The Kilnaruane High Cross

Iconography, Site, and Potential Pilgrimage Round in Bantry, County Cork

by

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A Thesis Presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Masters of Arts in
Art History and Visual Culture

Guelph, Ontario, Canada
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ABSTRACT

THE KILNARUANE HIGH CROSS: ICONOGRAPHY, SITE, AND POTENTIAL PILGRIMAGE ROUND IN BANTRY, COUNTY CORK

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This thesis considers the iconography and site of the last-surviving (fragmentary) standing cross in south-west Ireland: the Kilnaruane High Cross. Overlooking Bantry Bay atop a hill in west Cork, this monument is situated within a rectilinear earth enclosure among a number of stone fragments, including four corner posts of a tomb-shrine, two bullaun stones, and a perforated pivot-stone. In addition, the following study reassesses the iconography on the north-east and south-west faces of the high cross as well as the high cross itself in light of other monumental high crosses, with a particular emphasis on its stylistic qualities, construction, and dating. The results suggest that both the iconography and location of the Kilnaruane high cross and site allude to a potential pilgrimage round located in the Bantry Bay area – situated, as it were, on the periphery of peninsular Kerry and the thriving culture of seafaring voyage in the south-west.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development, writing, and completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and support of many. First and foremost, I would like to thank my mother and father for their gift of education and genuine interest in my studies, as well as my sister for patiently tolerating innumerable lectures on the obscure beauty of high crosses (among my other scholarly eccentricities). Additionally, I would like to thank my friend and travel-companion, Cassandra Dawn Taylor, for her sense of humour and love of Ireland, in particular, Moone, County Kildare.

I would also like to thank the town of Bantry, County Cork and the Office of Public Works in Ireland for their resources during my research, as well as the School of Fine Arts and Music and the College of Arts at the University of Guelph for supporting my travels abroad. Furthermore, I am forever indebted to all my teachers in the Art History department for nurturing my mind and soul during these past years. In particular I would like to thank the extraordinary Dr Sally Hickson for her undying faith in me, for our shared-love of daydreaming, for countless afternoons spent philosophizing, and for her editor’s eye during the writing of this thesis. I am also deeply grateful for the expertise and time provided by Dr Malcolm Thurlby of York University. Above all, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to my mentor and friend, Dr Dominic Marner, for his constant encouragement and support of this study – from the initial spark of curiosity to exploring early medieval Ireland, so much of this thesis is a product of your faith in me, thank you.

An Túr Solais
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INTRODUCTION

*The Kilnaruane High Cross* is perhaps one of the most peripheral of stone monuments of the Irish early-Christian period (Fig. 1, 2). Typically dated to the eighth century, this little-known high cross stands atop a rising hill near the town of Bantry, County Cork on the south-west coast of what was once the medieval Kingdom of Munster (Map 2). Today only the shaft of the high cross remains, leading to a number of local misnomers, including *slab*, *pillar*, and simply *stone*. Although recent scholarship has appropriately designated the monument as a ‘high cross shaft,’ the following study will refer to its original form as a high cross despite the absence of the cross-head that once stood attached to the double open-ended mortises at its apex (Fig. 3). The high cross itself is positioned within the south-west end of a rectilinear earth-enclosure measuring 27m at its widest point and rising little-more than 0.5m in elevation (Fig. 4). While the high cross has garnered the majority of scholarly attention in the past, the four corner-posts adjacent to the monument have also been noted and identified as the supporting stones of a tomb-shrine of a founder saint that has since disappeared (Fig. 5). Additionally, other stone fragments within the enclosure include two *bullauns* (basin-like stones) and what will be referred to as a ‘pivot-stone’ scattered nearby (Fig. 6, 7).

That the majority of high crosses are located throughout the midlands of Ireland and along the eastern counties, the rather distant location of the Kilnaruane high cross and site to the
south-west is considerably rare; so much so that this monument is the only (fragmented) high cross on the entire western seaboard. Unlike the later monumental high crosses that are found at well-known sites like Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly, Kells, Co. Meath, and Monasterboice, Co. Louth, the Kilnaruane high cross owes much of its obscurity to a lack of scholarly attention from both archaeologists and art historians alike. The existing literature has primarily dealt with the iconography – the symbolic meanings – of the imagery on the north-east and south-west faces of the shaft, while others have briefly pointed to the presence of the additional stone fragments. No publication has dealt with the rectilinear earth-enclosure or the faint traces of a larger outer enclosure recognized by Tomás Ó Carragáin.¹

In light of the above, the following study is multi-faceted. The first aim is to reassess the iconography on the north-east and south-west faces (Chapters Two and Three), challenging a number of traditional interpretations, but also reaffirming others. Additionally, the high cross itself will be considered in light of the monumental tradition of the Irish high cross, with a particular emphasis on its stylistic qualities, construction, and dating (Chapter Four). Furthermore, although the tomb-shrine of the founder saint was identified by Michael Herity in 1993, we will explore the role it may have played within the enclosure and how it functioned in tandem with the high cross and a possible oratory that may have occupied the vacant area within the relatively small site. Finally, the bullaun stones and the pivot-stone will also be considered in relation to the elements within the enclosure, while the site itself will be examined in the context of well-known monastic settlements throughout the Dingle and Iveragh Peninsulas such as Skellig Michael and Killabuonia in Co. Kerry, as well as sites along the west-coast – High Island, Co. Galway, for example.

¹ Tomás Ó Carragáin, Office of Public Works (Ireland) information plaque at Kilnaruane, Bantry, Co. Cork.
What the results suggest is that both the high cross and site at Kilnaruane were not only a rare outlying example of the monastic tradition of peninsular Kerry, but were also potentially the location of a pilgrimage round, also known as *an turas* (literally ‘a journey’). With the rising eighth-century cult of Saint Brendan the Navigator, came a thriving culture of seafaring pilgrimage throughout the west coast, with a particular fervour in the Dingle and Iveragh peninsulas. Additionally, the ecclesiastic tensions of the seventh century that would culminate with the Synod of Whitby (664), as well as the possibility of secular participation within Kilnaruane, will be the main historical and cultural backdrops for the following chapters. Although I will focus primarily on the Kilnaruane high cross and its iconography, I will also employ it as a beacon that can illuminate the surviving stone fragments within the context of the settlement and, furthermore, suggest what roles the site may have played in an effort to understand the spirit of monasticism that conceived its creation. But before such matters can be addressed it would be beneficial to consider what has already been said about the Kilnaruane high cross and its surroundings.
Studies that have addressed the Kilnaruane high cross are relatively few and far between. They primarily consist of brief descriptions and cursory interpretations of the imagery, with more recent publications tending to focus on the vertical boat on the north-east face. Until now there has been no satisfactory study of the high cross in relation to the surviving stone fragments and the enclosing site as an integrated unit, or as David Jenkins puts it, a ‘sacred core.’ Fortunately (for this author) the site was likely abandoned during the Viking raids of the ninth century, leaving some of its features discernible as they may have appeared during the height of occupation. This provides an opportunity to explore a unique southerly Christian settlement in the former Kingdom of Munster – one that stands possibly between early sites like Reask, Co. Kerry and Skellig Michael and the later examples at Kells and Clonmacnoise that continued to thrive into the twelfth century. Although scholars discussing the Kilnaruane high cross have pointed to it as an unusual feature of early Irish monasticism in the south-west, they have not completely explored to what extent it reflects the wider ecclesiastic atmosphere of Ireland, nor has the literature addressed more regional traditions and practices such as the possibilities of secular patronage and pilgrimage rounds. It is the iconography of the high cross that we must initially turn to; today it provides the most concrete representation of the peoples that once

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2 David H. Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest:’ the Sacred Topography of the Early Medieval Irish Church, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), XII.
occupied the site. That being said, what is severely lacking in the current body of scholarship is a nuanced understanding of the iconography of the Kilnaruane high cross as it relates to the larger canon of monumental sculptural design in Ireland and abroad – i.e. the insular high cross – and how that in turn is linked to the religious atmosphere of the Bantry Bay area.

**The Kilnaruane High Cross**

The earliest references to the high cross at Kilnaruane and the site come in the form of engraved maps and cursory listings in topographical publications of Ireland. According to Colum and James Hourihane in their 1979 article, “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone, Bantry, Co. Cork,” the first of these references is found in the Patent Rolls of James I of 1612 which lists the township as Kilnorwane. Subsequently a number of maps also refer to it in varying ways, including: the Down Survey (1655) in which it appears as Killnerown and then Killneraum, and also two maps by Sir William Petty where it is Kilnerowen (1655/9) and again Killnerown (1672). As Hourihane and Hourihane suggest the different variations of the site’s name are etymologically alike in their construction. Appearing commonly in Ireland the prefix kill, keel, chill, or cill na translate to the *church of*. The village Kilmacanogue, Co. Wicklow for example refers to the church of Saint Mocheanóg (a figure typically associated with Saint Patrick), while Kilfenora, Co. Clare translates to the ‘church of the fertile hillside.’ David Jenkins, however, marks the ambiguity of the variants of *kill*, commenting that its wide use in both civil and historiographical

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contexts has skewed its meaning from any specific Christian configuration of topography.\(^7\) For now it will suffice to say that Kilnaruane seems to be designated as some form of religious settlement, very likely monastic in type. The question then becomes what is Kilnaruane the church of?

In 1849 – nearly two-hundred years after Kilnaruane first appeared on the early maps – John Windele in *Historical and Descriptive Notices of the City of Cork and its Vicinity* would offer an etymological interpretation of the name.\(^8\) Responding to a brief note by Samuel Lewis who commented that the site was a “burial-ground” marked by a “very antique pillar…with some rude sculpture of men in armour and other curious devices,” Windele suggested that the name “Kill-na-romhawn” may offer an alternative interpretation.\(^9\) He contends that -romhawn refers to the church of the Romans, a notion that is later picked up by Hourihane and Hourihane who further trace the name to the word *Róm(h)ánach*.\(^10\) The term was likely used to refer to Irish Christians who sided with the newly-established Roman calculation of Easter during the Synod of Whitby in 664; which also convened to discuss the observance of the tonsure and other points of contention between ecclesiasts of Ireland and their continental brethren.\(^11\) Although Lewis is the first to describe the high cross when he, rather mistakenly, suggests ‘men in armour,’ it is Windele who recognized that the high cross and the site itself are “certainly Christian.”\(^12\)

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\(^7\) David H. Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest:’ the Sacred Topography of the Early Medieval Irish Church, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2010), 13; fn. 67.


\(^10\) Windele, *Historical and Descriptive Notices*, 311.


\(^12\) Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 166; Windele, *Historical and Descriptive Notices*, 311.
Windele continues stating that the “site, whatever its former use may have been, is at present a well cultivated enclosure, on a rising ground...[with] fragments of wrought stone.” A rather dramatic illustration accompanies Windele’s reference in which he interprets the upper-most panel on the south-west face as four bands of interlace (Fig. 8).

For the next one-hundred years the Kilnaruane high cross and its surrounding site would receive little notable attention. As it has been noted above much of the early literature is relatively cursory and typically part of a survey of topographical features. Lewis and Windele would be the first to include the Kilnaruane high cross and its site in their publications, but a generation later Henry Crawford would also include it in his 1916 “Supplementary List of Early Cross-Slabs and Pillars.” Crawford provides the first published measurements of the high cross as well as the first attempt to identify some of its iconography:

…the panels on the north contain…two figures holding an object between them and standing on either side of a small table or stand,...a Greek cross with square centre and extremities,...a figure standing with uplifted hands, and interlaced pattern much worn, but probably consisting of snakes or sea-horses.

Some fifteen years later, Françoise Henry would mention the high cross in her 1932 doctoral thesis La Sculpture Irlandise Pendant les Douze Premiers Siècles de l’être Chrétienne which was subsequently published in 1933. In her 1940 book Irish Art in the Early Christian Period, Henry would again include the high cross in a short paragraph. While Crawford describes snakes and sea-horses in the upper-most part of the south-west face, Henry suggests

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13 Windele, *Historical and Descriptive Notices*, 311.
15 Crawford, “Supplementary List,” 164: As it is today, the ‘figures holding an object between them’ face not to the ‘north,’ as it is noted by Crawford, but to the south-west.
“snake-like beasts arranged swastika-fashion,” and curiously enough, would completely omit the Greek cross where Crawford had accurately recognized it.”¹⁸ Alternatively, the *ornas* figure does not go unnoticed, but is described as a familiar image of early Christian iconography found abroad and in various mediums, including the Roman catacombs and some sarcophagi, but Henry does not offer any specific examples in this regard.¹⁹ In addition to the descriptions, Henry also provides some brief iconographic interpretations. For example, the cruciform above the rudder “can leave little doubt that we have a representation of the boat of the church,” and Crawford’s ‘two figures holding an object between them,’ Henry corrects as a “crude representation of St Paul and St Anthony kneeling on both sides of the wafer-shaped bread brought to them by the bird.”²⁰ It is clear that Henry was familiar with the iconography of Saint Jerome’s (c.347-420) fourth-century *Vita Pauli* from which the story of the two saints originates.

Henry was also the first to recognize the weathered image of the boat and five oarsmen on the north-east face where Lewis, Windele, and Crawford had not. The uniqueness of the image is clear in Henry’s commentary: “The unexpected thing about it is that it shoots straight upwards amidst a sea of crosses...very literally portrayed as sailing to Heaven.”²¹ Additionally, other significant contributions by Henry include: the observation of two ‘incisions’ on top of the shaft and the suggestion of an eighth-century date of origin based on stylistic and iconographic affinities to comparable examples, particularly to the realism of the Ahenny Cross, Co. Tipperary (Fig. 54).²²

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The next reference to the high cross would appear in Paul Johnstone’s 1964 article “The Bantry Boat,” nearly a quarter of a century later. In the article Johnstone makes a significant advance in our understanding of the vertically-oriented boat on the north-east face. He contends that the image is an accurate portrayal of the traditional Irish curragh (currach) – a raw-hide boat – historically found on the west-coast of Ireland (Fig. 9). Johnstone argues that the carved boat and the high cross itself are indeed from the eighth century – as Henry suggested – and that it is clearly pre-Viking both in its representation of the curragh and its simple realism. Furthermore, Johnstone states that the Kilnaruane curragh is the only surviving representation of the early-Irish hide boat, and possibly the only example of the type of vessel Saint Columba and Saint Brendan may have used for their voyages. Additionally, the Kilnaruane high cross demonstrates that the modern day curragh has changed very little in appearance and function since the eighth century. Johnstone considers the boat in some detail marking a number of key differences between the curragh and the Viking vessels that appear later on a number of Irish and Pictish stone monuments. The most notable difference is that Viking ships are double-ended in that they have an equally high bow and stern (Johnston cites an example of a carved Viking-style ship on the West Cross at Monasterboice), whereas curraghs have a disproportionately balanced bow and stern to the ratio of 2¼:1 that was designed to “ride very lightly on the water…not cut through the water so much as skim over it;” the high bow lending it the ability to overcome large waves in rough waters. The only comparable example provided by Johnstone is a boat carved on a Pictish stone at Cossans near Glamis where it has a “similar

trailing oar, does not appear quite double-ended, and is most likely not Viking” (Fig. 11).\textsuperscript{30} On the other hand, unlike the Kilnaruane \textit{curragh} this Pictish stone lacks oars, and is likely from the ninth century.\textsuperscript{31}

The majority of Johnstone’s article is a discussion of the oarsmen and the construction of the \textit{curragh} as it is found on the high cross, but it is clear that the history of insular seafaring technology is what is most pertinent to the study. Although the Greek cross on the south-west face is mentioned briefly, Johnstone does not delve into an iconographic discussion of the remaining imagery. Nor does he discuss the vertical nature of the boat, only echoing Henry’s comment that it is “being rowed hard heavenward amidst a sea of crosses.”\textsuperscript{32} Johnstone’s engagement with the high cross itself is minimal at best, but his article is an excellent example of how such imagery as the \textit{curragh} may be applied to a more secular area of study like shipbuilding. It is worth noting that in 1978 Tim Severin used the carved representation of the Kilnaruane \textit{curragh} as a model for his reconstruction of a skin boat in which he attempted to recreate the famous voyage of St Brendan the Navigator; a rough sketch of the Kilnaruane \textit{curragh} appears in his book \textit{The Brendan Voyage}.\textsuperscript{33}

The attention garnered by Severin and his enactment of the famous \textit{peregrinatio} (sea journey) may have incited the publication of the most comprehensive study of the Kilnaruane high cross to date. Just the following year Colum and James Hourihane wrote “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone, Co. Cork,” offering fresh descriptions and insight not only regarding the high cross, but also into the site itself. Moving through the panels on the north-east and south-west faces (which are incorrectly described as north-west and south-east), Hourihane and Hourihane suggest

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Johnstone, “The Bantry Boat,” 280.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Johnstone, “The Bantry Boat,” 280.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Johnstone, “The Bantry Boat,” 277.
\end{itemize}
a number of corrections of past references to the iconography. For example, the uppermost south-west panel bearing interlace is not zoomorphic in nature as Crawford and Henry had suggested, but rather abstract in the form of “two individual pieces of single stranded ribbon-interlace with four terminals.” These ribbons are interpreted – quite inexplicably – as a representation of the struggle between vice and virtue. Of the orans figure, Hourihane and Hourihane only add that due to the curvature of the shoulders and the ‘well-cut’ ears that it is rather naturalistically rendered, and that it represents the salvation of prayer; a solution to the supposed conflicting nature of the panel above.

The panel depicting Saints Anthony and Paul on the south-west face is described in full, including the astute recognition of high-backed chairs, raised hands, the circular wafer-like bread upon a T-shaped table, and a ‘paten-like dish’ holding the bread which Hourihane and Hourihane compare to the Pictish Nigg Cross-Slab from Easter Ross, Scotland (Fig. 12). Additionally, a couple of other comparable examples are offered, including Muiredach’s Cross at Monasterboice and the famous Ruthwell Cross in Dumfries, Scotland. Lastly, a bird is identified above the patent and the two figures of the saints are considered to be in profile, yet asymmetrical in execution. With all this in mind, Hourihane and Hourihane interpret the iconography of the contractio scene between the two saints as indicative of the contemplative life of the monastic community that likely existed at Kilnaruane.

Addressing the top-most panel on the north-east face, Hourihane and Hourihane are first to suggest that what little remains of the imagery was possibly the ribbon interlace of a spiral

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37 Hourihane and Hourihane, “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone,” 67, 69. Quite mysteriously, Hourihane and Hourihane note in their comment of the Nigg Stone that it is of Spanish origin.
motif; an accompanying line drawing produced by the authors demonstrates this (Fig. 1).

Another first is the recognition of the panel below not as a ‘sphinx-like’ figure, as Henry would contend, but four quadrupeds on a vertical axis. The authors link these rather strange quadrupeds to the four heavenly creatures described in the Book of Revelations which are also the four Evangelist symbols: the winged man or angel, the lion, the calf, and the eagle. As for the panel depicting the vertical boat, the authors are confident in the interpretation offered by Henry, namely, that it is a representation of the Ship of the Church. Noting that the boat is oriented symbolically towards the sky, Hourihane and Hourihane suggest that it is travelling through a storm, guarded by the four angels (the quadrupeds) who are responsible for delivering it to heaven. Finally, in full agreement with Paul Johnstone’s treatment of the depicted curragh and its real counterparts, Hourihane and Hourihane conclude that it was clearly modelled from reality.

