine in his possession until 1826, when he published his account in his *Irish Antiquarian Researches*, before presenting it to the Duke of Sussex. It is unlikely that he would have handed it over in a fragmentary state, so he had it cleaned and restored. Confirmation of this can be found in his account: 'The plates (on the front) being very thin, it required great care and attention to remove its impurities without injury'.<sup>219</sup> As regards the back plate Betham states '... that I found it impossible to restore it'.<sup>220</sup> As Armstrong and Crawford indicated, the back of the shrine shows no evidence of the 'violent action' and, furthermore, the distortion evident in the bottom right corner may indicate that the present back was manufactured by piecing together the original sections, taking a mould and casting a new plate.<sup>221</sup> Either the sections were misaligned or they shifted during the moulding process resulting in the cast reproducing these errors. An alternative is that the restorer made a copy by sight rather than replicating it. Armstrong and Crawford appear to have had direct access to the wood behind the plates as they confirmed Betham's identification of yew, but that it survived only behind the base plate, and that the top and sides of the shrine were constructed from 'modern yellow pine'.<sup>222</sup> Therefore the original wooden case, hollowed out from solid yew, now only remains behind the base plate, the rest of the wood is modern. Armstrong does not refer to the piece of oak used to fill up the vacant side in his description but this was probably discarded and replaced with the

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<sup>219</sup> Betham 1826, 213.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>221</sup> Armstrong et al 1922, 109.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.



yellow pine during Betham's restoration.

From the above, the evidence demonstrates that Betham had the shrine dismantled, the front was cleaned and polished and some of the settings were removed for examination and the three intact sides were vigorously cleaned and polished. These actions removed the original silver and niello inlay except for the traces still remaining in the grooves [Fig.21]. The beast head escutcheons were also removed and cleaned, but do not seem to have undergone any polishing as there are still reasonable amounts of niello remaining. Also, since the heads were cast in high relief they would not have been as easy to polish as the flat surfaces on the sides. A new openwork base plate was cast (or copied) from the original, the chain was cleaned and the copper alloy binding strips and corner clamps were gilded. When all the components were cleaned and repaired they were mounted onto the new pine box, with the original yew back, using some of the original nails. Red paper was used to cover the box and provide a contrast with the openwork plates on the sides and base. Originally there would have been some form of backing plate behind the openwork plates, either of silver or tinned copper alloy, but it was probably damaged beyond repair. At this time a direct copy of long side A was made in order to complete the decorative scheme of the shrine as there was, according to Betham, 'a vacancy left on one of the sides'.<sup>223</sup> Presumably this implies that a side of the shrine, rather than the interior wooden box, was missing, as Betham later states that the open side was filled up with a piece of oak. The original side may have been lost before Betham acquired the shrine, or else he received the side in fragments and was unable to restore it. The beast-head escutcheon on SSA was replaced in the wrong position as the moustache lappet of the left beast extends into and obscures the openwork decoration of the plate, while there is a corresponding undecorated area on either side of the right head to accommodate the absent moustache. Analysis of the wear patterns on the inner surface of the central loop confirm that the escutcheon is not in the intended position.

At this stage it is worth specifying the technical and stylistic reasons for proposing that long side A is a direct copy of long side B.

1) Both sides bear an analogous pattern. This is unique on book-shrines as the closest in form to the Misach is the shrine of the Cathach, the short sides of which exhibit variations on two intertwined zoomorphs. The one difference that can be cited between the sides of the Misach

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<sup>223</sup> Betham 1826, 218.

is at the junction of the beak and the isolated foliated tendril of the left beast. A short gap is present on LSB, while on LSA the tendril slightly overlaps the upper beak. This is due to a fracture in the metal at this point and the overlapping occurs due to the tension applied by the horizontal binding strips. If this plate was free of stress a gap would develop, which is the case on LSB.

2) The presence of nail perforations in analogous locations in both sides. Even allowing for visual guidelines, such as circular breaks in the interlace pattern to enable the goldsmith to assemble the shrine, it would be beyond the bounds of coincidence to choose the exact same points. Long side A has fourteen perforations, nine of which are the same size and are situated along the edges and in the decorative field. The other five perforations are possibly secondary. Long side B has all these perforations with seven additional holes. There are three brass nails placed at intervals along the centre of the panel. The dimensions of both plates appear to be exact but at present this cannot be determined as the binding strips obscure the edges of the plates. The slight displacement of the binding strips on the short ends of LSB allow the deeply incised grooves framing the panel to be seen. On LSA the binding strips partially overlap the zoomorphic decoration.

3) Differences in the alloys. There appears to be two different alloys used in the casting of each plate, the metal of LSB looks paler and more 'brassy', which would indicate that a high proportion of zinc was present in the alloy. Long side A has a reddish hue which is possibly due to a high copper content in the alloy. Scientific analysis of the metal composition would resolve this question. Long side B has a rougher, more unfinished appearance and the grooves are shallower and are not keyed to accept inlay. In addition LSA may never have been finished: the reserved areas of plain metal in the centre of the loops and between the strands may have been intended to be cut away, thus forming an openwork panel as seen on the short sides. An openwork plate would also have enabled a contrast to be set up with a backing material, such as a tinned surface.

Few writers have proposed an opinion on which elements of the shrine are primary, that is late eleventh century, and which are modern. Armstrong and Crawford were under the impression that the sides, as well as the base, were modern copies, with only the beast head-escutcheons, and possibly the chain, were assigned an eleventh century date, while Crawford stated that it 'has almost all been renewed.'<sup>224</sup> Henry refuted this view and stated that 'this

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<sup>224</sup> Armstrong et al. 1922, 108-9; Crawford 1923, 153.



imaginative orgy (on the short sides) is hardly likely to be a reconstruction', but agreed that one of the long sides had to be a copy.<sup>225</sup> If, as Armstrong and Crawford proposed, all the sides were copies, why would the jeweller leave traces of silver and niello inlay in the grooves and not fully reconstruct the original appearance of the sides by adding new inlays? The answer is that these are the original plates which retained an unknown proportion of inlay, but the vigorous cleaning removed all but traces of the inlay, the remaining fragments are shown in **Figure 21**. The only method to resolve this is by scientific analysis of the metal components, LSB and the base should provide the composition of the modern alloys. The short sides and LSA should have a similar composition, yet differ from the modern alloys. The beast-head escutcheons would probably have a copper alloy containing a small amount of lead to allow the complex shape to be cast easily. If, on the other hand, all the sides and base supply similar results, then this would demonstrate that these components may be modern. A complication may arise if the modern portions were cast by reusing the original metal from the damaged base and sides; this would negate the results.

There is no indication of what the eleventh century-front would have looked like, but the late medieval front may have been based upon the original iconographic scheme.<sup>226</sup> An X-radiograph of the front may reveal the presence of primary nail holes and fragmentary mountings beneath the late medieval front.

It is difficult to determine if the contents of the eleventh-century shrine were intended to be accessible. As the binding-strips and corner pieces are most likely to be eleventh century in date, it would be very unlikely that any of the sides were intended to be removed as the binding strips maintain the box in a sealed condition. Access to the interior may have been possible during the refurbishments in the later medieval period. As proposed, the first refurbishment of the shrine probably occurred in the early fifteenth century. The reason for this intervention is unknown as there is no surviving inscription, but the front, especially if it had delicate repoussé work, may have been in need of repair. There may have been numerous restorations, repairs and additions made to the front of the shrine since the eleventh century, so the goldsmith, under direction from the patron, may have replaced these with a more unified scheme.

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<sup>225</sup> Henry 1970, 93.

<sup>226</sup> See pp.322-23 for further discussion on this topic.

The next stage of refurbishment is recorded on the front of the shrine when Brian Ó'Muirgheasa had it restored in 1534. This involved the addition of the inscribed plates, eight settings, the lateral filigree band and the covering of the crucifix figure and binding strips in silver sheet. There is no information recorded about Brian Ó'Muirgheasa in the annals or historical sources.<sup>227</sup> There would have been more cause to remove the front in this restoration as the binding strips would have had to be dismantled in order to insert the settings and apply the sheet silver. Betham referred to a piece of wax and a fragment of vellum found beneath the central setting which may have been further associative relics of the original saint, or else the crystal may have been loose and these materials functioned as padding in order to secure the crystal in place.<sup>228</sup>

So far the conclusion has been reached that the relic contained within the shrine was likely to have been a calendar.<sup>229</sup> If this was directly associated with Cairnech (ob. 530) it would have been at least four hundred and fifty years old when it was enshrined in the late eleventh century. This is not so unusual as the shrine of the Cathach, which is also mid- to late-eleventh century in date, contained a psalter which has been dated to c.600 AD.<sup>230</sup> However, the eleventh century shrine for the Misach need not have been the first as there may have been an earlier shrine (of eighth to ninth century date?) which had to be replaced due to wear and tear sustained over the centuries. The enshrined calendar must have survived until at least 1534, as it is unlikely that Brian Ó'Muirgheasa was going to commission a shrine for a relic that no longer existed. The 'missagh or ornaments' referred to in the Lifford Inquisition of 1609 could apply to the shrine alone, as there is no evidence that the relic was still extant at this time. According to Petrie the keepers of the Misach were obliged to sell the shrine because of poverty caused by the abolition of Church tenures.<sup>231</sup> This probably occurred around the middle of the eighteenth century as the shrine was purchased c.1760 by Thomas Barnard. Again, it is not possible to establish if the shrine contained the manuscript at this time.

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<sup>227</sup> See p.293 for references to other Ó'Muirgheasa recorded in the annals.

<sup>228</sup> Betham 1826, 219.

<sup>229</sup> See pp.330-331 above.

<sup>230</sup> RIA MS 12 R.33; Alexander 1978, no.4.

<sup>231</sup> Petrie 1878, 103.



The next aspect to consider is where the shrine may have been manufactured. As noted previously the dimensions and form of the Misach, that is, a shallow rectangular box, along with the decoration on the sides and the base, correspond to the shrine of the Cathach.<sup>232</sup> Henry, on the basis of technique and motif analysis, included the Misach in her metalwork group centred on Kells which was later modified by Ó Floinn and designated the 'Cathach group'.<sup>233</sup> However there are differences between the shrines: the long sides of the Cathach display separate rectangular panels with individual beasts and abstract motifs, while the Misach sides display zoomorphic ornament along the full length of the side. There does not appear to be any eleventh century binding strips extant on the Cathach and there is no provision made for a carrying chain on the sides. Overall, though, the similarities outweigh the differences. As proposed in the Cathach chapter the evidence indicates that Kells was probably the centre where the shrine was made. From the analysis of form and style, this would also appear to be where the Misach was manufactured.

From the evidence presented in the stylistic analysis section above, the Misach has been dated to 1070-98. Henry suggested, in her discussion of the Annals of Tigernach entry for 1090, that along with the other named reliquaries, the Cathach and the Misach may have been sent from Donegal to Kells with the silver required to enshrine them.<sup>234</sup> Henry's views were then incorrectly propagated by subsequent writers who used the annal entry as conclusive evidence for dating the shrines of the Cathach and the Misach to 1090, even though they were not directly referred to in the annal entry. The arguments presented in the Cathach chapter has demonstrated that there is no established evidence for the enshrinement of Columban relics at Kells in 1090 and therefore this entry cannot be used to provide a firm date for the enshrinement of the Cathach or the Misach.

