

How Old is Gallarus Oratory?

A Reappraisal of Its Role in Early Irish Architecture

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THE small stone oratory at Gallarus near the end of the Dingle peninsula in co. Kerry (PL. IV, A; FIG. 10) is the best known of the western Irish boat-shaped oratories—so called because their walls, which slope inwards to an apex, resemble the shape of an upturned boat. As Gallarus is the only intact example of its type, it has attracted considerable attention from antiquarians, archaeologists and architects since the middle of the 18th century and has been ascribed by them generally to the 8th century or earlier. The importance of the oratory in the study of Irish ecclesiastical architecture has lain in the role allotted to it as a connecting link in a supposed progression from the beehive hut to the fully developed church with upright walls. My purpose in examining the date of the building is to question the validity of these current theories, and to act as devil's advocate for the possibility of a later date for the building and for the acceptance of the consequences this would have on the study of Early Christian architecture in Ireland.

The first account we have of the oratory is Smith's curiously inaccurate description of 1756:

'Not far from Gallarus is one of the curious stone cells . . . which being entirely perfect, its figure is here given [FIG. 11]: the door is 5 feet high, and about $2\frac{1}{2}$ broad, placed in one end of the building, and at the other end is a small neat window, the sides and bottom of which consist only of one stone, extremely well cut, with hardly any mark of the tool upon it. The room is about 20 feet long by 10 broad, and 20 feet high on the outside to the top of the arch, and the walls are about 4 feet thick. The whole is so neatly joyned within side, that it would be difficult to put the point of a knife between any of the stones, which are dove-tailed, for the most part into each other, and placed without the least particle of mortar: the side walls incline together from the bottom to the top, forming a kind of parabolic curve. It seems difficult to determine how these buildings were erected, as most of our modern vaults and arches were either built with cement, or hewn out of the solid rock. Some think that an heap of earth was first raised, in the form of the inside of the cell, and that they built over it and wedged in the keystone at the top, over which are a range of loose stones laid like a ridge; all the structure being thus finished, they carried out all the work at the door; and lastly, smoothed the walls on the inside with chisels &c. The stone is a brown free-stone, brought from the cliffs of the sea shore, which cuts readily, and is very durable.'¹

¹ C. Smith, *Antient and Present State of the County of Kerry* (Dublin, 1756), p. 191.