We have already considered the etymological interpretation of the site’s name by Colum and James Hourihane, but it is worth noting a number of other observations marked by the authors. The rather isolated location of the Kilnaruane high cross, far away from well-known monumental examples throughout the midlands and to the east, as well as the absence of a cross-head, prompt the authors to question whether this particular monument was a high cross at all. Hourihane and Hourihane point to the fact that all references to the high cross have been in the form of ‘pillar’ or simply ‘stone,’ but that the appearance of some common iconography – such as the Greek-Cross and the contractio scene – find parallels on later high crosses. Furthermore,
the authors concur with Henry’s eighth-century dating, adding that the proportion of decorated to undecorated areas of the high cross suggests not only an early point of origin but a significant developmental phase of the high cross during this particular period in Ireland.\textsuperscript{46} Additionally, the authors chronologically associate the Romani name of the site with the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the mid-seventh century, during which the ‘roman manner’ of calculating Easter as well as some other practices were accepted – albeit slowly – throughout Ireland.\textsuperscript{47} This, in turn, justifies the authors’ contention that the site’s mid-seventh-century name is closely related to the eighth-century dating of the high cross proposed by Henry.\textsuperscript{48} Finally, Hourihane and Hourihane also recognize the presence of two bullaun stones within the enclosure, concluding that the remaining stone fragments and the site may have been used for burials during the great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1992 Peter Harbison produced an extensive iconographic and photographic survey of the high crosses of Ireland.\textsuperscript{50} In addition to what has already been stated about the Kilnaruane high cross and its iconography by Françoise Henry and, in particular, Colum and James Hourihane, Harbison provides several points that push the discussion forward. The first is that the ‘incisions’ described by Henry, or open-ended mortises, “may have been for the attachment of a ring or head, now lost,” but leaves the suggestion at that.\textsuperscript{51} These curious mortises will be explored in greater detail below in Chapter Four. Moreover, rather than five oarsmen within the vertically-oriented boat, Harbison identifies seven figures, the additional two sitting back-to-back.

\textsuperscript{46} Hourihane and Hourihane, “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone,” 71.
\textsuperscript{47} Hourihane and Hourihane, “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone,” 72.
\textsuperscript{49} Hourihane and Hourihane, “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone,” 72.
\textsuperscript{50} Peter Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey} (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1992).
\textsuperscript{51} Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey}, 131.
at the bow of the boat.\textsuperscript{52} Although not immediately apparent, in favourable lighting, Harbison is correct in this regard – the forearm of the second-last figure before the end of the bow is quite clear while the second figure is nearly lost among the weathered stone. The line drawing produced by Hourihane and Hourihane does not include these figures, but a drawing sent to me personally by Dr Rachel Moss of Corpus Christi College, Oxford indicates the presence of these forms, but quite roughly and not distinguishable as human figures (Fig. 13). It should be noted here that these additional figures do not hold oars as is the case with the others, and as such are referred to in this study as ‘passengers.’

Regarding the panel itself, however, Harbison appears to disagree with the ‘Boat of the Church’ interpretation in favour of the more ‘scriptural’ ‘Christ Stilling the Tempest.’\textsuperscript{53} The forearm of the aforementioned second-last figure is described as raised, or at the very least extending forward, and the uppermost cruciform exterior to the boat is, for Harbison, reminiscent of the collapsing mast depicted in the scene of ‘Christ Asleep’ portrayed at the foot of the ivory book-cover of Bodleian MS Douce 176 dating to the early-ninth century.\textsuperscript{54} The last significant contribution by Harbison is the possibility of a ninth-century date for the Kilnaruane high cross, based on the figure sculpture on both faces – very much the same manner in which Henry ascribed an eighth-century point of origin.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, according to the literature so far, the Kilnaruane high cross could date from as early as the Synod of Whitby (664) and as late as the Viking Age (the climax of which occurred in 870).

\textsuperscript{52} Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey}, 132.
\textsuperscript{53} Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey}, 132.
\textsuperscript{54} Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey}, 254-55.
\textsuperscript{55} Harbison, \textit{The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographical and Photographic Survey}, 382.
In 1993 Michael Herity makes a short reference to the site at Kilnaruane instead of the high cross, namely regarding the four corner posts lying adjacent to and nearby the monument.\textsuperscript{56} Herity provides a very convincing reconstruction of the probable tomb-shrine that may have been of the box-type, reminiscent of the now-ruined example at High Island, Co. Galway according to Herity (Fig. 70, 72). Aside from this reference, very few scholars have attempted to address the other stone fragments scattered throughout the site. The one exception is Emyr Estyn Evans’ note of a couple of “relics,” including two bullaun stones lying within the enclosure in his publication \textit{Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland} (1966).\textsuperscript{57}

One of the most recent discussions of the Kilnaruane high cross is in a 1998 article entitled “Voyagers in the Vault of Heaven: The Phenomenon of Ships in the Sky in Medieval Ireland and Beyond” by Michael McCaughan.\textsuperscript{58} Like Paul Johnstone before him, McCaughan does not concentrate on the high cross or the site, but rather on the vertical boat itself. Where McCaughan differs widely from Johnstone’s engagement with the boat imagery is that he considers the iconography of the carved boat in light of textual evidence of the medieval visions of flying ships in an effort to develop an iconography of ‘airship’ phenomena.\textsuperscript{59} Although McCaughan does not discuss the imagery on the south-west face he does describe in great detail the vertical boat in question. Aside from the now-established identification of the boat, its seven figures, the small cross at the rudder, and the ‘sea of crosses,’ McCaughan aptly recognizes that even though the boat itself is vertical the crosses that flank it are “conventionally upright and at


\textsuperscript{59} McCaughan, “Voyagers in the Vault of Heaven,” 170.
right angles” to the *curragh*. This small but nonetheless intriguing observation indicates that the panel was possibly *designed* within its own borders to be read as if it were ascending away from the earth, upon which the bottom two crosses seem to be represented as standing firmly in place; the ‘ground’ even delineated by a nearly horizontal line. McCaughan agrees with Henry’s interpretation when she wrote that “representationally the curragh is being rowed heavenwards by its crew and that symbolically, as the Ship of the Church, it is voyaging through the heavens to salvation.”

McCaughan begins with a discussion of the high cross but then breaks away to consider more textual evidence of ships in the sky. For example he refers to the Annals of Ulster under the year 749 in which “ships (naues) with their crews were seen in the air above Clonmacnoise.” As McCaughan presents a number of other textual examples he notes that a pattern appears in the accounts of flying ships: first, the phenomena are considered as actual events; there is always a large number of witnesses present; the ships are seen floating in mid-air; the crews in the flying ships appear to swim in the air; and finally the air/water element gives life to the people below but threatens those in the airship. This leads McCaughan to consider in what ways miraculous phenomena breached reality for the medieval individual as well as how the iconography of the flying ship is curiously common to Irish tales – both folk and Christian – but also as far abroad as Canada.

As for the Kilnaruane high cross, McCaughan does not return to it but uses it initially to support his iconographic interpretations – which are convincing but nonetheless more literary

than visual. Although McCaughan attempts to include flying ships found in a number of Irish annals into the larger Irish iconographic tradition, he does not take into account the uniqueness of the Kilnaruane high cross. The value of McCaughan’s article is in its very emphasis on the literary which brings to the study at hand an important dimension of supportive evidence.

The most recent, and currently the last, reference to the Kilnaruane high cross comes in the form of a brief comment regarding the *contractio* scene on the south-west face by Tomás Ó Carragáin in his 2010 book *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual, and Memory*. Specifically, Ó Carragáin draws upon this panel as an example of single-prop tables in his discussion of ‘Altars, Aumbries, and other Liturgical Furniture.’

As we have seen, the Kilnaruane high cross has received modest scholarly attention over the last century, but, as the following chapters will explore, the relationship of the high cross to the additional stone fragments within the site – including the *bullauns*, the possible tomb-shrine, and the enclosure itself – has yet to be considered. It is of course critical that we first return to the iconography of the high cross in light of the existing literature in an effort to provide additional insight into the meanings and interpretations already put forth. The resulting conclusions will not only offer a deeper understanding of the individual imagery, but also establish a socio-cultural and ecclesio-political foundation upon which we may reassemble – albeit speculatively – the remaining stone fragments and subsequently hypothesize the nature of Kilnaruane during its apogee.

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67 Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 188-90.
This chapter will consider the imagery on the north-east face of the Kilnaruane high cross with the specific intention of offering a variety of possible interpretations based on both regional and national associations. The north-east face displays the unconventionally-vertical curragh, above which are four quadrupeds and a possible scrolled motif. These images, and those on the south-west face, with the exception of the contractio panel to some extent, are not narratives per se, nor should they necessarily be considered as precursors to more complex scriptural scenes that would appear in subsequent centuries. In this sense early stone monuments that display a visual programme of symbols encouraged a multivalent understanding from their audiences through a state of meditation or ruminatio. This stands in stark contrast to later narrative scenes which – although visually sophisticated – are conceptually resolved and bound to a singular biblical event (‘Adam and Eve,’ ‘Jonah and the Whale,’ ‘Christ Crucified,’ etc.) allowing for a relatively uncomplicated iconographic understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, the images on the Kilnaruane high cross – ranging from the pseudo-narrative contractio to the abstract ribbon interlace – may have required a multi-faceted and temporally continuous engagement by their original audience. In other words, these images are both objects of veneration during a direct interaction with them, but are also meditative triggers that may have

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extended beyond their own visual confines to occupy the spiritual realm of the mind; particularly after the moment of viewing has passed. Additionally, as will be discussed below, the ‘visual programme,’ or more appropriately, the visual schema and organization of the images as they relate to one another, and as the two faces of the high cross are considered to be two separate ‘collections’ of images, will prove significant to both the national ecclesio-political climate of the eighth century as well as to the more immediate practices performed at Kilnaruane.

*The Vertical Boat*

Known as the Bantry or Kilnaruane boat this image is significant for two reasons. First, it is the only extant example of a vertically-oriented boat found anywhere in insular and continental art of the medieval period. Secondly, it is considered to be the earliest depiction of the traditional Irish boat known as the *curragh*. According to Paul Johnstone the image shows that the traditional boat has changed very little in its design since the eighth century: the characteristic flat stern, the sharp break in the gunwale, and a high bow – which allow it to lightly skim over water – are still present in examples today. Unseen in the carving are the raw-hide skins that would have covered the outside of the boat, both insulating and water-proofing the vessel. Unfortunately, like the rest of the high cross, the image of the *curragh* is quickly deteriorating and may be completely lost within another century. Therefore, it is critical that an exploration of the iconography of the boat be set in motion in an effort to include this image within the discourse of Irish high cross studies.

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The boat is carved in a relatively simple manner depicting a helmsmen, a crew of four oarsmen, and two passengers amid three cruciforms – one at the bow and two at its stern – that are oriented conventionally upright, suggesting a horizontal ‘ground,’ possibly indicated by the lower frame of the panel, and therefore, as previously mentioned, implying an upward movement of the boat, as if it were “very literally portrayed as sailing to heaven.” Perched on top of the rudder of the boat is a smaller fourth cruciform that remains true to the boat’s upward orientation. Widely-speaking, boat imagery is commonly found in the early art of many western cultures. For example, not unlike the *curragh* on the high cross, an Early Bronze Age sword from Rørby, Western Zealand, Denmark displays an accurate depiction of a variation of the *Hjortspring* boat (Fig. 14). This type of boat can also be found on a number of petroglyphs in Nordic countries, including Norway and Sweden. Similarly, a Pictish petroglyph in Jonathan’s Cave at East Wemyss, Fife, Scotland portrays what could be mistaken for a *curragh*, but according to Johnstone is more akin to British Bronze Age vessels (Fig. 15). Where the oars are hidden behind the hulls of the boats in the Nordic examples, this latter petroglyph displays pronounced oars that plunge downward and into the water. The seventh-century Sutton Hoo ship burial discovered underneath an earth mound in Suffolk should also be noted for it is here that the Anglo-Saxon king, Rædwald, was entombed in a boat with a great hoard of gold, armour, and jewelry.

Within an Irish context, images of seafaring vessels during the early medieval period are almost exclusively depictions of Noah’s Ark. Johnstone – discussing the Ark imagery on the
west face of the West Cross at Kells and on the east face of the Armagh Cross, Co. Armagh—states that the inclusion of architectural arcades in the superstructure of these boats was likely inspired by Carolingian ivories, and are characteristically Viking in design. That is, double-ended where the stern and bow rise at equal heights, as is also evident on the east face of the aforementioned Killary Cross and—although not a depiction of Noah’s Ark—on an English example on the Fishing Stane at Gosforth, Northumberland (Fig. 16). It is interesting that the Irish artists/craftsmen chose the Viking-style for the depiction of Noah’s Ark, as if it were an allusion to the apocryphal ninth-century invasions. Despite the relative frequency of Ark imagery, it would be difficult to justify that the Kilnaruane curragh depicts the same subject matter. First, there were eight individuals on Noah’s ark, not seven. Secondly, the sign of the cross seems to be out of place within the context of the Old Testament narrative, and most of all, Noah certainly did not literally nor figuratively sail the Ark to heaven, but to the newly-restored earthly realm. Additionally, it would not be until the ninth century that Ark iconography would appear on more elaborate scriptural Irish high crosses, and even then on a horizontal orientation. As such, it is safe to move away from an Ark interpretation in light of these details.

The next reasonable iconographic reading would be, as Peter Harbison has suggested, ‘Christ Stilling the Tempest;’ iconography that does not appear in surviving Irish high crosses. Although there are parallels of this particular miracle, for example in the illustrated Life of Saint Cuthbert written by the Venerable Bede in the early-eighth century—in which Cuthbert calms a storm—as well as in various examples of Irish navigational tales known as immrama (the Voyage of Mael Dúin, for example). However, this interpretation does not solve the mystery of the vertical nature of the depicted curragh. Nonetheless, because of its rather unusual orientation,

room must be left for the possibility that it is indeed ‘Christ Stilling the Tempest,’ particularly with Harbison’s observation that one of the two passengers gestures with a raised hand (although it does not appear to be the case to this author). On the other hand, there have been more convincing suggestions. For example, as we have touched upon, Michael McCaughan has argued that the heaven-bound boat may, in fact, be tied to the Irish phenomenon recorded during the eighth century in which actual ships appeared in the sky.\(^\text{74}\) The Annals of Ulster record that in the year 749 “Ships (naues) with their crews were seen in the air above Clonmacnoise” (a prominent monastic centre located in the Irish midlands), and a fourteenth-century manuscript records that “one day the monks of Clonmacnoise were holding a meeting…and as they were at their deliberations there they saw a ship sailing over them in the air, going as it were on the sea…”\(^\text{75}\) It should be noted, however, that in addition to ships in the sky there are also records of other sky-bound marvels or “mirabilia” as they are called: including steeples of fire, levitating crosses, and showers of silver, honey, and blood.\(^\text{76}\) McCaughan argues that the juxtaposition of the vertically-oriented Kilnaruane curragh against the conventionally upright crosses suggests that it is indeed ascending, or flying, through the air. However, the sources that he employs to support his argument state that the boats are seen as if “on the sea,” “sailing along in the air,” or “racing through the air,” in other words, horizontally, not ascending as may be the case at Kilnaruane.\(^\text{77}\)

McCaughan interprets the air-ship wonders as:

…a challenge to absolutism of knowledge. They imply the relativity of all human knowledge, that is, the distinction between the unknown and the unknowable (noumena) and things perceived or apprehended by our senses (phenomena). These wonder stories represent, in a particular way, one of the defining characteristic of Celtic literature that Nora Chadwick has described as “the

complete ascendency of the imagination and fancy over the world of logic, and over our normal ideas of cause and effect, of the way things happen in the world.”\textsuperscript{78}

This appears to be a rather exhaustive interpretation of what McCaughan states to be a Celtic literary trope. I am therefore, cautious with his interpretation, but not altogether dismissive of the possibility. Nonetheless, without a precedent or contemporary example of an image of a ship in the sky, it remains – so to speak – up in the air.

Local Bantry traditions claim that the carved boat is a representation of the navigational tale \textit{Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis}, also known as the \textit{Voyage of Saint Brendan}. In this tale Saint Brendan the Navigator and a crew of fourteen monks embark on a voyage into the Atlantic Ocean in search of an island paradise. While on their seven-year long journey they come to experience a number of curious miracles, battles with seas monsters, and hellish encounters, but eventually find – with great joy – the paradise that they seek. Although the tale is considered to be a metaphor for the Christian life, the historical sixth-century figure of Saint Brendan did indeed exist and is known to have founded monastic settlements in the neighbouring county of Kerry. However, the surviving hagiographic records do not indicate that a settlement at Kilnaruane was founded by the saint. It is believed that he founded the monastery Clonfert in Co. Galway, as well as a number of monastic cells in Ardfert, Co. Kerry, and other settlements in the Arran Islands, but no specific mention of Kilnaruane or the Bantry Bay area. Saint Brendan even traveled as far as Wales and Northern France during his lifetime and it would not be completely inconceivable that at some point he had made it to south-west Ireland. It may have been that a group of his followers were responsible for the settlement at Kilnaruane, adopting the saint as

\textsuperscript{78} McCaughan, “Voyagers in the Vault of Heaven,” 176.
their venerated holy figure, even perhaps emulating his voyage within the setting of Bantry Bay and its numerous islands. The town of Bantry, in any case, claims an association with Saint Brendan – there is even a modern statue of the saint in the town square (Fig. 17).

The Brendan interpretation is only strengthened by the fact that in the *Navigatio* the saint and his crew:

…got iron tools and constructed a light boat ribbed with wood and with a wooden frame…, covered it with ox-hides tanned with the bark of oak and smeared the joints of the hides on the outside with fat…They also placed a mast in the middle of the boat and a sail and the other requirements for steering a boat.79

The description seems to suggest that Brendan and his crew of monks used a *curragh* for their voyage. In 1976-77 Tim Severin, convinced of this, used the image of the boat from the Kilnaruane high cross as a model for the construction of a replica.80 The image is, however, clearly missing the mast and sails as they are described in the passage, as well as the remaining ten monks. The accuracy of the *curragh* only belies the possibility that the artist had simply run out of room for these missing features; the design and configuration are undoubtedly intentional. Additionally, crosses or cruciforms do not play a prominent role in the story of the *Navigatio* as they appear surrounding the Kilnaruane image, nor is there a cruciform at the top of the rudder in the tale. The very fact that there are fourteen crew members – in addition to “boat hides for the makings of two other boats, supplies for forty days, fat for preparing hides to cover the boat and other things needed for human life,” as well as a mast and sails – suggests that Saint Brendan’s vessel was more of a ship than a boat. The vertical orientation of the image also cannot be

justified by any specific event in the Navigatio. The one exception is that the upward direction of the boat is symbolic of a path towards heaven in much the same way that Saint Brendan’s boat sailed towards a paradise island. The greatest challenge, however, with justifying the notion that the vertical boat is a representation of the Navigatio or Saint Brendan is that there is no surviving visual iconography linked to Brendan. It may be for this reason that scholars who have dealt with the Kilnaruane image have completely omitted the possibility that it is a representation of the saint’s voyage. Although the image lacks specific links to Brendan and his journey, it is very possible that is a more general – perhaps regional – representation of religious or spiritual seafaring that points to pilgrimage, particularly when it is viewed in light of the other non-scriptural and more general iconography on the high cross. However, scholars have opted for the more universal iconographic interpretation of the boat as a symbol of the Church rather than explore the possibilities of a local or regional connection. Although significantly later, a minor visual tradition of the ‘navi’ does appear, albeit briefly, for example, on the mosaic said to have occupied the space above the entrance of Old Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome known as the Navicella (literally ‘little ship’) during the fourteenth century (Fig. 18). This later visual tradition seems to have been referenced anachronistically by scholars that have addressed the Kilnaruane boat. Nonetheless, it would be helpful to trace the roots of this particular visual trope in an effort to clearly explore its relation to the Kilnaruane image.

