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Celtic Tradition in Liturgical Practice : The Irish Synthesis

by

Gale Justin

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1998

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Celtic Tradition in Liturgical Practice: The Irish Synthesis

by

Gale Justin

Adviser: Professor Howard L. Adelson

This dissertation is an investigation of the foundation of the Irish synthesis, as understood through the challenges to it in the seventh-century tonsure controversy. It demonstrates that:

- the nature and context of Irish Christianity differed from the orthodoxy of Roman Christianity and built upon Celtic tradition through a process of accretion, and
- Irish tonsure served to signal Irish Christian identity, deriving symbolism through that process of accretion, and
- this instigated the tonsure controversy with those who did not practice the Irish form of Christianity.

This dissertation will examine the tonsure controversy specifically from the point of view of the Irish Christians. Of immediate attention in this First Chapter, Irish Tonsure, is how the Irish saw themselves as a group and why it was so important for them to hold onto their singular practice.

From the perspective of the Church of Rome, Irish/British practice was tolerated, even encouraged by the policies of Gregory I, but fell into disfavor and was regarded more like heterodoxy over time. This shift was played out in the seventh-century and is discussed in my Second Chapter, Tonsure Controversy.

In my Third Chapter, Tonsure within Irish Christianity, I discuss the nature and context of Irish Christianity which engendered the Irish synthesis.

Essential to this study are the concepts of tradition ethnicity, and symbolism, because the meeting of Roman Christianity and Irish Christianity was also a meeting of a written tradition with an oral tradition, two distinct systems of symbolism and two distinct ethnic groups.

There was a unique relationship between the pre-Christian past and Insular Christianity. It was expressed in Hiberno-Saxon culture and was facilitated by the Irish synthesis. One element of the Irish synthesis was native tradition. That tradition carried with it a group identity. Upon becoming Christian, the Irish had to reinforce their identity, which they did by creating boundaries. The Irish practice of tonsure was used to maintain their ethnic boundary.

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First of all, I would like to thank my Dissertation Committee for the time, energy and effort they put into facilitating the completion of this work. Their insight has brought me to this point and I am deeply grateful. Howard L. Adelson, you initiated this work with me, providing instruction and support every step of the way; Catherine McKenna, you have introduced me to the world of Celtic Studies and opened my eyes to complexities of the field; Sam Levin, your wisdom, enthusiasm and spirit have motivated me to cross the fen; Pamela Sheingorn, your thoughtful perception has given me direction.

sāwol sēcean sōð-fæstra dōm

Like the Wanderer, my thoughts tend toward those who guided me through this work and are gone: I thank Harry Bober and Helaine Newstead for their illumination and encouragement. I thank my parents, Rose Hildegarde Nussbaum Justin and David Justin for their questions and appreciation.

Many friends have lighted and lightened my labors along the way:
Martha Zimiles interlaced interest, insight and technology,
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Stephanie Keylin painted a clearer picture,
Marilyn Tauber stretched my imagination and heard my voice,
Jan Hawkins has been my fellow wanderer
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Dina McClellan kept past, present and future in balance,
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Liam Morrissey accessed Ireland's magic,
Vickie Charlton held the thoughts,
Jackie Brown thought through,
Hilry Fisher saw me through,
Paul Justin came through,
Giuliana Reed pondered the perplexities with me,
Catherine Macklin fathomed the complexities and shared the vision,
and
my husband, Kenny Kosek, who, like Kai, *when his companion was coldest, would be fuel to kindle her fire,*
and
Justy Kosek, my son, inspired me and made sure I had love for my "inner core"

I THANK YOU ALL

Dedicated

to my Teacher
once and future

HELAINE NEWSTEAD

and my son
forever

JUSTY

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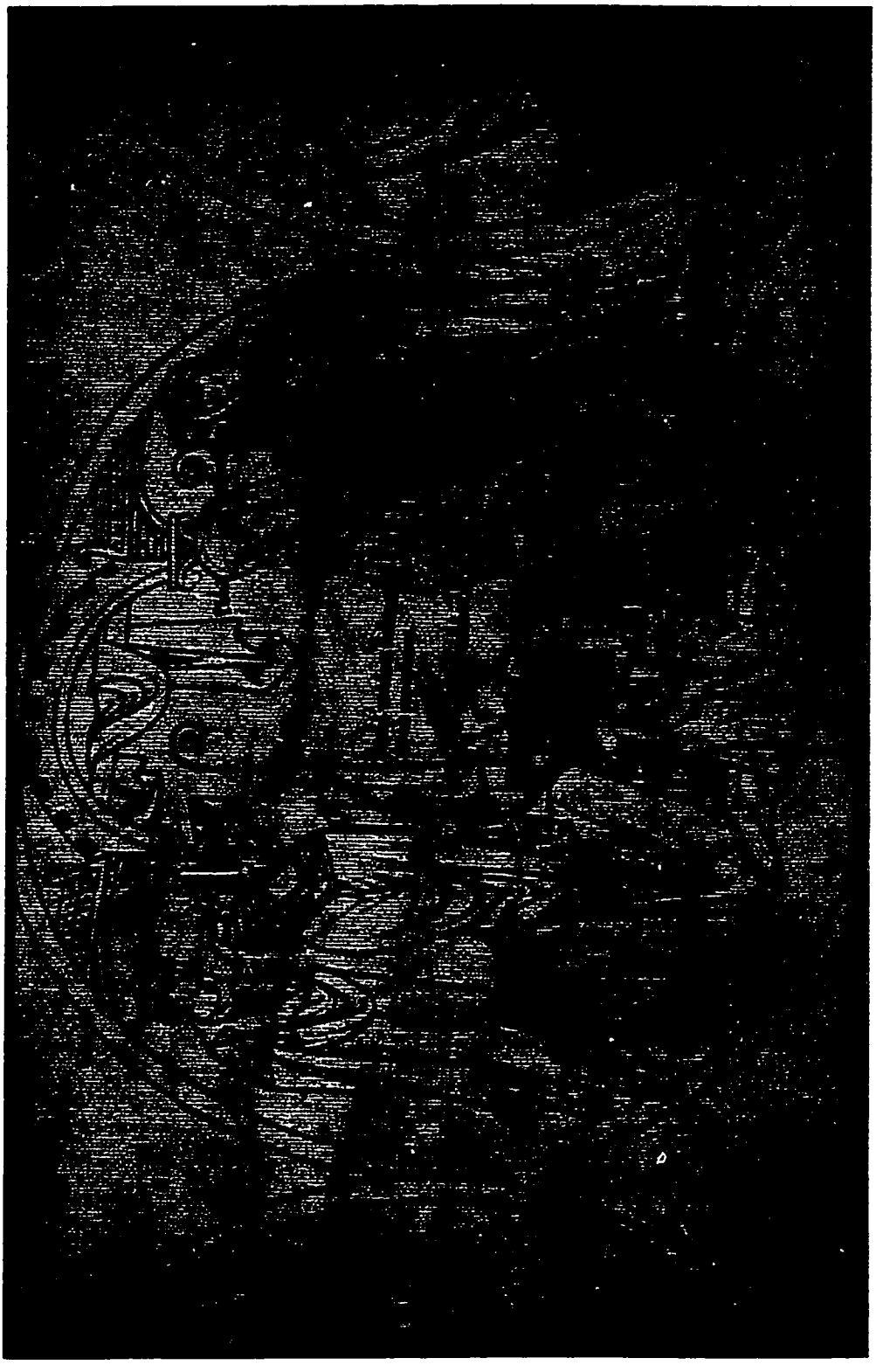

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Celtic Tradition In Liturgical Practice: The Irish Synthesis

Prolegomena

When I began this dissertation the distinctive Celtic tonsure had been discussed as a manifestation of the distinctive nature of the Celtic churches. There was some speculation on the form of tonsure, its derivation and meaning. Since that time the concept of a Celtic Church has been rejected and along with it, the significance of tonsure distinctiveness has been minimized. As Wendy Davies has summed up in "The Myth of the Celtic Church"[1]: "For all the complexities of this issue, it is clear that diversity was normal in Europe in the seventh and eighth centuries, and that diversity within Celtic areas is perfectly well evidenced: the British were often seen as deviant, but not all Irish followed the same practice anyway."[2]

The fact remains that some ripple of controversy was stirred in the seventh century in relation to how clerical hair was sheared and insightful work has been done in recent years to address that tonsure controversy. Examinations of Bede and Irish medieval studies have progressed in light of the increasing availability of rich source material attracting a great deal of attention to certain areas of Irish history. As a result the study of the tonsure has to a certain extent come to be more balanced.

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[1] Wendy Davies, "The Myth of the Celtic Church," The Early Church in Wales and the West, ed. Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxbow Monograph 16: 1992), 12-21

[2] Ibid., 17

In an earlier part of this waning century, scholars thought the peculiar hairstyle that gave rise to the tonsure controversy of the British Isles was, doubtless, a borrowing from some old nationalistic tradition of druids and warriors. Phillipe Gobillot composed a paragraph on the phenomenon of *"La tonsure celtique"* ("Celtic tonsure"), in his *"Sur la Tonsure Chrétienne et ses prétendues origines païennes"*[3] ("On the Christian tonsure and its supposed pagan origins"). He had no hesitation describing what it looked like, and the nature of its origins. *"C'était, sans doute, plus ou moins modifié, un emprunt à une vieille tradition nationales des druides et des guerriers."*[4] ("It was undoubtedly, perhaps somewhat altered, proof of an ancient national tradition of the druids and the warriors.") Ironically this article was seminal in dispelling the accepted notion that Christian tonsure originally derived from the pagan ritual of shaving priests in Mediterranean lands.

After speculating about the variance in form between the Roman and Celtic tonsures, Louis Gougaud concluded that the origin of the latter form "was probably an insular invention." He ventured a theory similar to that expressed by Gobillot to explain insular reluctance to adopt the Roman tonsure: "It is probable then that the tonsure to which the insular clergy clung with such infatuation rests ultimately on some national tradition."[5] He

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[3] Ph. Gobillot, *"Sur la Tonsure Chrétienne et ses prétendues origines païennes,"* Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique *Tome* 21 (1925): 399-454

[4] Ibid., 440

[5] Louis Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic Lands transl. M. Joynt (London: 1932), 204

believed that Celts had a whole set of secular tonsures, but went no further to substantiate that hypothesis.

Louis Gougaud entertained the connection between the Celtic tonsure and that of the druids, an idea suggested by an interpretive reading of Bede and other available sources at the time. A basis for this from the druid side had been explored by Maud Joynt in her article trying to decipher the phrase "airbacc giunnae" which appears in a passage in Tírechán's Life of Patrick: "From this passage it seems that the native name given to the druidic tonsure [*norma magica*] was *airbacc giunnae* . . . words interpreted as 'frontal curve of the tonsure'"[6] Gougaud related this conclusion to Rev. John Dowden's article examining "original documents" to inform a picture of the actual cut of the "Celtic" tonsure.[7]

Dowden's argument for his representation rings untrue in the light of contemporary understanding of the source material of this period. He relied upon Bede, the *Canonum Hibernensis* and other sources too skewed to the Roman point of view to give a reliable depiction of the appearance of any tonsure preferred by the insular clergy.

In fact the documentary sources yield little in the way of illustration of the authentic tonsure, although recent scholarly efforts have found that

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[6] Maud Joynt, "*Airbacc giunnae*," Ériu X (1928): 130-134

[7] John Dowden, "An Examination of Original Documents On The Question of the Form of the Celtic Tonsure," Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 30 (1895-6): 327-37, in which he interprets the form to be a patch of hair shorn from the top of the cleric's head from

"some indirect evidence for the shape of the Celtic tonsure is provided in the law texts"[8] and other reliable Irish sources.

One recent study follows Gobillot and Gougaud. Concerned with a history of the tonsure within the institution of the Church, Louis Trichet wrote *La Tonsure, Vie et Mort d'une Pratique ecclésiastique* ("The Tonsure, the Life and Death of an Ecclesiastic Practice") in 1990. He recounted the schism between the Roman practice and that of the Irish, beginning with Saint Patrick's disapproval, first as a rift and then as a dissension on the part of the Irish clergy. He too cited those sources which likened the insular practice with that of Simon Magus, magi in general and the druids.

> *"En fait, les moines prenaient la place des druides païens, sortes de magiciens qui tenaient le rôle de chefs religieux. Il n'est pas étonnant qu'ils aient adopté comme marque extérieure de leur fonction la coiffure caractéristique de leurs prédécesseurs, s'il est permis d'utiliser ce terme. Naturellement, cette rasure sur le devant de la tête faisait contraste avec les cheveux courts que la tradition imposait aux clercs depuis les origines. Patrice le premier trouva tout à fait inconvenant que les serviteurs de Dieu imitent les sorciers païens et il ordonna aux ecclésiastiques irlandais de se conformer à l'usage romain."*[9]
> "In fact, the monks took the place of the pagan druids, [who were] sort of magicians who held the role of religious leaders. It is surprising that they adopted the hair style characteristic of their predecessors, if it is permissible to use this term, as the exterior sign of their function. Naturally the shaving of the front of the head contrasted with the short hair that had been imposed on clerics from the beginning. Patrick was

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ear to ear leaving hair in front and behind. The shaved part would have looked like a crescent moon worn as a cap.

[8] William Sayers, "Early Irish Attitudes toward Hair and Beards, Baldness and Tonsure," *Zeitschrift fiir Celtische Philologie Band* 44 (1991): 181n.72

[9] Louis Trichet, *La Tonsure, Vie et Mort d'une Pratique Ecclésiastique (Paris: Cerf Editions, 1990)*: 87

> the first to find it inappropriate that the servants of God imitated the pagan sorcerers and he demanded that the Irish churchmen conform to Roman usage."

Trichet was so convinced of the Irish tonsure's derivation from druidic tonsure that he depicted Irish clerics imitating pagan sorcerers. Yet there exists little evidence about the druids or their practices and certainly none which describes their appearance. This idea has been compelling to more than a few historians since Bede, but the evidence does not support it. A dispassionate reading of the sources reveals no reliable description of a druid's hairstyle. But this theory may be useful to support the ideas that the tonsure embodies: an insular connection with the pre-Christian past.

Trichet and the earlier scholars concerned with what lay behind the tonsure controversy in terms of form and ideas were hampered by the inaccessibility of sources. With new understanding about insular sources, and a widening of methodologies with which to utilize them, scholars have taken a new look at this issue.

Two recent papers have redressed the earlier imbalance in the sources. Each has a more expansive focus, employing methods and ideas informed by related fields. Edward James has interpreted "the significance of hair and its cutting in society as a whole," or at least in early medieval continental and English society.[10] William Sayers has done that for Ireland and to a certain extent the other celtic societies.[11]

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[10] Edward James, "Bede and the Tonsure Question," *Peritia*, vol. 3, (1984): 85-98

Edward James began his essay on the tonsure controversy by pointing out that "indeed the whole early history of the tonsure has never attracted the attention which it deserves", quoting Bede: *"nam et de hoc quaestio non minima erat"*[12] ("this was no small issue"). His history of hair and haircutting mainly focused on the custom and laws of the Germanic societies of the continent and England.

Informed by anthropological concepts he maintained that tonsure was "an element in a process of status elevation": "This system only became fully established within the framework of the barbarian kingdoms. It is there that the idea of a specifically shaped clerical tonsure, which many in Bede's day felt was of crucial importance, was established."[13] From James' point of view, the *corona,* a shaved circle at the top of the head, was the shape of choice for the Visigothic church and then for the church in England. The emphasis on the *corona* "was born out of the need for church unity, out of a need to find a symbol of orthodoxy in a church that was threatened by rival beliefs. . . . the adoption of a particular tonsure was the outward expression of membership of a single unified church."[14]

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[11] Sayers "Early Irish Attitudes," 154-189

[12] Ibid., 85; Bede, History of the English Church and People, transl. Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955) III.26, p. 193

[13] Ibid., II.1, p.95

[14] Ibid., II.1, p. 97

"As Ceolfrith said, there had been no controversies about the tonsure at the time of the church fathers; the controversy only arose in the seventh century, out of the accidental conjuncture of disparate hairstyles and beliefs, and within a society which took more regard of such external signs than had the imperial world of the fourth and fifth centuries." James saw the major issues of the seventh century as that of Easter calculation and ecclesiastical organization particularly the Episcopal power structure. He found tonsure to be "seen by individuals on both sides as a way of publicising their allegiance," and found that "in the middle of the seventh century it may have contributed much to the bitterness of the dispute which split the newly established English church down the middle and was . . . threatening its very existence."[15]

Indeed the seventh century was pivotal, but it's significance must be pursued more fully. It is reductive to perceive the tonsure as mere publicity.

William Sayers has applied a wealth of literary sources and a variety of approaches to the subject. He used the Irish law tracts and the Welsh tales; he looked back at the Indo-European roots of things Irish, and forward to an Orkney saga of 1200, recalling events of the 1130's. He studied various celtic sources concluding that there must have been something in the nature of celtic society that used the hair as a sign of status.

"The central importance attached to hair and beards as social and legal indicators, and the apparent categorization of hair styles, perhaps in a

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[15] Ibid., II.1, p. 97-98

taxonomy more rigorously organized than the available evidence would indicate, explain why Celtic ecclesiastics resisted the introduction of the Roman tonsures as vigorously as they did that of the Roman system for determining the date of Easter, both symbolic of the greater question of ecclesiastic organization."[16] Here it appears that Sayers has agreed with James. He has also exchanged the idea that the Irish tonsure was a druidic tonsure with the concept that it displaced and replaced the druidic tonsure. "Christian monastic tonsure appears to have supplanted the druidic tonsure, yet another example of the assumption of pagan forms into Christian practice, with the accompanying doctrinal justification and legitimation. Both represented sacrifices in return for initiation to knowledge and a community of a higher order." He concluded that the tonsure controversy was a bid by Rome and the Roman party of the English Church to "bring Ireland and the Irish houses in Britain into the fold of orthodoxy". And taking the Irish point of view, he has demonstrated that it was a threat to "the synchronic axis of social structure, where the taxonomy of hair styles gave clear indication of social class and function."[17]

Ultimately what James and Sayers have done is to re-approach the insular tonsure seeing it as an element in the larger issue of the ecclesiastical organization of the church.

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[16] Sayers, "Early Irish Attitudes," 182

[17] Ibid., 189

As extensive as this work is there is more that tonsure has to tell us about Irish society. What is of interest to me is that those who insisted on the Irish tonsure *with such infatuation* were linking themselves spiritually to their Christian predecessors through their native tradition. This imperfectly documented issue is an indicator of how Irish society was as deeply rooted in its heritage as dynamic in its experience of the medieval synthesis.

It was through tonsure that the Irish indicated their ethnic identity at the same time as they marked their Christianity. From the Irish point of view, tonsure was a flag of faction carried over from the pre-Christian society. In this way they simultaneously converted to a new belief system and transmitted their native traditions. They distinguished themselves from the Roman orthodoxy that saw practice as a question of right or wrong and allowed no diversity. However, I do not believe that ecclesiastical organization was the concern of the Irish who retained the Irish tonsure. They were maintaining a tie with their forefathers, their Irish Church fathers, in spirit just as their native traditions had taught them to build on the past, transmitting and modifying, retaining and adjusting. Their practice resulting from the accretion of custom and culture, Christianity was the latest stage for the Irish in a cumulative exploration of man's place in the cosmos.

Celtic Tradition In Liturgical Practice: The Irish Synthesis

Chapter 1: Irish Tonsure

In 664 Colman, abbot of Lindisfarne, enjoined by King Oswiu of Northumbria, advised a council held at the Abbey of Whitby in Mercia regarding Christian liturgical practice. That meeting came to be known as the Synod of Whitby. The King was trying to decide which of the two current modes of Christian ecclesiastical practice should prevail in his kingdom and the recently annexed Mercia. Colman spoke for Irish custom on the issues of clerical tonsure and calculation of the date of Easter. He maintained that he followed the long-standing custom of his venerated predecessors which pre-dated the practice of the Roman churchmen. Agilbert, Bishop of the West Saxons and Wilfrid, a prominent English churchman, presented the orthodox point of view which recognized only the practice of Rome as correct observance. Theirs was the tonsure of St. Peter and only that tonsure was acceptable. Roman opposition to Irish practice came to be called the tonsure and Paschal controversies. King Oswiu sought to resolve those controversies for his domain; and he found Wilfrid's arguments to be persuasive.

The outcome of the council was meant to establish uniformity of practice in Northumbria in accordance with the practice of Rome. Oswiu and his successors did for the most part continue to support the primacy of Rome in practice. Yet they also maintained ties with Lindisfarne's parent foundation at Iona from which Northumbria was initially converted and

whose monks retained Irish tonsure and Easter dating long after the Synod of Whitby. Colman left Lindisfarne, as a result of the Synod of Whitby, followed by the Irish monks of Lindisfarne as well as thirty English monks choosing to perpetuate Irish practice, and established a monastic foundation back in Ireland. Wilfrid fell out of favor with the royalty of Northumbria before he could succeed Colman at Lindisfarne. The tonsure and Easter controversies persisted. The Irish tonsure was worn at Iona down into the next century.

The Synod of Whitby has been interpreted as representing a turning point in medieval history. Historians have long considered it the moment when the universal church displaced the more local Irish church in the British Isles and went on to dominate the culture of Europe. According to studies of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*[18], documentation from Roman church sources and the Roman-oriented *Canonum Hibernensis*[19], the impact of the Roman church was augmented by the Synod of Whitby. The dismissal of Colman and the preference for Roman practice by Oswiu have been extrapolated by historians to mean the immediate cessation of Irish liturgical practice in Europe and a concomitant ebb of the Irish element in insular culture. From that perspective Ireland's place in medieval history has been relegated to fragmentary influences and momentary contacts. However there

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[18]Bede, History of the English Church and People, translated Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955)

[19] *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*,,*Die irische Kanonensammlung*, 2nd ed., ed. F.W.H. Wasserschleben, (Leipzig: Verlag, 1885, reprint Aalen, 1966), this Irish collection of canons

is call for a revised approach to what took place at Whitby, which after all was neither a binding council nor a Church synod.[20] Further investigation of the sources reveals the persistence of an Irish synthesis of native tradition, classical tradition and Christianity in the Hiberno-Saxon culture of this period. The development of that synthesis and its dissemination produced a unique and important aspect of medieval history.

This dissertation is an investigation of the foundation of that synthesis, as understood through the challenges to it in the seventh-century tonsure controversy. It demonstrates that:

- the nature and context of Irish Christianity differed from the orthodoxy of Roman Christianity and built upon Celtic tradition through a process of accretion, and
- Irish tonsure served to signal Irish Christian identity, deriving symbolism through that process of accretion, and
- this instigated the tonsure controversy with those who did not practice the Irish form of Christianity.

The Irish synthesis resulted from the manner in which the Irish adopted Christianity. Although is was different than the adoption of Christianity experienced by the British, there were correspondences. Both the British and the Irish maintained that some of their shared practices, like tonsure, predated the primacy of Rome and were more venerable. The

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compiled in the early eighth century, includes material from earlier sources like Irish and non-Irish synodal decrees, biblical quotations and exegesis.

[20] Margaret Pepperdene, "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, A New Perspective," Celtica vol. IV (1958): 253-62

tonsure they shared had particular relevance for distinguishing the wearer from the Roman clerics and tying him to this older, more venerable tradition. I shall refer to this tonsure as Irish tonsure for purposes of this paper although it was worn by Irish, British[21] and even English Christians who followed some practices distinct from those of Rome. It is the development and use of this tonsure by the Irish on which this dissertation is focused. Despite similarity of practice the British and Irish Christians were held in very different regard by the Romans and English as Bede made clear in no uncertain terms. At no point did the British, Irish, English or Romans see the practices of Easter dating and tonsure as aspects of a Celtic Church.[22] What the

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[21] There has been a question as to whether the Britons took up the Irish style because they were Celtic. Jane Stevenson in her introduction to F.E. Warren, The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church, 2nd ed., ed. Jane Stevenson (New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1987), xi, compares the English and the Irish ethnic identities: "The Anglo-Saxons had a well developed sense of ethnic identity, and were very much aware of their Germanic roots. This provided at least some part of the impulse towards evangelising the pagans of Germany. Irish sources do not appear to express an equivalent sense of celticity. See for instance F.J. Byrne, "Senchas," p.144: 'the Irish preserved no tradition of being Celts, and neither did the Welsh. The medieval pseudo-historical theories about their origin did not connect them either with one another or with the ancient Gauls.'" Also refers to F.J Byrne: "Tribes & tribalism." But their art certainly did connect them with their Celtic past and perhaps, identity. It would seem that the Irish identity expressed itself on a non-verbal rather than a verbal level: through gesture, art, ritual, custom.

[22] Richard Sharpe, "Gildas as a Father of the Church," in Gildas: New Approaches, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Dover, N.H.: Boydell Press, 1984), 201, "the question of whether or not there ever was a 'Celtic Church' cannot be answered by comparing a model of the Irish Church with one of the Welsh Church. Our models are not sufficiently accurate, and the evidence from different areas is too disparate in date and character to allow genuinely comparable models to be framed. From the seventh century onwards, the Celtic Churches are developing in different directions: but our evidence concerning Gildas, 'Vinnian', and Columbanus is enough to support the view that for a time the Celtic Churches shared one mind. Only this can explain the similarity of the historical problems presented by the regional Churches of the seventh and later centuries."

British and Irish shared was a pre-Vulgate Latin culture[23] and written traditions made up of common material. Rather than a shared Celtic Church, the ecclesiastical development of Ireland, Wales, Brittany and Cornwall drew upon common sources and grew up in connection with one another. There was a temporal factor to their interrelationship. As a result of British missions similarities in institutions and practices in Celtic lands were more pronounced in the fifth and sixth centuries than in the following centuries. The original British practices were drawn from continental practices that became obsolete there with the developments in Rome. By the later sixth and seventh centuries Ireland, Wales, Brittany and Cornwall grew apart as their Christianity diverged in response to independent internal and external exigencies.

This dissertation will examine the tonsure controversy specifically from the point of view of the Irish Christians. Of immediate attention in this First Chapter, Irish Tonsure, is how the Irish saw themselves as a group and why it was so important for them to hold onto their singular practice.

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[23] "...there was in many respects a shared Latin culture for several centuries in Wales, Cornwall, Ireland and to some extent Brittany: clerics and monks were studying the same Latin works, using the same terms, thinking within the same conceptual framework, and using similar biblical texts, related to the older *Vetus Latina* rather than the Vulgate. They studied within the framework of a learning that was biblical and patristic rather than classical, a learning sometimes strongly influenced by the late classical grammatical tradition. Their approach to ecclesiastical status and to the place of the church in politics and society was heavily influenced by the Old Testament and by Mosaic Law in particular. ... We find the word *refugium* used for sanctuary, in its territorially expanded western sense of a specially protected zone where special penalties applied for infringements, taken from Leviticus *'civitates refugii'*; this is an Old Testament usage, but a usage not taken up on the continent, although immunities as such were common enough." Wendy Davies, "The Myth of the Celtic Church," in The Early

From the perspective of the Church of Rome, Irish/British practice was tolerated, even encouraged by the policies of Gregory I, but fell into disfavor and was regarded more like heterodoxy over time. This shift was played out in the seventh-century and is discussed in my Second Chapter, Tonsure Controversy.

In my Third Chapter, Tonsure within Irish Christianity, I discuss the nature and context of Irish Christianity which engendered the Irish synthesis.

Essential to this study are the concepts of tradition ethnicity, and symbolism, because the meeting of Roman Christianity and Irish Christianity was also a meeting of a written tradition with an oral tradition, two distinct systems of symbolism and two distinct ethnic groups.

There was a unique relationship between the pre-Christian past and Insular Christianity. It was expressed in Hiberno-Saxon culture and was facilitated by the Irish synthesis. One element of the Irish synthesis was native tradition. That tradition carried with it a group identity. Upon becoming Christian, the Irish had to reinforce their identity, which they did by creating boundaries. The Irish practice of tonsure was used to maintain their ethnic boundary.

Fredrik Barth's anthropological study of ethnicity can bring insight to this issue. His work approaches concepts of group identity from the point of

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Church in Wales and the West, Recent Work in Early Christian Archaeology, History and Place-Names, ed. Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxbow Monograph 16, 1992), 18-19

view of the social boundary by which a group defines itself rather than the "cultural stuff that it encloses":

> If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion. Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories; and the different ways in which they are maintained, not only by a once-and-for-all recruitment but by continual expression and validation, need to be analysed.[24]

In doing so, Barth points out:

> The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant. ...the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change - yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.[25]

Although neither the Irish nor the British descendants of the continental Celts regarded themselves as Celts, or felt themselves to be kindred of one another, each of these groups maintained their specific group identity when interacting with outsiders, such as English or Gallic neighbors. Bede recorded a complaint about the Scots and the British by Laurence,

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[24] Fredrik Barth, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries," in Selected Essays of Fredrik Barth: Volume 1, Process and Form in Social Life, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 204

[25] *Ibid.*, 202, 203

Augustine's successor to the see of Canterbury, which reflects the experience of being on the receiving end of British and Irish dichotomization:

> Until we realized the true situation, we had a high regard for the devotion both of the Britons and of the Scots, believing that they followed the customs of the universal Church. On further acquaintance with the Britons, we imagined that the Scots must be better. We have now, however, learned through Bishop Dagan [Irish Bishop from Wexford] on his visit to this island, and through Abbot Columbanus in Gaul, that the Scots are no different from the Britons in their practices. For when Bishop Dagan visited us, he refused not only to eat with us but even to take his meal in the same house as ourselves.[26]

Dagan was willing to meet with his fellow bishop professionally but he would not socialize more casually. Continuing dichotomization was a feature of the Irish conversion to Christianity as they began to share their religious sector of activity with other ethnic groups. The Irish tonsure was a cultural feature that served as a boundary. It was a variation on the hair ritual, a cultural rite in use from very early times for initiation and identification.

Another anthropologically informed category of ethnic identification is the symbol. For the ancient continental Celts it was the symbol system of the head which provided the major cultural differentiae for the Celtic ethnic boundary. For it was the head and its accompanying extensive symbolism which to the Celts signified the frontier between man and the cosmos, the supernatural, the spirit world. The head intermediated between the human and the spiritual; it bounded the mortal and led to the spiritual, and so it

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[26] Bede II.4, p. 106

defined the one and connected it to the other. The head was key for humankind's inter-relations with the cosmos, and the Celts' inter-relations with the outside world. Any alteration or adornment of the head was referent to the entire symbolism the Celt attached to the head. Tonsure and shaving as well as decapitation drew their meanings from the head's implied power.

Sherry Ortner is an anthropologist whose work has been concerned with interpreting symbols and how societies use them. She defines two categories that are key: summarizing symbols and elaborating symbols.[27] She sees the first as static, summing up the identity of the group. For the Celts, the head had that role. The Celt invested the head with meaning that every Celt would recognize. The head was the vehicle, the intermediary between man and the supernatural; through it the Celt obtained his understanding of man's place in the cosmos. Elaborating symbols are more active and may be key scenarios which place and order a great many social concepts for a group. Haircutting was such a scenario for the Celts. It was a ritual which amplified the structure of their society: building upon the meanings contained in its head symbol system to delineate stature and nature within the group. Tonsure functioned as an elaborating symbol at a time of great transition for the Irish. Adopting an outside belief system entailed intensive ethnic inter-relations so they used the tonsure as they had always used ritual head

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[27] Sherry Ortner, "On Key Symbols," American Anthropologist, vol. 75, #5, (October 1973): 1338-1345

adornment: to call up their ultimate place in the scheme of existence. Such symbolism was most vital in the context of the Celtic religious tradition and apart from Christian teaching. Where this was understood there was conflict, for the symbolism behind the tonsure ritual belonged to two separate traditions. "A religious tradition consists of a ritual and an art as well as a mythology, and each of these components is intelligible in terms of the others. Symbols, whether they be myths or ceremonies or objects, reveal their full significance only within a particular tradition."[28] Tonsure revealed its full significance for the Irish within the particular intersection of native tradition and Christian religion.

The underlying rationale for the categorization of any group by ethnicity is extremely important for understanding the relationship between groups. That Irish Christians clung to certain liturgical practices divergent from the Roman custom was a result of their distinct ethnic bases. Despite conversion to Christianity the Irish had a society and a culture that stemmed from their group identity. That identity was not assailed by Christianity, and remaining intact despite the influx of a new system of belief it retained dominant status in the Irish world. Fredrik Barth has pointed out the priority status of ethnic identity:

> ...regarded as a status, ethnic identity is superordinate to most other statuses, and defines the permissible constellations of statuses, or social personalities, which an individual with that identity may assume.

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[28] Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales, (London and N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1961, Reprint 1989), 25

> ...One might thus also say that it is imperative, in that it cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside by other definitions of the situation.[29]

Upon becoming Christian, the Irish had to reinforce their ethnic boundaries as they were now sharing their religious sector of activity with other ethnic groups. But they also had to create a pivotal basis upon which to carry out a dialogue with the newly adopted Christian Church. The boundary was maintained by the head symbol system, a cultural image utilized from very early times as an identifying demarcation. The classical authors associated the continental Celts with head cults, headhunting, and the veneration of the head and skull; the various Celtic groups of the British Isles, unaware of their Celtic ancestry, also appear to attach great importance to the head. Like their continental counterparts, they left behind remains of head monuments and sanctification of the head, as well as a body of oral tradition that depicts the importance of the head as symbolic of the relations between man and the supernatural. The pivotal basis for interaction with the Christian Church was the symbolic tonsure, both a Christian symbolic liturgical practice and an Irish practice evocative of the key symbol system of head-imagery.

Irish society was heir to centuries of Celtic development that may be traced back to the La Tène stage of the Celtic Iron Age, 500 B.C. - A.D. 1[30], and beyond, in certain aspects, to the Halstatt culture of c.1100-500 B.C.[31]

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[29] Barth, "Ethnic Groups," 206

The Celts were a branch of Indo-Europeans with a common linguistic base, "a single Celtic language spoken on the Continent for some two or three millennia before it broke up into successor languages in the first millennia BC"[32]. Their continuity as a group and their ethnic bond was effected more by their chosen association, their shared language, social mores and culture than bloodlines. Migration, intermarriage and conquest over time distanced the later Celtic peoples genetically from those first Celts who emerged from Central Europe. Yet social institutions and cultural characteristics persisted.[33] "The presumptive origin of these peoples seems to lie partially in the inhabitants of north-Alpine Europe designated by archaeologists by reason of their burial rites as 'Urnfield' people."[34] Migratory for many centuries, groups of Celts moved West across Europe from what is now Hungary to cross the

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[30] Carole Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure: The Generation of Archaeologically Testable Hypotheses from Literary Evidence," Anthropological Papers #54, (Ann Arbor: Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 1974): 33ff, good historiography of the work on chronology for this second period of the Celtic Iron Age. The sources determining the periodization of this stage have been artifacts, burial practices and art styles. See page 34: "The difficulties encountered in comparing these various chronologies are considerable. Each period, if defined on the basis of stylistic changes, varies from one area of Europe to another and from one region of France to another. That variation has simply not been described for each region, and without consistently reliable data from many more sites in France than are presently available, a group of more accurate regional chronologies cannot be developed."

[31] Celtic development was cumulative so that later cultural expression reflected earlier circumstance, prompting Kenneth Jackson's interpretation of the Ulster cycle's redactions as "a window on the Iron Age".

[32] T.M. Charles Edwards, Early Irish and Welsh Kinship, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1f

[33] *Ibid.*; T.G.E. Powell, The Celts, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), Chapter 1; J.J. Tierney, "The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius," Proc. Royal Irish Academy, 60, § C, #5 (1959-60): 189-275

[34] Anne Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 9

English channel and then the Irish Sea.[35] They settled down after having expanded to the limits of Western Europe: Ireland, Wales and Scotland. In Ireland, 100 A.D. saw a Celtic society associated with a sedentary culture and having absorbed some of the culture of its particular local environment. Ireland was beyond the grasp of Germanic and Roman institutions and interest, on the brink of the Atlantic Ocean. Roman and Germanic influence could still be received but not imposed. Through their new environment they turned to new forms of subsistence, new social structures. Although arrival in their insular home was a turning point in Irish-Celtic history, the continuity of prior traditions remained at the center of Irish life. That pattern of accretion, innovation intertwined with continuity, remained a persistent aspect of Irish cultural development.

The advent of Christianity in Ireland has been a matter of speculation. The chronicler Prosper of Acquitaine records that in the year 431: *"Ad Scottos*

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[35] *Lebor Gabala*, "Book of Invasions," an eleventh century copy of a long transmitted history of the invasions of Ireland, is now considered mythological and pseudo-historical, its genealogies politically motivated, establishing the foundation for local political domination through ancestry. "If the search for large-scale 'invasions' in the Irish archaeological record proves negative, it is perhaps more advisable to see the arrival of Indo-European or Celtic-speaking peoples as a gradual process which took place not at one fell swoop causing great upheavals in society, but peacefully over hundreds if not thousands of years--Hawkes's concept of 'cumulative Celticity'. The process may well have begun during the early Bronze Age, but an effort by James Mallory to achieve even the smallest degree of consensus among Irish archaeologists and linguists on the matter led only to the premise that the arrival of the Celts in Ireland was less likely to have taken place in the second rather than in the first millennium B.C. With this uncertainty we should possibly see the similarities between the Ulster cycle of tales and the Celtic society as described by Posidonius around 100 B.C. as containing a considerable number of traits inherited from some earlier common ancestors." Peter Harbison, Pre-Christian Ireland, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 171-2

in Christum credentes ordinatus a papa Caelestino Palladius primus episcopus mittitur ('Consecrated by Pope Celestine, Palladius is sent as the first bishop to the Irish who believe in Christ')."[36] Who those very first Irish Christians were and the nature of their conversion is a matter of conjecture. For how long before 431 there were Irish Christians is also unknown. Perhaps there was more than one source of Christianity. In the third century trade and cultural contacts existed between the continental and insular Celts. There is also reason to believe that an initial contact may have taken place at Leinster just opposite to the northwest coast of Wales through contact with British Christians.[37] By the fifth century the Roman Church reached out to the insular Celts in order to continue the conversion of the British Isles. Germanus of Auxerre was sent to Britons in Wales in 429 (to counteract the heretical teachings of Pelagius[38]) at the time that Palladius was on his mission to Ireland. Palladius went to a different part of the island than Patrick, thus there seems to have been two different fledgling Christian communities already in existence.

For re-evaluation of the Indo-European expansion as a result of peaceful diffusion of agriculture rather than aggression, see Colin Renfrew, "The Origins of Indo-European Languages," Scientific American, (October 1989): 106-114

[36] Michael Richter, Medieval Ireland, The Enduring Tradition, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1983), 43, also 47ff, for the beginnings of Christianity in Ireland according to the evidence of Latin loan words

[37] Richter, Medieval Ireland, 47

[38] Pelagius was a British monk (411-18) who interpreted divine grace as supplemental to human righteousness and rejected the doctrines of original sin and predestination. C.W.

The Church had to appeal to the Irish through their own traditions, since they had been cut off from the cultural developments of the continent, and had remained outside the Roman sphere even during the Roman occupation of Britain. This is reflected in the early Irish Church.[39] It was at one time early Church policy to absorb pagan festivals,[40] turn them into Christian celebrations, and to rededicate pagan holy places as Churches or shrines, a technique inherited from the conquest strategy of the Roman Empire. Pope Gregory stated this policy fully along with its rationale when he sent a mission to convert the British Isles. The Venerable Bede wrote in his History of the English Church and People, that Pope Gregory the Great in A.D. 601 asked Abbot Mellitus to convey the following instructions to Augustine, his man in Britain:

> We have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and we have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among the people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well-built, they must be

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Privité-Orton, The Shorter Cambridge Medieval History, vol.I, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 123

[39] Of course the Celtic population in Gaul, and consequently the form of its Church would have been completely Romanized. J.T. McNeill, Celtic Penitentials and Their Influence on Continental Christianity, (Paris, 1923), 11-14, tracks early Christian traces in Gaul. He points out that the ready acceptance of Celts for Christianity was related to "the general trend in the society of Gaul, in which the Celtic population with surprising alacrity acquired the essentials of the Roman Latin culture." This resulted in a certain loss of Celtic cultural integrity. "Thus in most of Gaul those factors which might have nurtured a church distinctively Celtic were obliterated. Instead, the Christian Celts of Gaul were from the first incorporated in what was becoming the imperial and papal church of the West."

[40] A policy which recurs in Church history. See The Letters of Saint Boniface, trans. Ephraim Emerton, Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies, XXXI (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), viii, 204

> purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God. And since they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to demons, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place, such as a day of Dedication or the festivals of the holy martyrs whose relics are enshrined there. On such occasions they might well construct shelters of boughs for themselves around the churches that were once temples, and celebrate the solemnity with devout feasting. They are no longer to sacrifice beasts to the Devil, but they may kill them for food to the praise of God, and give thanks to the Giver of all gifts for the plenty they enjoy. If the people are allowed some worldly pleasures in this way, they will more readily come to desire the joys of the spirit. For it is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb a mountain top climbs gradually step by step, and not in one leap.[41]

More than mere architecture would be retained by a society converted in such a way. As far as the conversion that Irish society experienced, the structures and forms of much of pre-Christian Irish life were preserved by Irish Christians and, in some cases, incorporated into the Irish Church.[42] No controversy arose as these threads were first interlaced. The result was a fabric distinctive in character from that of the Roman Church in Gaul or

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[41] Gregory's Epistles XI.56, in Bede, I.30, pp. 86-87

[42] Jean Markale, *Le Christianisme Celtiques et ses Survivances Populaires* (Paris: Editions Imago, 1983), 87ff; Some more recent coverage of pre-Christian survivals in early Christianity delve into underlying motivations for retaining pre-Christian beliefs. A couple of examples: Michel Picard, "The strange death of Guaire Mac Áedáin," in Sages, Saints and Storytellers, Celtic Studies in Honor of Professor James Carney, ed. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 373, sees the use of earlier lore in hagiography as method for Christian beliefs to supplant pre-Christian beliefs. Pádraig Ó Riain interprets the retaining of the older cultural forms in the language of the Irish church as a method for preserving legal status in, "Conservation in the Vocabulary of the Early Irish Church," Sages, Saints and Storytellers, Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney, ed. Donnchadh ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 358-366

Spain in Merovingian times. That fabric reflected the condition of an imported religion adjusting to its new milieu. Investigators, like Kathleen Hughes have pointed out the complex nature of early Christianity in Ireland: "the Church, though conscious of its moral separateness, is in process of integration with the customs of a pagan society."[43] The process seemed parallel to that by which Roman secular forms and pre-Christian spiritual forms were incorporated into the early Christian Church of Rome (e.g. Roman basilica, Roman law, etc.). But as the Irish Church established itself as an integrated part of the society, the elements of synthesis within it came to challenge some of the practices and authority of the Church of Rome. The very methods of conversion used by the Roman Church throughout Europe fostered conflict for it in Ireland. By incorporating the structures of the beliefs of Celtic culture into Christianity the Roman Church was sowing the seeds of variance into the Irish Church. The Celtic tradition provides a key to the interpretation of some of the underlying conflicts between the Roman and Irish Churches.

The pronounced Celtic element in the Church, however, as it established itself in Ireland had as much to do with the nature of Irish society as the receptivity of the Church for foreign practices. For "in spite of the very large number of petty political units, early Ireland was unified in law and

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[43] Kathleen Hughes, The Church in Early Irish Society, (London: Methuen, 1966), 53

culture."[44] That unity carried with it a highly sophisticated Celtic tradition with social and artistic forms going back to 500 B.C. At the same time that Gregory advocated the transposing of non-Christian foundations into the newly established religion, the Irish social structure was providing a place of honor for its new Church within its own organization. When it came to Ireland, the Christian Church, with its priests and monasteries, fit into a place already carved out in the society. The *sui littre,* Doctor of the Sacred Text, came to rank equally in stature with the pagan *ollamh,* highest rank, of scholar who spent twelve years training.[45] Christian clergymen took their place beside the pagan Irish learned men, a niche reserved for their class in the society. Christian clergymen traveled freely, assured of protection, outside the *tuath,* the subdivision of the political and legal structure of early Ireland. Prior to the advent of Christianity this was an exclusive privilege of poets, judges, historians, artisans and chieftains. Irish society had a long tradition which encouraged exchange of ideas and communication of knowledge. This was reflected in the nature of its first adoption of writing: "A common written form of Irish, in use from Munster in the south to the Irish colonies in Scotland in the far north, ignored dialect differences in the vernacular

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[44] Liam de Paor, "The Christian Triumph: The Golden Age," in Treasures of Early Irish Art, 1500 B.C. to 1500 A.D., (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977), 94

[45] Eoin McNeill, "Ancient Irish Law: the Law of Status or Franchise," Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, xxxvi (1923): C: 313

speech and provided a means of transmitting ideas and tradition."[46] The Irish Church became a part of the mechanism of unification by accepting a place within the already existing institutions, legal and cultural. The Irish Church, by joining Irish society, also brought Irish customs into its own practice.

