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Sacred Sites and the Modern National Identity of Ireland

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ABSTRACT: The focus of this work is on the impact of early Christian monastic sites and symbols to the evolution of a modern national identity in Ireland through the iconography and socio-physiological link developing in Leinster, Ireland between the fifth and thirteenth centuries. This study illustrates how specific locations and their function within the larger religious communities influenced generations and shaped Irish identity. This study is important because the study and preservation of the monastic locations, religious monuments, and sacred texts for future generations insures a continued sense of collective identity, a critical element to understanding socio-cultural development.

Understanding this national iconography starts with a general overview of the sites, structures and individuals integral to the first conversion of Pagan Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries, namely Saint Patrick, Saint Brigid, Saint Columba and their disciples. Later champions of social and religious tolerance, such as civil rights activist Daniel O'Connell and celebrated historian George Petrie, advocated the revitalization of Irish pride by using early medieval monastic symbolism. Modest chapels and grand cathedrals became rallying

grounds for an emerging communal awareness as late Victorian society gave way to new ideas of national, rather than familial, identities’.

Beyond the structures of worship, high cross, round tower, distinctively Celtic illuminated manuscripts, and even the native Gaelic language became symbols of Irish freedom and defiance in the face of invasion, persecution, and revolution through centuries of struggle for home rule and religious acceptance.

Early medieval Christianity in Ireland evolved into a version Catholicism unlike any other in the world as the earliest missionaries and monks synthesized Pagan stories and imagery into their own faith to ease conversions. This tactic, first documented by Saint Patrick in his mission to the High King of Ireland, developed into the Celtic Church, wholly and uniquely Irish in its makeup.

Not until the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1177 by Henry II of England, did Irish clergy lose their great sway and control over both the spiritual and political worlds. After the twelfth century, native Irish monks were systematically replaced with English, as were the nobility, in an effort to Anglicize the island.

After centuries of struggle the Irish finally won their freedom and the liberty of expression. As a result, the nation made a concentrated effort, starting in the early twentieth century, to preserve and celebrate their native heritage using the indelible symbols of Christianity distinct to Ireland.

Now, as a modern nation with a booming economy, Ireland is embracing their heritage and working hard to preserve the sites and symbols of early monasticism so vital to the national identity. The environment of continuing religious stresses between the North and South of the island creates cultural and

political challenges for preservationist, museums' staff, and heritage offices to present the national history as accurately and unbiased as possible. Ireland's pride in its monastic history and national iconographic identity is a model for the world and their efforts in perseveration and interpretation teach a great deal about the indelible spirit of the Irish people.

Introduction: Sacred Sites and the Modern National Identity of Ireland

Ireland, “the land of saints and scholars,” conjures a mystical, romantic, image of lush green fields dotted with herds of grazing sheep and crumbling monastic ruins. The real relationship between early Irish monasticism and the modern national identity, however, is far more complex, especially in the more densely populated southeastern region, where physical remains and symbolic iconography perpetuate modern patriotic awareness even in the center of the nation’s capital, Dublin. As a thoroughly modern nation, with Dublin as its largest city, Ireland struggled under Viking and then English rule for centuries, and as a consequence current patriotic concepts of culture and heritage hold a special place in the hearts and minds of the people.¹ In particular, cultural icons include monasteries, towers, stone crosses, and illuminated manuscripts. As early social centers, monasteries, even more than trading villages, established the first truly Irish networks of art and literature, preserving, at great personal cost to the inhabitants and for all time, treasures, monuments, and buildings that inspire us centuries later. This research is a culmination of ideas focused around artifacts, monuments, and buildings. The first two sections concentrate on defining the sites and objects within Leinster, located on the southeastern region of the island, while the last section distinguishes the historical context from their specific contributions to and importance in contemporary Irish iconography, a symbol of national identity. This study will focus on specific architectural and material cultures native to the province of Leinster. To identify Ireland’s patriotic

¹ Gabriel Doherty, “National Identity and the Study of Irish History,” *The English Historical Review* 111 (1996): 348.

consciousness, physical aspects and remains of the nation's sacred sites are reviewed from an iconographical perspective within their historiographic context. To this end, a sacred site, as with any physical aspect of religion or history, is a tangible link to one's cultural and personal heritage. Sacred places and objects further understanding of direct spiritual or mystical experiences, making them as important as the religious context or cultural myths as strategic locations. Studying and preserving the monastic locations, religious monuments, and sacred texts for future generations insures a continuation of a shared sense of collective identity, a critical element to understanding social development and cultural backgrounds.

National identity, emerging in the nineteenth century is closely associated with the term "nationalism" in Europe, and does not simply define iconography and popular culture. Rather, national identity forms out of self awareness by people for their own history, heritage, material culture, and ethnic mythos.² National Heritage sites are places of commemoration and can illuminate all aspects of social and political life, both in Ireland and the rest of the world; this relationship between historical sites in return shapes usage and management of culture mediums from museums, to academia, to general tourism. In this way, Irish ideas of personal and a shared communal past translate into public identity shared internationally and domestically among diverse populations. From a narrowed vantage point of Irish national identity, patriotic pride, in the sense of

² B. J. Graham, "Heritage Conservation and Revisionist Nationalism in Ireland," *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture, and Identity in the New Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), 135.

cultural awareness, is engrained in the daily lives and psyches of the people in the understanding of their shared past through monuments, objects, and sacred sites.

But what defines heritage in an objective sense? According to Mark McCarthy work in *Ireland's Heritages*:

Rather than being a physical object, heritage is a historically contingent cultural process, and is an instrument of cultural power that invokes the mobilization of the past for present circumstances. Despite an incessant framing within an idea (or ideal) of the past, heritage can only be understood within the context of the present-heritage value only had significance in the her and now, and therefore reflects our present society as well as our desires for the future.³

The people themselves determine, through direct or unconscious effort, what symbols and ideas represent them as a collective “community.” According to the groundbreaking work by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, national identity is created out of a collective social sense of community, stemming from “understood” elements of literature and symbolism. Anderson particularly emphasized the importance of literature on the preservation of and interest in pre-eighteenth century history as it helped shape the modern community. In particular, national identity is defined not only by a created ideological and material sense of communal self, but also largely shaped by

³ Mark McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritages: Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 123. “Dr. Mark McCarthy is a Lecturer in Heritage Studies, at the School of Humanities, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology at Galway, Republic of Ireland,” From <http://www.ashgate.com>, “Mark McCarthy” accessed 31 May 2007.

shared value systems within the culture, namely religion, a major political and social factor in Ireland from the fifth century onward.⁴

Ireland struggled for centuries to define itself under foreign domination as well as religious discrimination and prejudices. Today, in a virtual Cinderella story, the Emerald Isle emerges as a “Celtic Tiger,” experiencing economic and cultural renaissances not seen since the late Middle Ages in Europe. The island’s economy shifted effectively from a third world country in the early twentieth century, to an economic power house in the last two decades of the twentieth century.⁵

Leinster, one of four modern provinces including Munster, in the south, Connacht, to the west, and parts of Ulster in the north, stands out as a place of high importance when studying Irish national identity for several reasons. First, nearly forty percent of Ireland’s entire population, just above four million, lives within sixty miles of Dublin City, geographically concentrating culture within Leinster’s boundaries. This population density in the southeast is over eighty-eight percent Roman Catholic and boasts more than its share of monastic heritage sites of historical importance to the creation of a modern national identity for the Republic of Ireland.⁶

Second, during Ireland’s ecclesiastic ‘Golden Age’ most monastic communities came to be established and later flourished in Leinster and

⁴ Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 136-7.

⁵ Róisín Ní Mháille Battel, “Ireland’s “Celtic Tiger” Economy,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 28, (2003): 93-111. <http://links.jstor.org/>, accessed 24 April 2007.

⁶ “Ireland,” *CIA World Book*, <https://www.cia.gov/>, accessed 19 April 2007.

Connacht, though structures within the former survived the centuries, as a whole, in better condition. Third, Leinster contains a number of the better known ruins, monuments, and religious artifacts associated with the time between the arrival of Christianity in the fifth century C.E. and the Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century that effectively ended Irish religious self-governance.⁷ Focus on physical evidence of monasticism's role in Irish heritage is herein defined in the context of monastic constructions most relevant to cultural evolution. These include two highly recognizable monuments; round towers and high crosses, and the treasures of academia particularly in art history and literature departments, illuminated manuscripts.

In addition to monastic sites there are other icons of Irish identity including holy wells and the saints. Holy wells are natural occurrences with spiritual attribution attached to the sites. Saints are known to us by their works through the annals and oral histories. In the case of holy wells, the springs predate any structures added to the site, while saints are generally known for their guidance in the world of the spirit not that of the temporal, material world. This study examines the place of monasteries, round towers, high crosses, and illuminated manuscripts in the construction of Irish national identity. So that while holy wells and saints are part of Irish national identity, the creations of native Irish artisans and architects are of greater interest because they reflect the applied spiritual framework of inspired humanity, which in turn frames Irish nation identity.

⁷Alfred P. Smyth, *Celtic Leinster: Towards an Historical Geography of Early Irish Civilization, A.D. 500-1600* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1982), 2-3.

The material culture and architecture in Leinster is dominated by the power, politics, and influence of an independent, “Celtic” Church dating from the fifth century C.E. After the mid-twelfth century Anglo-Norman invasion, monasteries and abbeys, foundations of faith and learning were destabilized and no longer permitted spiritual sovereignty. From this, and subsequent conquests, the people dedicated themselves to preserving the church, as it became a perfect historical and cultural conduit for Irish identity.

The oldest primary sources for this study include modern translations of the *Book of Leinster*, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, also known as the *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*, the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, and the *Annals of Ulster*.⁸ Also consulted were the Venerable Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the *Book of Armagh*, and the *Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* from the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin.⁹

For the most part, however, these works record primarily the lives and works of individuals important to the church, not the sites and objects they and their subsequent followers produced. The annals, while present in all religious houses as a record of births, deaths, conversions and spiritual events, remain

⁸ R. I. Best, M. A. O'Brien, and Osborn Bergin, *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Lebar Na Núachongbála* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1954); Michael O'Clery, et al. *Annala Rioghachta Eireann. Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland* (New York: AMS Press, 1966); Conell Mageoghagan and Denis Murphy, *The Annals of Clonmacnoise: Being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D. 1408* (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1993); Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Annals of Ulster, to A.D. 1131* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983).

⁹ The Venerable Bede, Thomas Stapleton, and J. E. King, *Baedae Opera Historica: With an English Translation* (The Loeb Classical Library, London: W. Heinemann, 1930); John Gwynn, *Liber Ardmachanus: The Book of Armagh* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co, 1913); Batholomew MacCarthy and Marianus Scotus, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus* (Dublin: Academy House, 1892).

confidential church documents requiring special permission for anyone wishing access to them. There are a few exceptions, where annalists record natural disasters, fire, war, raids, or important deaths. These entries include descriptions of round towers, high crosses, sacred relics, or specific treasures taken or destroyed. Not until the mid-nineteenth century, however, did emerging ideas of nationalism spur the first truly scientific archeological and historical projects into Ireland's illustrious monastic foundations.

Principally, the *Ordinance Survey of Ireland* conducted by George Petrie (1790-1866) in 1824, and a team of professional historians, topographers, and early archeologists, developed the layout and provenance for the monuments, monastic sites, and geographic importance.¹⁰ In 1845 Petrie published *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, Anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion*, a radical work proposing that Irish artisans and religious leaders built the sacred

¹⁰ Gillian M. Doherty, *The Irish Ordnance Survey: History, Culture and Memory* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004). George Petrie, born 1 January 1790 in Dublin, was first and foremost an artist. He worked for the Royal Hibernian Academy, wrote antiquarian articles for the Dublin Penny Journal, and eventually researched under the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. He is well recognized for a scientific approach to Irish history and prided himself on obtaining and using primary sources, including the annals and the current archeological finds and techniques. For this work, however, a copy of the original Ordnance Survey was not found. His book, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, Anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion; Comprising an Essay on the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland*, won him the Gold Medal and Prize from the Royal Irish Academy, as well as the highest respect from his colleges. His work on the *Irish Ordnance Survey*, from 1833 to 1846, and the "Essay on the Origins and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland," published in 1843, further illustrated an emerging nationalist view of Ireland's ecclesiastical roots. Marie-Louise Legg, s.v. "Petrie, George (1790–1866)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): <http://www.oxforddnb.com> accessed 25 March 2007.

sites and monuments. This study ran contrary to the popular academic belief that early Celts were too primitive to create masterpieces of art and architecture.¹¹

Following in his footsteps, Kathleen Hughes (d. c. 1985) produced several works on early ecclesiastical history, as well as secular, social, and cultural histories.¹² Hughes' study, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, *Celtic Monasticism: the Modern Traveler to the Early Irish Church*, and the bibliography, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources*, provide a general history of the topics covered in this thesis.¹³

The texts of greatest importance for specific topical information came from Tadhg O'Keeffe's *Ireland's Round Towers*, Harold G. Leask's *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, Peter Galloway's *The Cathedrals of Ireland*,

¹¹ George Petrie, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, Anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion; Comprising an Essay on the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland, Which Obtained the Gold Medal and Prize of the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1845); Tadhg O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers: Buildings, Rituals and Landscapes of the Early Irish Church* (Stroud, Gloucestershire, Great Britain: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2004), 32-6. Further explanation of Petrie's battle for early Irish artistic recognition can be found in chapter two in regards to his campaign against centuries old prejudiced views within the Royal Irish Academy.

¹² Kathleen Winifred Hughes, born possibly around 1927, died around 1985. She "was the first and only Nora Chadwick Reader in Celtic Studies in the University of Cambridge. Previously she had held the Lectureship in the Early History and Culture of the British Isles which had been created for Nora Chadwick in 1950. She was a Fellow of Newnham College and Director of Studies in both History and Anglo-Saxon. Her responsibilities in the Department of Anglo-Saxon & Kindred Studies, subsequently the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse & Celtic, were in the fields of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh history of the early and central Middle Ages. Her achievements in respect of Gaelic history have been widely celebrated, notably in the memorial volume *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe*, published in 1982." Professional biography found at <http://www.hughes.cam.ac.uk/about/events/kathleen2001.html>, accessed 24 April 2007.

¹³ Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966); Kathleen Hughes and Ann Hamlin, *Celtic Monasticism: The Modern Traveler to the Early Irish Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981); Kathleen Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972).