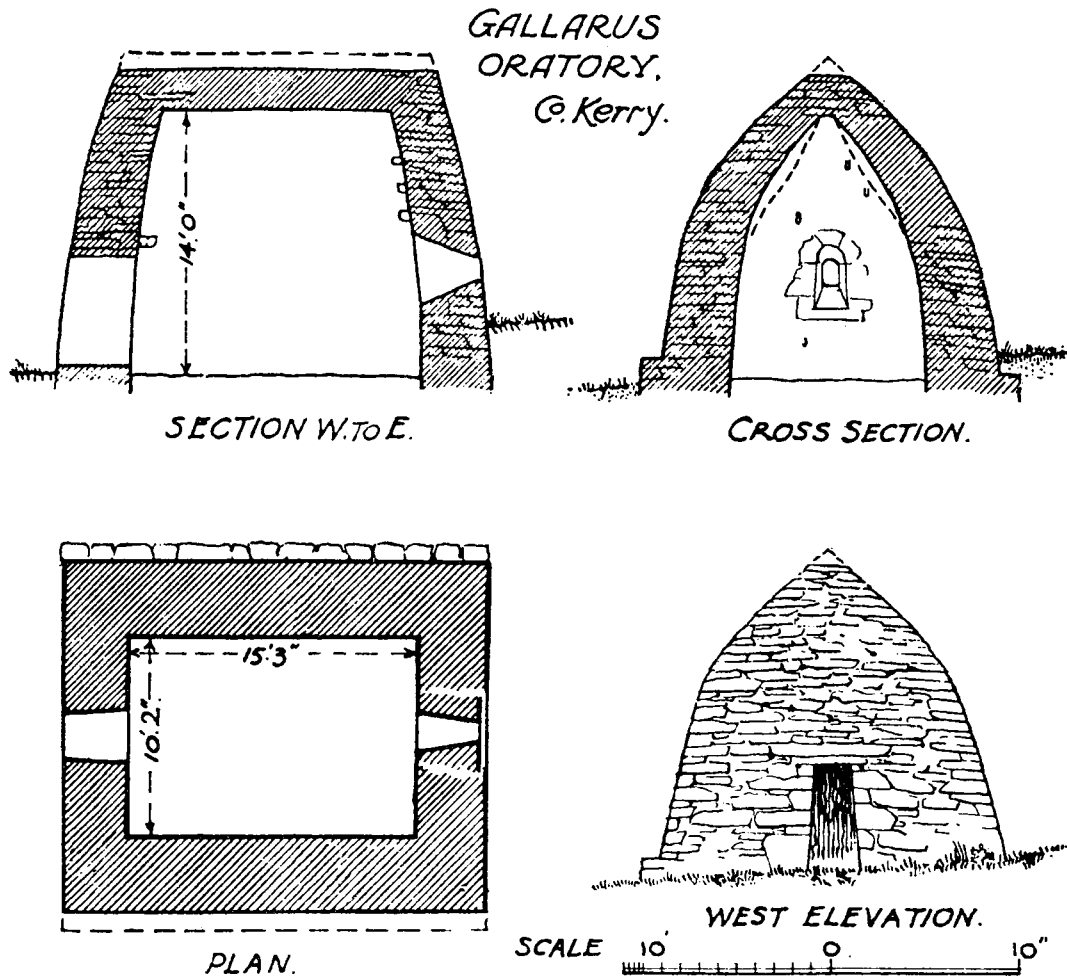


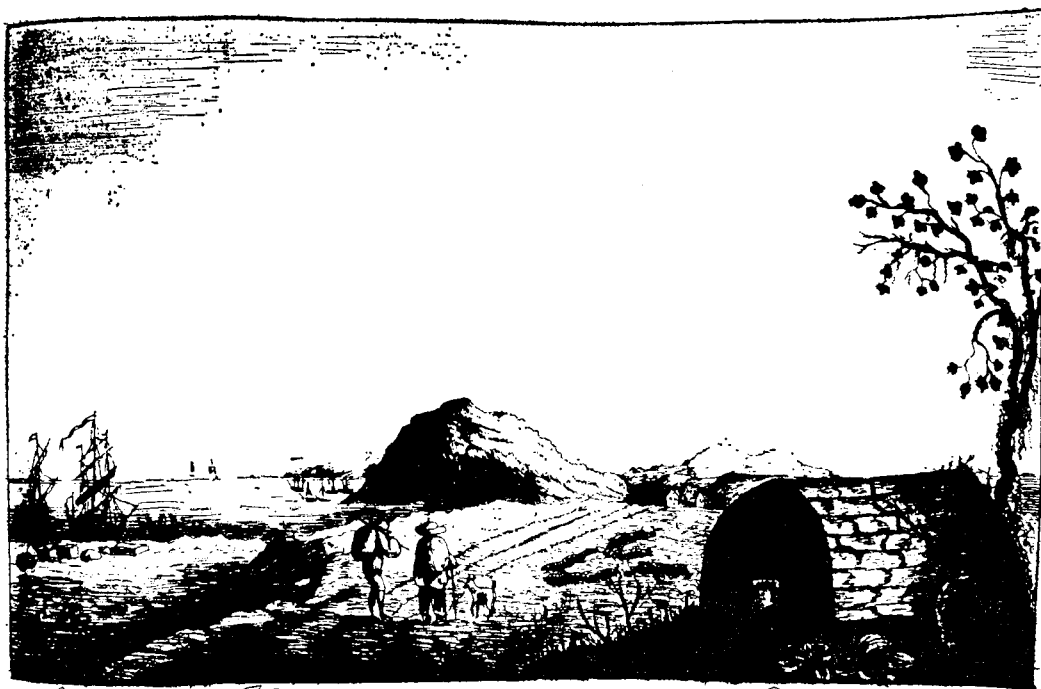
FIG. 10
GALLARUS ORATORY, CO. KERRY

Sections, plan and elevation (p. 34). The plinth recently discovered at base of E. wall is not shown.