The very nature of the conversion of Ireland gave its new Church an inherent flexibility. Although the first Christians sent by Rome to convert Ireland brought with them the concept of episcopal organization for the Irish Church, the practice eventually varied and the structural format of the Church changed.[47] By the sixth century the Roman Church was striving for uniformity in organization and practice under the papacy. Nevertheless administration of religious units was independent yet cooperative in Ireland, deviating from Roman administrative structure in which even the smallest units participated in a carefully organized hierarchy. Since Ireland had no urban centers nor centralized governmental institutions its new Christianity could not maintain precisely the same structure as the continental Church. The Church established in Rome imitated imperial administration and had a distinct legal definition. The Irish Church anchored itself in Irish life, a rural environment with an orally transmitted, highly sophisticated code of laws, a complex kinship system and a dynamic political situation.

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[46] de Paor, "Christian Triumph," 94

[47] Richard Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," Peritia, Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland, vol. 3, (1984): 230ff

The secular social structure of kinship hierarchy was correlated in the *paruchiae* of the Christian monastic orders. A system of *paruchiae* developed in place of territorial dioceses. The *paruchiae* was a group of monastic foundations that recognized a single authoritative figure in the person of its founder, and after his death, his designated successors. The system imitated the economic and social kinship tie organization of the *tuath*. Within this ecclesiastical system the powers of jurisdiction were held by abbots who reflected the rural environment, rather than bishops who reflected an urban society. Unlike continental Europe, Ireland had no "metropolitan" sees. As the Roman Church initially followed the administrative bureaucracy of its imperial pagan past in its form and operation, just so the Irish Church had a native legacy. The bishop of the Roman Church was an important figure in the hierarchy of ecclesiastical power. In the Irish Church the bishop's importance was limited to his special liturgical role: his status merely denoting his sacramental function. Power was wielded by the abbot who retained an ecclesiastical and social position akin to the chieftain of the *tuath*. Within the Irish hierarchy may be found its system of social and spiritual priorities. The social order of the Irish world delineated its priests, and they carried with them native beliefs, customs and priorities. The founders of monasteries, *erlama*, were imbued with the status and privilege of tutelary deities. Through their powers and their lineage the rights and property of monasteries were sustained intact.

Local Irish symbol systems, rather than Roman traditions took precedence in peoples' faith. Like the gentle conversion Gregory advocated, Christianizing of places already viewed as sacred resulted in the incorporation of the beliefs surrounding those places into Christianity, though the beliefs underwent a sea change. Classical heritage via the Gauls and the British, Christian tradition, in biblical exegesis and continental hagiographic writings, and native traditional lore worked their way into a knotwork or interlace pattern. Saints' miracles resembled the supernatural feats expected of druids and pagan gods alongside echoes of continental saints lives and biblical motifs.

What motivated the preservation of pre-Christian lore was undoubtedly multifarious. The requirements of a society taking on a new belief system and thus new associates while retaining its identity and socio/legal structures were diverse. Clerics invested in the new perspective while fitting it into the current developments of the evolving laws and social climate. Those pagan practices and beliefs that were acceptable to Christian eschatology and morality found their way into the culture of early Christian Ireland. Some customs like royal rituals would have survived because of their social urgency. Yet other practices and lore may have survived in order to be marginalized.[48]

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[48] Picard, "The strange death," 373: "In transmitting older myths as anecdotes or isolated legends within the context of a Christian system of faith, they contributed to the breaking up of an integrated system of pagan beliefs, leaving the fragments to survive as superstitions and fairy tales."

There is debate among researchers currently about the purposes of the ample pagan survivals evident in the record of early Christian Ireland. Just a few examples here make it clear that there is a good deal of flux among investigators concerning this issue. Jean-Michel Picard[49] gleans the undoing of the pagan belief system in Adomnán's life of Columba. But at the same time that work has reference to the goodness of non-Christians and a positive attitude toward the existence of a pagan past, which is discussed in my third chapter below. Jane Stevenson calls for evidence which focuses on "the integration of native and imported elements in Irish Christian culture"[50]. An answer to that call can be found in work of Pádraig Ó Riain who finds traces of the native tradition which are evidence for how that tradition served to integrate the new religion into Irish society.[51] Ó Riain examines the vocabulary of the conversion and concludes that although the Irish borrowed many words of Latin, they did not incorporate non-Irish cults into their Christianity. Because property rights were tied into the old religion through the laws, the new religion had to find a way to work with the old.

> If serious disruption of the Irish system of succession to religious office and property was to be avoided, there was no immediate alternative to the adaptation of pre-Christian local cults to meet the requirements of the new creed. It follows that those pagan deities who continued to

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[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Jane Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy in Ireland," Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Section C--Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature, Volume 89, C, Number 6(1989): 127-165

[51] Pádraig Ó Riain, "Traces of Lug in early Irish hagiographical tradition," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 36 (1977): 138-55

> inform the Irish church as *érlama* in exceptionally large numbers were retained for essentially legal reasons.[52]

For the early Christian Irish society native law was a cornerstone. It was written down in the vernacular beginning in the seventh-century. Here again there is controversy among scholars as to when the laws were written, what stimulated that writing and who wrote the laws. The collection of vernacular law and lore may have been a response to the plagues of the period as well as to the stage of conversion that Christianity had reached. Although these things are not entirely apparent, is seems evident that accommodating the law was vital to the survival of Christianity as a part of Irish society. Ó Riain shows how it was an important and integral aspect of clerical education, along with native lore:

> ...the syllabus of the ideal or exemplary Irish monastic school comprised three interacting subjects--*léigenn* 'ecclesiastical learning', *filidecht* 'poetry or native lore' and *féinechas* 'native law'. ... Latin loan-words, representing ecclesiastical learning, may account for the greater part of the technical vocabulary of the early Irish church. The native element, which seems to have largely drawn its inspiration from the language of early Irish law, was, however, by no means insignificant. The clear implication is that when a christian vocabulary was first formed in Ireland, experts in native law contributed to it. In other words, the interaction of *léigenn* and *féinechas* would now seem to be dateable to the very beginnings of Irish christianity.[53]

It is significant that Christian learning, law and other cultural expression made up the curriculum for the monks. These embody the elements of the

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[52] Ó Riain, "Conservation," 360

[53] *Ibid.*, 363

Irish synthesis and their requirement for a monk's education indicates that the preservation of native culture was intentional.

Christian religion came from the continent and then became infused with Irish traditional culture. So too did the liturgy of the Irish Church institutionalize the imagery and the symbolism of the pre-Christian Irish. The Irish Church was distinct from the Roman Church as is evident from the new forms which it produced as well as the controversy over orthodoxy climaxing in the Synod of Whitby: the tonsure controversy and the controversy over Easter. But the seeds of the dissension were sown much earlier than the Synod in 664 and even earlier than the development of monasticism the century before.

Tonsure signaled the ethnic boundary, the frontier, between Irish society and the continental society which had shaped the Christian Church. By calling up the central cultural differentiae (the system of head symbolism) which had for centuries maintained the Celtic ethnic identity, the distinct Irish tonsure allowed interaction with the Roman Church across their ethnic boundary. The vastly different ethnic backgrounds of the two Churches, Roman and Irish, called for an ethnic boundary whose expression and validation was continual so there could be interaction within Christianity, the sector of assumed common understanding and mutual interest. At the same time there was an aspect of Irish interaction which was beyond that sector:

> ...the ethnic boundary canalizes social life - it entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations. The

> identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally 'playing the same game', and this means that there is between them a potential for diversification and expansion of their social relationship to cover eventually all sectors and domains of activity. On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest. ...Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose such a structuring of interaction: a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification.[54]

It was the nature of the Irish ethnic boundary, which derived the elements of its cultural differentiae from Celtic heritage, that, in conjunction with the accretion type of conversion process they experienced, created the particular perception of the Christian religion which fostered monastic innovation and sought to preserve itself at the showdown of the Synod of Whitby.

> I have argued that boundaries are also maintained between ethnic units, and that consequently it is possible to specify the nature of continuity and persistence of such units. ...ethnic boundaries are maintained...by a limited set of cultural features. The persistence of the unit then depends on the persistence of these cultural differentiae. The important thing to recognize is that a drastic reduction of cultural differences between ethnic groups **[like conversion to Christianity]** does not correlate in any simple way with a reduction in the organizational relevance of ethnic identities, or a breakdown in boundary-maintaining processes.[55]

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[54] Barth, "Ethnic Groups," 204

[55] Barth, "Ethnic Groups," 222 and 227

At Whitby in 664, there was an ecclesiastical showdown, a contest of liturgical practice; and the stakes were considerable. Beyond format and structure, in most doctrinal matters, the Irish Church was in complete agreement with Rome. Irish clerics were recognized for fervor and orthodoxy. Yet by the seventh-century Rome regarded the Irish Church as heterodox. This discordance was not based wholly on organizational differences, nor was it a minor matter in the world of the early Middle Ages. Rome's attitude towards the Irish Church had ramifications in the institutional and political development of not only the European Church but also of European secular affairs. The synod of the seventh-century, where the ecclesiastical conflict of Rome and Ireland was played out, determined whether emerging Christian kingdoms would participate in the localized individual Irish church, (whose Christianity was acquired through a process of accretion, incorporating an older traditional heritage and accommodating to the structure of its native society) or become part of a centralized, institutionally organized, universal Roman Christianity, (an orthodoxy with a standard system and an ultimate authority in the person of the Pope).

The Synod of Whitby determined which of the two systems of Christianity would prevail in Mercia, the last kingdom of the British Isles to be converted from paganism to Christianity, upon its conquest by Northumbria. After hearing arguments from both the Roman and Irish clergy, the Christian Northumbrian king, at first sympathetic to the Irish

Church, chose to move closer to the continent and Roman heritage. King Oswiu and his sons elected to adopt the Roman Church with its uniformity and central organization, a grander more universal institution than the natively colored, individually oriented Irish Church. That choice betokened the growing political ambition of the developing kingdoms in England. That choice was, as well, a harbinger of what was to come in Europe as the Roman Church allied itself with the rising kingdoms of the early Middle Ages.

The Irish Church, however, did not die at Whitby; its heartbeat was not stopped until the Danish invasions of the ninth and tenth centuries. Even beyond that devastation, the influence of Irish Christianity was felt in Europe. Practices of the Irish Church, like private confession, tempered Roman Christianity as the only tolerated ecclesiastical variations. Hiberno-Saxon culture developed out of the Irish synthesis and contributed substantially to the growth of European culture. A listing of the important European monasteries which began as Irish foundations (e.g. Echternach, Bobbio, Prum, Etivel, Senones, Moyenmoutier, St. Mihiel-sur-Meuse, Malmeday, Stavelot, Luxeuil, Condot, Annegray, St. Gall, Fontaines, Relais, Faremoutiers, Jouane) attests to the fact that Ireland actively participated in the medieval world and had a medieval culture of its own. Henri Pirenne, the father of medieval socio-economic history, defined and delineated the "medieval synthesis" as consisting of three elements: the Germanic, the Roman, and the Christian. Indeed Ireland experienced a synthesis woven of native, classical and Christian threads. This fringe synthesis produced a different medieval

culture in Ireland and enabled Ireland to take a recognizable part in the European medieval culture. The study of the Irish Church, and especially the native element, provides a third dimension to the picture of the European Middle Ages. The existence of an alternate synthesis made for a rich, if problematic, interaction between Christian Ireland and so-called Catholic Europe during the early Middle Ages. It was of course the native element of that synthesis which germinated the seeds of dissonance and also sparked cultural exchange and interaction. By examining how the Celtic ethos adhered to Christianity through Church practice it is possible to define that element.

The focal point for this investigation of the nature of the Celtic element in Ireland's fringe synthesis is the most salient, germane, and perplexing issue of the Romano-Irish ecclesiastical struggle: the tonsure controversy. The Irish liturgical and ritual practices concerning Easter and tonsure served as hinges in the process of Christianization. They allowed Christianity to open a door for the Irish to a new perception of life and afterlife, but they remained firmly affixed to the native structure, the foundation of the Irish traditional way of life.

Cutting of the hair has played a role in various traditions, i.e. Jewish, classical Roman.[56] It played a particular role in Irish society. Throughout

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[56] Raymond Firth, Symbols, Public and Private, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1973): 288-291; 296ff "...deliberate shaving of the head, or close cutting of the hair, has taken on a ritual quality, intended to mark a transition from one social state to another, and in

Irish literature there recur themes of the importance of hair, its cutting and shaving. Both Christian and pre-Christian expressions, whether from oral or literary traditions, depicted hair as having ritual significance and gave particular importance to the manner of its removal. Narrative motifs found in Christian literature represented haircutting or tonsure as part of ordination along with baptism. In the Tripartite Life of Saint Patrick[57] is a passage that uses the tonsure to indicate consecration as a lay cleric.

> As they were thinking of him they saw Fiacc the Fair [coming] to them. Said Dubthach to Patrick, 'Come to tonsure me, for the man will succour me to my consolation by his being tonsured in my behalf, for great is his dutifulness.' Thereafter, then, Fiacc the Fair succoured Dubthach, and Patrick tonsured him and baptized him. He conferred a bishop's grade upon him, so that he (Fiacc) was the bishop who was first consecrated in Leinster.
>
> *Amal immindráitset conacatar Fíacc Find cuccu. Asbert friPátricc: 'tair dumberradsa, air fumrése infer dummimdídnaad duaberrad tarmuchenn, air ismár agoire.' Isdisin, dino, iurráith Fíacc Find Dubthach, ocus berrsi Pátricc ocus baitzisi. Dubbert grád nepscoip foir, cónide epscop insin citaruoirtned laLaigniu.*

Throughout the Irish chronicles reference was made to tonsurings as significant events which marked historically important dates. Someone's ordination was described as his tonsuring; other references to priesthood itself used the term tonsure to represent the office. In the early Christian period in

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particular to imply a modification in the status or social condition of the person whose hair is so treated."

[57] The Tripartite Life of Patrick vol. 2, ed. Whitley Stokes (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Chronicles & Memorials, 1887, Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1965), 344-345

the British Isles monks recorded tales of the oral tradition behind a thin veil of Christian story. Narrative motifs found in the works written down from the oral tradition place importance on haircutting and shaving.[58] Haircutting apparently signified a boon and a bond between powerful people in such a way that implied submission and allegiance.[59]

The Irish clergy were immovable on the issue of tonsure,[60] not because it was a mere custom but because it was seen as a tradition vital to the

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[58] "The vernacular tradition, although compiled some centuries after the advent of Christianity to the British Isles, does contain fragments of genuine pre-Christian cults and rites." Anne Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 118

[59] The implications of this will be discussed in Chapter Three below

[60] Bede, V.21, pp. 325-327. Letter of Abbot Ceolfrid to Nechtan, King of the Picts: As for the tonsure that Simon the magician is said to have worn, I ask what faithful Christian will not instantly detest it, like magic itself, with the scorn it deserves...Do not think that I have spoken in this way about those who wear this tonsure as though they are damned even if they maintain Catholic unity in belief and practice. On the contrary, I am sure that many of them were holy men and pleasing to God. Among them is Adomnán, a renowned priest and abbot of the Columbans...He replied: 'My dear brother, rest assured that, although I wear Simon's

persistence of the Irish Church. It was part of what enabled the Christian Church to fit into Irish society, by creating a pivotal symbol, one symbolic ritual which had separate meanings for Irish society and Roman Christianity.

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tonsure after the custom of my country, I wholeheartedly abominate and reject all simoniacal wickedness.' ...after he had returned to Scotland, he won over large numbers to the Catholic observance of Easter by his preaching. But although he was their lawfully constituted head, he was unable to persuade the monks of Iona to adopt a better rule of life. Had his authority been sufficiently great, he would surely have taken care to correct the tonsure also."

Chapter 2: Tonsure Controversy

Irish practice was not controversial to the Church of Rome following Pope Gregory I. But the seventh-century saw a shift in the Church of Rome toward more standardized organization. As the trend in Rome leaned increasingly toward universalism through uniformity in practice, Irish tonsure and Easter dating came to be increasingly criticized.

By the seventh-century those anomalous liturgical practices of the Irish Church threatened the expansion of Christianity in the British Isles. Until that time the particular nature of Irish Christianity kept it strong through periods when the Church of Rome was severely challenged by local conditions on the European mainland. Irish Christianity was tightly bound to tradition, both in doctrine and liturgy. Consequently Irish monks became the preservers of dogma and practice, they compiled texts of ancient authorities[61] which greatly enhanced ecclesiastical learning. The vitality of Irish Christianity was expressed in an enormous missionary effort which was not merely designed to convert pagans but to bring a fuller Christianity to fruition within the Christian world. It was carried forward by the establishment of a number of Irish monasteries in the British Isles and on the continent. Irish missions brought Christianity to new territories and new

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[61] Richard Sharpe, "Gildas as a Father of the Church," in Gildas: New Approaches ed.: Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Dover, N.H.: Boydell Press, 1984), p.201

generations, as well as reclaiming some areas where Christianity had been corrupted. Though some of Ireland's practices varied from those developing out of the Roman Church, its liturgy and clerics had long been recognized and accepted by Rome. St. Chrysostom, who lived from 386 to 398, depicted Ireland as a land of the faithful albeit foreign: "There too, ...men may be heard discussing points in scripture, with differing voices but not with differing belief, with varying tongues but not with varying faith."[62]

During the seventh-century one practice became an irritant to the Roman Church: tonsure. The different form of haircut used by Irish clerics was adhered to without doctrinal justification. Where it derived from and why it stood as an ecclesiastic mark was not explained by those who wore it, yielding a flurry of theories among Roman clerics. Declarations of orthodoxy, unanswered accusations of heterodoxy or even heretical affiliation, precipitated meetings of clerical and political powerbrokers to standardize the practice according to the Roman style. Although the mode of haircut for Churchmen had differed throughout Christendom over the previous centuries, only in the seventh-century did this issue become a serious point of contention. Tonsure was not the only controversial area for the Church. There were also episcopal power struggles, a paschal controversy, conflicts of monastic survival, secular interference, and the troubles of heresies like Pelagianism. The tonsure controversy touched all of those other problems of

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[62] Quoted in F.E. Warren, The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church, 2nd ed., ed. Jane Stevenson (New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1987), 28 n3.

the early Church, and was also at the heart of medieval conceptions of faith, identity and tradition. Serving as an ethnic boundary marker, it carried with it a venerable symbolism resonate with native tradition.

The tonsure controversy is often approached from the point of view of Roman discontent with the Scotish Church. Much has been made of that Church's faintly Jewish-tinged practices of Easter calculation. It's tonsure was attributed to the Druids, to the sinful biblical wizard Simon Magus. Its lacked and episcopal structure at a time when regularizing the structure of the Church appeared to Rome to be vital for its survival and spread. Its organization defied the prevailing power structure. It had a homely quality, and in spite of its catholic spread--its inherent provincialism, individualism. To re-focus with emphasis on the study of Irish development in its relation to the Church of Rome, allows for more appropriate speculation. This is not easily done: the nature of the available sources, and those methods by which they have been approached, have shaped our view of the history of this period. That history has often been written straight from Romanized sources, resulting in interpretations formulated by those sources. Those sources were written to convince the reader of their point of view about Irish Christianity.[63] The words we read from the seventh and eighth centuries, written by ecclesiastics in the Roman tradition, obscure the Irish intent. Any

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[63] T.M. Charles-Edwards points this out in his Introduction to Early Irish and Welsh Kinship, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 4: "If early Anglo-Saxon law is not merely normative rather than descriptive, but, in its written form, designed to persuade, so also, quite openly, is Bede's Ecclesiastical History."

perception of the Irish vision through Aldhelm or Theodore or through Bede's redactions of Augustine, Laurence, Mellitus, Gregory, etc. is based on what emerges between the lines, which can be elusive or at least ambiguous.

Irish evidence points to the lack of deliberate policy or overall organizational schema of Irish Christianity throughout its emergence.[64] There is certainty about monasticism taking root deep down in the Christian soil of Ireland. There is little evidence of an episcopal power structure within the Irish monastic system, although bishops did of course play an indispensable liturgical role. Organizationally, we see an Irish Church growing up independent of much of the Roman tradition. Yet the Christian message of Irish clerics was clear and strong and in tune with Roman orthodoxy; enough so that they were able to bring Christianity into rural Europe through their missions. Three years after the death of Columbanus, a monk of Bobbio named Jonas composed a Life of Columbanus, in which he wrote that Christianity was "cherished uncompromisingly" by the Irish.[65] Irish clerics felt part of a long tradition, as the writings of Columbanus clearly

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[64] Richard Sharpe dispels the notion of Patrick laying down an episcopal structure (with or without Armagh at the top of an organizational hierarchy). R. Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," Peritia, Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland, vol. 3, (1984): 240.

240. He challenges the premise of Kathleen Hughes and others who claim there was change in the organization of the Irish ecclesiastical system from an initial episcopal structure set up by Patrick to the institution of monastic order solidly established by the seventh century. He postulates a lack of order, in the Roman sense, prior to monasticism; or an order derived from local need and responsive to regional variation.

show.[66] And although the Irish accepted Rome and made pilgrimages, they were not bound by Rome. They saw their custom as having primacy, and were willing to diverge from Rome.[67]

Was there a point of real discontent with Rome, which became vital for the Irish Church? Or perhaps such a point was never reached because from the introduction of Christianity into Ireland the Irish regarded Rome as just another "part of" the Christian Church and in no way their overseer.

Thus, the question emerges: did the Roman Church merely grow in stature through seventh-century turn of events, the conversion of pagan realms, to the point where it could set itself up as the elder brother, the boss, the leader, the chief Apostle's Church? Was it buying its own marketing strategy while the Irish church was not?

At this time, the orthodoxy of Rome was seeking a universal, uniform Christianity. The Irish were strong in following their customs. At the same time the Irish were participating in the universal Church of Peter. So diversity of practice was called for by the Irish as the only solution to the continuity of their practice within the Church at large. Columbanus

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[65] Jonas, "Life of St. Columban," Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History vol. 2, no.7, Pennsylvania University History Department, (1895): 2; *Patrilogiae latinae cursus completus* ed.J. P. Migne, vol. 87: col. 1014

[66] *Patrilogiae latinae* vol. 80

[67] James P. Mackey, "The theology of Columbanus," in Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Learning and Literature, ed. Proinseas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), 233, where through theological evidence he makes the point of Columbanus' orthodoxy as well as Irishness.

exemplified the complexity of the Irish situation. It is evident in the correspondence of Columbanus with Pope Boniface IV that the Irish missionary was critical of the Pontiff and not reluctant to express his admonitions. He was not over-awed by the role of the Apostolic See. While he recognized the See because it was to Peter that Jesus bestowed the keys, Columbanus made clear in their correspondence that the Pope as a person must live up to being the keybearer. James Mackey provides an important close reading of this correspondence and shows how Columbanus was arguing for a pluriformity of Christian thought and practice rather than uniformity. It fits into the argument of this dissertation that Columbanus attributed his thought 1) to his country's customs, and 2) to a Church decree. This was the Irish synthesis. Mackey has presented a Columbanus who was aware of the nature of his Irish Christianity. Mackey points out that

> He has no hesitation in affirming the primacy of Rome, as the centre of unity of the peoples entering the kingdom of God through the church on earth, and as an authoritative source of the true faith for those far flung peoples. 'For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world's edge, are disciples of saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Ghost, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching .... but the Catholic faith as it has been delivered by you first, who are the successor of the holy apostles, is maintained unbroken.'
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> And just at this point, intriguingly, Columbanus appeals directly to his own Irish culture: 'the freedom of my country's customs, to put it so, has been part-cause of my audacity. For amongst us it is not a man's station but his principles that matter.'
>
> And Columbanus reminds the pope of the decree of the First Council of Constantinople (canon 2), 'that churches of God planted in pagan nations should live by their own laws. So, in the case of the

easter controversy, he can contemplate the possibility that 'both traditions are good.'[68]

Columbanus expressed the nature of Irish Christianity. While he affirmed the papacy, Columbanus worked from a different premise than Boniface and his followers. He placed emphasis on different aspects of Christian development. Yet as F.E. Warren commented, "He allows a high post of honor to the See of Rome, but second to that of Jerusalem, the place of our Lord's resurrection."[69]

> *Propter Christi geminos apostolos, vos prope coelestes estis, et Roma orbis terrarum caput et ecclesiarum, salva loci Dominicae resurrectionis singulari praerogativa.* Epistle 4[70]
>
> Because of the twin apostles of Christ, you are near the heavens, and Rome is the head of the world and of the churches, save for the prerogatives of the particular place of the Lord's resurrection.

His emphasis on Jerusalem, derived from a tradition following the disciple, Saint John, rather than emphasizing Peter as the keeper of the keys. Columbanus maintained another order, a different system, a tradition which had little observance of ecclesiastical hierarchy in the Roman manner.[71]

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[68] Mackey, "Theology of Columbanus," p.234

[69] Warren, Liturgy and Ritual, 38

[70] Ibid., n5. See n1-4 for the tone of Columbanus in his critique of the Pope. For further insight: G.S.M. Walker and L. Bieler (edd. &transl.) Sancti Columbani Opera (Dublin 1957); Kathleen Hughes, 'The Celtic Church and the Papacy', in The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages ed. C.H. Lawrence (London 1965), 13-14

[71] Indeed Richard Sharpe points out that throughout the advance of Christianity in Ireland "there is no evidence pointing to a clearly defined hierarchical structure, ...in short, no sign that the growth of the church or its organization were the subject of any form of control. Instead, in the seventh, eighth, and later centuries, churches clash with one another in disputes both major and minor without there being any agreed authority to whom recourse might be had. "Concerning the Organization of the Church," 241

Spiritually, Jerusalem was the center, but not the earthly Jerusalem, rather the idealized city of Christian tradition.

The eruption of the tonsure controversy in the mid-seventh-century sheds light on the political climate of early Christian England and its relationship with the Church. There were twin Churches, separate, having grown up with a common body of doctrine yet nurtured in different settings. Each produced divergent organizational structures and liturgical practices that were initially able to co-exist without friction, despite elements of contradiction. Such contradiction was embodied in the dual controversies of Christian ritual practice. Re-viewing the tonsure controversy with emphasis upon the geo-political climate at the time, clarifies its apprehension. The Scots appear as competitors to the Roman clergy. They had exposed the British Isles and the continent to their brand of Christian worship and by the second quarter of the seventh-century, the Roman Church wanted to replace the Irish missions and assume the growing ecclesiastical influence in the political sphere. But the sign of the tonsure and the celebration of Easter as practiced by Christians converted by Irish monks were discordant with the Roman practice. Especially in England, the divergence of the two Churches would have been a threat to the influence and concomitant authority Rome held over the newly converted kingdoms.

It is with this discord that the Venerable Bede struggled, producing a resounding ambivalence toward Irish and British Christianity. Despite his emphatic condemnation of the British for their Celtic practices, he could not

bring himself to chastise fully the Irish Church from which he derived learning.[72] His background supported one attitude toward Irish Christianity, while his calling required another.[73]

Bede may have benefited directly from Irish learning, but he actively participated in the propagation of the Roman Church. And for those who followed, he has been the molder of the Roman Church's image in the world of seventh-century. But Bede wrote from inside his own historical circumstances and his emphases reflect that situation: "...Bede implies that the state of separation and the feelings of enmity between the two churches remained at least unchanged. In fact they became gradually intensified. The Roman attitude towards the Celtic Church, both British and Irish, in the latter part of the seventh-century was one of unmitigated hostility."[74] Bede wrote about the situation between the British and Roman Churches from within the struggle, in that the enmity that F.E. Warren viewed as Roman was one

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[72] Bede used Irish writers...Bede, who grew up in Irish-evangelized Northumbria and would have come into contact with Irish ideas or influences if not an Irish teacher." Joseph F.T. Kelly, "The Venerable Bede and Hiberno-Latin Exegesis," in Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture, Studies in Medieval Culture 20, ed. Paul Szarmach (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 65-75

[73] T.M. Charles-Edwards, "Bede, The Irish and the Britons" *Celtica* XV (1983): 42-52, attributes Bede's hostility toward the Britons to their neglecting to convert the English. Bede's tolerance of the Irish is connected to their missionary zeal and their eventual conversion to Roman practice: "The last major event in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is the conversion of the monks of Iona in 716 to the canonical Easter and tonsure...As God did not neglect the English whom he foreknew to be Christians, so he [Bede] did not neglect the Irish whom he foreknew to be "Romani". In his perceptive O'Donnell lecture on insular ethnic stereotyping, Patrick Sim-Williams sees the situation in terms of Bede's preconceptions: "Bede, who had used the holy, pacific Irish as a stick to beat the heretical, perfidious Welsh," in "The Visionary Celt: the construction of an Ethnic preconception," Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 11, (Summer 1986): 76

that Bede himself shared. Bede quoted from the following letter of Laurence, Augustine's successor to the See of Canterbury, AD 604:

> 'When, in accordance with its custom, which holds good throughout the world, the apostolic see sent us to the western lands to preach the Gospel to the heathen peoples, we came to this island of Britain. Until we realized the true situation, we had a high regard for the devotion both of the Britons and of the Scots, believing that they followed the customs of the universal Church. On further acquaintance with the Britons, we imagined that the Scots must be better. We have now, however, learned through Bishop Dagan {Irish Bishop from Wexford} on his visit to this island, and through Abbot Columbanus in Gaul, that the Scots are no different from the Britons in their practices. For when Bishop Dagan visited us, he refused not only to eat with us but even to take his meal in the same house as ourselves.'[75]

Bede then added his eighth century perspective in the same section of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: "Laurence and his fellow-bishops also wrote a dignified letter to the British bishops, in which he tried to bring them into Catholic unity; but the present state of affairs shows how little he succeeded. (Sed quantum haec agendo profecerit, adhuc praesentia tempora declarant.)" Bede II.4. [76] By the end of the first quarter of the eighth century there was distinct alienation between the Churches of the British Isles that followed Roman custom and those that followed Celtic custom, either Scots or British. How could this but be reflected in Bede's recounting of the seventh-century tonsure controversy.

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[74] Warren, Liturgy and Ritual, 41

[75] Bede, History of the English Church and People, translated Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955), II.4, p. 106

[76] Cited in Warren's discussion of this issue, Liturgy and Ritual, 41, n2

Bede's angle is evident in his recounting of Laurence, who

> sought also to extend his pastoral care to the original inhabitants of Britain, and to the Scots of Ireland adjacent to this island of Britain. For having learned that in their own country the life and practice of the Scots and of the Britons were in many respects unorthodox - particularly in the observance of Easter, which, as previously explained, they did not keep at the right time, ... - he wrote them a letter jointly with his fellow-bishops, urging them to join in maintaining the unity, peace, and Catholic customs of the Christian Church established throughout the world.[77]

It was the stubborn adherence to their customary practices that outraged Bede. His was not an investigation to understand why the practices were meaningful and valid to the Scots and British. At the same time, we glean from Bede's accounts that the British and Scots were more than disinterested in Roman custom. They refused to break bread under the same roof. They did not take kindly to being challenged. Theirs was an authentic Christian tradition, and they were conscious of it. Columbanus had embodied that Scotish attitude a century earlier than Bede's writing. He was proud of coming "'from the world's end'," from a people who are "'inhabitants of the world's edge.'" As James Mackey states it: "Irish users of the phrase never intend to convey the slightest sense of inferiority of their faith, and of the patterns of their Christian life, or of their learning, whether secular or sacred." In fact, it would appear that Columbanus used both secular

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[77] Bede, II.4, pp. 105-6

and sacred culture in justifying his rejection of Roman Easter calculation, which "'has not been accepted by our teachers, by the former scholars of Ireland, by the mathematicians most skilled in reckoning chronology.'"[78]. » Columbanus was strongly self-confident in both his learning and his orthodoxy. His claim was that Ireland preserved ancient apostolic Christianity unchanged, whereas Rome had changed and derived foreign doctrine. In his words to Pope Boniface, he was speaking of his authentic Christian tradition and he was also speaking of tradition as substantiating authenticity:

> Nihil extra Evangelicam et Apostolicam doctrinam recipientes; nullus haereticus, nullus Judaeus, nullus schismaticus fuit, sed fides Catholica sicut a vobis primum, sanctorum scilicet Apostolorum successoribus tradita est, inconcussa tenetur.[79] Epistle IV to Boniface (612), Fleming Collectan 139.
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> [Our Irish Church fathers] accepting nothing outside the Evangelical and Apostolic doctrine; there was nothing heretical, there was nothing Jewish, there was nothing schismatic; but the Catholic faith as it is handed down first by you, namely the successor of the holy Apostles, is being held firm.

Bede reported the dialogue specifically addressing the issues of tonsure and Easter at the Synod of Whitby. Bishop Colman, who was to speak for the Irish rite and its origin, was recorded as justifying the Irish practice, for the most part, through tradition. The Roman side was on record discrediting the

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[78] Mackey, "Theology of Columbanus," 233-4, uses these quotations from the letters of Columbanus for his ideas regarding Celtic theology.

[79] Noted in Warren, Liturgy and Ritual, 28 n7

logic of Irish calculation of Easter and challenging their version of tradition. Bede recounts the following:

> When Wilfrid had received the king's command to speak, he said: 'Our Easter customs are those that we have seen universally observed in Rome, where the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul lived, taught, suffered, and are buried. We have also seen the same customs generally observed throughout Italy and Gaul when we traveled through these countries for study and prayer. Furthermore, we have learnt that Easter is observed by men of different nations and languages at one and the same time, in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, and throughout the world, wherever the Church of Christ has spread. The only people who stupidly contend against the whole world are these Scots and their partners in obstinacy the Picts and Britons, who inhabit only a portion of these the two uttermost islands of the ocean.
>
> ...And with regard to your Father Columba and his followers,... I do not deny that... they loved Him in primitive simplicity but in devout sincerity. Nor do I think that their ways of keeping Easter were seriously harmful, so long as no one came to show them a more perfect way to follow. Indeed, I feel certain that, if any Catholic reckoner had come to them, they would readily have accepted his guidance, as we know that they readily observed such of God's ordinances as they already knew. But you and your colleagues are most certainly guilty of sin if you reject the decrees of the Apostolic See, indeed of the universal Church, which are confirmed by Holy Writ. For, although your Fathers were holy men, do you imagine that they, a few men in a corner of a remote island, are to be preferred before the universal Church of Christ throughout the world?[80]

From Bede's perspective there was a clear delineation of the right and the wrong in this situation. He reflected the orthodoxy of which he was a proponent. His own time had controversies and squabbles whose roots he could trace to the developments of the past. "He wrote expressly of the good that had been done by good men in the hope and belief that others might be inspired by their example, and conversely that the example of those who had

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[80] Bede, III.25, pp. 188-192

done ill might be shunned. If we were to look more closely into his idea of what constituted the good we would find it to lie in all things which tended to the unity of the faith within the Catholic Church. This conception will seem neither narrow nor bigoted to those who remember how recently Christianity had come to England, how much of Europe was still pagan, and how strong was Bede's faith."[81]

When we do remember the advent of Christianity to England, in light of this question of orthodoxy, we come face to face with the mission and purposes of Gregory the Great. It was his policies which gave the conversion of Britain its character. He selected emissaries whom he trusted to transport his vision to the new territories. He followed them with advice on how the conversion should proceed. And when we read his directives, his purposes are apparent. He wanted to spread the true Catholic faith world-wide and he wanted to eliminate all of its deviations. For Britain, he states outright his desire for the universality of the Catholic faith.

> For the almighty Lord has covered with his lightning cloud the ends of the sea: because, by the brilliant miracles of preachers, he has brought even the ends of the world to the faith. For behold, he has now penetrated the hearts of almost all nations. Behold he has joined together in one faith the boundaries of the East and West. Behold the tongue of Britain which only knew how

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[81] Peter Hunter Blair, Northumbria in the Days of Bede, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 37-8; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), xxiii, has a similar point of view, in terms of Bede's view about the unity of the Church, being a condition for its survival. "...even the well-loved Celtic clergy were rightly sacrificed to its claims." At one point he states: "In other words, Bede overdid Whitby." It would seem that Bede at least had an ax to grind.

> to utter barbarous sounds has long since begun to sound the divine praises with the Hebrew Alleluia! Behold the once swelling ocean is calmed beneath and subject to the feet of the saints; and its barbarous motions, which earthly princes could not subdue with the sword, are now, through the fear of God, bound by the mouths of priests with words only; and he that when an unbeliever stood not in awe of fighting troops, now as a believer fears the tongues of the humble. For because the virtue of the Divine knowledge is poured into him by precepts, by heavenly words and by the brightness of miracles, he is so curbed by the dread of the same divinity that he fears to do wrong and longs with all his desire to attain eternal glory.[82]

Britain was only one arena for Gregory's pastoral ambitions. Gregory's missionary activities extended in several directions. Viewed altogether certain patterns emerge. Although there were variations in his treatment of prospective converts, for the most part Gregory's missionary policies tended toward persuasion rather than force; and his concerns were pastoral rather than political. In advising the Archbishop of Seville on an issue of practice concerning the ceremony of baptism, Gregory allowed for rooted customs to prevail: "'As long as there is unity in the faith, difference in custom is not prejudicial to the Holy Church.'"[83] In Britain Gregory told the missions to

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[82] Quoted by Bede II.1: *Magna Moralia* xxvii, this translation is from Jeffrey Richards Consul of God, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 246; Richards' n. 87 states, "It has generally been assumed that this was added to *Magna Moralia* after completion and refers to the English mission. Brechter argues that it is a quotation from Tertullian and pre-dates the mission. Even if this is so, it is an indication of Gregory's outlook and confirms the primarily spiritual view of the English mission."

[83] *Ibid.*, 244-5. "Gregory's missionary strategy with regard to England is clear. He wanted a programme of conversion by encouragement and conciliation, by working with and through the lay authorities and by eschewing force. He was willing to be adaptable in matters of ceremonial and practice."

build on the current beliefs of the people; he also prescribed incorporating practices of the local churches which would appeal to the people.

To Gregory the achievement of universality in the Christian church was not hampered by the Irish church. His competition was not with the other Christianity of the British Isles. Nor was it Gregory's purpose to beat out the Irish or British churches in converting the pagan kingdoms. But by Bede's time in the eighth century, that church which Gregory established was in certain conflict with the Irish churches. Was it that Irish practices were unorthodox: those same practices that Gregory told Augustine to borrow from, to accustom the minds of the English?

It seems so, when we read Bede's report of Augustine's questions to Pope Gregory upon his arrival among the English (Anglo-Saxons of Kent).[84] Newly consecrated as bishop, Augustine was feeling for the party line:

> Augustine's second question: Since we hold the same Faith, why do customs vary in different Churches? Why, for instance, does the method of saying Mass differ in the holy Roman church and in the churches of Gaul?

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[84] This is an excerpt from the text of Gregory's letter which has been questioned as to its authenticity, producing a lengthy debate among scholars. Forgery was raised as a possibility in 735, the year Bede died, by Pope Boniface who was unable to "'find a copy of it in the archives of the church of Rome among the other exemplars of the said pope'". It seems natural that that eighth century pope would have had a problem with the attribution of such ideas to the papacy. His suspicion of forgery underscores the divergence between Roman policy and attitude between the sixth and eighth centuries. Paul Meyvaert argues convincingly for authenticity and makes a clear case for Gregory advocating the borrowing of liturgical customs from other churches. See "Diversity within unity, a Gregorian theme," The Heythrop Journal IV (1963), and "Bede's text of the 'Libellus Responsionum' of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury," in England Before the Conquest, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes, (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 15ff, where Boniface's letter is quoted in full, and Meyvaert states "Gregory cherished the idea of a certain diversity of customs within the unity of one faith and charity."

> Pope Gregory's reply: My brother, you are familiar with the usage of the Roman Church, in which you were brought up. But if you have found customs, whether in the Church of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English, which is still young in the Faith, whatever you have been able to learn with profit from the various Churches. For things should not be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things. Therefore select from each of the Churches whatever things are devout, religious, and right; and when you have bound them, as it were, into a Sheaf, let the minds of the English grow accustomed to it.[85]
>
> *Segunda Interrogatio Augustini. Cum una sit fides, sunt eccleasiarum diversae consuetudines* Gregory's Epistles XI.64[86]

What changed for the Church from 597 to the eighth century?[87] Gregory's concerns for universality are quoted by Bede but their spirit takes on a different tone in the world of the eighth century. To Gregory, the Irish churches were not at all a threat. But by the time Bede was writing, the Irish and especially the British practitioners were more than a mere annoyance. Gregory may not have been very familiar with the church, so far from Rome. But for Bede, not only proximity bred contempt. The changes effected by time reoriented priorities for the Catholic churchmen of the British Isles. Looking back on the seventh-century from the eighth, consistent practice appeared

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[85] Bede, I.27A, p. 73

[86] Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland vol. III, ed. Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871, reprinted 1964), 19

[87] Richards, Consul, 246: "What were Gregory's motives in sending the English mission? The idea that Greg wanted to beat the Welsh and Irish churches to the conversion of the English is not borne out by the evidence... His correspondence emphasized the moral rather than jurisdictional aspects of the mission."

more crucial than it did to Gregory in the late sixth century. It was the perspective of an established church rather than one in the process of conversion.

The seventh-century saw the completion of the process Gregory had sent Augustine to initiate. The conversion of the last pagan kingdom of the English signaled an end to the era begun by the first Roman mission of conversion to the British Isles. It consolidated that frontier for the Roman Church. The situation was no longer purely pastoral. The Roman Church was becoming world-wide. It was also about to become more involved with the political complexities of the British kingdoms and the continental Christian kingdoms, as they themselves consolidated. Whatever their political differences, the English kingdoms now had common ground in Christianity. The sees at Canterbury and York, established by the papal missions, through royal houses, provided ecclesiastical centers for the entire Isle which were, of course, to evolve enormous power.

Bede evaluated this situation with hindsight. He held dear the concept of a world-wide Church and comprehended the precariousness of its establishment. It is therefore understandable that in Wilfrid's appeal to King Oswiu of Northumbria, universality was wielded as a weapon. The scathing remarks and contempt for the Scots emphasized that they were relatively few and from a remote area. Perhaps these very conditions earned them high regard for their zealousness and orthodoxy in far flung and vital missionary work. Certainly it is what brought Christianity to Northumbria, coming from

Iona. Nevertheless, Bede was concerned primarily with the primacy of the Roman Church, and its establishment as a force to be reckoned with in the British Isles.

From the sixth century to the eighth century values had changed. It was not the Scots and their fervent religious practice that had changed. The times had changed. The developments of European political realities included new sovereignties and the Roman Church had become a complex and growing presence in those realities.

The lengths to which the proponents of the Roman point of view on tonsure would go is evidenced by a forgery of the seventh-century. Just as Boniface could have suspected forgery in the *"Libellus Responsionum"* of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, or as the Donation of Constantine could have been promulgated as authentic in its time, so churchmen of the seventh-century understood the effect of "auctoritas". The seminal position of the learned Gildas[88] as a sixth century of the Celtic Father of Church was exploited by those who wanted to discredit Irish tonsure within the tradition of its own church.

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[88] "If it is ever possible to use the term 'Celtic Church,' a popular but imprecise expression, it is in the second half of the sixth century: 'the Celtic Church' is the *'ecclesiae occidentis'* of Columbanus. Despite the scantiness of contemporary testimony, and the absence of solid information about personalities, I suggest that we have enough evidence to conjecture that all this is the legacy of Gildas." Sharpe, "Gildas," 202

Gildas had been consulted during his lifetime as an authority on ecclesiastical discipline.[89] His writings appeared in the sixth century collections which served as clerical handbooks for the Churches of Ireland and Britain. Issues of ecclesiastical discipline were resolved through reference to passages from Scripture, decrees of early synods, writings of the Fathers, and even some very recent sources of authority: Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, "Patrick"[90], Adomnán -- abbot of Iona, Gildas.