George Lennox Barrow's *The Round Towers of Ireland*, Brian Lalor's *The Irish Round Tower: Origins and Architecture Explored*, Hilary Richardson and John Scarry's *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, Peter Harbison's *The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographic and Photographic Survey*, Lisa Bitel's *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland*, John A. Watt's *The Church and The Two Nations in Medieval Ireland*, and George Henderson's *From Durrow to Kells: the Insular Gospel-Books, 650-800*.¹⁴ These works offer histories and physical layouts of monastic sites, ecclesiastic buildings, round towers, high crosses, illuminated manuscripts, and other specific topics.

Research in Chapters One and Two concentrates on specific monastery and abbey locations of greatest importance of Leinster between the fifth and thirteenth centuries, the indigenous art and architecture of round towers, high crosses, and illuminated manuscripts. Chapter Three, however, contextualizes material culture and architecture by narrowing the definition of “modern national Irish identity,” and it explores how the Irish took monastic culture and

¹⁴ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*; Harold G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings* (Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalgan Press, W. Tempest LTD, 1955); Peter Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland* (Belfast: University of Belfast, 1992); George Lennox Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland: A Study and Gazetteer* (Dublin: The Academy Press, 1979); Brian Lalor, *The Irish Round Tower: Origins and Architecture Explored* (Cork, Ireland: The Collins Press, 1999); Hilary Richardson and John Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1990); Peter Harbison, *Irish High Crosses; With the Figure Sculptures Explained* (Drogheda, Co. Louth: The Republic of Ireland, The Boyne Valley Honey Company, 1994); Lisa Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); John A. Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970); George Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells: the Insular Gospel-Books, 650-80* (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1987).

incorporated it into part of their national identity. Drawing on the scholarship of Mark McCarthy, the ultimate goal of this project will be to illustrate not only culturally important sites, structures, and artifacts, but continued relationships between historical mythos surrounding monasticism and the social character within the Republic of Ireland as a sovereign state in twenty-first century Europe. McCarthy's work argues from an historical perspective that events accruing at geographical important locations act as a catalyst in the creation and evolution of local and cultural myth and tradition that, over time, create the foundations of identifiable cultural markers.¹⁵ Ireland's cultural heritage, as connected to early monastic settlements and material culture as well as subsequent iconography, thrives as a result of an invigorated indigenous confidence, increasingly more evident through bolstered focuses on domestic histories from patriotic standpoints.

Why spotlight monastic history as a conduit of national identity? Simply, Irish Christianity from the fifth to thirteenth century developed with relative freedom from papal oversight and Western European social conflicts.¹⁶ This freedom enabled Irish monastic aesthetics to mature independently from continental styles, preserving native artistic designs centuries longer than their counterparts.¹⁷ Indeed, some political and spiritual leaders during the early middle ages, held similar social prominence to tribal kings, possessing greater governing power than anywhere else in Europe between the ninth and thirteenth

¹⁵ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritages*, 243.

¹⁶ Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 5.

¹⁷ Hughes and Hamlin, *Celtic Monasticism*, VII.

century. Evidence for this power is most obviously manifested in the care and expense allocated for the building of churches, chapels, and monasteries.¹⁸

¹⁸ Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 1.

Chapter One: Churches and Monastic Buildings.

Monks and religious women of eastern Ireland accomplished significant missionary, scholarly, and artistic works in the early Middle Ages. This evidence appears in the structures in which they worshipped, lived, and worked, as well as in the villages that sprang up around their communities. Within the walled monastic grounds, clerics went about their days praying, preaching to lay followers, transcribing sacred texts, illuminating the beautiful manuscripts, and farming for themselves and the surrounding area. In the natural evolution of communal development, construction started with the main church for the observance of spiritual ceremonies, followed by living quarters and workshops. In the twentieth-first century these sites are known as icons of Irish identity. The defense, restoration and maintenance of these spiritual places points to the Irish remembering how they, as a people, distinguished themselves from Vikings, the English, and Normans from early times. This delineation further helps explain the sites' venerated stance within Irish culture.

Early churches, some of the oldest dating to the late fifth century, started out as tiny, crude structures often made of wood with little or no structural decoration. By the eight and ninth centuries elaborate constructions meant to inspire faith and spiritual devotion appeared. With little influence from Britain or the Continent, Irish ecclesiastical architecture developed aesthetically and fundamentally differently from contemporary movements. Generations later, the buildings remain a testament to the accomplishments of Ireland's monastic age,

started in the fifth century by the Saint Patrick (c. mid-fifth century) and his followers.

Of the large number of monastic sites, oratories, and cathedrals in Leinster, twenty-three predate the Anglo-Norman invasion. The twenty-three represent exemplary Irish structural design and embellishment. These spiritual houses endured centuries of raiding, wars, rebellions, and the ravages of time, in various degrees of repair, and ingrained themselves on the landscape and the psyche of the people. In some instances, the memory of what once was continues in myth and legend after the edifice itself was destroyed. But, often the ancient stones are reconstructed into new buildings that stand on the very spot of their lost forbearers, insuring the prolongation of the location as one of holiness.¹⁹

Today, people from all over the world make pilgrimages to these sites to walk in the footsteps of saints, and pray and witness some of the oldest churches, chapels, and religious buildings in Christendom. While grand buildings draw a majority of tourists, most built before the twelfth century Anglo-Norman invasion are relatively small in size. Chapels ranged from tiny, unmortared stone huts hanging onto the battered cliffs of the coastline, to the inland oratories, varying in size from ten feet square to massive rectangles. Later Ireland's grand cathedrals will rival any built in England.

Several original church buildings still standing in Ireland were constructed around the same time as Christian orders on the Continent began erecting houses of worship. Unlike their counterparts, Irish architects developed a unique

¹⁹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 44-5.

aesthetic. With the exception of rounded Roman arches, Irish churches are recognized for their “native architecture,” and not until the twelfth century did Romanesque structural design have any large scale influence on the religious building styles.²⁰

The earliest sites are particularly important because woodworking was representative of a wide tradition among native builders, while stonework was much less common. Universally, stone survived the wear and tear of centuries better than wooden architectural counterparts. Therefore, surmising from stone remains, archeologists, as well as art and architectural historians, deduct wooden components of structures and suggest in design drawings the likely original appearances for lost buildings and objects. Being less frequent because of financial expenditure and labor intensity, however, stone structures were either of very great importance or located in areas low in sufficient timber resources to build using the traditional method.²¹

The origin of stone church building became a major debate among scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly for the renowned George Petrie of the Royal Irish Academy and the *Irish Ordinance Survey*. He defended the foundation of masonry traditions as dating back to the late fifth century, the time of the emergence of early Christians on the island. Opposing Petrie’s view, Arthur Charles Champneys, in his 1910 book *Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture*, argued that the stone work structural designs appeared no earlier than the tenth or eleventh centuries, the time of the Anglo-

²⁰ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, I.

²¹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 1-2.

Norman invasion.²² An attitude of dismissal, suggesting that native Irish artisans were incapable of advanced stonework or decorative carving techniques, became a recurring theme within scholarly institutions established to encourage the study of Ireland's past during the early twentieth century.²³

According to a thirteenth century copy of an ancient *Brehon Laws*, all church buildings were classified as either *damhliag* or *durthech*, meaning they were made of stone or timber, respectively.²⁴ The *Brehon Laws* are ancient civil statutes that governed Irish life at all levels, especially the kings, from the first recorded history to the Anglo-Norman invasion in the thirteenth century.²⁵ Apparently there were few issues reconciling these laws with those of the Christian missionaries after the nation's conversion because of their continued usage. Other primary records included the *Annals of Ulster*, *Connacht*, *Leinster*, *Munster* and of the *Four Masters*, and do not specifically refer to the erection of churches, but rather events such as deaths of great leaders, both spiritual and secular, destruction of buildings, raids and wars that devastated large areas, and natural disasters that caused damage.²⁶ Recounted events in the annals describe predominantly wooden buildings, indicating that, for the most part, early use of easily repairable timber was cheaper than and preferred to stone.²⁷ Timber constructions were practical and supplied the basic structural foundations. For

²² Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 2.

²³ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 2-3.

²⁴ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 6.

²⁵ Douglas Hyde and Dr. Michael J. Breen, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company. <http://www.newadvent.org>, accessed 16 March 2007.

²⁶ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 3.

²⁷ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 5.

example, in the seventh century, when Saint Finian of Iona was ordained, his contemporary, the Bishop of Lindisfarne, living off the coast of North Umbria in England, commissioned the first church to be built “entirely of sawn wood after the Scotie (i.e. Irish) manner, covered with reeds.”²⁸

The *Annals of Ulster* estimate that a typical timber structure (*durthech*) measured as a ten-by-fifteen-foot rectangle. It also records the deaths of 260 people in 812 C.E., who were burned alive within a single wooden church at Frevent in County Meath, the upper most area of Leinster, proving that some churches were quite large.²⁹ Another *durthech*, the original church of Saint Brigid (c. 451-525) located in County Kildare, was a massive structure with partitioned sections to separate men from women during Mass.³⁰ The sixth century Saint Brigid’s Church also had large windows, in contrast to contemporary stone churches having few if any relatively small scale windows.³¹

Timber structures, particularly in Ireland, often preceded or evolved from “wattle and daub” buildings, like those of Saint Ciarcan of Leir, Saint Kevin’s at Glendalough. Later, parts of Saint Brigid’s Kildare became internationally known as centers of faith and scholarship for both men and women.³²

²⁸ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 5.

²⁹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 7.

³⁰ The dates given here are the accepted birth and death dates of Saint Brigid herself, not the church bearing her name. The spelling for Saint Brigid’s name appears in many variations depending on the source. This spelling used for this work will adopt the form Brigid, as it appears in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. W.H. Grattan-Flood, “Saint Brigid” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company. <http://www.newadvent.org> accessed 16 March 2007.

³¹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 7.

³² Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 7.

Whether wood or stone, early churches in Ireland, from the first Christian missionaries until the establishment of Saint Patrick's monastic orders were "rectangular building[s], gabled at both ends and small in size."³³ A traditional Romanesque basilica plan aligns a church as a cross, with three aisles; a wider central aisle and two side aisles separated by rows of columns, with an apse at one end and nave at the other. The apse is the semicircular area indicating the head of the cross where religious ceremonies take place. According to Leask, however, throughout Ireland "is the centralized plan or the round eastern termination, the apse, ever found," before the twelfth century.³⁴

Stone structures, including churches, monastic housing, and workshops, took two basic forms of construction; traditional mortared and unmortared corbelled styles, also called bee-hive huts. The unmortared stone buildings, found primarily in timber poor areas along the western coasts survived the ages nearly as well as any traditionally mortared structure. This fact is most likely a consequence of the stone mason's expertise. Simple bee-hive construction, known in Celtic as *clocháns*, provided shelter to monks or religious women seeking extreme isolation by establishing cells and tiny churches in remote regions, near lakes, or on deserted islands to separate themselves from the world of men and to better understand the divine nature of God.³⁵ The *clocháns* are found along the rocky western coast, from Inishmurray in the north to the south and on the Dingle peninsula. The highest concentration, however, is found on the

³³ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 8.

³⁴ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 8.

³⁵ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 2, 17.

Skellig Islands, immediately south of Dingle, along the coastline of County Kerry.³⁶ On Skellig Michael, the largest islands in the chain, the monastery of Saint Michael has six *clocháns*, and two corbelled oratories in the unmortared style and only a single, small, rectangular church in the mortared stone.³⁷ The *clocháns*, were later adjoined to, or mimicked by, small oratories or places of prayer. Bronze Age inhabitants first employed this corbel construction method in passage graves, such as those found at the Newgrange archeological complex west of Dublin.³⁸

Typically the rounded huts had space enough for an individual or couple of people to sleep. Oratories throughout the mainland of Ireland were much larger, with one at Callarus in County Kerry measuring about ten by fifteen feet in width and length with fourteen-foot-vaulted ceilings.³⁹ Windows at Callarus are still small, few in quantity, and generally simple trapezoid cutouts in the thick masonry.⁴⁰

Characteristically, the walls of a *cloche* create a rectangle, a square, or a circle while the roof took on a number of variations from a pointed arch to a rounded or gothic looking arch, despite being constructed of ridged stone slabs.⁴¹ More examples of triangular roofs exist on the eastern coast and throughout the midlands, such as at Saint Columba's 'house,' a small church measuring fifteen by nineteen feet at Kells in County Meath, located about forty miles north of

³⁶ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 18.

³⁷ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 19.

³⁸ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 17-8.

³⁹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 22.

⁴⁰ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 24-5, 27.

⁴¹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 28-9.

Dublin. The earliest church at Kells has this type of vaulted roof, as does Saint Kevin's church at Glendalough in County Wicklow, the later dating from the sixth century.⁴²

Glendalough's small church, its famous round tower, parts of a surrounding wall, and the graveyard are all that remain of what was once one of the single most important centers of life, religion, and scholarship in Western Europe.⁴³ The church of Kells was similarly constructed as the examples cited above, with an impressive twenty-three foot ceiling, a decorated arched entrance, and two narrow windows of differing size and style. Similarly, Saint Begnet's Church on Dalkey Island, off the coast of Dublin, had a sharply angled roof with a tall ceiling despite relatively diminutive exterior walls, though the ceiling is now gone.⁴⁴

But the most well known of the stone roofed churches is the chapel of Cormac and Saint Patrick's Rock at Cashel in County Tipperary, on the eastern border of Leinster between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Here, the roof sits on taller walls than other contemporary examples and the entire building is large enough to hold a loft measuring sixteen by twenty feet above the sanctuary, which most likely served as living quarters for the head of the church or important clergy. While each construction holds its own unique historical significance, their architectural styles can be more easily divided into three early aesthetic phases.

⁴² Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 28-9.

⁴³ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 33.

⁴⁴ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 33-4.

Pre-Norman mortared churches developed through all three distinct phases starting in the seventh century and continuing into the twelfth. Each successive movement built on traditions starting with the simplistic, small, stone churches of early Christians. While referring to the styles as Romanesque, both European and Irish scholars alike, agree that while elements of Anglo-Norman and continental architecture are present, the overall design and aesthetic represents “the most original and truly national of Irish architectural achievements.”⁴⁵ The Roman arch is present in many of the first ecclesiastical buildings, though not universally and the structures’ dimensions remained smaller than European constructions. Perhaps, the diminutive scale is what prompted Irish artisans to focus their attention on decorative ornamentation.⁴⁶

During the first phase of Irish monastic building decoration focused on doorways, arches, and windows because with each century, the decorations became increasingly more ornate. Ironically, among the ruined sites, these sections are often the only remains of an entire structure. Their survival is probably a result of carved stones being undesirable for scavenging or reuse in later buildings and walls. In this first stylistic phase, decoration concentrated along the bases and capitals of columns with light relief around archways. Carvings began as pseudo-geometric bands and abstract humanistic forms, quickly becoming figural and containing biblical iconography, an element vital to teaching non-literate lay populations.⁴⁷ The chapel at Glendalough is a first phase

⁴⁵ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 79.