In 1964 Jean Daniélou dedicated a chapter to the ‘Ship of the Church’ in his book Primitive Christian Symbols. In it Daniélou draws evidence from a number of texts, including the anonymous fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions and the second-century letter by Clement to James at the beginning of the Homilies.\footnote{Jean Daniélou, Primitive Christian Symbols (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964), 58-60.} It is the same passage from the latter text – the letter to
James – that Hourihane and Hourihane also include in their article on the Kilnaruane high cross:

“The body of the church as a whole is like a great ship carrying men of many different origins through the violent storm.” 82 The passage indeed does allude to a general notion of the ‘Ship of the Church,’ but as Daniélou suggests the allegory continues with references to the passengers in various orders: “God is the owner of the ship and Christ the pilot, the bishop is like the look-out man, the presbyters are the crew, the deacons the leading oarsmen, the catechists the stewards.” 83

In as much as the message of the ‘Ship of the Church’ is spiritually hopeful, it is also sharply political – as Daniélou puts it: “the ship is not presented as the means of salvation, but simply as that which is saved,” that is, “God’s power can bring deliverance, and that deliverance obtained by the intercession of holy men.” 84 A theological visual reference to the Church during the late-seventh or early-eighth century in Ireland is, in this light, not without reason. It is possible that the image and, consequently, the high cross itself possibly came to be during a period of transition for monastic Ireland – specifically, the ecclesiastical disputes of the seventh century and their culmination in the Northumbrian Synod of Whitby in 664, as Colum and James Hourihane have suggested. Among a number of topics under consideration at the synod was the dating of Easter and the appropriate form of the tonsure, or hairstyle of the clergy, both of which were of the highest concern. The synod marked the popular acceptance of the new Roman calendar and the revised calculation of Easter, but would leave Ireland’s ecclesiastical leaders much divided. For example, Colman, the Irish representative and bishop of Lindisfarne, attended the great meeting but would reject Roman practices, contending that St John, not St Peter (who

84 Daniélou, Primitive Christian Symbols, 64-65.
was the first pope) was the rightful authority for the Irish.\textsuperscript{85} As Bede explains in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* Colman:

…saw that his teachings were rejected and his principles despised; he took those who wished to follow him, that is, those who would not accept the catholic Easter and the tonsure in the shape of the crown (for there was no small argument about this too), and returned to Ireland in order to discuss with his own party what he ought to do in the matter.\textsuperscript{86}

In effect Colman was rejecting Rome. Not everyone was opposed to the outcomes of the synod, however. For instance Bede also tells us that after Colman returned to Ireland, Tuda:

…a servant of Christ, who had been educated among the southern Irish and there consecrated bishop, became bishop of the Northumbrian people; he had the ecclesiastical tonsure in the form of a crown, according to the custom of that kingdom, and also observed the catholic rules of the date of Easter.\textsuperscript{87}

Note that Tuda was educated and consecrated among the *southern* Irish which, according to Bede, had already by 664 accepted the Roman practices.\textsuperscript{88}

In addition to the name ‘Kilnaruane’ (i.e. *Church of the Romans*) as a link to Rome and by extension the universal Church, the image of the boat may also directly relate to these themes. The answer may lie – although tenuously – in the following third-century passage from the *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* by the Roman theologian Hippolytus:

For the wings of the vessels are the churches; and the sea is the world, in which the Church is set, like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed; for she has with

\textsuperscript{87} Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 160.
\textsuperscript{88} Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 153.
her the skilled Pilot, Christ. And she bears in her midst also the trophy (which is erected) over death; for she carries with her the cross of the Lord. Her bow points east, her stern west, her keel is to the south. For her double rudder she has the two Testaments. ...On her either side are seamen, like guardian angels, who steer and look after the Church. The ladder rising upwards to the sailyard is an image of the sign of Christ’s passion leading the faithful to climb up into Heaven.89

During the medieval period maps were almost consistently oriented to the east instead of the north as we find them today. The eastern orientation emphasized the direction of the Holy Land of Jerusalem as well as the eastern position of the Garden of Eden according to Genesis (2:8). The thirteenth-century Hereford Mappa Mundi is a good example of this. If an eastern orientation is transposed over the Kilnaruane curragh, Hippolytus’ description of the bow, stern, and keel matches exactly. The double rudder as the two Testaments is perhaps represented by the two cruciforms at the stern of the Kilnaruane boat. Additionally, the seamen “like guardian angels” are perhaps, in this case, the oarsmen, while the pilot may be interpreted as Christ himself with the small cruciform above the rudder. Hippolytus’ references to “the trophy of victory over death” and the “sign of Christ’s passion” may refer to the image of the uppermost cruciform. The mast and rigging – which are not realistically present in the image of the Kilnaruane boat – are symbolic of the Cross, particularly for their similar form. Daniélou explains: “…the ladder leading aloft is an image of the cross whereby believers raise themselves to heaven…Thus the mast and rigging as a whole form as it were a cosmic ladder.”90

Furthermore, we may also turn to a number of other literary resemblances to the Kilnaruane curragh. For example, the anonymous Apostolic Constitutions also support the eastern orientation: “See that the deacons show the brethren to their places, as sailors do

90 Daniélou, Primitive Christian Symbols, 60.
passengers...See that the Church is...turned toward the east, as is proper for a ship... (emphasis added)." Moreover, the fourth-century Roman statesman, writer, and theologian, Cassiodorus – who also founded the monastery Vivarium – wrote in his *Explanation of the Psalms*:

...the setting of the cross is such that its top points to the heavens yet its base does not quit the earth. When implanted it touches the depths of the realm below and its breadth, with arms so to say extended, stretches towards the regions of the whole world; when flat it marks out the four points of the earth.  

In this light high crosses were considered to be pointing to the east, both standing erect and while flat upon the ground. As the fifth-century Christian poet Sedulius wrote (here paraphrased briefly): “the east shines on Christ’s head, and the west caresses his feet.”

Although there appears to be no definitive connection between Kilnaruane and the aforementioned written sources, nor are there any known references in the annals, hagiographies, or chronicles of Ireland to Hippolytus *et al*, it is not too farfetched that such obscure texts may have found their way to the south-west. Tuda had traveled from the south to Northumbria, while other figures, such as Saint Columba, traveled even further on to the continent and back. During this period Irish monasteries were highly productive in their output of manuscripts and had also gained a reputation for their engagement with Latin scholarship. From the seventh century monasteries quickly expanded their *scriptoria* to accommodate a great influx of eager students, both Irish and foreign, as Bede writes: “The Irish welcomed them all gladly, gave them their daily food, and also provided them with books to read and with instruction, without asking for

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any payment.”\textsuperscript{95} Irish monks also traveled abroad to Britain and the continent, often establishing monastic settlements as they went. Moreover, a zeal for Latin learning and a great exchange of knowledge with every new student or learned individual – particularly from the continent – was an opportunity for the Irish to expand their literary repertoire. It is possible, therefore, that an individual or individuals from the community at Kilnaruane had come across the writings of Hippolytus or Cassiodorus. Or it might have even been the artist himself who, as Johnstone mentions, was likely both “an able artist and a seaman;” that is, someone who traveled.\textsuperscript{96}

Considering the above, the Kilnaruane boat arguably expresses the notion of the ‘Universal Church’ as it was promoted by Rome during the seventh and early-eighth centuries. The boat might have been employed as a politically harmonizing visual slogan (to borrow John Higgitt’s term) during a period of great ecclesiastical tension.\textsuperscript{97} We can see similar slogans elsewhere. For example, the pillar at Kilnasaggart, Co. Armagh is inscribed with “this place has been given by Ternoc, son of Ciaran-the-Little, under the protection of Peter the Apostle” (Fig. 19). François Henry interprets this inscription and accompanying twelve cruciforms as “an affirmation of fidelity to the Chair of St Peter as a consequence of the Synod of Whitby,” in other words, a nod to the authority of Papal Rome.\textsuperscript{98} Similarly, John Higgitt also suggests that the iconography of Saint Peter on the wooden coffin of Saint Cuthbert, specifically the tonsure that he boasts, speaks to “a partisan statement about ecclesiastical organization in general;” once again referring to Rome, as Lindisfarne was quickly Romanized after the synod.\textsuperscript{99} As the largest and most prominent image on the Kilnaruane high cross, the iconography of the ‘Boat of the

\textsuperscript{95} Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, \textit{Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200} (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1995), 196.
\textsuperscript{96} Johnstone, “The Bantry Boat,” 278.
\textsuperscript{97} Higgitt, “The Iconography of St Peter,” 272-273.
\textsuperscript{99} Higgitt, “The Iconography of St Peter,” 274.
Church’ may have been clear to the clergy that viewed it from within the enclosure, using it as an anchor – so to speak – for their own ecclesiastical duties.

That the Kilnaruané curragh provokes a variety of interpretations speaks to the impossibility of definitively settling on just one. However, it is possible to indirectly coax the most accurate purpose and/or significance of the image in light of the remaining iconography and within the context of both the physical site and its stone fragments as well as the cultural and religious practices of south-west Ireland; themes that will be discuss in the following chapters.

*The Scrolled Motif*

The vertical boat is not the only pictorial feature that bears symbolic associations. Setting aside the four quadrupeds for the time being, the faint scroll motif at the highest position on the north-east face is the remains of what was possibly the bottom of another image of the ‘Boat of the Church,’ albeit an abstract variation. Hourihane and Hourihane make the only acknowledgment of this motif on the high cross shaft, but do not attempt an interpretation. However, in her treatment of earlier Irish monuments Henry notes that inscribed slabs bearing simple cruciforms are at times accompanied by “an indication of a boat on which the cross is standing, [as] an early representation of the boat of the church.”\(^{100}\) Often the bow and stern of these ‘abstract boats’ are curled into two spirals joined by a curving keel from which a cross rises (oddly enough, the curling motif is reminiscent of Viking style vessels). This motif appears particularly on seventh-century slabs and pillars in the county of Kerry – at Reask, Kilshannig, and Cloon West for example (Fig. 20). John Sheehan marks two types of these motifs: the

\(^{100}\) Henry, *Irish Art*, 32.
scrolled palmette and the simple C-scroll.\textsuperscript{101} The two types differ slightly in form but are likely derivatives of the same base motif of a curling pelta.\textsuperscript{102} Sheehan does not offer an iconographic interpretation for the scrolled motif, only concluding that it is decorative in nature.

The scrolled motif also appears on the eighth-century Athlone Crucifixion Plaque and on a more ornate Armenian example in the Khatchk’ar (memorial stone) of Aputayli from the thirteenth century (Fig. 21, 22). The motif is at once the mast of the boat and the cross as it was implied by Hippolytus. It is suggested here that in its original form the north-east face of the Kilnaruane high cross possibly bore a very similar configuration of this motif. If this is the case the date of origin for the high cross would be earlier in the eighth century than later, if not the seventh century, as most of these motifs appear between the sixth and late seventh centuries in Ireland.

\textit{The Four Quadrupeds}

Returning to the four quadrupeds, they are portrayed in pairs, facing one another with wide eyes and detailed oblong faces that bear sharp jawlines with parted mouths. They stand on the same vertical axis as the boat, except that the ‘ground’ that the bottom pair stands on is on the opposing side of the vessel; the boat’s stern is to the right of the image while the quadrupeds stand on the left. The seventh-century Sutton Hoo Purse Lid displays very similar quadrupeds flanking a human figure, rearing in appearance rather than oriented vertically (Fig. 23). Quadrupeds of this kind can also be seen in the Book of Kells (Dublin, Trinity College Library,

\textsuperscript{102} Sheehan, “The Crux of the Matter,” 100.
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MS A. I. (58), f.201v) and, once again, on the North Cross at Castledermot, Co. Kildare (Fig. 24). The latter example is commonly referred to as ‘Daniel in the Lions’ Den’ and also occurs on the north side of the ninth-century Tall Cross at Monasterboice and on the east face of the Moone Cross, Co. Kildare (Fig. 25). The Kilnaruane quadrupeds are iconographically inconsistent with the story of Daniel for the simple reason that Daniel is missing from the scene. Additionally, it may be argued that the quadrupeds represent the four Evangelists, but typically such iconography would take on the form of a human or angel (Matthew), a lion (Mark), a bull-calf (Luke), and an eagle (John), not four identical animal motifs as is the case here.

There is another possible interpretation, but it would not particularly align with the image of the boat. In the Navigatio of Saint Brendan there is an instance during the voyage when the crew of monks come across an island overrun with sheep: “Walking around the island they found various flocks of sheep – all of one colour, white. The sheep were so numerous that the ground could not be seen at all.”¹⁰³ The Kilnaruane quadrupeds could be a representation of this moment in the tale, but what is to account for their vertical orientation? It is perhaps more convincing that the quadrupeds are the universal flock of Christ ascending, as it were, with the ‘Boat of the Church.’ Alternatively, there may have been a less ‘scriptural’ association with the quadrupeds and the curragh positioned below them. That the ‘ground’ is represented to the left side of the north-east face and that of the stern of the curragh is to the right, possibly corresponds with the surrounding topography of the site. Namely, to the left of the north-east face (or south-east of the site) is a small range of hills – i.e. terrain – while to the right of the cross (north-west of the site) is Bantry Bay in clear view. The stern of the curragh could have faced the same direction as the quadrupeds, but it seems as if it was intentionally designed to signal the water, while the

¹⁰³ Barron and Burges, The Voyage of Saint Brendan, 33.
quadrupeds point to land. We will return to the significance of this interpretation later, but for now we must turn our attention to the iconography of the south-west face.
CHAPTER THREE
The South-West Face

The south-west face of the Kilnaruane high cross boasts four panels depicting Saints Anthony and Paul in the standard iconographic expression of *confractio*; an inscribed Greek cross with square terminations; an *orans* figure; and a panel containing ribbon or zoomorphic interlace. Although there appears to be no clear ‘programme’ or logical succession of imagery comparable to more ‘scriptural’ high crosses, what becomes apparent is an overall message of salvation. The theme may be read by way of the contemplative life of monasticism represented by the *confractio* image, as well as the invocation of the Word of God indicated by the Greek Cross – which we will explore shortly – and the call to prayer alluded to by the *orans* figure with hands outstretched in solemn supplication.

_Saints Anthony and Paul_

On the lowest panel of the south-west face is a scene of the meeting of Saints Anthony and Paul (Fig. 26). Françoise Henry describes the scene as “crude” but it has simply experienced the greatest weathering of all the surviving imagery.\(^\text{104}\) Today it is virtually impossible to

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\(^{104}\) Henry, _Irish Art_, 108.
distinguish the two figures facing one another, the table between them, and the bird hovering above them delivering the loaf of the Eucharist. The scene depicts Jerome’s account of the event: Paul the hermit is visited by Saint Anthony in the wilderness – or desert/ desertum – and while they discussed certain matters a raven descended from the heavens to deliver a loaf of bread, as it regularly did for the hermit, except instead of a half-loaf it brought a whole one to be divided between the two saints. Paul and Anthony spent the rest of their day debating which of them should break the loaf. Both Paul the host and Anthony the junior did not wish to deny the other the privilege. Eventually they decided to break the loaf together. After this Paul the hermit dies and Anthony, with the aid of two lions, is tasked with his burial.

The scene is relatively common among Irish high crosses and other insular stone monuments. The scene appears on the north face of the Moone Cross for example, as well as on the north face of the Kells Market Cross, the north side of Muiredach’s Cross at Monasterboice, the north arm of the east face of the Cross of Saints Patrick and Columba at Kells, and the previously-mentioned Nigg Cross-Slab (Fig. 60). Typically, the moment depicted is of the confractio, or the breaking of the bread. In the instance of the Clonca Cross, Co. Donegal, however, the moment represented appears to be just after the confractio but before the death of Paul as the two quadrupeds (presumably the lions) sit in waiting above the pair (Fig. 51).

In addition to representing the liturgical practice of the Eucharist – which is often the first interpretation of images depicting Anthony and Paul – Paul Meyvaert has pointed to an alternative association particular to the Irish context. Specifically, the term confractio, coined by Dom Louis Gougaud in 1961, refers to two priests jointly breaking bread.105 Typically the Eucharist is not considered to be a monastic practice, but an ecclesiastical tradition. However,

Irish episcopal and monastic structures were characteristically blended, while their Northumbrian and continental counterparts were very much separate.\textsuperscript{106} Although the actual structure of religious life in Ireland has long been disputed, it has generally been agreed that both an abbot and a bishop could – and often did – cross paths.\textsuperscript{107} A \textit{paruchia} was a network of monasteries with no geographic boundaries connected to a central abbey at which the abbot assumed leadership, while the bishop traditionally oversaw the clergy and conducted pastoral care (i.e. Sacraments) within a specific geographical area referred to as the See. It has been suggested that due to the largely monastic nature of religious life in Ireland, the bishops did not play as major of a role as they have abroad. As such, often bishops and the clergy were found within or associated with powerful abbeys, but not necessarily with the outlying monasteries.

Thus, the \textit{contractio} of two ‘priests’ breaking bread is perhaps more appropriately a representation of the unique character of Irish religious structures and the relationship between their leaders, or as Meyvaert puts it: it underlines “the central place of the Eucharistic sacrifice in a monastic context.”\textsuperscript{108} In Adamnan’s \textit{Life} of Saint Columba of Iona (an Irish satellite monastery in Scotland), there is an instance in which a stranger appears on the island,

...who humbly kept himself out of sight, as much as he could, so that no one knew that he was a bishop. But yet that fact could not remain hidden from Columba. For on the next Lord’s-day, when the stranger was bidden by the saint to prepare, according to custom, the body of Christ [the Eucharist], he called the saint to assist him, so that they should, as two presbyters, \textit{together break the Lord’s bread}. Thereupon the saint, going to the altar, suddenly looked upon his face, and thus addressed him: “Christ bless you, brother: break this bread alone, according to the episcopal rite, for we know you are a bishop. Why until now have you tried to conceal yourself, so that the reverence due to you was not paid by us?”\textsuperscript{109} (Emphasis added)

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\textsuperscript{106} Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest,’ 16.  \\
\textsuperscript{107} Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest,’ 15-20.  \\
\textsuperscript{108} Meyvaert, “A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross,” 135.  \\
\textsuperscript{109} Quoted from Meyvaert, “A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross,” 134-35.
\end{flushright}
We see here that Columba so revered the bishop’s Eucharistic rite that he insisted that the bishop break the bread alone. The exchange is very much an echo of the exchange between Anthony and Paul who also did not wish to deny the other the privilege of the Eucharist. In this manner, the *contractio* panel on the south-west face does not necessarily indicate the sacrament of the Eucharist, but rather the communal nature of religious life at the settlement, which may have been largely monastic, and yet permeable in that pastoral care by clergy may have also occurred near it.