The fragment which was composed in the name of Gildas turned up in the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, with the paragraph that follows it. Its lack of authenticity is now agreed upon;[91] it does not appear in the extant compilation of works by Gildas, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 279.

> Gildas says: The Britons are, contrary to the whole world, enemies to Roman usages not only in the mass, but also in tonsure, because, along with the Jews, they serve the shadows of things to come rather than the truth.
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> The Romans say: The tradition is that the tonsure of the British took its origin from Simon Magus, whose tonsure reached only from ear to ear, following the very excellence of the tonsure of sorcerers, by which only the fore part of the forehead

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[89] *Ibid.*, 194, "He is the only one of these 'Fathers' of whom this can be said."

[90] *Ibid.*, 193 "Patrick is the most frequently cited 'Father' of this kind (even though the ascriptions to him are doubtful)."

[91] *Ibid.*, 194 n.6: this fragment "..was rejected by Councils, Haddan and Stubbs, I.108,n.*, and by all later commentators... is almost certainly a product of the tonsurial controversy in Ireland, perhaps in the first half of the seventh century." Also see Kathleen Hughes, The Church in Early Irish Society, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), 125-6, linked so-called Gildas passage with the seventh century Irish romanising party. And Jane Stevenson, in her Introduction to Warren's Liturgy and Ritual, liii, remarks "although the genuine Gildas was used in the *Hibernensis*, this particular remark reeks of seventh-century controversy and is not to be trusted." And: Councils Haddan and Stubbs, vol.I, 108: "the allusion to the tonsure in the last paragraph (which is not in the Corpus ms.) belongs apparently to a later date than his; although to one prior to the actual adoption of the Roman tonsure either by the Irish (prob. AD 630 southern and 704 northern) or by the British Church (AD 768)."

was wont to be covered. But that the first originator of this tonsure in Ireland was a swine-herd of King Loegaire mac Neill, is made evident by the word of Patrick. From him nearly all the Irish assumed this tonsure.

Gildas ait: Britones toti mundo contrarii, moribus Romanis inimici, non solum in missa, sed in tonsura etiam: cum Judaeis umbrae magis futurorum seruientes quam ueritati.

Romani dicunt: Britonum tonsura a Symone Mago sumpsisse exordium traditur, cuius tonsura omnem capitis anteriorem partem ab aure ad aurem tantum contingebat, pro excellentia ipsa Magorum tonsura, qua sola frons anterior tegi solebat, priorum. Auctorem vero huius tonsurae in Hibernia subulcum Regis Loigairi filii Neil extitisse Patricii sermo testatur; ex quo Hibernenses pene omnes hanc tonsuram sumserunt.[92]

Not surprisingly, this passage summarized the grievances against Irish tonsure. Despite the fact that the accusations were unfounded and even contradicted one another, the message was coherent that the Scots and the Britons were disruptive of the Christian order by persisting with equanimity in a wrong practice. This was what Bede called their stubbornness. They did not look for guidance from the Roman Church. They consulted with their own separate inherent sense of history, reminiscent of the Jews. They too had an historical tradition, independent, with an internal logic, incomprehensible

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[92] In *Gildae, De Excidio Britanniae, Fragmenta, Liber de Paenitentia, accedit et Lorica Gildae* ed. and transl. Hugh Williams, (London: David Nutt, 1899), 268-271; where the two paragraphs were placed under: *"Fragmenta Dubia,"* with extensive notation explaining their connection to the seventh century tonsure controversy and lack of connection to Gildas. "This extract from *Hibernensis* lii,6 seems exceedingly doubtful as assigned to Gildas: the first four words may be his, but the remainder will be best regarded as a gloss added by the compiler of the Irish collection, at a time when the Church of Ireland had adopted Roman customs, while the British churches still held aloof." *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis, Die Irische Kanonensammlung* ed. Herrmann Wasserschleben (Leipzig: Verlag Von Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1885, reprint Aalen, 1966), 212

to the Roman clergy. And now they were defiling a sacred Christian rite by appropriating the look of a swineherd!

As if the association with Jewish ritual, (suggested association with the Paschal reckoning), were not sufficiently compromising, the connection with paganism smacked of heresy. Simon Magus was a versatile model; not only had he been a Jew, but a magician, as well, which put him in league with the druids.

There were other condemnations of the Irish tonsure under false pretenses like that attributed to Patrick: "Si quis clericus, cujus capilli non sunt tonsi Romano more, debet excommunicari."[93] It is likely that this was written after the "Gildas," once Ireland had completely adopted the Roman tonsure, and the last holdouts were the Picts, the Britons and the Bretons. Practice of the Irish tonsure was reported down to the first quarter of the ninth century in Scotland and on the continent.

In England during the seventh-century the Roman Church took measures to condemn the practice of Irish tonsure. Theodore, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 668 - 672, traveled throughout England, "campaigning" against the Irish tonsure and Easter calculation. He denied the validity of orders imposed by Irish or British bishops 'who are not Catholic with respect to Easter and the tonsure' and required reconsecration

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[93] *Hibernensis*, 213; Councils, Haddan and Stubbs 328 c.6 in the "Canons Attributed to S. Patrick." See 331 n"e": "The part of this canon relating to the tonsure is in *Cod. Can. Hibern.*, LI.7, and is there also attributed to S. Patrick. It clearly cannot be really his."

by a 'Catholic bishop.' Such measures were seen later, in the Carolingian era, as a consequence of the Scotish practice of one-bishop consecration. In no uncertain terms the Penitential of Theodore stateed that Irish and British practice in Éaster observance and tonsure were not catholic. Those ordained by Irish or British bishops who were not Catholic in their practices regarding Easter and tonsure must be reconfirmed at the hands of a true Catholic bishop.

> *Poenitentiale Theodori*
>
> IX. *De communione Scottorum et Brittonum qui in Pascha et tonsura catholici non sunt.*
>
> *1. Qui ordinati sunt a Scottorum vel Britonum Episcopis, qui in Pascha vel tonsura catholici non sunt, adunati aecclesiae non sunt, sed iterum a catholico Episcopo manus impositione confirmentur*[94]

Eventually the Irish and then the British changed their practice. Perhaps the disciplinary action took its toll on the Irish practice, by the eighth century.

> AD 704. Failure of Adomnán to convert the Scottish and Irish Columbite monks to the Roman Easter and tonsure
> Sept. 23. Death of Adomnán
>
> AD 710. Letter of Ceolfrid to Nectan Mac Drerili of the Picts, and consequent adoption by the Picts of the Roman Easter and tonsure
>
> AD 716. The Monks of Hy adopt the Roman Easter[95]

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[94] Councils, Haddan and Stubbs, vol.III, 197

[95] Annals of Tigernach, ad an. 716.--Pasca in Eo civitate commotatur.--Ib., ad an. 717. Expulsio familiae Ie trans Dorsum Britannie a Nectono Rege.--Ib., ad an. 718. Tonsura corona super familiam Iea datur.--So also *Ann. Ulton.*, ad ann. Councils, Haddan & Stubbs, vol.II, 114

> AD 717 The Columbite clergy are banished from the Pictish kingdom
>
> AD 718 The Monks of Hy accept the Roman tonsure
>
> AD 755 Easter was changed in Gwynedd by the advice of Elvod, Bishop of Bangor; but the other Bishops did not concur therein; on which account the Saxons invaded the Cymry in South Wales
>
> AD 768 The Welsh adopt the Roman Easter
>
> AD 777 Easter was altered in South Wales
>
> AD 809 Elvod, Archbishop of Gwynedd, died;...and a great tumult [occurred] among the ecclesiastics on account of Easter; for the Bishops of Llandaff and Menevia would not succumb to the Archbishop of Gwynedd, being themselves Archbishops of older privilege.[96]

These are familiar entries for the historian to review. The conquest, the conversion: through a death, a politically savvy admonition, an acceptance of change in the surrounding world; something was given up. When the Irish and the British Churches converted to the Roman practice they did so not as churches but as individuals. This is evident, after the Synod of Whitby, when Colman left the home he had made at Lindisfarne, where he had been Bishop for three years, to return "home" to Ireland with those who wished to follow him, that is, all who still dissented from the Catholic Easter reckoning and tonsure - for there was no small argument

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[96] *Ibid.*, vol. I, 203-204

about this as well - and returned to the land of the Scots.[97] Those who accompanied Colman included thirty English individuals who joined him in Ireland.

The ranks who "followed" the Irish practice dwindled during the seventh and eighth century. Exasperation at the last holdouts is perceptible through the historical record. But those who "followed" Colman from the halls of Whitby in 664 and down into the ninth century did so one by one. Each cleric searching his soul, reviewing his heritage, made hard decisions about his chosen road. Some of that process is discernible between the lines of the historical record, if only through meaningful silences.

An example of such a silence was that of Adomnán, conveyed by Bede in a letter that the Abbot Ceolfrid wrote to Nechtan, King of the Picts. It took place in a conversation Ceolfrid had had with Adomnán concerning tonsure. Ceolfrid aggressively challenged Adomnán to defend the tonsure he wore.

> He replied: My dear brother rest assured that, although I wear Simon's tonsure after the custom of my country, I wholeheartedly abominate and reject all simoniacal wickedness. So far as my frailty permits, I wish to follow in the footsteps of the most blessed Prince of the Apostles.

But Ceolfrid neither understood nor accepted Adomnán answer. He repeatedly urged Adomnán to conform to the Roman tonsure.

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[97] Bede, III.26, p. 193

> Such then were my words to Adomnán, who showed how greatly he had profited by seeing the observances of our Church; for after he had returned to Scotland, he won over large numbers to the Catholic observance of Easter by his preaching. But although he was their lawfully constituted head, he was unable to persuade the monks of Iona to adopt a better rule of life. Had his authority been sufficiently great, he would surely have taken care to correct the tonsure also.[98] Bede V.21

Adomnán was silent, he did not "correct" his tonsure, nor did explain it. Adomnán, one of the most learned and authoritative people of his time, had recognized the Roman Easter and made an effort to spread it throughout the Irish churches. Yet he adhered to the more personal of the Irish practices without justifying or explaining its significance. Why was one of the finest minds of his time silent about so important an issue? Why do we have records of Irish arguments for their Easter calculation but none at all regarding tonsure?

Aldhelm of Malmesbury (Abbot 675-705) also depicted that disturbing silence in his letter to King Geraint:

> Finally, a rumour hostile to the faith of the Church has bruited it about far and wide that there are in your province certain bishops and clerics who obstinately refuse the tonsure of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and persist in recalcitrantly defending themselves with the exculpating apology that they imitate the tonsure of their founders and predecessors, whom they argue with grandiloquent assertions to have been illumined by divine grace. And if these should be concerned to learn from us who was the first to employ this manner of

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[98] *Ibid.*, V.21, pp. 326-327

> shaving or tonsure, they fall dumb, either not knowing the truth or concealing the falsehood.
>
> ...And so that all may be concluded in the summary of a brief sentence: he who does not follow the teaching and rule of St. Peter boasts vainly and idly about his Catholic Faith.[99]

Could there have been an acceptable answer that just did not find its way into the record in the way the Easter justifications had. Adomnán all but corroborated the accusation that his tonsure was based on Simon's tonsure by failing to argue the point. Certainly the implications of having a tonsure in imitation of Simon Magus were intelligible to the Irish and British, yet they never spoke to the accusation. Simon Magus was an enemy to the Roman Church, a Jew and a sorcerer. Aldhelm, again:

> we have learned that the author of (this mode of) tonsure, in the opinion of many, was Simon, the founder of the magical art. 'The Struggle of the Apostles' [cf. Act VIII. 14-24] and the ten books of Clement [i.e. Ps.- Clement, Recognitiones] give witness to what sort and how great was the deception of necromancy that he fraudulently devised against the blessed Peter.[100]

Accusations concerning the tonsure of Simon Magus and the dating of Easter according to the Jewish calendar lent credence to the idea that the Irish practice was heterodox. Although no centralized Irish church existed, there prevailed what was seen as a "stubborn" adherence to the customs handed down by the founders. A complex liturgical heritage, which acknowledged

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[99] Letter to Geraint (or Gerontius) in Aldhelm, the Prose Works, transl. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 155-60

[100] *Ibid.*, 200: Lapidge and Herren find that Aldhelm's attribution of the 'tonsure-heresy' to Simon may have derived from the statement by Eusebius that 'Simon was the prime

the Jewish origins of Christianity, was observed by the tradition bound Irish. This had nothing to do with actual Jewish practices. But there was certainly enough difference in emphasis in the two traditions for the Irish and British to be perceived as outsiders, strangers, the "other" by the Roman Church.

The accusation of Jewish associations to Irish practice must have meant something very different to the Irish and Roman churchmen. What contact with Jews existed for the Irish, beyond their books? Yet Jews were present in the Roman world, protected under the law as well as subjected to serious legal disabilities. Jeffrey Richards writes about Pope Gregory the Great's position on this matter: "... as always with Gregory, there were, besides his undoubted love of justice, good practical reasons for not stirring up trouble with the Jews, who lived in most of the great cities of Italy. 'At this time especially when there is danger from the enemy, you must not have a divided population.'"[101]

The Jews were tolerated, protected and constrained by the law of Rome. They had long been the "other" of the Roman Christian world. "Gregory did not regard Judaism as a religion, but as a 'superstitio' whose adherents needed rescue. His treatment of them demonstrates both his 'Romanitas' and his 'Christianitas' in action."[102] The presence of diversity within any society can pose a threat. In September, 602, Gregory the Great had to write a letter to the

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author of every heresy'. (*Hist. Eccl.* XIII.1) Aldhelm will have known Eusebius in Rufinus's translation."

[101] Richards, Consul, 228-229

[102] *Ibid.*

people of Rome exhorting them to refrain from judaizing tendencies: they had taken to "observing the Sabbath on Saturday, Jewish style."[103] The hostility of the seventh-century Roman churchmen may have been founded in the fear of similar responses to Irish influence.

Close proximity created the necessity for boundaries, carefully determined. They were provided in Gregory's Rome by the head of the Church, representing the entire mystical body of believers, bringing them into awareness of their faith. His letter called for the rejection of temptation; his authority established a boundary around the faithful which symbolically kept the "other" outside of the group. Every group has its identifying symbols and its boundaries. Perhaps the Romans recognized something in the Irish practice of Christianity which they could not penetrate.

The question arises of Irish awareness. There is every indication that the controversy over Easter was more than just a question of calculation. But more problematic was the accusation that Irish tonsure imitated a tonsure worn by the druids, for that would have been truly heretical. There is some indication that the pre-Christian Irish society was one where tonsure or haircutting was in practice for various purposes and with various meanings. The Irish Dictionary lists the word "mael" as meaning tonsured, shorn, crop-headed. This term is found throughout the historical record of this period. "Besides lowly members of society and adolescents, there is another class of

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[103] *Ibid.*, 229-230

persons who are characterized as "mael" in medieval literature: these are the druids, the priests of the pagan Irish religion."[104]

Perhaps the tonsures were similar. There were other areas where priests took up the allotment or status of the druids, men of letters, of the age-old society. In the hagiographic tradition, Christian saints were the natural heirs to druidic power. "...the saint is depicted having won the right to act as an intermediary with God in exactly the manner in which a druid (or brahman) might have."[105]

Indeed there were pagan survivals in the seventh-century. Could this be the meaning of the Irish tonsure? Was it mimicry of the druidic form? Is that what the silence was about? Certainly if priests could fall into conditions in the law previously enjoyed by druids could they not have inherited the druidic appearance?

If we turn our attention away from the Roman point of view; and our point of view as westerners and heirs of Roman culture and organization, we may see the situation more clearly.

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[104] Joseph Falaky Nagy, "Demne Mael," *Celtica* 14 (1981): 9-10, "The clerics of the early Irish church had a tonsure different from that prevalent throughout the rest of the Christian West; the Irish church reformers who opposed this Irish tonsure claimed that it originated with the druids. Whether or not this claim is true, it is clear that a link was believed to exist between the state of being "mael" and the druidical profession." This subject will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter concerning haircutting and its symbolism. The discussion will include the meanings of tonsure in the Christian context, both the ritual and the form. There are similarities with the druidic symbolism: "It is ironic that one of the most prestigious figures in Pagan Irish society, the druid, is "mael"; he is distinguished by an outward sign also borne by inferior or liminal members of society." Certainly this has great resonance with Christian monasticism.

Certain elements appear emphatically. The Irish had adopted Christianity freely. Little coercion outside of Patrick's miracles seems to have been experienced. This was their choice and they embraced it. They married Christianity to their existing culture. This was almost a foreshadowing of Gregory's dictum of conversion to use the old "superstitions" to bring the people into recognition of the one true religion.

Almost a foreshadowing, but not quite... What Gregory described was the conversion into one religion by the eradication of another. There is clear indication that this is not what happened in Ireland. More was retained than Gregory would have anticipated. Since Irish religion was inextricably part of an Irish way of life it would not have been possible to eradicate one without the other. Basically the Irish way of life was too vital, too venerable to be eradicated in several generations. In fact it was this way of life that nurtured Christianity and kept it alive.

Irish society was highly sophisticated, evolving out of centuries of unbroken cultural transmission down through the generations. Motifs and artifacts of culture were carried through time and place, yielding a variety of social responses. There was an aspect of this world that was conservative: the everyday business of its people was to retain the inherent values of the past by keeping the forms of culture intact. This was the refuge that Christianity found: which then kept that belief system alive to re-transmit it.

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[105] Daniel Melia, "Law and the Shaman Saint," in Celtic Folklore and Christianity, (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Loftin, 1983), 126

It was also the aspect of Irish culture which clung to a special form of tonsure for its priests. In his discussion of Saint Patrick, Patrick Ford points out how certain symbols were able to express and subsequently resolve "...the tensions arising from the confrontation between the old and new religions." Ford also talks about the "persistence of symbology" through the confrontation of the "old religion, namely the inherited native religion with its attendant myths and the new religion, Christianity." That confrontation itself got deeply absorbed into the fabric of the overall society. So deeply, to the point where the Irish clergymen were perhaps unaware of connection between Christian and pre-Christian practice. But their identity was tied up in the symbolism, not only of the form of tonsure, but of the implications of the act of tonsure, as well.

The nature of the oral tradition may have been preservational and conservative in some aspects but Irish society was complex. The world that received Christianity was dynamic, responding to developing internal structures and its external environment. The headhunting of the past had turned into art, the early social order had turned into law. A highly developed system of status created order and a equally high level of education created learned people who, in turn, enjoyed high status.

This society was by no means overthrown or replaced or minimized in any way. The social order, law, education systems, indeed the whole framework of Irish society was intact and unchallenged. Christianity appealed to the social order in respect of its hierarchy and authority. Even in

Patrick's legend, he initially approached King Leoghaire. The Irish framework never moved, Christianity came and was fit in by those to whom it appealed.

And this is why the Irish were the perfect people to missionize other oral tradition societies. It is specifically relevant to the flowering of culture that occurred between the English and Irish in the seventh-century. As the English became Christian they opened up a dialogue with Irish culture. The products of that dialogue are the astounding artifacts of insular collaboration in the early Christian period. England and Ireland were related in their early Christian periods. This relation had to do with their proximity, shared monastic traditions, shared liturgical practices, and a shared conversion from a somewhat similar way of life, a conversion from an oral tradition, or rather a past-oriented tradition. This conversion, moreover, was made in such a way as to preserve much of the past tradition for both cultures, creating a harmony out of the past and present.

It is the nature of that cultural interaction which holds the key to the liturgical prohibitions. During the seventh and eighth century in the British Isles there was a melding of spiritual and cultural styles.[106] Nature and symbolic art around the word, were picked up and placed in Anglo-Saxon context; both verbal and graphic arts with no precedent in Roman culture. The Irish and the English had in common that they were both developing

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[106] See Meyer Schapiro, "The Place of Ireland in Hiberno-Saxon Art" in Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art, (New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1979), 225ff

away from their pagan past but still retaining their mechanisms of their oral transmission culture and incorporating it into their art.

It is remarkable that the very times which saw the most censuring of divergent Irish liturgical practice were the times when there was the highest degree of cultural interaction between England and Ireland. "... the time of greatest mutual influence between the two churches was the seventh and eighth centuries. In spite of differences in ecclesiastical organization clergy seemed to have moved freely between the two countries and settled permanently and happily in each others' lands, so that many of their penitential and devotional ideas and their literary expressions were drawn from a common stock, while their books passed into each others' scriptoria, influencing the transmission of texts, and their scribes developed handwriting so similar in style that it has to be designated as 'insular'".[107] The closeness of English and Irish collaboration was another reason for maintaining boundaries.

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[107] Kathleen Hughes, "Evidence for contacts between the churches of the Irish and English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age," in England Before the Conquest, ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 67

Chapter 3: Irish Christianity

The previous chapter examined the developing attitude of the Roman Church to the societies of the British Isles in the seventh-century that contributed to intolerance toward diversity in the practice of tonsure. It reviewed the position of the Roman Church vis à vis the Irish presence in England. The writings of Bede reveal the important role that Ireland played in the conversion of much of England; Irish Christianity was inspirational to many English converts. As a consequence, there grew up the confusion of practice that led to debate over the acceptability of the Irish tonsure at the Synod of Whitby. Further, within Ireland itself in the seventh-century there was a split between those who adhered to the ultimate authority of Rome, advocating conformity of practice (*Romani*), and those who perpetuated the liturgical practice established by Columba and the other Irish Church fathers (*Hibernici*).[108] This chapter explores the discord over the Irish tonsure in the context of sixth- and seventh-century Irish cultural, social, and political development.

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[108] "...*Romani* has come to be understood as often meaning supporters of the Roman Easter. But the term is of wider significance than this. The main aspect of its use is the assertion of a belief in the oneness of Latin Christendom, with its hierarchy culminating in the papal primacy of the bishop of Rome." Richard Sharpe, "Armagh and Rome in the seventh century," in Ireland and Europe. The early Church, ed. Proinseas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 68

The extent of this *Romani/Hibernici* split varied during the early Christian period throughout Ireland and the Irish sphere of influence.[109] Initially, Rome tolerated and even advocated divergence of practice.[110] Was that early acceptance of the signs, symbols, and ceremonies of a prior belief system exclusively a function of Gregory's personality, or the circumstances of the Church and European geo-political conditions of his time? The previous chapter investigated peculiarities of the seventh-century which heralded a shift in Church policy with regard to practice. Certainly the historical factors of the sixth and seventh centuries discussed in that chapter contributed fundamentally to the emergence of controversy over practice. Yet an essential aspect of the problem remains and deserves reflection. This chapter investigates the issue from another point of view. It argues that the underlying symbolism of tonsure informs the nature of the

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[109] For instance "Armagh conformed independently, at some point after 640, but before 688 when Aed of Sleaty, in the south, submitted to Armagh, something unlikely to have happened while Armagh still followed the uncanonical reckoning." Sharpe goes on to suggest: "There is strong evidence suggesting that the adoption of the Roman Easter at Armagh took place in the years that we know that Tomméne, coarb of Patrick (AU 623-61), initiated dealings with the Holy See." *Ibid.*, 64

[110] One of Augustine's questions to Gregory: "Since we hold the same Faith, why do customs vary in different Churches? Why, for instance, does the method of saying Mass differ in the holy Roman church and in the churches of Gaul?" Pope Gregory's reply: "My brother, you are familiar with the usage of the Roman Church, in which you were brought up. But if you have found customs, whether in the Church of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English, which is still young in the Faith, whatever you have been able to learn with profit from the various Churches. For things should not be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things. Therefore select from each of the Churches whatever things are devout, religious, and right; and when you have bound them, as it were, into a Sheaf, let the minds of the English grow accustomed to it." I.27, Bede, A History of the English Church and People, translated. Leo Sherley-Price (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955) 73

Romani/Hibernici schism and gives depth to the consequences of the tonsure controversy for medieval Europe.

What seems to be in question is to what extent the tonsure was meaningful and how profound the dispute was. Some historians have discounted its importance as well as its centrality to the events of the seventh-century.[111] Yet the tonsure was written about extensively by those sympathetic to the Roman Church and worn with conviction; thought went into the adoption of either form. It was however heeded as a symbol by the faithful and, as with any symbol, retained implicit meaning. Its message may seem indistinct from the distance of thirteen hundred years. Yet, difficult as it is to read, tonsure reveals something significant. The nature of tonsure sets the tone and direction of this investigation: tonsure was both a ritual gesture and a ceremonial sign.

The significance of the tonsure controversy lies in the context of its occurrence. Ultimately it is the story of how distinct societies can approach the same religion in such different ways that they produce both remarkably coherent syntheses and conflicting variations on its themes. This culture clash resulted in neither war nor political or even economic domination, but out of it arose a conflict of styles (form and practice) so potent that coexistence was threatened. Insular conversion produced the flowering of insular art and

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[111] Wendy Davies, "The Myth of the Celtic Church," in The Early Church in Wales and the West, ed. Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxbow Monograph 16: 1992), 12-21, discussed in my *Prolegomena*

the profusion of Irish literate learning on the one hand and on the other hand, the bitter schisms of ecclesiastical conformity that ignited the paschal and tonsure controversies. The present study focuses on the evidence from liturgical practice, ritual form. How could Rome and the Irish agree on a form of tonsure when the ritual itself served incongruous, even divergent purposes? The natures of the two forms of Christianity were so discrete that the meaning of the ritual did not fully correspond.

While there was dispute regarding tonsure style, and a disconnection in the interpretation of the liturgical rite, the ceremony to perform it was not questioned. The service for the tonsure was uniform on the continent and in the British Isles. Irish liturgy appears to have originated in Gaul: at the end of the seventh-century it was consistent with the liturgical style of the continent.[112] Practiced by both the Irish and Roman Christians, "the rite of *tonsuratio* in the Middle Ages marked, or accompanied entrance into the ranks of the clergy and into monastic observance."[113] That rite, *ordo ad clericum faciendum,* conferred tonsure, and was separate from the ordination rite. It was associated with the assumption of clerical dress, the other outward

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[112] Cyrille Vogel, Medieval Liturgy. An introduction to the sources , (Washington D.C. 1986), 87. In a discussion of the *Palimpsest Sacramentary.* Vogel states: "The Irish liturgy appears to be purely gallican in origin."

[113] Dom Pierre De Puniet, The Roman Pontifical, a history and commentary, (New York: Longmans, 1932), 111; see also L.Eisenhofer and J. Lechner, The Liturgy of the Roman Rite, (Edinburgh: 1961), 397; and *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 15, (Paris: 1946), 1228-35: col. 1232

sign of the ecclesiastic. According to monastic tradition, both were put on for the first time on the day of profession.

The ceremony for tonsuring followed the order below:

Order of the Service:

I. Invitatory: *Oremus fratres carissimi*
Formula of clothing: *Adesto Domine*

II. The rite of tonsure
Tu es Domine, with Psalm xvi
Hi accipiens, with Psalm xxiii

III. The prayer, *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, propitiare*, found in the Gelasian Sacramentaries of the eighth century

IV. The final prayer, *Præsta quæsumus*[114]

The ritual was Roman and was found in the Gregorian and Gelasian Sacramentaries of the eighth century. The prayers and chants come from a wealth of sources, some of which are quite old, especially the *Oremus fratres carissimi*, preserved as the invitatory prayer:

> *Præsta quæsumus, omnipotens Deus, ut huic famulo tuo qui* ad deponendam comam capitis sui *pro tuo amore festinat, des Spiritum Sanctum qui* habitum religionis *in eo . . .* custodiat.[115]
>
> Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, to this your servant who hurries to tonsure the hair of his head for your love: may you give to the Holy Spirit who may preserve in him the habit of religion

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[114] de Puniet, Roman Pontifical, 118

[115] *Ibid.*, 108-109: "Except for the introductory words, the two forms of this prayer, the older one which is given in the Roman sacramentary, and the one now in use whose invitatory form is characteristic of the Gallican sources from which I. is derived, are substantially identical."

The symbolism of this rite of tonsure came very early in Christianity, predating the clerical use of symbolic vestments.

> Tonsure and the clothing of clerics remain the outward and official sign of membership in the hierarchy of the Church, and the reception of them is the appointed means for joining the ranks of the clergy. ...there is the putting off of the world and its vanities, symbolised by the cutting of the hair, and there is the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new with the insignia that mark the cleric out as belonging to the household of the Master he has chosen.[116]

Taking the tonsure, the monks or regular clergy sacrificed their earthly life through the divestiture of their hair, in order to commence a new and closer interrelationship with God. But more than putting off the hair, the tonsure marks the body with a sign, an ever-present mark of the bond with God. The two accompanying Psalms bear out this idea. In Psalm xvi,[117] the aspirant for tonsure seeks out the holy life to be in God's keeping, divine care, as in a guardianship: "Preserve me, Almighty, for I have taken refuge in You." The pledge of the postulant is described in the third person, giving the distinct effect of witnesses observing the swearing of allegiance: "You said to

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[116] *Ibid.*, 121

[117] *Biblia Sacra Latina, ex Biblia Sacra Vulgatæ Editionis*, Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, Inc., 1977, 366: *Conserva me, Domini, quoniam speravi in te./Dixi Domino: Deus meus es tu, quoniam bonorum meorum non eges./Sanctis, qui sunt in terra ejus, mirificavit omnes volumtates meas in eis./Multiplicatæ sunt infirmitates eorum: postea acceleraverunt. Non congregabo conventicula eorum de sanguinibus: nec memor ero nominum eorum per labia mea./ Dominus pars hereditatis meæ, et calicis mei: tu es, qui restitues hereditatem meam mihi./Funes ceciderunt mihi in prclaris: etenim hereditas mea præclara est mihi./Benedicam Dominum , qui tribuit mihi intellectum: insuper et usque ad noctem increpuerunt me renes mei./ Providebam Dominum in conspectu meo semper: quoniam a dextris est mihi, ne commovear./ Propter hoc lætatum est cor meum, et exultavit lingua mea: insuper et caro mea requiescet in spe./Quoniam non derelinques animam meam in inferno: nec dabis sanctum tuum videre corruptionem. Notas mihi fecisti vias vitæ, adimplebis me lætitia cum vultu tuo; delectationes in dextera tua usque in finem.*

God, 'You are my Lord, I have no well being without You.'" Exclusive, steadfast loyalty is the surety of the candidate who is being tonsured, acknowledging devotion to the Almighty "Who has given me counsel;" and whose right hand will guide and insure eternal safety. The new cleric professes: "God is the portion of my inheritance." The day of Profession was seen as the ritual whereby worldly inheritance was exchanged for spiritual inheritance. The taking of tonsure was more than a symbolic act of the moment. It had to be maintained (some monastic rules stipulated once a month). That maintenance gave the cleric a perpetual reminder of the bond he entered into.

Psalm xxiii[118] describes the nature of the bond: the new cleric professes allegiance to a new life and a new lord providing the security of that life: "God is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. ... I will fear no evil for you are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the full presence of my enemies, You anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. only good and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of God..." This ritual has twofold significance. The Roman clergy attached meaning to the rite within Church symbology.

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[118] Ibid., 368: *Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi de-erit:/In loco pascuæ ibi collocavit. Super aquam refectionis educavit me:/Animam meam convertit. Deduxit me super semitas justitiæ, propter nomen suum./ Nam, et si ambulavero in medio umbræ mortis, non timebo mala: quoniam tu mecum es./ Virga tua, et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt./ Parasti in conspectu meo mensam, adversus eos, qui tribulant me. Impinguasti in oleo caput meum: et calix meus inebrians quam præclarus est!/ Et misericordia tua subsequetur me omnibus diebus vitæ meæ: Et ut inhabitem in domo Domine, in longitudinem dierum.*

For the Irish clergy this service would have resonated with aspects of their own cultural heritage.

The reference to *habitum religionis* in the *ordo* was most probably to the monastic habit, which was adopted during the fourth century. Not until later was there distinctive liturgical apparel. For in the early Christian period, until approximately the fifth century, the one outward sign of the regular clergy was the tonsure. "As a general rule it may be safely asserted that for the first five centuries the clergy were in no way distinguished from the laity by their dress. There was nothing to distinguish them from laymen except, up to a certain point, their shaven or close-cropped heads. ... It was only during the era of the barbarian invasions, when the laity took to copying the dress of the conquerors, breeches and a short tunic, that the clergy began to be distinguishable, owing to the fact that they adhered to the older form of dress, a long tunic, dalmatic and *casula* or *planeta.* By the end of the sixth century this outfit was made compulsory for clerics, as is enacted in the canons of the second Council of Braga in 572 and as plainly appears from the correspondence of Gregory the Great."[119] By the seventh-century, tonsure was not the sole mark of the cleric but it was certainly the more venerable.

It would seem that in the ecclesiastical liturgy the ceremony of tonsuring occurred in the same place in the service and was accompanied by the same prayers for both followers of Roman practice and Irish. But while

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[119] De Puniet, Roman Pontifical, 115-116

renouncing association with the past, the Irish cleric was in another way proclaiming it. Rome was setting up the true religion now and forever: encompassing all of the past and the future with one set of values and one set of rules. For Rome, a tonsure stood for what was right, correct: it was the mark of distinction that labeled the cleric as belonging to the one universal Church, apart from all that had come before, establishing what had changed completely, irrevocably, with the advent of Christian doctrine. Although it did not start out that way, by the seventh-century that Roman Church needed one true tonsure to symbolize that one true Church.[120] On the other hand, for the Irish, the tonsure preserved a connection with those who had come before, like Columba. As Adomnán stated to Ceolfrid, he wore his tonsure "after the custom of my country."[121] By maintaining custom based on historical claim, as a mode of passing along ritual, the Irish church fathers became an essential link to Christianity for Irish Christians, connecting themselves and their followers with an enduring tradition. Eventually the

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[120] My own conclusions concur with those of Edward James on this point: "Just as the adoption of a particular hairstyle might signify membership of a class or an ethnic group, so the adoption of a particular tonsure was the outward expression of membership of a single unified church. ...it demonstrated the headship of St. Peter over the true church. ...there had been no controversies about the tonsure at the time of the church fathers; the controversy only arose in the seventh century, out of the accidental conjuncture of disparate hairstyles and beliefs, and within a society which took more regard of such external signs than had the imperial world of the fourth and fifth centuries." E. James, "Bede and the Tonsure Question," *Peritia*, vol. 3, (1984): 97, however, why that was true, we see differently. I disagree with James' assertion that "As the opposing sides lined up and attitudes hardened, the tonsure came to be seen by individuals on both sides as a way of publicising their allegiance." It seems to me that the silence of those retaining the Irish tonsure is an indication that their custom was not for the sake of publicity.

[121] Bede, V.21, p. 326

heritage of the pre-Christian or non-Christian world was to provide a useful and enriching vocabulary for Irish Christianity. *Auctoritas* for the *Romani* was established by decree from a central authority. *Auctoritas* for the *Hibernici* was borne out of temporal primacy; it was embodied in continuity through the customary preservation of the past. This distinction is not parallel because they were produced by two separate modes of belief. It is the difference between a religion that is an orthodoxy and one that has been added onto an existing tradition, the top layer of an accretion of beliefs and ritual responses to the world.

This is not to say that the Romans did not build on their past, or that the Irish were entrenched in a backward-looking continuum. The Roman Church adopted basilica architecture for early Christian churches and the episcopal hierarchical structure to govern the Church; both were inherited from the secular world of the ancient Romans. Correspondingly, early Irish society perpetuated a lively dialogue between the heritage of custom (which creates order through adaptation), and innovative accommodation in the ongoing present. The early Christian Irish lived in a dynamic society. Innovations like writing and Church-going were woven into their lives in a variety of ways during many years, throughout the various regions and at the diverse levels of society. Most of this experience is far out of our reach because time has swept away the evidence, and out of our grasp because we are ignorant of the experience of many levels of the society. But what is evident in the seventh-century is that the Roman Church had cut itself from

the moorings of its inception and established an exclusively self-referential symbol system. At the same time, amidst change and innovation in the Irish world, people made choices with reference both to the bordering worlds of Anglo/Roman Christianity, and to a relatively stable socio-political environment that was handed down by a non-Christian past. The essential experience of Roman Christianity in the seventh-century was its orthodox present. The essential experience of early Christian Ireland embodied a dialogue between the heritage of the past and the transformations of the present.

Jack Goody has identified religions that use writing and are born out of literate cultural traditions as conveyors of literacy: "one could say that these alphabetic religions spread literacy and equally that literacy spread these religions."[122] Furthermore, he has studied how the effects of literacy have been antithetical to oral traditional societies and have led to the eventual eradication of traditional belief systems.[123] Goody talks about how oral "systems of belief are open-ended in a meaningful way, encouraging the

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[122] Jack Goody, The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4

[123] Writing about oral tradition belief systems "...we define a religion in terms of the practices and beliefs of a particular group of territorially bounded individuals - a tribe or a kingdom. Indeed one can argue that it was not until the competition from Islam or Christianity that the idea of an Asante religion, as distinct from the more inclusive concept of an Asante way of life, began to take shape, first in the mind of the observer and then in that of the actor." By contrast: "Literate religions have some kind of autonomous boundary. Practitioners are committed to one alone and may be defined by their attachment to a Holy Book, their recognition of a Credo, as well as their practice of certain rituals, prayers, modes of propitiation." Ibid., 4-5

search, the quest after the truth."[124] These "religions are more 'flexible', subject to change and absorption rather than rejection and conversion." Flexibility, as a characteristic of oral beliefs, is seen "rendering them open to internal change as well as to external imports." On the other hand: "In the literate churches, the dogma and services are rigid (that is, dogmatic, ritualistic, orthodox)."[125] Goody contrasts "the process of incorporation that tends to mark the oral situation." Goody's research has profound implications for early Christian Ireland:

> ...in the longer term the acceptance of Christian beliefs and practices meant, not simply a supplement bringing limited modifications to the existing religious system, but the rejection of all else. It meant conversion, the crossing of a boundary, the exchange of one total set for another of a different, literate type. Eclecticism was no longer the order of the day. Orthodoxy took over. Truth took on a different meaning for there was a new measuring stick, the written word.[126]

When Christianity came to Ireland there was some resistance to its orthodox nature, probably in many ways that we cannot even imagine, but certainly in the establishment of the *Hibernici* and others who resisted Roman practices. As Richard Sharpe has shown, there is no evidence of any episcopal hierarchical structure,[127] nor have basilican churches been found

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[124] Ibid., 8

[125] Ibid., 9

[126] Ibid., 10

[127] Richard Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland," Peritia, Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland, vol. 3, (1984): 232

for the early Christian period. Irish Christianity reverted to native practices for structures.[128] Ecclesiastical buildings took shape within existing raths or similar newly created circular walled structures. Early church centres were circular or boat-shaped rather than cruciform.[129] Even before Irish conversion to Christianity, there had been contact between the oral and chirographic traditions.[130] Yet writing did not become widespread immediately. The very nature of the two traditions produced an unstable chemistry, commingling eventually, for a moment, to create something singular and fine. Then ultimately relenting to the undertow of the literate religion, the initial form of early Irish Christian culture was swept by the universalism of Roman

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[128] Contrast Bede's description of the conversion of the Picts as characterised by Nechtan's letter to Abbot Ceolfrid [c. A.D. 710]: "The king requested Ceolfrid to write him a letter of guidance that would help him to refute those who presumed to keep Easter at the wrong time; and although he was relatively well informed on these matters himself, he also requested information about the form and reason for the tonsure that clergy should wear. In addition, he asked that architects be sent him in order to build a stone church for his people in the Roman style, promising that he would dedicate it in honour of the blessed Prince of the Apostles and that he and his people would follow the customs of the holy apostolic Roman Church, as far as they could learn them in view of their remoteness from the Roman people and from Roman speech." Bede, II.8, p. 113. Of course it is through Roman writing that the remoteness was to be overcome.

[129] E.R. Norman and J.K.S. St. Joseph, The early development of Irish society, (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), particularly, Chapter 5, "Early Christian Sites," 90-121, *fig.* 56 shows the oldest extant Irish monastic plan: concentric circles, from the Book of Mulling!

[130] "Latin loan-words-the principal source of innovation-had already begun to enter Irish even before Palladius was sent *'ad Scottos in Christum credentes'*. Pádraig Ó Riain, "Conservation in the Vocabulary of the Early Irish Church," in Sages, saints and storytellers, Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney, ed: D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach, Kim McCone, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989): 358. On Latin loan-words in early Irish: J. Carney, "Three Old Irish accentual poems," Ériu 22 (1971): 69-70; and more fully, D. McManus, "A chronology of the Latin loan-words in early Irish," Ériu 34 (1983) 21-71. Jane Stevenson, "The Beginnings of Literacy in Ireland," Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Section C--Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature, Volume 89, C, Number 6 (1989): 127-165

Christianity.[131] The emergence of the *Romani* and the tonsure controversy were harbingers of that universalism.

> I would like to suggest that one component of universalism...is characteristic not only of Christianity but of all the major world religions and is directly related to their use of writing. For literate religions influence the normative structure of a social system towards universalism in two outstanding ways. First, insofar as the religion comes from the 'outside' in some sense, by the process of conversion and expansion, its norms are necessarily applied to more than one group or society. Secondly, written formulations encourage the decontextualization or generalization of norms. The second of these processes works in the following way. In written codes there is a tendency to present a single 'abstract' formula which overlays, and to some extent replaces, the more contextualized norms of oral societies.[132]

The Irish tonsure was just such a replaced norm. Roman Christianity, replaced one tonsure with another, altering the inherent meaning of tonsuring through what Goody calls "a certain decay of ceremony"[133]. As a consequence, the tonsure controversy holds a dual meaning. Irish tonsure was a contextualized norm that was replaced by a more universal practice, whose meaning was abstracted to the single formulation of Petrine iconography. Yet at the same time Irish tonsure was held onto for a

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[131] There is certainly a case to be made for the strong continuity of the native element which is so much part of the identity of the early Christian Irish culture beyond the practice of the Church. The *Acallam na Senórach* of c.1200 is just one testament to the memory of memory and other aspects of the oral legacy - Joseph Falaky Nagy, "Compositional Concerns in the *Acallam na Senórach*," in Sages, saints and storytellers, Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney, ed: D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach, Kim McCone, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 149-158; Nagy, "Oral Tradition in the *Acallam na Senórach*," Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages, ed. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), 77-95

[132] Goody, Logic of Writing, 12

protracted period, indicating how essential the context of this norm was, and indeed how vital their initial form of Christianity was to the early Irish Christian and those who followed them.

Head and hair of course are meaningful in every society to some extent, and specific meaning for the Christian tonsure within its liturgy has been pointed out above. However, the Roman Church, which adopted the very art, architecture, and governing hierarchical structure of the secular Roman Empire, dissociated its clerical tonsure from any earlier identification or meaning.[134] There were conventions that correlated a head shorn in the coronal form with slavery in ancient times.[135] Short hair in early Christian times was considered symbolic of the clerics' simple life.[136] But seventh-century writing around the tonsure controversy designated the derivation of the Roman tonsure from Saint Peter's hair dress, and any other symbolism was lost. For those following Roman practice in the seventh-century, that particular cut corresponded to Peter's significance in the doctrine.

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[133] Ibid., 43

[134] P. Gobillot, "*Sur la tonsure chrétienne et ses prétendues origines païennes*," Revue d'histoire ecclesiastique, Louvain 1925, 399-455

[135] De Puniet, Roman Pontifical, 109

[136] *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines*, C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, Tome IV, première (N-Q), s.v., "Tonsor" 354-357

> Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it: and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.[137]

The symbolism of the tonsure was narrowly defined as Peter's and locked into the importance of Peter in Church creed. The explanation for the actual shape of the tonsure was "because Peter was shorn this way in memory of our Lord's Passion."[138] As Bede recorded, Abbot Ceolfrid admonished Adomnán for persisting in his Irish tonsure; he also spelled out the inducement for wearing the Petrine tonsure:

> ...you should give some indication of your inward esteem for whatever derives from the Apostle Peter by displaying openly whatever you know to be his. For I think that your wisdom clearly appreciates that it would be better for you, who are vowed to God, to alter your outward appearance from any resemblance to a man whom you wholeheartedly detest, and whose hideous face you would loathe to see. On the other hand, since you wish to follow the examples and teachings of Peter, it would be fitting for you to conform to the outward appearance of him whom you desire to have as your advocate in the presence of God.[139]

By way of contrast, the symbolism of Irish tonsure is now unknown (there is no longer even any certainty about the form itself). So tacit were the Irish clerics regarding the meaning of the form that the speculations of others resound in the silence. Contemporary testimony on the symbolism of Irish

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[137] Bede, III.25, p. 192: Wilfrid used this reference at the Synod of Whitby and it convinced Oswiu to follow Roman practice. Bede V.21, p. 324: Ceolfrid used it as well to influence Adomnán, he however remained unconvinced .