After Leask, op. cit. in note 23, by courtesy

In discussing another oratory of the same type on the Blasket Island of Inish-vickillane, not five miles from Gallarus, Smith reports:

‘The Irish say that these cells were erected by the first missionaries who preached the gospel in these parts: they have the same appearance within side as the most ancient *Roman* arches, and were, like them, built without mortar. They were probably the first edifices of stone that were erected in *Ireland*, and may possibly challenge even the round towers, which stand near several of our old cathedral churches, as to point of antiquity. Their form seems to have been taken from that of the small



*An Ancient Hermitage at GALERUS near SMERIWICK
where the Spanish forces landed in 1579*

FIG. 11

GALLARUS ORATORY, CO. KERRY, IN 1756 (p. 34)

After Smith, op. cit. in note 1

huts made of bended wattles, by the old inhabitants of the *British Islands*, which being stuck in the ground and bent, so as to form an arch at the top, nearly resemble the form of these antient cells.²

Two years later, Dr. Richard Pococke, in a letter addressed probably to his sister, Elizabeth, made further comments on the oratory and how it was built:

'This building seems not to have been built on a center, but probably a frame inside out, at each end, from whence they drew a line to direct the workmen. . . . Near this building they show a grave with a head at the cross of it and call it the tomb of the Giant; the tradition is that Griffith More³ was buried there, & as they call'd [it] a chapel, so probably it was built by him or his family at their burial place.'⁴

We have to wait until 1841 for the first accurate description and correct measurements of the oratory, which are contained in the Ordnance Survey letters for the county of Kerry:

² *Ibid.*, p. 184. Smith's remarks are copied verbatim in [P. Luckombe], *A Tour Through Ireland* (London, 1780), p. 277.

³ I have been unable to find out anything about Griffith More.

⁴ P. Ó. Máidín, 'Pococke's tour of south and south-west Ireland in 1758', *J. Cork Hist. Archaeol. Soc.*, LXIV (1959), 35 ff., particularly 43, letter 14.

'The cell measures on the inside fifteen feet three inches in length (not twenty feet as Dr. Smith carelessly writes) and ten feet two inches in breadth. There is a small round-headed window on the East gable measuring on the inside where it is four feet four inches from the floor, three feet two inches in height and in width one foot five and a half inches at top and one foot nine inches at bottom, and on the outside, where the lower part is [set in] (from the present level of the ground) one foot four inches in height and ten inches in width at the middle.

'The doorway is on the West end; it is rectangular and measures five feet seven inches in height on the outside, and in width one foot nine and a half inches at top and two feet four inches at the bottom, and on the outside five feet six and a half inches in height, and in width one foot eight and a half inches at top and two feet four inches at the bottom. On the inside there are two projecting stones over the lintel with a hole in each, used for fastening the door. The lintel is a green flag three feet seven inches long, four and a half inches thick, and extends the entire thickness of the wall, that is three feet five and a half inches. The wall is three feet eleven inches in thickness at the ground and three feet five and a half inches at the lintel of the doorway. The stones of which this cell is built are large and long, all the same kind in the walls, doorway, window and roof. The side walls slope gradually till they meet in an angle at the top. From the level of the floor to the vertex of the roof thirteen feet eight inches as measured with a tape (not twenty feet as Dr. Smith says). The height from the ground on the outside to the ridge of the roof along the slope of the wall, eighteen feet five inches, top stone included. The height of the East gable which is perpendicular on the outside, sixteen feet. No cement is visible. This Cell or Little Chapel stands in a small graveyard now deserted. In this graveyard to the North East of the building there is a standing stone with a cross sculptured on the West side of it [PL. V, A]. This stone is three feet six inches high, one foot one inch broad and four inches in thickness.'

This description was written by O'Donovan, and a somewhat similar though abbreviated version was published a few years later by O'Donovan's colleague and friend, George Petrie. In his book Petrie has this to say of Gallarus and other oratories of the same type (FIG. 12):

'It is remarkable, however, that the early Irish Christians do not appear to have adopted all at once the quadrangular form and upright walls, here alluded to as characteristic of the houses of the Romans, and observable in the churches still existing, the erection of which is ascribed to St. Patrick and his successors. In the remote barony of Kerry called Corcaguiny, and particularly in the neighbourhood of Smerwick Harbour, where the remains of stone fortresses and circular stone houses are most numerous spread through the valleys and on the mountains, we meet with several ancient oratories, exhibiting only an imperfect development of the Roman mode of construction, being built of uncemented stones admirably fitted to each other, and their lateral walls converging from the base to their apex in curved lines;—indeed their end walls, though in a much lesser degree, converge also. Another feature in these edifices worthy of notice, as exhibiting a characteristic which they have in common with pagan monuments, is, that none of them evince an acquaintance with the principle of the arch, and that, except in one instance, that of Gallerus, their doorways are extremely low, as in the pagan forts and houses.'