It is also difficult to support the hypothesis that both shrines should be regarded as contemporary and manufactured at Kells, when the Misach is clearly an inferior copy executed by a craftsman with lesser abilities than Sitric Mac Aedh. One possible explanation is that if the Cathach was one of the two gospels which returned in 1090, along with the

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<sup>232</sup> The dimensions of the shrines to the nearest cm are: Cathach: 25(l) x 19(w) x 3.6(Ht); Misach: 26(l) x 23(w) x 6(Ht) cm. The extra height of the Misach is due to the projecting 'feet' on the base and the wider binding strips.

<sup>233</sup> Henry 1970, 77; Ó Floinn 1987a, 180-1.

<sup>234</sup> Henry 1970, 89-91.

tribute, from Donegal to Kells, the funds raised may have been used to refurbish further Columban relics, one of which was the Misach. The patron may have wanted to emulate previously existing Columban book shrines, notably the shrine of the Cathach, and, therefore, the Misach was either a copy or a generic Columban type of book shrine. This hypothesis would also imply that the Misach should be dated sometime shortly after 1090.

Dr Bernard Meehan contends that one of the two gospels referred to in the annal entry was 'surely the Book of Kells, the other perhaps the Book of Durrow'.<sup>235</sup> He has also argued that the author/compiler of the entry would not have erred in describing a psalter as a gospel book.<sup>236</sup> However Meehan's argument can be refuted on three counts: when the reliquaries were returned to Kells in 1090 the exact nature of their contents may not have been apparent, beyond a manuscript associated with Columba. If one of the gospels was the acclaimed Book of Kells then surely the annals would have emphasised this. Secondly Ó Floinn has proposed that prior to the thirteenth century, the shrine known as the Cathach may have had another title, the *Soscéla Martain* (Gospel of St Martin), even though the enclosed manuscript was a psalter.<sup>237</sup> If this were the case then it shows that the contents of shrines were open to misinterpretation and mis-identified.<sup>238</sup> Bannerman has stated that the Book of Kells was not a 'badge of St Columba's authority' because it had remained at Kells long after the *comarbas* removed it to Derry in 1150, but Meehan's hypothesis would place the Books of Kells and Durrow in the north prior to 1090 as they had to be returned to Kells along with the other relics after the circuit.<sup>239</sup> However, as Meehan has stated that 'it is safe to assume' that the great gospel book of Colum Cille which was stolen from Kells in 1007 'is the Book of Kells', therefore it had to be present in Kells in the early eleventh century.<sup>240</sup> The Book of Kells was used for recording charter entries concerning Kells, the

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<sup>235</sup> Meehan 1994, 14.

<sup>236</sup> Pers. comm.

<sup>237</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 126-7. This issue has been dealt with more fully in the Cathach chapter, see pp.275-77 above.

<sup>238</sup> Lawlor (1916, 327-8) has shown that the appellations 'gospel' or 'psalter' should not be taken literally.

<sup>239</sup> Bannerman 1993, 44.

<sup>240</sup> Meehan 1994, 14. See discussion on the theft of the 'great Gospel of Colum Cille' in Chapter 1, pp.66-73.



earliest of these dates to the late eleventh century,<sup>241</sup> so the manuscript was in Kells at this period. Therefore the only period in which the Book of Kells could have been in the north is between 1007 (the theft of the Book) and 1090/late eleventh century (the annal charter evidence). Besides the loss of the *Cuilebad Coluim Cille* at sea in 1034<sup>242</sup> there is no record in the texts or annals for the movement of Columban relics to or from Kells in the period outlined above, and therefore the conclusion drawn is that the Book of Kells remained in Kells throughout the eleventh century and was not one of the gospels referred to in the annal entry of 1090.

The refurbishment and repairs of c.1400 may have been carried out in a workshop close to where the shrine was housed. It is not known what extent of lands were held by the Uí Muirgheasa in the late medieval period, but they were probably located in an area from the lower Foyle to Inishowen and a workshop may have been located here.<sup>243</sup> The work involved was not very elaborate as all that was required was a set of dies and some basic metalworking tools. The next phase of restoration, in 1534, consisted of adding the inscribed plates, the eight settings and covering the binding strips and crucifix with silver. This task would have been more complex due to the technical complexity and extent of the filigree settings.

The Dunvegan cup, dated to 1493, has already been referred to as a parallel for some of the technical and decorative features found on the shrine.<sup>244</sup> This artefact is associated with the Maguires of Fermanagh and Ó Floinn has drawn attention to an annal entry of 1479 which records the death of Matthew Ua Maelruanaidh as an *ollamh* in metalwork and a skilled goldsmith to the Maguires.<sup>245</sup> Further evidence for the existence of a northern workshop in the late medieval period is the obit in 1491 of Tadhg Ua Siriden, who was entitled 'the best goldsmith in Leath Chuinn' (the northern half of Ireland).<sup>246</sup> Other ecclesiastical artefacts and shrines which have northern provenances include the Domnach

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<sup>241</sup> Herbert 1994, 62.

<sup>242</sup> AU; Ó Floinn 1997a, 155-6.

<sup>243</sup> Ó Floinn 1995b, 129.

<sup>244</sup> See p.323.

<sup>245</sup> AU; Ó Floinn 1996, 36-7.

<sup>246</sup> AU; *ibid.*, 36.

Airgid (Clones, Co Monaghan), the Cross of Clogher (Slawin church, Co Fermanagh), St Caillin's book shrine (Fenagh, Co Leitrim), the Bell of St Mura, and the shrine of the Bearnán Conaill (Donegal).<sup>247</sup> The above evidence demonstrates that there were metalworking centres in the northern half of the country active from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. One of these, possibly located in the environs of Derry, would have been capable of refurbishing the Misach.

It is not possible to determine how many goldsmiths were involved in fabricating the eleventh century shrine as the most important element, the front, is missing.<sup>248</sup> The decoration of the sides and base would not have been beyond the capabilities of a single craftsman, although, in this case he was somewhat incompetent in his layout and finishing of the zoomorphic decoration. Nonetheless, the modelling of the beast-head escutcheons on the sides are of competent quality.

There are also areas of the shrine which appear to have been left unfinished. On the long side the figure-of-eight voids in the centre of the loops appear unfinished and it may have been intended that they were to be inlaid or cut out to reveal a contrasting background. There is an area of undecorated metal behind the beast head escutcheons on SSA, and to a lesser extent on SSB. It may have been the intention of the goldsmith to conceal this area with a cruciform mount, similar to that on SSB, but for some unknown reason the design altered. A further area of undecorated metal is present on the body of the ribbon-shaped zoomorph on SSB. This may have been an intentional device used to highlight the zoomorph against the contoured inlaid tendrils entwining the animal. Two different schemes were used: openwork decoration based on asymmetrical meandering zoomorphs (short sides), while the long side is much more regular and symmetrical with a tightly controlled pattern. Dissimilar sides are also found on the Cathach shrine.

The late medieval phases of refurbishment are not unduly complex and, again, there is no reason why a single goldsmith would not have been able to implement each of these schemes. The techniques used in this phase include engraving, for example the decorative motifs on the binding strips and on the collets of the settings. The inscribed plates were

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<sup>247</sup> Ó'Floinn 1983, no.85; 1995b, 135.

<sup>248</sup> See the Conclusions chapter for a general discussion on the goldsmiths involved in the manufacture of the book shrines.



executed by the same hand due to the similarities in the hatched background with the binding strips. The filigree work and settings are of a high standard but the covering of the crucifix is relatively crude.

## CHAPTER SIX: ASSESSMENT OF THE EVIDENCE

After examining in detail the construction, decorative techniques, style, iconography and historical considerations relating to the four book shrines, the scope of this chapter is to expand these observations and apply them to extract comparable information from the remainder of the Irish book shrines. The first section considers the physical aspects of the shrines, including relevant constructional and decorative features such as wooden cores, binding strips, suspension escutcheons and openwork plates in order to determine if any classes or groups emerge. The remainder of the chapter deals with the more abstract concepts concerning the status, organisation and role of the goldsmiths involved in the construction of the shrines, the reasons for enshrinement, and the function and role of the book shrines studied.

### **Constructional features**

There are basic constructional and decorative components which are common to a number of book shrines. These are outlined in tabular form on the next page, and are considered in more detail overleaf.

From the table there are no definite typological groupings, except for the Cathach<sup>1</sup> and the Misach, which are similar in size, shape and decoration, and bereft of figural iconography on the sides. The relevant chapters have concluded that the Misach may be a later copy of the Cathach or a generic Columban book shrine originating from a single workshop.<sup>2</sup> The presence or lack of a wooden core<sup>3</sup> and the addition of mounts for accommodating carrying straps or chains appear arbitrary. This is to be expected as these book shrines are not a category of artefact which can be resolved typologically as the sample number is too small, and, more pertinently, the form and dimensions of the shrine are determined by the enclosed manuscript.

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<sup>1</sup> Rather than use the full title of the book shrines pertaining to the associated manuscripts, the following abbreviations will be used where necessary: Kinale for Lough Kinale, the Cathach for the Shrine of the Cathach, Stowe for the Shrine of the Stowe Missal, Moling for the Shrine of the Book of Moling, Dimma for the Shrine of the Book of Dimma and the Soisceál for the Soisceál Molaisse.

<sup>2</sup> See pp.338-39 above.

<sup>3</sup> It was not physically possible to examine the interior of St Caillin's shrine and the Misach, but the observations of previous writers who gained access while the shrines were in a dismantled state were considered.



As shown in the table certain shrines employed a wooden core<sup>4</sup> to which the metal components were nailed while others were fabricated from metal sheets without a core. At present there is no known reasonable explanation for this distinction. The lack of cores in Dimma and Soiscéal may be due to the fact that these shrines had to accommodate a manuscript with a cover and therefore the greater dimensions required to receive an additional wooden core would have added to the expense of materials. However the shrine of the Stowe Missal has a wooden core and the manuscript a set of wooden boards covered with kidskin. The greater than average depth of the Soisceál may imply that it contained an illuminated manuscript of the four gospels with thick wooden boards as covers. The Cathach has an eighteenth- to nineteenth-century wooden core, and when opened by William Betham in the early nineteenth century the manuscript still retained its covers, albeit in a damaged state, along with a decayed wooden box.

The only group of Insular shrines studied in detail so far are the bell shrines and the house-shaped reliquaries.<sup>5</sup> As with the book shrines a number of the house-shaped shrines retain a wooden core and suspension fittings, while others have no cores or fittings.<sup>6</sup> Those without cores comprise Bobbio, Clonmore, Bologna, the River Shannon and the smaller of the Lough Erne shrines. The earliest example with a core is the early-eighth century Monymusk shrine.<sup>7</sup> Ó Floinn's group of 'typical' house-shaped shrines (Abbadia, 'Emly', Monymusk, Melhus, Setnes, Bologna and Copenhagen) all have wooden cores, hinged lids locked by a sliding pin and decorative mounts attached by shanks and plates which are secured together by binding strips.<sup>8</sup> These range in date from the late seventh to the ninth centuries AD. The third group consists of the larger Lough Erne and the Clonard shrines [Pl. 76.a]. These are the largest; they lack polychrome mounts but do possess wooden cores.

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'core', as defined here, embraces both a hollowed out block of solid wood and a box made from separate wooden elements, consisting of sides, base and top.

<sup>5</sup> Blindheim 1984; Ó Floinn 1989/90. Duff's unpublished thesis (1977) on house-shaped shrines was not available for study. Bourke completed a limited study of the bell shrines in his thesis (1980, 118-31).