[138] *Ibid.*, V.21, p. 325

tonsure was self-assured, consistent, and written exclusively by those who opposed it. The attribution of the Irish tonsure to Simon Magus fit nicely into the Petrine tonsure iconography. A pointed example is the interchange between Ceolfrid and Adomnán. To Ceolfrid, Adomnán "displayed remarkable wisdom, humility, and devotion in his ways and conversation." This did not prevent Ceolfrid in the course of discussion, from asking Adomnán, "if you seek the society of blessed Peter, why do you imitate the tonsure of the man whom Peter cursed?"[140]

Ceolfrid could have learned from Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury, 675-705, something about why Adomnán clung to a different tonsure than that sanctioned by Peter's Church. What is put forth in the written record as a "defense" of the position of adherents to Irish tonsure amounts to a description of the process of transmission of traditional customary societies. The founders, provided their authority and instituted a ritual, establishing the perpetuation of a custom. Embodied in that custom was their wisdom "illumined by divine grace." In a letter to King Geraint, Aldhelm wrote:

> Finally, a rumour hostile to the faith of the Church has bruited it about far and wide that there are in your province certain bishops and clerics who obstinately refuse the tonsure of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and persist in recalcitrantly defending themselves with the exculpating apology that they imitate the tonsure of their founders and predecessors, whom they argue with grandiloquent assertions to have been illumined by divine grace. And if these should be concerned to

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[139] Ibid., 326

[140] Ibid., 326-7

> learn from us who was the first to employ this manner of shaving or tonsure, they fall dumb either not knowing the truth or concealing the falsehood.
>
> ...And so that all may be concluded in the summary of a brief sentence: he who does not follow the teaching and rule of St. Peter boasts vainly and idly about his Catholic Faith.[141]

The only extant native reply to criticism of the Irish tonsure is Adomnán's second-hand response to Ceolfrid in the letter recorded by Bede (v.21). He refrained from explicit interpretation of the symbolism of his tonsure, but he was adamant about adhering to it.

> My dear brother rest assured that, although I wear Simon's tonsure after the custom of my country, I wholeheartedly abominate and reject all simoniacal wickedness. So far as my frailty permits, I wish to follow in the footsteps of the most blessed Prince of the Apostles. Bede: V.21

And even when his monastery adopted the Roman dating of Easter, it kept the practice of the Irish tonsure.

> Adomnán... showed how greatly he had profited by seeing the observances of our Church; for after he had returned to Scotland, he won over large numbers to the Catholic observance of Easter by his preaching. But although he was their lawfully constituted head, he was unable to persuade the monks of Iona to adopt a better rule of life. Had his authority been sufficiently great, he would surely have taken care to correct the tonsure also." Bede V.21[142]

Adomnán did not care to "correct" his tonsure, as far as the soures reveal. Despite taking it upon himself to bring Roman Easter to Ireland as

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[141] Aldhelm, the Prose Works, translated. Michael Lapidge & Michael Herren, (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), Letter to Geraint (or Gerontius), 155-60

[142] Ibid., 326-327

well as to Iona, he adhered to the more personal of the Celtic practices without justifying or explaining its significance. He thus effectively extricated tonsure from its exclusive association with the Paschal controversy. Tonsure practice was singled out and unrelinquished while the Irish dating of Easter was rejected. Bede's description of Adomnán's return to Ireland to preach the Roman dating of Easter, does not disclose a concomitant conversion to the Roman tonsure. T.M. Charles-Edwards and others interpret Adomnán's reversal about Easter practice as an indication that Adomnán had joined the *Romani*.[143] However according to Ceolfrid's letter, Adomnán unequivocally adhered to Irish tonsure.

Adomnán's duality of practice was probably not a unique circumstance although the record of it is unique. Both the anomalous Irish tonsure and

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[143] Ibid., 299, "[c. A.D. 703] Adomnán, priest and abbot of the monks who lived on the Isle of Iona, was sent by his nation on a mission to Aldfrid, King of the English, and remained in his province for some while, where he observed the rites of the Church canonically performed. He was earnestly advised by many who were more learned than himself not to presume to act contrary to the universal customs of the Church, whether in the keeping of Easter or in any other observances, seeing that his following was very small and situated in a remote corner of the world. As a result he changed his opinions, and readily adopted what he saw and heard in the churches of the English in place of the customs of his own people." Bede, V.15. Bede went on to say how he then sailed to Ireland and converted the majority of the Irish under the jurisdiction of Iona to Roman Easter, although he was not successful in converting the monks of Iona before his death. T.M. Charles-Edwards, Early Irish and Welsh Kinship, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 11: "Two major *cánai* were promulgated under the aegis of critics of native practices, *Cáin Fhuithribe*, and *Cáin Adamnáin*. ... Adomnán himself was recently a convert to the party of the *Romani* in the Irish Church." Judging by [the kind of things he wrote about pagans and] his retaining of the Irish tonsure I am not so sure that Adomnán could be called a 'critic of native practices'. There are still many questions to be asked concerning the party of the *Romani* before a clear attribution can be made in the case of Adomnán. W. Sayers, "Early Irish Attitudes toward Hair, Beards, Baldness and Tonsure," Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie, *Band* 44, (1991): 183, n77: "According to the annals, Adomnán then submitted to the Petrine tonsure, because of his compassion for Ireland, but had difficulty converting his fellow monks. This rewrite of history effectively exculpates Adomnán, permitting later reference to him as a fully orthodox figure."

divergent Paschal dating were a result of accretion. These liturgical practices appear to have developed at an early stage of Irish conversion[144] and were established according to venerable tradition by the forefathers of the Irish Church. That tradition paralleled the ancient custom of an oral transmission society in which ritual's function was to pass along wisdom. Easter dating and tonsure, although associated with one another, actually represented two different aspects of the custom which was handed down -- one social and the other personal. It is revealing that the social had a shorter retention span. As the community of the faithful expanded it became susceptible to pressures of conformity. Social uniformity was required for the maintenance of Christian society. In social contexts divergent customs in the observance of a festival could be deeply disruptive, causing interpersonal conflicts at the very least. In fact the marriage of the Northumbrian King Oswiu to a Kentish princess was a reason for holding the Synod of Whitby, trying to bring consistent practice to the realm.

But tonsure served a different function: it was worn as the mark of a bond between God and an initiate; It was a physical choice and its consequences were individual. Tonsure for both Roman Christians and the Irish was a sign. Both societies had a use for the purely visual aspect of the ritual form. Ong traces the word *sign* to an earlier period of Roman culture:

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[144] Kenneth Harrison, "Episodes in the history of the Easter cycles in Ireland," Ireland in Early Medieval Europe. Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes, eds: D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick, D. Dumville, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 307-319

> ...sign refers to something visually apprehended. *Signum*, which furnished us with the word 'sign', meant the standard that a unit of the Roman army carried aloft for visual identification - etymologically, the 'object one follows' (Proto-Indo-European root, *sekw-*, to follow). Though the Romans knew the alphabet, this *signum* was not a lettered word but some kind of pictorial design or image, such as an eagle for example.[145]

Walter Ong has characterized the nature of the spoken word as different from the written.[146] Where the spoken word moves through time, the written word does not, nor do signs. Ong makes the distinction between written words and spoken saying that "a textual, visual representation of a word is not a real word. What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can evoke in his or her consciousness real words in actual or imagined sound." In a society founded on writing, both visual imagery and written words refer back to texts. Certainly this was true for Roman tonsure, the sign was *worn*, "carried for visual identification," and it referred back to the Gospel, *Logos*. Peter's role in Christ's passion was understood through what was written into the Gospels. It is clear that the Roman clergy, in their attempts to discredit Irish tonsure by associating it with Simon Magus, were only comfortable with a literary referent for that symbolism as well.

Symbolic visual imagery such as the sign of tonsure called forth a textual referent for Roman Christians, but for Irish society, the reference was

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[145] Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy, the Technologizing of the Word, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1982, reprint 1988), 76

to ritual. Irish tonsure would have resonated with customs rooted in the culture of oral tradition: "...oral memory differs significantly from textual memory in that oral memory has a highly somatic component."[147] Walter Ong's distinction of the oral from the written word is useful for interpreting signs and symbols of an oral society which has adopted writing.

Although by the seventh-century writing had been thoroughly absorbed by the Irish intelligentsia, there was no wholesale eradication of the earlier society which had first adopted writing. Alongside innovations of literacy and writing, oral memory and institutions of the oral tradition were retained. At the present time, investigators[148] may be unresolved in their conclusions regarding when and the extent to which writing technology had become part of the legal system. Yet it is certain that the old formulaic style, the basis for the oral transmission of laws for instance, were still accorded respect and pride of place in the seventh-century. This is the period that the extant vernacular record dates back to. Within that record, the legal codes specifically attribute the preservation of the law to oral transmission.

> For the author of the text [Senchas Már] one of the few ways of justifying a claim for the great antiquity of a tradition stretching far back into the preliterate period would have been to resort to asserting the retentive power of oral tradition: 'The tradition of the men of Ireland what has preserved it?' 'The joint memory of the ancients, the transmission from one ear to another, the chanting of the poets.'

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[146] Ibid., 75-77

[147] Ibid., 67

[148] Jane Stevenson, "Beginnings," 165

'[S]eanchus fear nËireand, cid conid-rul-tear? Comcuimhne da tsean, tidnacul cluaise diaraile, dIcetal file.[149]

The culture of writing in seventh-century Ireland was ecclesiastical and a unique branch of the literate culture of the continent and Britain. The vocabulary of the early Irish Church retained pre-Christian meanings of words which were pressed into the service of Christianity in the early period.[150] As with native words used in written material, visual signs would have retained much of their import despite a Christian context. The vast majority of the laity would have responded to visual imagery as signs within the traditional symbol system, referent to ritual rather than writing. In a society where the mechanisms of memory of oral transmission endured, signs and visual cues would naturally conform to Ong's criteria for the spoken word:[151] "The oral word, as we have noted, never exists in a simply

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[149] Liam Breatnach, "Law," in Progress in Medieval Irish Studies, ed. Kim McCone and Katherine Simms (Maynooth: Dept. Of Old Irish, Saint Patrick's College, 1996), 112

[150] Ó Riain, "Conservation," 358-366

[151] These ideas are put forth with an awareness of the current controversy over the contributions of the oral tradition to the extant body of literature of the early Christian period in Ireland. "Prior to the acquisition of the Roman alphabet along with organised Christianity in the fifth century Ireland was to all intents and purposes a non-literate society. Consequently oral tradition is the sole possibility for the preceding period and is hardly likely to have been eradicated by the introduction of limited, if expanding, clerical and monastic literacy from the fifth century onwards. The fact remains, however, that we have no direct knowledge of this presumed oral tradition and that what have come down to us from the period in question are exclusively the written products of the monastically educated. To deny that these were influenced by and drew upon an oral tradition with pagan roots would be as fatuous as the unprovable and unsupported nativist assumptions about the dominant role of orality and paganism in the creation of the so-called secular genres of this monastic literature." Kim McCone, Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1991), 5. It would appear that all sides of this controversy admit to the persistence of oral tradition down into the Christian period. So it is in the hope of illumination of the situation of

verbal context, as a written word does. Spoken words are always modifications of a total, existential situation, which always engages the body."[152] This would be consistent with signs born of rituals in such a society. Tonsure in the Roman context pertained to texts about Peter, Prince of the apostles. In the Irish context tonsure concerned the experience of haircutting and what that meant in the society. Ceremonial haircutting was a ritual that was remembered by its haircut. The tonsure represented the tonsuring. It was within the ritual where the haircut was achieved that the important essential bond or pact was entered into.

Hair had fundamental symbolic meaning for the Celts throughout their history. Hair and head symbolism extended back into Indo-European religion. The significance of haircutting ritual was derived from the iconography of the head. The head was venerated by the Celts as the house of the human spirit, the seat of man's identity, and the source of generative energy. Consistently throughout their history Celtic peoples created testimonies of reverence for the head, leaving evidence of the awe it inspired in them: from Celtic settlement sites and plans, architecture, plastic arts and coinage to written descriptions by classical authors and recorded redactions of stories by later Christian writers. It was the head and its accompanying extensive imagery that the Celt used to signify the mortal boundary, the

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tradition co-existent with innovative Christianity and writing that I proceed to analyze the mechanisms of oral tradition within the Christian context.

[152] Ong, Orality and Literacy, 67-68

frontier between man and the cosmos. The head mediated between the human and the supernatural; it bounded the mortal and suggested the spiritual, delimiting the one while connecting it to the other. The head was pivotal for humankind's inter-relations with the eternal, and the Celt's inter-relations with the non-Celtic world. The head was a key symbol for the Celt; a summarizing symbol.[153] As mentioned in the first chapter, summarizing symbols are static, summing up the identity of the group: the head conveyed meaning every Celt would recognize, any non-Celt would not. This symbolic role of the head helped the Celts maintain their separate identity. Despite any cultural interchange and absorption that may have occurred with outsiders, the Celts retained a boundary that defined them as a group.[154] It was the head rituals that the early Celt used with the greatest impact to signify identity in relation to those on the other side of that boundary point: headhunting, accompanied by the preservation, decoration and veneration of human skulls. In later centuries head cults developed whose rituals for the most part replaced headhunting but carried forward its symbolic significance.

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[153] Sherry Ortner, "On Key Symbols," American Anthropologist, vol. 75, #5, (October 1973): 1338-1345

[154] "...the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. ... The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, , and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change - yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content." Fredrik Barth, "Ethnic groups and boundaries," Selected essays of Fredrik Barth: Volume 1, process and form in social life, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 202-3

Alteration or adornment of the head correlated to the entire symbolism the Celt attached to the head. Haircutting, and in turn tonsure, drew meaning from the head's implied power as an elaborating symbol. Elaborating symbols are active and may be key scenarios which place and order social concepts for a group.[155] Haircutting was such a scenario for the Celts. It was a ritual which amplified the structure of the society: building upon the meanings contained in its head symbol system to delineate stature and nature within the group. Tonsure functioned as an elaborating symbol at a time of great transition for the Irish. Adopting an outside belief system entailed intensive ethnic inter-relations so the British and Irish used the tonsure as they had always used ritual head adornment: to call up their ultimate place in the scheme of existence. Such symbolism was most vital in the context of the celtic religious tradition and apart from Christian teaching. Where this was understood there was conflict, for the symbolism behind the tonsure ritual belonged to two separate traditions.

Few examples of ritual haircutting other than tonsure have been documented. The nature of textual material for this period makes those that are extant complicated to interpret. They were, in the first place, incorporated into records maintained long after their practice ceased. Why they were recorded has great bearing on whether the record represents the ritual reliably. But such rationale is also difficult to ascertain. Much controversy

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[155] Ortner, "Key Symbols," 1338

has gathered around whether Christian monks who must have made the records would have wanted to record pagan rituals without devising to color or diminish them. Some believe that: "as rites are the external, tangible manifestation of any religion, they are usually a prime target of any missionaries."[156]

However pre-Christian celtic society appears to have left behind intriguing traces of its social mores and rituals in a variety of ways. Two British sources, one in the vernacular and the other in Latin, retain what appears to be a ritual of common celtic origins. The sources each record an act of hairdressing. Both redactions, one fictional and mythical, the other "historical" have placed great significance on the ritual of the haircut. These are not Irish sources but speak to a shared heritage of the British and the Irish.

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[156] Jean-Michel Picard, "The strange death of Guaire Mac Áedáin," Sages, saints and storytellers, Celtic studies in honor of Professor James Carney, ed. Donnchadh ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 373 - "... ceremonies such as royal enthronement survived because of their social importance" [pagan beliefs and rituals related to the core of Christian eschatology, having had to be replaced]. "For P. Mac Cana this would explain why the religious system of the Irish Celts appears so fragmentary. But censorship may not have been the only way of ensuring the disappearance of certain beliefs. The treatment of the tale of Gúaire's death in the *Vita Columbae* shows another approach. Without rejecting or suppressing the lore which was part of the culture of his local audience, Adomnán brings what was probably left of a death ritual to the level of an ordinary death, thus contributing to the loss of symbolism. ... Themes of traditional folklore were not introduced as a diversion but as part of the general purpose of hagiographers, namely the edification of the faithful and the consolidation of the position of their churches. Reducing the cosmogonic content of ancient Indo-European myths to their 'historical' meaning and transferring the super-natural element to the person of the saint are two complementary techniques designed to obliterate older beliefs and replace them by the new Christian faith. The sixth and seventh century monastic writers were not entirely successful in their attempts and many pagan beliefs lived on after them. However, they were responsible for an important feature of the medieval Irish tradition. In transmitting older myths as anecdotes or isolated legends within the context of a Christian system of faith, they contributed to the breaking up of an integrated system of pagan beliefs, leaving the fragments to survive as superstitions and fairy tales."

In his discussion of the first example, the tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Patrick Ford has pointed out the legal element within the tale. It suggests some accessibility within the sources of a common celtic heritage:

> There is much in the description of his [*Culhwch's*] advent to the court, his admission to Arthur's presence, and the scene that develops between them that suggests an archaic provenance, conditioned by a concern for legal propriety. Whatever its literary merits may be, and whatever other clues may be adduced in support of the date of the redaction, these survivals are surely indications of the tale's antiquity, especially where they seem to stem from a common Celtic legal tradition.[157]

In the world of celtic story the significance of kindred tie bonds, hospitality behaviors, and gender relationships were often clearly illustrated by the characters, their actions, the plots and the symbolism inherent within all elements. Ritual activities may be found embedded in redacted texts as casual moments or as pivotal subplots upon which the fate of a meaningful figure hinges. Mundane on the surface, certain activities are nuministic within a deeper social context. Attention to the placement and emphasis of actions and interactions makes it possible to discern some aspects of ritual within oral memory. In the tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, haircutting defines an important social relationship. At two turning points in the tale, major characters are bound to one another through haircutting.

Culhwch ac Olwen is an important re-telling of an old story, both for the world of celtic story and for medieval literature. It is the earliest purely

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[157] Patrick K. Ford, "Welsh *asswynaw* and Celtic legal idiom," Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, University of Wales 26, (1976): 147-153

Welsh Arthurian tale. Although it was written down by Christian monks around 1100 AD, its mythical elements apparently date back to the earlier oral tradition. Several international folklore themes, evidencing an oral memory are clearly discernible, threaded meaningfully throughout this redaction: "The Jealous Stepmother," "The Giants' Daughter," "The Oldest Animals". It stands as both an important artifact of oral history and one which must have had significant resonance for early Welsh Christianity. Handed down for so many generations, itself a property of the continuity of British culture, it carries significant information about the methods by which this culture was preserved and passed along, at first orally and then in writing.

In the story, Arthur has followers with supernatural powers. His stature, as the leader of magical retainers, straddles the earthly and spiritual realms in mythic proportions. He is called upon to assist the young hero, Culhwch, in achieving his destiny by overcoming supernatural obstacles. Other figures in the story, like Olwen, who has attributes of a nature goddess, and of course, the giant, have suggestive mythical overtones. The various magical followers of Arthur and the oldest animals episode provide the flavor of the rich tradition behind this tale.

Culhwch is a prince, whose birth under special circumstances has mystical significance. He loses his mother soon after birth. A stepmother reveals his fate through a curse: he may marry no one except the giant's daughter. His observant and concerned father offers him consolation by reminding him that he is first cousin to Arthur, whose mother is his

mother's sister. With that matrilineal connection, surely no problems are insoluble, no fate insurmountable. A paternal directive to have Arthur cut his hair sends Culhwch off to Arthur's court to ask for the attainment of his bride as a consequent boon. Culhwch flouts protocol by insisting, with much bravado, upon immediate access to Arthur. Eschewing promises of treasure and delights, Culhwch makes an urgent request to have his hair cut. As Arthur cuts Culhwch 's hair he is moved by the lad and offers to grant him his heart's desire. And so the hunt is on for Olwen, the daughter of Ysbaddaden Penkawr, chief giant. Getting to her is difficult, but courting her borders on disaster, since the successful outcome is destined to bring about Ysbaddaden's demise. After a brutal encounter with Arthur and his followers, the giant sets conditions for Olwen's matrimony which entail a list of impossible tasks. But Culhwch has Arthur's sworn assistance. And although much of their world is laid waste in the process, the demands are met. Many of the directives are provisions for Ysbaddaden Penkawr to be properly shaved and for his hair to be groomed and cut. These rituals must be performed as conditions for him to be decapitated. He is ritually executed as a prerequisite for Olwen to wed. The other demands are also nuptial preliminaries to furnish the wedding party and feed the guests. Accomplishing the tasks requires clever and magical feats, yielding marvels from mysteries. In the end, Culhwch and Olwen marry "and she was his only wife so long as he lived."

Haircutting of Culhwch brings about the adventure and haircutting of the giant allows for its resolution in Culhwch's and Olwen's wedded bliss. Through the cutting of Culhwch's hair, Arthur is bound to assist him; and through the cutting of the hair and beard of Ysbaddaden Penkawr, Olwen is tied to Culhwch. The happy resolution of the adventure twice hinges on the performance of a ritual haircut.

When Culhwch's father sends the boy off to seek Arthur's help he links the obligation of kinship and the ritual of haircutting. "'It is easy for thee to achieve that, son,' said his father to him. 'Arthur is thy first cousin. Go then to Arthur to trim thy hair, and ask that of him as his gift to thee.'"[158] ("'*Hawd it kaffel hynny, uab,' heb y tat vrthaw. 'Arthur yssyd geuynderw it. Dos titheu ar Arthur y diwyn dy wallt, ac erchych hynny idaw yn gyuarws it.*'")[159] Upon arriving at court Culhwch reveals to no one, neither doorkeeper nor the man himself, his kinship tie to Arthur. It appears that the ritual of haircutting yields a more dependable obligation than that of a blood bond. For before Culhwch is willing to reveal his kinship to Arthur he secures his haircut.

> Quoth the youth: 'I have not come here to wheedle meat and drink. But if I obtain my boon, I will repay it, and I will

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[158] The Mabinogion, translated Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1949, revised 1974), 96

[159] *Culhwch and Olwen*, An edition and study of the oldest Arthurian tale ed. Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 3. Patrick Ford's translation: "'It's easy for you to achieve that, son,' his father told him. 'Go to Arthur, who is your cousin, to have your hair trimmed, and request that from him as your gift.'" The Mabinogi, and other Medieval Welsh tales, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 123

> praise it. If I obtain it not, I will bear hence thine honour as far as thy renown was farthest in the four corners of the world.' Quoth Arthur, 'Though thou bide not here, chieftain, thou shalt obtain the boon thy head and they tongue shall name, as far as wind dries, as far as rain wets, as far as sun runs, as far as sea stretches, as far as earth extends, save only my ship and my mantle, and Caledfwlch, my sword, and Rhongomyniad my spear, and Wynebgwrthucher my shield, and Carnwennan my dagger, and Gwenhwyfar ny wife.' 'God's truth thereon?' 'Thou shalt have it gladly. Name what thou wilt.' 'I will. I would have my hair trimmed.' 'That thou shalt have.' Arthur took a golden comb and shears with loops of silver, and he combed his head.[160]
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> Amkawd y mab, 'Ny dothwyf i yma yr frawdunyaw bwyt a llynn. Namyn or kaffaf uyghyuarws, y dalu a'e uoli a wnaf. Onys caffaf, dwyn dy vyneb di a wnaf hyt y bu dy glot ym pedryal byt bellaf.' Amkawd Arthur, 'Kyn ny thriccyth ti yma, unben, to a geffy [y] kyuarws a notto dy benn a'th tauawd, hyt y sych gwynt, hyt y gwlych glaw, hyt yr etil heul, hyt yd ymgyffret mor, hyt yd ydiw dayar, eithyr uy llong a'm llen, a Chaletuwlch uyg cledyf, a Rongomynyat uyg gvayw, ac Vyneb Gwrthucher uy yscwyt, a Charnwenhan uyg kyllell, a Gwenhvyuar uyg gwreic.' 'Gwir Dyw ar hynny?' 'Ti a'e keffy yn llawen. Not a nottych.' 'Nodaf. Diwyn uy gwallt a uynaf.' 'Ti a gyffy hynny.' Kymryt crip eur o Arthur, a gwelliu a doleu aryant itaw, a chribaw y benn a oruc.[161]

Arthur himself must discover his relation to Culhwch without being told. And it is through the process of the haircutting that Arthur is able to divine that bond. As he takes up the ceremonial implements requisite for the task, he commences the performance of the ritual. More than the actual cutting is important: the special implements (a golden comb and shears with loops of silver), the public gathering , and the grooming are all part and parcel of the ritual. And it is within the ritual that Arthur senses, before it is

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[160] The Mabinogi, 99-100

[161] *Culhwch and Olwen*, 6-7

spoken, that he and Culhwch are related: "'My heart grows tender towards thee: I know thou are sprung from my blood.'"[162] (*"'Mae uyg kallon yn tirioni vrthyt. Mi a wn dy hanuot o'm gvaet.'"*)[163] When Culhwch says: *"Diwyn uy gwallt a uynaf,"* he is asking for a special ceremony, one which brings with it great revelation. This is no mere haircut. Not only is a bond of obligation proclaimed, but a truth is revealed. Arthur's recognition of Culhwch is directly related to his action of grooming the young man's hair.

Patrick Ford translates the initial demand upon Arthur as: "'...if I get my gift, [we know he intends to ask for the hair ritual], I shall repay it and praise it; if I don't, I shall satirize you to the farthest corners your fame has reached.'"[164] Ford states in his article on "Welsh *asswynaw* and Celtic Legal Idiom" that Culhwch's demand and threat of satire can be seen in a legal context. The haircut ritual may well be tied together with the kinship bond.

> Kulhwch then insists on receiving his *cyfarws*, threatening satire if it is withheld. The precise nature and occasion of the *cyfarws* is not entirely clear to me, but I would guess that it was sought and given on occasions such as the recognition of his son by a father: in the case of questionable paternity, the son's status was dependent upon recognition by the father, and such formal declarations may have been required for other degrees of questionable kinship. At any rate, such a formal acknowledgment may underly Arthur's statement to Kulhwch when he says *mi a wn dy hanuot om gvaet.*

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[162] The Mabinogi, 100

[163] *Culhwch and Olwen*, 7

[164] The Mabinogi, 125

Being groomed by Arthur provides Culhwch with new status which has recourse to privilege. This change of life experienced by Culhwch gives him a connection to power in the form of Arthur's obligation. In that, not just Culhwch is affected. Something occurs between Arthur and Culhwch through the act of haircutting. Hair, which continually reproduces itself, serves as part for whole. Haircutting is then a sacrifice; a sacrifice of the part of a person as a pledge or allegiance of the whole being. The whole person is being given and there would seem to be an obligation on the part of the haircutter, although the text does not make this explicit. The bond established does transform both parties. Arthur is distinctly affected by the young man. This scenario recalls the xvi and xxiii Psalms of the tonsure rite. Some of their descriptions match this setting.

The sacrifice of Culhwch's former life corresponds with the cleric's sacrifice as he takes the tonsure. As the youth goes to Arthur for assistance and is welcomed, his deepest needs provided for, so the cleric pledges allegiance to his God, according to Psalm xvi. "Preserve me, Almighty, for I have taken refuge in You." We know that Culhwch feels desperate and that state of being is echoed in the Psalm, "You said to God, 'You are my Master, I have no well being without You.'" Psalm xxiii describes the nature of the bond produced by this ritual. Its language fits Culhwch's situation: facing evil in the form of Ysbaddaden Penkawr, knowing he has Arthur on his bond. "I will fear no evil for you are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they

comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the full presence of my enemies." It is his wedding table that Arthur sets for Culhwch.

That the Welsh tale has resonance with Christian liturgy is not surprising since it was undoubtedly recorded by a Christian scribe.[165] And it is helpful that the Christian symbolism resonates with that in the tale. But its preservation of an earlier ritual form can also inform how Christians in celtic lands viewed the Christian rituals.

The word *diwyn*, used to describe what Culhwch is told to ask for (*diwyn dy wallt)* and what his boon from Arthur is to be (*diwyn uy gwallt*), did not mean "cut". Spurrell's Welsh-English Dictionary[166] lists it as "to trim or comb (hair)" and "to bless". (It also lists the noun, *diwyndeb* as "blessedness".) The narrator chose this word decidedly and repeatedly to convey the meaning of a holy ritual.

According to the *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru*, University of Wales Dictionary, the following definitions are given: "(a) to reform, improve, correct, redress, rectify, repair, amend, restore, make good, recompense, pay

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[165] John Carey, "Listening to the Celts," Gnosis Magazine, 17 (1988): "If you are primarily interested in proving pagan roots, or Christian influence, the evidence becomes simply the mask that's hiding something better. ... Irish Christianity was truly Irish and truly Christian--a synthesis which was an affirmation rather than a compromise. ... The gods, the Otherworld, the ecstatic vision of the poet-prophet -- all found their place in the cosmos of the new theology. ... How would such a synthesis have worked theoretically? For the most part we can only guess, as the Irish were not much inclined to spell ideas out in abstract terms. They speak to us only in symbols, in tales and images: we can see their spirit most clearly in the working of their imaginations." For a very different discussion of this topic-Kim McCone, Pagan past and Christian present in early Irish literature, (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1991), especially "Heroes and Saints," 179-202

compensation for, expiate. (b) to adorn, embellish, trim." The definition of *diwyn* has significance in that the performance of *diwyn* becomes the ceremony. *Diwyn* is the rite which initiates the haircutting. Both the (a) and (b) definitions may well apply to the situation: the (b) defining the action and the (a) indicating something of the symbolism, or perhaps customary social implications. Judging from the dialogue and action of the tale, the haircut ritual does enhance Culhwch and put him in the position of having a claim for which Arthur must "make good" or grant "recompense". The curse laid on him by his stepmother is addressed, its evil expiated, his destiny rectified. Culhwch secures his goal not solely by reiterating what he deserves by blood, through collateral kinship as first cousin, but by asserting the claim due him from the hair ritual which he asked for as his gift/boon (*erchych hynny idaw yn gyuarws it*:): "'My claim on thee is that thou get me Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant.'"[167] "'*Nodaf arnat kaffel im Olwen merch Yspadaden Penkawr.*'"[168]

Within the tale the hair ritual has a pivotal role in carrying the action forward with suspense and giving balance to the beginning and end of the tale. Culhwch's mission to Arthur, his dramatic entrance to the Hall, the revelation of his kinship to Arthur provide dramatic balance to the emphasis

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[166] *Geiriadur Cymraeg a Saesneg* Spurrell's Welsh-English Dictionary, ed. J. Bodvan Anwyl, 12th ed., (Carmarthen: W. Spurrell & Son, 1934), 159

[167] The Mabinogion, 100

[168] *Culhwch and Olwen*, 7

on the hair ritual of the giant and its consequences. Yet although the ritual serves the storyteller's craft, some critics believe the "narrator" of the tale to be unaware of the meaning of the hair ritual. In their edition of the tale, Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans assume an oversight on the part of the narrator or composer of the tale. Reading it for the sense of the author's intention connects Culhwch to Arthur not merely through earthly blood ties but through a spiritual bond of hair ritual as well.

> ...it appears that the narrator of the story was not entirely clear as to the ancient and symbolic significance of the hair-cutting, for Arthur grants Culhwch's request even before he questions the boy as to his name and parentage. Once his blood relationship to the king has been confirmed, Culhwch then claims from Arthur, as his *pencenedl*, the *cyfarws* or privileged gift to which he is entitled on the occasion of his acceptance into the tribe. Culhwch's *cyfarws* is that the king should help him to discover Olwen.[169]

Edmond Faral also read into the tale an obliviousness on the part of the narrrator to the significance of ritual.

> : "...il apparaît que l'écrivain gallois, à en juger par certaines étrangetés de son conte, travaillait ici sur un thème dont lui-même, déjà, ne saisissait plus la signification"[170]

I believe the "écrivain" understood a great deal. He paints the ceremony vividly with much detail around actions and responses. This is a very well rendered scene. The description intentionally makes the

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[169] Ibid., xxxii

haircutting take precedence and that is because it should. Because kinship bonds were not all. The important legal relationships were bound up with other social bonds. The tale portrays something of how that worked. The symbolic centrality of the haircutting ritual is supported by the action and meaning of the tale. Culhwch is instructed from the beginning to ask for *diwyn dy wallt* as a means to *gyuarws*. Indeed when Arthur offers the moon (*geffy [y] kyuarws*), Culhwch insists on his hair ritual before he asks for assistance in obtaining the hand of Olwen. He wants assistance, when he comes up against the darkest forces of the supernatural, supported by a bond achieved through the hair ritual. He threatens satire rather than using his kinship tie as entrée to Arthur's hall, and he refrains from proclaiming that tie before his hair is cut. He follows his father's instructions in order, to the letter. Only after Arthur has been affected through his involvement in Culhwch's *diwyn*, and their bond established, is he prepared to take on the supernatural challenges imposed by the giant. The greatest challenge of all the tasks demanded by Ysbaddaden Penkawr lies in obtaining the implements for a hair ritual, the razor, comb and shears from between the two ears of the indestructible Twrch Trwyth. (This mythical enchanted giant wild boar, is also found as one of the *mirabilia* in the *Historia Brittonum*[171]). It is in this encounter that Arthur and his followers come face to face with mortal

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[170] Edmond Faral, "*Sur le Rite de la 'Capillature' dans Quelques Textes Médiévaux*," A miscellany of studies in Romance languages & literatures, presented to Leon E. Kastner, ed. Mary Williams, James de Rothschild (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1932), 249

limitations. The Twrch Trwyth lays waste to the land and threatens the warriors' existence; and although they eventually run him off they are unable to stop his destruction or destroy him. The implements are obtained to conduct another hair ritual, which ultimately provides symbolic renewal to the devastated land through the couple's union. They have overcome mythic odds to get together, yet the supernatural opponent who has laid waste to most of the land remains at large, undefeated.

Another passage contains a ritual related to that in *Culhwch ac Olwen.* It is encountered in the ninth-century Latin *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius. The correlation of the two passages dates to the early part of this century. The second hair ritual is referred to in the tales of a licentious British king, Guorthegirn, whose misconduct has repeatedly been brought to the attention of St. Germanus. Guorthegirn has had a son with his own daughter. Germanus, aware of the scandal, is about to address a synod of clerics and laity when the king enjoins his daughter to go to the synod and place their child into the arms of St. Germanus, saying that he is the father of the child. When she proceeds to do this, Germanus receives the child, without blushing and says:

> *'I will be a father to thee, and I will not let thee go until there be given to me a razor with scissors and a comb, and it is permitted to thee to give these to thy carnal father.' And thus it was done. And the child obeyed Germanus, and went to his grandfather--that is his carnal father--Guorthegirn, and the boy said to him, 'Thou art my father, shear my head and comb my*

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[171] Gwyn Jones, Kings, beasts and heroes, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 87

hair.' And he was ashamed and remained silent, and would not reply to the child, but rose up, and was very angry"

['Pater tibi ero, nate; nec te dimittam donec mihi nouacula cum forcipe pectineque detur et tibi liceat haec patri tuo carnali dare'. Sicque factum est. Et infans sancto obediuit Germano, perrexitque ad auum suum--patrem scilicet carnalem--Guorthegirnum; et dixit illi puer, 'Pater meus es: capud meum tonde, et comam capitis mei!' Et ille erubescens siluit, et infantulo respondere noluit, sed surgens iratus est ualde.][172]

The Harley ms. Adds:

As Guorthegirn flees from Germanus' sight, he was damned by Germanus and the entire Council of the Britons.

[ut a facie sancti Germanus fugeret, et maledictus est et damnatus a sancto Germano et omni Brittonum concilio.][173]

Within a Christian context this time, a haircutting rite reveals the complex kinship situation of the royal family. The blood tie in both stories is related to the ritual of haircutting. Both rituals bring forth a revelation about kinship bonds and an obligation on the part of the king toward the boy who is submitting to the haircut.[174] This ritual, and there were probably others like it,

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[172] *Culhwch and Olwen*, xxxi-xxxii

[173] Edmond Faral, *La Légende Arthurienne, Études et Documents Première Partie: Les Plus Anciens Textes Tome* III, *(Paris: Librairie Ancienne*, 1929): 30; *Nennius et l'Historia Brittonum, Étude Critique*, by Ferdinand Lot, *Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Publiée sous les auspices du Ministère de l'Instruction Publique, Sciences, Historiques et Phililogiques, Fascicule 263, (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1934), 178*

[174] In Edmond Faral's (1929) understanding of the passage, the ceremony indicates the *carnal* father of the boy. Faral objects to the connection with *Culhwch ac Olwen* because of what was understood about its dating at the time he was writing. More recent interpretations view the ceremony as "a common rite of passage" (Charles-Edwards 1993) or "as a recognition and acceptance of consanguinity" (Bromwich and Evans 1992). Both use the *Historia Brittonum* passage as evidence that this practice was a widespread European convention. Some investigators believe that these two rituals correspond and ultimately derive from a continental tradition going back to the Romans (Charlotte Guest citing Rees's Cyclopaedia, in her 1877 translation of The Mabinogion, 1877, 260, Charles-Edwards 1993). Charles-Edwards sees the rite as being "inherited from Roman custom," Irish and Welsh Kinship, 180 n45. However, hair rituals being a widespread component of culture, the existence of parallel conventions which he cites does not prove their origins or direct descent from Roman customs and

publicly marked the participant with a recognizable sign, signifying a legal bond, and linked the symbolism of haircutting with legal status. That clearly carried meaning for Irish and British Christian societies, those societies that retained the celtic tonsure.[175]

The hair rituals illustrated above display important parallels with tonsuring, such as the transitional state of the recipient from one status and condition to another, the establishment of obligations through a somatic rite. The public nature of the ritual created witnesses to the bond who could both verify and proclaim it. These are elements that place the ritual within an oral tradition context. And it is tonsure's parallel with such elements that point up its significance to those who retained the Irish tonsure.

Ritual was an integral part of Irish and British culture, serving purposes that spanned the social, legal and spiritual realms. It has been increasingly evident that head and hair rituals survived from earlier Celtic culture into the insular celtic traditions. There is some indication that the pre-Christian Celtic society was one where tonsure or haircutting was a widespread practice with a variety of applications. The words *mael* and

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it is far more likely that the Celtic customs recorded were authentic memories of earlier rituals which were appropriate to their customary social framework and also relevant enough to the contemporary experience (having sufficient biblical parallel among other connections) to warrant being retained in recorded form. A celtic ritual may well parallel the Roman and Germanic, just as many hair rituals parallel those of other cultures without being derived from them-not the least those with common Indo-European heritage. But this dissertation does not argue that this is *the* ritual that informed the symbolism of the Irish tonsure.

[175] Ó Riain, "Conservation," 362: "Being an intrusive element in Irish society, Christianity had perforce to be concerned with the question of its legal status. ...how closely related in christian Ireland were the notions of sacredness or holiness and status."

berrad have both tonsure and haircutting connotations, linking the pre-Christian practices with the Christian.

The Irish Dictionary lists the word *berrad* to mean "act of cutting, clipping (hair), shaving" and a second meaning is "act of tonsuring; tonsure" giving examples of Patrick tonsuring in order to make someone a clergyman, and a slave's tonsure. Also *berraid:* "shears, clips; shaves; tonsures; cuts".

As part of a ruse to help out Patrick in finding "the material of a bishop," Dubthach offers to be made a priest in place of another:

> "As they were thinking of him they saw Fiacc the Fair [coming] to them. Said Dubthach to Patrick, 'Come to tonsure me, for the man will succour me to my consolation by his being tonsured in my behalf, for great is his dutifulness.' Thereafter, then, Fiacc the Fair succoured Dubthach, and Patrick tonsured him and baptized him. He conferred a bishop's grade upon him, so that he (Fiacc) was the bishop who was first consecrated in Leinster."
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> *"Amal immindráitset conacatar Fíacc Find cuccu. Asbert friPátricc : 'tair dumberradsa, air fumrése infer dummimdídnaad duaberrad tarmuchenn, air ismár agoire.' Isdisin, dino, iurráith Fíacc Find Dubthach, ocus berrsi Pátricc ocus baitzisi. Dubbert grád nepscoip foir, cónide epscop insin citaruoirtned laLaigniu."*[176]

The Irish word *mael* is listed in the Irish Dictionary as having meanings applied to both animate and inanimate subjects. This term is found throughout the historical record of this period meaning "shorn, crop-headed and by extension bald" applied to different kinds of people: *Totmáel*-Patrick's charioteer; *Lucet mael*-druid's name. Another meaning, that of

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[176] The tripartite life of Patrick, ed. Whitley Stokes (Great Britain, Public Record Office, Chronicles & Memorials, 1887; Kraus Reprint Ltd, 1965), vol. 2, 344-345

"cropped head" or "head" of "slave" or "servant," hence "devoted to": "received its chief development after the introduction of Christianity, generally in combination with names of saints (in this connection the meaning 'tonsured' may have been implied; it is occasionally glossed 'calvus')".[177]

These words were used for both druids and clerics marking their corresponding identities. From the meaning of *mael* as "devoted to," comes an understanding of the bond created by the haircut ritual and the tonsure. *Mael* was applied to saints and druids alike and indicated for each, that their physical state, indeed their whole being (*pars pro toto*) was participating in a devotion outside the social order, in the supernatural realm.

> "Besides lowly members of society and adolescents, there is another class of persons who are characterized as *mael* in medieval literature: these are the druids, the priests of the pagan Irish religion. In the *Vita Tripartita*, St. Patrick meets two druids named *Mael* and *Capillatus* ('Hairy') both of whom he wins over to the new religion. *Capillatus* receives the monastic tonsure from Patrick, but *Mael* needs no tonsure, since his head is already shorn in the native style of druids. ... We see in the story of *Mael* and *Capillatus* an indication that the druids shaved their head in some special way. The clerics of the early Irish church had a tonsure different from that prevalent throughout the rest of the Christian West; the Irish church reformers who opposed this Celtic tonsure claimed that it originated with the druids. Whether or not this claim is true, it is clear that a link was believed to exist between the state of being *mael* and the druidical profession."[178]

In a divergent interpretation of this story J.B. Bury understands *Mael* to represent the native tonsure and *Capillatus*, "which signifies the removal

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[177] Irish Dictionary

[178] Joseph Falaky Nagy, "Demne Mael," *Celtica* 14 (1981): 9-10

of all the hair in the fashion already largely adopted in the western Empire," the Roman tonsure. Finding that "the story, taken literally, does not hang together," he concludes that it originated to explain an Irish proverb, *cosmail Mael do Chaplait, "Mael* is like unto *Caplait"* which he believes "arose when the two tonsures [native and Roman] were in use together, and expressed the claim that the native mode was as legitimate for a monk as the foreign."[179]

The proverb may be germane to the tonsure controversy but its interpretation is ambiguous. It can be interpreted as a seventh-century *Romani* attempt to create a context that would establish a firm association between Irish tonsure and druidic tonsure. The actuality that Irish Christian tonsure directly imitated a tonsure worn by practicing contemporary druids[180] does not seem plausible because that would have been truly heretical and highly confusing. In light of the Peter/Simon Magus iconography, however, the accusation on the part of opponents of Irish tonsure was consistent.

Scholarly speculation about Christian tonsure's direct derivation from druidic tonsure has been sustained by the logic of a connection between the controversial tonsure and the Irish tradition. Earlier in this century Louis

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[179] J.B. Bury, The Life of St. Patrick (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1905), 142-144

[180] "That druids of some sort were active in Ireland in the seventh and indeed the early eighth centuries emerges unequivocally from the laws and penitentials; that they were not merely conjurers but retained some kind of parareligious role is apparent from the allusion in the early canons known as the *Synodus episcoporum* to their serving as guarantors of oaths and from the tantalizing allusion in the theological treatise *De mirabilibus sacrae Scripturae* to their promulgation of a doctrine of metempsychosis in the mid-seventh century." John Carey, "Saint Patrick, the Druids, and the end of the world," History of religions v. 36 #1 (August 1996): 43-44

Gougaud and Phillip Gobillot made such a suggestion. William Sayers has taken it up and through extensive illustrations furnishes connection after connection between Christian and pre-Christian hair significance. And Edward James has provided some needed perspective on the matter.