⁵ *Letters containing Information relative to the Antiquities of the County of Kerry collected during the Progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1841*, pp. 98 ff. (typescript ed., 1935, pp. 44 ff.).

⁶ G. Petrie, *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion, comprising an Essay on the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers of Ireland* (Dublin, 1845), p. 129.

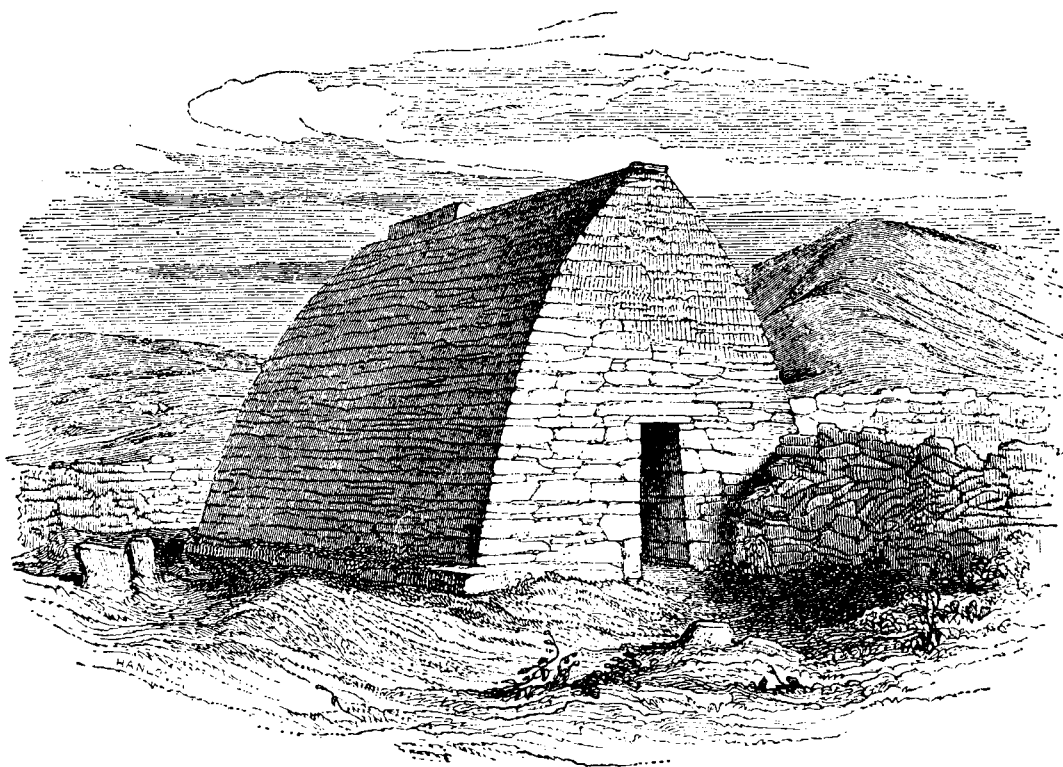


FIG. 12

GALLARUS ORATORY, CO. KERRY, IN 1845 (p. 37)

After Petrie, op. cit. in note 6, by courtesy

Petrie was the first to attempt to give an absolute date for the construction of Gallarus, and wrote the following rather extraordinary paragraph on the subject:

‘That these oratories . . . were first erected for Christian uses, is, I think, extremely probable; and I am strongly inclined to believe that they may be even more ancient than the period assigned for the conversion of the Irish generally by their great apostle Patrick. I should state, in proof of this antiquity, that adjacent to each of these oratories may be seen the remains of the circular stone houses, which were the habitations of their founders; and, what is of more importance, that their graves are marked by upright pillar-stones, sometimes bearing inscriptions in the Ogham character, as found on monuments presumed to be pagan, and in other instances as at the oratory of Gallerus, with an inscription in the Graeco-Roman or Byzantine character of the fourth or fifth century.’⁷

One of the very few dissentient voices raised to dispute Petrie’s dating was that of the Cork architect, Arthur Hill, who, in discussing the near-by 12th-century Romanesque church at Kilmalkedar (PL. IV, B), pointed out that both the nave and the added chancel of the church shared with the oratories

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132 f.