<sup>6</sup> Ó Floinn's paper (1989/90, 52) lists a total of fourteen shrines. To this should be added the decorative roof-plate from a house-shaped shrine which closely resembles the Bologna example (Ryan 1985b, 57-59, pls. 1-2).

<sup>7</sup> Spearman 1989, no. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Ó Floinn (1989/90, 52) is mistaken regarding the presence of a wooden core in the Bologna shrine as, according to Blindheim (1984, 50) and Ryan (1989, no. 132), there is no core. However this does not affect his classification of the shrines.

TABLE 2: Constructional features of the book shrines.

BOOK SHRINE	WOODEN CORE/BOX	OPENWORK PLATES (NUMBER)	SUSPENSION ESCUTCHEON	ACCESS TO INTERIOR	SURVIVING MANUSCRIPT	INSCRIPTION		GOLDSMITH	
						Primary Phase	Secondary Phase	Primary Phase	Secondary Phase
KINALE	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	—	N	—
SOISCEÁL	N	Y(1)	Y	?	N	Y	N	Gilla Bathín	N
STOWE	Y	Y(8)	N	Y	RIA MS D.IV2	Y	Y	Donnchadh Ua Taccain	Domhnall Ua Tolari
CATHACH	Y	Y(1)	N	N	RIA MS 12.R.33	Y	N	Sitric Mac Mac Aedh	N
MISACH	Y	Y(1)	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N
DIMMA	N	Y(4)	N	?	TCD MS 59	N	Y	N	Tomás
MOLING	N	N	N	Y	TCD MS 60	Y	—	N	—
ST. CAILLÍN'S	Y	Y(1)	N	N	N	Y	—	N	—



It is significant that the earliest house-shaped shrines (Clonmore, Bobbio, smaller Lough Erne) had no wooden cores, and, except for Clonmore, were sealed. The presence of a wooden core in the later types appears arbitrary. It may be that the presence of a wooden core and tubular binding strips retained by nails made the construction less labour intensive. As there was no need for solder, the alignment of the backing plates was not as crucial as dimensional discrepancies could be concealed by the binding strips. Another function of the wooden core may have been to impart resilience and strength to the structure.

Another constructional feature on the book shrines is the evidence for suspension fittings. The use of a strap or chain to transport a book shrine would have been ritualistic as the shrine would have been placed around the neck of the person swearing an oath, in inauguration ceremonies, or when used in the liturgy and church processions. There is no immediate answer as to why some shrines were commissioned to accommodate straps and others were not. As determined in the relevant chapters the only shrines which retain suspension fittings are the Soisceál and the Misach; the latter shrine still has its original chain attached. Due to the narrow width of the suspension loop on the Soisceál it is more probable that a chain was used. The end-panels of the Lough Kinale Shrine have suspension loops linked to strap fittings which display excessive wear patterns on the contact surfaces of the jointed components. This wear pattern would indicate periodic use for at least fifty years [PI.55.b].<sup>9</sup> Excessive wear would be expected on Kinale due to the bulk of the enclosed manuscript in addition to size and weight of the large shrine. The dimensions of the strap hinges show that it required a thick leather strap to support the shrine.<sup>10</sup> There is no constructional evidence for the attachment of a strap or chain on the Cathach, Dimma, Moling, Stowe and St Caillin's shrines.

Other shrines with carrying chains include the late medieval cover for the Bearnán Chonaill and St Patrick's Bell Shrine, while suspension loops are present on St Mura's Bell

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<sup>9</sup> A significant paper by Thunmark-Nylén (1993, 223-34) has analysed the degrees of wear on 604 Viking box brooches, and, allowing for variations, demonstrated that certain brooches may have been in use for up to 160 years (*ibid.*, 231-33). While there is no direct correlation between Lough Kinale and the box brooches an approximation of the relative degree of wear can be inferred, accepting that the shrine would not have been subject to daily use.

<sup>10</sup> From the measurement of the interior of the strap hinge the strap would have had a maximum thickness of 8 mm.

Shrine and the Breac Maedhóg [Pls. 84, 81.a, 74.b].<sup>11</sup> The Bologna shrine still retains a chain which may be secondary, and the escutcheon plate of the Melhus shrine has a fragment of a leather cord.<sup>12</sup> Ranavaik has two escutcheons, Monymusk and Abbadia each have one large escutcheon and the 'Emly', River Shannon and Setnes house-shaped shrines formerly had fittings.

As related in the above chapters, binding strips are common to all book shrines. The usual type are tubular, C-shaped in cross section and plain, except for the raised mouldings which are found on the Cathach and Misach. The binding strips of the book shrines are held in place by tripartite binding strips at the corners. The Lough Kinale Shrine has the typical split, tinned copper alloy tubes which were nailed at the ends and terminated in sleeves at the corner pillars. Of the five extant binding strips three were shaped from sheet metal and the remaining two were cast. The binding strips are secured in place by nails which perforate the wooden interior, while the corner pillars have raised circular mouldings on their underside which act as feet.

On the Soisceál, radiography has revealed that the silver binding strips on the long side are attached directly to the copper alloy plate by U-shaped flanges which extend below the openwork silver sheet [Fig. 16]. Only two binding strips, which are silver, remain from the eleventh century phase of the Cathach. The Misach is the only book shrine which retains its full complement of cast copper alloy binding strips, all of which appear to be eleventh-century in date. Also present are tripartite tubular corner mouldings with small projecting feet. The wear on these feet are consistent with an eleventh century date.<sup>13</sup> There are no surviving binding strips on the Stowe Missal Shrine but there are numerous nail holes, indicating their former positions, along the curved edges of the backing plates. St Caillin's has one silver strip on the front, the remainder are nineteenth-century copper alloy replacements. The elaborate corner mouldings on the front and back of this shrine have finely-cast human heads in the corners. The copper binding strips on Dimma have unusual mitred and soldered joints which do not conform to the tripartite arrangement of other binding strips so far cited. This would indicate that these are nineteenth-century

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<sup>1</sup> The chain for St Patrick's Bell Shrine is now lost.

<sup>2</sup> Blindheim 1984, 3, 44.

<sup>3</sup> Using the same parameters referred to in n.9 above.



replacements. On Moling there are copper alloy binding strips, of C-shaped cross-section, present only on the lid and base of the shrine. The sides are constructed from overlapping rectangular sheets.

Binding strips of the typical tubular, C-shaped cross section have a long history and first appear in the eighth century on the series of house-shaped shrines and on the Moylough belt-shrine.<sup>14</sup> One distinction is that the edges of the backing plates on the house-shaped shrines, as well as the Moylough and Lough Kinale shrines are not curved to engage the binding strips; this feature first appears in shrines of the eleventh century. Binding strips of C-shaped cross section are used in the construction of reliquaries dating from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries and include the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, the crosses of Cong and Clogher, the bell shrines of St Patrick, St Mura, and St Conaill, St Manachan's shrine and the Breac Maedhóg [Pls.71-72,94,81-84,73-74].

Certain complex constructional elements on the earlier book shrines developed into simpler components on the later series of shrines. For example the large C-shaped binding strips on the Lough Kinale Shrine terminate at the corners where they are retained by sleeves which extend from the vertical corner pillars. This same arrangement of binding strips and corner pillars can be seen on the Misach, c.350 years later, where the sleeves on the pillars have become more elongated, with the pillars and sleeves now cast as an integral tripartite unit. The raised hollow circular feet present on the corner pillars of Lough Kinale have developed into cast circular mouldings on the late eleventh-century Misach, and are present as heads on the base of St Caillin's shrine and as raised lentoids on the base of the Domhnach Airgid [Pls.56.a,48-50,63,68].

A feature found on the end panels of the Lough Kinale shrine are the annular mounts with four projecting beast-heads. A separate suspension loop was inserted into the two rectangular slots and secured by a locking pin on the interior. A similar assembly appears on the Misach as a ringed cross from which two beast heads emerge, with the suspension loop for the chain formed by the necks of the beasts. This mount has developed from two separate components on Lough Kinale into an integral single cast unit on the Misach.

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<sup>14</sup> Ó Floinn 1989/90, 52-53; Ryan 1989, no. 47.

The only book shrines which retain their original fronts are Kinale, the Soisceál and Dimma, all of which are based on a central cross. On Kinale the arms of the cross incorporate cast openwork panels with animal ornament; the cross on the Soisceál Molaisse has inset panels of gold filigree and Dimma has openwork panels with animal ornament surrounding an early nineteenth-century replacement cross [Pls.53.a,24,57]. The original cross on Dimma may have been similar to that from Cloyne, Co Cork [Pl.13.b].<sup>15</sup> Applied crosses, crucifix figures and the cruciform arrangement of mounts can be seen on the remainder of the book shrines. Stowe has an inscribed cross on the reverse while the front bears an engraved crucifix and applied settings in the form of a cross. Applied crucifixes and cruciform arrangement of mounts are present on the fronts of the Misach and St Caillin's shrines [Pls.47,62].

The two atypical shrines are the Cathach and Moling. It has been argued that book shrines with crosses on the front indicate that they enshrined gospel books, while shrines lacking crosses held manuscripts which were not gospels, such as the Cathach which contained a psalter.<sup>16</sup> However this hypothesis does not explain the shrine for the Book of Moling, which enclosed a pocket gospel book, but does not have a cross on the front, nor the fourteenth-century front of the shrine of the Cathach which bears a repoussé crucifixion scene, rather than a cross.<sup>17</sup> It is more likely that crosses were used for apotropaic effect, in order to protect the sacred contents of a shrine against intrusive malevolent forces. These can be seen on all manner of shrines as applied crosses, crucifixes, or mounts arranged in the form of a cross.<sup>18</sup>

The next section evaluates the presence of openwork plates on the Irish book shrines, their parallels and occurrence on ecclesiastical metalwork and other artefacts, and explores

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<sup>15</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.82.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly 1992, 281-3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>18</sup> Crosses are found on the following shrines: the Domhnach Airgid which has an applied crucifix figure on the front and an applied cross on the reverse; the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth: a crucifix figure and applied cross on the front and an applied cross on the reverse; Corp Naomh: crucifix on the front and an applied cross and a plate with an openwork cruciform design on the reverse; St Conall's Bell has an engraved cross on the cap while the shrine has a crucifix on the front; the Shrine of St Patrick's and St Mura's bells have an applied cross on the front; the eleventh-century shrine of St Senan's Bell shrine has an inlaid cross on the front and back and there is an engraved cross present on the copper alloy sheet covering the Glankeen Bell [Pls.67,71-72,77-78,83,80].



their probable origins. Their widespread use is probably due to their implicit apotropaic function as their decorative scheme involves the use of multiple cross forms. This initial employment for apotropaic use may have later developed as a visual emblem signifying the presence of an enclosed relic.

The openwork plates on the four relevant shrines have been already described in detail. Different patterns are obtained by varying the width of the frame (the positive elements of the design) and the size, number and positioning of the geometric negative spaces. The conventional pattern consists of T-shaped voids along the edges, L shapes in the corners, with the central field filled with alternating cross-shaped and rectangular openings.<sup>19</sup>

As noted in the relevant chapters the earliest dated appearance of these plates is on the reverse of the Soisceál, which bears the conventional pattern, and uniquely, uses a decorated copper alloy sheet set behind the openwork plate.<sup>20</sup> All other shrines have a plain backing sheet of either copper alloy, silver or gold foil. The Cathach has the conventional openwork pattern, and the plate on the Misach is a nineteenth-century copy, which reproduces the original pattern, but differs as there are no rectangular voids in the decorative scheme. The shrine of the Stowe Missal has the most extensive and varied array of openwork plaques found on any Irish medieval reliquary. The base has chequerboard and triangular patterns, the long sides exhibit the conventional pattern while SSB has an openwork chequerboard pattern and circles linked by diagonal lines. The late medieval examples found on Dimma and St Caillin's have variations on the conventional pattern. Except for the Misach, all openwork plates on the shrines are fabricated from silver, or copper alloy sheeted in silver. There are no openwork plates with geometric voids on the Lough Kinale or Moling shrines.