⁴⁶ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 80-1.

⁴⁷ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 82-3, 84-5.

building that is little more than four walls and a stone roof, but the decorative elements are well preserved, making it a good point of comparison with those of the next aesthetic movement.⁴⁸

Later, decoration spread to column shafts and increasingly they became more sophisticated, especially around framed doorways. Carving relief remains relatively limited in the decades before elements of Roman or Continental architecture became more pronounced, at which point elaborate carvings intensified, not only in frequency but in complexity and detail.⁴⁹ Around the mid-twelfth century the artistry on arches, windows and doorways appeared more like Gothic architecture.⁵⁰ The Churches of Saint Saviour at Glendalough and the Nun's Chapel of Clonmacnoise illustrate the changing motifs. Also part of this architectural development are the churches at Donaghmore and Roscrea, in County Tipperary and Clonfert in County Galway, as well as the arched doorway leading into the round tower at Saint Brigid's Kildare convent in County Kildare.⁵¹

In the later second and early third phases, decoration continued to alter chapels' appearances even more. Columns, previously engaged, became fully or nearly freestanding, and were covered from base to capital in vibrant symbols increasingly resembling figures found in manuscript illuminations. These evolving designs replaced much of the simple geometric and stylized zoomorphic forms of the first and early second phases. Despite the advancing decoration,

⁴⁸ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 86.

⁴⁹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 87-8.

⁵⁰ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 88.

⁵¹ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 87-8.

however, columns still retained some of their classical chevrons, though they became much more intricately carved.⁵² In the later third and subsequently final phase, native Irish architectural designs appeared. These artistic changes coincided with the early thirteenth century and the arrival of Anglo-Norman priests, who, upon gaining political and spiritual supremacy, instigated clerical reforms that effectively stripped the Irish church of its independence.⁵³

In Leinster, scholars regard only a hand full of monastic sites as significant, including Clonard, Clonmacnoise, Ferns, Glendalough, Kildare, Kilkenny, Louth, and Monasterboice. Secondary, though no less vital to the history of Irish architecture, is Lismore Cathedral, also known as a center of power once controlling the better part of a nation. Other important locations include Dublin's Christ Church Cathedral, the monastic sites of Durrow, Rathmichael, Sword and Kells, and the abbey at Kildare. The remaining seven locations, consisting of Ardagh, Birr (also seen as Boirra), Finglas, Innisfallen, Killeigh, Moone, and Killeedy are more important for what they contributed to the symbolic advancement of Irish monasticism in Leinster, up until the twelfth century, namely high crosses, round towers, illuminated manuscripts, and ecclesiastical schools, than actual chapels and churches that once occupied an area. These sites once stood as testaments to faith and scholarship on the furthest fringes of Christendom, and in many cases continued to serve as spiritual havens

⁵² Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 144-5.

⁵³ Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 144-5.

and educational centers after their downfall, destruction, or loss of support by rulers.⁵⁴

Among the finest ecclesiastic centers in the world is Saint Finian's Clonard in County Meath, pronounced *cluain Ioraid* in Irish, literally meaning "Erard's Meadow."⁵⁵ Built around 520 C.E., the monastic school at Clonard produced the Twelve Apostles of Ireland Saint Brendan of Clonfert, Saint Brendan of Birr, Saint Canice of Agnavoe (Kilkenny), Saint Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Saint Ciaran of Saighir, Saint Columbcille of Iona and Kells, Saint Columba of Terry Glass, Saint Lasserian mac Nadfraech, Saint Mobhí of Glasnevin, Saint Molaisse of Devinish, Saint Ninni of Inishmacsaint, Saint Ruadan of Lorrha, and Saint Sinell of Cleenish. Clonard was established as the Diocese of West Meath, and later a separate province, after a decree from the Synod of Raith Bressail in 1111 C.E. and another at Kells in 1152 C.E.⁵⁶

Buildings, other than the lost schools of Finian, include Saint Mary's Abbey and Cathedral Church built by Hugh de Lacy (d. 26 July 1186) and the Augustinian priory of Saint John.⁵⁷ Hugh de Lacy, lord of Weobley, came with Henry II of England to Ireland in the late 1170s after Pope Adrian IV granted England permission to conquer the Island. Lacy was made *procurator generalis* in Ireland and controlled the king's interests in Dublin. He was, ironically,

⁵⁴ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 44-5.

⁵⁵ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland* 44.

⁵⁶ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 44-5.

⁵⁷ M. T. Flanagan, s.v. "Lacy, Hugh de (d. 1186)," H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15852> accessed March 29, 2007.

assassinated by his own workman as the construction of one of his many castles, built from the pilfered stones of Durrow Abbey, had just begun.⁵⁸

The Anglo-Norman invasion of 1177 C.E. changed the face of Irish Christianity forever. For example, early on, when the bishopric formerly located at Clonard was moved to the Norman cathedral at Trim in 1202 C.E. by the Anglo-Norman Bishop Simon (1192-1224), resentment over the arrival of the Anglo-Normans reared its ugly head and the O’Ciardha family burned Clonard. The clan claimed that the Anglo-French clergy had somehow killed the leader’s son. This attack, coupled with expanding religious authority into north-eastern territories and eliminating native monastic influence almost completely, fueled the fires of indignation.⁵⁹ Saint Mary’s Abbey at Clonard, unlike many counterparts, managed to remain active with their own canonesses leading the community until about 1530 when the abbey was completely abandoned.⁶⁰

Other major buildings of Clonard, Saint John’s Priory and Saint Peter’s Abbey, were joined into one structure in 1202. By 1540 the site containing a single unified church, belfry, cemetery, and a central hall stood in a state of decay. In 1821, when Irish Catholicism was under the thumb of British occupiers, what remained of this sacred site was leveled to make way for a new Protestant parish church. James Brewer, a nineteenth-century writer and topographer, opined that “the hand of the spoiler has devastated Clonard perhaps more completely than any

⁵⁸ Flanagan, s.v. “Lacy, Hugh de (d. 1186),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁵⁹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 44.

⁶⁰ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 44-5.

other for our ancient churches.”⁶¹ His profound sense of loss and outrage at the utter demise of this sacred and historical site frequently repeats itself over the course of time as Ireland’s ancient churches fell under Anglican control.

Suppression of the Roman Catholic Church and later Protestant disillusionment took its toll on the Irish mentality into the twentieth century. The nineteenth century Church of Saint Finian, now occupying the site, is a plain, gray limestone box of a building, measuring about forty-nine by twenty-two feet, with only three simple windows along the southern wall. Many Irish nationalists consider it a disgrace to the memory of the Irish structure that once stood in architectural glory there. The oldest element in the church is the fifteenth century baptismal font located at the western end of the church.⁶² In 1990, however, on the “recommendation of the Commission on Church buildings,” the chapel closed its doors and is currently under lease negotiations with local heritage groups who wish to see the remains preserved.⁶³

Clonmacnoise (*cluain moccu nois*, meaning “meadow of the sons of Níos,” in County Offaly consists of a cathedral, eight smaller oratories, two round towers, and three high crosses, though not all are have survived the ages completely intact. Founded by Saint Cieran, also known as Kieran, (516- 546) in the mid-sixth century just before his death, Clonmacnoise monastery came to fruition after Saint Cieran had a dream telling him to start a missionary school in

⁶¹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 45.

⁶² Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 45.

⁶³ “Clonard Heritage Trail,”

<http://www.meath.ie/Tourism/Heritage/HeritageTrails/ClonardHeritageTrail> accessed 26 March 2007.

the center of Ireland. He selected a spot on the River Shannon, on the eastern border of Leinster near Connacht. From here knowledge was cultivated and missionary monks emerged to evangelize Ireland and later the rest of Europe.⁶⁴

Despite the abundance of chapel architecture dating back as far as the tenth century, Clonmacnoise is most famous for its round tower and multiple high crosses, to clarify, most of the general Celtic crosses in the graveyard are monuments not grave markers.⁶⁵ The round tower, sometimes referred to as ‘O’Rourke’s Tower,’ is almost certainly the oldest surviving stone element on the site and is dedicated to the King of Ireland, Fergal O’Rourke, King of Connacht.⁶⁶ Visitors today can see the cathedral, the chapels, called *Teampall* or temples, of Doulin, Hurpain, Rí, Chealaigh, Chiaráin, Chonchobhair, Fhinghin, and the Church of the ‘Nunnery’.⁶⁷

Another King of Leinster made his capital at Ferns (*Fearna*, meaning a place of alders, a type of native tree), site of the cathedral and monastery of Saint Edan of Clonmore in the late sixth century. Edan of Clonmore is also called Aidan or Mo, from an Irish version of the native Welshmen’s name. After a great victory at Dunboyke in 598, the King gave lands to Edan and where “the semi-circular wall around the graveyard marks the rampart he erected to protect his church and monastery.”⁶⁸ Over the course of ninety-six years, from 834 to 930, Vikings raided the Ferns monastery no less than eight times until, in 937, the

⁶⁴ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 48-9.

⁶⁵ For a more detailed description of form and function see chapter two.

⁶⁶ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 51.

⁶⁷ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 48-9.

⁶⁸ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 108.

seafarers finally burned it to the ground. Later, in 1154, another Leinster king, Dermot MacMurrough, burned the entire site, only to rebuild it at his expense in 1169 as a priory. Ironically, when MacMurrough died three years later he requested to be buried near the shrines of St. Moedhoc [Aden] and St. Moling (d. 697), and adjoining the rebuilt church.⁶⁹ The modern structures served the bishoprics of Ferns and Leighlin up to the nineteenth century. The two seats were combined with Ossory, until a fire in the 1960s reduced what remained at Ferns to rubble. In keeping with the spirit of hope and to maintain the memory of this historic site a new deanery was built, adjoining what remained.⁷⁰

While more accessible locations like Ferns suffered at the hands of marauders, remote sanctuaries such as Glendalough (*Gleann dá locha*, meaning ‘glen of the two lakes’) escaped nearly unscathed. Glendalough, in County Wicklow, is one of the most best preserved sites dating from pre Anglo-Norman Ireland, set between two valleys, two lakes, and a thick forest, Saint Kevin’s community avoided much of the raiding experienced by other sites because of its remote setting in the Wicklow Mountains. Many surviving buildings within this complex demonstrate the important native architectural developments in a comparatively secluded forest setting. The monastery operated up until the sixteenth century as a refuge for those seeking a better understanding of the divine through meditation, prayer, and reflection.⁷¹ Saint Kevin, also called *Cóemgen*, born to Leinster nobility, adopted the monastic life and sought isolation in a cave

⁶⁹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 108.

⁷⁰ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 109-10.

⁷¹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 114.

now called ‘Saint Kevin’s Bed,’ on the steep hillside south of the upper lake. ‘Saint Kevin’s Cell’ is similarly situated on a ledge just west of Reefert Church, the main sanctuary. Saint Kevin’s house is little more than a ten-by-eleven foot circular stone hut.⁷²

Glendalough monastery proper consists of an entrance gate dating from between the tenth to thirteenth century, various ruined workshops, often only foundations, eight churches, a one hundred foot tall, perfectly preserved round tower, and the high cross of Saint Kevin standing about thirty feet to the south of the main church. Glendalough’s religious houses include Saint Kevin’s Church, sometimes called a ‘kitchen’ because of the large chimney and the cathedral dating from around the tenth century, though much of it is a twelfth century reconstruction; Trinity Church to the north, built around the eleventh or twelfth century; *Teampall na Sceillig* (The Church of the Rock) possibly from the seventh century, Saint Mary’s Church (Our Lady’s Church) west of the cemetery, dating from the seventh or eighth century, and Saint Saviour’s Priory built in the twelfth century. The last, Saint Saviour’s Priory, built at the apex of the third Irish architectural phase, whose distinguishing features include more naturalistic figures in art and architecture and more freestanding interior column designs, is the best example of this native aesthetic movement at Glendalough.⁷³

While Saint Kevin’s refuge endures virtually intact, he is remembered more for the complex of buildings dedicated in his name than for his spiritual leadership. On the other hand, the life and legend of Saint Brigid of Kildare

⁷² Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 115.

⁷³ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 115-6, 117-8.

earned her the honor of the being one of the three patron saints of Ireland, not to mention the only woman to earn the designation.⁷⁴ Little affirmative information exists, however, about the real Brigid beyond the flowery, mythical writings of hagiographers who depict her as the quintessential Christian maiden overcoming her pagan parentage to fully embrace the church and follow in the path of Christ's charity. Brigid's Kildare was a celebrated school and dual monastery where men and women practiced the rule of Saint Benedict, rising early to chant the Divine Office, working in the scriptorium or fields, and sharing food and spiritual camaraderie.⁷⁵ The dual monasteries were unique in that their unusual configuration of spiritual life had men and women sharing communal spaces. The church permitted this practice until the twelfth centuries.⁷⁶

At Kildare (*Cill Dara*, meaning 'Dara's Church'), first built as a convent in the mid-sixth century, Brigid exercised authority not only over her church, clerics, and region, but also over bishops, who answered to her, something rare but not unheard of in early Christendom. In administering sovereign authority, she appointed a monk named Condleth (d. 520) to be the bishop. Indeed, he was fully subordinate to her! In this rare case, Kildare provides an example of a double monastery headed by a woman. When Brigid died in the early sixth century, her remains were moved to Down Patrick (*Dún Phádraig*, meaning 'Patrick's fort') in County Down to the north as a guard against plunder or desecration from

⁷⁴ The three patron saints of Ireland are Patrick, Columba or Columcille (though he is occasionally attributed to Scotland instead) and Brigid.

⁷⁵ Robert T. Reilly, *Irish Saints* (New York: Avenel Books, 1981), 17, 22-3.