*The Greek Cross*

The panel directly above the scene of the *contractio* has been described by Colum and James Hourihane as an equal-armed Greek cross with square terminations, a matching square centre, and four closely-fitted subsidiary compartments flanking the top and bottom terminations respectively. François Henry does not mention this panel in her brief discussion of the Kilnaruane monument, nor is it particularly explored by Paul Johnstone, Peter Harbison, or Michael McCaughan in their respective references to the high cross. In their iconographic interpretation of the cross panel, Hourihane and Hourihane suggest that the cross represents the “cosmic significance of the redeeming act,” particularly as an ‘answer’ to the supplication of the *orans* figure above it. The significance of the cross panel as it relates to the *orans* figure above and the *contractio* panel below will be explored shortly, but first it would be useful to address the formal qualities of the Greek cross.

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Contrary to Hourihane and Hourihane’s assertion, the cross panel is not a perfect square but a rectangle measuring approximately 8.5 X 11.0 inches with a cross that is proportionately taller than it is wide and therefore not equal-armed as it has been assumed to be. However, the difference in length is minute – an additional 1.25 inches to each vertical cross arm – but enough to illusionistically oscillate between a perfect Greek cross and an elongated one. This particular ‘illusion’ or disparity in length is part of a more wide-spread practice that appears more so in insular illumination than in monumental insular stone sculpture. For example, the Mark (f.94v) and Luke (f.138v) cross-carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels (London, British Library Cotton MS Nero D.iv) display this convention (Fig. 27, 28). Both pages appear to display equal-armed crosses, but as Robert Stevick and Michelle Brown have confirmed, are in fact not equal in length.112 Like the Kilnaruane panel, the Mark and Luke pages display longer vertical cross-arms which – according to Brown – reveal an intentional use of mathematical principles of measurement with the intention of encouraging introspection through inspection.113 The use of mathematical principles in this manner is also evident in the illuminator’s employment of the Golden Rule for the layout of the cross-carpet pages preceding the Lindisfarne Jerome (f.2v) text and the gospel of Matthew (f.26v) (Fig. 29, 30).114 The use of ‘hidden’ mathematical details extended beyond the initial planning of the design to include not only a spiritual and symbolic engagement by way of enacted *ruminatio*, but was also an act of mimicking the “divine principles” of God’s Creation, in which balance is obtained through organic individuality and geometric unity.115

Unlike the previously mentioned cross-carpet pages and other examples found in familiar illuminated manuscripts, the Kilnaruane cross panel does not conform to the mathematical rule of the Golden Ratio. Specifically, for its height of 11 inches the panel would require a width measuring 6.8 inches (or close to) instead of its current 8.5 inches to proportionately measure a Golden Rectangle. This is not to say that we should dismiss the fact that the panel is stylistically related to illuminated cross-carpet pages, especially because most cross-carpet pages do not conform to the Golden Ratio. For example, the aforementioned Mark and Luke folios may display a disparity in length in their vertical cross-arms, but they do not display a use of the Golden Ratio.

Considering the prefatory Jerome page (f.2v) and the remaining cross-carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels, there is a subtle oscillation between negative and positive space as the cruciform designs act as both solid objects and as “open armatures” that frame and contain intricate configurations of interlace. Similarly, the cruciform and subsidiary compartments of the Kilnaruane panel alternate between a cruciform upon a background and a cruciform embedded or ‘locked’ into the subsidiary sections. The latter view reveals a maze of channels reminiscent of the red cruciform outline of the Luke cross-carpet page (page 220) in the Lichfield Gospels (MS s.n.) and the Matthew cruciform in the Lindisfarne Gospels (f.26v) (Fig. 31).

Furthermore, another similar play on the framing and the form of the cross – not to mention its stylistic affinity to the Kilnaruane panel itself – is the Matthew cross-carpet page (f.1v) in the Book of Durrow (Dublin, Trinity College MS A.4.5 (57)) (Fig. 32). The outline of the Durrow

square terminations projects into the field of interlace on which the cross sits with the addition of minor terminations that anchor the cruciform design onto the larger interlaced background.

To return to the Kilnaruane cross panel, possible applied pigmentation at the time of its creation may have differentiated between the two areas, but a lack of it fuses the cruciform and subsidiary compartments into a unified panel, particularly as the two areas sit flush with one another. Consequently, this panel appears to be more deeply incised than any other on the high cross. It could be that because of its linear geometric design the execution of it may have been easier in comparison to its more naturalistic counterparts (i.e. the human forms, the boat, interlace, etc.). As such the cross panel appears to leap off the monument’s face, highlighted with thin bands of shadow which are all the more emphasized in good lighting conditions.

The result in all of the previous examples is a simultaneously enclosed and permeated cruciform, which may have been symbolic of both the state of the human body as a spiritual vehicle and the divine dual nature of Christ as both man and deity. To this it may be added that jeweled reliquary and liturgical crosses (*crux gemmata*) in their striking similarity to cross-carpet pages, particularly those that bear four square terminations and a square centre, have been suggested to symbolize the five holy wounds of Christ (nailing to the cross of two hands, two feet, and the pierced side) and are thus an embodiment of Christ himself. An enamelled bronze cross now found in Limerick, Co. Munster and a liturgical cross from Tully Lough, Co. Roscommon – both dating to the ninth century – display particularly embellished square terminations reminiscent of wounds (Fig. 33). The Tully Lough cross contains within its square terminations ornate round bosses that seem to be almost literally ‘pierced’ with raised nibs.

Additionally, perhaps displaying a more direct notion of the embodiment of Christ is a small enamel-decorated hook mount originally attached to a hanging-bowl (a cauldron-shaped

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dish) found in a ninth-century Viking grave at Myklebostad, Norway (Fig. 34). The hook mount figurine, taken during Viking excursions into Ireland, displays a square torso decorated with millefiori ornamentation and square L-shaped terminations reminiscent of cross-carpet designs. In this instance of what is perhaps one of the earliest examples of Irish monastic figure sculpture outside of more monumental examples, there is a convergence of the symbolic embodiment of Christ and a representation of his body proper. Examples of this type of figure may also be found on the high cross at Moone (although without the added decoration), as well as in a more realistically portrayed ninth-century figure at Lismore Cathedral, Co. Waterford, and also in the Book of Deer (Cambridge University Library, MS, Ii.6.32) in which case the simple figures hold or have hanging from their necks a satchel containing a book (Fig. 35). According to Dominic Marner, the satchel represents the Word as it was employed as an apotropaic or talismanic device not only within an ecclesiastical context but also as it was used for the healing of the sick and the protection of its wearer during battle.

If we consider the apotropaic function of wearing the Word of God, or holding it in front of oneself during the liturgy, and the stylistic affinities that both cross-carpet pages and liturgical crosses share with the Kilnaruane cross panel, the panel itself, is not only a representation of the embodiment of Christ as we have seen, but an embodiment of the Word in the suggestion of the book itself. To put it simply, the designer of the panel – in a gesture of visual multivalence – not only refers to the Cross and the Crucifixion, but also intentionally refers to a cross-carpet page. Why is this? In his discussion of the figure with the halo wearing a satchel in the Book of Deer (f.16v), Marner states that the satchel “alludes to a book rather than representing a physical book per se. The notion of the satchel worn around the neck refers to that aspect of the book, that is,

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the Word, which has talismanic power (emphasis added).”\(^{121}\) In short, the satchel refers to the power of the Word rather than the actual Word itself – i.e. Biblical scripture. In a similar fashion, the Kilnaruane cross panel is not a representation of a physical book (despite the possibility that its dimensions suggest a modestly-sized manuscript), rather, the reference to a cross-carpet page refers, to adopt Marner’s suggestion, to “the act of using the book,” but perhaps more significant to the monastic context of the panel, to the use of the spoken Word of God.\(^{122}\) In addition to the panel’s protective talismanic function, it may also refer to the monastic hours of prayer, particularly as gospel books were brought in procession to the altar during these events (possibly open to the evangelist and cross-carpet pages) or it is even perhaps an allusion to the prayers and rituals performed by passing pilgrims.\(^{123}\) It is interesting to note that the panel itself faces the exterior of the enclosure, potentially acting as a visual prelude to what is within the sanctum sanctorum in much the same way that cross-carpet pages precede the text.

The notion of the panel’s redeeming qualities as suggested by Hourihane and Hourihane may also be interpreted through the previously-mentioned formal qualities of the panel’s execution. If we consider lighting conditions as they influence the viewing of the cross panel – which we may refer to as atmospheric context – a unique play of illumination occurs throughout the span of a day. For example, the deep lines of the panel capture darker shadows as the sun begins to rise in the morning; highlighting or illuminating, as it were, the panel by its very contrast to the shadows of the lines. As the day progresses, and the literal light of the world illuminates the earth, the shadows of the panel move about, constantly framing the panel. At sunset the shadows return and once again highlight the cross panel, exchanging the literal light


for spiritual light – i.e. the illuminating power of the Word. As Psalm 119, verse 105 states: “Your word is a lamp to my feet/ and a light to my path.” In this manner, the visual reference to cross-carpet pages as a slogan of the Word of God is not unlike the illumination of manuscripts in which the Word is revealed visually. Additionally, the balance of light is perhaps most apparent at night as candles were likely lit beneath the monument, at which time the contrast between light and shadow would have been at its highest. The deep-set shadows of the cross panel may have also produced a lively display of moving shadows. A parallel of this experience could be seen at Clonmacnoise where today the original monuments of the monastic settlement are installed in a minimally-lit gallery (Fig. 36). The floor lights are angled in such a way that the shadows among the carved stones – outlining and emphasizing the depth of the figures and decoration – add a dimension to the viewing experience: the imagery seems to break away from the stone, as if animated. The designer(s) of the monuments at Clonmacnoise and at Kilnaruane were likely very aware of – and intentionally incorporated – the atmospheric context in their design. Of course the weather changed dramatically in the south-west of Ireland with bouts of rain and wind, but the capturing of light in stone by way of shadows is the very mechanism that sets the cross panel apart from the others.

There are only a few comparable examples of cross panels depicted on stone monuments in Ireland, particularly as they relate to cross-carpet pages. A stone slab at Ardmoreel, Killorglin, Co. Kerry dating to the seventh century is perhaps the best example of a visual affinity to manuscript illumination (Fig. 37). Discussing the Chi-Rho imagery and the triple-barred cross on this slab, Michael Herity notes that the rectangular frame – with its accompanying ornaments positioned at each corner and the projections found midway along each side of the frame – is comparable to frames found in the Echternach and Lindisfarne Gospels, the Codex Usserianus
Primus (Dublin, Trinity College Library, 55), and the Book of Durrow.\textsuperscript{124} Additionally, it seems that the slab is also proportionately similar to the cross-carpet pages found in the previously mentioned manuscripts, in that it closely adheres to the Golden Ratio (expressed as $1:1.618$, the slab measuring $1:1.56$).\textsuperscript{125} Furthermore, Françoise Henry discusses the similarities between illumination, metalwork, and stone sculpture as inextricably entwined.\textsuperscript{126} Henry marks a distinction between the mobile nature of manuscripts and metalwork and that of stone sculpture, which was typically carved in local stone and therefore reflective of local ornamental trends.\textsuperscript{127} Consequently, Henry suggests that a manuscript may be traced to its origin by closely examining its decorative programme in comparison to a region’s decorative style found in its stone monuments.\textsuperscript{128} Although the Killorglin slab is relatively simple and an earlier example, the parallel between it and the Kilnaruane cross panel is clear; they are even geographically close to one another with the slab found in the neighboring county of Kerry.

Looking elsewhere, the monastic ruins at Clonmacnoise, hold a substantial collection of stone slabs incised with variations of the Greek cross reminiscent of the Kilnaruane cross panel (Fig. 38). Individually the recumbent grave slabs are relatively modest. Together however, they express the importance of burial rites and the translation of relics during a period of shifting ecclesiastical practices during the seventh and eighth centuries.\textsuperscript{129} Although depicted in a number of variations, the configurations of the Clonmacnoise grave slabs and the Kilnaruane cross panel share several similarities in their rectilinear – at times square – framing, the use of square

\textsuperscript{125} Herity, “Carpet Pages and Chi-Rhos,” 161.
\textsuperscript{126} From Herity, “Carpet Pages and Chi-Rhos,” 167.
\textsuperscript{127} From Herity, “Carpet Pages and Chi-Rhos,” 167.
\textsuperscript{128} Herity, “Carpet Pages and Chi-Rhos,” 167.
\textsuperscript{129} Ó Carragáin, \textit{Churches in Early Medieval Ireland}, 84.
terminations which also appear as the conventional \textit{tau}, and in some cases also share the fifth square found at the intersection of the cross-arms. Widely speaking though, variations of inscribed Greek crosses such as these eighth and ninth-century examples may be found throughout Ireland as early as the sixth century with the importation and rise of Christianity in the fifth century. For example, a cross-slab at Glencolumbcille, the slabs at Drumirrin, Kilcashel, Cloughboy, and Newtownburke, all Co. Donegal, as well as later examples at Toureen Peakaun, Co. Tipperary also display the linear outline and geometric execution of the Greek cross – at times no more than a rough incision of intersecting lines (Fig. 39). Preceding the popularity and sophistication of monumental high crosses, standing stone slabs and pillars were often marked with more than one cruciform, perhaps alluding to their collective apotropaic power, particularly at borders and thresholds.

Later examples of Greek cruciforms on Irish high crosses are more abstract in nature and at times difficult to discern. The twelfth-century cross at Dysert O’Dea, Co. Clare displays two iterations of the Greek cruciform on its west face and on the north side of the cross pediment (Fig. 40). Another variation of the cruciform also appears at a lower level on the north cross at Ahenny, Co Tipperary and on the north side of the cross at Bealin, Co. Westmeath (Fig. 41, 42). These panels have been considered to some degree, but like the Kilnaruane panel were perhaps associated with the daily monastic routine and the Word of God by way of the redeeming power of the Cross. The accessibility of the aforementioned panels (in that most are positioned at the audience’s level), including the Kilnaruane example in question, recalls the cruciform on the west side of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell monument (Fig. 43). As Paul Meyvaert discusses, the reason for the placement of the cruciform – which he recognizes as a crucifixion

scene badly worn – at ground level is precisely for its accessibility as it was conventional for individuals to pray beneath the cross.\textsuperscript{131} In her \textit{Life of St Willibald}, the Anglo-Saxon nun Huneberc, describes the importance of the high cross during the eighth century:

When [Willibald’s] parents, in great anxiety of mind, were still uncertain about the fate of their [sick] infant son, they took him and offered him up before the holy cross of our Lord and Saviour. And this they did, not in the church but at the foot of the cross, for on the estates of the nobles and good men of the Saxon race it is a custom to have a cross, which is dedicated to our Lord and held in great reverence, erected on some prominent spot for the convenience of those who wish to pray daily before it. There before the cross they laid him.\textsuperscript{132}

In this manner the cruciform at the foot of the Ruthwell monument and those found on the aforementioned examples, as well as the Kilnaruane cross panel, perform a similar apotropaic function as do the book satchels in the Book of Deer. Not only do they heal and protect the sick, they are also the point of contact between the audience and the spiritual realm. This is all the more emphasized by the convergence of the carved cruciform and the act of prayer and supplication by the use of the Word of God; Meyvaert notes that those praying before the Ruthwell crucifixion scene would be facing east, the traditional direction of prayer.\textsuperscript{133} This does not appear to be the case at Kilnaruane and also does not seem to be a significant practice throughout Ireland.

\textit{The Orans Figure}

An \textit{orans} or \textit{orant(e)} is a figure depicted with arms outstretched and uplifted in the conventional gesture of prayer and supplication in western art. These figures are consistently portrayed wearing long tunics or robes that extend to the ankles, leaving the feet exposed and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Meyvaert, “A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross,” 106-107.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Quoted from Meyvaert, “A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross,” 107.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Meyvaert, “A New Perspective on the Ruthwell Cross,” 107.
\end{itemize}
often in profile. The earliest examples appear on the walls and ceilings of the Roman catacombs, but may also be found on a number of sarcophagi and accompanying *tituli* (inscriptions in stone) (Fig. 44). It has been suggested that the advent of Christianity and its precarious relationship with Imperial Rome had, according to Graydon Snyder, prompted the appropriation and depiction of the *orans* figure as a “symbol of deliverance.”\(^{134}\) For example, a scene of ‘Daniel in the Lion’s Den’ (an *orans* flanked by quadrupeds) represents “gratefulness for deliverance in the face of Roman persecution.”\(^{135}\) Indeed deliverance would come in the fourth century during the height of the conflict between the new faith and the state. The *orans* figure, once found in great frequency, would nearly disappear from the Christian visual repertoire as Constantine I and Licinius resolved to treat Christians benevolently under the proclamation of the Edict of Milan in the winter of 313.

During the formative years of Christianity the *orans* figure also appeared on coins dating between the rules of Trajan and Maximian. Often the figures are accompanied by the inscription *pietas* or *pietas aug*, referring to filial piety and loyalty but also possibly extending to feelings of national fidelity.\(^{136}\) Valarie Abrahamsen, furthermore, traces the *orans* figure to the Neolithic period, finding parallels between numerous examples of female goddess figurines and the *orans* as it would appear later.\(^{137}\) The iconography of the goddess as the eternal mother, the huntress, as well as life-giving and regenerative may well be gleamed in later examples where the majority of *orans* figures are represented as female, often veiled and wearing female garments.\(^{138}\)

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Unfortunately, there has been little discussion as to why early Christians inserted female *orans* figures into scriptural scenes; she inexplicably appears as ‘Jonah in the Boat,’ as ‘Daniel in the Lions’ Den,’ and even as the ‘Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace’. Abrahamsen suggests that the female variation – as it appears in Roman catacombs – is a derivative of Greco-Roman goddess imagery and Christian burial practices, specifically as a symbol of the afterlife, or as she puts it: the *orans* “reinforces the link between life and death and recalls that people saw the earth as both womb and tomb.” Snyder on the other hand opposes an individualistic interpretation of the orans figure as a hopeful slogan of mysticism, but instead opts to frame the figure (female, male, or otherwise ambiguous) within a social context. Specifically, for early Christians it was a symbol of community, that is – the church. Peace, security, and deliverance were the promises of the universal Christian community, here represented as the all-embracing *orans* both in funerary and ecclesiastical art.

In light of the above, the *orans* figure on the south-west face of the Kilnaruane high cross poses a unique challenge to an iconographic interpretation. Although the *orans* does not completely disappear from Christian art after the fourth century, the low frequency at which it does occur (and has survived) does not allow for a common understanding of its symbolic significance. Additionally, it is critical that we mark a distinction between an orans figure within a scene – as it appears commonly as ‘Daniel in the Lions’ Den’ or as ‘Christ Crucified’ – and independent or singular figures that are not bound to a specific scriptural narrative but stand, so

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139 Abrahamsen, “The Orante,” 13, 11.
140 Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 38.
141 Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 38. In an effort to briefly advance this discussion of the Church and the orans figure I suggest that the profusion of female orans figures is symbolic of the Church as the bride of Christ and is consequently apocalyptic in nature, specifically as the figure appears in the Roman catacombs as Noah in the Ark and the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace. Additionally, there is also a nod to the eternal resurrection of the souls of the Church after the coming of Christ as told by the Book of Revelation.
to speak, as symbols of universal significance (Fig. 45). It is to the latter that the *orans* figure on the Kilnaruane high cross belongs.