Other shrines which have openwork plates include the Corp Naomh, St Patrick's Bell Shrine, the Breac Maedhóg, the Cross of Clogher, the sides of the Bearnán Conaill, and an unprovenanced mounting in the NMI. The plate on the reverse of the Corp Naomh has an

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<sup>19</sup> Crawford 1922, 77, Fig.2. There are errors in the correlations between the drawing and the captions.

<sup>20</sup> For other unusual characteristics of the Soisceál openwork plate, see p.121.

unusual pattern, which consists of repeating cross-shapes [Pl. 78].<sup>21</sup> St Patrick's Bell Shrine has an openwork silver sheet on the reverse which is similar to the conventional pattern, but differs in that there are no rectangular voids in the central field: they are situated along the edges which gives rise to a positive swastika pattern on the frame [Pl. 81.b]. On the bottom of the Breac Maedhóg there are two separate openwork copper alloy plates which are crudely cut out with the openings forming a misaligned swastika pattern. From their shape they appear to have been reused from another artefact and may have been accommodated on the roof portion of a small house-shaped reliquary.<sup>22</sup> An openwork copper alloy plate of irregular shape, which would have fitted on the reverse of a processional cross of similar form to the Cross of Cong, bears the conventional openwork pattern and has been dated to the eleventh century.<sup>23</sup> Openwork plates continue into the late medieval period and are found on the reverse of the Cross of Clogher, which has a series of copper alloy sheets with the conventional pattern, and on the sides of the Bearnán Conaill bell shrine which bear a repeating pattern of stepped crosses [Pls. 94, 84].

These openwork plaques appear only on the reverse and sides of shrines, and since they are present on the Cross of Clogher, this may imply that Clogher was originally a reliquary cross.<sup>24</sup> However the Cross of Cong formerly enclosed a relic of the True Cross, but it contains no geometric openwork plates. Another consideration is the persistence of the conventional geometric pattern. It first appears<sup>25</sup> on the Soisceál Molaisse in the early eleventh century and the same pattern is found on the Cross of Clogher some 400 years later.

Decorative panels with the conventional L, T and cruciform shapes are encountered

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<sup>21</sup> Recent research by Johnson (1997, 232) has dated this shrine to the tenth century, though she argues that the openwork plate is late medieval (*ibid.*, n.313). However in her catalogue description she states that the openwork plate 'may also be original' (*ibid.*, Vol.II, 60). Since the openwork plate is overlain by a sheet-metal cross belonging to the primary phase of the shrine, and the patination and wear patterns on the openwork plate are analogous to the other mounts present, the writer would propose that it belongs to the primary (tenth to early eleventh centuries) phase of the shrine.

<sup>22</sup> Mahr 1932, pl.62:1,a.

<sup>23</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 186, pl.II:d; 1999, 196, pl.4.

<sup>24</sup> Raftery 1941, 63. There has been no detailed study of this cross to establish if it was made as a reliquary cross.

<sup>25</sup> For the earlier sculptural parallels, see below. The parallels for openwork plaques in Irish metalwork, stone and bone are detailed in the Soisceál chapter.



on the ninth-century high crosses from Kilree and Killamery, Co Kilkenny, and on the base of the cross from Monaincha, Co Tipperary.<sup>26</sup> These panels are found in the same position on Kilree and Killamery, on the shaft panel directly above the centre of the head. As noted below these openwork plates may have been used to signify a reliquary, which may imply that the model on which these high crosses were based was a reliquary cross. It has been argued that a reliquary cross could have been the model for the Ahenny crosses; this would explain the archaic character of the decorative features, which were designed to imitate an earlier metalwork jewelled cross of some importance.<sup>27</sup>

On the Continent openwork patterns are used as a background to the figural scenes on the Magdeburg Antependium-type Ottonian ivories of the tenth century, but these postdate the earlier high crosses from Kilree and Killamery.<sup>28</sup> However they are found on earlier artefacts, for example on the eighth-century reliquary casket of St Liudger, from the Abbey Church of St Werden, Germany.<sup>29</sup> This casket is fabricated from bone plaques which are decorated in a number of different manners; openwork cruciform panels flank orant figures. The decorative scheme of St Peter's Throne in Rome has openwork bone plaques with gilt-metal sheets as backing plates. The throne has been dated to the third quarter of the ninth century.<sup>30</sup> A major relic such as this would have been viewed by many of the visiting Irish ecclesiastics and pilgrims, and thus may have had a visual impact and influenced those involved in the commissioning of shrines. The pierced metal thrones of the reliquary statues at Essen and Conques have been cited as a source for openwork plates.<sup>31</sup> However as these statues are dated to the late tenth century it is more likely that they were influenced by the decorative scheme on St Peter's Throne.

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<sup>26</sup> Edwards 1990b, 40-44; Harbison 1992, no.162, fig.446; no.146, figs.409, 412, 470.

<sup>27</sup> See Edwards (1983, 5, 30-32) for the dating and a summary of the literature on the crosses from the kingdom of Ossory. In a paper read to the Fourth International Art Conference, Cardiff, on 4th september 1998 entitled **Politics and Patrons: archaeology, artefacts and methodology**, Ragnall Ó Floinn has put forward convincing historical evidence for the dating of the Ahenny group of crosses to the third quarter of the ninth century, based on the patronage of Cerball mac Dunlainge, king of Ossory, who died in 888.

<sup>28</sup> Lasko 1994, 88-90.

<sup>29</sup> Lasko 1971, ill.117; Gaborit-Chopin 1978, no.32.

<sup>30</sup> Gaborit-Chopin 1978, no.68; Lasko 1994, 61, pl.81.

<sup>31</sup> Ó Floinn 1999, 195.

A pair of tenth-century book covers in Noyon Cathedral Treasury bear openwork horn plaques of similar form to the Irish examples. The front, which is relatively complete, has an openwork plaque in each corner consisting of two cruciform voids framed by eight T shapes. These covers originally held relics in compartments behind the openwork plaques and, as there was no direct access, the apertures were used for viewing the enclosed relics [Pl.18].<sup>32</sup> These plaques served a dual purpose: they indicated the presence of an enclosed relic, and they were deemed fit to decorate objects of an ecclesiastical nature because of the apotropaic function of the cruciform devices.<sup>33</sup> Insular book covers may have been decorated with pierced metal and/or bone plaques and, as in the Noyon example, some examples may have had compartments to hold relics. When designing or fabricating a book shrine, openwork metal plaques were incorporated in order to signify a reliquary, or, more pertinently, an enclosed relic to which there was no direct access.

The other possible source of influence, as considered in detail by Stevenson, is the presence of numerous negative crosses in manuscript carpet pages which he described as 'multiple-cross pages'.<sup>34</sup> Although there are no direct comparisons in regard to the conventional pattern found on the book shrines, the use of multiple crosses as symbolic decoration may be derived from illumination.<sup>35</sup> If the four evangelist symbols page provided the source for the design of the front of the Soisceál, then the carpet pages with numerous negative crosses may have influenced the reverse of shrines.<sup>36</sup> However since the manuscript crosses were not that conspicuous, and given that so much of the decoration in manuscripts appears to be derived from metalwork, it is more probable that the decorative schemes on the reverse of shrines were influenced by metal openwork plaques. In addition they may have been used on reliquary thrones and/or altar frontals now lost to us.

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<sup>32</sup> Steenbock 1965, no.37, pls.54-5. See p.52 above.

<sup>33</sup> Stevenson (1981/2,) has explored the subject of cross symbolism in depth.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 15 and pp.11-18, Figs. 6-7 for a detailed discussion on this topic.

<sup>35</sup> See pp.44-47 above. Ernst Kitzinger (1993, 3-6) has also pursued research into the apotropaic intent of knots and interlace.

<sup>36</sup> An initial page from a manuscript (BM Add. MS. 20692) of the Reichenau/Trier scriptorium of the second half of the tenth century, provides a relevant parallel. It has a large arcaded frame filled with a grid of L, T and cruciform shapes (Fuglesang 1980, 113, Pl.90:b).



## Accessibility

Now that the constructional and decorative aspects of the book shrines have been reviewed, analysis of the results may assist in resolving one of the more intriguing questions, namely whether the contents of the shrines were intended to be accessible. The means of sealing book shrines necessitated C-shaped binding strips, which had to be retained in place either by nails, or by engaging with the curved edges of the backing sheets. The corners were clamped together with vertical pillars and later using tripartite mouldings.

There are three book shrines which were sealed by means of binding strips and corner pillars: Kinale, the Misach and St Caillin's. Although incomplete, the constructional evidence of the binding strips, corner pillars and nails, indicate that when complete, the Lough Kinale shrine was completely sealed [Pls.56.a,b].<sup>37</sup> The shrine was dissembled with some force, either to extricate the decorative mountings<sup>38</sup> which has led to tearing of the backing sheets, or to gain access to the contents. On the Misach all the binding strips and corner pillars are nailed in place and form a sealed unit, while on St Caillin's, even though there is only one original binding strip remaining, the positions of the replacement strips show that this shrine was completely sealed. A significant feature of St Caillin's shrine is that, although it dates from the sixteenth century, it reproduces earlier components such as the openwork base plate. Since it was also sealed this method of construction may have been following the convention of the earlier book shrines.

Due to the clumsiness of nineteenth-century investigations, vital constructional evidence from certain book shrines has been either lost or concealed by modifications and restorations. The Soisceál has one long side missing, but, where they are not obscured by solder, the edges of the backing sheets on three of the sides, the front and reverse are curved outwards, which would indicate that the shrine was intended to be sealed. There is a short side missing on Dimma, but where visible, the edges of the backing sheets are curved outwards. Insufficient constructional components survive on the Cathach to determine whether it was sealed, but the historical accounts record that the O'Donnell's ordered that the shrine should not be opened.

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<sup>37</sup> Kelly, E.P. 1993, Fig. 20:8,9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 174.

The Stowe shrine differs from the other book shrines in that the edges of the backing sheet on SSA are straight and not curved, and thus may imply that this end slid across the width of the shrine to allow access to the interior [Fig.17.a]. There are no binding strips remaining, but the edges of three of the sides, the front and reverse have curved edges with nail holes at intervals. The binding strips may have been removed when the shrine was opened in the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> It has been argued elsewhere that since the manuscript incorporated excerpts from St John's Gospel and three spells against various ailments, the manuscript may have been used directly for healing and other functions, and was probably accessible.<sup>40</sup> The shrine of the Book of Moling is also dissimilar as it has a fastening mechanism consisting of a swivel hook which maintains the removable lid in a closed position. The shrine could be opened at will.

The missing sides from the Soisceál Molaisse, the Misach and the shine for the Book of Dimma are probably due to damage caused when the shrines were opened with force. If the shrines were meant to open, either the front, or one of the sides, would have been removable, but the presence of tubular binding strips makes this operation almost impossible without inflicting damage. This evidence would therefore indicate that the Soisceál, the Cathach and Dimma were sealed when first made. Conversely the sides may also have been lost if they were removable, but the shrines, when in the custody of the *coarbs*, would have been maintained intact and in good condition.