> Gougaud: "What was the origin of the Celtic tonsure? It was probably of insular invention. The druids of Ireland wore a tonsure. According to one manuscript of the *Hibernensis*, they shaved even the forepart of the head *de aure ad aurem*, except for a tuft of hair allowed to grow on the forehead. As Simon was the magician or druid *par excellence* and, moreover, the father of all heresies, we can well conceive that the orthodox party did not hesitate to make him responsible for the tonsure they contemned. It is probable then that the tonsure to which the insular clergy clung with such infatuation rests ultimately on some national tradition."[181]
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> Gobillot: "La tonsure celtique--C'était, sans doute, plus ou moins modifié, un emprunt à une vieille tradition nationale des druides et des guerriers."[182]
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> Sayers: "The central importance attached to hair and beards as social and legal indicators, and the apparent categorization of hair styles, perhaps in a taxonomy more rigorously organized than the available evidence would indicate, explain why Celtic ecclesiastics resisted the introduction of the Roman tonsures as vigorously as they did that of the Roman system for determining the date of Easter, both symbolic of the greater question of ecclesiastic organization."[183]
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> "...The legal tracts confirm the evidence of the epic literary texts, although both refer to an earlier culture, many of whose features had evolved by the time the works were committed to manuscript. Yet, while hair styles may have changed over time, the importance of hair seems to have continued. Christian monastic tonsure appears to have

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[181] Louis Gougaud, Christianity in Celtic lands, translated M. Joynt (London: 1932), 204f, the original French edition appeared in Paris, 1911, see note #74 below: the *Hibernensis* evidence refuted.

[182] Ph. Gobillot, *"Sur La Tonsure Chrétienne et ses Pretendues Origines Païennes."* Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique *Tome* 21, (1925): 122

[183] Sayers, "Irish Attitudes," *182*

> supplanted the druidic tonsure, yet another example of the assumption of pagan forms into Christian practice, with accompanying doctrinal justification and legitimation. Both represented sacrifices in return for initiation to knowledge and a community of a higher order. The Paschal and tonsure controversies, when Rome and the Roman party of the English church sought to bring Ireland and the Irish houses in Britain into the fold of orthodoxy, can be seen from the Irish perspective as threats to two ordering principles of Irish life: organization along the diachronic axis of the calendar year, and along the synchronic axis of social structure, where the taxonomy of hair styles gave clear indication of social class and function."[184]

> James: "'Orthodox' Irish churchmen might well have had an interest in associating the unorthodox tonsure with the former druids," but the evidence for why today it "does however still seem to be generally accepted ... does not demonstrate any link between pagan and christian priestly hair-styles. It is probably more judicious on the basis of the evidence to return 'not proven', or even return to [Charles] Plummer's judgment that 'here, as in their Easter practice, the Celts were merely perpetuating an older system which had long been obsolete elsewhere.' To understand the importance of the tonsure in the early medieval church it is not enough to look at the rationalisations of early medieval churchmen about its origins or symbolism; it is much more relevant to attempt to determine the significance of hair and its cutting in society as a whole." [185]

While any direct derivation from druidic tonsure is unlikely, there is substantial indication that the Christian tonsure resonated with native traditions. When Christianity came to Ireland, that complex intact society put its well developed symbol system at the disposal of the new beliefs, including its extensive hair and hair cutting taxonomy. The response to Christian tonsure can best be understood by exploring the meaning within Irish culture

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[184] *Ibid.*, 188-189

[185] James, "Bede and the Tonsure Question," 86-87. He dismisses the "evidence" for some persistent arguments connecting druidic and Christian tonsures, including those found in Maud Joynt "Airbacc guinnae," Ériu 10 (1926-8): 130-34, and Ludwig Bieler, The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 10 (Dublin 1979) 144

of the sign of shorn hair. Joseph Falaky Nagy presents a pertinent analysis of the symbolism of being *mael* as it functioned to place the druid in society.

> "It is ironic that one of the most prestigious figures in pagan Irish society, the druid, is *mael;* he is distinguished by an outward sign also borne by inferior or liminal members of society. As a possessor of great knowledge the druid performs crucial social functions. Yet the knowledge which gives the druid his social status comes from a source outside society; it is a supernatural commodity, which passes from the otherworld to this world. The druid and other related types who also possess special supernatural knowledge, such as craftsmen, practice their professions within society, but they rely for their power and identity on mysterious extra-social sources. They mediate between worlds, and so they are liminal figures with both social and extra-social aspects. Therefore, in the case of the druid, the state of being *mael* is not a sign of weakness but of strength. Druids and other possessors of supernatural knowledge are in a way peripheral members of society, like the lowly classes and youths in a stage of transition, all of whom are *mael.* However, the druid's lack of hair signifies both his existence on the periphery of society and his ability to transcend the boundary between this world and the otherworld. He is the medium between worlds and thus belongs to each only marginally."[186]

The druid and the recipient of the hair cutting ritual cross from one state to another and a bond is formed at that borderline. When Christianity came to Ireland there was a place for the priest alongside one that had already been established for the other liminal figures within the framework of Irish culture. "The missionary and the druid seem to have come to understand one another, to some extent at least, during the slow peaceful years of transition."[187] Christianity joined the Irish and brought with it a ritual coherent with what was already there.

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[186] Nagy, "*Demne Mael,*" 10-11

[187] Carey, "St. Patrick," 17

That ritual served as a physical expression of beliefs and a symbol of order in the world for those who clung to the insular tonsure. The sign of Irish tonsure carried with it meaning which combined two symbol systems. The identifying mark of Christian clergy, the mark of status in the social order of Irish society, was in both systems the indicator of liminal relationship, transcending the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. Coming from its tradition and its conversion, "Irish Christianity was truly Irish and truly Christian--a synthesis which was an affirmation rather than a compromise. *Because* Christianity had been accepted as the universal religion, the revealed truth, it *had* to be compatible with native beliefs; *because* native culture had an enduring value, it *had* to make sense in the framework of Christian doctrine. The validity of each was proved by its ability to coexist with the other."[188] Having incorporated an extrinsic belief system and an innovative technology, the role of continuity was crucial to the stability of seventh-century Irish culture and its societies.

This perspective on Irish tonsure fits into a larger context of early Christian Irish culture. It is in the seventh-century that native law codes, which had been passed down generation after generation through oral transmission, were written down--in the vernacular. While the Roman church was standardizing itself, spreading its universal form and message to ambivalent British kingdoms, the Irish were using the tool of writing to

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[188] *Ibid.*

record their own secular law and in the process affirm the central status of their own language. The written codes retain the form in which they were preserved for so long. Although there is at present some controversy among scholars about the role of jurists and oral law in the seventh-century, the oral formulaic mode of the earlier law tracts indicates an enduring respect for the native traditions. The widescale use of the vernacular to retain and grow important aspects of social order is no small indication of the importance of cultural continuity. It is interesting that Irish churchmen like Columbanus were perpetuators of the Latin tradition through mastery of that language and the glories of its past.[189] It is common to refer to the learned Irish ecclesiastics of this period as the preservers of Christian and Latin cultures, even of civilization. Tools needed to mastermind such preservation were a vital aspect of Irish native traditions and they naturally came into play within the Irish societies as well as beyond their borders. When Christian churchmen who were Irish grown made choices about their mission they drew on a vast store of both Latin and Irish tradition.

While the intelligentsia of the rest of Europe were eschewing their vernacular expression, choosing Latin to promote learning and to universalize culture, the Irish were applying the lessons they were learning from Christianity, its language, and its technology to their language, stories, laws--their heritage. Concomitantly their heritage was fastened onto

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[189] Sancti Columbani Opera, ed. and translated, G.S.M. Walker, (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Study, 1957)

Christianity. That was a choice that the Irish clergy made: to be Christian, but not only, not thoroughly Roman Christian. Despite the orthodoxy of their beliefs their dedication to the church and its doctrines, their religion was not Roman orthodoxy but one that had developed through accretion. What their church and their Christian beliefs were founded upon (Irish society and culture) the Irish clerics chose not to relinquish. Signs and symbols, like language, became conduits, bridges, for the meeting of the new and the old; the confrontation of the traditional and innovative For a time the tonsure controversy represented their struggle with the uneasy fusion of this situation.

The *Hibernici* kept the Irish tonsure to make themselves distinct: Irish among the English, the continental, the Roman Christians. As pointed out in the last chapter, these were individual choices, by Colman leaving the Synod of Whitby, by those monks-English as well as Irish-who followed him to Ireland, by Adomnán and each cleric in Irish, English and continental communities that found meaning, order and their own tradition in that form. Yet the choices of the *Romani* and the *Hibernici* were both, in actuality, Irish choices.

The ambitions of the *Romani* within Ireland came to focus in the end on the internal Irish situation. They did not universalize themselves merely to participate in the universal ecclesiastical hierarchy, but used the Roman affiliation to support their bid for prestige, power and change within Irish society. Ultimately whether they chose an Irish tonsure or a Roman one, they

kept being Irish: of the tradition, its language, its laws and the social and political life that grew out of them. That is the meaning of the proverb *cosmail Mael do Chaplait*. The lesson the seventh-century brought to the eighth century was the vitality of heritage within innovation and the usefulness of innovation for social mobility.

The tonsure controversy was in part fueled within Ireland by the aspirations of some of the leading ecclesiastical institutions. Among the zealous Irish establishments, the ambitions of Armagh can be dated to the early part of the seventh-century.

> In this period, influences were reaching Ireland which presented opportunities for the head of a great church to achieve a more elevated status and a position of greater power than had hitherto existed anywhere among the Celtic churches. This influence is to be associated with the arrival of the Gregorian mission in Anglo-Saxon England and the outbreak of Paschal controversy; Armagh, it seems was quick to respond to the challenge.[190]

Other Irish institutions, like Iona, had no interest in joining the *Romani*, at that time. Even later when Adomnán preached the Roman Easter dating there is reason to believe that this was not a conversion to the *Romani* fold since he and his monks retained their Irish tonsure. The ecclesiastical conflicts of seventh-century Ireland mirror a period of transition for the Irish church but by the eighth century the accretion that defined the Irish adoption of Christianity prevailed within Ireland.

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[190] Sharpe, "Armagh and Rome," 64

A letter from Cummian[191] to Ségéne, abbot of Iona (624-52), datable to ca. 632, described a synod of Mag Léna. Cummian's letter stands as a witness to Irish support of the unity of Christendom: How can we, from a small, remote land, presume that we in our ways are correct and everyone else is wrong. We must conform to Roman practice as one church body, following the primacy of Rome, and dispense with diversity of practice and rule. In contrast, there is documentation from the early eighth century that "shows that by that date the commitment of the *Romani* to the practice of the universal Church had been overcome by the more diverse, more tolerant views of the *Hibernenses*. It was this change of attitude in the late seventh-century which undermined the Paschal victory of the *Romani* and left the Irish Church to continue its independent, *laisser faire* development without the emergence of a metropolitan hierarchy."[192]

As it turned out, the tonsure and paschal controversies, fomented by the Gregorian mission to Britain, created an opportunity for factions in Ireland to use the Roman church to aggrandize their power within Ireland. By the eighth century, Armagh's ambitions had re-focused from a universal

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[191] *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, LXXXVII, 31, 969-978, *"Epistola Cummiani Hiberni, ad Segienum Huensem Abbatem, De Controversia Paschali"*

[192] Sharpe, "Armagh and Rome," 68, has found evidence of opposing parties tolerating diversity within the Church: he cites the *Vita S. Munnu* of the early eighth century, which preserves record of a synod of Mag Ailbe, where a divergence of opinion about the primacy and practice of Rome was acceptable.

territorial claim[193] to the dominance of its many subordinate churches. This shift may well have been a reaction to conditions brought about by serious plagues that beset Ireland in the 660's. Whatever the immediate stimuli, it is clearly a response consistent with a society that had adopted Christianity through accretion. Its own diversity of practice, born from its heritage and traditional ways, became the essential value in critical times.

Social bonds, law, kinship ties were understood as the fabric of early Christian Irish society. In the custom of the society resided the collective memory of the people who had gone before, who had laid down rules and structure. Custom was relied upon to keep society from dissolution: from the chaos of disintegration within or destruction brought on by outside forces or influences. In retaining the culture of the past, custom could be used as a building block stepping stone to the future but without it there could be no future because chaos would descend. The custom of Irish tonsure played an important role in weaving together the divergent underlying symbolism. For both Christian and traditional belief systems it was a sign which represented a

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[193] Richard Sharpe, "St. Patrick and the See of Armagh," Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 4, (Winter 1982), 33-59, Sharpe interprets the development of the cult of Patrick, centered at Armagh, in light of the ambitions of Armagh for ecclesiastical dominance, on p. 59: "Notwithstanding the widespread cult of Patrick, there is no trace of his connection with Armagh, still less of an Armagh primacy, until the seventh century. From that time, Patrician hagiography allows us to see the Patrick legend shift from a generalized cult to gain focus on Armagh. In the same period, Armagh can be seen rising to power for reasons other than hagiographical. Political alliances may have played an important part. But the real key to the rise of Armagh lies in the success of the *Liber Angeli* in proclaiming its metropolitan status, and especially in the ecclesiastical politics behind the establishment of the *paruchia* of Patrick outlined for us in that text and in Tírechán's *Collectanea*. Propagation of the legend embellished Patrick's story, but was not fundamental to Armagh's power. Likewise, Muirchú's

connection with the supernatural. Its significance was rooted in the preservation of origins and descent.

Foremost among the forefathers of the Irish church was Columcille, Columba, founder of Iona. It was his *signum* that the Irish clergy followed.[194] It was through the example of his community that the north of England converted to Christianity. In Book III. 4 of his History of the English Church and People, Bede introduced St. Columba as follows:

> "In the year of our Lord 565, when Justin the Younger succeeded Justinian and ruled as Emperor of Rome, a priest and abbot named Columba, distinguished by his monastic habit and life, came from Ireland to Britain to preach the word of God in the provinces of the northern Picts, which are separated from those of the southern Picts by a range of steep and desolate mountains."[195]

His subsequent characterization of Columba was based upon what he knew of those who followed the saint: "...whatever type of man he may have been, we know for certain that he left successors, distinguished for their purity of life, their love of God, and their loyalty to the monastic rule." What else Bede had to say about Columba, pertained to Iona or the tonsure controversy in which Columba was implicated. In the scene of the Synod of Whitby Colman was portrayed maintaining Columba's virtue in practice by

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rejection of the Ulaid and his leanings toward the Uí Néill fell in line with ecclesiastical developments already in train."

[194] As Colman, who represented the followers of Columba said at Whitby, "Are we to believe that our most revered Father Columba and his successors, men so dear to God, thought or acted contrary to Holy Scripture when they followed this custom [Irish tonsure and Easter dating]?" Bede, III. 25, p. 191

[195] *Ibid.*, III.4, p. 146

citing "heavenly signs" and "miracles," to which Wilfrid responded by demanding: "And even if your Columba - or may I say, ours also if he was the servant of Christ - was a Saint potent in miracles, can he take precedence before the most blessed Prince of the Apostles...?"[196]

Bede's introduction to Columba maintained the bounds of Roman Christian culture. He knew little of Columba: his followers and his work, his reputation. He presented him in a literary formula, set in the context of imperial roman chronology. The mountains of Scotland indicated political boundaries, and suggested a metaphor for the Christian and non-Christian realms. But the very different Irish context may be glimpsed through Colman, at the Synod of Whitby citing heavenly signs and miracles to attest to Columba's sanctity.

Adomnán told how Columba's life and death were marked by flashing streamers in the sky. Ethne, Columba's mother had a vision as she awaited his birth: "'a great mantle...stretched from Insi-mod [islands off the coast of Mayo] to Caer-Abrocc [York] and every color was present in it.' More than a millennium later came verification that the aurora borealis probably was witnessed in 521 and 522 in both Ireland and Britain along the typical auroral arc extending WNW-ESE."[197] This placed him in context, but a context not of Roman rulers rather one of kinship ties and heavenly signs: the spiritual

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[196] *Ibid.*, III.25, p. 191-2,

[197] Gareth Dunleavy, Colum's other island, the Irish at Lindisfarne, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 11-12

side of natural phenomena. Ethne's vision can be understood in a purely mystical sense or as a mystical interpretation of the natural. Natural settings-territory, and blood ties-dynasty, informed Irish spirituality. They were also bound up with legal status. In early Christian Ireland the concepts of sacredness, holiness and status were intertwined.[198]

That intertwining came through pre-Christian society by the process of accretion. Due to the nature of accretion, it is possible to trace back, to a certain extent, through cultural transmission to find roots in pre-Christian society. Saints served as heroes of their kinship groups, they retained the power of the highest status of their society. An aspect of that power was derived from their liminal role intervening with the otherworld. Evident in the hagiography is that their cultural role correlated with that of the druids. But this was no mere literary formulation. The transfer of symbolism served important legal and social functions.

An example may be found in the *Cáin Adomnáin,* a law or rule attributed to the abbot of Iona, biographer of Columba, which was enacted to protect women, children and clerics from violence "the earliest of a series of

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[198] Riain, "Conservation," 362, "Being an intrusive element in Irish society, Christianity had perforce to be concerned with the question of its legal status." In explaining the early Christian words used commonly for heaven "*nem*" and holy "*nóeb*" in their connection to *neimed,* he discusses the semantic range of *neimed*: "'consecrated ground or burial place' and 'privilege, status or privileged person' ...There can be little doubt that *neimed* had already acquired its secondary legal meaning prior to the arrival of Christianity. ...On this assumption, the word's place in early Christian terminology would simply have mirrored what went before. ... *neimed's* semantic range again clearly shows how closely related in Christian Ireland were the notions of sacredness, or holiness and status."

cána noted in the medieval Irish annals between 697 and 887".[199] The fines and obligations resulting from violation would go to the community of Adomnán, presumably Iona. Within the law, compiled in separate Latin and Irish segments, is found a compendium of transcendental motifs: recapitation, resurrection, of Adomnán as well as by Adomnán, angelic intervention, ritual fasting (*troscad*) against God[200], shamanic ordeal and initiation. Pre-Christian symbol, ritual and shamanistic lore infused and ensured this rule, which penetrated the traditional legal system. The *Crith Gablach*, a law tract, regarding status, used it as an example of "a rule of religion that illuminates".[201] The pre-Christian ritual, symbolism and lore was a source of very real power in the legal tradition which carried on beside canon law and in the Irish institutionalization of Christianity.

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[199] "...the saint is depicted as having won the right to act as an intermediary with God in exactly the manner in which a druid (or Brahman) might have. Adomnán's authority is depicted as being the same as the authority of the ancient keepers of the law—the druids, men with the hereditary right to cultivate a special relationship with the otherworld on behalf of their society as a whole. And just as the law tracts contain bits of saga material to illustrate the origins of certain laws or the operation of certain principles of the traditional law, so the compiler of the *Cáin Adomnáin* must justify his community's right to collect certain fines by invoking the origin legend of the authority he is attempting to use. Having a priest on your side is not enough; having a hero-saint-druid who talks to God and defeats kings with bells and curses clearly is. And it is clear from the nature of the shamanic initiation that it is the manner of acquiring the power that is important for validation, not the mere use of that power itself." Daniel Frederick Melia, "Law and the Shaman Saint," in Celtic Folklore and Christianity, (Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Loftin, 1983), 125-127

[200] For a fuller discussion of *troscad* in this period: D.A. Binchy, "A pre-Christian survival in medieval Irish hagiography," Ireland in Early Medieval Europe, 165-178

[201] "For there are three ordinances to which it is proper for a king to bind his *tuatha* by pledge: rule for the expulsion of a foreign race (i.e. against the Saxons), and a rule for the cultivation of crops, and a rule of religion that illuminates such as the Law of Adomnán." From *Crith Gablach* ed. D.A. Binchy, Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1941, translation: Melia, "Law and the Shaman Saint," 124

Miracles and heavenly signs were not a mere display or proof of supernatural power and connection to the otherworld; they embodied the license to practice transcendental negotiations, and legal transactions. They reverted back to the early custom of the society. The *Cáin Adomnáin* was "sanctified in the tradition of pre-Christian law--a tradition in which all lawyers were originally sacred personages."[202] This cannot be understood simply as saints usurping the role of druids. Christianity was obligated to maintain the complex interrelationship among various aspects of the society that was already in place. As norms and practices grew and eroded, change took place in the structures of dynasties, the bases of kingship and the social organization developed, reinventing itself. Yet there was a balance to be maintained of social, legal and spiritual mechanisms which had interdepended on one another since very early times. Into this mix, Christianity and its symbol system were accepted and put to work. In order to participate Christianity had to be understood from the context of the native system.

Pre-Christian meanings of words were pressed into the service of Christianity in the early period. The derivation of the word "*érlam* 'patron' (saint), founder, originally tutelar deity'"[203] had important legal ramifications. The place of the patron saint in Christianity had found a correlate in the

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[202] Melia, "Law and the Shaman Saint," 127

[203] Ó'Riain, "Conservation," 359

vocabulary of Irish society that was built on pre-Christian spiritual symbolism. Its legal implications were that the privileges accorded the tutelar deity would inform the rights, privileges and responsibilities of the saint. Title and property, for instance, which was based on lineage, should have derived from the local deity as the ultimate ancestor.[204] Outside the church this devolved upon the complex dynastic system.

> In the ecclesiastical sphere, however, where there could be no question of direct descent from the founder, a new norm was devised. At least in respect of certain churches title to office and property passed from the founder to his family, the *fine érlama* 'family of the founder-saint'. It is explicitly stated in the tract on legal custom--*Córus Béscna*--that right of succession to the highest office in the *'eacluis fine erluma'* rested firstly in the family of the patron saint. Statements in much later lives of saints show that this was no idle formula and that it could affect even the most prominent of churches.[205]

Columba was the founder-saint of Iona and was succeeded as abbot by his own dynastic relations. Columba and eight abbots of the first nine abbots of Iona after him, including Adomnán, were direct descendants of Conall Gulban, son of Niall Noígiallach, and thereby of the royal line of the Cenél Conaill of the Northern Uí Néill.[206] The importance of lineage in this

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[204] *Ibid.*, "Where questions of title or property were at issue, descent had a crucial bearing on the outcome. ... It must seem very likely that title to such things as office and lands was felt to derive from the ultimate ancestor. ...Mythological origin tales of essentially genealogical character were used to legitimize cult and legal practices. Irish mythological tales have also been taken to be exemplary in character. ...The generally acknowledged legitimizing effect of Irish genealogical texts ultimately derived from the remote mythological personages named in them--the local deities. In the secular sphere title no doubt still derived ultimately from the now euhemerized local ancestral deity.

[205] *Ibid.*, 360

[206] John Bannerman, "Appendix" to Kathleen Hughes, "The church and the world in early Christian Ireland," Irish Historical Studies XIII #50 (September 1962): 113

circumstance was pronounced. "It was the saint's role as source of ecclesiastical title that introduced the term *érlam* to the vocabulary of the early Irish church."[207] Along with it came the importance of statements of pedigree. Saints' Lives and genealogies amounted in this context to documentation of title.[208]

Pedigree then like tonsure had importance to Iona from more than one perspective. Both drew on the symbol system of the pre-Christian tradition. It is interesting to note that in *Culhwch ac Olwen,* during the hair ritual, Arthur asks for Culhwch to recite his pedigree by which he confirms their common lineage.

> "And he asked who he was. Quoth Arthur: "My heart grows tender towards thee: I know thou art sprung from my blood. Declare who thou art.' 'I will: Culhwch son of Cilydd son of Cyleddon Wledig, by Goleuddyd daughter of Anlawdd Wledig, my mother.' Quoth Arthur: 'True it is. Thou art then my first cousin.'"[209]
>
> *"A gouyn pwy oet a oruc. Amkawd Arthur, 'Mae uyg kallon yn tirioni vrthyt. Mi a wn dy hanuot o'm gvaet. Dywet pwy vyt.' 'Dywedaf. Kulhwch mab Kilyd mabKyledon Wledic o Oleudyt merch Anlawd Wledic, uy mam.' Amkawd Arthur, 'Gwir yw hynny. Keuynderw vyt titheu y mi.'[210]"*

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[207] Ó'Riain, "Conservation," 360

[208] *Ibid.* "In these circumstances, it was imperative that the *erlam*'s descent be recorded. Sometimes the pedigree was transmitted orally. Often, however, it was written down, the result being that Ireland, alone among the nations of western christendom, possesses a substantial collection of saints' pedigrees."

[209] Mabinogion, 100

[210] Culhwch and Olwen, 7

In their gloss of Anlawdd Wledig Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans find the following: "It is fair to conclude that *Anlawd/Amlawd* derives from the ecclesiastical tradition of the genealogies and Lives of the saints, and that his name was borrowed from these (perhaps independently) by the redactors of *Culhwch ac Olwen* and of the *Brut*."[211] Perhaps in the minds of the audience the genealogies combined with the ritual to form a stronger more binding union for Arthur and Culhwch.

Since origins and descent constituted important legal aspects of the society, which built upon its early spiritual foundations, the Roman church's proscription on paganism conflicted with some of the very factors that substantiated the claims of Irish ecclesiastical foundations like Iona. *Romani* institutions of the seventh-century like Armagh may well have been reacting to this conundrum in their rejection of native tonsure as well as in their ambitions for joining the Roman episcopal hierarchical structure. By adopting the Roman system, striving for the primacy of the Irish church, Armagh may have hoped to sidestep or sever its association with the native system of title. By rejection of the Irish tonsure, the *Romani* replaced it with a sign that had an exclusively Christian reference.

"The First Synod of Patrick, Auxilius, and Iserninus" was probably of the seventh-century.[212] "The synod has reservations about pagan-Christian

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[211] *Ibid.*, 44

[212] Sharpe, "St. Patrick," 33-59, for sources of Patrick, 35

contacts but makes it clear that such contacts were routine and considerable."[213]

The rejection of the pagan past is evidenced in the *vitae Patricii* by Tírechán (ca. 680) and Muirchú (ca.690). Tírechán composed a violent episode of Patrick's encounter with the druids of King Lóegaire. They are hostile and aggressive toward Christianity and ultimately overcome by the magic and miracles of Patrick, which are identical to those of the druids.[214] Patrick fights fire with fire and destroys the druid Cruth by fire which has a ripple effect: "In that hour all of the gentiles of Ireland were consumed." ["*In hac hora consumpta est gentilitas Hiberniae tota.*"]

In both Tírechan and Muirchú's works it is telling that despite biblical references (*in Temoria istorum Babylone*-'at Tara, their Babylon'), the mode of contending with the druids is the use of the same magic associated with the

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[213] Joseph F. T. Kelly, "Attitudes toward Paganism in Early Christian Ireland," in Diakonia. Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer, ed. Thomas Halton and J.P. Williams (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1986), 218: "For example, it refers twice to the likelihood that a pagan will default on a debt (Canons 8, 20), thus acknowledging that the practice existed. Canon 13 says, 'Alms offered by pagans are not to be accepted for the Church,' a clear witness that this had occurred and that there were positive relations between Christians and pagans. The remarkable Canon 14 refers to Christians who took oaths in the presence of druids, and the equally remarkable Canon 8 acknowledges that clerics gave surety for pagans. ... Pagan-Christian interaction was close and frequent." Kelly feels that the seventh century was the period of the Romanization of the Irish church and because of this there was a mounting intolerance of the pagans unlike what preceded in the works of Patrick and Adomnán which had to do with a tolerance of ancestors and pre-Christians. That tolerance he attributes to a sense of 'Ireland' at an early stage.

[214] For one relevant discussion of "the popular identification of sanctity with magical powers," and the saints "beating these druids at their own game," ideas which goes back to Charles Plummer, Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae 2 vols., (Oxford: 1910); and James F. Kenney, The Sources for the Early History of Ireland vol.I, (New York: 1929); among others. D.A. Binchy, "A pre-Christian survival in medieval Irish hagiography," Ireland in Early Medieval Europe, 167

druids. In light of their similarly destructive methods, Tírechán's distinctions between the pre-Christian and Christian beliefs seems exaggerated.[215] And Muirchú's work is blatantly and "rampantly antipagan".[216]

By contrast, when Adomnán wrote about the pagan, "who live without God's word - *populous gentilicus,*" he was able to find a natural goodness even before baptism by Columba: *"gentilis senex, naturale per totam bonum custodiens vitam"*. He was able to do this because he honored and valued the tradition that he came out of. He knew that the past was in the past, and it had its own virtues. The pre-Christian Irish were pre-Christian but that circumstance did not make them evil, it did not exclude them from grace. There is a lingering awareness that they were building upon a past that they brought forward, while they were no longer a part of: a sense of anachronism. Within Roman Christianity that sense of anachronism was lost. The past was undifferentiated, there was no sense of separation from it. The events of the Gospels were depicted as contemporary. The past was replaced by the ever present. But for the Irish there was a sense of the past as well as a coming to terms with the differences of the past.

Adomnán's attitude toward the pre-Christian heritage set the foundation for later conventions that actively sought to reconcile Christianity with the pagan past. There was an awareness of the anachronisms involved

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[215] Charles Edwards, Kinship, 163

[216] Kelly, "Attitudes toward Paganism," 219

and a self conscious connecting with the past.[217] The *Acallam na Senórach* depicts Patrick anachronistically baptizing the Fenian Cáilte and then serving as a preserver of oral tradition by recording his stories.

> "They stayed there until the morning of the next day, at which time Patrick donned his vestments and went outside onto the lawn. Following him were sixty priests, sixty psalmodists, and sixty bishops, sowing faith and religion throughout Ireland. Two guardian angels came to Patrick at that time, Aibelán and Solusbrethach. He asked them whether it were the wish of the King of Heaven and Earth that he, Patrick, be listening to stories of the Fian. The angels responded emphatically in unison: 'Dear holy cleric, no more than a third of the stories that they used to know do the old warriors tell you, on account of their forgetfulness. Let these be written by you on the tablets of poets and in the decrees of the learned, for it will be entertaining for both the masses and the nobility of later times to listen to these tales.' Then the angels left him."[218]

The *Acallam*'s composition, much later than the period in question, illustrates the continuity of the idea of preservation, and acts as a witness to a tradition of Christian preservation of the non-Christian past. The anachronism was intelligible to them and that is part of the point behind the

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[217] Joseph Falaky Nagy, "Oral Tradition in the *Acallam na Senórach*," Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages, ed. W.F.H. Nicolaisen (Binghampton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), 84: "For this text purports very self-consciously to be a transcription of the lore, tales, and poems transmitted by to Caílte Patrick and others in the era when writing came to Ireland along with Christianity." and 79: "This revival of toponymical awareness that Caílte fosters, like that of the medieval *dindshenchas* tradition as a whole, entails a keen sensitivity to the passing of time: Caílte and the author of the *Acallam* frequently remind their audiences that many of these names that are mentioned, discussed, and explained are no longer the names used to designate these places in the now of their narrative."

[218] Quoted by Nagy, "Oral Tradition in the *Acallam*," 84-85; "The consciousness exhibited here reflects the several centuries of scribal activity that preceded and followed the composition of the *Acallam*, a literary tradition which was rooted in the culture of early Christian Ireland and which coexisted synergistically with an ongoing oral tradition." 94

juxtaposition of the protagonists. The late Kathleen Hughes found that "Clerics saw no harm in writing down the sagas, though the morality of them was heroic."[219] But given the evidence of anti-pagan sentiment in the seventh-century, the early recording of secular lore was most probably a choice, not accepted by everyone. Clerics , poets and jurists may have "belonged to the same families, shared the same cultural heritage,"[220] but Christianity called upon individuals to convert, to leave their former lives and attachments and join in the community of Christ. There were many who severed the closest of ties to become Christian. Columbanus walked by (or over?) his prostrate mother as she blocked his exit to join the Christian community.[221] Still there were those who left family and retained heritage. Hughes imagined churchmen who took on the pre-Christian heritage as part of themselves.

> "It seems to me clear that Churchmen regarded these stories as their pre-Christian history. Relations between ecclesiastical and secular men of learning were close, at least from the seventh-century, probably as early as the sixth. Adomnán implies that it was usual at Iona in Columba's time to ask a visiting poet for 'a song of his own composition, sung to a tune'. One would clearly like to know what

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[219] Kathleen Hughes, "The Early Celtic Idea of History and the Modern Historian," An Inaugural Lecture, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, 12

[220] *Ibid.*, 20

[221] "His mother in anguish begged him not to leave her. But he said: 'Hast thou not heard, *'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me?''* He begged his mother, who placed herself in his way and held the door, to let him go. Weeping and stretched upon the floor, she said she would not permit it. Then he stepped across the threshold and asked his mother not to give way to her grief; she would never see him again in this life, but wherever the way of salvation led him, there he would go." Jonas, "Life of St. Columban," 4; *Patrilogiae latinae cursus completus* vol. 87: cols. 1015-16

songs such poets sang; I would guess that praise-poems of Columba's famous royal ancestors might be regarded as a tactful gesture."[222]

It does appear from the records and circumstances of their history that Columba, Adomnán and the whole Iona community would have been among those choosing to accept , preserve and live with the past in all of its aspects. It correlates with their maintaining a native tonsure in the tradition of their forebears. These are the effects of a Christianity of accretion. Such a form of Christianity was unlike the orthodoxy espoused by the *Romani* at Armagh, for instance. That see, vying for the primacy of Ireland, with Roman episcopal ambitions, did not see pagans as naturally good and deemed acceptable only a tonsure, sanctioned by Rome, which conformed to the iconography of the scriptures.

The brand of Christianity cultivated at Iona converted the pagan peoples in the region surrounding that foundation: the Picts and the Northumbrians. Through the Northumbrians the concepts sustaining that practice were passed along to other areas of Britain and down through time beyond the judgment of the Synod of Whitby.[223] Two aspects of the Christianity that the Irish exported from Iona and other like foundations were: 1) a continuity with the past and 2) an acceptance of that past. In the

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[222] Hughes, "Celtic Idea of History," 12

[223] Margaret W. Pepperdene, "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a New Perspective," Celtica IV, 1958, 253-262; and Dunleavy, Colum's Other Island, throughout

conversion of Northumbria those seeds were planted in fertile ground.[224] The pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon past shines through artifacts of early English Christianity. The forms, structure, atmosphere and traditions of pre-Christian lore are evident in Beowulf and the other treasures of Old English.[225] Caedmon's hymn testifies to Anglo-Saxon use of vernacular language and poetic values to express Christian sentiment in the seventh-century.[226]

> Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard
> metudaes maecti end his modgidanc
> uerc uuldurfadur sue he uundra gihuaes
> eci dryctin or astelidæ
> he aerist scop aelda barnü
> heben til hrofe haleg scepen.
> tha middungeard moncynnæs uard
> eci dryctin aefter tiadæ
> firum foldu frea allmectig
> 'Now should we praise the guardian of heaven's kingdom, the might of the Creator and the thought of his mind, the works of the Father of Glory: how the eternal Lord set a beginning for everything wondrous. The holy Creator first made heaven as a roof for the children of men; then the Guardian of mankind, Eternal Lord, Almighty Ruler, made the earth for men.'[227]

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[224] Michael Richter, "The English Link in Hiberno-Frankish relations in the seventh century," Ireland & Northern France, ad 600-850, ed. Jean-Michel Picard, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1991), 104: ". . . it is possible to argue that Christianity which the Irish practised could have been attractive to 'Saxons' for its own sake."

[225] Charles Donahue, "Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good," Traditio, 7 (1949-51): 263-277; P.L. Henry, The Early English and Celtic Lyric, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966; Dunleavy, Colum's Other Island, especially "Chapter VII The Celto-Saxon Elegy," 78-92

[226] "On the evidence of Bede, Cædmon's *Hymn* was composed between 660 and 680." Henry suggests an Old Irish lyric which may have served as an exemplar, "Chapter XII The Origin of Cædmon's Hymn," Henry, English and Celtic Lyric, 209-215; see also Katherine O'Brian, "Orality and the Developing text of Cædmon's *Hymn*," Speculum vol. 62 #1, (January 1987): 1-20

[227] Earliest extant Northumbrian old English version, dated 737, *Ibid.*, 211 and 213

Along with, and probably because of providing Anglo-Saxon cultures an opportunity to preserve their own heritage, the accretion form of Christianity introduced by the Irish became Insular Christianity and allowed the English and Irish to collaborate. The mutual participation with heritage, oral and pagan, gave insular societies the opportunity to merge their distinct traditions in cultural production: of art, architectural environments,[228] verse, and the many forms of metal, stone, glass, leather and wood crafts.[229] Many insular societies rejected such an opportunity: the Picts, the Britons and their conquerors were never going to get along well enough or accommodate each other's differences to the extent of developing mutual culture. But in the case of Northumbria and Ireland such culture flowered. Down into the tenth century in English "northern territories Anglo-Celtic art still flourished."[230]

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[228] Irish architecture was identified with structures that are found for this period in England: timber structures [until the late eighth century], circular monastic enclosures, cemeteries surrounding their Churches. The plan of a commercial center built within a ring-fort "played its part in linking the new to the old power". Rosemary Cramp, "Northumbria and Ireland," in Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture, ed. Paul Szarmach (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986): 191; and of course Bede's description of the church at Lindisfarne: "When Bishop Aidan departed this life, he was succeeded in the Bishopric by Finan, who had been consecrated and sent by the Scots. He built a church in the Isle of Lindisfarne suitable for an episcopal see, constructing it, however, not of stone, but of hewn oak thatched with reeds after the Scot manner." History, III.25, 185; Norman and St. Joseph, The Early Development of Irish Society, describes Irish monasteries as centers for metalworking and other crafts, as well as discussing the wooden nature of the earliest Christian Irish architecture, 90-121

[229] See Cramp, "Northumbria and Ireland," 185-199, for a good picture of the interactions of English-British-Irish crafts around the contemporary trading situations. 198: "Craftsmen of different races working together in the same monastic milieu in Northumbria are described in the literary sources. In the Northumbrian monastery celebrated in *De Abbatibus* there is a famous calligrapher, Ultan, who is Irish and a priest and who could ornament books with fair markings..."

[230] *Ibid.*, 199

Many English monasteries retained a "lasting influence of the Irish regimen imported from Iona." In the eighth century, some of the "the chief houses founded under the aegis Lindisfarne" or having Irish influence were Lastingham in the North Riding of Yorkshire, Whitby on the nearby coast, Hartelpool, on the coast of Durham, Ripon in the West Riding of Yorkshire (a monastery observing Irish customs from its founding until 661 when Wilfrid -of Synod of Whitby fame- was made its abbot), a nunnery at Tynemouth in Northumbria, Gilling in Yorkshire, Ingetlingum, Coldingham across the Scottish border in Berwickshire, Melrose in southeast Scotland, the monastery at Barrow, near Hull in Yorkshire set up by St. Chad, Crayke in Yorkshire.[231]

Undoubtedly these foundations maintained ties with Ireland, and there were comings and goings. There were English in Irish institutions as well. (See the "Map showing monasteries and other points of cultural contact between England and Ireland, A.D. 400-800" taken from Dunleavy, Colum's Other Island.

> "At this period there were many English nobles and lesser folk in Ireland who had left their own land during the episcopates of Bishops Finan and Colman, either to pursue religious studies or lead a life of stricter discipline. Some of these soon devoted themselves to the monastic life, while others preferred to travel, studying under various teachers in turn. The Scots welcomed them all kindly, and without asking for any

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[231] For more see Dunleavy, Colum's Other Island, 25, note 44, "In addition to these prominent northern monasteries with Irish ties, to the south stood other famous houses with Irish element in their founding traditions.

> payment, provided them with daily food, books, and instruction."[232]

Despite Bede's commitment to the uniformity of the Christian Church, and his disregard of stubborn adherence to Irish tonsure, he did record the cooperative efforts between the English and the Irish. Both cultures influenced one another throughout the seventh and eighth centuries. Kathleen Hughes pointed out:

> "In spite of differences in ecclesiastical organization clergy seemed to have moved freely between the two countries and settled permanently and happily in each others' lands, so that many of their penitential and devotional ideas and their literary expressions were drawn from a common stock, while their books passed into each others' scriptoria, influencing the transmission of texts, and their scribes developed handwriting so similar in style that it has to be designated as 'insular'."[233]

The very insularity of their close proximity affected the English who had followed Colman to Ireland after the Synod of Whitby. Clearly the English chose to "follow" the Irish but they also chose to be distinct. Bede writes that after the Synod of Whitby:

> "The Scots bishop Colman left Britain, taking with him all the Scots he had collected at Lindisfarne, together with about thirty English whom he had likewise trained in the monastic life. Leaving some brethren in his own church, he first visited the isle of Iona, from which he had originally been sent to preach the word to the English. He subsequently retired to a small island at some distance from the west coast of Ireland,

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[232] Bede III.27, p. 195

[233] Kathleen Hughes, "Evidence for contacts between the churches of the Irish and English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age," in England Before the Conquest ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: University Press, 1971): 67.

> known in the Scots tongue as Inishboffin, meaning the Isle of the White Heifer. On his arrival, he founded a monastery, and established there the monks of both races whom he had gathered. But a dispute arose among them because in summer the Scots went off to wander on their own around places they knew instead of assisting at harvest, and then, as winter approached, came back and wanted to share whatever the English monks had gathered. Colman sought a remedy for this dispute, and after searching near and far, discovered a site suitable for a monastery on the Irish mainland, a place which the Scots call Mageo. Here he bought a small tract of land from the nobleman who owned the land, who made it a condition of sale that the monks who settled there should pray for him. So a monastery was promptly built with the help of the nobleman and all the neighbors, and Colman established the English monks there, leaving the Scots on the original island. This monastery is still occupied by English monks."[234]

Bede's rendering of this story reveals his own conviction that English and Irish were distinct races.[235] There were other monasteries which housed monks of different ethnic backgrounds. But clearly some distinction was conceived of and origins are mentioned with import.

> "The identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It thus entails the assumption that the two are fundamentally 'playing the same game', and this means that there is between them a potential for diversification and expansion of their social relationship to cover eventually all sectors and domains of activity. On the other hand, a dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest. ...Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose such a structuring of interaction: a set of prescriptions governing situations of

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[234] Bede IV.4, p. 213

[235] For a discussion of the Irish ethnic identity: Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception," Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 11 (Summer 1986): 71-96

> contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification.
>
> "...the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change - yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content."[236]

The close proximity of insular monks working together and an awareness of parallel but different movement out of an oral past called for a boundary. As discussed in the opening of this thesis that boundary was maintained for the Irish by their form of tonsure.

> "a drastic reduction of cultural differences between ethnic groups [like conversion to Christianity] does not correlate in any simple way with a reduction in the organizational relevance of ethnic identities, or a breakdown in boundary-maintaining processes."[237]

Upon becoming Christian, the Irish had to reinforce their ethnic boundaries as they were now sharing their religious sector of activity with other ethnic groups. The boundary was maintained by the hair ritual, a cultural rite utilized from very early times as an identifying demarcation. The pivotal basis for interaction with the Christian Church was the symbolic tonsure, both a Christian symbolic liturgical practice and an Irish social practice indicating status and evocative of the liminal role of its wearer.

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[236] Fredrik Barth, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries," in Selected essays of Fredrik Barth: Volume 1, process and form in social life (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 202 and 203

Tonsure signaled the ethnic boundary, the frontier, between Irish society, the English and the continental society.

The Irish tonsure served as a sign of ethnic boundary so that within Christianity, that sector "of assumed common understanding and mutual interest," there could be interaction. Where this is demonstrated most clearly in the art. A close "reading" of Hiberno-Saxon manuscript illumination will illustrate this point.

The unique relationship between the pre-Christian past and Insular Christianity was being worked out on the pages of the manuscripts being transcribed in the Irish and English monasteries. The earliest evidence of the direction that this relationship was going to take in the visual arts may be seen in the Cathach of St. Columba.[238] (See Illustrations #1 and #'2)." In the Cathach the art of book decoration has turned away from the Late Antique paradigms and adopted the native vocabulary."[239]

From the seventh-century to the beginning of the ninth century the Hiberno-Saxon world created a new form of art: the illuminated Gospel

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[237] *Ibid.*, 222

[238] Carl Nordenfalk, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting (New York: George Braziller, 1977), 14, finds that "the most plausible date for the Cathach is around 625 A.D." G. Frank Mitchell, "Foreign Influences and the Beginnings of Christian Art," from the catalog: Treasures of Early Irish Art, 1500 B.C. to 1500 A.D. (New York City: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977), 58-9, dates the Cathach about A.D. 550; at the same time, noting that a certain motif, "type of animal also appears in an early seventh-century Northumbrian manuscript, indicating that the Cathach scribe had contacts with the Saxon world."