Colum and James Hourihane have recognized that the Kilnaruane *orans* is depicted in a naturalistic manner with hunched shoulders and prominently executed ears on either side of a round head.\(^{142}\) In addition to this, it is also worth noting that the figure is relatively proportionate in its anatomical features and is not only the largest image on the south-west face, but is also the only image that breaks the boundary of its panel with hands extending over the frame (Fig. 26). The facial features of the figure are no longer discernible nor can its gender be ascertained, but it was likely considered male within the context of the monastic settlement; the figure may have at one time even boasted a *tonsure* as the figures on Saint Cuthbert’s coffin have been shown to bear.\(^{143}\) Not unlike its early Christian precursors, the Kilnaruane *orans* also dons a long garment that extends just above the ankles, revealing feet positioned heel to heel.

There are only three surviving examples of this type of *orans* figure in Ireland dating between the sixth and eighth century. One of these figures may be found at Conwal, Co. Donegal while the remaining two are in the county of Meath, one at Staholmock and the third at Dunshaughlin (Fig. 46).\(^{144}\) The latter example is arguably a more sophisticated design and execution of a full orans figure with a high degree of anatomical accuracy, but is nonetheless of the same independent type as the Kilnaruane example. In a similar manner as at Kilnaruane the Dunshaughlin *orans* is also portrayed with arms uplifted and is visually dominating, but differs in that it is perceived as nude with an ornate waist-high and knee-length garment. Helen Roe

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\(^{143}\) For a focused discussion on the depiction of *tonsures*, particularly on the figure of Saint Peter, see: John Higgitt, “The Iconography of St Peter in Anglo-Saxon England, and St Cuthbert’s Coffin,” in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to A.D. 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989).

assigns the Dunshaughlin orans to the seventh or early-eighth century, remarking that it is of Frankish influence, possibly by way of an imported model.\textsuperscript{145} According to Roe’s dating, the Dunshaughlin and Kilnaruane figures were likely created within the same century, perhaps alluding to a widespread usage of this particular visual design during this time. Other orans figures found throughout Ireland are comparably simple and rather diminutive, as the examples on the east face of the Clonca Cross, Co. Donegal and the small cross slab at Gallen, Co. Offaly display (Fig. 47, 48).

Iconographically, the bent and outstretched arms of the orans figure are reminiscent of the universal Christian gesture of prayer as described in the Old Testament and the writings of the early Church Fathers, and may also be found in Irish hagiographies and stories. For example, during an encounter with a sea creature Saint Brendan in the \textit{Navigatio} “…raised his hands to Heaven and said: ‘Lord, deliver your servants, as you delivered David from Goliath, the giant. Lord, deliver us, as you delivered Jonas from the belly of the whale.’”\textsuperscript{146} Once again deliverance as a theme appears prominent in the figure of the orans, but also – as Roe suggests for the independent figure – “these simple and devotional forms served to show the faithful man or his immortal soul in close communion with his Saviour.”\textsuperscript{147} Communion in this sense is obtained through the gesture of prayer that is not only visually but also physically evocative of Christ outstretched upon the cross as it is experienced through mimicking the gesture. In addition, the subtle yet important detail of two prominently displayed ears suggests that the orans figure within the context of the monastic community at Kilnaruane was not only a call to prayer but also a call to attentive listening – that is, of the daily hours. The Kilnaruane orans figure does not

\textsuperscript{145} Roe, “The Orans,” 220.
\textsuperscript{146} W. R. J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess, ed., \textit{The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation} (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 47.
\textsuperscript{147} Roe, “The Oran,” 220-221.
stand alone but – like its hands that extend beyond the confines of its panel – occupies and takes part in the functions of the monastic community. It therefore, becomes a symbol of communal prayer and devotion, as well as a signpost of monastic ritual and structures not unlike the *contractio* scene of Saints Anthony and Paul; particularly as the clergy were likely compelled to face the *orans* figure and the remaining imagery on the south-west face upon entering the *sanctum sanctorum* of the enclosure. In this light it is not the iconography of the *orans* figure that is significant, but the psychology of it as a symbol. In other words, the influence it bears upon monastic behaviour while simultaneously acting as a mediator of ritual may speak to a multifaceted engaging experience that extended beyond the frame of an iconographic reading of meaning and into an all-encompassing expression of rumination and communal devotion.

*The Interlace Panel*

The uppermost panel on the south-west face contains dramatically weathered interlace, to a point that scholars have produced inconsistent interpretations (Fig. 26). Henry Crawford was the first to attempt a reading of the imagery, describing the panel as “an interlace pattern much worn, but probably consisting of snakes or sea-horses.”¹⁴⁸ Françoise Henry elaborates on Crawford’s description by claiming that there are “four snake-like beasts arranged swastika-fashion,” with which Paul Johnstone agrees.¹⁴⁹ We turn our attention once more to Colum and James Hourihane who offer the most significant interpretation of the panel to date: “Careful examination shows…that the decoration is not zoomorphic and probably consisted of two individual pieces of single stranded ribbon-interlace with four terminals.”¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Hourihane and Hourihane attempt an iconographic interpretation of the interlace panel,

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¹⁴⁸ Crawford, “Supplementary list of early cross-slabs and pillars,” 164.
suggesting that it is a representation of the conflict between vice and virtue, but provide little evidence or insight beyond this.\textsuperscript{151}

If we consider for a brief moment the initial interpretations by Crawford and Henry in which they describe the panel as zoomorphic – i.e. displaying snakes and seahorses – the question that begs answering is: what prompted such an observation? Upon close inspection the lower left and lower right corners contain what appear to be the terminating ends of the ribbon interlace as Hourihane and Hourihan describe. The terminations are wider than the ribbons and are indented in a manner that recalls the execution of animal heads on the lowest panel of the north side of the cross at Moone or perhaps the inhabited interlace designs found in the cross-carpet pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels (f.2v, f.94v) and the Book of Durrow (f.192b) (Fig. 49). It may have been this small feature of the terminations that indicated to Crawford and Henry the head of a snake, for example, while the curling ribbon at the bottom of the panel is reminiscent of the curling tail of a seahorse (which, it may be worth noting, does not appear in Insular art, or western art, for that matter, during the Medieval period).

Among the surviving examples of early Irish monumental stone sculpture, abstract ornamentation is perhaps the most dominating visual expression, significantly surpassing figural depictions both in variation and usage. In her discussion of abstract ornament on early medieval Irish crosses, Nancy Edwards remarks upon the difficulty of ascertaining a working catalogue, or put another way, a working vocabulary of ornament.\textsuperscript{152} Recognizing a number of seminal studies on Insular ornament – including \textit{The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland} (1903) by J.R. Allen and J. Anderson as well as the study of ornamentation on Northumbrian sculpture by G.

\textsuperscript{151} Hourihane and Hourihan, “The Kilnaruane Pillar Stone,” 67.
Adcock – Edwards points to a lack of scholarly attention to Irish ornament. As a result she offers a preliminary catalogue, setting interlace, spirals, fretwork, and step patterns into distinct categories. The Kilnaruane panel in question belongs to the interlace category, particularly because it can be classified by the number of interwoven ribbons or strands – typically interlace such as this panel can be further sub-categorized into three-strand or eight-strand plaits. However, there may be any number of strands present as it is evident in the extremely elaborate interlace designs on the ninth-century West Cross at Kilkieran, Co. Kilkenny and the aforementioned Clonca Cross from the seventh or eighth century (Fig. 50, 51). According to Hourihane and Hourihane, the Kilnaruane panel contains two strands of plaiting, but due to the extreme weathering of the stone it is difficult to say for certain.

Despite its weathered condition, the interlace panel bears a general form which may be compared to other examples of interlace in Ireland. For example, the curling and triangular features (found at the bottom and top of the panel respectively) are reminiscent of ornamentation on the east face of the cross at Tihilly, Co. Offaly, the north side of the cross at Termonfechin, Co. Louth, and the minor panel to the left of the blessing hand of God on the underside of the cross arm of Muiredach’s Cross at Monasterboice, Co. Louth (Fig. 52). Although bearing close resemblance to these examples, the Kilnaruane panel is not as tightly interwoven, and thus may be more comparable to panels displaying what Peter Harbison calls “loose interlace;” the most comparable example being the bottom panel on the north side of the North Cross at Clonmacnoise (Fig. 53).

The abstract nature of the Kilnaruane interlace panel makes it difficult to assign a particular iconographic meaning. Unlike the inhabited scrollwork on the Bewcastle and Ruthwell

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155 Peter Harbison, The High Crosses of Ireland: An Iconographic and Photographic Survey, 54.
monuments, which not only represent the Eucharist but also the life-giving power of the Word of God, the Kilnaruane interlace escapes such specific interpretations, particularly as it lacks both zoomorphic and botanical imagery and is thus relegated to the catalogue of organized ornamentation. Any symbolic associations it may have carried at one time have been lost, but since it may be considered to be part of a sub-category of ornamentation, as compared above, there may have been a general significance to this particular ornamentation, especially as it may be found throughout Ireland.

The north-east face of the Kilnaruane high cross differs from its south-western counterpart in that the execution of the vertical boat and its attending quadrupeds suggest an upward movement, leading the eye, as it were, heavenward. Conversely, the iconography on the south-west face, as we have just explored, appears compartmentalized within a series of framed panels and – apart from the gesture of the orans figure – displays little movement in its sequence of images. What appears to be a static arrangement of iconography is in fact the antithesis of the heaven-bound north-east face, in that the south-west panels represent the earth-bound, in particular, those seeking salvation.
CHAPTER FOUR
The Sacred Core

With the exception of some aerial photography and a brief topographical survey conducted respectively by the National Monuments Service and the Office of Public Works of Ireland, the site at Kilnaruane has never been the subject of an extensive archaeological excavation. What is more, scholars that have addressed Kilnaruane have rarely discussed the enclosing rectilinear mound or the stone fragments contained within – with the exception of the high cross shaft itself – nor have they attempted to discuss the relationship between the high cross and these surviving fragments. Of particular interest here are the remains of a box tomb-shrine adjacent to the high cross, as well as a number of stone fragments, including two bullaun stones, and what Tomás Ó Carragáin astutely recognized as a larger outer enclosure now severely levelled. As such, the extent to which we may relatively discern the layout of the settlement during its heyday is limited by this lacuna of both material evidence and scholarly attention. Thankfully, however, we are not completely in the dark, but may be able to coax a number of suggestions based on the layout of the settlement as it survives in view of both near and distant comparable sites.

Although there are no less than thirty-six known similarly enclosed sites – the majority of which are located on the Dingle and Iveragh Peninsulas and often boasting pre-Romanesque

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156 Ó Carragáin, Office of Public Works (Ireland) information plaque at Kilnaruane, Bantry, Co. Cork.
drystone churches – Kilnaruane has yet to be included among them.\textsuperscript{157} This is largely due to a lack of archaeological interest, but perhaps more significantly due to the absence of a church/oratory within the inner enclosure. In an effort to present the common layout – or ‘canon of planning’ as David Jenkins refers to it – of early Irish monastic settlements and subsequently cast Kilnaruane into this mould, the discussion to follow will first compare it to four major sites that have received a good deal of attention, specifically, two island settlements: High Island, Co. Galway (also known as Ardoileán) and Skellig Michael, Co. Kerry, and two relatively nearby land settlements: Reask, Co. Kerry and Killabuonia, Co. Kerry (Map 1).\textsuperscript{158} The site nearest Kilnaruane, Croagh, Co. Cork, will also be considered to the extent of the available literature. The results will suggest that Kilnaruane was, and still remains, a rare outlier, if not the most easterly, of the dense network of early monastic settlements still extant in peninsular County Kerry. That Bantry Bay sits at the foot of Kilnaruane is nothing short of indicative of the movement and presence of peoples – monastic, lay, or otherwise – of an area that may have at one time been a significant pilgrimage destination in the south-west coast; this too will be considered briefly.

First, however, it would be useful to begin with the archaeology of the Kilnaruane high cross shaft itself as it stands in relation to the monumental high cross tradition throughout Ireland and its satellite community, Iona, and then subsequently proceed outwards to the adjacent tomb-shrine, stone fragments, and the enclosing mounds mentioned above. Although we have already considered at length the individual iconographic elements on the north-east and south-west faces, a consideration of the high cross shaft proper will prove helpful in a number of respects. Chief among these is the question of chronologically contextualizing the high cross, or dating, which

\textsuperscript{157} Ó Carragáin, \textit{Churches in Early Medieval Ireland}, 52; Jenkins, '\textit{Holy, Holier, Holiest}', XII.
\textsuperscript{158} Jenkins, '\textit{Holy, Holier, Holiest}', XIII.
will result in no precise answer, but is nonetheless essential for what is undoubtedly the only surviving (fragmentary) high cross of the south-west. Françoise Henry was first to propose an eighth-century point of origin for the high cross due to the accuracy of the curragh on the north-east face and a similar attention to detail given to the chariot scene on the eighth-century North Cross at Ahenny.¹⁵⁹ Colum and James Hourihane have agreed with Henry’s suggestion in part, but added that based on the tumultuous ecclesiastical atmosphere of the seventh century, and the site’s Romani namesake, that a late seventh-century date is also possible.¹⁶⁰ Peter Harbison, on the other hand, has suggested a date as late as the ninth century. The following will add to these suggestions a number of overlooked elements that will aid in furthering the argument of a point of origin. Namely, the consideration of the north-west and south-east sides of the high cross as well as the question of the two open-ended mortises – specifically, how they functioned in tandem with the missing cross-head – will help illuminate a narrower time frame for a point of origin.

*The High Cross*

The Kilnaruane high cross shaft is approximately seven feet in height, eleven inches wide, and five and half inches in depth. The slender sandstone monument stands on a slight angle to the south-east and bears two open-ended mortises on an angled termination measuring between ten and fifteen degrees from its apex (Fig. 3). The sandstone is fragile, displaying significant vertical fissility – or splitting – of weak planes into thin sheets of sandstone that is perhaps more akin to the shale-like quality of lithic arenite sandstone (Fig. 55). Although quite dense, the monument is incredibly soft and unstable – reminiscent of rotting wood – and is very

weathered. In addition to dramatic bouts of wind and rain, the monument has endured its very own material instability, but has nonetheless lost almost all indications of ornament on its north-west and south-east sides. It may be considered a mark of intelligent design that the craftsmen intentionally carved the panelled imagery on the perpendicular face of the splitting shale, in other words, on the collection of the layers of sandstone (in much the same manner that imagery is found on the fore edge of later manuscripts), rather than on the flat surface of one of those layers (as they are exposed on the sides) which are at a higher risk of flaking. The ornament on the north-west and south-east sides will be explored in more detail below.

In *Irish High Crosses* (1964), Françoise Henry outlines seven ‘groups’ of high crosses ranging from those displaying intricate ornament, little figuration, and obscure iconography to exceptionally monumental crosses depicting scriptural scenes or high-relief Christ figures. Henry’s groups are determined by similarities in structure (for example, the Ossory Group at Ahenny as well as the crosses found at Kilkieran and Tibberaghny, Co. Kilkenny); by a local stylistic tradition and/or use of a particular stone type (Old Kilcullen, Moone, Castledermot, Co. Kildare as well as Ullard and St Mullins, Co. Carlow, all west of the Wicklow Mountains); by a specific monastic settlement (the crosses at Kells); or the style of a potential workshop or school, as may be the case with the crosses found at Clonmacnoise, Monasterboice, and Durrow, Co. Laois, of which Henry remarks that the “bold, rounded relief is unmistakable.”¹⁶¹ Henry goes so far as to suggest that some groups may well have been the products of an individual hand; “the wanderings of a single sculptor.”¹⁶²

Moving toward a more general scheme of classification, Roger Stalley designates three types of high crosses. The first – plain crosses – boast little ornament but are often quite

¹⁶¹ Françoise Henry, *Irish High Crosses* (Dublin: Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland at the Three Candles Ltd., 1964), 21-34.
dominating with their smooth faces and stark monumentality (e.g. Castlekeeran, Co. Meath).\textsuperscript{163} The second type is found in great profusion throughout Ireland – the ornamental cross – often displays a wide variety of decoration including interlace, geometric patterns, and cable motifs with little, if any figuration.\textsuperscript{164} The most familiar examples of the ornamental type is the group at Ahenny, but we may also include less-familiar examples such as the North Cross at Duleek, Co. Meath, the cross at Killamery, Co. Kilkenny, and the positively unusual cross found at Kilbroney, Co. Down (Fig. 56). Identified largely by depictions of biblical scenes, the third type is the scriptural high cross.\textsuperscript{165} Although adhering to no systemic progression of scenes, nor a consistent use of the same biblical scenes, most scriptural crosses display high-relief figural imagery with a modest degree of ornament and are typically the tallest of high crosses. The best examples are the crosses at Durrow and Castledermot, Co. Kildare, but also the monumental crosses at Clonmacnoise, Moone, and Monasterboice (Fig. 57). It should be noted, however, that ‘scriptural’ is a slight misnomer because many scenes on these crosses may also have more secular, pre-Christian, and/or mythological associations that often go unmentioned.\textsuperscript{166}

That both Henry and Stalley would choose to avoid an explicitly chronological categorization of Irish high crosses is by no means without cause. Although most of the surviving crosses date between the seventh and ninth centuries, in most cases it is difficult to accurately determine when they were erected; the dedicated crosses at Clonmacnoise and Monasterboice being the exceptions. Nonetheless, Henry’s broad and diverse list of groups speaks to significant differences in style and construction which may be attributed to aesthetic

\textsuperscript{164} Stalley, \textit{Irish High Crosses}, 15.
\textsuperscript{165} Stalley, \textit{Irish High Crosses}, 15.
\textsuperscript{166} For a more inclusive consideration of ‘scriptural,’ secular, pre-Christian, and/or mythological themes of Irish high crosses see: Arthur Kingsley Porter, \textit{The Crosses and Culture of Ireland} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931).
progression, but the list remains problematic for the looseness of its categorical markers. For example, although the crosses at Clonmacnoise and Monasterboice may be the products of a particular school of style and iconography, the crosses at either monastic settlement could be designated as a separate group altogether as Henry suggests for Kells. The obverse may also apply: the crosses at Kells easily fall into the group of ‘disciplined iconography’ – for Stalley, the scriptural type – under which Henry designates the crosses at Monasterboice, Durrow, and Clonmacnoise as prime examples.\(^{167}\) Henry’s categorical scheme thus falls short of a satisfactory approach to typology.

On the other hand, Stalley provides a succinct categorization of three types of high crosses that emphasize the content rather than particular styles or stylistic traditions. A lack of ornament, the presence of exceptional ornament, followed by a proliferation of figurative scenes – or the transition from the symbolic to the narrative – erroneously alludes to a progressive trajectory of high cross design. The implication being of course that crosses lacking ornament, the plain ones, are in a manner earlier examples, that is, not as sophisticated as their highly-ornamental or didactic ‘later’ counterparts. Admittedly, Stalley does recognize the broad and overlapping nature of the aforementioned types stating that such an “analysis can be quite complicated and it is easier, at least initially,” to think in terms of general categories.\(^{168}\) Granted. However, the three types do not account for the vast variety of monuments that do not fall into any of the types themselves, which are a large category in their own right.\(^{169}\) It should also be noted that a ‘high cross’ here refers to a standing stone monument, typically taller than six feet.