The Shrine of the Book of Durrow was accessible in the late-eleventh to early-twelfth centuries as indicated by the note which was entered on the last page of the manuscript.<sup>41</sup> This records the ceding of land belonging to the abbey of Glenn Uissen, Co Carlow, to the monastery of Durrow.<sup>42</sup> Although the shrine for the Book of Armagh, which was commissioned by Donnchad Mac Maelsechnáill in 937, may have been sealed, it was opened in 1007 when the signature of Brian Boruma was entered onto f.16v of the manuscript.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> O'Rahilly 1925, 103.

<sup>40</sup> See pp.211-213 above.

<sup>41</sup> TCD MS 57; Alexander 1978, no. 6. The shrine was manufactured in the period 879-916. See pp.65-66 above.

<sup>42</sup> F.248<sup>v</sup>; Luce 1960, 30; Meehan 1996, 14.

<sup>43</sup> TCD MS 52; Alexander 1978, no. 53; Gwynn 1978, 41.



The method of sealing the contents using binding strips was not unique to book shrines; other shrines were also sealed with no direct access permitted to the enclosed relic. The Moylough belt shrine encloses a fragmentary belt between metal plates which is sealed with tubular binding strips of C-shaped cross section held in place by nails.<sup>44</sup> Tubular binding strips and nails were also used to seal the Breac Maedhóg and the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, and the edges of the backing plates on both shrines are curved outwards and perforated by nail holes. Although the Shrine of St Lachtin's Arm was fabricated using flat binding strips, the assembly would have been sealed as the circular base was secured in place by pins [Pl.76.b].<sup>45</sup> The early class of house-shaped shrines from Bobbio and Lough Erne (the smaller shrine) were sealed as they were fabricated from metal plates and soldered along the edges. The interiors were not accessible and the relics in the Bobbio shrine may have been viewed through the mica windows on the front plates.<sup>46</sup>

There is no obvious explanation as to why certain Irish book shrines were sealed, and others were not. From the investigation of the openwork plates it was suggested that the plates may have been derived from cruciform apertures, or windows, present on shrines, which allowed the enclosed relic to be seen, but not touched. This same concept may have been applied to book shrines. A more practical reason may be due to the physical nature of the enclosed relic, a book made of fragile vellum, which was sensitive to handling and the environment. The *coarbs* realised that the relic in their care was suffering undue damage and may have arranged to have it sealed permanently in a modified or new shrine. In addition, when used for the many social rituals, such as oaths, healing and pledges, portions of the revered manuscript may have been removed or stolen, thus compelling the *coarbs* to arrange for protection for the relic by permanently sealing it in the shrine. This action may have caused the shrine to acquire the status as a secondary relic as it now represented the power and sanctity of the original relic. However, the principal reason was due to the revered status of the enclosed manuscript, usually a gospel, and the nature of its contents: the Divine Word of God, and the manuscript would have been further exalted if it was associated with a local saint. This factor might have been just cause for the book to remain sealed within its shrine

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<sup>44</sup> Ryan 1989, no. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ó Floinn 1983, no.80.

<sup>46</sup> For Bobbio see Bourke (1994/5, 287-299) and Ryan (1990, 102-111), and for Lough Erne, Ó Floinn (1989 no.130a; 1989/90, 52-3).

and not be exposed to mere mortals.

### The role of the goldsmiths

There is a dearth of historical and literary evidence from Ireland pertaining to the status, organisation and work practices of metalworkers in the early to late medieval period. For this reason the more abundant documentary evidence from England and the Continent has to be used for comparative purposes. The detailed analysis of the book shrines has allowed some questions to be answered, such as whether the book shrines were fabricated by a single goldsmith or a team, how long it took to complete a shrine and more general questions such as recycling of materials, and whether the goldsmiths were itinerant or resident at a centre.

Research on early medieval craftsmen in Ireland has been undertaken by O'Meadhra, Ryan, Ó Floinn and MacLean.<sup>47</sup> The majority of Irish monasteries were probably self-sufficient as regards subsistence metalworking, comprising mundane objects such as knives, vessels and simple tools. However the more ambitious artefacts, such as reliquaries and ecclesiastical artefacts, were probably only produced in the more prestigious monasteries with resources to hand, such as Armagh, Clonmacnoise and Kells,<sup>48</sup> and commercial towns such as Dublin. Summaries of the archaeological evidence of fine metalwork from excavations in monasteries and church sites have concluded that there are no definite structures associated with metalworking activities.<sup>49</sup> In Ireland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, metalworking was confined to towns and large monasteries. Royal patronage was a crucial factor in the development of monastic schools and metalworking centres. This was reflected in the patronage of the O'Connors of Connaught in the twelfth century, and the endowment of monastic treasuries in response to the eleventh century reorganisation of the Irish church.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> O'Meadhra 1987b, 163 ff; Ryan 1988a; Ó Floinn 1987a, 179-80; Micheli 1996, 8-11. MacLean (1995, *passim*), deals primarily with the status of the sculptor.

<sup>48</sup> For a summary of the recent excavations and archaeological discoveries at these sites see Bourke (1993a, Ch.7), King (1992, 12-14) and Ó Floinn (1995a). See p.252 of the Cathach chapter regarding the amount of ecclesiastical artefacts provenanced to Clonmacnoise.

<sup>49</sup> Ryan 1988a, 39-44. A more recent paper (Comber 1997) has reviewed and discussed the evidence for non-ferrous metalworking at Lagore and other sites.

<sup>50</sup> O Floinn 1987, 189.



Recent research by MacLean regarding the apprenticeship, training and status of the sculptor in early medieval Ireland has resolved some issues which may assist in examining the role and training of metalworkers.<sup>51</sup> He has considered the legal and social status of the craftsmen and the relationship between the master craftsman and his dependants and apprentices, which are conveyed in the eighth-century legal tracts, notably the *Uraicecht becc*. From *Uraicecht becc* there are three basic ranks within a craftsman's workshop: master, adult assistants with legal standing as commoners, and dependant apprentices who were still minors.<sup>52</sup> It was prudent to confine training in the more arcane and valuable skills, such as metalworking, to relatives; therefore apprentices were usually family members.<sup>53</sup> In the eighth century, during the period of *Uraicecht becc*, the status of a *sáer*, who was a master wright, akin to a skilled carpenter, was deemed to be higher than a master metalworker. The status of the *sáer* advanced as he mastered more crafts until he attained the position of 'chief master wright'. The chief master wright was expected to exercise 'expert knowledge' or 'supervision' of workers beneath him, and therefore acted as an overseer.<sup>54</sup> The term *sóir* was reserved for smiths engaged in metalwork. The income and payment of craftsmen and goldsmiths, which included livestock and land, has been appraised by Ryan, Maclean and Dodwell.<sup>55</sup>

One authority has argued that in Ireland the workshops were static and the patrons travelled to the metalworking centres.<sup>56</sup> Anníaraí, who was a member of the monastic community of Lynn, Co Westmeath, has been cited as an example of a resident goldsmith.<sup>57</sup> The Life of Colmán of Lynn describes Anníaraí as the 'famous goldsmith of the community of Tech Conan' and one episode describes how he made an ornamental bridle

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<sup>51</sup> MacLean 1995, *passim*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>53</sup> Ryan 1988a, 36. On St Patrick's Bell shrine, the goldsmith Condulig Ua Hinmainen and his sons are referred to in the inscription: *ocus do chondulig u inmainen cona maccaib ro cumtaig* (Ó Floinn 1983, no. 79b).

<sup>54</sup> Maclean 1995, 134-5.

<sup>55</sup> Ryan (1988a, 35) has argued that metalworkers may have been part-time and derived some income from farming, as they were paid with livestock and would have required lands in order to sustain their assets. MacLean (1995, 135) has remarked upon the 'chief master' (sculptor) who received one sixth of the two cows each paid for various tasks and commissions completed, while Dodwell (1982, 77-78) has shown that some of the more successful goldsmiths in Anglo-Saxon England were rewarded with gifts of estates.

<sup>56</sup> O'Meadhra 1987b, 165-9.

<sup>57</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 179.

of gold and silver for the king of Offaly.<sup>58</sup> From this it would appear that although attached to the monastery, he undertook secular commissions, which would have served to increase the prestige and reputation of the monastery.<sup>59</sup> Donnchad Ua Taccáin, a member of the Clonmacnoise community, made the shrine of the Stowe Missal for the monastery of Lorrha.<sup>60</sup> This shows that the lesser monasteries sometimes looked to their powerful neighbours for their more prestigious commissions. A renowned goldsmith may have attracted gifts of property and tithes to the monastery as payment for services. There are other hagiographical accounts for ecclesiastics who were also metalworkers. Reference has previously been made to St Dageaus, Abbot of Inishcealtra (d.587), where he is described as making bells, crosiers and book covers.<sup>61</sup> A rare example of an obit for a craftsman concerns Mael Brigte Ua Brolcháin, who is described in the annals as *Primsaer Ereann*, chief wright of Ireland (AU 1029).<sup>62</sup>

The metalworking assemblage at Lagore has been viewed as a result of seasonal activity by itinerant metalworkers who were periodically summoned to undertake commissions.<sup>63</sup> Small-scale and mundane work may have been carried out by an itinerant metalworker who would have travelled around settlements and monasteries to carry out minor commissions and repairs, and was not dependant on a patron. A competent metalworker would have been able to produce a surplus of simple artefacts such as tools, utensils and decorative items such as strap-ends and pins. These items may have been traded or sold at markets or fairs around the country, probably at ecclesiastical sites and territorial boundaries, thus saving the metalworker from having to travel to remote locations. Prestigious commissions would have been carried out by renowned craftsmen, probably as heads of monastic ateliers, who due to their status, were paid visits by patrons and attracted wealth to the monastery. However large-scale and complex commissions may have required the craftsmen to travel, and such men may have assembled a team of assistants. Therefore it is not possible to state that goldsmiths were either itinerant or resident; both categories

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<sup>58</sup> Ó Floinn *ibid.*, Meyer 1911, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Ó Floinn 1987a, 179.

<sup>60</sup> Ó Floinn 1997a, 257.

<sup>61</sup> See p.23 for citation and further references.

<sup>62</sup> See MacLean (1995, 126, n.4) for obits of craftsmen prior to the eleventh century.

<sup>63</sup> Ryan 1988a, 38.



existed simultaneously. It is probable that, as craftsmen gained experience and increased their status, they aspired to residential status within the confines of a monastery or urban centre.

The documentary evidence from late Anglo-Saxon England provides a background to the questions as to whether the goldsmiths were monastic or secular, the organisation of the craft and the composition of the teams.<sup>64</sup> Mannig, the abbot of Evesham (d.1066), was regarded as the greatest master craftsman of the Confessor's reign, and his masterpiece was probably the gold, silver, and gemmed shrine intended for the relics of St Odolph, which was made c.1058. Mannig was in overall charge of the project and provided the initial designs, and the master craftsman responsible to him was Godric, head of the group of lay professionals.<sup>65</sup> Mannig has been compared to a mint master who supervised and maintained standards amongst moneyers but was not directly involved in the manufacture and production of coins.<sup>66</sup> At Winchester, the goldsmiths who made the shrine for the translation of St Swithun's relics in 971, were secular and were assembled together by King Edgar at his own residence.<sup>67</sup>

As monastic houses increased in size in the twelfth century, so did their wealth, which led to the growing employment of paid professionals. Abbot Suger employed secular artists to paint the walls and windows of St Denis in the 1140s, which suggests that the number of painter monks available was limited.<sup>68</sup> Religious communities, especially new foundations, had a particular interest in attracting craftsmen. When Bernard, the former abbot of Quercy, set up the house of Tiron, near Chartres, in 1141, he allowed craftsman who became monks to continue to practice their skills.<sup>69</sup> Bishop Geoffrey of Auxerre (1052-76) appointed some of his canons entirely on their ability as craftsmen and obtained

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<sup>64</sup> Dodwell 1982, 65-66.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Dodwell (1993, 38) has reviewed the employment of secular craftsmen in monasteries and provided further examples. Petzold (1995, 26-43) has provided an excellent review of the role and function of the patron and artist in the Romanesque period.