[239] Nordenfalk, Painting, 14.

Book, as represented by the Book of Durrow (c.675-680 A.D.), the Lindisfarne Gospels (c.700-705 A.D.), and the Book of Kells (c.800 A.D.)[240]

> "...the very process of writing changed from a simple means of communication to something almost talismanic, by being combined with ornaments totally new and persuasive concept of the book which was to prove fruitful all through the early Medieval centuries."[241]

The basis for the creation of this new style was the new insular early Christian art, which was the amalgam of the early Christian art of Byzantium, especially, and also of Rome introduced into the pre-Christian art of the Hiberno-Saxon world. That pagan art also came from a long tradition. The first century B.C. and the first century A.D. saw the flowering of an early Celtic Insular School whose decoration was a distinctive variation on the continental European School of early Celtic art, which developed from about the middle of the fifth century B.C. and is associated with the La Tène culture. La Tène art itself had various roots: Greek, Illyrian, Dacian. Thracian, Persian, Sarmatian-Scythian, Etruscan arts, as well as the preceding Hallstatt (c.750-500 B.C.) Celtic culture's decorative art. (Illustration #3.)[242] The La Tène stage

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[240] The Book of Durrow is Dublin, Trinity College Library, 57, its provenance: the Columban Monastery of Durrow; the Lindisfarne Gospels is London, British Library, Cotton MS. Nero D. IV, its provenance: Lindisfarne; the Book of Kells is Dublin, Trinity College Library, 58, its provenance: Kells.

[241] Nordenfalk, Painting, 8.

[242] John Brailsford, Early Celtic Masterpieces from Britain, In the British Museum (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1975), 9: "La Tène art had various roots and this diversity is reflected in the varied nature of examples of the Early Style. The first phase is not represented in Britain but one of its finest masterpieces, a pair of decorated flagons from Basse-Yutz in the Moselle department of France, may be seen exhibited in the British Museum. These flagons are Italic in form and their decoration includes the classical palmette, while the hounds on the handles are oriental in character and the ducks on the spout are derived from the preceding Hallstatt culture of Central Europe."

evolved from these roots with swirling abstract patterns, curvilinear flora designs, fanciful three-dimensional treatments of animal and human heads. A subsequent development combined all of this by the further abstraction and integration of the animate features growing out of the foliage, or camouflaged within the geometrical forms. The amalgamated form of La Tène art is that which is represented in finds on the British Isles. (As seen in Illustration #4.) (Other forms of La Tène style seeped through the artistic membrane of the insular world in later centuries, carried along by mature northern and gallic descendants of the La Tène culture.) It was a mysterious art style, where the human and animal explorers, sent out by forces beyond their control, made persistent journey into the rhythmically stormy cosmos of swirling geometry.

> Throughout Celtic culture, there is no clear dividing line between the real and the imaginary, between this world and the next. It is no surprise, therefore, that the transformation of shapes--from human to animal, from plant to creature, from geometric abstraction to figurative representation--is the fundamental characteristic of Celtic art.[243]

This characteristic is as true in the totally sophisticated and realized art of the Gospel Books, as it is in the finds of the ancient Celts. A comparison of the handiwork from sites in Hungary and Switzerland with illuminations from the Book of Kells reveals another dimension. It is ike the Celtic Otherworld, where time and space do not need to be bridged since there is other order which binds the fabric of creation. Compare Illustrations #5, #6,

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[243] Vincent Megaw, "The Shape-Changers: Art of the Iron Age Celts," Archaeology, vol. 31, #3, (May/June 1978): 30.

#7. The tiny bead would fit right into the page from the Book of Kells. The Carpet Page from the Book of Durrow could have drawn its inspiration from the very same bead. Illustration #8 is an ancient torc with animals whose bodies, although not exactly interlaced, are crisscrossed, and whose paws grasp stem-like growths, which they also bite. These are the ancestors of creatures found in the Book of Kells, Illustration #9. The weblike pattern created on the torc, is a prototype for that in Illustration #10. Where the earlier motif of biting animals in #8 forms a curvilinear elaboration for a circular object, the animals of #10 form curvilinear pattern echoing the accompanying words on the page, and indeed containing the letters ITA beginning line two, and AI of "AIT" at line five. In Illustrations #5 and #8 the figures depicted refer to the objects they decorate by design. This other order can be understood in formal terms by close attention to the formation of a single ancient Celtic face: nature is reduced to patterns made up of simple geometric shapes within a three dimensional setting. (For examples on such faces see Illustrations #11 and #12.) Incorporated into geometrically ordered designs, such faces blend in, peering out all of a sudden, upon close inspection.

Close inspection of early Christian Insular art reveals mysteries. The geometry has been tamed into faces that fix us with their stares; but also trained into earthly and astral mobiles, set into hectic whorling motion by the winds of change. The winds of change, are the winds of Christian change, subject to the forces of order, the Christian cosmic order. No matter how chaotic the designs become, they are drawn into the logic of the whole. For

this art has an ultimate structure inherent in it, which seems to have crystallized upon contact with early Christianity. Suddenly, the fundamental underlying order gelled within a new mold.

> The strong tendency of the different elements to combine together, forming in some cases a continuous, ever-shifting pattern, is also the mark of a time when all the motifs have been accepted and absorbed to a point where they could come together like the letters of a word, or the words of a sentence.[244]

In the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, Christian scholars conceived cosmologies where the cosmos was a geometric unity. Isidore of Seville, in *De Natura Rerum*, advocated pure science for interpretation of scripture. Number symbolism and pure geometry go together in the Gospel Books. Cassiodorus, on the nature of divine institutions, saw the universe in terms of order. In these centuries Christian thought found human instrumentation to be available through wisdom, a set curriculum of learning. In mathematical sciences, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy or music there is order: number, measure and harmony of the spheres. Numerical order created the stability shaping the carpet pages of the Gospel Books. The opening carpet page of the Lindisfarne Gospels (Illustration #13) was precisely laid out on a grid plan whose modular divisions were derived from multiples of the width of the framing bands. The result is a strongly projected image of a cross which seems to float above the page. What was put in order

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[244] Françoise Henry, The Book of Kells (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 205

to produce this effect was double stranded interlace and knotwork in an alternating color field of red and yellow, interconnected as well as free floating squares, diagonal and other intricate step patterns, red fillets, engaged biting birds, and interlaced finials with double dog heads and rosettes. These Gospels Books grew out of the Christian world view. A Christian structure and system. The abstract carpet page in the Lindisfarne Gospels, opening the Gospels of Saint Mark, is such a Christian structure. (Illustration #14.) It is a cosmic system, where the motifs respond to a basic Christian unity. Both the generating forces of the spiral, and the tangled webs of serpentine animal forms are ordered and contained in a strictly symmetrical force field pattern. Birds and other creatures are interlaced to the frame--they cannot get away! There is great diversity, but this is not a wilderness of multiplicity. It is ultimate order from chaos. Spontaneity is depicted in the spirals, growing foliate forms, and interlaced threads. It is contained by the static geometric unity.

The Word brought about this unity. *In principio erat verbum.* These words appear, emerging as part of the fabric. They were the reason for the fabric: fol. 292R of the Book Kells (Illustration #15), John 1:1. Words were very important to this culture. Not only were they being written down now, they were being illuminated. In the Book of Kells, fol. 114V (Illustration #16), Matthew 26:31, we find a magnificently decorated sentence, framed by a beast whose overlong tongue flops out of his open, sharp-toothed mouth. The interstices of the letters and words are colored in, confounding the mere

reading of them. Deciphering the calligraphy causes the words to reverberate and the meaning to resound: *Tunc dicit illis Ihs omnes uos scan[dalum].* If, "Then Jesus said to them: you will all be scandalized," the manuscript's illuminator then found a way, within the special vocabulary of his art, to illustrate the scandal that the utterance of these divine words would ignite. *Scandalum* is related to the ecclesiastical Greek, *skandalon,* "snare," "cause of moral stumbling". Scandalize, in this sense, is to defame somebody by spreading defamatory talk; malicious gossip. The beasts of this Kells page are opening their mouths with defamatory talk, they curl their tongues with malicious gossip. The interlace knots are scandal snares holding the beasts. The snares of design cause the reader to stumble through the words. The obscured words, are obscured by design, they illuminate the meaning behind the words. One beast spews forth *Tunc di,* caught fast in the letters and the accompanying interlacings, foliage and creatures. The motifs are the message. Clarity of meaning may be found in the complexity of design.

The motifs of the Gospel Books were derived from Celtic and Anglo-Saxon metalwork, part of the collaboration brought about by the accretion Christianity that they came to share. Metalcraft had combined the use of a great variety of techniques to create its effects. The Snettisham torc (Illustration #17), brings together repoussé, with twisted gold wire, spherical bosses. The Holcombe mirror back (Illustration #25) unites designs of fold over symmetry set out with a pair of compasses, and chased surface patterns using punched stipling. A Saxon brooch from Kent (Illustration #18) with

garnet and lapis lazuli inlaid, synthesizes filigree with tiny gold beaded interlacings, and mirrors the clean orderly geometry found in the Lindisfarne Gospel carpet page fol. 94V (Illustration #14). The Gospel books reproduced the metalsmith techniques in the full assortment of motifs which they shared.

Color-filled chambers, resembling cloisonné are found in panels and margins of the manuscripts. (Illustration #13.) Many of the painted motifs look as if they have been inlaid into the page like the coral, stone or glass set into the metalworks. The central circle of a Lindisfarne Gospel carpet page simulates the millefiori patterned glass often used in jewelry and other objects. (Illustration #14.)

Pre-Christian decorative techniques, mastered by the early Christian insular artists became the patterns of order within a higher order. This is dramatically exemplified by the system of organization underlying the overall carpet pages of the Gospel Books. Examples of this phenomenon are Illustrations #7, 19, and 20. The interlacings have a kind of order holding them together, but there is also an overall arrangement which separates spirals from spiraling knotwork on the Book of Durrow page; and beast interlace from bird interlace on the Lindisfarne Gospel and Book of Chad pages. Like a white on white brocade, these paintings illustrate how the subject of a well woven tapestry may conceal its weave. There is a tension of simultaneous equivalents in the figure-ground relationship. The method of defining space by the space defined, creates subject patterns in both the

negative and positive spaces of the picture. This approach to space was inherited by the illuminators from the early Celtic artists. (Illustration #21.) It became integral to the art of the illuminators, beyond their decorations, in the very calligraphy of the early Christian insular style. These artists show a great self-consciousness, whether borrowing from past art, or from the practices of other media. Their use of these techniques is akin to the writing of the *Acallam*, the subject is enhanced by the form.

Snakes, animals, birds, spirals, geometric shapes are the subjects of overall designs: carpet pages and initials. These motifs are the subjects of the signs (words, etc.) and the symbols (crosses, etc.) which are in essence the objects of Christian order as conceived in each Gospel book, and indeed the objects of Christian order in the cosmos that the Gospel books represent. The transition from one realm of order to another, to still another, is most elaborately signified on the Chi Ro page of the Book of Kells. Circlets of La Tène spirals float through a space shared by densely packed, engaged snakes, animal, human, and angel figures. Ever emerging from the multitude of forms are the initials of Christ: XPI, and a bit of frame, outlined in purple and red. This puzzle has incorporated pieces from numerous levels of the imagination, interlocking to form a cosmic whole. The initials are a sign of Christ, *logos* as divinity, reminding us that a word is more than a word: it is a spiritual as well as somatic experience. The angels connect the abstraction of the name to a supernatural state of being, and then to us. There are representatives of an earthly milieu (humans, cats, kittens or mice, moths, an

otter holding a salmon) some of whom have symbolic meanings. Interlace, spirals and radiating concentric circles have long traditions of meaning.

The spiral is a generating form. It is also "the oldest ornament in Insular decoration," owing "a debt to solar patterns such as the helix."[245] Used on a prehistoric Irish tomb from 2500 B.C., spirals counteract the massive solidity of the megalith with outwardly pulsating swirls. Spirals and concentric circles proliferate outwards yet constantly refer back to their beginning. In that way they are like the lifetime of mortals and are as appropriate at Newgrange as they are in the Gospel books. The Chi Ro page of the Book of Kells reads: *Christi autem generatio* [written: *XPI h generatio*]. The spirals and the concentric circles indicate the generating force of the birth of Christ. There is a resemblance between the generating symbolism of the tomb entrance and that of Christianity, which the Gospel book artists must have been sustaining. The life cycle of Christ generated salvation for mankind so that this human life could spiral out from this world to the next. That radiating compulsion of the concentric circles is like the microgroove geometry of tree rings, or ripples on water. They emanate, expanding outward in all directions from a single point, in perpetual motion, as if to say, 'Such is the generation of Christ.' Spirals and concentric circles are especially appropriate in the Gospels, spreading the word. They take on this dynamic literally on the *In principio* pages. (Such as Illustration #15.)

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[245] *Ibid.*

Interlace is contained in the central portion of the X, on the *Chi Ro* page of the Book of Kells. Chaos, contained by the ultimate order. The snakes of bestiality and the interlace of confusion are there confounded. The animal interlace carpet page of the Book of Durrow (Illustration #24) is strong in its eye-catching (Illustration #26) colorism, inherited from Germanic migration period art. The serpentine undulations of the pervasive bestial element are provocative. Harry Bober interpreted this bestial element as demonic.[246] He has cited Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Saint Paul who construe the reptilian and amphibian creatures as noxious. Throughout the Bible, serpents serve as instruments of punishment. Self-biting and back-biting animals are the antithesis of the doctrine of "love thy neighbor as thyself," since they do neither. In association with the Garden of Eden, the serpent carries connotations of guilt and remorse. Bober associated interlace and the beasts. To a certain extent, any Hiberno-Saxon interlace is an abstraction of animal interlace. Interlace is a world-wide phenomenon in all types of art forms. Unique to Hiberno-Saxon visual arts is interlace employing inscrutable knots at every twist and turn. It is the knots which stabilize the wildness on these pages, they give us a sense of control over the beasts. When the beasts are interlaced and knotted up, they are creatures of chaos caught and held fast, in a tangle, helpless. The knotwork stabilizes the delicate balance between the

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[246] Unpublished. Given at the lecture series in conjunction with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's show "Treasures of Early Irish Art, 1500 B.C.-1500 A.D."

chaotic profusion of spontaneity and the structural geometry.[247] Although the knotwork is constructed logically, it is impossible for the casual viewer to clearly unravel the progress of each contributing strand through a knot and out the other side. The knots are inscrutable; a leap of faith is necessary to get by them. They are the spiritual fetter which overcomes evil, or chaos, or perhaps merely wildness. They are the tool of a Divine Being, Who created a world in which demons may exist, but where they can only do as much as He permits.

Hiberno-Saxon visual arts consolidated during the centuries from the initial illuminations of the Cathach to the great, highly intricate and developed art beyond the Book of Kells. Throughout its development, the integrity of the past and its preservation were indivisible from the inventiveness of Hiberno-Saxon art. This art grew out of a respect and understanding for the images and their meanings from the cultural past, along with the sense of distance. The meanings of motifs are preserved while they themselves are re-used at the service of Christianity. The objects found at Sutton Hoo reflect this. The Iron Age Witham Shield (Illustration #25) retains the scars of wear. It had had a boar figure on it at one time. It was

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[247] Relevant to this view an important point was made by Jacques Guilmain 1. "The Geometry of the Cross Carpet Pages in the Lindisfarne Gospels," Speculum 62, #1 (January 1987): 52, "It is an art that cannot be described simply as a catalogue of its component parts, for just as significant is the syntax of those parts. Its compositions are not architectonic frames filled with "decorations," but integrated forms in which all details relate to the wholes as complete fabrics."

repaired in the Iron Age with bosses, to preserve it. Preservation was part of the tradition which the Gospel book illuminators drew their art from.

At the same time innovation played an important role in the tradition. While preserving past motifs in the manuscript illuminations, the artists creating the manuscripts responded to current events. A relevant example can be observed by comparing the Book of Durrow (Illustration #26) to the [Echternach] Gospels of St. Willibrord (Illustration #27). Meyer Schapiro compared each book's symbol of Matthew with their distinct tonsures:

> "There is within the Book of Durrow ...peculiar matching of the gospel texts with the symbols of the evangelists: the man with Matthew, the eagle with Mark, the bull with Luke and the lion with John. ...The order of symbols here corresponds to the pre-Vulgate, so-called Western order of the gospels (Matthew, John, Luke and Mark), which is found in the oldest Irish Latin gospel manuscripts, whereas the Durrow text follows the order of the Vulgate (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."[248]

The scribe of Durrow must have been copying from two distinct manuscripts, a Vulgate from which he transcribed his text, and an old Latin copy from which he took other elements, including the order of the symbols of the evangelists. Like Adomnán's mixed roman and native practices, the book of Durrow mixed the authorities it followed.

> "Now we know from Bede (V.19) that when Wilfrid, the great opponent of Celtic particularism in Northumbria, first visited Rome in 654, he learned, besides the Roman method of computing Easter, the correct 'order' of the Gospels which he had not known in his own country (*'in patria nequiverat'*). Around 670, the same Wilfrid gave to the church of Ripon a luxurious gospel manuscript in gold, purple and

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[248] Meyer Schapiro, "On the Place of Ireland in Hiberno-Saxon Art," in Late Antique, Early Christian and Medieval Art, (New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1979), 231

> gems, described as written '*in ordine,*' a fact which was considered worth recording in his epitaph (Bede, *loc. cit.).* The Book of Durrow, with its Vulgate order of the Gospels and older Western order of the symbols, belongs then to the period of transition from the old Irish order to the newly introduced Roman one, i.e. after the Council of Whitby (663 or 664) and before the eighth century when the symbol follow the canonical grouping. The paintings of the Durrow symbols were apparently copied from a manuscript written prior to the mid-seventh-century. The origin of the Echternach gospels, slightly later in this same transitional period, is perhaps reflected in the clear (& exceptional) Roman tonsure given to the image of the man and in the explicit reference in the colophon to the correction of the text with the help of a manuscript that had belonged to St. Jerome."[249]

The last decades of the seventh-century were crucial years for the development of Hiberno-Saxon book illumination: when the books of Durrow, Echternach [Gospels of Saint Willibrord] and Lindisfarne were executed.

This period includes the reign of king Aldfrith in Northumbria and the abbacy of Adomnán at Iona. They were strategic to maintaining the culture manifested in these books. They had a complex connection that is only recently being unraveled. Their connection includes issues of the Irish tonsure, but it is unclear where Aldfrith stood on the tonsure. Aldfrith was the son of King Oswiu of Northumbria and an Uí Néill princess, and he was educated in Iona. He came to his throne straight from Iona, and he quarreled at some point with Wilfrid, the supporter of the Roman tonsure during the Synod of Whitby. He had serious acquaintance with both Adomnán

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[249] *Ibid.*, 228

(received his book and released Uí Néill prisoners to him) and Aldhelm[250], who were on opposite sides of the tonsure controversy.[251] Perhaps Aldfrith was bridging a gap or perhaps his attitude shows something of the nature of Northumbria at the time.

For forty years before Aldfrith's reign, kings of Northumbria had power over the eastern portion of the Dál Riata, the home of Columba's monastery at Iona. That monastery was ruled almost exclusively from the late sixth until the early eighth century by one branch of the northern Uí Néill. In 685 the northern Uí Néill supported a Pictish-Dál Riatan insurgence, removing Ecgfrith as ruler of Northumbria "to support the claim of their kinsman Aldfrith to the Northumbrian kingship."[252]

There was something thicker than water between England and Ireland in the early Christian period. There was a strong correspondence and attraction that had to do in some part with the strength of Irish learning and its accretion culture. Aldfrith, Aldhelm and Adomnán all died within a year of one another yet the complex culture of which they were such an important

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[250] See Aldhelm, The Prose Works, translated by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1978), 154-161, Aldhelm had a firm orthodox stand on Irish tonsure. His letters reveal that he had a strong, if ambiguous, response to the much praised Irish education of the time. He wrote to those who traveled to Ireland for study, that he was glad and it seems relieved that they had returned from "sucking the teat of wisdom" where they had "nourished for a long time in the first cradles of learning" (161). And: "..you have decided to undertake, with the Lord as your pilot, a journey across the sea, since you have been inflamed by a keenness for study".(154) These letters are full of embroidered admonitions, in difficult Latin, regarding the trend of pursuing advanced learning in Ireland.

[251] See excerpt above from his letter to Geraint

part continued to blossom. Despite the council held at Whitby in 664, Northumbrians and Irish retained the Irish roots of their cultures within Christianity and its accretion is evident in the culture that has been left to history.

Various historical factors impinged upon insular Christianity. In the seventh and eighth centuries "identity of interest and political federation made Northumbria firmly part of the Irish Sea province."[253] Contemporary geo-political circumstances including proximity, conquest and other aggression, alliance, intermarriage as well as commerce contributed to the cultural developments occurring amongst the Picts, English and Irish during the sixth seventh and eighth centuries. But also contributing to those cultural developments was the encounter of and coming to terms with the separate but comparable past (oral tradition) culture of each of these societies. Complexities abound in the situation: each group was part of a larger heritage from which it was more or less evolving; Christianity came in and out of parts of the region with more than one Christian practice in use. Alongside the political outcomes of the various interactions, the substantial cultural output stands independently, and informs aspects of the nature of the interchange amongst these societies in that time.

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[252] Hermann Moisl, "The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century," Peritia 2 (1983): 123

[253] Cramp, "Northumbria and Ireland," 199

The practice of tonsure served as a bone of contention for Bede to distance himself from his own connection to Irish Christianity[254] as well as for the *Romani* whose Irishness got in the way of their orthodox ambitions; and it served as a boundary for those who practiced their beliefs and their art in "mixed" ecclesiastical institutions; and as a tradition for those in natively connected Irish institutions. If tonsure may be considered a rite of initiation, the words of Mircea Eliade express its dual nature in the seventh and early eighth century: "Like every other cultural fact, the phenomenon of initiation is also a historical fact. In other words, the concrete expressions of initiation are related both to the structure of the respective society and to its history. On the other hand, initiation implies an existential experience--the experience of ritual death and the revelation of the sacred; that is, it exhibits a dimension that is metacultural and transhistorical."[255]

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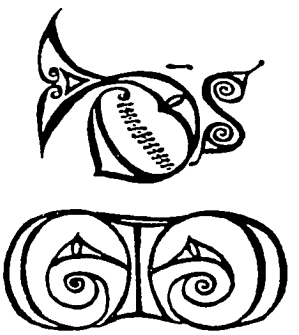
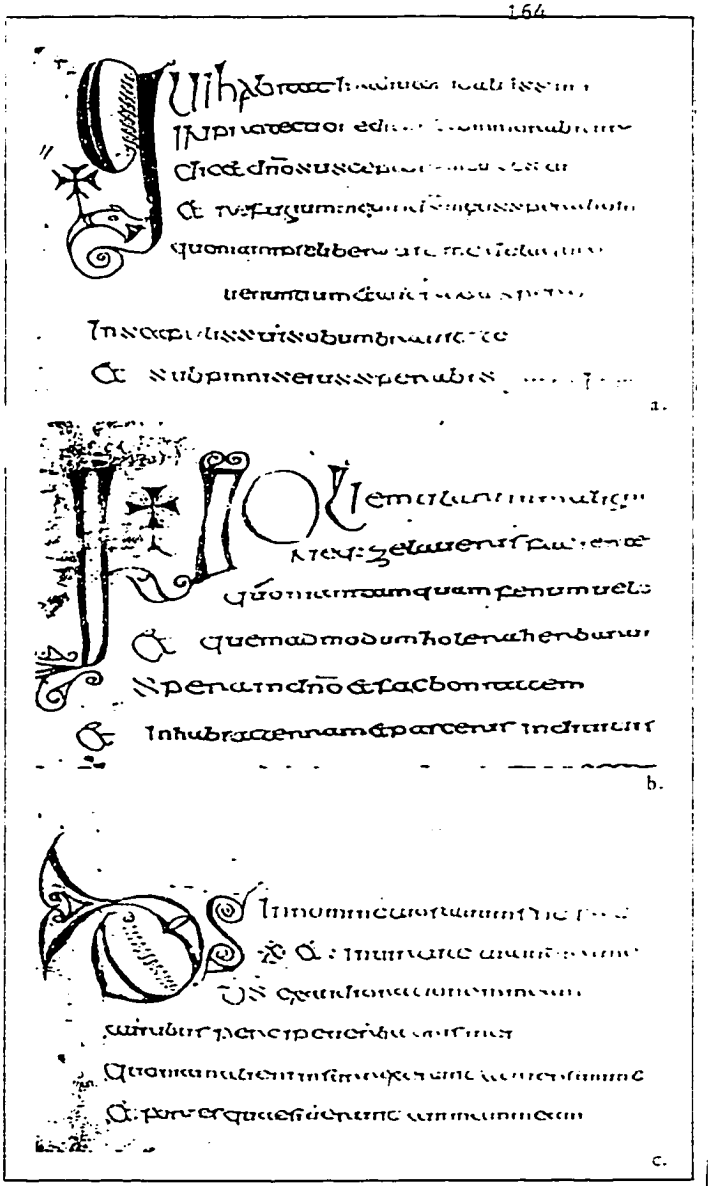
[254] Pepperdene, "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*," 253ff

[255] Mircea Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, transl. Willard Trask (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958), 120



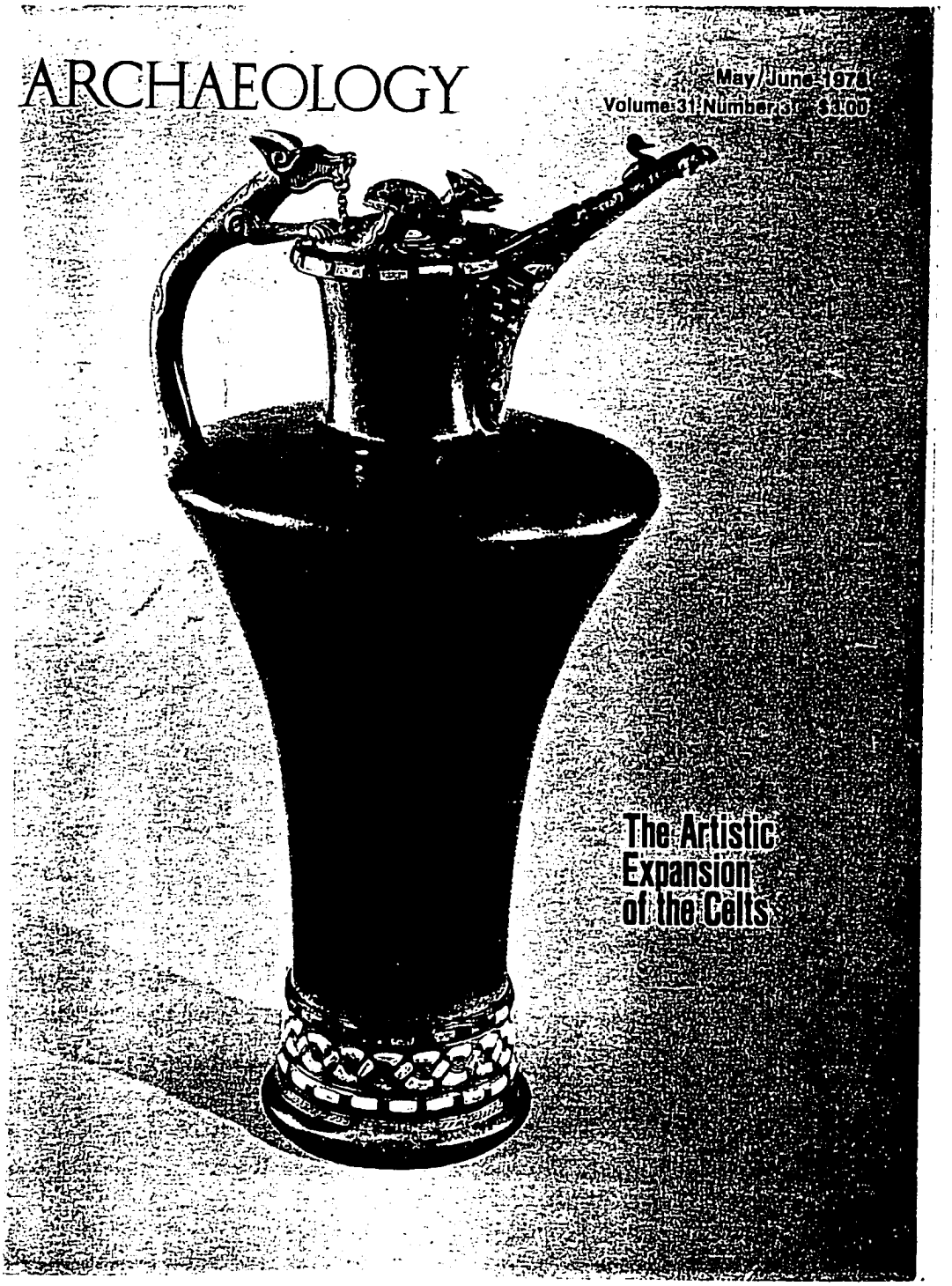


a.

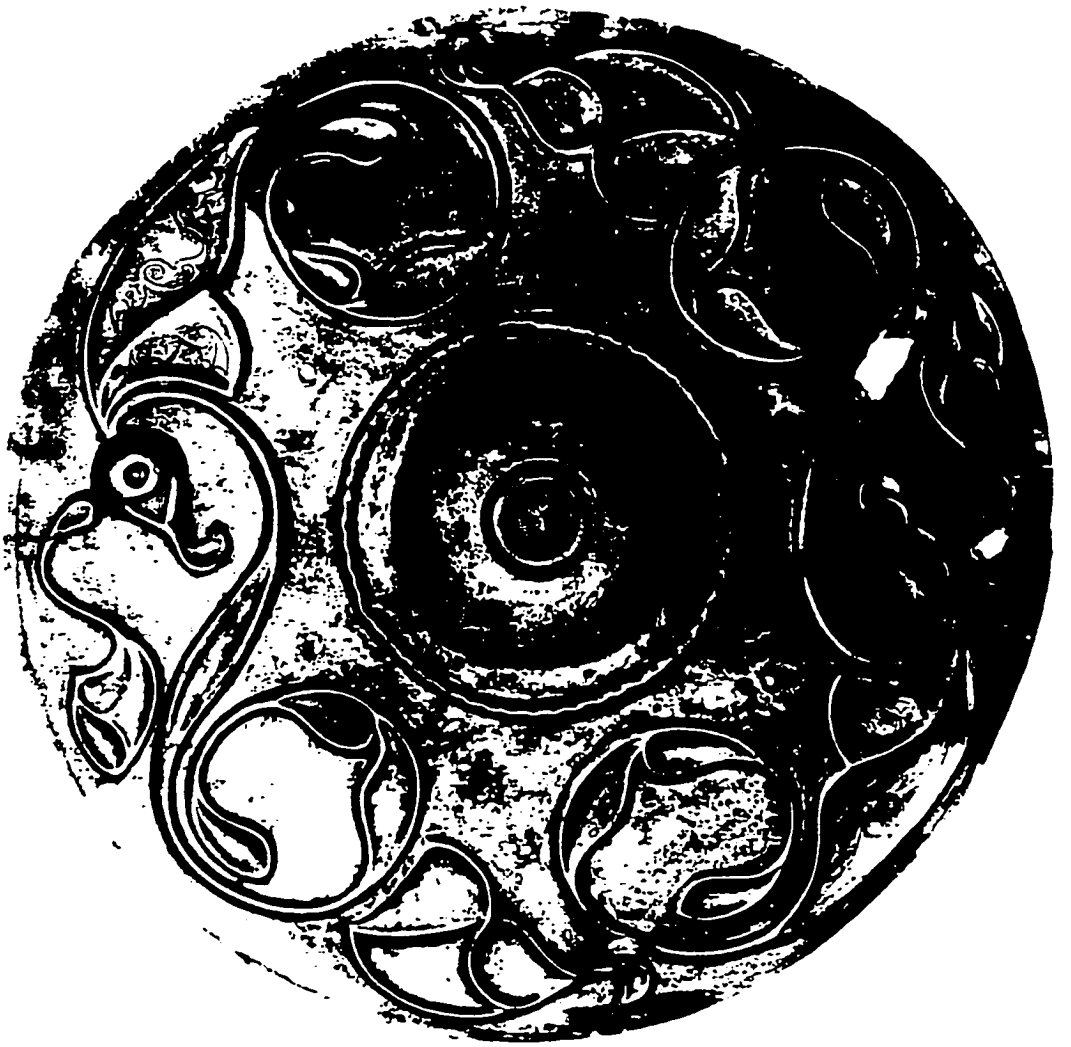
b.

c.

#1 Cathach of Saint Columba page
#2 elaborated initials from the Cathach of Saint Columba



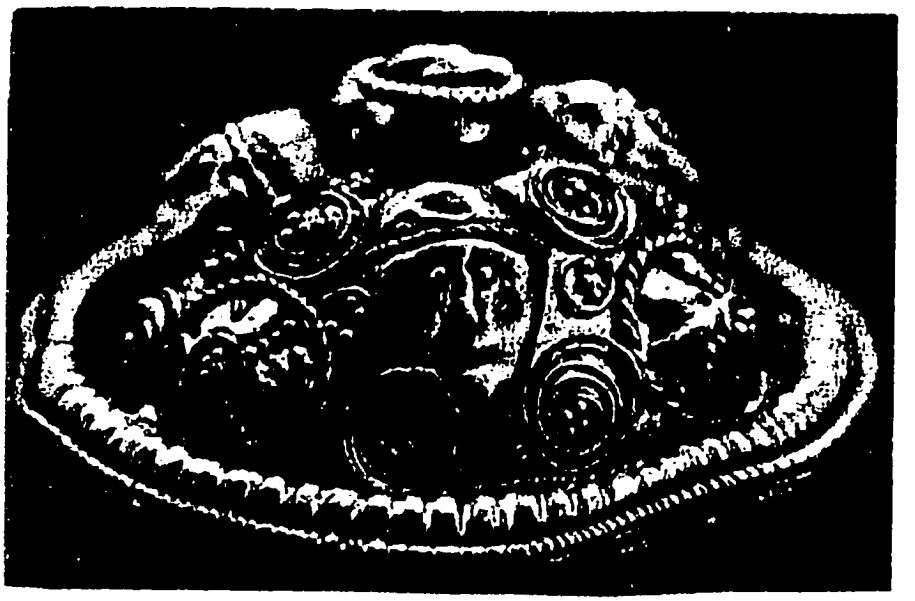
#3 bronze flagon from Basse-Yutz



#4a Wansworth shield boss – photograph

#4b Wandsworth shield boss-drawing

#5 Gold Bead, Hungary
diameter: 1 inch

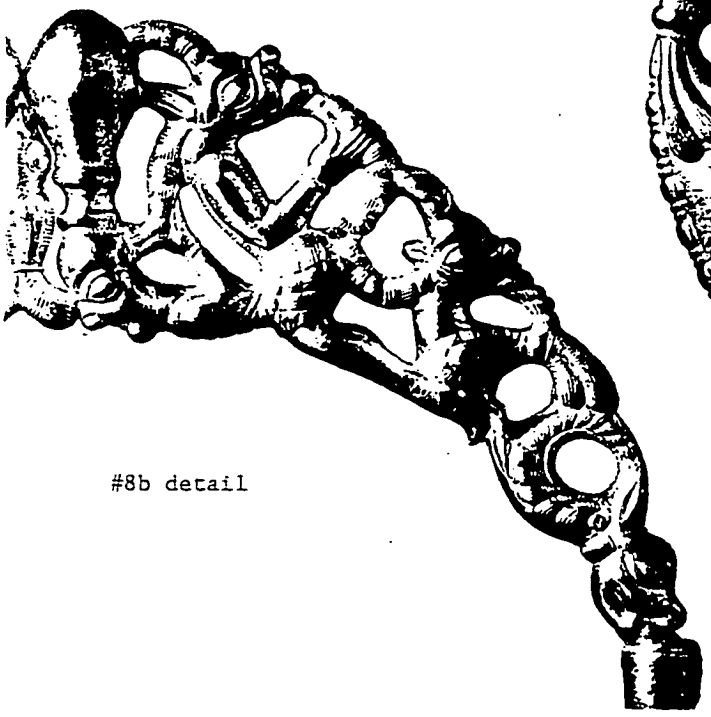


Book of Kells

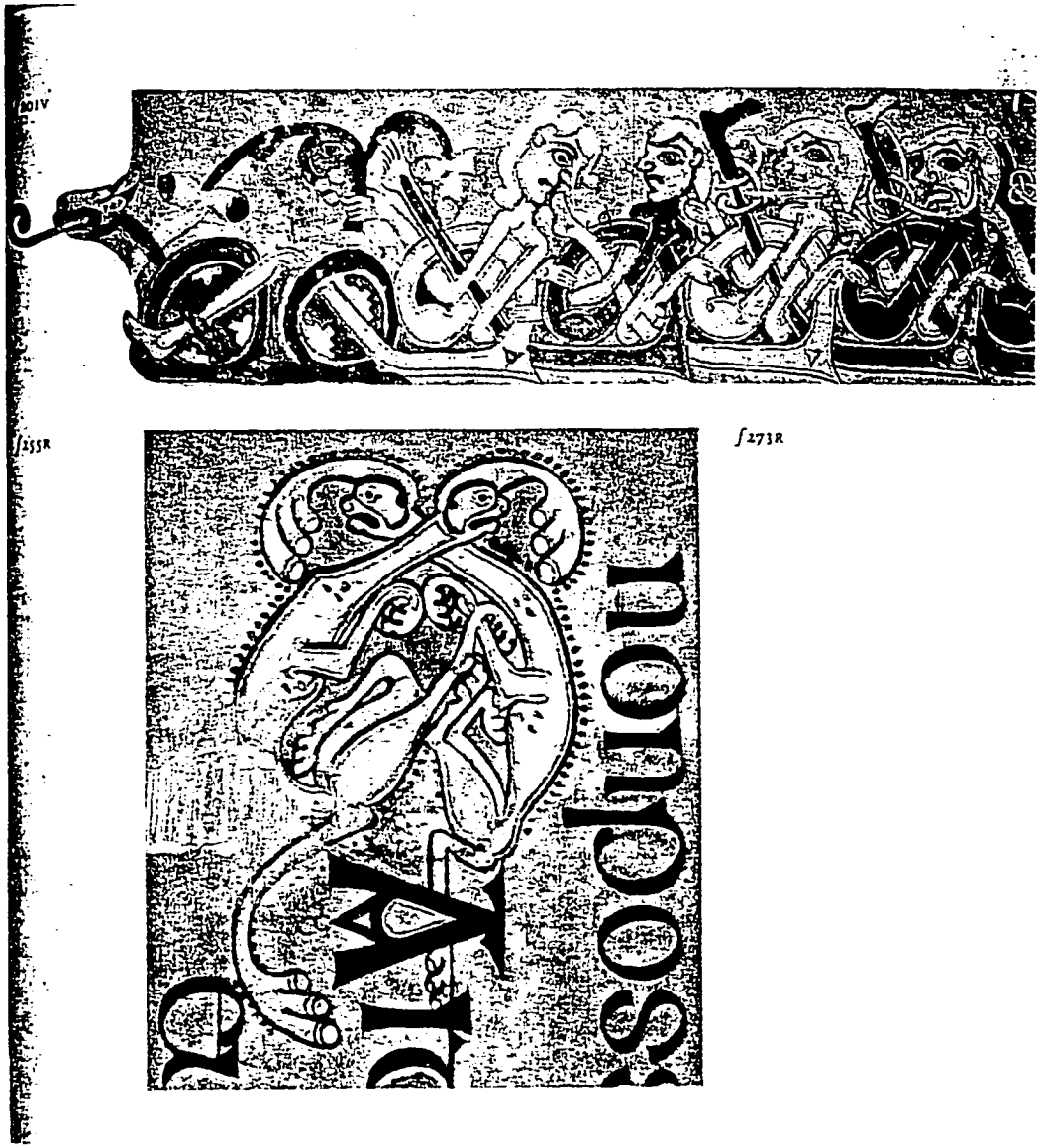
#6 "Chi Ro" page fol. 34r

Book of Durrow fol.3v

#8a torcs from hoard at Erstfeld, Switzerland

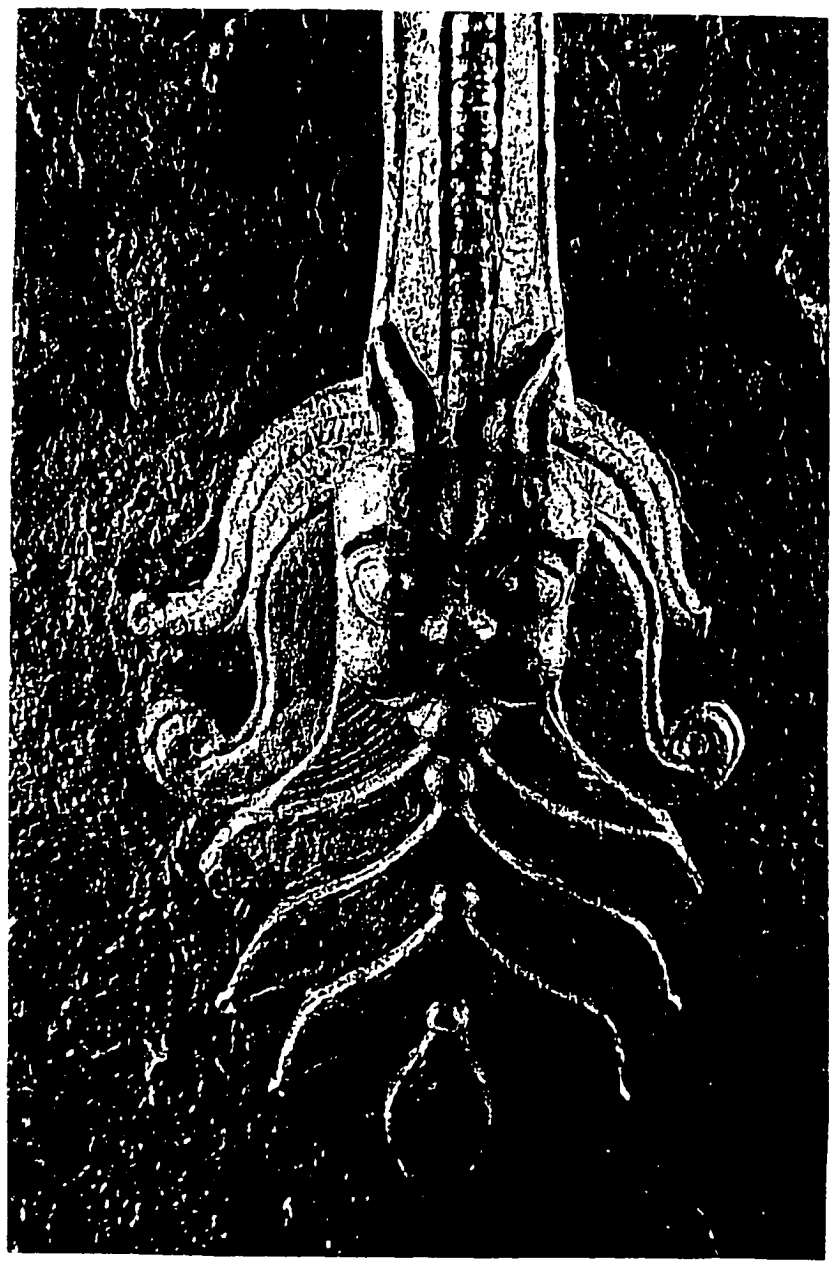


#8b detail

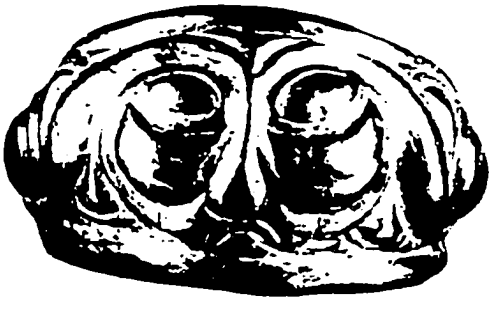


#9 Book of Kells, details

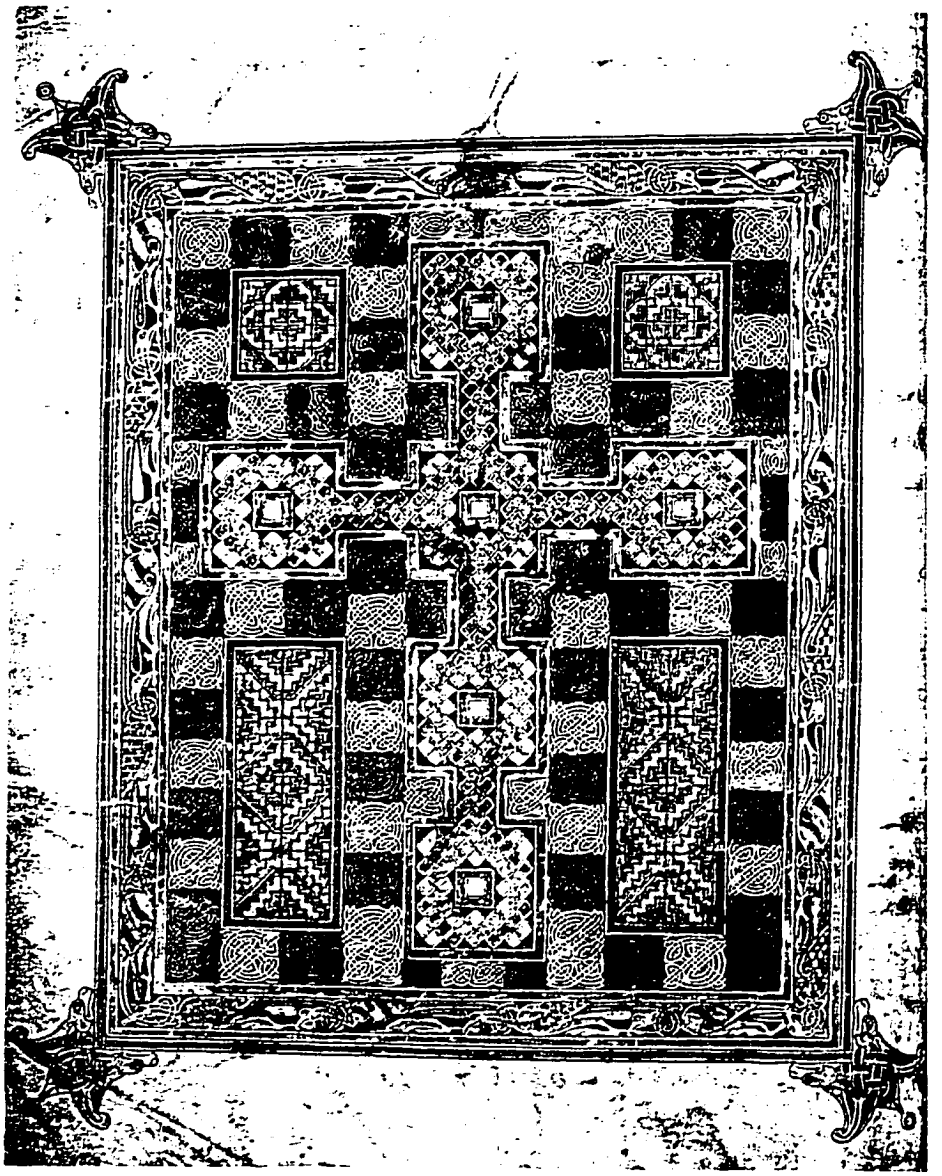
#10 Book of Kells, detail fol. 250v "ITA" & "AI"