\(^{169}\) The very nature of the distribution of high crosses in Ireland and the variety of styles both in imagery and construction eludes a comprehensive mode of categorization. Although intentionally general, the three types provided by Stalley are, in this author’s opinion, the most useful. In addition to these types and Henry’s suggestion of localization and comparison of stylistic affinities, it may be possible to organize high crosses based on their function and religious context, that is, their placement in a strictly monastic setting versus an ecclesiastical one.
and usually rendered on all sides to a degree, that either survives in the characteristic Latin 
cruciform formation (often with a ring, or ‘wreath’) or now fragmentary with a missing cross-
head. The standing or recumbent stone slabs and/or inscribed pillars – attributed to the very early 
Christian period between the fifth and early seventh century – stand outside of this definition.

The Kilnaruane high cross is one example that easily escapes most, if not all, of the 
previous attempts of categorization. As it is the only surviving (fragmentary) high cross in the 
south-west of Ireland (with perhaps the exception of the standing cross-slab at Skellig Michael 
which displays modest cross-arm projections) there can be little comparison to local traditions,
styles, or use of a specific stone type (Fig. 58). As previously mentioned, Henry is the first to 
offer a stylistic comparative example with the suggestion that the vertical boat on the north-east 
face is “depicted with the same accuracy in details as the Ahenny chariot,” here referring to the 
scene on the north base of the North Cross at Ahenny (Fig. 54). The Cross of the Scriptures at 
Clonmacnoise boasts a similar chariot scene on the east base with very much the same detail 
visible at Ahenny (Fig. 59). Both scenes are executed in a superb expression of naturalism with 
an acute attention to the articulation of the legs of horses. Additionally, the Ahenny and 
Clonmacnoise sculptors display an understanding of anatomical proportion (both of the horses 
and the human figures surmounted on them) and, to some degree, spatial depth. In light of this, it 
is apparent that the Kilnaruane boat and its accompanying figures do not adhere to a similar 
sense of naturalism as we see at Ahenny or Clonmacnoise. The articulation of the figures in the 
boat are rudimentary at best, perhaps more akin to the type of figures featured on the North Cross 
at Castledermot, but not as simple as those found on the cross at Moone. Additionally, the robust 
and disproportioned manner in which the oars appear at Kilnaruane stand in contrast to the 
accuracy of whips and reins in both chariot scenes. Henry’s comparison, however, rings true for

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170 Henry, Irish Art, 108.
the attention to the realistic depiction of the chariots and the boat themselves, this is what is meant by the ‘accuracy of details’. Nonetheless, we must be cautious when considering realistic accuracies or expressions of naturalism should we fall into the trap of claiming such monuments as later, more progressive examples, rather than the products of a talented sculptor or the limitations of a particular material (the later Moone Cross, for example, made of granite and its accompanying simple imagery).

Hourihane and Hourihane draw the second – and only other – comparison of the Kilnaruane high cross to another monument, although like Henry, only selectively. Regarding the Greek Cross panel on the south-west face, the authors point to the similar example found on the cross at Toureen Peakaun, suggesting that aside from the cross panel and the scene depicting Saints Anthony and Paul, the Kilnaruane high cross falls outside of the standard repertoire of iconography in Ireland.171 Therein lies the problem of placing the monument within a group, or type of high cross design. The unique inclusion of unknown iconography (the vertical boat), obscure iconography (the orans figure), ornament (interlace panel), and familiar iconography (the aforementioned Greek Cross and *contractio* panel) blurs the lines of topology for this particular monument. Thus, Kilnaruane cannot be classified as a strictly plain, ornamental, or scriptural high cross as Stalley would suggest, nor can it be classified based on a monastic centre or, as mentioned above, a local or even regional style simply because there remain no extant examples in the south-west for comparison; despite the proliferation of cross-slabs and early Christian monastic settlements throughout the Iveragh Peninsula and the larger vicinity of County Kerry. Consequently, the Kilnaruane high cross is completely singular not only in its immediate geographical context but also in light of the trends associated with the wider body of Irish high cross design as it has been treated by scholars. This may have led Hourihane and

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Hourihane to conclude that due to the peculiar proportion of ornament to undecorated or unoccupied areas of the stone face that the high cross is of an early date, perhaps even representative of a “significant developmental stage in the Irish high cross.”

Therefore, we must take recourse to what may be viewed as a traditional method of analysis: the stylistic comparison. To begin, despite the great distance between it and Kilnaruane, the Clonca Cross at Inishowen, Co. Donegal is perhaps the only surviving high cross with significant parallels with the monument in question (Fig. 51). Standing south of Carndonagh, Co. Donegal where an intriguing group of a slab-like high cross and two short accompanying pillars have been dated to as early as the seventh century, the Clonca Cross – bearing little or no resemblance to the famous Carndonagh group – occupies a possible sixth-century monastic settlement that includes a second, now overturned, cross. Sometime during the late twentieth century, the standing cross received structural, and questionable, restoration to its cross-head (most of which is now new concrete). With the restorative work, Clonca stands at approximately thirteen feet in height which comes markedly close to the height of Kilnaruane at roughly ten feet should it be reunited with its missing cross-head. Peter Harbison dates the Clonca Cross to the early ninth century due to the depiction of croziers on the west face (which do not appear before the ninth-century) and the inclusion of the scene traditionally identified as the New Testament ‘Miracle of the Loaves and Fish.’ The latter scene again appears on monuments typically attributed to late eighth or ninth-century ‘scriptural crosses’ – for example, the south base of Moone and the south base of the North Cross at Castledermot. The slender nature of the Clonca Cross and the significantly short cross-arms are quite unusual for a ninth-

century high cross, yet it shares similar proportions (*sans* cross-ring) to Moone and perhaps the crosses at Monasterboice or even Saint Martin’s Cross at Iona (Fig. 61). It is possible, however, that the Clonca Cross, like Kilnaruane, is an example of the developing stage of the monumental Irish high cross; a rare vestige of transitioning styles and modes of construction.

Iconographically, Kilnaruane and Clonca share two similar panels. The first is the appearance of Saints Anthony and Paul on the south-west face at Kilnaruane and the west face at Clonca. Although similar in content the execution of the two saints differs in both monuments. As we have explored earlier the Kilnaruane Anthony and Paul sit in profile on either side of a single-prop table onto which a raven delivers a loaf of bread; the scene is the familiar iconography of the *contractio*. In an unusual iteration of the hermit-saints, the Clonca sculptors represent Anthony and Paul frontally, sitting side-by-side with possibly interlocking arms, above which crouch two quadrupeds in profile accompanied by the aforementioned croziers.\(^{176}\) The moment depicted here is not of the *contractio*, but arguably the foreshadowing of the death of Paul whom Anthony buries with the assistance of two lions (the quadrupeds).

The second iconographic similarity is found on the left cross-arm on the east face of the Clonca Cross in the form of a small orans figure mentioned in Chapter Two. The figure appears with arms up-lifted, its left arm following the curving border of the destroyed central roundel, bearing the same hunched shoulders and outwardly-turned feet as we find at Kilnaruane. Additionally, both orans figures display similar hand gestures best described as pincer-like, for lack of a better term. Although it is the presence of an orans figure on both monuments that suggests an iconographic relationship between them (a rare one at that) it should be noted that, like the Anthony and Paul imagery, the treatment of each figure markedly differs in a number of respects. For example, the Kilnaruane figure stands on the panel’s border while the Clonca figure

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appears to float within the claustrophobic interior of the cross-arm. The Clonca figure is relatively simple in execution displaying a round head, pointed chin, and inscribed facial features and appears to don a rectangular robe that reaches above the knees which stands in contrast to the inclusion of ears and the ankle-length robe at Kilnaruane. The greatest difference, however, between the Clonca and Kilnaruane orans figures is the proportional treatment of anatomy; Kilnaruane is undoubtedly a more accurate portrayal of the human form where Clonca displays a rather diminutive figure. Lastly, the Kilnaruane orans figure is displayed prominently on the south-west face within the largest panel and is positioned, as it were, at eye level which is perhaps more akin to the placement of the Anthony and Paul imagery on the west face of the Clonca Cross.

The figure typically regarded as Christ distributing the loaves and fish on the Clonca Cross bears some resemblance to the Anthony and Paul figures on the south-west face of Kilnaruane. The figures in both monuments are portrayed in profile, with angular facial features, and seated on relatively simple chairs, or stools in the case of Kilnaruane. What is perhaps the greatest similarity between the two monuments is the long rectilinear execution of bordered panels that sit snuggly within each monument face. The panelling, particularly of the interlace, may be compared to the initial on folio 6r of the Orléans manuscript (Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 17) in which rectilinear panels of interlace are stacked one on top of another accompanied by a distinct border (Fig. 62). Such panelling is also evident on the cross at Kilbroney, Co. Down mentioned above, and on the Keills Cross located near the village of Tayvallich Knapdale, Scotland (Fig. 63). There is of course a distinction that must be made between a series of interlace panels and a series of figural – or pictorial – panels as we find at Kilnaruane (which is largely bare of interlace on either face). In this regard the comparison to the Clonca Cross or
other similarly executed monuments becomes difficult as Kilnaruane cannot be considered an ‘ornamental’ cross explicitly, but is perhaps better described as a bare figural monument. Such monuments appear much later during the eleventh and twelfth centuries as is the case with the West Cross at Kilfenora, Co. Clare (Fig. 64). Nonetheless, it is the proportional qualities, the slender shaping of the shaft, and some of the iconography that marks the Clonca Cross the most akin to the Kilnaruane high cross.

In contrast to the minimal expression of interlace on the north-east and south-west faces of Kilnaruane, there is some indication that the north-west and south-east sides did indeed display some form of ornament. With favourable lighting the faint undulations and outlines of ornament are visible on the north-west side in particular (Fig. 65). It may be that these subtle bands of interlace are the result of weathering, that is, appearing to look like ornament, but it cannot be dismissed wholly in this regard due to an evident consistency and pattern-like quality that meanders up along the side of the shaft. Similar side ornament occurs in great profusion in Irish high crosses and monuments, for example on the aforementioned Carndonagh Slab, Co. Donegal, the cross at Killamery, Co. Kilkenny, the north side of the North Cross at Castledermot, and perhaps most telling of all, the east side of the cross at Castlebernard, Co. Offaly which displays weathered yet discernable side ornament (Fig. 66).

At this junction it would be beneficial to briefly consider the construction of the Kilnaruane high cross. As it has been mentioned previously, the top of the shaft is defined by a slanted or angled surface of approximately fifteen to twenty degrees that is in turn punctured by two open-ended mortises. Although Henry has noted that the “incisions” were likely the point of contact and support for a cross-head, the question remains how such a design functioned in light
of more common applications of the traditional single mortise and tenon. Peter Harbison has briefly suggested that a ring may have been attached to these mortises, but it would be helpful to take his suggestion a little further. In much the same manner that iconography and ornament are found in great variety and articulation, the mode of construction of Irish high crosses varies in a number of ways. For example, high crosses may appear as one single piece of stone (e.g. Carndonagh) or – more commonly – as two sections (Drumcliff, Co. Sligo, Ardboe, Co. Tyrone, Monasterboice, Co. Louth), but may also appear as three (Moone). Some high crosses, as is the case with the Ossory group at Ahenny, boast an added conical cap that is expressed elsewhere as a shingle-roofed oratory (Tall Cross at Monasterboice, and Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise), but more rarely may also be found in the form of an A-shaped tomb-shrine which the cross at Killamery, Co. Kilkenny displays and is perhaps the only surviving example. Moreover, the individual sections of these monuments are constructed with a tenon that fits into the mortise of the surmounting section (Fig. 67). The tenon may be visible today on fragmentary high crosses as we see on the North Cross at Clonmacnoise, but is perhaps better demonstrated in its functionality in the South Cross at Castledermot (Fig. 68). High crosses of the eighth and ninth centuries are typically fitted into a supporting pyramidal base or plinth – often decorated as well – that act as a mortise for the shaft of the high cross as a whole. Although the mortise and tenon mode of construction is perhaps the most common, it remains to be seen whether there are additional techniques particular to certain periods or regional practices that could aid in the ever-elusive project of dating. Of course, what is desired is a thorough survey of

177 Henry, Irish Art, 108.
178 To my knowledge, the Killamery A-shaped cap has not garnered much, if any, scholarly attention, but is undoubtedly a very unique feature. A distinction should be marked, in my mind, between an oratory-like cap elevated to the apex of a high cross and that of a cap in the form of tomb-shrine typically associated with a founder saint.
high cross construction, which would undoubtedly prove difficult, particularly if the avenue to such a study includes dismembering its fragile subjects.

The Kilnaruane high cross appears to have been constructed of at least two sections (the shaft and the cross-head) but may also have donned a cap of some form. The possibility of a stone base is plausible here, yet doubtful because the high cross shaft would have stood significantly close to the box tomb-shrine, leaving little room for a fully three-dimensional base. However, there is approximately three feet of undecorated stone between the base of the high cross and the panels on both faces, suggesting that the shaft was supported in some manner. Perhaps a collection of loose stones, or a wooden base, or even a mound of earth and grass supported the shaft, but so far both the archaeological and scholarly sources have been silent in this regard.179 With the cross-head now missing we return to the question of the existing and unconventional design of the angled surface and two open-ended mortises. Aside from being noted briefly by Henry and Hourihane and Hourihane, the mortises have not been discussed, nor has the presence of a cross-head been confirmed – no matter how speculatively – but has remained a possibility with scholars who have tread lightly around the question of whether the Kilnaruane monument was a high cross at all. This is certainly understandable, as Hourihane and Hourihane have pointed out, the existing references to the Kilnaruane high cross shaft all refer to it in some manner as a ‘pillar’ or simply as a stone, which only suggests that the high cross lost its cross-head relatively early, that is, before the rise of the antiquarian-historian.180 We must, therefore, consider the open-ended mortises and the angled surface of the high cross shaft to further this discussion and – to the best of our ability – dispel some of the uncertainty regarding its status as a high cross.

179 My thanks to Dr Dominic Marner for this suggestion.
In carpentry it is common knowledge that to cut a two-by-four piece of wood on an angle (say, forty-five degrees) produces a larger surface area to which another piece of wood may be attached to. The function of a larger surface area in this case is stability and strength. The angle at which the Kilnaruane shaft is cut (no more than twenty degrees) arguably increases the surface area producing a more stable point of contact between the shaft and cross-head (Fig. 3). Twenty degrees is significant in this case. As the weight of the cross-head pushed down onto the shaft, a more extreme angle (such as forty-five degrees) would have been too unstable despite a larger surface area; consequently causing the cross-head to topple over. Twenty degrees, however, may be the ideal angle in which a larger surface area is achieved – and thus greater stability – without the risk of toppling the cross-head. Carpenters, but perhaps more appropriately in this context, boat builders, would likely have been familiar with techniques such as these. The accuracy of the *curragh* depicted on the north-east face and the proximity of Kilnaruane to Bantry Bay, and its accompanying harbour, are difficult to dismiss as mere coincidence, only speaking to the abilities of the designer(s) and craftsmen of the Kilnaruane high cross. Paul Johnstone put it aptly commenting that “the carving [of the boat] seems to have been done by a craftsman who was both an able artist and a seaman.”¹⁸¹

With regard to the open-ended mortises, the manner in which they functioned to support the cross-head may perhaps shed some light on the dating of the Kilnaruane high cross itself. Reminiscent of what can be referred to as the ‘modular’ rings of the Ahenny group or the horizontal incisions on the cross-arms of St Martin’s Cross at Iona, it is proposed here that the open-ended mortises of the shaft were indeed fitted with the lower converging quadrants of a ring, or wreath as Harbison had proposed (Fig. 69). If this is the case, the cross head would have been a single unit of stone like so many other examples composed of the cruciform arms and the

ring – a rather ingenious structural development in which the ring is not only present for its symbolic purposes, but arguably was relied upon to support the weight of the cross-arms, which would have been distributed through the lower ring quadrants and into the main shaft. Further structural support is also evident by the wedge-like form of the mortises, indicating that the ends of the ring quadrants were probably tapered, in effect locking into the mortises.

Now, why the designers of this particular high cross chose this technique rather than the more common single mortise and tenon could be due to the limitations of the stone itself. To work a deep single mortise – or two cuboid open-ended mortises for that matter – into the top of the shaft would have been risky business for a material prone to splitting, and even if attempted the sheer surface area (or lack thereof) at the apex may not have been sufficient. In other words, this high cross was relatively small in girth as high crosses go, so small in fact, that Hourihane and Hourihane’s suggestion of a developmental stage of the high cross seems all the more convincing. But if this is an example of a transitioning moment in the trajectory of high cross design – the gestating version, so to speak, of those ‘more developed’ crosses at Ahenny, Clonmacnoise, Kells, and Monasterboice – we would then expect similar versions nearer to the concentrated distribution of crosses inland and to the east, and yet we are at a loss in this regard. There is simply a lack of exemplars. As such, the fragmentary Kilnaruane high cross could be the earliest surviving example of the ringed high cross in all of Ireland.

Although it is tempting to claim such a coveted status as ‘earliest surviving’ and conclude the argument with that, it does not come without a number of issues. For example, that a transitioning exemplar sits at some distance away from the major high crosses is curious in light of the current scholarly assumption that there was no high cross culture in the south, as Ó Carragáin notes: “very few ecclesiastical sites in Munster have pre-twelfth-century high

crosses… [it appears that] the Munster kings did not invest in stone crosses; perhaps the form was identified too closely with their [northern] rivals.” Rather than an obscure transitional or developmental example of the high cross that presumably migrated into the midlands and north Ireland, could the Kilnaruane cross have been contemporaneous with the grander exemplars and the lively high cross tradition already in play during the eighth and ninth centuries? Specifically, a tradition that allowed for variety, expression, and perhaps most importantly of all, the influence and reliance of secular patronage? For example, Máel Brigte ma Tornáin, who was abbot of both Armagh and Kells between 891 and 927, is believed to have commissioned the crosses at Kells, while the patronage of the Ossory group of crosses (north-east of Munster) has been attributed to king Cerball mac Dúnlainge who reigned between 847-88. The motivation for commissioning the latter group has often been suggested to be an effort to establish the boundaries of the Ossory kingdom. Furthermore, a number of inscribed dedications on high crosses also point to the involvement of kings, including the cross at Durrow mentioning a Clann Cholmáin king (from a branch of the southern Uí Néill dynasty), but also the inscription on the base of Muiredach’s Cross at Monasterboice which reads OR DO MUIREDACH LAS NDERN(A)D(I) CRO(SSA) (pray for Muiredach who had the cross erected). That there can be high crosses as different as those at Ahenny (Ossory group) and Monasterboice speaks to the diversity and influence of design and construction even among settlements proximate to one another yet ruled by various secular authorities with any number of political agendas. Although there is currently little in the way of literary and historical evidence in the case of Kilnaruane, it is very possible – if only speculatively – that the high cross was one such product of an aspiring family or ruling clan, or even an ambitious lesser king of Munster who sought to associate himself with the greater

183 Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 120.
184 Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 120-22.
185 Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 122; Powell, *The High Crosses of Ireland*, 168.
ecclesiastical centres and dynastic houses further abroad, particularly if the high cross form was identified with other kingdoms. The iconography, style, and construction of the high cross, including its relatively small size, may speak to the lesser status of its patron – in wealth and hierarchy – rather than an early or developmental stage of the high cross more generally. In addition, factors such as regional and/or personal aesthetics and iconography, as well as available artistic talent, the limitations of the material, and the ecclesiastical climate of the region no less, all played a role in the creation of this unique high cross already steeped in a relatively established Irish penchant for erecting stone monuments.