⁷⁶ O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 130.

continued Viking raids. After a short period of burial at Kildare, the faithful laid her remains next to the recognized graves of Saint Patrick and Saint Columba.⁷⁷

The early community at Kildare built a wooden church. Since this congregation housed both men and women, timbered partitions separated sacred church space for both sexes to view a third section, the altar, where the bishop celebrated Mass and offered prayers. The three areas insured the separation of men and women, while allowing each side to view the eastern section where a bishop took his place. The church created by Saint Brigid earned a reputation for beauty, described by a seventh-century monk as “supreme.” At the same time Cogitosus, the monk, explained that the church also served as a town center, a place of refuge, and as a bank of sorts to protect valuables against Viking raids. The Synod of Kells-Mellifant in 1152 stripped the abbess of her power and placed the entire community under foreign, male bishops. Strengthening ties between the secular and sacred, Kildare’s bishop, who served from 1223 to 1232, allowed the Fitzgerald family, the most politically and economically powerful clan in the region, to build a cathedral honoring Saint Brigid, that remains to this day.⁷⁸ The Kildare community thrived as patrons made further additions to the cathedral in 1482. By 1540, Kildare and its double monastery headed by women faded into legend, even mythology, after it was privately controlled by the Fitzgerald family. In 1641 Oliver Cromwell set out to subdue Ireland by force.⁷⁹ During the

⁷⁷ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 120-1.

⁷⁸ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 178-9; Galloway. *The Cathedrals of Ireland*. 121.

⁷⁹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 121.

rebellion between native Catholic Irish and Protestant Scots-English settlers further damaged the church, already in ruins. Badly needed restorations finally began on the church and other buildings in 1682 with the arrival of a new Bishop, William Moerton, who served from 1682 to 1705 C.E.⁸⁰ Moerton, formerly the dean of Christ Church Cathedral in central Dublin, devoted much of his annual income of about £600 to the reconstruction, beginning a lasting link between the two cathedrals.⁸¹ Most of what stands today is a seventeenth century construction, with the exception of a west wall in the nave, rebuilt in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸²

A contemporary of Saint Brigid, Saint Canice (515-600 C.E.), also called Kenny or Kenneth in Scotland, founded a monastic settlement between two hills in County Kilkenny around the mid-sixth century. His monastery, also named Kilkenny (*Cill Chainnigh*, meaning ‘Church of Cainneach’ or ‘Canice,’ Irish for Kenneth), though originally wooden, existed until the eleventh century.⁸³

After Killenny burned in 1087, and again in 1114 C.E., a stone structure replaced it and was finished in the mid-twelfth century after appropriations from the Synod of Ráith Bressail, in 1111 C.E., renamed it the Diocese of Ossory (Osraige), for the district where it is located.⁸⁴ Two hundred years later, on 22 May 1332, Killenny’s round tower, almost forty feet taller than its later replacement

⁸⁰ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 122.

⁸¹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 122.

⁸² Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 123.

⁸³ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 129; Michael M. O’Kane. “St. Canice,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03250a.htm>, accessed 20 March 2007.

⁸⁴ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 129-30.

and dating from between the eighth and tenth century fell into the side chapel destroying the western part of the cathedral in the process.⁸⁵ Now the site is occupied by two cathedrals; that of the thirteenth and seventeenth century Cathedral Church of Saint Canice, and the Diocese of Ossory at the Cathedral Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, built in the Gothic revival architectural style of the eighteenth century.⁸⁶

Saint Mary's Abbey in County Louth, by comparison, is tiny and simple in appearance, but one of a few Irish style churches still standing. The site is tied to ancient pagan rites, with the name Louth possibly having linguistic connections to *Lugh*, a Celtic deity whose name means 'herb'. The monastery of Saint Mochta (d. 535 C.E.) at Louth, sometimes called Saint Mo, once consisted of several buildings that supported populations such as a main church, a priory, rectory, and a number of other structures within the community. Today only a small church and Saint Mochta's House remain of what, in the twelfth century became a major position of ecclesiastical authority. It continued as a monastery until the sixteenth century when all such organizations were dissolved in one of many anti-Catholic laws promulgated by Britain's parliament during the Protestant Reformation in England. A modern pilgrim to the site sees the once powerful monastery of Saint Mochta as looking "gaunt and tragic."⁸⁷

Louth's nearest monastic neighbor is Monasterboice, also in county Louth and probably founded sometime before 923 C.E. At Monasterboice only a round

⁸⁵ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 31-2.

⁸⁶ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 129-30, 132-3.

⁸⁷ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 172-3, 174.

tower and a number of high crosses mark the area today.⁸⁸ Like many sacred ecclesiastical sites, Monasterboice retains little of its original architecture and glory. Likewise, Durrow, Swords, and Rathmichael faded into the landscape, identifiable through what few markers endure.

Though disassembled in 1182 by Hugh de Lacy to build his castle, Durrow (meaning “the field of Oaks”) retains a high cross and church yard. These are reminders of the grand abbey that produced some of the world’s finest illuminated manuscripts, including the *Book of Durrow*, now at Trinity College in Dublin.⁸⁹ With almost nothing left of the Swords and Rathmichael monasteries, both nearly physically vanished, cultural memory persists enough to retain the interested and devout religious pilgrim tours. The base of a round tower and small graveyard are all that mark the spot where the spiritual community of Swords stood, while at Rathmichael only a graveyard and partially reconstructed round tower remain along side of a seventeenth century chapel.⁹⁰

Similarly, Lismore Cathedral (*Lios mór*, meaning ‘great ring fort’) in County Waterford, lost its original monastery. None the less, cultural memory draws pilgrims to a beautiful seventeenth century construction marking the original site. At Lismore, founded in the early seventh century by Saint Carthage, only five of the eighth and ninth century stone grave slabs, now relocated to the

⁸⁸ Arthur Kingsley Porter, *The Crosses and Culture of Ireland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 28.

⁸⁹ Bede, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), 223; John Healy, “School of Durrow,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03250a.htm>, accessed 20 March 2007.

⁹⁰ Nicholas Donnelly, “Dublin,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03250a.htm>, accessed 20 March 2007.

Cathedral's west wall, give physical testimony to the completion of Saint Carthage's dream.⁹¹

Christ Church in Dublin, formally called the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity, also lost its original monastery in 1871 when a new one replaced the pre-tenth century one. Construction dates for the original are not known, but it came under attack with repeated burnings and rebuilding during subsequent Viking invasions of the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁹² The people who rebuilt Christ Church found it hard to part with the structure when the time came for a new building, and the alien form of Christianity that came with it. William Butler, the reconstruction architect of Kildare, began work at Christ Church in 1871 after a wealthy Dubliner, Henry Roe, donated funds for this and additional expansions.⁹³

Butler, however, met with resistance, and in his journal wrote that on one occasion a group of local children came to him, inquiring, "Is goin' to be a chapel?" He replied, "Certainly not," soliciting yells and complaints from the crowd. One young boy insisted, "Yes, it is; we'll have it yet, as we had it before. D'ye think we'll let the auld swaddlers have it; ye needn't be measuring it: it'll be pulled down." The verbal attack was followed by volleys of stones and mud.⁹⁴

Finally, though no less critical is the monastery of Kells (*Ceananna*, meaning 'head abode') in County Meath, created by the followers of Saint Columba, one of three patron saints of Ireland, and birth place of the internationally praised *Book of Kells*. The legend of Saint Columba, a

⁹¹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 166-7.

⁹² Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 80.

⁹³ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 81.

⁹⁴ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 82.

modernized round tower, and the revered illuminated manuscript *Book of Kells* housed at Trinity College library, and the site's history, as presented in the various annals, are part of Ireland's historical identity.

Established by the monks of the monastery at Ionia, who fled Viking raiders, the followers of Saint Columba built Kells in the early ninth century. The community saw rapid growth as a renowned ecclesiastical school, promoting the study of classical as well as sacred literature and transcriptions emerged. Relocation, unfortunately, did not save the monks from violence and between 920 and 1019 Vikings plundered the treasuries four times. The Synod of Kells in 1151, headed and enforced by the Anglo-Norman bishops, imposed religious reforms for Ireland and secured all major seats of power. In 1315, Kells was attacked again, this time not by Scandinavians but by Edward Balliol the Bruce (King) of Scotland (1282-1364). Two centuries later, in 1551 C.E., the monastic order at Kells dissolved and despite desperate efforts to preserve it, the pressures to reform were so powerful that the cathedral ceased functioning in the late sixteenth century.⁹⁵

Though varying in size, influence, age, and even function to some degree, all these sites helped to form the basis for a significant amount of Irish history. Today, Skellig Michael, off the Western coast, is one example of extreme hermitage, as well as one of only two United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites in Ireland as of 2003. Despite the difficulty involved in reaching the ragged slopes where seventh

⁹⁵ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 118-9.

century bee-hive huts, workshops, and a small chapel cling to the barren landscape, tourists visit the site annually to witness how spiritual life carved out a niche in such an uninhabitable location.⁹⁶

Similarly, work to save Saint Brigid's Kildare struggled against foreign prejudices into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By 1869, the year in which the Irish Church Act passed, Kildare again fell into disrepair and neglect. This Act disestablished the Church of Ireland, and vested the parishioners of Kildare with the responsibility for all maintenance and restoration costs of the crumbling seventeenth century cathedral.

Through all the political shifts and religious changes, a communal devotion to the preservation of not only the church and site, but the ideals for which it stands shows a cultural connection to Kildare that transcends history and architecture. The 1869 Act, though Protestant in origin, helped maintain Kildare's church for a community who understood it as much more than a building in need of repairs. Twenty-five years and £12,000 later, Kildare was rededicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson, who, on 22 September 1896, delivered his last sermon. Benson died on the return trip to England. A memorial window pane was inserted into the new stained-glass windows on the cathedral's west side.⁹⁷

In 1992, the latest major preservation project administered by the Department of Public Works and sponsored by local heritage organizations for the restoration of Kildare Cathedral began. The development, lasting more than five

⁹⁶ Peter Cunningham, "Another Over Site?" *Irish Independent*, 17 May (2003): 56-7.

⁹⁷ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 123.

years and costing more than £250,000, was committed to the preservation of this national treasure.⁹⁸ The road to preservation, however, was littered with the debris of conflicts and uprisings, when the people looked to their national heritage and faith to see them through the “troubles.”

Religion, especially the debate between traditional Catholicism and Anglican Protestantism, fueled not only arguments, but bloody civil wars. Irish people, in general terms, have been willing to fight and bleed for their right to spiritual freedom. These earliest examples of monastic settlement are an integral part in the evolution of Irish identity. So vital to Ireland’s identity, for example, is Kieran’s monastery to the ecclesiastical history of Christendom that on 30 September 1979, Pope John Paul II (b. 18 May 1920 –d. 2 April 2005), during a tour of Ireland, made a special journey to view the ruins of Clonmacnoise. On this pilgrimage he prayed at the twentieth century altar in Teampall Fhinghin (The Church of Fhinghin), the largest of the still standing churches.⁹⁹

The Pope, as do countless pilgrims and tourists, recognizes the sacred sites of early monastic Ireland as part of a larger idea based largely in the desire for independence and a community awareness that still permeates every city, village, and home in Ireland. It cannot be successfully argued that Ireland, without the historical ramifications to land, culture, and society given to it by early monastic traditions, is secular in its general growth as a nation. Places like Kells, Durrow, Kildare, Clonmacnoise, and Glendalough, as well as the art and ideas created

⁹⁸ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 124.

⁹⁹ Galloway, *The Cathedrals of Ireland*, 48-9.

there, were the catalysts and repositories of early Irish identity. Subsequent generations regard these places as representative of Irish pride and independence.

Chapter Two: Round Towers, High Crosses, and Illuminated Manuscripts: Symbols of Irish Monasticism.

Churches alone do not constitute a sacred site, nor does a site dictate the importance of its own history. Rather, it is the culmination of many elements, joined, yet distinct, that creates a provenance for not only a place, but a nation and its people. The churches and buildings that facilitated monasteries and convents in their work, while important, are not the only element of Ireland's spiritual history. In modern cities such as Dublin, Limerick, Belfast, and so many others, icons of national identity appear on almost every street corner, on shop walls and pub signs, and in the schoolbooks that teach future generations. Frequently embedded within these images are three main elements, round towers, high crosses, Celtic calligraphy and images drawing from the illuminated manuscripts housed in special museums. These objects, produced during the Irish monastic "golden age," form a pool of historical symbols that are internationally and instantly recognizable as definitively Irish representations throughout the world. The "golden age" of Ireland refers specifically to approximately two hundred years between 600 and 800 C.E., when monks and nuns produced a uniquely Irish style of religious art and literature know as insular or Hiberno-Saxon, reflecting artistic and linguistic similarities with contemporary English scribes.¹⁰⁰

The importance of the round tower today relates directly to the ancient structures as architecturally unique to pre-Anglicized Ireland. These towers are

¹⁰⁰ Janetta Rebold Benton, *Art of The Middle Ages* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2002), 41-2.

recognizable symbols of the island's rich and long ecclesiastical heritage.¹⁰¹ The structures stood watch over sacred and secular grounds, many constructed on pre-existing sacred sites illustrating the value of location. Through a review of the places and spaces in which these towers were built, we can see the important role round towers played in Ireland's cultural development.¹⁰²

Round towers signal the sites of churches, monasteries, and ecclesiastical schools that rapidly grew in size, wealth, and influence from the mid-fifth century onward. The value of these spatial configurations extends beyond religious observances. Communities of religious scholars, artists, and artisans produced exquisite manuscripts illuminated with gold and silver leaf, and paint colors in red, blue, and green derived from crushing semi-precious stones into a fine powder. Today these documents are regarded as priceless in value both for the artwork and text, providing a window to Irish sensibilities of beauty. In addition to the manuscripts most monasteries, churches and convents drew pilgrims for spiritual renewal to the altar in which relics of saints and martyrs were encased. The considerable wealth of these religious estates, including the monastic treasures, made the sacred structures targets of raids and manipulation as pawns in domestic power struggles. Viking raiders, as well as feuding kings, threatened the sacrosanct grounds, especially along ill-defined provincial borders. This political instability resulted in the destruction of numerous church buildings and the ruthless slaughtering of clergy, ecclesiastical students, and religious women.

¹⁰¹ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 36, 38.

¹⁰² O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 19, 26.

Competing clans vied for approval from the Church and rallied popular support in their claims of ascendancy.¹⁰³

As early as the ninth century, periodic raids from Viking marauders plagued the coasts of Europe. Ireland was no exception. By the early tenth century, numerous monastic communities, not only in Leinster but throughout the island, erected round towers for use as lookout vantages and bell towers.¹⁰⁴ In many instances, the soaring stone cylinders are all that remain of the churches, towns, and whole populations that once thrived in their shadows. The towers served as vantage points, but primarily as “bell houses” calling the faithful to prayers and mass. Occasionally the cylindrical buildings functioned as emergency storehouses for the precious relics of saints and as a sanctuary of last resort for monks. According to monastic annals, the last of these remaining monks, however, faced certain death by suffocation or incineration when the raiders, both Viking and domestic warring tribesmen, burned the towers.¹⁰⁵

Early Irish scholars called round towers, *cloicthach* or *cliog-theach*, literally meaning “bell tower” or “house of the bell,” belying its everyday use.¹⁰⁶ Nearly one hundred towers are identifiable in Ireland, with sixty-five still standing to some degree.¹⁰⁷ Confined to sites of monastic communities, the towers, in

¹⁰³ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 21, 24.