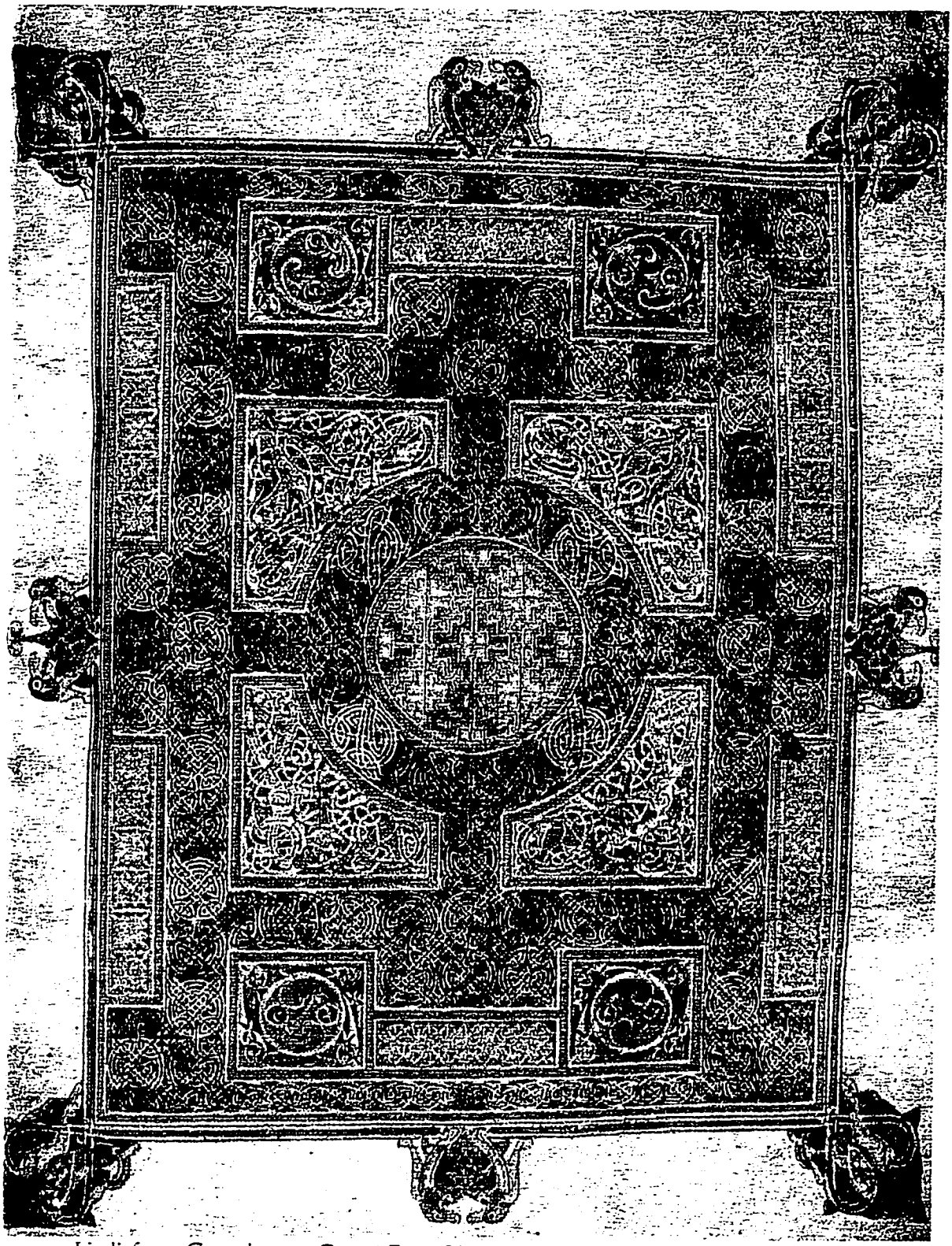
#11 handle base, c. 5th century B.C.



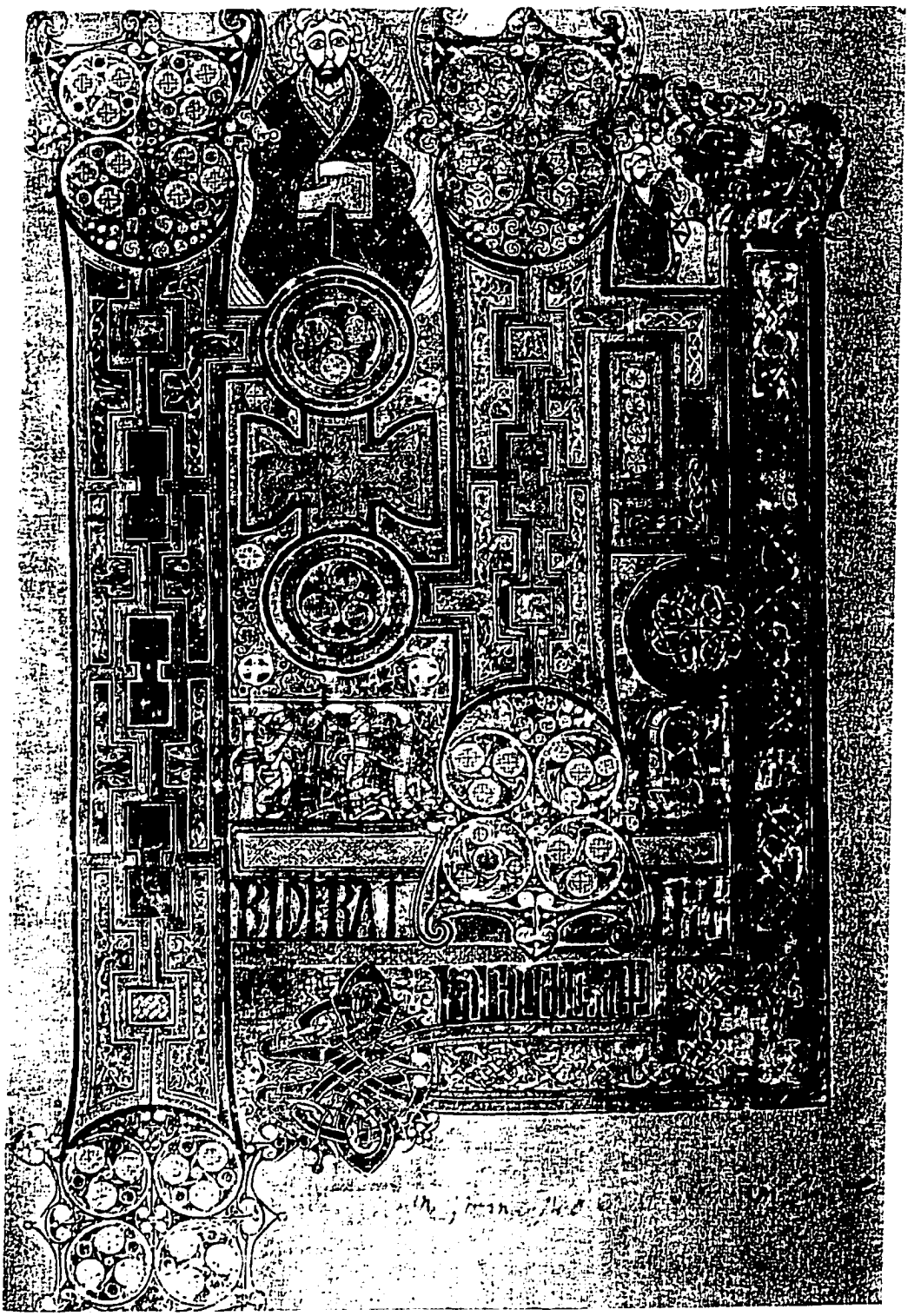
#12 gold finger ring (perhaps Sardinia)



#13 Lindisfarne Gospels fol. 2v



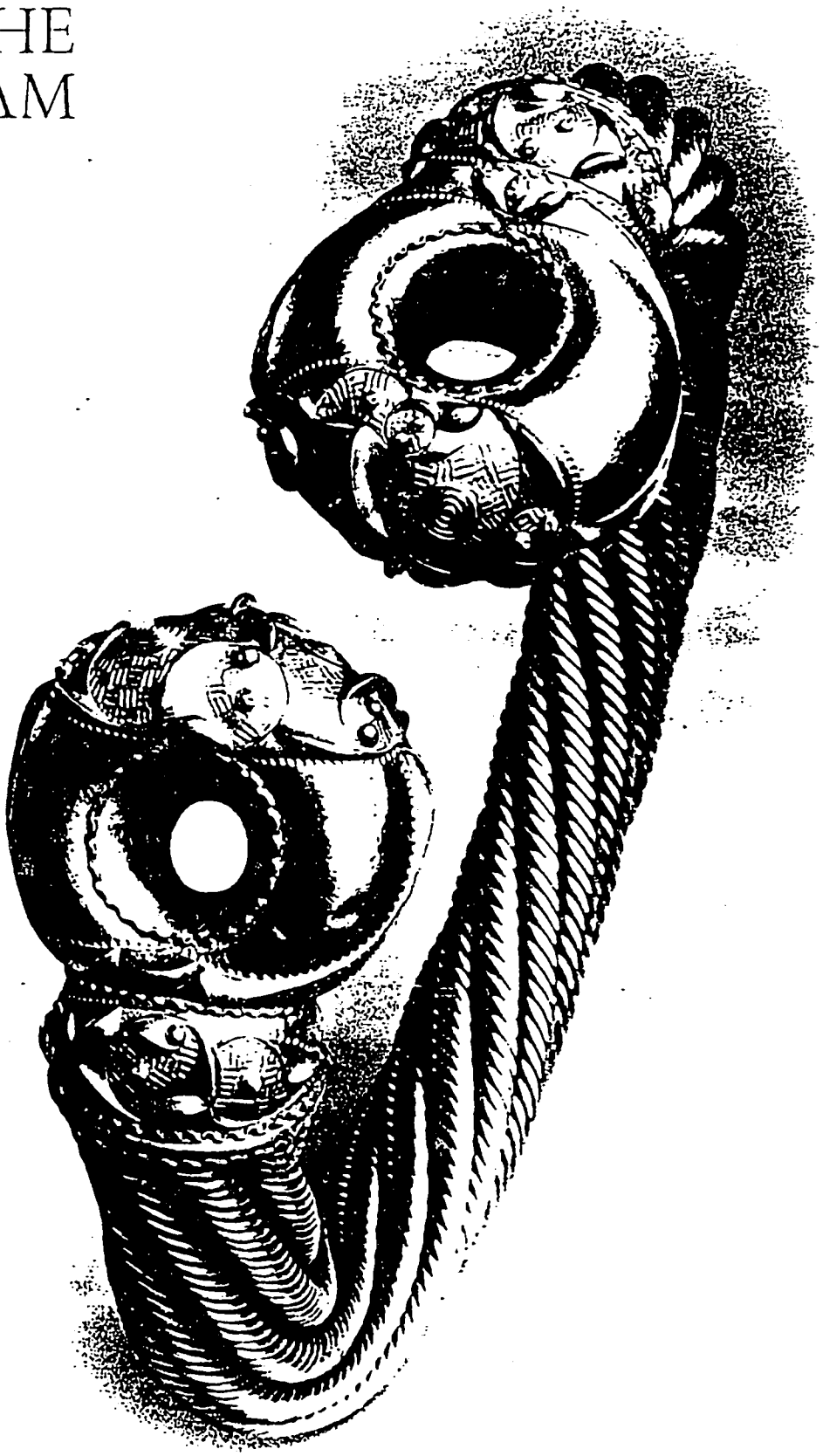
#14 Lindisfarne Gospels Carpet Page 94 v



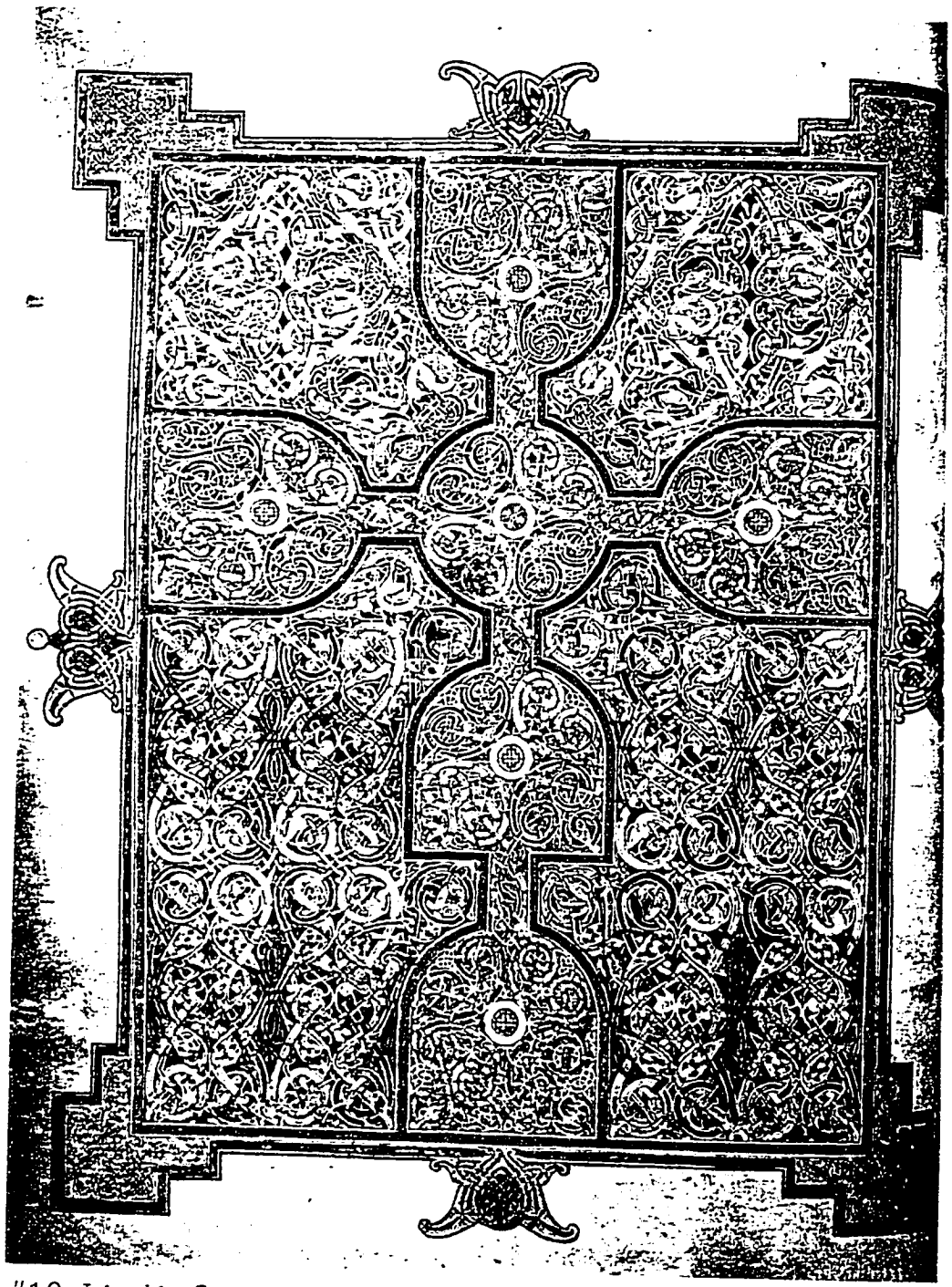
#15 Book of Kells, fol. 292r "In principio..."

Book of Kells, fol. 114v *Tunc dicit illis Ihs omnes uos scan[dalum]* Matthew 26:31
#16

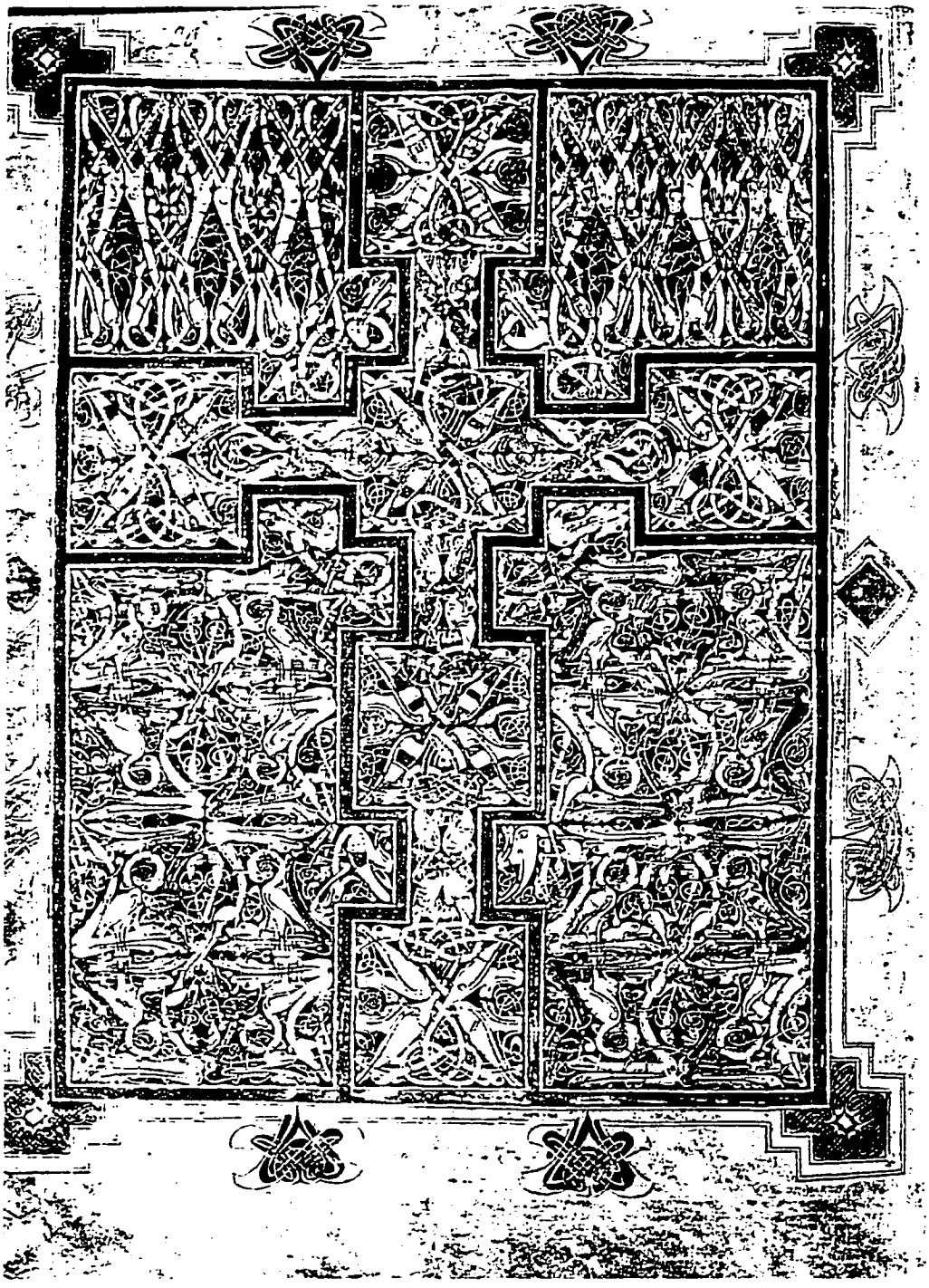
#17 THE SNETTISHAM TORC



#18 Saxon Brooch
Seventh Century

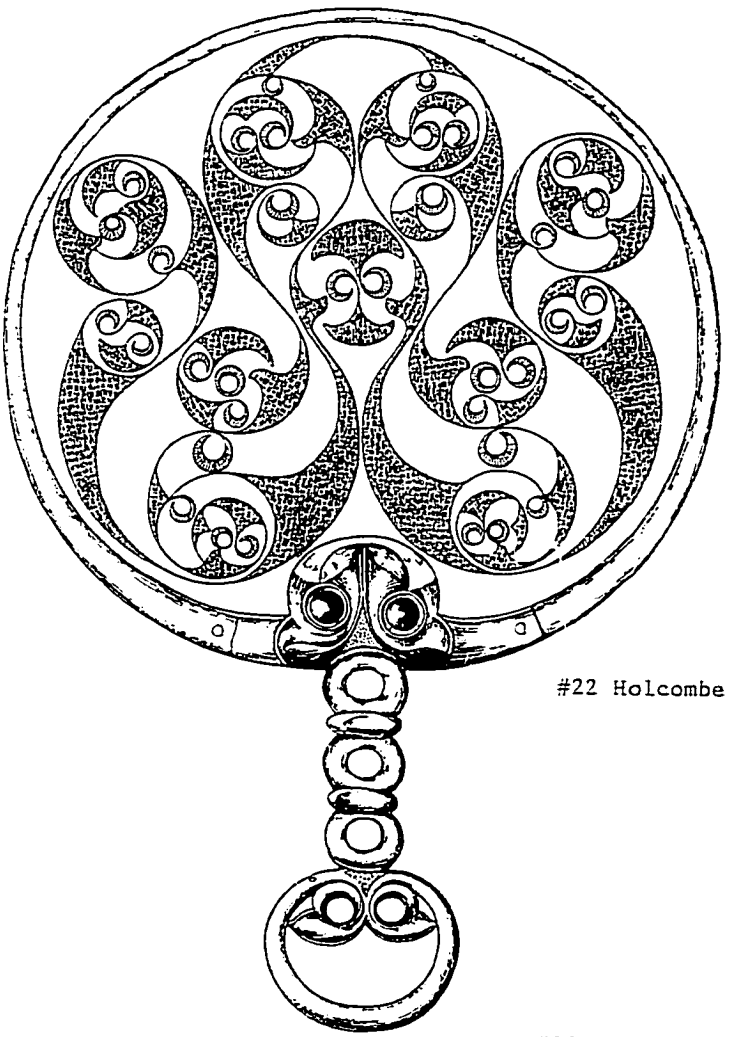


#19 Lindisfarne Gospels fol. 26v



#20 Gospels of Saint Chad

#21 Bronze-age pottery

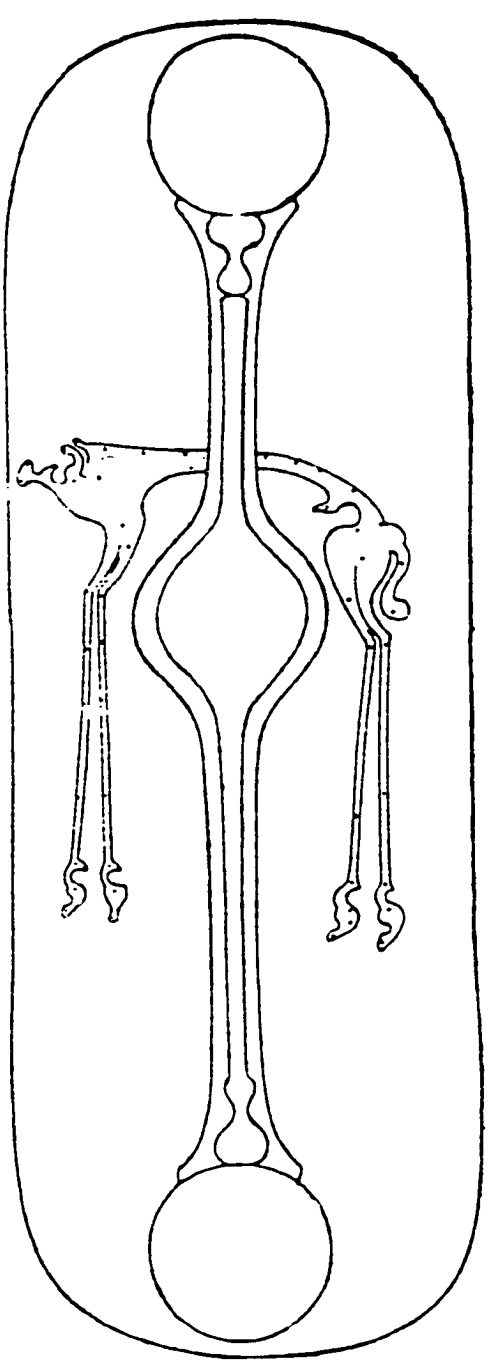


#22 Holcombe mirror back

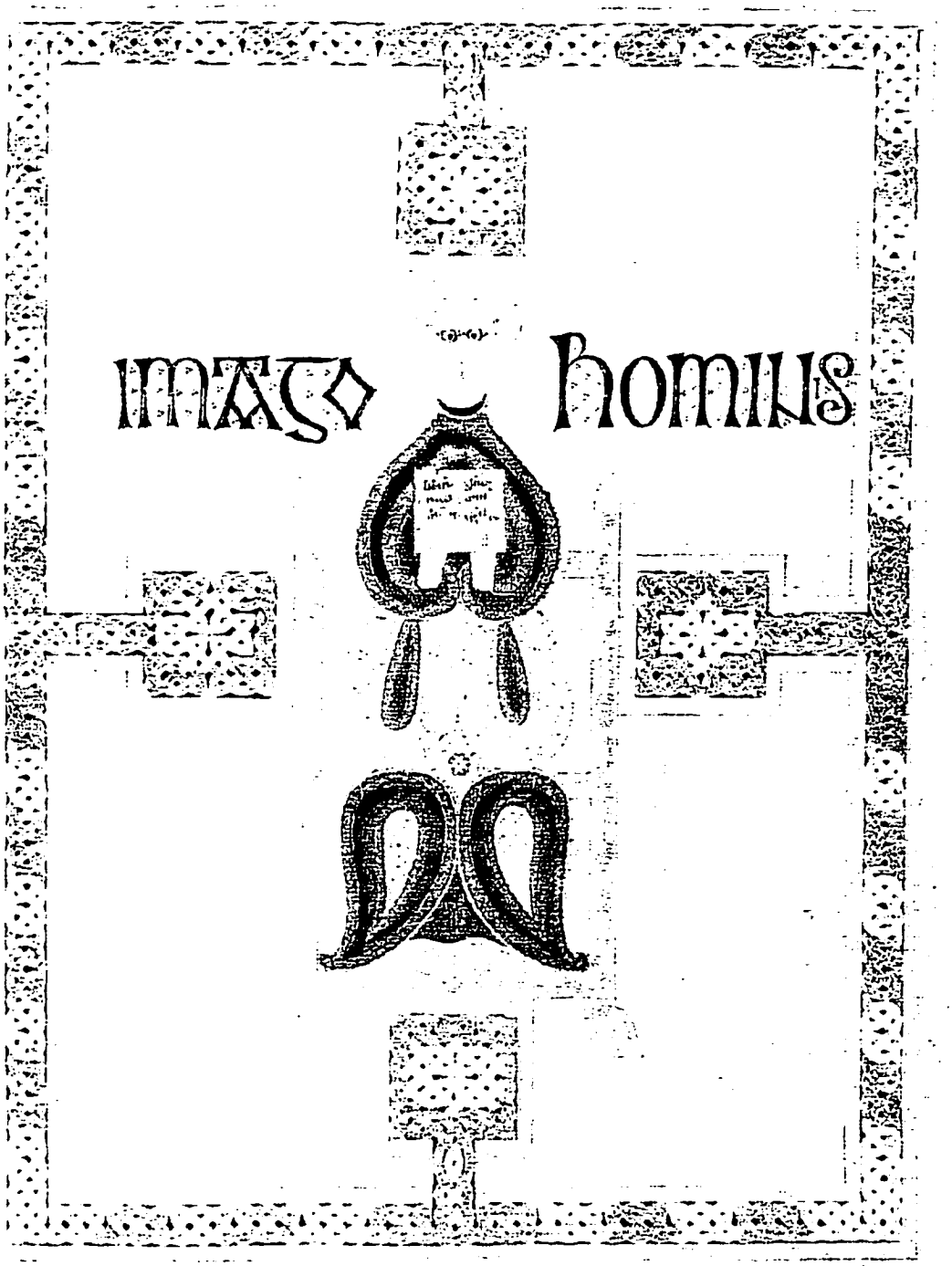
#23 Newgrange tomb entrance

#24 Book of Durrow fol. 192v

#25 THE WITHAM SHIELD



Book of Durrow, fol. 21v man, Symbol of Saint Matthew
#26



Gospels of Saint Willibrord fol.18v man, symbol of Saint Matthew
#27

Appendix: Celtic Head Symbolism

The head was a key symbol for the Celt; a summarizing symbol. Summarizing symbols[256] are static, summing up the identity of the group. The head was the vehicle, the intermediary between man and the supernatural; through its veneration the Celt celebrated man's place in the cosmos. The form of veneration was the head cult. The heads of enemies as well as comrades were venerated. The head detached as well as attached to the human body was venerated. The disembodied head communicated meaningfully according to ritual that every Celt would recognize, any non-Celt would not. In this way the signs of the head symbol system functioned as boundary markers for the Celts as an ethnic group.

The key to that association lies in the symbol system of the Celts. Within its forms and practices head veneration provides a guideline to the belief system which maintained social interaction and cultural heritage. Head rituals were infused with spiritual symbolism, supplying essential vocabulary for the religious grammar. Head hunting was so deeply meaningful to Celtic life that related imagery persisted in artwork and story well past the survival of the custom itself. Long after it ceased to be a way of life,[257] headhunting provided vital symbolism for the Celtic world of story.

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[256] Sherry Ortner, "On key Symbols," American Anthropologist vol. 75, #5, (October 1973): 1338-1345

[257] To draw an analogy with another instance of cultural overlap: long after U.S. law "had put an end to " the Native American custom of taking scalps, scalps were brought to Enemy Way ceremonies by Navajos who had fought in Vietnam.

There is substantial evidence for cult worship[258] of the human head by the Celts. The human head also played a role in other Celtic cults and rituals. Abundant material has been assembled which indicates that the head was the major religious symbol of Celts throughout their geographical range and during the entire period of archaeological record. Continental sources from the earliest archaeological periods have been analyzed and interpreted by Pierre Lambrechts. His findings were echoed for the British Isles by Anne Ross. Lambrechts and Ross as well as several other scholars have studied stone carvings of heads with minimal or no bodies, votive objects emphasizing the head, metalwork and woodcarving focused upon the head, as well as an array of patterned designs in various media with cleverly camouflaged head motifs peering out of alternating subject/ground correspondences. The frequency and manner in which formal creative emphasis was placed on the human head and its features has prompted interpretations of the place of the head in Celtic life. Those interpretations establish the existence of the cult of the head and develop an understanding of its iconography.

In *L'Exaltation de la Tète dans la pensée et dans l'art des Celtes*, Lambrechts determined that in the minor arts and the stone statues of the La Tène period there was a typical Celtic head with distinctive traits: 1)frontal face; 2) human ears replaced by those of another animal or the absence of ears altogether; 3) the nose shaped like a broad based triangle; 4) a variety of mouth shapes; 5) horizontal eyes, either seemingly

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[258] Anne Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p.61: "Cult is a convenient term to apply to the different religious ideas prevalent amongst the pagan Celts, but it would be incorrect to imagine rigid barriers between them or to think that they were mutually exclusive."

shut or else large and prominent; 6) often a mustache, sometimes a beard; 7) often the forehead was adorned; 8) often there was a characteristic double crown.[259] Such consistently repeated motifs prompted Lambrechts to address the idea of a *"motif national"* ("national motif"). He suggested that severed heads had become something of a slogan for the study of the Celts and that it was preferable to speak of the exaltation of the head. That concept covers a wider range of phenomena: from decapitated enemies to gods represented exclusively, or for the most part, by their heads, synthesizing and summing up their total personas. A marked characteristic of celtic thought was the tendency to use a part to represent the whole, which was manifested by the desire to venerate the head in respect of the rest of the body.[260] Lambrechts alludes to the phenomenon of part for whole seen over and over again in the great Celtic stone monuments and the metalwork masterpieces. A deity or a deceased person, those that inhabit the realm of the supernatural or spirit world, was represented by a large head and an insignificant, perhaps puny, body. Clearly the head was the part that stood for the whole being. But the disproportion can be seen as signaling something more than this point. Since the head was seen as the center and symbol of man's spirituality, these representations of the head-body relationship placed emphasis beyond the corporeal being, on the spiritual aspect of man's relationship to his physical context.

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[259] Pierre Lambrechts, *L'Exaltation de la Tête dans la pensée et dans l'art des Celtes*, (Bruges: 1954), 19

[260] *Ibid.*, 21-22

Given the special status of the head is not surprising to find it taken out of its natural context. Without regard to the real function of the body or the laws of nature, the head had a life of its own. In representations of the head, the spiritual aspect of man's relationship to his physical context was conceived and portrayed. The autonomous head, or the head dominating the body often had a face which projected the meaning of the proportional disparity of body and head. By abstracting the common features of the face and placing extraordinary emphasis on the shape of the skull, a grandiose character was given to the head. In those circumstances, the head took on a larger than life character.[261]

Spatial relationships had been used throughout Celtic creation to indicate alternative dimensions. From the earliest motifs such as the La Tène spiral, the subject/ground distinction and interplay was a fundamental element of Celtic art. [See Illustration #21, and Illustration #16, where the words *Tunc dicit illis Ihs omnes uos scan[dalum],* at the bottom of the manuscript page, were colored in to alternate subject and ground.] The spiral exemplarized the subject/ground relationship throughout the periods of Celtic art and it was indicative of generative energy such as in the *Chi Ro* page of the book of Kells [Illustration #6]. Amid the design, a mass of spirals, the text reads *Christi autem generatio.* Proclaiming the generation of Christ, the page ties in

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[261] An abstract style of art appeared in the late Roman Empire and became the basis of the art of Medieval Europe. Celtic abstraction appears to have been influential in the later adoption of this style. Abstraction and spatial relations were hallmarks that persisted throughout Celtic art history and can be observed in all forms of Hiberno-Saxon culture.

with the ancient use of the spiral, found in funerary art , as symbolic of the interplay of death and the cycle of life.[262] The spirituality of this aspect of Celtic art is apparent.

In the works of pre-Christian Celtic art the head and the face, rather than the cross, interlace, or word, had first place in the most intricate of Celtic subject/ground design. This is especially evident in Celtic coinage where the portrait head was borrowed from Hellenistic or Roman designs and then subjected to a series of abstractions. Gradually the ground was brought into the forefront of emphasis in the design until it balanced with the facial features of the figure, creating an almost completely abstract pattern.

The severed head on coinage restates the boundary between the Celt and those with whom he exchanged currency. The head was the Celtic mark and could be represented more or less abstractly. Head rituals can be found on coinage with naturalistic depictions of decapitated heads. The style of these may be more classical than Celtic, the subject nevertheless is unmistakably Celtic. Severed heads on coinage can be found throughout Celtic history. Anne Ross cites the coinage of Cunobelinus and Tasciovanus as bearing an assortment of head types.[263] One which has a severed head being hoisted into the air by a priestlike figure is of particular interest. It directly illustrates the ritual of decapitation in association with the head cult and was depicted in a naturalistic style.

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[262] The ideas clarifying the meaning behind Celtic abstraction owe their existence to the work of the late Harry Bober, Professor of Medieval Art History at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. He encouraged me in my use of them for this discussion when he was helping to direct this dissertation, just before his death.

[263] Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, 69

Worldly objects other than coinage displaying representations of the head, took on a spiritual quality for the Celts. Accouterments like chariot and horse decorations, shield bosses, and dagger hilts became apotropaic. The head image was believed to be protective certainly in the context of the battlefield. Heads appeared in a variety of styles, more or less naturalistic, more or less covert. All are testaments to the Celtic cult of the head.

Military contact was the most spectacular of the interactions between the early Celts and their ancient neighbors. The Celts maintained their separate identity despite any cultural interchange and absorption that may have occurred with outsiders. The Celts retained a boundary that defined them as a group.[264] And at that boundary point, it was the head rituals that the Celt used with greatest impact to signify his identity in relation to those on the other side. The ancients were perplexed and interpreted these customs as hostility. Yet, the Celts' reverence for the head placed their bellicosity within a cosmic framework, for it is clear that their most prevalent resort to the supernatural was through the head.[265] Celtic warfare was in part ritual and their reverence for life was exhibited in their treatment of the dead. What to the classical authors appeared as a desecration of mortal remains was to the Celt a celebration of that which was immortal in the human condition.

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[264] Fredrik Barth, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries," in Selected Essays of Fredrik Barth: Volume 1, Process and Form in Social Life, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 202, 203, "the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary." See my Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of ethnic boundaries.

[265] Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, 61: "The motif of the severed head figures throughout the entire field of Celtic cult practice, temporally and geographically, and it can be traced in both representational and literary contexts from the very beginning to the latter part of the tradition."

The very mark of a superior warrior was the accumulation of notable enemy heads through the ultimate display of battle prowess: decapitation. Decapitation was the dynamic which proclaimed the Celtic warrior: it testified to his skill, assured his social standing, bonded him to the power and life-blood of his worthy opponent and marked him as a force to be reckoned with, capable of transmuting enemy power into fighting strength. Through decapitation, dominance rather than mere destruction was achieved. Creative energy was also unleashed and infused into the spirit of the victor. Since the head emanated that energy, the death of an enemy through decapitation was also his preservation. In a sense the destructive aspect of killing was transcended through the act or rite of decapitation and the accompanying creation of a ritual object out of the head. The spiritual power of the opponent was acknowledged and preserved. Respect for the opponent was essential to a process which transferred the victim's power to the Celtic warrior. In the Welsh tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, Ysbaddaden Penkawr, the head giant, stipulated that the hero behead him before he marry his daughter. It was not the giant's desire to lose his head, in other words his life. He spoke for the cosmic world order. The consequent transfer of power was a necessary component of the nuptials. Only through decapitation was the giants' mystical potency distilled and collected by the man who would now take over responsibility for his kin. And since the head giant was also the giant head his character had the significance of deity. His beheading signified a new world order with Culhwch as the figure of earthly royalty and Olwen as the nature goddess united at its vanguard.

Warfare is hostility and defeat one result of it. But the decapitation of the defeated and the preservation of the head or skull was an act of incorporating the corporeality of the foe into the symbolic life of the Celt. If the identity of man was to be found in the head, the enemy was most satisfactorily possessed when he was decapitated and his head carried off. Not merely the head of the enemy but any head was a carrier of supernaturally derived power. In this we see the head as the central supernatural germ of a man. If one were to perpetuate man beyond death through one of his parts it would have been the head.

Classical authors, who took the Celts as their subject for ethnographies or military accounts, placed headhunting in central focus when discussing the fighting habits of the Celts. Several writers of the ancient tradition remarked on incidents of head severing and the practices associated with the taking of heads of enemies in battle. There are various versions of a description of the Celts fastening enemy heads to the manes of their horses and then nailing these heads to the entrances of their homes. The attendant celebration reduced the heads to booty and called forth the image of hunters displaying the heads of their quarry. Some versions go on to a description of the Celts embalming the heads of distinguished enemies, and prizing them for generations as keepsakes, more valued than large sums of money or the weight of the head in gold.

From Strabo:

> "To the frankness and high-spiritedness of their temperament must be added the traits of childish boastfulness and love of decoration. They wear ornaments of gold, torques on their necks, and bracelets on their arms and wrists, while people of high rank wear dyed garments besprinkled with gold. It is this vanity which makes them unbearable in victory and so completely downcast in defeat. In addition to their

> witlessness they possess a trait of barbarous savagery which is especially peculiar to the northern peoples, for when they are leaving the battle-field they fasten to the necks of their horses the heads of their enemies, and on arriving home they nail up this spectacle at the entrances to their houses. Posidonius says that he saw this sight in many places, and was at first disgusted by it, but afterwards, becoming used to it, could bear it w/ equanimity. But they embalmed the heads of distinguished enemies w/ cedar-oil, and used to make a display of them to strangers, and were unwilling to let them be redeemed even for their weight in gold. The Romans have put an end to these customs and also to their sacrificial and divinatory practices opposed to our customs." Strabo IV, 5[266]

Livy in his "Historiae" referring to events in the third century B.C. wrote:

> "Consuls got no report of the disaster until some Gallic horsemen came in sight, with heads hanging at their horses' breasts, or fixed on their lances, and singing their customary songs of triumph." Elsewhere Livy writes of the Boii, Celts of the Po valley, after their ambush and killing of the Roman consul-elect Lucius Postumius. They "stripped his body, cut off the head, and carried their spoils in triumph to the most hallowed of their temples. There they cleaned out the head, as is their custom, and gilded the skull, which thereafter served them as a holy vessel to pour libations from and as a drinking cup for the priest and the temple attendants."[267]

The Greek and Roman ethnographic and literary traditions were witness to the periphery of Celtic world. But as onlookers, foreigners, and enemies their words must be carefully corroborated. Literary tradition itself functions in a manner alien to the understanding of much that is central to oral tradition culture.[268] The performance of

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[266] J.J. Tierney, "The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius," Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy vol. 60 section c #5, (March 1960): 269

[267] Livy, "*Historiae*" from The Early History of Rome, (Penguin Books Ltd., 1960)

[268] Carole L. Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure: The Generation of Archaeologically Testable Hypotheses From Literary Evidence," Anthropological Papers #54 (Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1974): v-vi: "The same types of sources exist as are used in modern studies of culture contact, namely the journals of traders, travelers, and the military, the compilation of written and unwritten information by historians of the period, and finally the archaeological evidence. Only the

traditional ritual activity is a primary form of preservation for an oral tradition society where a literary tradition could put into writing those concepts which had greatest meaning for its society. Writing presupposes articulating those meaningful concepts using language. But an oral tradition society would not necessarily verbalize its most significant conceptions. Human emotions and psychological concepts are often most clearly expressed through physical demonstration and display. Acting out in ritual performance codifies and preserves the underlying meaning. Where a literate society may use writing to transcend death in order to pass norms and ideas from one generation to the next, an oral transmission society chooses to rely on ritual practice. Caesar, who had a Druid friend, Diviciacus, included in his ethnography a discussion of the choice of orality for cultural transmission. In discussing the Druids,

> "It is said that they commit to memory immense amounts of poetry. And so some of them continue their studies for twenty years. They consider it improper to entrust their studies to writing, although they use the Greek alphabet in nearly everything else, in their public and private accounts. I think they established this practice for two reasons, because they were unwilling, first, that their system of training should be bruited abroad among the common people, and second, that the student should rely on the written word and neglect the exercise of his memory. It is normal experience that the help of the written word causes a loss of diligence in memorizing by heart."[269]

Caesar overlooked the non-verbal customs in his own descriptions of the Celts; this is understandable since he probably had little understanding of their importance

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latter counterbalances the obvious bias of the literate classical world against the Celtic barbarians, so called to a certain extent because theirs was an oral rather than a literary intellectual tradition."