The marked parallels between the Kilnaruane high cross and the Clonca monument, as well as some possible indications of ornament on the north-west and south-east sides, and the very likely presence of a ringed cross-head based on the articulation of the shaft’s angled apex and open-ended mortises suggest that the high cross in question indeed belongs to the ‘golden age’ of high cross construction during the late-eighth and ninth centuries. It would be difficult in this light to support a seventh-century point of origin as an immediate reaction to the precarious ecclesiastical climate as Hourihane and Hourihane have suggested. To further our discussion, and also to seek out more evidence for a narrower dating period, we turn our attention to the remaining stone fragments at Kilnaruane, namely the box tomb-shrine, the bullaun stones and the single pivot-stone.

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186 Although outside the purview of this study, the notion of a developmental stage of the Irish high cross is of great importance. If we seek out early examples we will find them made not of stone, but of wood, and consequently very difficult to trace with little to no material evidence surviving the millennium since their creation; apart from their documentation in written sources.
The Tomb-Shrine

Adjacent to the high cross shaft on the south-west end of the enclosure and firmly planted into the ground are two corner posts – with two additional posts unearthed and scattered nearby – of what Michael Herity identified as a box tomb-shrine of the Kilnaruane founder saint (Fig. 5). The corner posts are loosely rectangular in form measuring approximately three feet in length, with nearly-square cross-sections roughly thirteen to seventeen inches in dimension. Each post has been indented by a square notch from which a long vertical groove approximately twenty inches in length and one inch in depth extends along the mid-section. Although there is little else on the site to suggest a box tomb-shrine, including stone slabs, Herity has proposed a convincing reconstruction demonstrating how the notches may have locked in roof-slabs with a separate stone bar (Fig. 70, 71). Additionally, stone slabs seem to have been positioned at the head and foot of the shrine, arguably slid into place along the posts’ vertical grooves. Herity’s reconstruction seems to be based on an example of a similar box tomb-shrine at Kildrenagh on Valencia Island, Co. Kerry, the famous – yet ruined – decorated tomb-shrine at High Island, Co. Galway, as well as the Pictish Saint Andrews sarcophagus, Fife, Scotland (Fig. 72).

Found throughout Ireland and in a variety of forms, the tomb-shrine of the founder saint was a major aspect of ritual for many early monastic and pilgrimage sites. Often located within the settlement enclosure and in the open, the saint’s shrine was a key station of an turas – the pilgrimage route – typical of many sites throughout the west-coast, including Inishmurray, Co. Sligo and Skellig Michael. In most cases the tomb-shrine is accompanied by a standing inscribed stone pillar or slab, but very rarely by a high cross as is the case with Kilnaruane.

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Herity outlines four main variants of the tomb-shrine, including examples indicated by very early ogham stones and cross-decorated pillars dating to no later than the sixth-century, examples of which can be found at Teampall Mhanacháin, Ballymorereagh, on the Dingle peninsula and also at both Killabuonia and Kilreelig, Co. Kerry.¹⁹¹ Upright and recumbent cross-slabs are the second group. A burial of a founder saint indicated by a standing cross-slab on the west end of the enclosure at Caher Island, Co. Mayo falls into this second type; the burial itself covered by a recumbent slab of green slate.¹⁹² It should be noted that stone pillars, and in particular standing slabs, were a widespread Christian funerary tradition extending as far as Wales, Gaul, and Armenia, and although considered to be precursors to their grander eighth and ninth-century counterparts, high crosses would accrue additional uses within the context of secular, ecclesiastical, and monastic settings, particularly within the major monastic sites.¹⁹³ For example, the aforementioned Ossory group functioned as boundary markers, while the high crosses at Clonmacnoise lined the main causeway within the settlement.¹⁹⁴ That a high cross accompanies a tomb-shrine at Kilnaruane suggests that those settled at the site were well-versed in the burial practices of founder saints typical of monastic sites throughout west Ireland.

In addition to the recumbent slabs often laid over the burial place of the founder saint, Herity points to A-roofed tombs as a significant development associated with the rise of the cult of saints and pilgrimage. For example, the tomb at Killabuonia bears a whole in its west gable through which the founder saint’s relics could be touched (Fig. 73).¹⁹⁵ A significant number of these A-roofed shrines are found in the south-west, namely at Illaunloghan, Killoluaig, and

¹⁹³ Henry, Irish Art, 29; Brown, The Lindisfarne Gospels, 322-325, fig. 143.
Kilreelig, all in Co. Kerry. The tomb at Killabuonia is especially similar in length to Kilnaruane at 1.22 metres and 0.76 metres in width, but is perhaps more indicative of the relative size of a body. The last type discussed here is the box-shrine type, characterized by decorated stone slabs and positioned near oratories, is considered a seventh-century development. Found in various stages of ruin at Tullylease, Co. Cork, Inis Cealtra, Co. Clare, Carrowntemple in Co. Sligo, and at Tumna, Co. Roscommon – which has been identified as the tomb of the virgin Saint Edaoin – the box tomb-shrine often housed regional, or even local, saints and venerated holy men. Of the handful of examples, the tomb at High Island is perhaps the best documented – albeit destroyed – and most relevant to the discussion at hand.

Based on drawings produced by John O’Donovan and W.F. Wakeman during a field excursion to the island in 1839, the High Island tomb-shrine appears to have been constructed of at least four decorated stone slabs. The drawings indicate two narrow stones reminiscent of cross-slabs (one boasting a human figure with what appears to be raised hands, orans?) at the head and foot of the tomb, and also one side slab and a cover-slab. The opposing side of the tomb seems have been protected by the wall of the oratory against which the tomb originally stood. It should be noted that both the tomb-shrine and the oratory at High Island were enclosed by a rectilinear enclosure similar to the one at Kilnaruane (Fig. 75). Moreover, the tomb-shrine was adorned with equal-armed crosses, some bearing D-shaped terminals and simple palmettes that Herity compares to the expanded terminals of some penannular brooches, but that also may

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remind us of the Greek Cross panel on the south-west face of the Kilnaruane high cross.\textsuperscript{201} Although it is not clear to whom the tomb was dedicated to, the island monastery itself is known have been founded by Saint Fechin during the early-seventh century, and by the eighth it had become a popular pilgrimage destination.\textsuperscript{202} Thus, Herity proposes a dating period between 625 and 725 for the tomb-shrine and possibly also the oratory if it was contemporaneous with the tomb.\textsuperscript{203} Unfortunately, however, today very little remains of the tomb as it appeared to O’Donovan and Wakeman in the nineteenth century. Much of the site was robbed during the Famine including the walls of the enclosures and the stones that made up the oratory.\textsuperscript{204}

The exterior location of both the High Island tomb-shrine and the one suggested at Kilnaruane, essentially out in the open, should not be easily overlooked. The seventh-century monk and hagiographer, Cogitosus, noted that the church at Kildare placed the tomb-shrines of Saint Brigid and Saint Conlaed on either side of the altar \textit{within} the church, which was customary at larger Irish settlements as well as within English and Continental churches and basilicas.\textsuperscript{205} That many tomb-shrines appear in the open at a number of monastic settlements throughout the west suggest that they were important stations along pilgrimage rounds.\textsuperscript{206} The significance of pilgrimage at Kilnaruane will prove critical in our understanding not only of the tomb-shrine once-located at the site, but also of the high cross and the surrounding topography of Bantry. But first, let us consider some other notable stone features found within the inner enclosure of the site.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{201} Herity, “The Ornamental Tomb,” 70.
\textsuperscript{202} Herity, “The Ornamental Tomb,” 70.
\textsuperscript{203} Herity, “The Ornamental Tomb,” 70.
\textsuperscript{204} Herity, “The Ornamental Tomb,” 68.
\textsuperscript{205} Herity, “The Forms of the Tomb-Shrine of the Founder Saint in Ireland,” 292.
\textsuperscript{206} Herity, “The Forms of the Tomb-Shrine of the Founder Saint in Ireland,” 292.
\end{flushright}
Other Stone Fragments

Most references to Kilnaruane have been of the high cross shaft and its unusual iconography. Very rarely, however, have other stone fragments within the enclosure been addressed, including, one relatively flat curvilinear stone bearing a perforated circle – or hole – now positioned near the centre of the inner enclosure, and two boulders with basin-like depressions known as bullauns. In 1849 John Windele briefly noted that in addition to a “curious stone of the monumental kind” that “fragments of wrought stone lie around” the site, which may be a reference to the tomb-shrine posts, but also possibly a reference to these additional fragments.\(^{207}\) It would not be for another century that Emyr Estyn Evans would identify the two large boulders as bullauns, prompting Hourihane and Hourihane to later add – albeit inexplicably – that these boulders seem to have “functioned as hinge-stones/corner-posts in some form of structure no longer in existence.”\(^{208}\) Although it is not clear how the bullauns would have functioned as hinge-stones, it is very possible that Hourihane and Hourihane were specifically thinking of the flat curvilinear stone with a circular perforation at its centre – the pivot-stone.

That the perforated stone performed as a hinge-post is very possible within the context of the early Christian settlement. We find that some early drystone churches throughout west Ireland, including Ballywiheen and Church Island, Co. Kerry, as well as Inishglora, Co. Mayo, bore projecting stones above the inner lintel, in effect functioning as pivoting doorposts (Fig. 74).\(^{209}\) Additionally, similar pivot stones may also be found within some clochauns (drystone ‘beehive’ huts bearing corbelled roofs) in County Kerry.\(^{210}\) Although today there is very little at Kilnaruane to suggest the presence of a drystone church or clochaun, namely a clear foundation

\(^{207}\) Windele, *Historical and Descriptive Notices of the City of Cork and its Vicinity*, 311.


\(^{209}\) Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 52-54.

\(^{210}\) Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 52.
or ruined walls, there are a number of seemingly arbitrary stones – some rather cuboid in form – scattered within the site, but lacking any significant features. These may have been part of a stone structure possibly located in the centre of the inner enclosure, that is, directly across from the north-east face of the Kilnaruane high cross. As was the unfortunate fate of the High Island decorated tomb-shrine, it is very possible that Kilnaruane was robbed for its building material. Enjoying little isolation by way of distance and topography that so many island settlements found beneficial, the site itself is quite accessible and – aside from its position at the summit of a hill – exceptionally vulnerable. It is worth noting that along the road to Kilnaruane there are a number of drystone walls delineating small residential lots. These walls appear to be constructed of flat stones reminiscent of those used for oratories/churches throughout peninsular Kerry. A closer inspection of the walls may prove that the stones were appropriated from the nearby site, possibly from a drystone church, of which the pivot stone may be the last surviving feature (Fig. 7).

Traditionally, there have been two scholarly camps regarding bullaun stones (Fig. 6). The first contends that these boulders are the remnants of a pre-Christian culture that utilized them for pounding or grinding grains, nuts, and other subsistence products with an accompanying smaller stone.\(^{211}\) This practice is thought to have been adopted within Christian settlements as George H. Kinahan had suggested for a ball of granite fifteen inches in diameter at High Island, but that unfortunately no bullaun has ever been found at the site.\(^{212}\) More relevant to the study at

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hand, however, is the second interpretation that links bullauns with pre-Christian and early-Christian healing, veneration, and pilgrimage rituals.\textsuperscript{213}

Naturally-formed bullaun stones appear to have been ascribed healing properties based on the natural formation of the stones and the resemblance they bear to ailing body parts.\textsuperscript{214} For example, a bullaun with two side-by-side shallow round impressions near the shrine of Saint Brigid at Faughart, Co. Louth is said to cure eye problems.\textsuperscript{215} Similarly, a bullaun at Kiltinanlea near Clonlara, Co. Clare solves short-sightedness, while seven round stones submerged in a deep bullaun at Killeen, also in Clare, remove warts upon contact.\textsuperscript{216} Other bullauns have been viewed as “artificially” created, that is, boulders worked into basin-like formations.\textsuperscript{217} Often interpreted as baptismal fonts or containers for holy water, this type of bullaun is typically found on the exterior of early church entrances or along pilgrimage routes.\textsuperscript{218} At Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry for example, a multi-depressed bullaun had stood near the church dedicated to a minor saint associated with Brendan the Navigator, Saint Maolcethair, and during the twelfth-century Gerald of Wales noted a bullaun on the right-hand side of a doorway to a church of Saint Michael near Cork that miraculously replenished anew each day with enough wine for the daily Masses.\textsuperscript{219} Furthermore, bullauns have also been identified more abroad, specifically at the eighth-century monastery at Dull, Perthshire, Scotland dedicated to the Ionan abbot, Adomnán, accompanied by a holy well, recumbent slabs, and four relatively simple high crosses.\textsuperscript{220}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{213} Zucchelli, \textit{Stones of Adoration}, 151-2.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Zucchelli, \textit{Stones of Adoration}, 151-2.
\item \textsuperscript{215} Zucchelli, \textit{Stones of Adoration}, 154.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Thos J. Westorpp, “A Folklore Survey of County Clare (Continued),” \textit{Folklore}, 22:2 (1911): 212; Zucchelli, \textit{Stones of Adoration}, 153.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Zucchelli, \textit{Stones of Adoration}, 152.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Zucchelli, \textit{Stones of Adoration}, 152.
\end{itemize}
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In addition, the pilgrimage round to Mount Brandon (not to be confused with the Navigator, Brendan) on the furthest reach of the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry boasts – in addition to the aforementioned example at Kilmalkedar within the same round – another bullaun beneath a cross-inscribed boulder along Saint’s Road at Kilcolman.\textsuperscript{221} The boulder itself also appears to be inscribed with an ogham inscription reading “Colman the pilgrim;” perhaps an instance of medieval tagging.\textsuperscript{222} It is not unthinkable that these boulders were an important element of an turas, functioning as curative and ritualistic water-basins.\textsuperscript{223} Although pilgrimage routes were typically delineated by smaller stations often separated by desolate – and at times treacherous – terrain, some destinations were also monastic, as is the case with the famed settlements at Clonmacnoise and the Atlantic island-site of Skellig Michael.

Although the pivot-stone at Kilnaruane may have been a feature of other similar religious settlements throughout the western seaboard, the two bullauns are somewhat obscure in light of settlements such as High Island, Reask, and Killabuonia that may prove to be significant parallels to Kilnaruane itself. The ensuing discussion will attempt to negotiate these features of the sacred core, including the tomb-shrine of the founder saint, the high cross, and its iconography in an effort to suggest that Kilnaruane was an important site along a possible pilgrimage route within the Bantry area.

\textit{The Site}

According to Tomás Ó Carragáin the site at Kilnaruane boasts two earth enclosures: the inner, more discernable, rectilinear one within which the high cross and stone fragments lie, and the larger, albeit extremely levelled, outer enclosure measuring approximately 70m in diameter.

\textsuperscript{221} Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 92.
\textsuperscript{222} Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 93.
\textsuperscript{223} Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 94.
and presumably curvilinear in form. The latter can only be seen roughly while standing at the site; aerial photography by the National Monuments Service has not effectively captured it, and as such it is quite easy to mistake the visible inner enclosure as a small monastic settlement. Furthermore, the rectilinear form of the inner enclosure does not necessarily appear as the outer enclosure among known sites, instead we are more apt to find curvilinear and at times rhomboidal examples.

Until now, the site has not been discussed in light of the well-known monastic settlements throughout Kerry and the west-coast, nor has a basic plan of the layout of Kilnaruane been offered (Fig. 75). It has been long accepted that cross-inscribed slabs and pillars, tomb-shrines, and oratories were – in a number of variations – the focal point of the inner-most area of pre-Romanesque Irish monastic settlements.\textsuperscript{224} David Jenkins refers to this focal point as the ‘sacred core,’ commenting that the presence of at least one of the elements would indicate the sanctum sanctorum; the division of space alluded to in an early-eighth century drawing in the Book of Mulling (Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 60 (A. I. 15)) (Fig. 80).\textsuperscript{225} Additionally, the sacred core would be partitioned away from other areas of the greater enclosure, including the platea (an open area or ‘courtyard’) and the suburbana (possibly a living area occupied by clochauns) that are in turn surrounded by the outer enclosure, typically referred to as the termon or cashel (stone wall) or vallum (earth enclosure), although the exact meanings of these terms have been widely disputed.\textsuperscript{226} In many cases, we find that early monastic sites are delineated by drystone walls, often curvilinear in outline, and located in a number of differing topographical

\textsuperscript{225} Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest:’ XII.
\textsuperscript{226} Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest:’ XII-XIII, 35-36.
settings, including natural terraces (Killabuonia), islands (Skellig Michael and Inishmurray), and on flat land (Reask).

The resemblance that Kilnaruane bears to a number of these sites reveals that it belongs to the distribution of monastic settlements throughout peninsular Kerry and the western seaboard. For example, we have already touched upon some aspects of the hermitage on High Island off the coast of County Galway, including the rectilinear enclosure containing an oratory and the accompanying tomb-shrine of the founder saint, but it is also worth noting that this enclosure is positioned near the centre of a larger termon within which a cross-slab also appears south of the oratory (Fig. 75).\(^{227}\) Although the entire hermitage is comparable in size to the inner enclosure of Kilnaruane at 27m along its east-west axis, the inclusion of a separate inner enclosure containing an oratory and a tomb-shrine is of importance here; it should also be noted that monastic settlements varied widely in size throughout the south-west. In addition to the inner enclosure, a number of clochauns and wall-chambers, as well as pilgrimage ‘stations’ are also found within the hermitage. The turas would have passed through the hermitage, possibly beginning and ending at the tomb of the founder saint according to Michael Herity.\(^{228}\)

Considered to be one of the most desolate of island monasteries, Skellig Michael is located twenty kilometres off the tip of the Iveragh Peninsular at Bolus Head, Co. Kerry (Fig. 76). The main settlement is positioned on the north-east summit on a succession of natural terraces delineated by enclosing stone walls that date to as early as the sixth century. Six clochauns and two small oratories of Stage Two and Three-type, according to Ó Carragáin, are found within, as well as an area that may have been ‘The Monks Garden.’\(^{229}\) The settlement is


\(^{228}\) Herity, “The Hermitage on Ardoileáin,” 211.

\(^{229}\) Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, 50; Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest:’ 56-7.
distributed linearly along the terraced topography of the mountainous island, limited as it were, by the boundaries of the terrain. As such Skellig Michael does not necessarily look like other curvilinear settlements, but – as Jenkins remarks – the desire to adhere to a ‘canon of planning’ may have had “to accommodate the vagaries of the chosen terrain.” Nonetheless, what we see is an intentional partitioning and division of space by enclosure, specifically, the lone oratory on the uppermost terrace sits apart from the group of clochauns that appear huddled together. This is perhaps not unlike the enclosed oratory at High Island or even the possible oratory that may have occupied the space within the inner enclosure at Kilnaruane.