¹⁰⁴ Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 39.

¹⁰⁵ Petrie, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, 2-4; Colum Hourihane, *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 28-9.

¹⁰⁶ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 1, 18; Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 37. According to O’Keeffe, the spelling is *cloicthe[a]ch*, while George Lennox Barrow shows it as *cloig-theach*.

¹⁰⁷ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 17.

many cases, remain the only surviving indications of other ecclesiastical buildings that once stood at that location.¹⁰⁸

Geo-spatial concentrations of round towers correlate to the main centers of spiritual life in Ireland. The greatest numbers are located in the provinces of Connacht on the west coast and Leinster on the east coast, though a number of fine examples exist in the other two provinces of Munster and Ulster.¹⁰⁹ Based on maps of monastery locations during the Middle Ages, modern population centers remain in close proximity to these locations. Therefore, ancient monastic sites became centers for spirituality and learning. This is especially true around Dublin, between the Wicklow Mountains and the coast, and along the western coast of Connacht where monastic orders established hermitage monasteries for solitary reflection that eventually grew to include pilgrimage sites and secular villages. In total, there are ninety-seven confirmed examples in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the two separate nations occupying the island with the Republic of Ireland standing as a sovereign nation today.¹¹⁰ Leinster alone contains between thirty-three and thirty-five tower sites, with seven retaining their roof caps, though several are restorations or modern replacements. At least nine sites have little to no remaining structure. In these cases, only crumbling foundations or vague topographical impressions mark the former presence of a round tower.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 16.

¹¹⁰ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 17.

¹¹¹ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 17; Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 1.

The history of the towers became a major point of contention in the mid-nineteenth century, when Victorians debated early eighteenth-century scholarly interpretations of round tower origins.¹¹² According to one theory, circulating within the Royal Irish Academy (R.I.A.), round towers had to have been erected in the same era as their main religious building, with the churches being either stone (*an adaimhlaig*) or wooden (*a duirtheach*) structures. Constructed from the time of Saint Patrick in the mid fifth century onward, the central ecclesiastical buildings can be very closely dated within various annals and histories, including the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the *Annals of Leinster, Munster, Connacht* and, *Ulster*. Their founders are also mentioned in the works of the Venerable Bede in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, however, these references contain even less fundamental or structural information than native Irish records.¹¹³ Towers are not referenced specifically before the tenth century in these texts, but, rather the lives of church founders, who, in many cases, are the only indication of specific buildings attributed to them. Chronology problems occur because construction dates are practically nonexistent and sporadic recountings focused on damage or destruction resulting from natural forces, fire, or attacks.¹¹⁴

¹¹² O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 32-3.

¹¹³ Petrie, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, 37-8. The "annals and histories" refer to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, *The Four Masters*, and other various ecclesiastical records. To clarify, the records of Bede are far fewer and less detailed than domestic annals. In addition, coming from a British tradition, his work tends to paint the Irish in a less refined light than the contemporary English or Continental orders and scholars.

¹¹⁴ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 15, 26.

For example, the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* and the *Annals of Ulster* state that in 950 C.E. the “round tower is burned by Vikings (‘foreners’). It was full of relics, including the crosier or cup of the patron saint, a bell (‘the best of bells’), and ‘distinguished persons,’ including the lector (*ferleigind*) of Slane.¹¹⁵ The *Annals of the Four Masters* describe the destruction of the church and tower of Downpatrick, the traditional See of Saint Patrick, as caused by a lightning strike in 1015 C.E. In another account, the tower at Tullaghard in County Meath, was “attacked and burned” when filled with people in 1171 C.E. by an army from Breifne, a tribe from the modern day counties of Leitrim and Meath in the northwest Republic of Ireland.¹¹⁶

Another theory for the origins of round towers, once vehemently defended in scholarly circles and considered fundamentally flawed by modern standards, was that of pagan origins. This view argued that round towers were ancient pagan temples designed for the observation of phallic worship. Several British scholars within the Royal Irish Academy, in efforts to link themselves with classical cultures, went so far as to attribute round towers to a mythological group of Phoenicians, who, after becoming lost, established their religion among early Irish Celts.¹¹⁷ In this scenario, the Mediteranean refugees built phallic stone structures to the god Apollo. Henry O’Brien, a highly respected graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, and prominent supporter of a similar theory, working for the R. I. A., defended his belief that ancient non-Irish pagans constructed the earliest round

¹¹⁵ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 19.

¹¹⁶ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Hourihane, *From Ireland Coming*, 27-8.

towers, perhaps as late as the eleventh century. Later Christians, according to O'Brien, converted the structures to their own purposes.¹¹⁸ Further, he fantastically contended that the towers' origins came, not from Phoenicia, but from Persians who practiced Zoroastrianism.¹¹⁹ Countering the pagan theory of origin in the early nineteenth century, George Petrie (1790 – 1866) published his essay arguing the tower's Irish-Christian origins. The R.I.A. split over the matter. Ultimately, Petrie's reputation within the R.I.A. tipped the outcome in his favor, forever changing the way history viewed the creation of round towers.¹²⁰

Recent archeological research suggests that tower building began in the early ninth century. For example, one of the first indisputable construction records dates from 964 C.E., at the death of Cormac Ua Cillin, Bishop of Tuamgraney in County Clare.¹²¹ According to his obituary found in the *Chronicon Scotorum*, "he had built the 'great' church and round tower" there, though both structures are now gone.¹²² Likewise, many of these structures were absorbed into later constructions or left for time to erode until nothing remained but a barely identifiable circular foundation.¹²³ This loss is not, universally true, however, and a number of towers continue to be used and maintained by extant parishes. Today tourists and religious pilgrims travel to see the remains of the

¹¹⁸ Henry O'Brien, *Atlantis In Ireland: Round Towers Of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (New York: Steinerbooks, 1976), 8.

¹¹⁹ O'Brien, *Atlantis In Ireland*, 32, 61; O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 32-3.

¹²⁰ O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 32-3.

¹²¹ O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 19.

¹²² O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 26.

¹²³ O'Keefe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 43.

early medieval “golden age” in Ireland as presented through history centers, heritage sites, and local landmarks.¹²⁴

In particular, tourists are drawn to enigmatic towers at Castledermot, located twelve kilometers north of Carlow in County Kildare.¹²⁵ This massive structure stands a little over twenty meters high and is crowned with a crenulated battlement that replaced a traditional cone shaped roof some time after the twelfth century.¹²⁶ The original cap was likely much lower, as evident on the interior, where remains of a ruined barrel-vaulted ceiling, fewer than two meters above the first floor level, suggest an earlier, original roofline. Also unusual is that it is one of only two round towers with an entrance located near ground level. Most other entrances are considerably elevated and required a retractable ladder or stairs to gain access.¹²⁷ And while windows of all shapes and sizes are ubiquitous in round towers, Castledermot exhibits seven total with the first level alone boasting an unusually situated slit window. This type of opening is exceptional because its presence on the first or ground level is not seen in any other round tower constructed before the twelfth century and may represent early English architectural influences.¹²⁸

Though many other round towers stand crumbling and in ruin with more than half their stones gone, others survive in nearly perfect condition, thanks to the care of the public. Several examples underwent major or minor restorations at

¹²⁴ Benton, *Art of the Middle Ages*, 41-2.

¹²⁵ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 140.

¹²⁶ Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 114-5.

¹²⁷ Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 116.

¹²⁸ Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, 114-5, 116.

some point in their past. Many retained a great deal of their original look because the towers were converted to military use, churches expanded and absorbed the structures, or in modern times the public or religious groups paid for their restoration as national heritage sites. The round tower at Lusk monastery in County Dublin, allegedly the same age as the fifth century monastery at Saint MacCuilinn, provides such an example. Despite attachment to a late medieval belfry with a traditional crenulated battlement style top, Lusk's tower received a new conical roof, befitting its original era during the nineteenth century.¹²⁹

While the first monastery at Lusk is now gone, the surrounding graveyard still lies within the original walls of the enclosure. Considering the violent history of the monastery, including its pillaging in 835 C.E., and being burned nineteen years later, then again in 1089 by the "men of Munster," when 180 people were brutally murdered, and finally having everything, including the surrounding village, the abbey, and all the surrounding land "destroyed by men of Meath," it is miraculous that anything survives at all.¹³⁰ Again, the diligent care of the site in modern times is a testament to public devotion to these buildings.¹³¹

This attention to and continuing fascination with the ancient round towers, lasting into modern times, is critical to the creation of the towers' place in past, present, and future Irish identity.¹³² For example, through out the capital city of Dublin, a thoroughly modern European metropolis, round tower monuments and

¹²⁹ Lalor, *The Irish Round Tower*, 139.

¹³⁰ Lalor, *The Irish Round Tower*, 83.

¹³¹ Lalor, *The Irish Round Tower*, 83.

¹³² O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 36.

their imagery stand watch over milling tourists, hang on shop signs, and occasionally serve as decorative figures on the exteriors of pubs.¹³³

One of the best known round towers in Leinster is at Glasnevin Cemetery in the heart of Dublin, where the heroes and celebrities of Ireland have their final resting place. Toward the center, in the older section, stands the monument and crypt of Daniel O’Connell, a man who spent his life fighting for Irish independence, spiritual freedom, and fundamental human rights.¹³⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Daniel “The Liberator” O’Connell (1775-1847) fought in Ireland’s parliament to reform government standards relating to religious tolerance, racial discrimination, including the plight of African slaves and Australia’s aboriginal population, and for the opening of former anti-Catholic universities to all religious persuasions and social classes. He remains one of the best known figures in Irish history and is comparable his contemporary Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821) and William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898) for his impact on Ireland’s development. After his death, on 15 May 1847, his heart remained in Rome, interred in Saint Peter’s Basilica, where he had been on pilgrimage to Rome, and his remains were shipped back to Dublin where he was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, surrounded by the elite of Ireland’s dead. O’Connell’s resting place is visibly set apart with a 165-foot-tall round tower, built in the early

¹³³ O’Keeffe, *Ireland’s Round Towers*, 19, 20, 34.

¹³⁴ s.v. “Daniel O’Connell,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>, accessed 12 October 2006.

medieval style found natively in Ireland and commissioned by nationalist Irish as a monument to a great man.¹³⁵

The Glasnevin monument in Dublin, brainchild of George Petrie and built as a monument to remember the life of O'Connell, is a historically faithful modern construction of an early Irish round tower.¹³⁶ Petrie selected this monument because of its uniqueness to Ireland. It is a simple, expressive testament built in defense of Irish culture. Moreover, the frequency of its location on church sites and most critically perhaps, its interpretation as a symbol of defiance against the Vikings, and, by extension, foreigners in general attests to the formation of Irish identity.¹³⁷ O'Connell's tomb, paid for by public subscription, is located under the tower within the large cemetery.¹³⁸

Round towers take an international stand as well. Consider the impressive commemorative round tower constructed in 1998 to commemorate Irish losses in World War I and II. Here the round tower poses in the Flanders Peace Park in Messines, Belgium, a memorial to the roughly 370,000 Irish men who gave their lives. The tower is 110 feet tall and comprised of 400 tons of stone from a deconstructed Mullinger workhouse.¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that the armies of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland fought side by side to defend freedom on the battlefield of France. Members of the 36th Ulster Division and

¹³⁵ s.v. "Daniel O'Connell," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>, accessed 12 October 2006.

¹³⁶ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 36.

¹³⁷ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 38.

¹³⁸ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 36. The amount per subscription is not listed in any available primary or secondary resources.

¹³⁹ Maurice Hayes, "A Sign of Recovered Memory, Reparation" *Irish Independent*, 12 November (1998): 6.

16th Irish Division bravely laid down their lives as allies when, at home, the country was torn asunder during the early stages of the Great Troubles, as the Irish Civil War is sometimes called.¹⁴⁰ The ‘Troubles’ did not officially end until the Good Friday Peace Agreement of 10 April 1998.

High crosses, like the round towers, are an internationally recognizable symbol of the island nation. Ireland’s crosses are unique to the history of its people in that they exist in a form not seen natively elsewhere in the Christian world. The name “high cross,” found in *The Annals of the Four Masters* under entries for the year 957 C.E., specifically lists monuments erected before the start of thirteenth century and the Anglo-Norman invasion by King Henry II of England (1133 –1189).¹⁴¹ While not huge structures like the towers, high crosses, in many ways, preserve the symbolism of Irish Christianity and illustrate fine Irish artistry, making them a lasting image of the island. Basic sizes and compositions of high crosses are relatively formulaic, though the decoration applied later is far from it. Constructed mainly of stone, with a few existing examples of petrified wood, a common aspect of the crosses is their base, generally measuring approximately between 118 to 236 inches high, with a stepped or pyramid shape. The bases often survive while the cross itself and other surrounding buildings are gone.¹⁴²

The bodies of high crosses are predominantly solid pieces of stone, with a number having separate sections held together by mortar and tendon joints, with

¹⁴⁰ “History Erases Deeds of World War,” *Irish Independent*, 12 November (1998): 6.

¹⁴¹ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 2.

¹⁴² Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

long shafts holding the cross head. In some cases, there is a capstone, such as at Tihilly in County Offaly, along the far western boundary of Leinster, in the very center of Ireland.¹⁴³ The outstanding feature of Irish high crosses, also called Celtic crosses, is a circular attachment connecting the arms at the intersection. Only about sixty-eight of the nearly three hundred high crosses in Ireland have this characteristic, and of those, not all remain intact. These sixty-eight have an open ring while about as many have a disk or solid circular structure at the crux, bringing the total to fewer than 140 examples exhibiting traditional “Irish cross” characteristics.¹⁴⁴ An example of a step base is found at Killamery in County Kilkenny, located in the southern most section of the Province of Leinster, where an early seventh century monastery once stood. Here the form of a pyramid base remains, as it does at Oldcort and Bray monastery in County Wicklow south of Dublin on the eastern coast, where, there too, little else survives.¹⁴⁵

Several theories as to why Irish artisans decided to use a round disk behind the cross members of the Christian symbol exist. One possibility is that the circle is purely functional, allowing for longer arms, therefore larger crosses, for more impressive displays of wealth, power, and prestige. Still others claim, with more legend than historical fact, that the circle harkens back to the ancient Celts and the worship of a deity associated with the sun. The round disk is the ancient god’s symbol adopted by early missionaries in much the same way Saint Patrick (c. late fourth or early fifth century C.E.) utilized the shamrock to

¹⁴³ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

¹⁴⁴ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

illustrate the concept of the Holy Trinity to the kings. Patrick's methods of using symbolism to teach pagan populations in ways that best translated culture became a hallmark of Irish monasticism.¹⁴⁶ If true, this adaptation is an example of concessions Irish Christians made to continental Christianity that ultimately evolved into the Celtic Church.¹⁴⁷

On some crosses, rather than a single ring, there are four round diskettes set at the right angles of the cross member within a larger circle. These disks occur from the ninth and tenth century only and are not yet fully understood in relation to their purpose, apart from simply being a two hundred year aesthetic movement, and to this little is credited beyond speculation.¹⁴⁸ These aesthetic changes remained in place until the thirteenth century.