<sup>69</sup> Dodwell 1993, 38.

the skills of an experienced painter, glass-worker and goldsmith.<sup>70</sup>

Lightbown has evaluated the historical evidence for the activities and workshop organisation of the secular goldsmiths in late medieval France. The commission for the elaborate silver-gilt throne, set with pearls and precious stones, for King Jean le Bon's accession (1350-53) was given to the royal goldsmith Jehan le Brailler. He allocated some of the work to two to three craftsmen while he fashioned and reused silver-gilt sheets from an old throne.<sup>71</sup> Although he was the head of an atelier, he actively participated in the fabrication of the throne.

From the evidence presented above, it is apparent that in Anglo-Saxon and late-medieval England, and late-medieval France, the master craftsman acted as an overseer, akin to an architect, and could be a member of a religious order. He took in work at his resident monastery, where it would have attracted valuable income, and employed secular goldsmiths to assist with large or complex projects. It is also recorded that King Edgar of England assembled teams of secular goldsmiths at his own residence to work on commissions.

These elaborate commissions have to be contrasted with the Irish series of book shrines which are relatively small-scale and the evidence suggests they were the work of a single goldsmith. The evidence from the inscriptions on the book shrines suggests that in Ireland the patrons travelled to a metalworking centre in order to engage a goldsmith. Dublin, or a Dublin-trained goldsmith, has been proposed as the location for the manufacture of the *Soisceál Molaisse*. The Stowe shrine was made at Clonmacnoise by Donnchadh Ua Taccáin, Dimma at Roscrea or Roscommon, while the Cathach and Misach were most probably made at Kells. Dublin should not be completely disregarded as a provenance for the last two shrines, as there are a number of stylistic parallels and influences from motif-pieces and other artefacts which were retrieved from the Dublin excavations.

The next question to be addressed is the number of craftsmen involved in the construction of the book shrines. As noted above the book shrines are much smaller in scale than the large commissions undertaken by goldsmiths, such as Mannig in Anglo-Saxon

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Lightbown 1978, 84-5.



England. The wealth of technical evidence present in the metalworking treatise of Theophilus demonstrates that there is no compelling reason why a proficient craftsman would not have been capable of constructing a book shrine alone.<sup>72</sup> According to Theophilus's account, a goldsmith of the twelfth century would have been familiar with the full range of metalworking techniques, but there may have been an apprentice to carry out some of the less demanding tasks such as tending fires, pouring the castings and maintaining tools and equipment. However recent investigations concerning the methods and techniques of Theophilus regarding gold cloisonné enamelling has concluded that although he was familiar with, and may have observed the methods, he might not have had direct practical experience of the craft.<sup>73</sup>

The Anglian helmet from Coppergate, York, is thought to have been the work of a single craftsman, except for the chain-mail component, which was manufactured by a specialist.<sup>74</sup> Ryan, in his detailed study of the Derrynaflan chalice, estimated that it was 'essentially the work of one craftsman'.<sup>75</sup> Similar conclusions can be drawn from the evidence provided by the book shrines. In most cases it is clear that most of them could have been, and probably were, made by one individual, perhaps with the aid of an apprentice.

From the analysis of the stylistic traits and techniques on the Soisceál, the same hand was responsible for the filigree panels, the engraved panels with zoomorphic ornament on the sides and base plate, and the figurative panels on the front and sides, as well as the strap-hinge. However the goldsmith used a diverse range of animal ornament on the sides in order to vary his repertoire. It was also concluded that a single goldsmith fabricated the Stowe, Cathach and Misach shrines. On the Cathach the goldsmith demonstrated two distinct styles: panels of more traditional zoomorphs and abstract motifs on the long sides, combined with the more exotic and technically proficient Irish Ringerike composition on the short sides. In the case of the Misach, the goldsmith was somewhat incompetent in his layout and finishing of the zoomorphic decoration, and this shrine shows that not all commissions were of high quality.

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<sup>72</sup> Hawthorne and Smith 1979, Book III.

<sup>73</sup> Buckton 1994, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Tweddle 1992, 1036-56.

<sup>75</sup> Ryan 1985a, 208.

Most of the technical processes used on the Lough Kinale shrine, although a large and complex object, are straightforward and well within the abilities of a competent goldsmith. Little remains of the twelfth-century phase of Dimma, but the openwork plates with animal ornament were made by the same hand. The principal decorative device on St Caillin's shrine is the use of die-stamped plates to produce ecclesiastical figures on the front, and foliate motifs on the remainder of the shrine. There are exquisite figures, highlighted with niello, engraved on the silver frames bordering the ecclesiastic panels [Pl.66.a]. All this work was within the remit of a single goldsmith. The late medieval phases of refurbishment on the Cathach, Misach and Dimma shrines also use die-stamped motifs to good effect. The techniques used on these shrines, as well as on the late phase of the Stowe, and the limited range of mounts on Moling, were all within the abilities of a competent goldsmith.

A final consideration regarding the construction is to assess how long it would have taken the craftsman to fabricate the book shrines. The Soisceál Molaise is the most complete of the eleventh-century book shrines and has a wide range of decorative techniques.<sup>76</sup> An approximation of the time taken to complete this shrine by a single craftsman would be between three and five months.<sup>77</sup> In their present form, the remainder of the shrines would have taken less time to complete; however the fronts and panels which are now missing may have been technically complex with elaborate figural decoration and thus taken longer to complete than the Soisceál.

Moulds and dies were a necessary but expensive part of a goldsmith's stock in trade and normally passed to his successors, as noted in the wills of late-medieval pewterers, goldsmiths and braziers.<sup>78</sup> Moulds could have remained in a workshop for fifty years or more, whilst decorative panels, settings, letters for inscriptions and other embellishments were reused and combined on various types of artefacts.<sup>79</sup> The use of the same mould over several generations curbed innovation. In some instances a clay mould was made by taking

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<sup>76</sup> See Appendix No.2.

<sup>77</sup> See pp.151-2 above.

<sup>78</sup> Campbell 1987, 164.

<sup>79</sup> Blair and Blair 1991, 101.



impressions from existing pieces, thus reproducing unfashionable components.<sup>80</sup> An example of this practice can be observed on the crozier of Richard Fox, which is dated before 1501, and has figures of apostles and saints mounted onto the crook and upper shaft. Three identical apostles, presumably cast from the same mould, reappear on the set of Astor apostle spoons made in London and dated to 1536-37. A figure of the Virgin from the London set recurs on a later spoon dated to 1577-8.<sup>81</sup>

This practice of reusing dies and moulds over a long period of time has implications for artefacts dated by stylistic and iconographical means using the motifs and figures present on die-stamped sheets. The presence of die-stamped sheets bearing identical heraldic beasts has been noted on both the fronts of the Cathach and the Corp Naomh although there may be a gap of up to one hundred and fifty years in their manufacture [Pls.38,46,77].<sup>82</sup> There are also analogous die-stamped panels found on the front of the Misach and on the sides of the Cross of Clogher [Pls.47,94.b].<sup>83</sup>

Another workshop practice which was documented in the late medieval period, and probably occurred in early medieval times, was the recycling of plate, which was melted down and reused for other artefacts. Recycling occurred when plate went out of fashion, to provide material for new commissions, or in times of need as these were assets which were readily realisable. Some examples are noted below.

Jehan Duvivier, goldsmith to Charles V and VI, when commanded in 1391 to make various prestigious gold artefacts for Louis, Duke of Touraine, was presented with an old gold chaplet 'to break up and employ in a certain work of his craft'.<sup>84</sup> Guillaume Arrode, goldsmith to Charles VI, was employed principally to repair and restore old plate. In 1389

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<sup>80</sup> Campbell 1987, 163-4, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Campbell, M. 1991, 118, figs. 58-9; Cherry 1992, 40-44, pls. 43-44.

<sup>82</sup> The front of the Cathach has been dated from the middle to the third quarter of the fourteenth century (see p.271 above) while the medieval additions to the Corp Naomh have been dated to the sixteenth century (Hourihane 1984, 808-9). The die used for stamping the sheet may have been in use for a prolonged period of time or else the sheet on the Corp Naomh was reused from an earlier artefact.

<sup>83</sup> See pp.315-16. Apart from the book shrines discussed in this thesis, die-stamped sheets bearing heraldic beasts are to be found on the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth, Shrine of St Patrick's Hand, the Domhnach Airgid, the Corp Naomh and the Bearnán Conaill [Pls.71-72,69-70, 77-78,83-84].

<sup>84</sup> Lightbown 1978, 85.

he received a large quantity of old household and chapel plate to be melted down and converted into new items. On occasions Arrode also accepted old plate as part-payment for commissions which was then consigned to the melting pot.<sup>85</sup> It is probable that Irish goldsmiths from the same period were also engaged in similar activities when refurbishing shrines, and would have reused the old and worn precious metal on the shrines. So far no primary decoration has been detected beneath the late medieval remodellings of the fronts which would indicate that the old metal was completely removed. The missing gold foil panels from long side B of the Cathach may have been a casualty of this practice. These were probably melted down to provide the gold necessary for the gilding of the late medieval repoussé sheets and mounts on the front and sides of the shrine.

There are also accounts of donations of plate to ecclesiastical institutions. Countess Godiva (1040-80), wife of Leofric, earl of Mercia, bestowed all her treasures on the church '... and, sending for goldsmiths, piously distributed amongst them all the gold and silver she possessed to be made into (book covers for) sacred gospel-books, crucifixes, statues of the saints and other wonderful art objects for the church.'<sup>86</sup> Another insight into donations of gold and silver to the church is illustrated by the dispute between Eleanor of Vermandois and the canons of Saint Quentin in 1211, when new reliquaries were being prepared for the forthcoming translation of the relics of their patron saint. Eleanor accused the canons of losing a gold chalice which she had donated to the church and they responded that it had been melted down, the metal sold to raise funds, and the jewels saved to make a new reliquary for the elevation of the patron saint.<sup>87</sup> This latter incident demonstrates that precious stones and settings could be transferred from one shrine to another.

The various settings on the later phases of the medieval Irish shrines may have been reused from older and unfashionable ecclesiastical or secular artefacts. This practice is evident on the front of the Cathach where, in the sixteenth century, four additional settings were mounted on to the front. However these are crudely made and of different sizes which would imply that they were not made for the shrine and were reused from another artefact. The later medieval settings on the front of the Stowe shrine are also dissimilar and are most

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, where a full list of the plate is provided.

<sup>86</sup> Dodwell 1982, 66.