Shifting our attention from island-sites, a number of land settlements located relatively close to Kilnaruane reveal that the site in question follows a very similar mode of layout and inclusion of elements that make up the sacred core. For example, Reask, Co. Kerry is quite similar to Kilnaruane in that the outer stone termon measures approximately 45 by 43m with burials extending another 60m beyond this (to 70m diameter at Kilnaruane). Additionally, it contains the remains of a small oratory (3.5 by 2.7m), a number of cross-slabs – one bearing a Greek-esque Maltese Cross – located on the west end (as is the case at Kilnaruane), and also boasts the remains of a slab-shrine positioned in front of the oratory. Furthermore, the Reask sacred core is clearly enclosed by a rectilinear wall; closed off from the living area north of the larger termon. Jenkins notes that this specific combination of slab-shrine – and at times A-roofed shrine – within a rectilinear enclosure is characteristic of settlements in the south-west. The cross-slab bearing a Maltese Cross has been dated to as early as the sixth or seventh century.

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230 Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest,’ 55.
232 Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest,’ 71.
while the settlement itself and some of its elements – due in part to successive building phases – could be as late as the twelfth century.  

Lastly, the settlement at Killabuonia is located on the tip of the Iveragh Peninsula, and is dedicated to the reputed sister of Saint Patrick, Saint Buonia, but may in fact be associated with Saint Beoanus, a disciple of Saint Brendan. The settlement is positioned on two adjacent terraces running east-west that rise approximately 150m along a south-facing slope. The site has a prominent view of Skellig Michael to the west at 15km into the Atlantic Ocean and boasts an oratory on the upper terrace, as well as a cross-slab and an A-roofed tomb-shrine mentioned previously. Additionally, a number of clochauns and a holy well occupy the lower terrace, separated by stone walls. It appears that Killabuonia was not enclosed by a larger outer termon, but dictated by the terrain as we find at Skellig Michael that in turn may have been chosen precisely for its view of the distant island as Peter Harbison suggests for the site at Mount Brandon. What is also important to note in this instance is that the cross-slab and the tomb-shrine are positioned next to one another and near the entrance of the oratory enclosure as we find at Kilnaruane (Fig. 73).

In addition to High Island, Skellig Michael, Reask, and Killabuonia discussed here, we may also add other similar sites located throughout peninsular Kerry and further abroad, including Caher Island, Illaunloughan, Killoluaig, Kildreelig, Church Island, Inishmurray, and many more in order to suggest that there are clear parallels of layout and articulation of the ‘sacred core’ with the more-outlying settlement at Kilnaruane. Although seemingly located at a peripheral distance away from the concentration of early monastic settlements in the south-west,

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233 Jenkins, ‘Holy, Holier, Holiest,’ 71-74.
234 Ó Carragáin, Churches in Early Medieval Ireland, 311; Herity, “The Buildings and Layout of Early Irish Monasteries Before the Year 1000,” 34.
Kilnaruane is not completely singular in the area of West Cork. For example, Ó Carragáin lists the ill-documented site at Croagh, some 30km south of Kilnaruane, as one of the most easterly of monastic settlements.²³⁶ At Croagh we find a drystone oratory positioned at the north-east end of a curvilinear earth enclosure (akin to Kilnaruane) and a clochaun to the south, but the size of the enclosure and presence of other stone fragments is currently unknown.²³⁷ Additionally, there are a number of ring-forts (round pre-Christian or secular earth enclosures) located nearby which may have been viewed by way of virtual topographic maps. The notable example is the ring-fort located approximately 4km south-west of Kilnaruane at Boolteenagh. Furthermore, perhaps even more obscure than Croagh is the site at Kilmore located on Whiddy Island in Bantry Bay 5km north of Kilnaruane (Map 2). There is very little in the way of literature addressing Kilmore, but a monastic enclosure has been identified near the southern peak of the island in full view of the town of Bantry. It would not too out of place to suggest that this area of West Cork was at one time an area of modest monastic activity not unlike the Dingle and Iveragh peninsulas. What is certainly required – and desired – is extensive archaeological attention to confirm this hypothesis.

²³⁶ Ó Carragáin, Churches in Early Medieval Ireland, 307.
²³⁷ Ó Carragáin, Churches in Early Medieval Ireland, 307.
In the Latin version of the *Navigatio Brendani*, while the crew is anchored at the island known as the Paradise of Birds, a sudden fluttering “like the sound of a hand-bell” emits from a single bird as it perches on the side of the boat, beckoning the saint to listen.\textsuperscript{238} The bird says to Brendan:

> You and your brothers have now spent one year on your journey. Six still remain. Where you celebrated Easter today, there you will celebrate it every year…And where you were this year on Maundy Thursday, there you will be next year on that day. Similarly you will celebrate the Vigil of Easter Sunday where you formerly celebrated it, on the back of Jasconius [the whale]… and on the Island of the Community of Ailbe…you will celebrate Christmas Day.\textsuperscript{239}

While most scholars have interpreted the *Navigatio* as a metaphor for the cyclical monastic life, there is also the possibility that it hints at the previously-mentioned, and widely practiced, Irish tradition of the pilgrimage round (*an turas*).\textsuperscript{240} It is recorded that Brendan and his crew embarked from the Dingle Peninsula, near Mount Brandon, and would sail the Atlantic in search of Paradise, pausing at a number of islands before returning to Ireland. Not unlike pilgrimage rounds, the saint and his crew often performed prayers and conducted feasts at each island. It is little surprise then that many *an turas* routes are located along the western and south-west coast

\textsuperscript{238} Barron and Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, 36.
\textsuperscript{239} Barron and Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, 36-38.
\textsuperscript{240} Barron and Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, 11.
where Saint Brendan’s cult thrived well into the ninth century and for centuries to come.\textsuperscript{241}

Included among the known pilgrimage rounds is Caher Island, Co. Mayo, the aforementioned Mount Brandon round in Kerry, as well as High Island, Skellig Michael, and – considered to one of the most important pilgrimages in the south-west – Ballyourney, Co. Cork, some 50km north of Kilnaruane.\textsuperscript{242}

Although it is difficult to say for certain if the settlement at Kilnaruane was monastic in nature, it is argued here that in addition to the form of religious life practiced there, it was also a significant station – if not the primary station – of a local pilgrimage round. Although not always the case with \textit{an turas}, some stations were certainly located within monasteries and monks could – and often did – participate in rounds, while others are considered largely eremitic (High Island for example); all, however, appear to have been enclosed.\textsuperscript{243} The anatomy of \textit{an turas} includes a series of stations (High Island has as many as sixteen) between which pilgrims walked some distance and then paused at to perform prayers (often the \textit{Credo, Pater, Ave, and Gloria} in various combinations) or healing rituals (walking around \textit{cairns}, rubbing stones, or passing stones around the body).\textsuperscript{244} Typically these stations are marked by at least one cross-inscribed slab or pillar placed upon a flat stone platform or altar (a \textit{leacht}), and are designed as a cycle, often beginning and ending at the tomb-shrine of a founder saint.\textsuperscript{245} This appears to be the case at Caher Island as well as at Rathlin O’Birne, Co. Donegal, and Inishmurray, Co. Sligo, all boasting a form of the tomb-shrine. Furthermore, the presence of oratories has also been found at some

\begin{footnotes}
\item[241] Ó Carragáin, \textit{Churches in Early Medieval Ireland}, 54-55.
\item[243] Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 91.
\item[244] Herity, “The Antiquity of \textit{An Turas},” 92, 120.
\end{footnotes}
stations: the famous Gallarus oratory and the oratory located at Teampull Geal, Co. Kerry for example, are both located near the pilgrimage road to Mount Brandon (Fig. 76). Often pilgrimage rounds passed through the great variety of Irish terrain, including flatlands, valleys, and sandy beaches, as well as following rivers, crossing waters, and climbing vast slopes and mountains. For example, *Turas Chonaill* between Inishkeel, Co. Donegal and Glencolumcille extends some 300km over land and sand dunes.\(^{246}\) This particular *turas* is said to have been undertaken by Saint Conall Coal who founded Inishkeel during the sixth century; it still bears about eleven cross-inscribed monuments on its way to Glencolumcille, most of which are slabs, with the exception of one cross-inscribed boulder, and an instance of a cross carved into living rock.\(^{247}\) Moreover, within the boundaries of Glencolumcille itself, there is another *turas* – albeit smaller at 5km in distance – that circumnavigates the valley in which it is located.\(^{248}\) The barefoot pilgrim moves from one station to the next, offering prayer, and traveling across marshes, rivers, and steep slopes of 100m in approximately four hours.\(^{249}\) Thus we see that pilgrimage rounds varied in distance as well as terrain according to the history of its founding.

With this in mind, was Kilnaruan an important station of a *turas* that extended to the settlement at Kilmore on Whiddy Island? The pilgrims may have descended from the hill on which the settlement is located, crossed the lower valley north-west of the site, sailed across approximately 2km of water to the nearest point on Whiddy Island, and then walked to the settlement at Kilmore. From there they may have returned or continued north across Bantry Bay. Alternatively, it may be the case that the *turas* extended as far as Croagh to the south or possibly


\(^{249}\) Herity, “The Antiquity of *An Turas*,” 92.
to Ballyvourney to the north. We know that pilgrims ventured to a number of island-sites including Skellig Michael, High Island, and even Iona, and as such a short journey to Whiddy Island is not unthinkable. Furthermore, the *an turas* from Ventry to Mount Brandon on the Dingle Peninsula also included a trip from Ventry Harbour to Skellig Michael (which was in view of the harbour). Very similarly, Whiddy Island is in clear view from the hill-top settlement at Kilnaruane (Fig. 77). Peter Harbison has suggested that the locations of the oratories at Gallarus and Teampull Geal – the latter in particular – are notably away from the main pilgrimage road because of the view they obtain from their elevated positions on slopes. Mount Brandon can be seen from Gallarus, while both this mountain and Skellig Michael are visible from Teampull Geal, which stands on a man-made platform created specifically to obtain the view, despite the unsuitable terrain. As Harbison contends, “It demonstrates that the sight of the pilgrimage destination was an important consideration among early pilgrims.” Therefore, it is argued here that this is also the case at Kilnaruane, which is located at the summit of a hill that overlooks Whiddy Island.

Enclosed by an outer *termon* and an inner rectilinear enclosure, we have explored in what respects the settlement at Kilnaruane is characteristic of early-Christian religious sites throughout western and south-west Ireland. Specifically, the layout and presence of the ‘sacred core’ closely resembles well-known settlements such as High Island, Skellig Michael, Reask, and Killabuonia which have proven to be significant examples of hermitages and monasteries in Co. Galway and Peninsular Kerry. Additionally, within the inner enclosure the remains of a possible oratory of unknown type may be indicated by the modest open space to the north-east, in which the

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250 Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 98. There may be some significance in the similar names of ‘Ventry’ and ‘Bantry.’
251 Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 98.
252 Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 98.
253 Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 98.
fragment referred to as the pivot-stone lies today. Nearby, the two *bullaun* stones discussed in Chapter Four have been suggested to have accompanied the missing oratory, perhaps granting pilgrims good health and answered prayers. Furthermore, to those passing through during the early medieval period, the Kilnaruane founder saint may have been well-known, but today we are left will little more than the four corner-posts of his/her tomb-shrine. That the tomb is of the box-type has been proposed by Michael Herity, suggesting a late seventh-century origin where some other forms – such as the A-roofed type – have typically been considered earlier variations. Although tomb-shrines are a staple of nearly all monastic settlements, it is also clear that they played an important role within the tradition of *an turas*.

What remains is the unique cultural achievement that is the Kilnaruane high cross. Colum and James Hourihane have suggested that it may date to as early as the seventh century due to the controversies associated with the Synod of Whitby in 664 and Papal Rome, but also its *Romani* namesake. Alternatively, Françoise Henry has offered an eighth-century point of origin, while Peter Harbison was more inclined to propose as late as the ninth. If we consider the late-seventh-century dating of the box tomb-shrine; the resemblance that the high cross bears to the ninth-century Clonca Cross; the presence of some side ornament and a ringed cross-head; as well as the eighth-century fervour for *an turas* suggested by Michael Herity, we may be able to place the Kilnaruane high cross between the mid-eighth and mid-ninth centuries.  

Coincidently, the *Navigatio Brendani* has also been dated to the mid-eighth century, perhaps as early as c.730 (but no later than c.830), which would provide excellent heroic fodder for those pilgrims wishing to emulate the famous voyager. In this light, Peter Harbison has suggested that a tradition of sea-borne pilgrims may have developed across the Dingle and Iveragh Peninsulas during the early-

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255 Barron and Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, 18.
ninth century with the rise of the cult of Saint Brendan.\textsuperscript{256} It would seem that pilgrims embarking across Bantry Bay to Whiddy Island, and those that braved the rough Atlantic waters to Skellig Michael or High Island would fall into this tradition of honouring Brendan and his cult.

An early-ninth-century dating for the Kilnaruane high cross would also coincide with the grand tradition of monumental high cross design throughout Ireland. The closest examples may be the Ossory group at Ahenny which date to this early period, but share very little in the way of iconography with the Kilnaruane high cross. Additionally, the lowest panel on the south-west face, portraying Saints Anthony and Paul, speaks to the possible monastic typology of the settlement, while the inscribed Greek Cross above finds numerous parallels on the cross-inscribed slabs found guarding the stations of pilgrimage rounds throughout Peninsular Kerry. Moreover, the \textit{orans} figure – a universal symbol of supplication and prayer – may also be interpreted as an \textit{invitation} to prayer. We find that many cross-inscribed slabs located at \textit{an turas} stations are oriented to face oncoming pilgrims in much the same way that the south-west face of the Kilnaruane high cross faces those entering the rectilinear inner enclosure.\textsuperscript{257} The uppermost panels of both faces – containing ribbon interlace and C-scroll ornament respectively – remain an iconographic mystery both in the scarceness of detail and the vagaries of so-called ornament.

The rather inexplicable panel identified as four quadrupeds on a vertical axis has been suggested to represent the flock of Christ ascending to heaven with the assistance of the ‘Boat of the Church.’ Alternatively, it has been noted that the ‘ground’ that the quadrupeds occupy appears on the left side of the north-east face as if to point – or signal – to the terrain east of the settlement. Is it possible that these quadrupeds represent oncoming pilgrims? It has been assumed that the vertically-oriented quadrupeds, but perhaps more so the \textit{curragh}, were read by

\textsuperscript{256} Harbison, “Early Irish Pilgrimage Archaeology in the Dingle Peninsula,” 100.
\textsuperscript{257} Herity, “The Antiquity of \textit{An Turas},” 119.
their early audience as symbolically pointing upward. Today we perceive this upward movement due in part to the juxtaposition of the ‘conventionally upright’ small cruciforms located exterior to the curragh. Although it would appear as if there is an intentional desire to articulate a vertical-horizontal axis within the image of the curragh, such spatial organization is exceptionally rare – arguably absent – in Irish high crosses. As comparison could be made to the cross-slab at Kildonnan, Eigg, on the west highlands of Scotland which displays a hunting scene running down its vertical axis; it even boasts a similar incised border – or ‘ground’ – as we find below the curragh (Fig. 78). The hunter surmounted on horseback, his accompanying dogs, and the animals running before him are very clearly not intended to be read as if they were running into the ground, rather, the designer(s) utilized the vertical space of the slab to represent a scene that required a more horizontal plane; it is merely a matter of surface space and the need to express a narrative on standing monument. If that is not enough, amid the hunting scene – between the head of the horse, the tail of the lower quadruped, and the hind-legs of the upper one – is an incised Latin cross oriented ‘conventionally upright.’ It is suggested, therefore, that the vertical nature of the four quadrupeds as well as the curragh on the Kilnaruan high cross cannot be read as moving ‘downward’ or alternatively ‘upward.’ The mere fact that within the panel of the four quadrupeds one pair is oriented up and the other down finds the traditional reading of these images even more so problematic. Finally, it would be worth noting that if the curragh is indeed sailing heavenward away from the crosses positioned in the ‘ground,’ what is then to account for the uppermost cruciform that would logically, therefore, be in the air as well? Although it has been suggested that this cruciform is perhaps the sailyard of the boat or even the Cross of the Passion in the form of the ‘trophy of victory’ described by Hippolytus in his homily, there may be a better explanation yet.
That the four quadrupeds represent oncoming pilgrims or – due to the facing nature of the two pairs – a meeting of pilgrims, may help inform our reading of the boat. Specifically, it is suggested here that the curragh may have been read as a signal pointing pilgrims to Whiddy Island in the distance by way of its hull – albeit on a literally vertical axis – in much the same manner that the quadrupeds’ feet signal to the land east of the settlement from which pilgrims may have come. In this manner, the very accurate depiction of the curragh does not necessarily suggest ‘scriptural’ iconography (e.g. “Christ Stilling the Tempest”) that appears on later high crosses, or even universal iconography (“Ship of the Church”), but is rather more in line with what may be referred to as the ‘instructive’ iconography on the south-west face. For example, Saints Anthony and Paul indicated ‘monastery,’ while the Greek Cross and the orans figure signal ‘pilgrimage station,’ while the curragh points to the subsequent station.

A comparable example of instructive iconography may appear on a number of cross-slabs found within the turas at Glencolumcille (Fig. 79). These slabs – which we may refer to as ‘link-inscribed’ slabs – have, to a certain extent, been considered by Michael Herity who has interpreted them as little more than cross-inscribed stone monuments. Although many indeed boast cruciforms, the dominating design appears as a succession of square areas of pattern linked by vertical grooves. Further exploration of this peculiar design tradition is perhaps best saved for another study, but for now it may be suggested that these link-inscribed slabs located at turas stations may be indicating to the series of stations that are to come.

In a similar manner, it may be that the two cruciforms below the curragh indicate the site itself. There is in fact a stone fragment with the same dimensions as the existing cross-shaft and of the same stone-type on the east end of the Kilnaruane inner enclosure. Although very little remains of it, this fragment may have been a second high cross at the site; we have already seen
that multiple cross-slabs and high crosses within settlements were quite common. The uppermost cruciform positioned at the bow of the *curragh*, on the other hand, may indicate the following *turas* station located on Whiddy Island, by way of boat.

Although there has been very little archaeological interest in the Bantry Bay area, it may have been the case that Kilnaruane was one in a number of pilgrimage destinations between the Sheep’s Head and Beara peninsulas. The presence of a relatively large monastic settlement and the sophistication of the high cross, suggests a thriving religious community, albeit one that was largely transitory in nature. However, there are a number of unanswered questions that would prove helpful if answered in further determining the nature of Kilnaruane. For example, what was the layout of the outer *termon*? Did the site enclose *clochauns*? Would excavation of the site reveal the missing stone slabs of the tomb-shrine or the cross-head? And of course, was Kilmore a nearby monastic hermitage? Not unlike Saint Brendan on his seven-year journey to Paradise, or the pilgrims that undertook the round from Kilnaruane to Whiddy Island, the answers to these question may come to light with each successive round of scholarly interest, pushing the discussion ever forward, ever closer to the peoples that envisioned themselves the guardians of the furthest reaches of the world.


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