Elements of biblical imagery, found on the sides of crosses, are another Irish hallmark. Unfortunately, intricately designed figures and knot work tend to show severe weathering because of the sandstone used in construction. For example, the loss of decorations are evident on the lower section of the famous 'West' cross at Monasterboice in County Louth, in the northeastern part of Leinster.¹⁴⁹

While erosion has also taken its toll on the crosses at Larrha, in County Tipperary near the western boundary of Leinster, the figures are carved deeply

¹⁴⁶ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12; Clare Stancliffe, "Patrick (fl. 5th cent.)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>, accessed February 12, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

enough into the surface to remain visible today.¹⁵⁰ By comparison, the crosses of Monasterboice hold the secrets of longevity because of how stones were proportioned. Constructed from two types of sandstone, Monasterboice's "West cross," has one stone type at the head and another at the base, both being made of a more stable form of the stone.¹⁵¹ The physical geography of cross locations plays an important part in the medium selected for construction. For example, in the Barrow River Valley, near the Leinster Mountains that run predominantly north and south between Counties Laois, Kilkenny, and Carlow, granite is used. In the Midlands, including parts of counties Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Tipperary and Westmeath, and Clare, however, stonecutters carved from sedimentary gray limestone. In all cases, there is evidence of paint applications which highlighted various levels of carvings, making the artisanship more pronounced.¹⁵²

Though stone is easily accessible, remnants of wooden crosses survived through accidental preservation, when the wood petrified. Examples of petrified crosses include those excavated in a section of Dublin City associated with a ninth and tenth century Viking settlement. These wooden monuments also show similar carvings to stone successors and were most likely the norm before and during the use of stone for high crosses. Noticeably different in the two mediums is that stone crosses are larger, and carvings are more elaborate than those on

¹⁵⁰ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12; Harbison, *Irish High Crosses*, 84-5.

¹⁵¹ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12; Harbison. *Irish High Crosses*, 85.

¹⁵² Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12; Francoise Henry, *Irish High Crosses* (Dublin: The Three Candles LTD, 1964), 15-6.

wood. The first evidence of early Christian stone carving in Ireland comes from huge stone slabs with the basic figure of crosses carved onto one outward face. Later carvings more sophisticated designs appear at Duvillaum, in County Mayo on the western peninsula, at Ardamore, the in See of Saint Patrick in County Kerry, and at Glencolmcille in County Donegal in Northern Ireland.¹⁵³ The first true freestanding crosses appear to be those at Carndonagh, County Donegal. This slab cross and its neighboring *Fahan Mura* crosses are intricately carved with interlacing bands as found in the illuminated manuscript known as the *Book of Durrow*, dating all three objects from around to mid-seventh century or slightly earlier.¹⁵⁴

Believing isolation from the world and pleasures brought them closer to the divine will of God, hermit monks erected a large number of slab-crosses along the western coast and on numerous islands nearby. Slab crosses are all that remain of ruined monastic settlements on these islands.¹⁵⁵

Unlike slab crosses, occasionally used as grave markers, high crosses did not denote funerary rites or serve in any capacity, beyond the singular spiritual purpose of their creation. The practical application of high cross directly relate to the location within, or as the marker for, religious gatherings. Some marked the boundaries of the consecrated church grounds, sacred sights, or an important building lost entirely or long since rebuilt. A precious few still bear inscriptions

¹⁵³ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 12.

The monastery of Glencolmcille is attributed to Saint Colmcille, also called Columba of Iona and Kells (521-597 C.E.).

¹⁵⁴ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 14.

¹⁵⁵ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 14.

indicating the reasons for construction as well as who or what they memorialize. Crosses pay homage to saints and the holy men and women of Ireland, spread out as far as Scotland, where the Irish monastic influence was strongest. One example is the ‘South’ cross at Kells, located in the fifth century monastery of Saint Columba, and often called “the cross of Patrick and Columba” because this phrase appears in Irish at the base.¹⁵⁶

Iona, a region in western Scotland, is closely associated with Ireland’s Saint Columba who founded monasteries and established legendary scriptoriums, both there and at Kells on the Eastern coast of Northern Ireland. At Iona, monks began work on the *Book of Kells*, though they later finished it in Ireland after fleeing Scotland from Viking raiders. At Iona, across the sea from Columba’s native country, remain the crosses of Saint Martin (316 or 317-397 C.E.), Saint John the Baptist, among many other examples.¹⁵⁷

Inscribed monuments, such as the cross of Muiredach at Monasterboice in County Meath, dating from the late ninth century, often suffered greatly from both erosion and acts of violence. To counter this wearing, Muiredach’s cross underwent restorations throughout its history, possibly utilizing parts from other crosses, as seen in the variations materials of the base and main sections.¹⁵⁸ The cross at Monasterboice was commissioned by the Abbot Colman (d. 923 C.E.) and emanated from the “same workshop as the Cross of the Scriptures erected at

¹⁵⁶ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 15.

¹⁵⁷ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Judith Ann Calvert, *The Early Development of Irish High Crosses and Their Relationship to Scottish Sculpture in the Ninth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1978), 329.

Clonmacnoise for Flann Sinna (c. 920 C.E.), king of Ireland, in the first years of the tenth century.”¹⁵⁹

One of the most important groupings of high crosses stands at Monasterboice in County Louth, here three are intact, one partially undamaged still at the site, and sections of two others relocated to the permanent collection at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin.¹⁶⁰ A sixth cross, also at the site, is now little more than a stump of its former glory.¹⁶¹ The two full crosses are that of Muiredach and the “Tall” or West Cross.

The first is inscribed with a dedication, “*Or Do Muiredach Lansdern...Ro*,” translated from old Irish as “Pray for Muiredach who had the cross erected.”¹⁶² It has a pyramid base measuring a little over thirty inches tall and the entire sculpture stands just over seventeen feet from ground to top, this monument is the first thing any visitor sees when they approach the site.¹⁶³

The ‘West’ cross, located west of the medieval church now in ruins, is the “tallest surviving high cross known in Ireland,” towering twenty-three feet high, with the cross body over twenty-one feet of that amount. The history of the cross’s dedication shows that over the course of time its patronage changed among different people and holy men.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 16; Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, *The Memorial Slabs of Clonmacnoise, King's County: With an Appendix On the Materials For A History of The Monastery* (Dublin: University of Dublin Press, 1909), 115.

¹⁶⁰ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 140-1, 145-6.

¹⁶¹ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 153.

¹⁶² Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 140-1.

¹⁶³ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 140.

¹⁶⁴ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 146.

The “North Cross,” in the north-eastern corner of the churchyard, is a reconstruction with a central shaft formed from a scavenged cross and a head of another, though it is not clear if either is original to Monasterboice. The two sections join in the center with part of a modern core for stabilization. All together, the cross is about seven-and-a-half-feet tall, not including the base which is nearly two feet in width.¹⁶⁵ The exceptional West Cross base is completely covered on all sides with biblical scenes and pictorial stories, illustrating that the use of iconography is a key element in religious expression in pre-literate society.¹⁶⁶

Correspondingly, the “Cross Shaft,” located near the North Cross, where visitors are no longer allowed, stands at a little over five-feet-tall without the head or crux. The mortise hole located in the top section, where the shaft once held another piece possibly connected with the North Cross, indicates an absence of an original crosshead.¹⁶⁷ Within the public realm, Monasterboice shares a great deal of attention with Clonmacnoise as having groupings of incredibly well preserved high crosses.¹⁶⁸

At Clonmacnoise the most famous monuments are the ‘Cross of the Scriptures,’ the North and South Crosses, and two fragmentary sections, with the later still located on site while the other is at the National Museum of Ireland.¹⁶⁹

Of these four structures, the Cross of Scriptures is most well known, standing

¹⁶⁵ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 152.

¹⁶⁶ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 146.

¹⁶⁷ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 152.

¹⁶⁸ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 48-9, 50-1.

¹⁶⁹ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 53-4, 55-6.

almost thirteen feet tall from ground to top, with a five-foot arm reach. This cross is unusual in that its circle's depth radiates beyond the arms and is capped with a small, shingled roof. Like those at Monasterboice, carved illustrations completely cover the entire body, including a depiction of the last judgment on one side of the cross.¹⁷⁰

The North Cross, outside the oldest cathedral's northern door, is little more than the shaft of what was once an extremely important monument. This example, unlike others of similar composition, bears neither carvings nor inscriptions, but rather, its east face lacks any form of embellishment, while the opposite, western side, has interlacing engraved on it.¹⁷¹ The South Cross "stands close to the south-west corner of Temple Doolin" and measures nine and a half feet tall, not including the three-foot base.¹⁷² Flann Sinna's father, Máel Sechnaill Mac Maelruanaid (r. 846-862 C.E.), is credited with the commission of the high cross at Kinnitty in County Offaly in the center of the island. This sculpture bears the inscription "a prayer for King Máel Sechnaill son of Maelruanaid, a prayer for the King of Ireland," inscribed at its base, illustrating a critical link between royal patronage and Christian art production.¹⁷³

Human figures and traditional Irish knot-work cover the high crosses of Clonmacnoise, with both styles of decoration illustrating national art forms also associated with the famous illuminated manuscripts, like those of Kells and Durrow at Trinity College, and those in the British Museum's collection. Not to

¹⁷⁰ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 58-9.

¹⁷¹ Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 53-4.

¹⁷² Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 54.

¹⁷³ Richardson and Scarry, *An Introduction to Irish High Crosses*, 16.

be confused with the annals and histories, illuminated manuscripts were primarily religious in function and cost great sums of money for production by the monks cloistered in their scriptoria.

If, as anthropologists argue, language is the carrier of culture, then as philologists argue the text, the means of cultural transition, is the symbolic and iconographic transmitter of identity, in this case Irish national identity. From a modern perspective, the written works saved the native Celtic language, surviving centuries of English domination and high death tolls following the Great Famine of the 1840s and 50s, both attributed with wiping out the vernacular, in all but the furthest western regions.

Like apathetic children, with little understanding of their contributions monks, religious women, and other literate patrons wrote within the margins of enough documents so that the old Irish language is today translatable and spoken accurately. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the scribes made copies in both biblical Latin, also called 'Vulgate,' and in the vernacular of the lay Irish.¹⁷⁴ The British Museum in London holds multiple manuscripts exhibiting the interlacing of languages, as well as some of the most important illuminated manuscripts in the world.

For example, in the British Museum one twelfth-century Latin Gospel is written in the traditional text with artistic script, featuring periodic small, light script scribbled in between the lines of elaborate calligraphy. These notes are simple annotations in Irish, written by a clergy wanting an Irish translation to the

¹⁷⁴ Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period*, 66.

Latin text for easy reading. Unwittingly, monks comments represent something far more valuable, since these annotations have become equivalent to the Rosetta Stone of old Gaelic, providing the only preserved form of lay language from the early Middle Ages in Ireland.¹⁷⁵

The undisputed title of largest collection of priceless manuscripts, however, remains at Trinity College Library in Dublin, with their “Insular Gospel-books” of Kells and Durrow. The Library also holds the lesser known, though equally significant, *Books of Dimma, Armagh, and Mulling*. To say a work is a “Gospel-book” simply refers to the work being made up of enough content to comprise a full book.¹⁷⁶

The *Book of Kells*, donated to Trinity College library in the 1660s by the Bishop of Meath Henry Jones (no dates given) is attributed to the Kells and the work of Saint Columba (521- 597), also called the “dove of the church.”¹⁷⁷ Bishop Jones also donated a second Gospel from the Kells monastery, the Book of Durrow. Both Gospels’ association to Kells and its patron saint come from the early eleventh century *Annals of Ulster*, which recorded the theft of the second sacred text and its anonymous return to church’s care three months later. Unfortunately, the thieves striped the book of its gold leaf and precious ornamentation.¹⁷⁸ The same chronicler called it, “the chief relic (*primh-mind*) of

¹⁷⁵ Robin Flower, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum, Vol. III* (London: British Museum, 1953), 187.

¹⁷⁶ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 6.

¹⁷⁷ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 179; Columba Edmonds, “St. Columba,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, www.newadvent.org, (1908): accessed 22 March 2007; Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period*, 61.

¹⁷⁸ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 179.

the western world,” illustrating the single text’s importance to not only the Irish ecclesiastical communities but to all of Christendom. The *Book of Kells*, is not a complete biblical text, but rather a collection of the Gospels: Mathew, Mark, Luke, John. The book is comprised of 340 folios consisting of canon-tables, scholarly explanatory matter, a list of important Hebrew names, and a single surviving decorative carpet page.¹⁷⁹ This carpet page is the first page of a text and consists of a single letter decorated with intricate knot-work and fills the entire page as though it was carpeted with design, hence the term ‘carpet page.’ The page is dedicated to the artistic picture rather than mere information, and visually tells the story of the Bible from the beginning of creation to the salvation story.¹⁸⁰ What distinguishes this text is its form of script known as Insular which distinguishes itself from scripts appearing in England and on the Continent in its form and today is regarded as distinctively Irish.¹⁸¹

Canon-table pages are highly decorated, as are the scriptures, with simple, yet clear, charts of names and dates aligned by columns and capped with arches. Intricate interlacing designs of plant and animal forms completely cover any area not dedicated to lists and knot work, stylized zoomorphic forms, and portraits of saints weave tightly together, emblematic of the Irish design for border areas.¹⁸² Decoration completely consumes the carpet pages between sections and nearly all of the first pages of each Gospel, serving as an overture to each subdivision.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 131-2.

¹⁸⁰ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 170-1.

¹⁸¹ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 6.

¹⁸² Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 177-8.

¹⁸³ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 165-6.