'the leading idea . . . [of] . . . a gabled building, roofed in stone, without the employment of the arch. . . Two conclusions may be drawn from the identity of form, either the buildings are contemporary, the difference in their style being due to the different purposes they were designed to fulfill, or else the oratories were built at a time when the ability to execute stone carving did not exist in the neighbourhood.

'On the other hand this period could not have preceded the date of the church by many generations; for had it been so it is not likely that the method of stone roofing employed would have been so nearly identical with the oratories as it is. The nave of Kilmalkedar church must date from the beginning of the twelfth century . . . it being far from likely that the most western point of Europe took the lead . . . in the art of building. The chancel could not have been rebuilt later than seventy or a hundred years afterwards, as it is entirely free from any Gothic influence such as was introduced into the country in the thirteenth century. And we may conclude that the oratories did not precede the building of the church by a period much longer than that during which it in its turn was succeeded by the addition of the chancel. The probability then is, that neither of the oratories⁸ were built prior to the year One Thousand of our era.'⁹

It is a pity that these remarks were left to languish unheard in the wilderness, for they contain much common sense. Hill unfortunately drew no further conclusions from his observations and instead the day was won by Petrie, whose theory on the typological development in Irish ecclesiastical architecture from the beehive hut through Gallarus to the church with upright walls has since become generally accepted. It was followed by Du Noyer¹⁰ and Brash¹¹ as well as by Margaret Stokes¹² who, however, put forward a 5th- to 7th-century date for the oratory.

Dunraven, commenting upon Gallarus remarked that the flagstone at the top of the east gable has a socket hole at the end, and in another passage wrote:

'Some of the white quartz stones are lying about on the ground near the east end, like those at Temple Manchan; they say this (*vide* drawing) was on top of the gable, and was blown down. It has a (tenon?) for a socket, and is a very curious stone.'¹³

His drawings show only the door, and not this 'curious stone', but the passage quoted probably refers to the cross discussed below (p. 54). Dunraven also mentions that he found a hard whitish stuff between several of the joints which had been caused, according to him, by water percolating the stone. Romilly Allen¹⁴ suggested that the better quality masonry and the round-headed east window at Gallarus showed a more advanced style of architecture than other oratories of the type, but he did not hazard a guess as to the absolute date. Olden

⁸ The two oratories referred to are Gallarus and another of the same type at Kilmalkedar. The latter should not be confused with the Romanesque church in the same townland which was the subject of Hill's article.

⁹ A. Hill, 'Kilmalkedar', *J. Hist. Archaeol. Assoc. Ireland*, x (1868-9), 563 f.

¹⁰ G. V. Du Noyer, 'Notes on some peculiarities in ancient and mediaeval Irish ecclesiastical architecture', *J. Kilkenny and SE. Ireland Archaeol. Soc.*, viii (1864-6), 28.

¹¹ R. Brash, *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, to the Close of the Twelfth Century* (Dublin, 1875), p. 10.

¹² M. Stokes, *Early Christian Architecture in Ireland* (London, 1878), p. 39.

¹³ Edwin, third earl of Dunraven, *Notes on Irish Architecture*, 1 (ed. M. Stokes, London, 1875), 59 ff., pls. xxiii-iv.

¹⁴ J. Romilly Allen, 'Notes on the antiquities in county Kerry visited by the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and the Cambrian Archaeological Association, August 1891', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, xxii (1892), 271 ff.

reproduced the argument that, as Gallarus must have been founded by one of the early saints such as St. Melkedar, its approximate date must be 6th-century.¹⁵ Lynch repeated Romilly Allen's point about Gallarus being a little more advanced than other oratories of the type, and said that, in consequence, Gallarus could be later than the others.¹⁶

The outline of Petrie's evolutionary theory was followed also by Champneys, one of the most astute commentators on Irish church architecture, though a certain wary cautiousness can be detected in his remarks:

'There are certain marks of continuity which seem to make it probable that in some cases building in stone, with the addition of mortar, went on without any complete break from such structures as the oratories of Kilmalkedar and Gallarus and their predecessors, whatever the precise dates of these may be . . . The stone roofs . . . of an improved kind seem to be immediately derived from the type which we find in the oratories . . . and from still earlier architectural efforts. But the larger the number and the greater the importance of the buildings that are attributed to a very early date, the less becomes the probability of such dating in face of the evidence that the national custom of Ireland in early times was to build with wood.'¹⁷

In discussing oratories of Gallarus type specifically, Champneys says:

'These are almost always rectangular, and it is an interesting question whether this shape is a later development . . . The fact that the end walls of the early square oratories slope inwards, as well as their side walls, seems consistent with their derivation from a circular "bee-hive" shape; and such a change would be easily explained by the influence of the usual plan of chapels . . . But such progress is impossible to prove without dates for the buildings, which we do not possess; it is also perhaps made less probable by the instance of cells (not oratories) which are rectangular in plan internally, such as those on the Skelligs and on Church Island in Lough Currane.'¹⁸

Continuing this cautious line, he says of Gallarus itself:

'With round-headed windows and squared stone we seem to be getting to or beyond the borders of the primitive Irish architecture.'¹⁹

These remarks were completely disregarded by Power who went so far as to describe Gallarus as 'the oldest church in Ireland' and who wrote mellifluously of it:

'It has seen the snows of fourteen hundred winters upon Brandon mountain, and was contemporary with St. Columba. It saw the Danes come and go, and it was hoary when Strongbow landed.'²⁰

Like Power, Macalister also saw Gallarus as being among the earliest Irish churches, but said:

'We cannot presume that the arch was actually *unknown* when "Primitive" churches were being erected. It is noteworthy that the soffits of the lintels over the smaller

¹⁵ Rev. T. Olden, 'The oratory of Gallarus', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, xix (1895), 564 ff.

¹⁶ P. J. Lynch, 'Early Christian architecture of Ireland', *J. Limerick Field Club*, II (1901-4), 26 ff.

¹⁷ A. C. Champneys, *Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture* (London and Dublin, 1910), p. 36 f.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁰ Rev. P. Power, *Early Christian Ireland. A Manual of Irish Christian Archaeology* (Dublin, 1925), 17 ff.; *id.*, 'The oldest church in Ireland', *J. Ann. Rep. and Balance Sheet of co. Kerry Soc. for 1937-38* (1939), p. 33.

window-openings are generally scooped out as though to imitate an arch form, even in structures that shew no sign of the constructional use of the arch. This would seem to indicate that the builders were familiar with the appearance presented by an arch, even though they did not choose to make use of it.²¹

He points out that the small east window is constructionally a rudimentary arch, and continues:

'It follows that when Gall-arus was erected, the appearance of an arch was known in Ireland; the building cannot, therefore, be of the very remote antiquity which has been claimed for it. It is not likely to be older than the seventh century at furthest.'²²

Leask, the most noted commentator on early Irish architecture in recent years, is cautious in dating Gallarus:

'Built without the aid of mortar, of stones carefully selected, partially wrought and ingeniously fitted together, it has stood for perhaps more than 1,200 years.'²³

He does, however, admit:

'Though Gallarus is built without mortar as a *structural* medium, mortar is not entirely absent from the building; very fine lime mortar has been found filling the internal joints here and there: an internal pointing to the stonework. It has also been observed filling small hollows in the inner faces of the vault, faces which were brought to a fair smooth finish with pick or punch by the builders.'²⁴

Leask, too, sees the development of Early Christian architecture in stone from beehive hut to Gallarus, and from Gallarus to churches with upright walls and stone roofs (FIG. 13). He considers that the exposed and treeless coastal areas, remote from the woodlands of the interior, could not have nourished wooden churches of the type built in Early Christian times in other parts of Ireland, whereas stone was abundant for the building of stone churches. Leask thinks that stone churches on the W. coast were contemporary with wooden churches in the rest of the country, though the shape of the stone buildings was possibly somewhat affected by the wooden structures.²⁵