<sup>87</sup> Shortall 1997, 32.



probably reused [Pls.38,37]. Sometimes the goldsmiths respected the integrity of the shrine or attempted to emulate the original decorative scheme. An example of this is found on the long sides of the Cathach where the sixteenth-century corner mounts imitate the eleventh-century rectangular gold covered panels. These are the same size and bear similar abstract motifs such as knotwork and linked quatrefoils [Pls.44-45].<sup>88</sup>

Westropp referred to a significant, but little known passage in the medieval Life of St Enda which gives a rare insight into medieval aesthetics and the respect held for the original form of a shrine.<sup>89</sup> The compiler of the life laments the fact that the noble shrine of the saint's gospels was replaced by a brass box.<sup>90</sup> Presumably the original shrine had seen its day, suffered wear and tear, and was replaced, but due to the esteem in which it was held, it had also acquired the status of a secondary relic rather than just functioning as a receptacle for the saint's gospel book.

The methods and work practices of the late medieval goldsmiths may appear crude in their apparent disregard for the integrity and prestige of the shrine, revealed by their willingness to remove and reuse precious metals and their readiness to obscure and cut away the original components. Goldsmiths received direction from their patron and the shrines were probably in need of repair as a result of damage sustained from excessive handling in both liturgical and secular use. Certain shrines, such as the Cathach, were reconstructed and repaired, leaving little of the original shrine remaining. The goldsmith would have been aware of, and would have respected the sanctity of the relic, as the shrine was only regarded as a container to enclose the relic.<sup>91</sup> With the passage of time the shrine would have evolved into a secondary relic, especially if the contents of the shrine were inaccessible,

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<sup>88</sup> Panels SP2 and 3 on corner C, long side B [Fig.11:B].

<sup>89</sup> Westropp 1911, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Plummer 1910, 68, ch.XIX. This episode has not been translated or subjected to modern critical analysis. Sharpe (1991, 393) has stated that the life is no earlier than the thirteenth century. The episode reads as follows:

*Nam, peracto ieiunio, apparuit angelus Domini sancto Endeo, portans sibi dona duo a Deo sibi missa, videlicet librum quatuor euangeliorum, et casulam sacerdotalium ministeriorum. Per hec enim duo munera preciosa dabatur intelligi, quod ipse pre ceteris erat duplice honore dignis: videlicet in docendo per euangeliorum, et in presidendo per sacerdotalem casulam. Codex ille euuangelicus cum magna reverencia in ecclesia sancti Endei habetur: similiter et casula auro et argento ornata inter ecclesiastica munera quondam habebatur; set nunc solo metallo eris vestitur.*

<sup>91</sup> However see the incident cited above from the Life of St Enda where the compiler condemns the replacement of the original shrine.

when the shrine, rather than the relic, was used for oaths, healing and other functions.

The unfinished areas and the occasional lack of competency in the craftsmanship of the book shrines have been discussed in detail in the relevant chapters. These mistakes and examples of carelessness may have been due to haste in order to complete a commission in time, a heavy work load, or a lack of attention to detail. For example on the Soisceál it was noted that some of the decorative panels are lightly scribed but not yet engraved, and there are many errors in the layout of the abstract panels. On the Stowe shrine there are openwork panels misaligned; there are crudely incised sheet gold panels on long side B of the Cathach, and areas of undecorated metal on the short sides of the Misach. On Lough Kinale the beast heads on the end panels lack post-casting decoration, and there are blank areas on the zoomorphic panels on the front of Dimma. St Caillin's is the most complete of all the book shrines and the only defect appears to be the loss of control in the layout of the openwork decoration on the reverse. If the other Irish medieval shrines and ecclesiastical artefacts<sup>92</sup> were examined in detail it is probable that they would also exhibit unfinished sections or careless workmanship.

The purpose of the inscriptions on the shrines has been dealt with by Michelli though she did not consider the reasons for including the name of the craftsman.<sup>93</sup> The Irish eleventh-century book shrines are resplendent with the name of craftsmen/goldsmiths. Gilla Báithín appears on the Soisceál, Donnchadh Ua Taccáin on Stowe and Sitric Mac Meic Aedh on the Cathach, while in the late medieval period Domhnall Ua Tolari refurbished Stowe, and Tomás the shrine of the Book of Dimma. It has been suggested that, in the Romanesque period, the goldsmiths were named in inscriptions as the requests for prayer from spectators would have assisted them in gaining eternal salvation. Alternatively the signatures were indicators of social status or of the pride of the ecclesiastical foundation in acquiring the services of a renowned goldsmith.<sup>94</sup> These factors would also have applied to the inscriptions on the book shrines.

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<sup>92</sup> For example the Cross of Cong, the Shrine of St Patrick's Bell, the Shrine of St Lachtin's Arm and the Clonmacnoise and Lismore croziers.

<sup>93</sup> Michelli 1996, 8-11.

<sup>94</sup> Petzold 1995, 28-29.



## Iconography

This section provides a summary of the findings presented in the relevant chapters, but rather than list each shrine separately with its subjects, the subjects are treated as groups, independent of the shrines.

The cross, either as a cruciform arrangement of mounts, or as a crucifixion, is the principal iconographic element on the shrines. The front of the Soisceál is dominated by the cross with inset panels representing the symbols of the four evangelists, which appear to be direct copies from an Irish pocket-gospel book of eighth/ninth century date. Of the eleventh-century shrines, Stowe has the most varied and complex iconographic programme which includes possible David and/or Daniel panels, narrative or secular hunting scenes as well as figures of ecclesiastics and angels. There are no overt iconographic scenes on the Lough Kinale Shrine, but the birds on the cross-arms probably have symbolic significance. Figures of ecclesiastics appear on the side of the Soisceál and Stowe shrines, but are more commonplace on the later-medieval phases. Ecclesiastics appear as repeating die-stamped panels on the fronts of the Misach and St Caillin's shrine, as engraved figures on the front of Stowe, and as repoussé figures on the Cathach. Some of these have been identified as possible saints: St Columba and St Francis on the front of the Cathach, St Margaret on the Misach, and St Catherine on the front of St Caillins. Christ in Majesty appears on the front of the Cathach, while the Virgin and Child is present on the fronts of the Stowe and Misach shrines. Heraldic and mythological beasts appear on the late-medieval phases of the Cathach and Dimma shrines.

## Factors influencing the enshrinement of books

In Ireland the most probable source of inspiration for the enshrining of books was the liturgical rite known as *Ordo Romanus Primus*, which originated in Early Christian Rome.<sup>95</sup> As this practice developed, the reasons for commissioning and refurbishing individual book shrines were tied in with the aspirations and status of the ecclesiastical communities and local dynastic politics. The only book shrines which do not have an inscription pertaining to their primary phase are Kinale, Misach and Dimma. However the base plates of the latter two shrines, where the inscription is usually found, were either lost or damaged beyond repair in the early nineteenth century. In the later medieval period the

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<sup>95</sup> See pp.47-48 above for further discussion on these liturgical rituals.

reasons for enshrinement and refurbishment of existing shrines are more coherent and embrace a wider historical basis rather than local issues and politics. The Cathach is the only book shrine which lacks an inscription pertaining to the later medieval refurbishments. There appear to be two main phases of refurbishment. In the mid- to late-fourteenth century: which includes the Domhnach Airgid (c.1350), the Shrine of St Patrick's Tooth (1376), the Shrine of the Stowe Missal (1371-81), and the Cathach (third quarter of the fourteenth century), and the first half the sixteenth century which includes the Misach (1534), St Caillin's (1536) and the third phase of the Cathach. The shrine of the Book of Moling is one of the few shrines which can be dated to the early fifteenth century.<sup>96</sup> The Cathach and Dimma have three to four phases of refurbishment.<sup>97</sup> St Senan's bell is unique among the Irish shrines in that it still retains two separate shrines from the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, although the original bell is now lost.<sup>98</sup>

The fourteenth-century refurbishments appear to be associated with the Black Death, continuing plague and disease and the Gaelic Revival.<sup>99</sup> From the third decade of the fourteenth century, the cultural response to the overbearing presence of the English colony can be seen in the renewal of Irish customs. There was a conscious effort on behalf of the native Irish to reassert their presence and control over their ancestral lands. Native elements based on earlier models began to emerge in the repertoire of architectural motifs.<sup>100</sup> The Gaelic revival was most noticeable in manuscripts and metalwork, where in manuscript transcription and illustration the decoration was almost exclusively based on early Irish models. Compilations of Gaelic literature, history and law were made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Book of Ballymote was compiled for a Connacht chieftain, Tormaldacht Mac Diarmada (c.1400), and other manuscript compilations of note include

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<sup>96</sup> Macalister 1945, no. 567a, pl.v.

<sup>97</sup> The Cathach: fourteenth, sixteenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dimma has been refurbished in the fourteenth, fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>98</sup> Ó Floinn (1983, no.90 a,b) has described the later shrine as a 'casing'. The writer would use the term 'shrine' as it was made for the purpose of enclosing the bell and its associated shrine. Bourke (1980, 119) doubts whether there was ever a bell due to the small size of the shrine, and has suggested that it may have contained a fragment of a bell.

<sup>99</sup> A comprehensive account of the fourteenth-century Gaelic revival can be found in Lydon (1974, 150-89).

<sup>100</sup> Hourihane 1984, 26.



the Yellow Book of Lecan (c.1390), and the Great Book of Lecan (c.1417).<sup>101</sup> The earliest compilation is *Magauran duanaire* which was written some time before 1343 and is a collection of texts made for a patron and gathered to enhance his claim to land and prestige.<sup>102</sup> In 1375 Art MacMurrough Kavanagh was inaugurated as the first king of Leinster since the conquest and a bardic poem was composed for the occasion.<sup>103</sup> The interest in the past shown by the Gaelic Irish was equally manifested in the refurbishment of shrines, and the commissioning of new ones, which was seen by local rulers as a way of increasing their status and demonstrating their links to the ancient traditions.<sup>104</sup>

The Black Death originated from the east via the Black Sea in 1347, and was spread by rats bearing fleas which travelled by ships, overland with grain, or by fleas alone in bales of merchandise, particularly cloth or wool.<sup>105</sup> It was only transmitted to man when the fleas left the dying or dead rat victim and moved on to the human host. The plague was at its most virulent on those living near the coast and spread slowly from the ports to the inland regions. The English death rate has been calculated to be 30% of the total population.<sup>106</sup>

It appeared in England between 24 June and 1 August 1348, and crossed the Irish sea from the Bristol area in early August. The plague first materialised in Howth and Drogheda and within a few weeks of its first appearance the population of Dublin and Drogheda were almost annihilated, while between August and Christmas Day, 14,000 people perished in Dublin. A contemporary witness of the scourges of the Black Death in Ireland was Father Clyn, a Franciscan friar of Kilkenny, who produced a diary of the horrific events and eventually succumbed to the plague in 1349.<sup>107</sup> In Ireland the plague hit the Anglo-Norman towns the hardest. It is estimated that between half to one third of the total population died; however the countryside with scattered homesteads was not as severely affected.

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<sup>101</sup> Lydon 1974, 178-9.

<sup>102</sup> Henry and Marsh-Micheli 19887, 793-4.

<sup>103</sup> Lydon 1974, 178.

<sup>104</sup> Kelly, E.P. 1992, 286-88.

<sup>105</sup> Bean 1982, 25.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>107</sup> Gwynne 1938, 25.