Pigmentation, so well preserved by the conservators at Trinity College, holds another clue to the book's origins with many vibrant colors that were only accessible in the wealthiest scriptoriums. Highly skilled artisan-clerics developed the effervescent paints and sumptuous embellishments used on each page. To this end, the monastery of Kells, founded by followers of Saint Columba from Iona in Scotland, is an understandable choice for the scriptorium, though Ionian orders probably started there, finishing the book after escaping Viking raiders. Iona is the mother community to Kells, the bones of their shared patron saint rest between both Scotland and her homeland of Ireland, along with other relics, and the *Book of Kells*, presumably after these attacks became a larger threat.¹⁸⁴

The *Book of Durrow*, created around 675 C.E., is also attributed Saint Columba.¹⁸⁵ Similar to its sibling *Book of Kells*, Durrow is a Vulgate Gospel, written in a more modern form of Latin rather than the traditional "old Latin," typical of continental religious manuscripts.¹⁸⁶ Vulgate refers to a modern version of Latin rather than 'old Latin' associated with the earliest writings from Rome previously used for religious texts. Saint Jerome and Pope Damasus I, in the sixth century C.E., made the change to ease the use of Latin for readers during oration, though this was still not the vernacular.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, artwork, more so than content, is the major draw for scholars and tourists alike, who swarm the library at Trinity College for a glimpse of the precious illuminated volume.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 170-1.

¹⁸⁵ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 55.

¹⁸⁶ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 19.

¹⁸⁷ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org>, accessed 23 March 2007.

¹⁸⁸ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 19.

Being illuminated in and of itself creates another type of preservation issue that the library must battle daily. The once vibrant color for which this work is famous contributes to its deterioration. Vivid yellows, reds, blues and green slowly eat away at the thin vellum pages. Made from copper, green paint is especially hazardous as it slowly oxidizes over time, dissolving holes in the folios. Museum curators carefully monitor temperature, humidity, light, as well as all other environmental factors to stabilize the artwork and preserve each leaf for display.¹⁸⁹

The *Books of Armagh*, *Dimma* and *Mulling*, now housed with those of *Kells* and *Durrow* at Trinity College Library in Dublin, constitute a cache of illuminated manuscripts that also hold the individual monastic histories and hagiographies of their patron saints, opening a lens into the world of early medieval Ireland. The *Book of Armagh*, written between 807 or 808 C.E. and completed in 1002, contains the major primary source for Irish linguistics that, like examples in the British Museum, contains smaller handwriting with the vernacular interlaced between the spaces of scripture.¹⁹⁰ The *Book of Dimma*, written in the eighth century at St. Cronan's Abbey at Roscrea, bears the name of a monk who followed Saint Cronan. This evangelical script, like other Gospels, contains the four primary Gospels, with “an order for the Unction and Communion of the Sick inscribed between the Gospels of Saint Luke and Saint

¹⁸⁹ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 19.

¹⁹⁰ Joseph Dunn, “The Book of Armagh,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org>, accessed 25 March 2007.

John.”¹⁹¹ Finally, the *Book of Mullings*, also written in the eighth century, includes almost the exact type and order of information as the *Book of Dimma*. The *Book of Mullings*, however, came from the scriptorium at Saint Moling’s (d. 696 C.E.) at Ferns, in County Wexford, where illuminators are famous for their work in the style called the “school of Glendalough.” This style refers specifically to the artistic variations of central figures, though the difference is difficult to interpret at first glance.¹⁹²

These works are insular Gospels, referring to the artistry and calligraphy in a style distinct to early medieval Ireland and Britain. Kells monastery remains best known in Ireland for producing this script, as does its English counterpart at Lindisfarne, located off the northeastern coast of North Umbria, where seventh century monks produced the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. In both cases, the texts became symbols of national history and pride, praised as artistic, spiritual, and intellectual masterpieces.¹⁹³ From a wider perspective, the books of *Durrow* and *Kells* are not only national treasures, but also attractions for people seeking a deeper understanding of an essential element in Ireland’s advancement toward the modern nation it has become.

Across the ages, through wars, uprisings, famines, the happy times and those of “troubles,” the infallible resolve of the Irish people to remember who they are and where they come from remains evident. The popular self-image of

¹⁹¹ Henry Jenner, “The Celtic Rite,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org>, accessed 25 March 2007.

¹⁹² John Healy, “School of Glendalough,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org>, accessed 25 March 2007. The specific details of the artistic differences are not given and can not be judged from only photographic evidence.

¹⁹³ Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells*, 179-80, 197-8.

Ireland as a 'land of saints and scholars,' thrives in the modern tourism industry as local heritage sites perpetuate romantic fantasies of a gilded land of enchantment, spiritual devotion, and scholarly focus. The reality of an Irish national identity tied to an illustrious history of ecclesiastical monuments and artifacts, however, remains infinitely more complex. A national self-awareness, partially integrated into modern European identities, helps to define what it means to be Irish. This self-identification is easily observable through the eyes and ears of weekend tourists. Indeed, a connection with the past and the critical role of great ecclesiastical artifacts and sites, as evidence of the surviving influence of Irish monasticism, is visible throughout Irish history and growth, serving as one among many vital cultural cornerstones.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 42.

Chapter Three: Museums, Early Ecclesiastic Sites and Objects Representing the Modern Irish National Identity.

What link exists between the sites and artifacts covered in the previous chapters of this work? They are part of a fabric making up the modern national identity of Ireland. The earliest monastic settlements, with subsequent buildings, monuments, and manuscripts, have unquestionably shaped the island's culture and people today. There remains a very real connection between the ecclesiastical communities established between the fifth and twelfth centuries and modern Irish populations, both urban and rural. These places are not simply tourist destinations or backdrops for pretty pictures. They are utilized daily and cared for by the very people who draw upon them for their heritage. Seen on store fronts and public houses, for example the Oarsman Pub sign in Dublin displays a round tower, these icons historically define and symbolize what it means to be Irish.¹⁹⁵ Ideas of Irishness transcend centuries and even continents, as many people try to link themselves with the development of the island. Especially in the United States, where a major portion of citizens claim at least some Irish lineage, there is a desire to relate culturally to the mystique of Ireland.¹⁹⁶ Perhaps this is best seen in Saint Patrick's Day parades and festivals, where for one day everyone is Irish. Sold out crowds for shows like River Dance and Celtic music festivals around the world, Irish studies courses at universities, and thousands of children learning traditional Irish dance, further demonstrate this international fascination with all things Irish. Gaelic pride has long been

¹⁹⁵ O'Keeffe, *Ireland's Round Towers*, 19.

¹⁹⁶ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 195-6, 198-9.

understood in the country of its origins as reverence for historically important places and treasured objects, connecting the Irish with their homeland's ecclesiastical "Golden Age."

To reiterate, Mark McCarthy's work argues from an historical perspective that events occurring at a geographical location may transform into myth and tradition that, over time, create the foundations of local and national identification. The transition of a specific spatial area into a cultural heritage site with a particular demographic, according to McCarthy, follows a circular flow. The first step is the foundation of that location's purpose, then multiple stages of occupation, repurposing, loss, reinterpretation, protection, restoration, communal possession, and eventual diminishment only to begin the cycle again as it is thoroughly integrated into a heritage role. During each of these phases, a site is transformed from merely physical topography and buildings to an entity of public culture established in history. This "history" contains elements of truth, blended with stories recounted by the local population that then become embedded in the cultural provenance, or physical representations such as pubs signs, churches, and monuments.¹⁹⁷

McCarthy's formula, based on the statistical and analytical works of P. Howard and George Petrie, further explains primary research collected by Petrie and Howard in the later part of the eighteenth century during and following the Irish Ordinance Survey. Petrie's research in that instance was, originally, applied

¹⁹⁷ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 124-5. McCarthy's formula is based of the statistical analytical works of P. Howard "The Three Faces of Heritage," Paper Delivered at 'The Condition of Heritage' 4th Cambridge Heritage Seminar on 28 April 2001 and George Petrie "New Grange," *Dublin Penny Journal*, Vol.1, 1.

to the passage tomb of Newgrange, though the principles are laid out to incorporate any heritages sites by simplest definition in relation to a site's utilization and folklore. In this regard the cycles proposed can be applied to the early monastic sites as well as their modern usages and interpretations.

According to McCarthy, through processes of time and assimilation, heritage sites became what they are because national duty obligated the general public to preserve the legacy. The public sees a responsibility to preserve and understand for the future, knowing that without the continued upkeep of sites and monuments, the very concept of lineage and national history is negated. A historic site is, therefore, literally the provenance of a nation, and its absence expunges the people's heritage.¹⁹⁸

When presenting Ireland's monastic heritage a challenge emerges: how to reconcile national identity with touristic preconceptions. Simplifying tourism to a collection of stock images, allegedly illustrating the nation's sense of itself ignores a variety of factors that often lie behind the inclusion of a photograph in a regional guidebook. This emphasis on touristic promotion is not necessarily made clear by textual analysis of guidebooks or tourism advertising.¹⁹⁹

Authors and publishers of guidebooks or aids for tourists formulate national identity by producing and re-publishing literary accounts and images of historical sites. In this way, travel writers create expectations for what travelers will see upon arrival. The "grand tour" of the Victorian era dubbed Ireland a

¹⁹⁸ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 128-9.

¹⁹⁹ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 128-9.

“land of saints and scholars,” opening not only the eyes and purses of Britain, but all of Europe, to Irish monastic history and treasures.

During the period c.700–1200 AD the monastery is well documented in the early Irish Annals as a centre of great artistic and literary achievements. Royal patronage endowed the site with churches, high crosses and fine metalwork and two of the last High Kings of Ireland are buried in the Cathedral. The wealth of the site drew the attention of various Irish kings and later the Vikings, and it was regularly raided by them. Twelfth century reform of the Irish church and the arrival of the Normans heralded the decline of the site. Although it continued as an important site of pilgrimage, and came to prominence briefly in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was never again a major centre of piety, learning, trade or craftsmanship.²⁰⁰

Cultural tourism has been a practice of Europeans since antiquity; consider Pausanias, Strabo and Tacitus, not to mention accounts of international visits of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to the East and Egypt. The wide popularity of Irish tourism prompted the government to establish public offices within the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government (DEHLG) that were designed to protect and preserve historic areas, as well as sub-departments of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and local preservation societies run by the communities.²⁰¹

Having planted the seed, for preservation in several cases the work of civic-minded private groups saved otherwise discarded sites. For example, in June 1962, a townsman from County Wicklow proposed the establishment of a museum at Glendalough dedicated to preservation and remembrance of Irish

²⁰⁰ DEHLG, *Clonmacnoise Draft Management Plan* (Dublin: Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government, 1996), 5.

²⁰¹ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 196-7.

missionary work. The OPW refused, claiming that a museum honoring a site whose history continued to be debated by scholars was impractical.²⁰² Today, there is a communally run cultural center at Glendalough, serving thousands of domestic and international tourists annually.²⁰³

Catholic pilgrimage also contributed to Ireland's reputation of ecclesiastical importance, and continues to do so today with sightseeing groups and spiritual tours welcoming the faithful. For museums, this interest required a different approach to written and visual interpretations of sites and related artifacts. At a basic level a museum must, in theory, be objective. In reality, however, the historical narrative is shaped by cultural, political, and even regional issues that translate information and objects differently. In Ireland this is the biggest dilemma facing museums curators.²⁰⁴ For example "museums act as guardians and interpreters of the nation's cultural heritage, a defining element of national identity," and with the island divided into two nations, one fiercely independent and the other part of the United Kingdom, the job of interpreters is tremulous.²⁰⁵ Histories and identifications that work in Northern Ireland have the potential to start a conflict in the Republic of Ireland, and vice versa, over differing interpretations of their shared national past.²⁰⁶

The museum's role in developing nationalism firmly took root during the early nineteenth century, pushing facilities to become a material and

²⁰² McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 197.

²⁰³ Ireland Office of Public Works, "Glendalough Visitors Center" <http://www.heritageireland.ie>, accessed 25 March 2007.

²⁰⁴ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 206.

²⁰⁵ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 206.

²⁰⁶ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 206.

representative body for the construction of a historical narrative. In this capacity, museums have a responsibility to help the public, both domestic and international, comprehend Ireland's past and present. If misleading or misinterpreted the result is a complete loss of the social and artistic significance of each community. Interpretations can foster learning, understanding, and appreciation for diversification, but in a worse case scenario, a place of learning potentially becomes a conduit for prejudice, xenophobia, and intolerance through the distortion of history and civilization.²⁰⁷

An international trend, for much of the twentieth century, embraced a multicultural focus, lumping old national concentration with Irish "anarchism," an antiquated link to backward internal spotlighting. A more modern approach not only embraces international awareness, but redefines the narrower geocentric focal point, allowing culture to once again take center stage in interpretation. "Regional nationalisms" complicate the narrative further by raising the questions of who, where, and what to include in exhibits and labels. Larger museums, like the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin, must precariously balance both the national history with that of England, Scotland, Wales, as well as the rest of the world within the framework of equitable elucidations.²⁰⁸

In Northern Ireland, museums and heritage centers hesitate to focus overtly on the period of the "Troubles," though conflict sites and monuments to the events and people of the Irish Civil War draw large numbers of tourists

²⁰⁷ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 206.

²⁰⁸ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritage*, 206-7.

annually.²⁰⁹ In this instance avoidance of a topic, despite cultural relevance and national iconographic importance, is an attempt to discourage further social separation in a post-war society.²¹⁰

This does not mean that an exhibit on the “Troubles” focusing, for example, on Protestant actions will lead to another conflict, because museums do not operate in a politically influential manner and this outcome is highly unlikely. But the threat represents theoretical repercussions defining the moral dilemma of historical interpreters and collections managers.²¹¹ Their obligation to present an unbiased display of art, artifacts, and information is especially fragile because of past struggles still impacting changing national concepts.²¹²

To better understand Ireland’s struggle over their national identity and cultural heritage one must see what that country endured as a whole for nearly a thousand years. Under imperial rule, after the Anglo-Norman invasion, Ireland and her people were denied their own heritage, lands, and government.²¹³ This blow struck at something fundamental to the social fabric of the island. The Catholic Church here existed as nowhere else, dominating social and cultural life, and dictating powerful political influences with various lords, kings, high kings. In 1169 the emerging Anglo-Norman kingdom of England turned their attention westward to Ireland. Granted rights of sovereignty over the island some years

²⁰⁹ McCarthy, *Ireland’s Heritage*, 207.

²¹⁰ McCarthy, *Ireland’s Heritage*, 207.

²¹¹ McCarthy, *Ireland’s Heritage*, 207.