[269] Caesar, Gallic Wars, VI.14, in Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 272

in transmitting culture. Specifically where Celtic head practices were concerned, the sources we have may bear witness, however they were not participants in what they described, and thus must have derived any understanding of what they saw without an appreciation of context.

All the non-classical evidences of the role of the head assembled from extant Celtic sources, while less descriptive in a narrative sense, give us a window on the motivations of culture, allowing us to view the Celts from within. Of necessity, what provides this insiders' insight could not originally have been couched in a written tradition. For what the Celts themselves left were the trappings of a sacred ritual, the Morse code of a belief system, the signals sent out only to the initiate. To truly "receive", the non-written record - artifacts, oral tradition and other remains must be deciphered.

That the human head was the entryway to the supernatural is evidenced by a variety of sources. Since it was only with the advent of the Christian literary tradition that the world of Celtic story was recorded we have no direct documentary evidence of pagan beliefs. However the wealth of archaeological materials and the interpretation of the ancient oral tradition through later literary redactions provide substantial evidence for Celtic beliefs and practices regarding the human head.[270]

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[270] This dissertation concentrates on the human head, although divine association may perhaps be found with other creatures. In "Liminality an Knowledge in Irish Tradition", *Studia Celtica* vol. xvi/xvii, (1981/82): 136f, Joseph Nagy describes a divination ritual from "*Sanas Cormaic*" called "dichetal di chennaib": incantation from the tips. "It is briefly described as an 'aisneis do chendaib a chnamae' 'recitation from the tips of [the poet's] bones [i.e. fingers]'. Apparently this was a technique whereby the tips of various objects, not just the 'tips of the bones' were used by the poet to gather information. A term '*dichetal di chennaib coll*' 'incantation from the tips of hazel', or perhaps 'from the tips of heads', is attested... In two separate stories from the '*Sanas Cormaic*' poets are presented with skulls and are asked to ascertain whose remains they are; the poets identify the skulls as those of lapdogs

The creation of a ritual object out of the head for purposes of spiritual preservation is evident in the remains found at two extant Celtic sites: Entremont and Roqueperteuse. A sculpture, found at Entremont, shows a tète coupée replete with the hand of the beheader. In the context of Celtic art and iconography this was not an element of narrative depicting a particular event or scenes from Celtic life. The tète coupée sculpted or natural was an object of veneration. Columns at Roqueperteuse were built with niches for human heads, and were excavated intact. The venerated object thus became part of the very fabric and structure; in some sense spiritually supporting the column itself. Not only are the artifacts of these sites significant in revealing the existence of a head cult but study of Entremont's plan reveals the importance of that cult to its society. At Entremont we see why the ancient writers could not have known that.

The urban design and architectural monuments found at Rocqueperteuse and Entremont give insight into what the classical sources were missing and why. Sanctuaries have survived which clearly indicate that skulls were enshrined and centrally incorporated into holy spaces; spaces, it should be noted, that were inaccessible culturally, spiritually, and aesthetically to non-Celts. In a city such as Entremont, whose urban design would have been familiar and comfortable to a contemporary Mediterranean, the imposing Sanctuary was central but set apart in terms of its strictly Celtic aesthetic and symbolic import. The town was laid out in such a fashion that Diodorus called it a polis, yet the Sanctuary, on the highest ground

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and also reveal the identities of the dogs' owners. The head, as part for whole, serves each poet as a source of information about the creature whose head it is. In one of these stories the poet places the tip of

of the acropolis was something apart, something no Greek polis would contain. The ground plan of Entremont serves as a metaphor for the relationship between contemporary Greek and Celt. Here where there was great cultural interaction and mutual interest we find another boundary; one as emphatic as that of the battlefield.

Entremont was an active and prosperous Greco-Gaulish city. From c. 4th century B.C.-2nd century B.C., it served as the capital of the Celto-Ligurian confederation of the Saluvii.[271] As important a Celtic center as it was, it was also one of "...three sites within roughly the same area [as Glanum and Enserune]," which were "accommodations to the presence of external cultures".[272]

In this town, the Celts had much interaction with the Greeks: cultural interaction, trade.[273] Obvious Greek influence is visible in the street plan. This settlement was atypical of the Celts whose sedentary lifestyle was realized in very different physical plan.[274] Diodorus referred to Entremont as a polis. "The city plan is

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his wand upon the skull in order to find out whose it was.

[271] Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," 57

[272] *Ibid.*

[273] *Ibid.*, 59, "Pendants of polished coral, indicative of commerce with Marseilles, are in a mode which spread up the Rhone valley at the end of the Hallstatt epoch. ... Most of the coinage recovered represents that of the Greeks of about 200 B.C. Two major hoards were found, one of 435 pieces, one of a hundred pieces. Also recovered was the money of the Allobroges and Rome, both dating from the first half of the second century B.C. Thus occupation by force of arms was preceded by certain humanistic exchanges, which attest to the importance of commerce with Marseilles: jewels or coral and bracelets of glass and amphoras holding the wines of Rhodes and Campania and Campanian vases all bear witness to the abundant exportation which made the Italo-Greek merchants of the second century B.C. wealthy. A more tangible example of the interaction between indigenous and external elements is statuary that represents important aspects of the indigenous culture, but was executed in a style which reveals knowledge of Graeco-Etruscan plastic arts and three-dimensional sculpture.".

[274] Barry Cunliffe, The Celtic World, (N.Y.: Greenwich House, Crown Publishers, Inc., reprint, 1986, originally published New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979)), 65, Mont Beuvray, or Bibracte, the capital of the Aedui, at the time of Caesar: "The formidable hilltop is enclosed by five kilometers of defenses

very different from the usual Celtic agglomerations built merely for the purpose of the hunt or war; instead it evokes the cities of Greece, Magna Graecia, and Etruria. These cities (architecturally speaking) subordinate individual fantasies under law, and are obedient to the demands of hygiene and security, traffic, and religious precepts. Such cities are the product of a conception of a whole which gives organization to architecture: there are large wide streets, rectangular blocks, and yet the houses are often curvilinear and delimited by wheelruts."[275] What Diodorus described was the physical reflection of social organization and values that had more to do with concepts of community and public good than were at the time, in his culture, associated with Celtic society.

In order for a city to grow up and develop in the way Entremont did, there must have been a great deal of interconnection between the Saluvii and the Greeks. Even where the design and organization of Celtic settlement closely imitated Greek priorities, the most prominent institution of the town was its monument to and for the severed head both as trophy and as key summarizing symbol. Not only were war trophy heads on view, but statuary and carvings indicating the dead and various deities were prominent, all emphasizing the head. A stone carved severed head has survived replete with the hand of its decapitator. A column with engraved heads has a semiotic appearance that transcends the mere cataloging of enemy heads as an

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estimated to have stood five meters in height. Within, roads meandered from one quarter to another without evidence of rigid planning except that certain areas were set aside for different functions." This is an example of an "oppidum" of the period towards the end of the second century B.C. Hillforts were the previous type of settlement and continued in some areas down to the first centuries A.D.

[275] Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," 57

offering. What Barry Cunliffe called it's "stylized" heads[276] marked a cultural signpost to the spirit world of that which was Celtic and that which was man's.

Entremont, Roqueperteuse, and towns like them, where Saluvii and Greeks intermingled illustrate Fredrik Barth's ideas of ethnic group interaction when "other ethnic groups in the region become part of the natural environment".[277] This calls for "...the emergence of boundaries which maintain and generate ethnic diversity within larger encompassing social systems."[278] As the Celtic world became permeated by the classical world a cultural tension was created along with the social tension of the situation. But with the permanence of settlement a social system was forged through the contact of the Celts and their Mediterranean derived neighbors. "Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose such a structuring of interaction: a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification."[279]

At Entremont, a town plan organized according to Greek values of efficiency, public security and order, and the flow of trade complied with prescriptions governing situations of contact and allowed for articulation in that quarter of interaction. But the insulation of the Celtic religion from confrontation and modification is evident from

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[276] Cunliffe, Celtic World, 82

[277] Barth, "Ethnic Groups," 208

[278] *Ibid.*, 207

the lack of inter-ethnic interaction in the physical structure and make-up of the Sanctuary. In Carole Crumley's words:

> "The area called the Sanctuary is one of the most important parts of the site. Recovered votive objects in an evolved in-the-round style represent aspects of the distinctively Celtic severed head cult. The trophy skull is the veritable god of these sanctuaries. A sacred way to the sanctuary, lined with mosaics, climbs the flank of the enceinte northwest of the acropolis. The sanctuary itself is constructed on the highest part of the city. A great hall five meters wide and of unknown length was apparently of great religious importance. The sanctuary itself, reminiscent of Roqueperteuse, Glanum, Castelveyre de Sainte-Blaise, and Cadenet, has niches for severed heads. A fragment of the lintel from Entremont dates to before 123 B.C. [when the city was captured by the Romans and destroyed] Human skulls of individuals between 30 and 50 years old, bearing traces of suspension or trephination, were recovered. The excavation revealed the violent destruction of cult objects and a paving-over of the area at the time of the Roman occupation."[280]

When there was finally inter-ethnic interaction with the Romans at the Sanctuary, it took the form of full-scale violent eradication.

The city of Entremont then was a physical manifestation of Celtic lifestyle influenced by the Greeks. With a glaring exception: the Sanctuary. This place, apart from the essentials of the groundplan stood for the insistent Celtic element at Entremont. Parallels may be drawn between Celtic and Greek symbol systems[281] in relation to the idea of the head as psychic and generative center. Celtic regard of the human head was remarkably akin to Greek, Hellenistic and Roman belief. Greek thought and perception was replete with symbols and behavior centering around the head as holy, the seat of the psyche. Hippocratic tradition maintained that the seed of

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[279] *Ibid.*, 205

[280] Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," 59

[281] R.B. Onians, The Origins of European Thought, (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 121

life flowed from the head.[282] There were early classical cults which focused on the head through decapitation and other aspects: Gorgon, Medusa, etc. Although the Greeks too connected head and spirit, yet the manner of expression was unrelated; there was nothing Greek about the Sanctuary. That structure, which architecturally may have had Mediterranean parallels, was arrayed throughout with skulls. Here and in the nature and quantity of Celtic head sculpture on the continent and in Britain, and in the bits of Celtic story and ritual tradition that have filtered down to us, we find the true distinctiveness, the particular nature of Celtic head veneration.

Although the veneration of the head can be understood in the context of all human society, certain forms hark back to early practices. Gilding and decorating skulls, their placement in monuments, stuck on lances and displayed outside dwellings are customary rituals of many societies. Decorated heads were found in the earliest settlement at Jericho, for instance. Performance of these practices may however have carried with them the indication of a forgotten context where these customs were integral with an even more profound ritual. The rationale for some rituals, such as brain-balls, is certainly obscure. Irish tales described a ritual whereby the brain of a daunting enemy was extracted from the head after slaying, mixed with lime and shaped into a ball; when it hardened it became a weapon and a relic with supernatural power, able to destroy anyone who was its target. While practicing such a ritual preserved a way of life, the power of its symbolism came from a previously

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[282] *Ibid.*

handed down, venerable tradition whose essential meaning, its central act, had been long forgotten. Since the tradition from which it arose was lost, it was all the more important to hang onto the ritual without question. Such rituals could not be discarded: they were the only clue to what had gone before.

While other societies have seen the head as central, generative and have celebrated these and related ideas through head-hunting, head decapitation and various other forms of head veneration, the distinctiveness of Celtic head veneration can best be understood by how pervasive it is through all forms of Celtic cultural expression and in its use as a boundary-marker.

The Celtic voice, as retrieved through early literary redactions of the world of Celtic story, represented death most persistently as decapitation. The severing of the life essence from the earthly body signified the separation of the supernatural from the mortal. In Irish literature decapitations signaled the prowess of the warrior and the boldness of the hero. A typical encounter of Cúchulainn's:

> "Then he fought Loch with the sword and the 'gae bolga' that his charioteer sent him along the stream. He struck him with it up through the fundament of his body--for when Lóch was fighting, all his other parts were covered in a skin of horn.
>
> 'Yield to me: leave me space,' Lóch said.
>
> Cúchulainn yielded before him and Lóch fell forward on his face. From this Ath Traigid is named in Tir Mor--the Ford of Yielding. Then Cúchulainn cut his head off."[283]

Cúchulainn, as the quintessential Irish hero, carried forth symbolism in the severing of enemies' heads. There was a responsibility attached to the act. In

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[283] The Táin trans. Thomas Kinsella, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 136

"Cúchulainn's Courtship of Emer and his Training in Arms with Scathach": "Cochar Cruibne, one of Scathach's soldiers and a very hardened man, rushed at Cúchulainn and they struggled and fought for a long time. Then Cochar tried his special tricks of battle but Cúchulainn parried them off as if he had studied them all his life. Then he felled the champion and cut his head off. The woman Scathach mourned at this, but Cúchulainn said he would take on the deeds and duties of the dead man and lead her army and be her champion."[284]

In the Táin Bó Cuailnge ("The Cattle Raid of Cooley), there was a special house, called Craebderg, set aside by King Conchobar for "the severed head and spoils". Again and again heads were referred to as "spoils". In "Cúchulainn's Boyhood Deeds" of the Táin there was clearly something supernatural about the spoils collected in a series of beheadings by Cúchulainn: Foill, Fannall, and Tuachell:

> "You would be wise," the charioteer said, "to be careful of the man coming against you. Foill is his name," he said. "If you don't get him with your first thrust, you may thrust away all the day."
>
> 'He flung the spear at him, and it pierced him and broke his back. He removed the trophies and the head with them.
>
> "Watch this other one," the charioteer said. "Fannall is his name, and he treads the water no heavier than swan or swallow."
>
> "I swear he won't use that trick on an Ulsterman again," Cúchulainn said. "You have seen how I foot the pool at Emain."
>
> 'They met in the ford, and he killed the man and took away the trophies and the head.
>
> "Watch this next one advancing against you," the charioteer said. "Tuachell is his name, and he wasn't named in vain. He has never fallen to any weapon."
>
> "I have the 'del chliss' for him, a wily weapon to churn him up and red-riddle him," Cúchulainn said.

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[284] *Ibid.*, 30

> 'He threw the spear at him and tore him asunder where he stood. He went up and cut off his head. He gave the head and trophies to his charioteer.
>
> 'Then a scream rose up behind them from the mother, Nechta Scene. Cúchulainn lifted the trophies off the ground and brought the three heads with him into the chariot, saying:
>
> "I won't let go of these trophies until we reach Emain Macha."[285]

Not only was decapitation illustrated in the exploits of Cúchulainn. It is obvious from the stories that the treatment of the decapitated head carried a powerful significance. Cúchulainn empowered himself by beheading Orlám, the son of his enemies. He then wanted to intimidate them with the decapitated head. He instructed the man's charioteer to display the severed head and threatened his life if he did not. "Cúchulainn went up to Orlám and slew and beheaded him, and shook the head at the host. He set the head on the charioteer's back and said: 'Take this with you and keep it like that all the way into the camp. If you do anything but exactly what I say you'll get a shot from my sling.'"[286] When the charioteer did not follow his directives precisely, he slew him, by breaking his head open with the slingshot.

On occasion the warrior carried the heads away with him: "A single chariot warrior is here... and terribly he comes. He has in the chariot the bloody heads of his enemies." Yet at another time Cúchulainn, as the model warrior, would leave the heads where they were felled. After obtaining twelve heads he carefully lays out each on a stone at the site of his victory.[287] The first set of heads were apotropaic objects.

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[285] *Ibid.*, 89-90

[286] *Ibid.*., 95-96

[287] *Ibid.*., 5

The second were worshipped heads, since they were placed on stones, which meant pillars.[288]

Another illustration of the worshipped head is in the Irish story "Cath Almaine" which has actual historical characters. When a hero, Fergal, was slain his head was washed, combed, braided and placed in a silk cloth. It was presented with offerings: cooked animals. At which point it opened its eyes and gave thanks to God. Here, the Christian veneer is thin over a clearly worshipped idol, the venerated head.

Many of these instances of severed heads in Celtic battle tales resemble classical descriptions of Celtic head practices, or seem to illustrate the themes expressed in graphic and plastic arts in which the head appears to be apart from the body.

The Irish tale about Don Bo, the musician, involved a promise he made to Fergal to perform for him after an upcoming battle. When both were slain in the battle, the severed head of Donn-Bo played music, *pars pro toto*, the part standing in for the whole.

> "Fergal asked Donn-Bo to play music on the night before the battle of Allen. Donn-Bo refused, but promised to play the night after the battle. The heads of both Fergal and Donn-Bo were cut off in the battle. A warrior sent by Murchad son of Bran of the Leinstermen went to the battlefield and found Donn-Bo's head making music for the slain king. He brought Donn-Bo's head and replaced it on the trunk. Thereupon Donn-Bo came alive again and returned safe to his mother."[289]

Bendigeidfran (Bran the Blessed, or Bran the Head, from the story of "Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr") has long been for scholars the outstanding example of a head

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[288] Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, 122 n.2

[289] *Ibid.*, 120f

representing the whole being. His head not only represented his being but literally his spirit, his power, his divinity. When Bran was mortally wounded (in the foot by a poisoned spear) in a battle to save his sister from a very bad marriage, he asked his followers to strike off his head. The disembodied head served as fellow and protector to his companions. But this was more than the part for the whole since this head became exalted after its decapitation. Bran told his fellows: "And the head will be as pleasant company to you as ever it was at best when it was on me." But it was more than that: for eighty-seven years of feasting, the head remained uncorrupted. In fact it produced the magical feast accompanied by the ever-lovelier singing of the birds of Rhiannon for seven years. And then there was the Assembly of the Wondrous Head.

> "And notwithstanding all the sorrows they had seen before their eyes, and notwithstanding that they had themselves suffered, there came to them no remembrance either of that or of any sorrow in the world. And there they passed the fourscore years so that they were not aware of having ever spent a time more joyous and delightful than that. It was not more irksome, nor could any tell of his fellow that he was older during that time, than when they came there."[290]

Upon being buried in the White Mount at London, the head insured the protection of the surrounding land in perpetuity, "for no plague would ever come across the sea to this Island so long as the head was in that concealment."[291]

The heads were not merely symbolic of being, they were the actual beings and the potential of beings. Representations of the head alone, as in the case of Bran, were the essence of being brought into the material world. The potential of beings went

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[290] The Mabinogion transl. Gwyn and Thomas Jones, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1977), p.39

[291] *Ibid.*., 40

beyond the historical actuality of their bodied selves. The heads taken in battle were not viewed merely as the spirits of the vanquished or even their identities but the very beings themselves; rather than trophies of defeated enemies, they were captives, the actual enemies. And though words were very important to the Celts in daily life, handed down among the living and provided for in custom, the head was a link with the supernatural and beyond the limits of ephemeral mortality. Words were not used to describe the meaning found in head rituals; words only described the rituals themselves to pass their form from one generation to another in traditional stories. By understanding those stories to be holders of social and cultural form, the role of the head can be viewed in its essential symbolic role.

The head contained a vitality for the Celt, and in that realm alone retained the sensibility of the whole being, even cut off from the body. By recapitation the vitality resumed: the dead became the quick. The head embodied the moment, and through the head the moment was everlasting. Somehow this was understood and passed along in "Briucriu's Feast" and down through oral and literary tradition into "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight". These stories centered around a hero's test by a challenger. Both stories were manifestations of the head symbol system. Both challengers can be seen as representing the tradition of belief in the severed head, the head cult.

As the stories demonstrate, it is evident that not only was the head important to the headhunting Celts, but the process of beheading as well. For it was in the act of beheading that the Celts performed a sacred ritual of severing the soul from the body, the material world from the supernatural. The act of a Celtic warrior beheading his

enemy was a religious ritual orienting the Celt in relation to his otherworld. In the story of "Culhwch and Olwen", Culhwch can only realize his destiny by the decapitation of the fierce giant, Ysbaddaden Penkawr. The very act of decapitation signified a ritualistic and religiously imbued act. Through decapitation Culhwch became freed from all supernatural restriction and able to fulfill his destiny. The green knight, and his forebear in "Briucriu's Feast" experienced beheading as spirituals, immortals, supernatural beings, exhibiting the true meaning of sacrifice, indeed all ritual: to recreate the world order.

In "Briucriu's Feast" the argument of who was to receive the hero's portion at the feast turned into a challenge to the men of Ulster. One which only Cúchulainn could have answered. For this was a supernatural test which demanded a spiritual courage. It is central to the meaning of the tale that the challenger was a severed head. He picked up his own decapitated head; and with the act of his self-recapitation he described the coming together of the earthly and spiritual worlds. His challenge was to courage and honor: who would show up to be beheaded? But in another sense his challenge was one of faith.

"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" evolved at some distance from the belief system of the severed head, and fully within a Christian context. Still, in the "Gawain," the head embodied the moment and through the head the moment came to be everlasting. Sir Gawain answered the challenge of the green knight to King Arthur. It was befitting for a knight to come forward in place of his king. When he beheaded the green knight he had to keep his word to meet that knight later to suffer the same fate. Gawain had a moral obligation to keep his faith when he agreed to

accept the challenge the green knight put to Arthur, he was doing the right thing. When Gawain almost completely resisted the advances of his host's wife, he was almost completely doing the right thing. When he finally met the green knight at the appointed place and time his virtue was rewarded: he was merely nicked rather than beheaded. Gawain was rewarded with his life but the implication was clear that his faith in a morality he could not fathom achieved for him everlasting salvation. The story put emphasis on the moment, but what weighed in the balance was eternity. The context was one of Christian morality, the central aspect of Christian faith. Gawain was a Christian knight. So it is ironic that the representative of Christian faith was the severed head himself. Christian spirituality became grafted onto this tale, wherein eternal salvation was achieved by heroic confrontation with the severed head. The idea of Christian virtue and its reward of eternal salvation for the soul became connected to the life-force inherent in the severed head. Christianity in this work incorporated the image of the severed head as a spiritual symbol, revealing the potent and meaningful continuity of the older tradition. The host, the green knight, represented the spiritual challenge of Gawain, but he himself was a figure cast from the pre-Christian spiritual tradition.

In the legend of Saint Melor of Cornwall and Brittany there is an example of Christianity uniting two pre-Christian Celtic cults: that of the severed head and the sacred springs. After his assassination the severed head of the saint brought forth a

healing spring. Elsewhere in legend this saint's head sought to be rejoined to his body after burial.[292]

In folklore and later Christian hagiography, replacing the head of a decapitated person returned that energy to the slain, revived, restored, resuscitated and renewed the life. Such a supernatural circumstance marked redemption for the recapitator as it echoed resurrection for the recipient. In the story of Adomnán which is part of the Law of Adomnán (see Chapter 3), a recapitation became a Christian miracle. Adomnán wandered through a battlefield and came upon an infant suckling at the breast of its decapitated mother. He placed the head back on the mother, who came to life, and charged Adomnán to vouchsafe the rights of women in the world. In the Christian story the power of decapitation as a pre-Christian rite was superseded by the regenerative power of the Christian recapitation. The image was not without precedent in Celtic story and the regenerative power of a recapitation was not originally Christian. This borrowing illustrates how Christianity was able to engage the Celtic symbol system of the head, and elucidates the connection between pre-Christian beliefs and Christian practice. Christian iconography was able to incorporate the most essential Celtic symbol of man's interaction with the supernatural.

In Ireland pre-Christian sites were turned into Christian sacred places, as Gregory recommended in his letter to Augustine, (cited by Bede and referred to in the

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[292] Ross, Pagan Celtic Britain, 108-109

last chapter.) The Protestant Cathedral of Northern Ireland in County Armagh was built on the site of a pagan cult center, probably a pre-Christian shrine.[293]

Through the head we can see much of the value system of the Celts. The head was important to the Celts, not as the ancients perceived, a mere trophy or mark of a good warrior but as a central symbol of the Celtic cosmography, was to the Celt a part of life as well as death.

But ancient writers could have had little awareness of this; what their ethnographic tradition portrayed was the Celt detaching the heads of slain enemies and then displaying or functionalizing these heads or skulls. Their practice was at variance with that of the Celt and so their symbol system accorded them a different interpretation of the Celtic action. Nor did the ancients have access to that which would have demonstrated the symbol system of the Celt. Outsiders had no access to the sanctuaries such as Entremont and Rocqueperteuse nor the sacred places, the groves and wells, where non-military head rituals were conducted.

Classical witness viewed the taking of severed heads from the battlefield as primitive custom. Moreover, the Celts' exultation in the taking of heads and the exhibition of them was looked upon as a barbaric enterprise attesting to the ignobility of Celtic savagery. These must be taken as two separate points of view, for they are not as consistent as they first appear to be. Hellenistic ethnography was powerfully influenced "by contemporary philosophy and by general ideas in the sphere of

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[293] *Ibid.*., 115

religion, politics, and morals."[294] Ancient Greek positivism lay behind the perception of headhunting as an early stage of social development.[295]

Most of the classical viewpoint on the Celts derives from a single author, Posidonius. Posidonius (135-51 B.C.) was a stoic philosopher and historian who wrote the seminal ethnography of the Celts in Book 23 of his History. This work is not itself extant but is found in the work of several later writers: Athenaeus (fl. ca. A.D. 200), Caesar (100-44 B.C.), Diodorus Siculus (fl. 60-30 B.C.), and Strabo (64-3 B.C.-A.D. 21).[296] Piecing together all of the available derivations from Posidonius, it is clear that he viewed Celtic heroic custom as "illustration of barbarian high spirit", to which "he himself will have given the Homeric parallel as an illustration of the identity of Homeric and barbaric custom"[297] Posidonius used the terms barbaric or primitive not in the pejorative sense but to indicate his understanding that the Celts were at an early stage of development. Clearly he admired high spirits in the descriptions of Homer and saw Homer's characters as the forebears of the Greeks. He had an interest in the primitive stage for it clearly lead to the civilization in which he was cultivated. By seeing the Celts in this light they were less alien and had the potential to eventually

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[294] Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 192

[295] Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," 3: "Attitudes toward the Celts can be broadly divided into two groups: those who looked upon them as barbarians living a life somewhat closer to nature than that of civilized men (primitivists) and those who saw the Celts as representing earlier, less desirable stages of human achievement (positivists)."

[296] Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 198. Posidonius "it is thought, represents the highest level of achievement, not only in Celtic ethnography but in Greek ethnography as a whole. ...There is very little ethnographic material in later writers on the Celts which does not come from the four authors mentioned and ultimately from Posidonius."

[297] *Ibid.*, 202

become civilized. This was less a "hard" primitivist stance and more of a positivist approach. From such a perspective the practice of headhunting would not have been dismissed as offensive but rather tolerated.[298] Indeed Strabo mentioned that "Posidonius says that he saw this sight [severed heads on display] in many places, and was at first disgusted by it, but afterwards, becoming used to it, could bear it with equanimity."[299]

However it is clear that others viewed the Celtic practice of headhunting with greater disdain. Strabo wrote: "In addition to their witlessness they possess a trait of barbarous savagery which is especially peculiar to the northern peoples, for when they are leaving the battlefield they fasten to the necks of their horses the heads of their enemies, and on arriving home they nail up this spectacle at the entrances to their houses."[300] The opening condemnation was made clearly in the voice of hard

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[298] *Ibid.*, 212; Tierney paraphrases the primitivist ideas of Posidonius as follows: "The barbarian nations who, in their customs and civilization, represent a stage left far behind by the culturally advanced peoples, often in their simplicity and virtue recall the psychology of the Homeric or even the Golden Age: 'nemo quantum posset adversus eos experiebatur per quos coeperat posse, nec erat cuiquam aut animus in iniuriam aut causa, cum bene imperanti bene pareretur.'"

[299] *Ibid.*, 269

[300] Strabo IV, IV, 5 quoted in Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 269; Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," 6: "Tierney points out that both Strabo (in the above quotation) and Caesar (BG, 6, 16) repeat an attack on the Celts mentioned in Posidonius. Celtic vanity and boastfulness are illustrated, followed by documentation of their barbarous inhumanity as exemplified in the practices of headhunting and divination by human sacrifice. This use of Posidonius by Strabo and Caesar in the manner of the hard primitivists underscores the continued existence of the Posidonian tradition into the time of the Empire. However as Lovejoy and Boas suggest, Posidonius was "hard" because he was early and the Celts were still relatively new and strange to Mediterranean peoples; Strabo and Caesar have no such excuse, and in the case of both we are dealing with a rather obvious personal bias against the Celts."

primitivism, lacking any identification with Homeric, early Greek culture, or association with the psychic underpinnings of ritual.[301]

The most detailed descriptions of Celtic head-hunting practice appear to be taken from Strabo and Diodorus Siculus and illustrate their characterization of the Celts as barbarians with scenes of severed heads on display.

> "They cut off the heads of enemies slain in battle and attach them to the necks of their horses. The blood-stained spoils they hand over to their attendants and carry off as booty, while striking up a paean and singing a song of victory, and they nail up these first fruits upon their houses just as do those who lay low wild animals in certain kinds of hunting. They embalm in cedar-oil the heads of the most distinguished enemies and preserve them carefully in a chest, and display them w/ pride to strangers, saying that for this head, one of their ancestors, or his father, or the man himself, refused the offer of a large sum of money. They say that some of them boast that they refused the weight of the head in gold; thus displaying what is only a barbarous kind of magnanimity; for it is not a sign of nobility to refrain from selling the proofs of one's valour, it is rather true that it is bestial to continue one's hostility against a slain fellow man."[302]

The underlying criticism of the Celt is apparent in Diodorus. All of V 29 focused on the brash uncouthness of the Celtic warrior in battle, the abusive manner of combat, the brazen attitude. Although Diodorus touted the idea of "fellow man," he denied the Celt that status by misinterpreting his customs and misreading inherent symbolism as mere hostility. What Diodorus mistakenly called "bestial hostility" was neither magnanimity nor nobility, but the proper cultural response to the essential

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[301] Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," vi: "What was left unsaid in the classical literature on the Celts is nearly as important to our understanding of Roman attitudes toward the Celts as what was commented upon."

[302] From Diodorus Siculus, "*Bibliotheca Historica*" V 29, quoted in Tierney, "Celtic Ethography," 250

meaning of the Celtic symbolism. The head practices were emphatic ethnic boundary markers and they were very effective.

There was no interest among these writers for elements of universality in regard to the human head. No glimmer of common origins could have been revealed; no glimpse into the symbolism of what each custom meant. Although Greek thought and perception was replete with symbols and behavior centering around the head as holy and the seat of the psyche, the Posidonians made no remark on the centrality of the head in the two cultures. And although the Hippocratic tradition within which Posidonius worked maintained that the seed of life flowed from the head,[303] his works, as found in those of his followers revealed no awareness that Celtic regard of the human head was remarkably akin to Greek, Hellenistic and Roman belief. Scalping and decapitation produced war trophies in ancient cultures in various contexts, but these would not have been described as barbaric in the same way. The extant descriptions of Celtic headhunting leave behind a picture that was not shaped by Celtic context, nor informed by Greek parallels, but emerged from the biases within a long ethnographic tradition, that had a methodological history going back to Herodotus.[304]

Posidonius undertook the ethnography of the Celts as an introduction to his section on the first transalpine war against the Celts (125-121 B.C.) for Book 23 of his

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[303] R.B. Onians, The Origins of European Thought, (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 121

[304] Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 190

History.[305] Couched in a methodology that claimed to search for "true origins by studying the common qualities and family likenesses of nations"[306] he was in actuality giving background to contemporary military encounters and from that derived his orientation.[307] In focusing on warfare he was heir to a venerable tradition of writers who were struck by Celtic battle practices. For the early classical writers the battlefield provided the most significant encounter with the Celt. A thorough understanding of the actual Celtic symbolic value of head rituals requires clarification of classical tradition's approach to the Celtic battlefield. From the time of Aristotle there was a tradition of denigration associated with the Celtic warrior. Too brave?

> "We have no word for the man who is excessively fearless; perhaps one may call such a man mad or bereft of feeling, who fears nothing, neither earthquakes nor waves, as they say of the Celts."[308]

The historians Ephorus and Theopompus mentioned the Celts with dark references to their battle practices and fearlessness. Ptolemy, son of Lagus, Pausanias and Justin carry on the tradition of drawing the Celt as wild and irrational.[309] Polybius

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[305] *Ibid.*, 200

[306] *Ibid.*, 201

[307] Crumley, "Celtic Social Structure," 4: "It should also be noted that general feeling toward the Celts was relatively hostile, due to the Celtic invasion of Italy in the fourth century B.C. and earlier, and of Greece and Asia Minor in the third century B.C."

[308] Aristotle quoted in Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 194

[309] Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 195-6; "Ptolemy, son of Lagus, tells the story that the Celts living on the Adriatic met Alexander the Great on the Danube, and being asked by him what they feared most answered that it was lest the sky should fall on them. This story falls into a well-known category of Greek question and unexpected answer. ...It has behind it, however, the current belief in Celtic fearlessness" For a more current look at the ethnic stereotyping of the Celt: Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception", Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies #11 (Summer 1986), 71-96

characterized the fighting Celt's vanity, bravado and recklessness. He also gave an account of a practice of mass suicide upon defeat, and explained that the Gauls' fearlessness dissipated after the initial encounter. But Polybius recorded as well a Celtic custom which honored the dead of both sides, and in so doing provided an unusual perspective for a classical writer.[310] That clearly was not the perspective which motivated most classical interest. Even where the Celt was praised or depicted in a positive light it was for aspects that could be interpreted as Greek virtues rather than inherent aspects of Celtic culture understood by the classical authors. This was also seen in classical plastic arts in which the Celt was depicted as an heroic, and therefore substantial opponent, endowed with physical attributes that conformed to Greek ideals of beauty and dignity.[311]

The misinterpretation of Celtic head practices by the classical authors fits into Ruth Benedict's classic description of "otherness" from Patterns of Culture:

> "The distinction between any closed group and outside peoples, becomes in terms of religion that between the true believers and the heathen. Between these two categories for thousands of years there were no common meeting-points. No ideas or institutions that held in the one were valid in the other. Rather all institutions were seen in opposing terms according as they belonged to one or the other of the very often slightly differentiated religions: on the one side it was a question of Divine Truth and the true believer, of revelation and of God; on the other it was a matter of mortal error, of fables, of the damned and of devils."[312]

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[310] Tierney, "Celtic Ethnography," 197 on Polybius III, 62. "His account of the universal desire to fight and the universal congratulation of the vanquished dead no less than the victor throws a brilliant light on Celtic psychology."

[311] It is interesting to note that Tierney (page 198) views the classical representation of the Celt in the plastic arts as a record which confirms the ethnographic portrait. But this record merely indicates how the artists were doing the same thing as the ethnographers, and were probably evolving their images in response to the ethnographies through the processes of popular culture.

[312] Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), 8

That sense of alienation was compounded by the fact that from the other side the Celts would not have allowed the ancients access to their sanctuaries, their rituals, their belief system. The early ethnographers, as outsiders, could not have known anything which the Celts would not have wanted them to know: such as the depth underlying their head practices. Outsiders could only study what the Celts wanted them to see. They were only allowed to see the boundaries; the deeper practice of their rituals were for Celts alone: like the sanctuary at Entremont, a secret store, a trove of Celtic identity.

Celtic Tradition In Liturgical Practice: The Irish Synthesis

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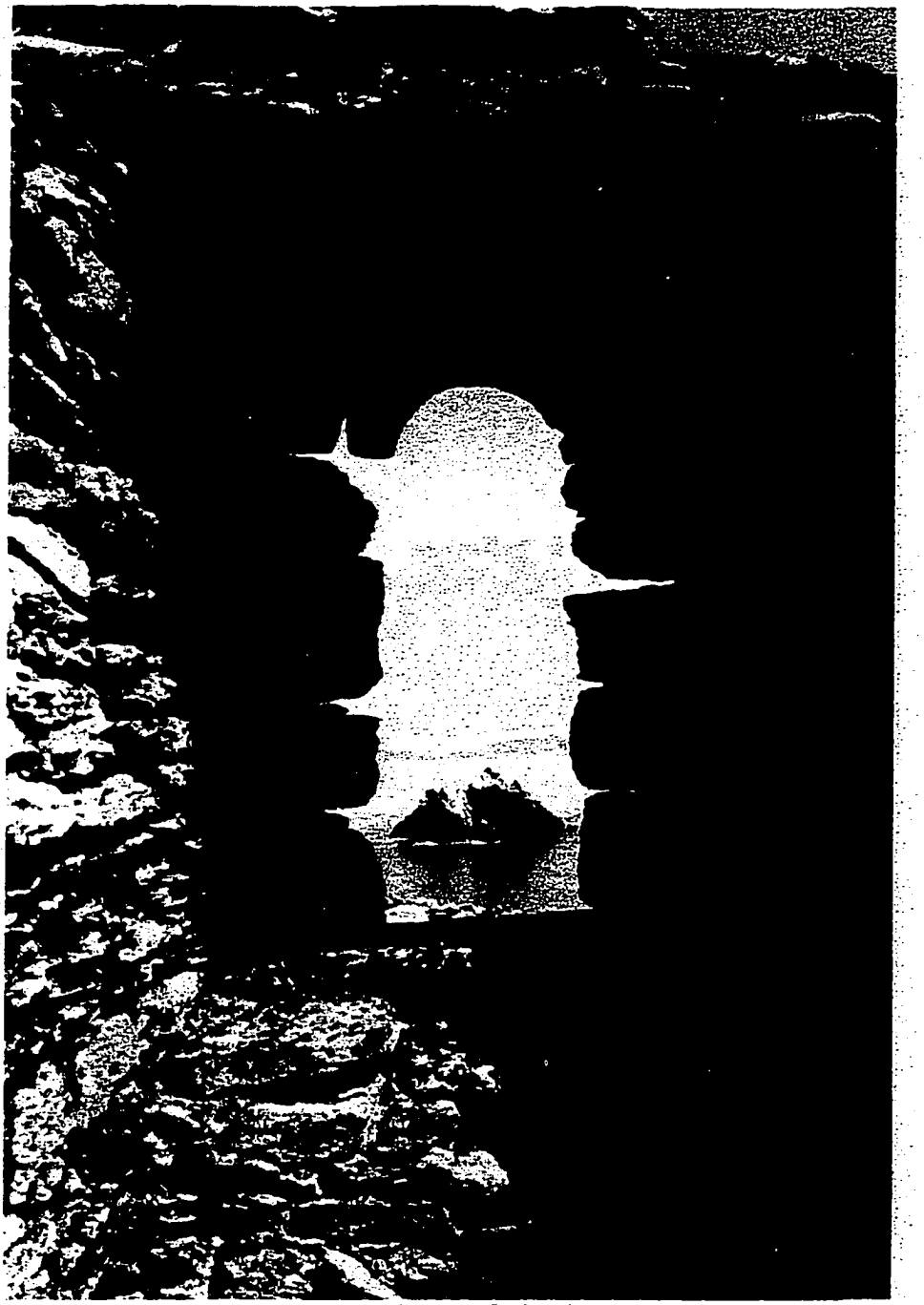

Skellig Michael, Ireland

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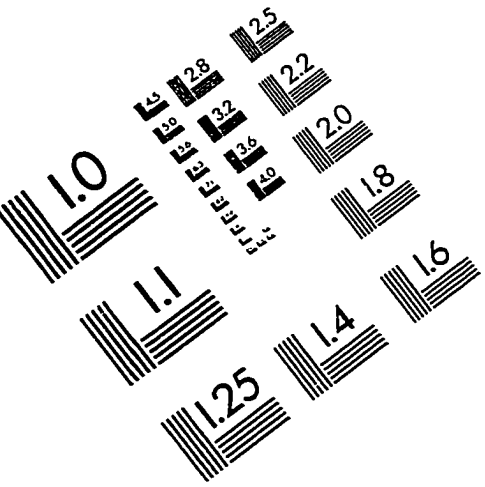

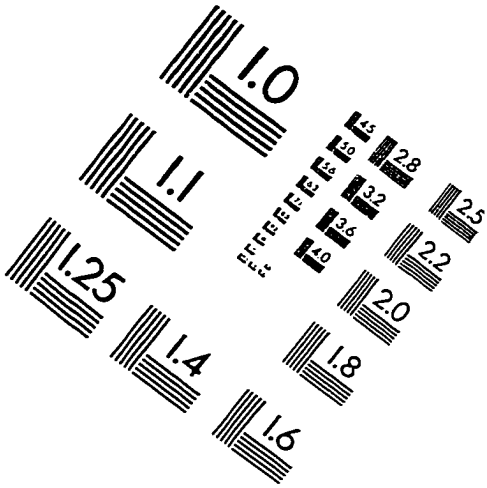

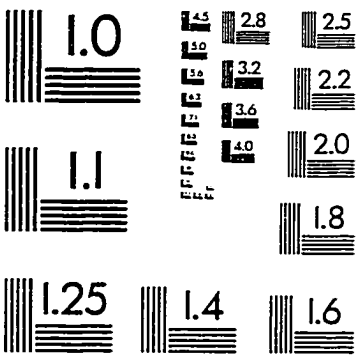

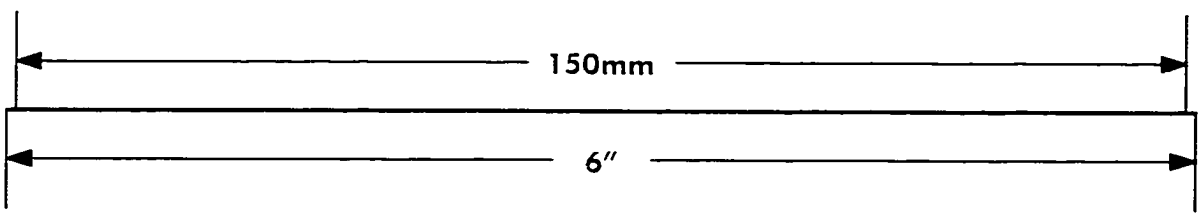

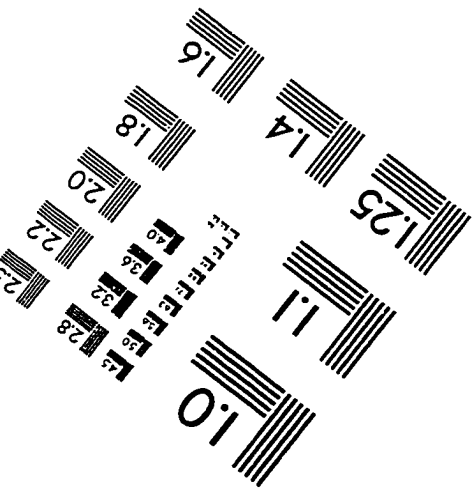

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