Father Clyn documented the pilgrimage to Teach Molinge on the river Barrow where, from September to October 1348, it attracted a multitude of bishops, ecclesiastics, prelates and noblemen who came from diverse parts of Ireland to visit the holy well and wade in the water.<sup>108</sup> It is safe to assume that this type of event was repeated in all places of pilgrimage and veneration, and reliquaries would have been in great demand for invoking protection against the plague. Katherine Hughes observed that the relic-circuits which took place in pre-Viking Ireland corresponded to the aftermaths of natural disasters such as plagues, floods, drought and famine, and may have been remedial in character.<sup>109</sup> After the ravages of the Black Death, patrons may have commissioned and refurbished shrines as recognition for having been spared, and as insurance for salvation against future plagues. The mid- to late-fourteenth century phases of the Irish shrines may reflect this practice and the plague of 1361 must also be taken into consideration for the dating of the shrines. Metalworkers who operated from towns may have been succumbed to the plague, thus leading to a shortage of skilled craftsmen and a decline in standards. This decline can be seen in the shrine of the Book of Moling, where the standard of workmanship is mediocre, and, except for the large central mount, the settings appear to have been reused from other artefacts or shrines.

### **Social and ritual uses of book shrines**

There is historical and anecdotal evidence for the various secular, social and ecclesiastical uses in which the shrines were employed.<sup>110</sup> These include shrines used as insignia of office, as battle talismans, for collecting tributes, swearing oaths, endorsing contracts and treaties, curing, cursing, and for funeral, ecclesiastical and inauguration ceremonies. Book shrines would have been used for a number of these functions but only the more politically significant events, such as battles, would have been noted in the sources.

The Cathach's function as a battler, where it acted as an apotropaic device to instill courage and inspire confidence in the host prior to combat, has been considered in the relevant chapter. The censer and the sacred monogram IHC on the base of the circular

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>109</sup> Hughes 1966, 168-9. However Lucas (1987, 16-17) advised caution in readily accepting a direct correlation between relic circuits and natural disasters.

<sup>110</sup> Lucas (1987, 13-36) has provided a seminal paper on this subject and categorised the employment of shrines and relics under a range of headings.



setting may also have been utilised in liturgical performance prior to battle, on relic circuits, or in inauguration ceremonies. The Misach was also used as a battle standard, and a fifteenth-century poem has established that the Soisceál was also used for this ritual.<sup>111</sup> McKenna related some of the local traditions associated with the Soisceál and stated that it was supposed to have had 'miraculous powers of healing', was used in the 'detection of theft' and became 'a talisman upon which oaths were sworn and solemn obligations entered into.'<sup>112</sup> It was also lent out for a returnable fee of £5, in order to formulate contracts and clear cases. There are no known surviving traditions pertaining to the Stowe Missal or the Book of Dimma. Although no manuscript directly associated with St Caillin survives, the Old Book of Caillin, which is also lost, is referred to in later sources and has been dated to the period 1350-1400.<sup>113</sup>

Recent research into arm, head and foot reliquaries has shown that many did not actually contain the relic represented by the form of the shrine and therefore the term 'body-part reliquaries' has been considered to be more apt.<sup>114</sup> Heads and arms were common as they are most expressive and communicative parts of the body. An arm reliquary, which could have contained other bones or additional relics, may have been used as liturgical props, for example to offer the blessing traditionally given by a living bishop. Thus they functioned as transmitters, rather than as a site of power, as ultimate power was seen to reside in heaven.<sup>115</sup> The shape would depend, then, upon its function, not its context.<sup>116</sup> Portable body-part reliquaries were used in processions and for healing by direct contact.

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 dictated that relics should not be exposed 'nude' to large crowds of the faithful, but instead be displayed within the reliquary.<sup>117</sup> By the

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<sup>111</sup> Ó'Canann 1994, 22, line 12.

<sup>112</sup> McKenna 1931, 37-8.

<sup>113</sup> Hynes 1931, 44.

<sup>114</sup> Bynum and Gerson 1997, 4.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-7.

<sup>117</sup> Montgomery 1997, 51-2, n.30.

mid-fifteenth century this practice resulted in a conflation of relic and reliquary.<sup>118</sup> Due to the sealed nature of the Irish book shrines the conflation probably occurred well before the decree of 1215.<sup>119</sup> The book shrines may have been regarded as *brandea*,<sup>120</sup> where due to the shrine's intimate contact with the book, it was believed to have absorbed the sanctity of the relic within and ultimately achieved relic status itself.<sup>121</sup> Contact with the shrine would have involved the faithful touching, rubbing and kissing, and the effect of these actions can be seen as wear on the front of the Soisceál Molaisse, on the sides of the Stowe, and most probably led to the replacement of the original fronts of the Cathach, Misach and Stowe shrines. The revered status of the gospel corresponded to the nature of its contents: the Divine Word of God, and the manuscript would have been further exalted if it was associated with a local saint.<sup>122</sup> These factors would have been just cause for the book to remain sealed within its shrine and not to be exposed to mere mortals.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> See the Accessibility section above.

<sup>120</sup> *Brandea* were regarded as contact relics and were originally small pieces of cloth which were lowered into St Peter's tomb where they were believed to have absorbed the sanctity radiating from the tomb (Lucas 1986, 6). For a more detailed description of this practice see Thomas (1971, 136-8) and Brown, P. (1981, 88).

<sup>121</sup> Nunan 1992, 133.

<sup>122</sup> See pp.356-7 above for further discussion on the reverential treatment of books.



## CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 1 of the thesis has examined the origin and development of writing materials and book covers from the Coptic, Early Christian, Byzantine, Carolingian and Ottonian periods. The systematic criteria used to survey the material were the historical sources, depictions in various media, and surviving examples. The same criteria were applied to study Irish early medieval book covers, of which only three survive. An effective means of research was the scrutiny of depictions of book cover mounts in the canon of Insular manuscripts. This allowed a number of decorative mountings of uncertain function to be identified as book mounts. The visual relationship between carpet pages and book covers was discussed and it appears that the form, layout and decoration of book covers influenced the ornamental scheme of some carpet pages. It was argued that the liturgical function of Early Christian book boxes served as the impetus for the origin of the Irish book shrines. The historical sources, depictions in various media and surviving examples were also used to investigate Continental book boxes and the Irish book shrines. Possible mountings and fragments from book shrines were also assessed. The historical references to the lost book shrines of Durrow and Armagh, and the Kells cover/shrine have been discussed, as were the documentary evidence for book shrines from England, Scotland and Wales.

The results of the research on the Irish book shrines can be summarised under the following headings:

### **Inscriptions**

The book shrines have inscriptions which associate the shrine with a specific date or a period in the life of an historic personage.<sup>1</sup> These inscriptions, therefore, provide dates for the manufacture of the shrines and also supply historical insights into local dynastic and ecclesiastical politics regarding the commissioning and patronage of the shrines. The thesis has appraised recent research on the inscriptions which has necessitated narrowing the dates on the Soisceál, Stowe and Cathach shrines.<sup>2</sup> The dates, in turn, provide a basis for the dating of comparable artefacts, rather than relying on typological and stylistic methods. For example the Soisceál can be dated to within ten years by its inscription and thus the wealth

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<sup>1</sup> See Wilson (1978, 135-8) for a classification of dating parameters, and Johnson (1998, 5) for subsequent modifications.

<sup>2</sup> Ó Floinn 1989a; Ó'Riain 1991b.

of animal ornament can be assigned to a specific decade. Analogous animal ornament on the motif-pieces from CCP have been dated by means of context and stratigraphy. These dates, however narrow, supply only a 'deposition' date and it is difficult to determine how long the motif-pieces were in use prior to deposition, as some of them display extensive wear. The use of the book shrine's inscriptions can assist in securing and refining the dates provided by the archaeological contexts. The palaeography of the inscriptions requires further study but punctuation marks were noted on the inscriptions on the Soisceál and Stowe shrines.

The late medieval features on the book shrines have previously been disregarded and derided, with greater attention being focused on the primary phases.<sup>3</sup> By using the inscriptions on the Stowe, Misach and St Caillin's shrines, and by comparative stylistic analysis, the thesis has resolved and formulated dates for other Irish book shrines, and by comparison other late medieval shrines and artefacts whose dates have previously been a source of contention. The reasons for repair and refurbishments during the late medieval phase are probably associated with the Gaelic revival and the effects of the Black Death and subsequent plagues.

### **Repairs, additions and modifications**

The book shrines were in use over a number of centuries, rather than decades, and they received various repairs, additions and modifications to their structure and decoration. The evolution and/or conservatism of certain components and features over time were investigated, for example, the binding strips, suspension escutcheons and openwork plates. The thesis has, by using all possible means of observation and analysis, revealed and determined dates for the different phases for the book shrines.<sup>4</sup> Exploitation of modern scientific techniques has revealed new evidence about the manufacture and repair of the shrines. It was determined that the Shrine of the Cathach was constructed in the second half of the eleventh century and that the repairs and additions date to the third quarter of the fourteenth century, the sixteenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A result of the in-

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<sup>3</sup> The honourable exceptions to this have been Stalley (1977) Hourihane (1984) and Ó Floinn (1983, 1991, 1994, 1996, 1998b).

<sup>4</sup> The use of radiography was successful in revealing features which were obscured by later mountings, for example the full extent of the decoration on the short sides and front of the Cathach, and on the long side of the Soisceál.



depth examinations of the book shrines has allowed some of the old hypotheses to be challenged, including Joseph Raftery's erroneous argument that the Soisceál was originally a house-shape shrine which was later modified to form a book shrine.<sup>5</sup> A technical re-appraisal of the Stowe shrine has determined the original function and position of the lid of the shrine. By gleaning antiquarian accounts of the Misach, and by utilising microscopy and other techniques, the question on what proportion of the present shrine is original was determined. The research has also disclosed techniques which were previously unknown. For example the use of vellum as a backing material behind the openwork panel on the side of the Stowe Missal Shrine. The inlaying of metal grilles into the surface of the amber studs on the front of the Lough Kinale shrine has already been noted.<sup>6</sup>

### **Accessibility**

Another issue investigated is the question of why certain Irish book shrines were sealed, and others not. The principal reason for sealing the book within the shrine appears to have been the exalted status of the gospel and the nature of its contents: the Divine Word of God. If identified with a local saint, the manuscript would have been the source of even greater reverence. A more practical reason may have been to protect the fragile contents from damage through handling.

### **Social and ritual uses**

Book shrines have been used for a wide range of social and ritual activities, and these rituals, which enhanced the spiritual essence of the relic and shrine, were linked closely to the local communities. In time the shrine itself came to be regarded as a secondary relic.

### **Role of the goldsmith**

A subject not previously addressed in detail is the role of the goldsmith. This has raised such questions as whether they were itinerant or resident, whether they operated in an ecclesiastical and/or urban centre, whether they worked alone or with assistants, and the time taken to complete a shrine. The thesis has, where possible, answered these questions and it is suggested that each book shrine was the work of a single goldsmith, and locations

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<sup>5</sup> Raftery 1941, 120.

<sup>6</sup> Kelly, E.P. 1993, 168.

have also been proposed for the manufacture of each shrine.

### **Iconography**

The iconographical difficulties have also been considered and new identifications have been presented for certain figures and themes, both in the primary and late-medieval phases.

### **Future research**

The thesis has raised potential areas of investigation which may be answered in the future by further scientific analysis. For example the non-destructive analysis of certain components is required in order to determine the metal alloy content and to resolve the various constructional phases. It is also hoped to complete a radiographic survey of all the book shrines.

This examination of book shrines has demonstrated the value and importance of detailed observation and analysis of Irish metalwork objects, the results of which offer unique insights into the art and culture of early medieval Ireland. The conclusions obtained and the questions raised during the investigation can now be used as a framework for research on other Irish shrines and complex artefacts.