²¹² McCarthy, *Ireland’s Heritage*, 207.

²¹³ Norah Carlin, “The Levellers and the Conquest of Ireland in 1649,”

The Historical Journal, 30, (1987): 269-288. <http://www.jstore.org>, accessed 15 February 2007.

earlier by Pope Adrian IV's (1100 -1159) *Bull Laudabiliter*, King Henry II of England (1133 -1189) sent two waves of military forces to conquer Leinster, starting with the eastern coast.²¹⁴ Robert FitzStephen (d. c. 1192) established the first English foothold at Wexford with the aid of the king of Leinster.²¹⁵ Less than a year later the legendary Richard "Strongbow" de Clair, Earl of Pembroke (1130 -1176), controlled all of Waterford, Dublin, and Leinster.²¹⁶ By the close of the twelfth century all of Ireland, with the exception of Connacht, fell to English power.²¹⁷

During this great upheaval, the church underwent clerical reforms that threatened the fabric of Irish ecclesiastical uniqueness. Bishops were replaced with English priests and anyone of Irish heritage who held important dioceses or large amounts of land were replaced with more "suitable" Anglo-Normans.²¹⁸

Non-clerical populations were forced to confine themselves to an area later called the 'pale,' on the outskirts of English occupied lands in south and western areas of Leinster. This segregation delineated the difference between the invaders and their hold on cities with complex social orders, and native populations, clinging to rural traditions. Old rivalries prevented Irish nobles from

²¹⁴ "The Bull of Pope Adrian IV Empowering Henry II to Conquer Ireland. A.D. 1155," *The Avalon Project*, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/medieval/bullad.htm>, accessed 25 March 2007.

²¹⁵ M. T. Flanagan, s.v. "Robert FitzStephen (d. before 1192)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>, accessed 05 April 2007.

²¹⁶ Goddard H. Orpen, "The Effects of Norman Rule in Ireland, 1169-1333," *The American Historical Review*, 19, (1914): 247. <http://www.jstor.org>, accessed 7 April 2007.

²¹⁷ Orpen, "The Effects of Norman Rule in Ireland," 247.

²¹⁸ Orpen, "The Effects of Norman Rule in Ireland," 246.

placing power struggles aside and uniting against a common enemy.²¹⁹ The Irish witnessed the gradual assimilation of English cultural practices. This process was concretized four centuries later, when Oliver Cromwell and his ‘New Model Army’ invaded Ireland. This time the Irish lost the most fundamental element of their culture, the right to practice Roman Catholicism.²²⁰

With a 1641 rebellion and subsequent massacre of thousands of Protestants still fresh on his mind, Oliver Cromwell arrived in Ireland in 1649 with an aim to re-conquer the cities and the pale, and to erase backward “Popish” ways. His hatred for the Irish became evident the moment his new model army landed, seizing power and control by quickly instituting policies of murder and terror. With Cromwell’s dominance solidified, England’s Parliament issued the *Act of Settlement of Ireland*, ousting native land holders completely, replacing them with loyal, Protestant British colonists in 1652.²²¹ In 1689, and throughout the early 1690s, deposed King James II (1633-1701) used Ireland as a staging ground for reclaiming the throne of Great Britain. The Irish protected him and demanded a repeal of the *Act of Settlement*. Parliament reluctantly agreed to the terms, resulting in the deaths of numerous Protestant English and Scottish immigrants by enraged Irish, and laying the groundwork for the nineteenth and twentieth century civil war in Northern Ireland.²²²

²¹⁹ Orpen, “The Effects of Norman Rule in Ireland,” 246-7.

²²⁰ Carlin, “The Levellers and the Conquest of Ireland in 1649,” 269-88.

²²¹ Harold Orel, *Irish History and Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976), 124-5.

²²² Orel, *Irish History and Culture*, 126.

When looking at the creation of Ireland's national identity, one must understand the deep seeded importance of native land, especially spaces linked to spirituality and the church. Spiritual and temporal powers are inexorably linked throughout Irish history, with religion forming the linchpin in the Irish people's connection to this past. Monastic sites on the island are so vitally and distinctly Irish that without them the development of the nation, as recognized in modern terms, becomes decontextualized.²²³

Before the monasteries, no indigenous urban centers existed to circulate ideas and culture, no central government or single king existed to unite the people under a common banner of heritage.²²⁴ With the exception of Dublin and the ninth and tenth century Viking settlements, the only forms of community and education in Ireland existed in monasteries and abbeys. Irish devotion to sacred monastic sites and the history encompassed therein is best illustrated in the push for more world heritage sites, as recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).²²⁵

As of 1996, only two sites in Ireland are recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage sites; the area known as the "Bend of the Boyne" (in Irish, the *Brú na Bóinne*) containing the megalithic passage graves of Newgrange, Knowth, and Dowth as well as a number of smaller archeological excavations and Skellig

²²³ Gerard Delanty and Patrick O'Mahony, *Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1998), 108.

²²⁴ Delanty and O'Mahony, *Rethinking Irish History*, 108.

²²⁵ Yvonne Whelan, *Reinventing Modern Dublin: Streetscape, Iconography and the Politics of Identity* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003), 5-6.

Michael, on the Skellig Island chain off the western coast.²²⁶ Skellig Michael is the seventh century hermitage monastic site recognized as being unique to Ireland, and therefore important for the interpretation of national history.²²⁷ In 1992 the DEHLG petitioned UNESCO for the addition of Clonmacnoise in County Offaly and Cashel in County Tipperary to the list of world heritage sites because of its historical and cultural importance.²²⁸ Clonmacnoise is the crowning jewel of early Irish monasticism because of its historical importance and geocentric location on island, overlooking a major river. Care of Clonmacnoise, including surrounding land and monuments, falls under the current jurisdiction of the National Monuments Council through the National Monuments Act of 1987. Of these UNESCO added Clonmacnoise to the list in 1996.²²⁹ To secure the recognition of UNESCO and the world historical community the National Monuments Council developed the *Clonmacnoise Draft Management Plan*, formalizing future plans for preservation and utilizations for archeological and tourism purposes.²³⁰ The *Draft Management Plan* emphasized important aspects of the site in terms of preservation of its historiographic significance. The plan includes various structures and monuments such as the ‘Nuns’ church, the

²²⁶ The Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government, “Ireland: Properties inscribed on the World Heritage List” <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ie> accessed 6 April 2007.

²²⁷ For further information on Skellig Michael please see chapter one “Churches and Monastic Buildings.”

²²⁸ DEHLG, “Ireland: Properties inscribed on the World Heritage List” <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ie> accessed 6 April 2007. Under the DEHLG, the Office of Public Works (OPW) cares for and maintains over seven hundred monuments including many of the monastic sites covered in this work.

²²⁹ DEHLG, *Clonmacnoise Draft Management Plan*, 5.

²³⁰ DEHLG, *Clonmacnoise Draft Management Plan*, 15.

cathedral, the ruins of six chapels, the remains of a thirteenth century castle, over six hundred cross engraved slab markers in the graveyard, three holy wells, a number of remarkably well-preserved high crosses, and an early twelfth century round tower, also called 'Rourke's tower' for the king buried within.²³¹

Clonmacnoise, as well as the other truly significant locations and monuments of Leinster, covered in previous chapters, stand at the heart of the modern national identity thanks, not only to the perseverance of Irish culture through centuries of foreign control, but to advances in field archeology and the scientific approach in recording history by men like George Petrie with his topographical work the *Irish Ordinance Survey* of the mid-nineteenth century. To clarify, the *Irish Ordinance Survey* covered monastic sites and the entire topography of Ireland for government purposes. The recording of archeological excavations and historical sites throughout the country was something Petrie incorporated at a time when archeology was transforming from a pseudo-science into a scholarly endeavor, resting in the importance of the documentation of all aspects of historical sites, including those of religious origins.²³²

Modern nationalists like Petrie do not remind people of what it means to be Irish, that will never be forgotten, rather, they reopened the scholarly communities' eyes to important religious sites, their inhabitation within the context of creating Ireland's groundwork, and of a monastic tradition that dominated the land, creating works of art, faith, and scholarship unrivaled in beauty and brilliance in early Medieval Europe. So much of Irish national

²³¹ DEHLG, *Clonmacnoise Draft Management Plan*, 17, 18, 19.

²³² Doherty, *The Irish Ordinance Survey*, 2-3.

identity is shaped by the works of monks and religious women for more than sixteen hundred years that without a clear understanding of their contributions, Irish culture and society becomes rather meaningless.²³³ Monastic communities became centers of power for kings and high kings throughout the centuries, with top clergy acting as advisors and diplomats for various factions.²³⁴ People established villages around and within the walls of monasteries where, before, the landscape was almost singularly rural and agrarian with all social ties related to kinship.²³⁵

Ecclesiastic communities, begun by Saint Patrick (c. fifth century) and his followers in the fifth and early sixth century, created ideals of a collective civilization, emphasize higher education, and, to some degree, created the early stages of sexual egalitarianism, as evident in accounts of the extraordinarily influential Saint Brigid of Kildare, as well as a number of prominent abbesses operating mixed gender monasteries long before the Anglo-Norman's came to the Island.²³⁶

Though not blatant, Ireland's iconographical links are ever present. For example, the Republic of Ireland's independence stems, in large part, from Catholic struggles for rights to practice traditions and religion freely.²³⁷ Similarly,

²³³ Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 6. Saint Ciaran is proof that common people were trained in ecclesiastical school as well because he was the son of a carpenter and later trained under Saint Enda on the Aran Islands.; Brendan Lehane, *The Quest of Three Abbots* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 92.

²³⁴ Watt, *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland*, 3.

²³⁵ Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 6.

²³⁶ T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 237.

²³⁷ Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 6.

popular iconography utilizes not only conflict against foreign rule, such as the Harp of Brian Boru, a national treasure, whose image is found on the new Irish Euro coin as well as the national coat of arms, but respects significant contributions of the monasteries, such as ecclesiastical schools that trained both noble children and anyone willing to be devoted to the Church.²³⁸

The close connection between the role of the church and the lives of the people created a relationship of mutual care. Now, centuries after the monasteries golden age, generations of loyal patrons and civic minded citizens work diligently to preserve this integral chapter in their history. Despite wars, famines, and religious shifts, the physical aspects of the monasteries discussed in previous chapters, like the round towers, high crosses, chapels, cathedrals, and illuminated manuscripts remain a source of pride to which the nation looks for inspiration and a sense of cultural provenance.

²³⁸ Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 6. Saint Ciaran is proof that common people were trained in ecclesiastical school as well because he was the son of a carpenter and later trained under Saint Enda on the Aran Islands.; Lehane, *The Quest of Three Abbots*, 92.

Conclusion

A genuine knowledge of our motherland, such as may be obtained by a genuine and sympathetic study of native history... alone can impart the warmth of patriotic feeling, the enthusiasm for the motherland, without which the development of the national character on traditional lives is impossible. It supplies the spirit that aims naturally and instinctively at reproducing the best types of the [people] in character and aspirations after deeds of renown. A [people] trained up without a true fructifying knowledge of the country's past is like the child reared in a 'home'; its aspirations are sterilized or mis-directed[sic], its love for motherland degenerates into something cold, formal and fruitless; it may understand the theory of patriotism, but true patriotism is not a theory, it is the spirit, the impulse of the child, directed, strengthened, and stimulated by hereditary instinct and ripened into action by the glow of parental affection.²³⁹

Leinster stands out in historical influence on an island drenched in political, social, religious, and cultural exceptionality because of the mass concentration of important monastic sites whose structures and legacies endeared themselves to the collective identity of Irish national pride. Producing both architecture and artifacts whose images are found in both back allies and grandiose cathedrals, and whose form conjures images of the mythical legacy of the Emerald Island in people all around the world.

Without the interpretation, presentation of history and artifacts by museums and heritage preservation organizations, however, basic elements of cultural understanding become skewed in personal and political propaganda, losing a great deal of importance in the public sphere through loss of credibility. So great is the influence of historical preservation entities, that the basic concepts of "community, as defined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, are

²³⁹ Doherty, "National Identity and the Study of Irish History," 329-30. In this block quote the implicative word "race" was replaced twice with the more politically correct form "people."

based in large part on what hand how national history is presented.²⁴⁰ According to Mark McCarthy, museums, while outwardly objective to the public, are fundamentally subjective in their role as “guardians and interpreters of the nation’s cultural heritage, a defining element of national identity.”²⁴¹ A concentrated effort to maintain political neutrality and to withhold personal opinion among museum and site staff is therefore critical to producing an unbiased interpretation of physical remains and sites, especially regarding sacred sites in a country still recovering from a religiously motivated civil war.

The manner in which native Irish people admittedly represent themselves in tourism ultimately reflects how they see themselves both individually and as a collective culture.²⁴² To this end the visible symbolism, directly related to the early monastic ‘golden age’ from the fifth to thirteenth centuries, and clearly illustrates the national iconographic link with the early saints and religious communities in modern terms. A continued effort on the part of both the public and historical management sectors is vital to better understand the sacred sites, artifacts, and architectural remains, while simultaneously promoting native culture in global and economic theaters.

Dublin, and in turn all of Leinster, entered a renewal phase during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The region is emerging as the “Celtic Tiger,” an economic entity that managed to remain loyal to its national identity, heritage, and sense of history while engaging the rest of Europe and the world on

²⁴⁰ Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 136-7.

²⁴¹ McCarthy, *Ireland’s Heritage*, 206.

²⁴² McCarthy, *Ireland’s Heritages*, 238.

a level economic playing field of growth and expansion. In the eyes of many, Ireland is breaking free from old stereotypes of a poor rural society of quaint folk in little thatched roof cottages, clinging to ancient superstitions and outdated customs.²⁴³

Today, Ireland, a country of infinite variability and beauty, consists of every form and function of people and businesses imaginable, prospering as few other nations in such a short amount of time while retaining their fundamental identity and promoting the continued preservation of sacred sites and artifacts for the future. Irishness became a global phenomenon, embracing a cultural attitude both domestically and internationally. Throughout Irish history, during occupation, famine, war, and religious intolerance, a cultural community emerged, fiercely independent and profoundly unique in art and architecture, styles as important to the development of a nation as they are to the advancement of western civilization from the 'dark ages' to modern times.

Religious communities of Leinster, often working in violent conditions, safeguarded spirituality and advances artistic developments treasured today for their insight into an ancient, literary veiled past. In return, the responsibility of current and future generation is to care for and maintain these labors as they are absorbed into an ever changing Ireland.

²⁴³ McCarthy, *Ireland's Heritages*, 237.

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