Leask's tentative dating of c. 750 for Gallarus has been followed by O'Kelly²⁶ who says that the similar oratory on Church Island, Valencia (co. Kerry), may be slightly earlier than Gallarus, though he admits that the existence of a south window in the Church Island oratory might be used to argue that it is slightly later. The Church Island oratory is used as a parallel by Thomas²⁷ to date a stone oratory on Ardwall Isle (Kirkcudbright), though on the basis of Northumbrian evidence he suggests that the middle 8th-century date is, if anything, 'on the late side'. The De Paors are cautious about the date of Gallarus:

²¹ R. A. S. Macalister, *Archaeology of Ireland* (London, 1928), p. 241.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²³ H. G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 1 (Dundalk, 1955), 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22 f.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶ M. J. O'Kelly, 'Church Island near Valencia, co. Kerry', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, LIX, sect. C (1958), 128.

²⁷ C. Thomas, 'An Early Christian cemetery and chapel on Ardwall Isle, Kirkcudbright', *Med. Archaeol.*, XI (1967), 171.

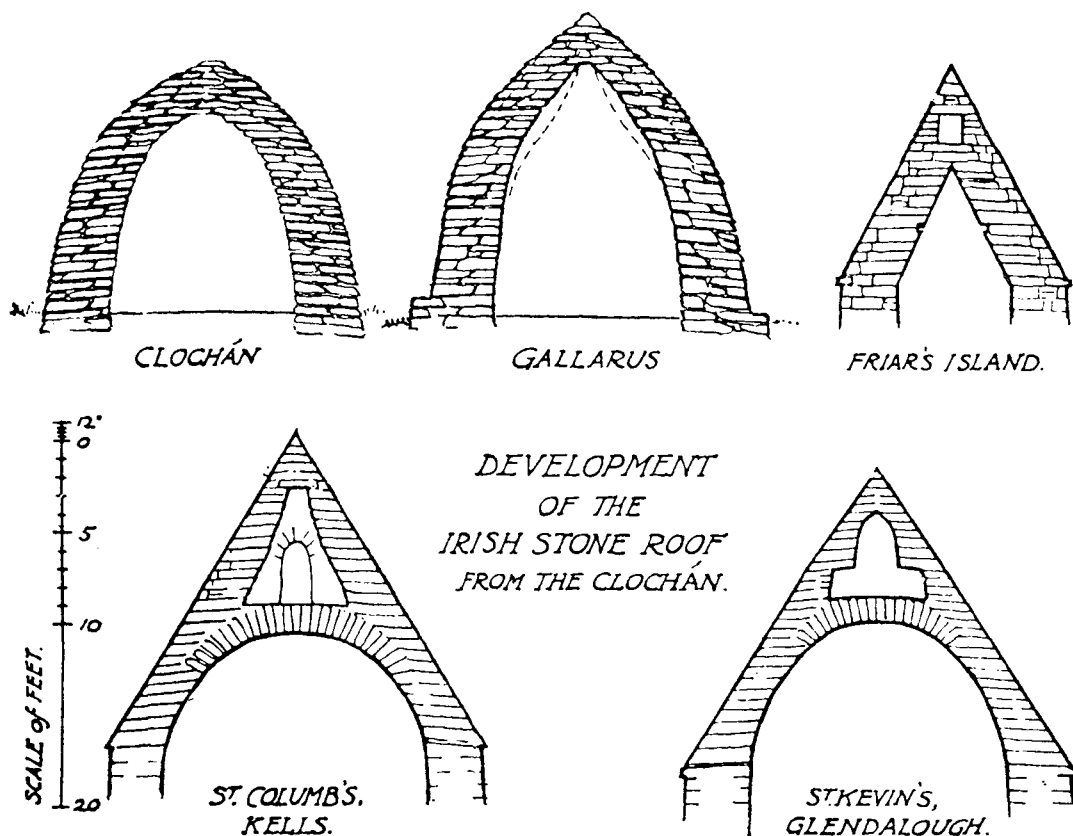


FIG. 13
DEVELOPMENT FROM BEEHIVE HUT TO STONE-ROOFED CHURCH IN
IRELAND (p. 41)

After Leask, op. cit. in note 23, by courtesy

'The date of this little building is not known; it is usually assumed to be at least as early as the eighth century but it may well be several centuries later.'²⁸

Evans is inclined also to believe that Gallarus may belong to the 8th century,²⁹ and Miss Henry, though she does not attempt a precise dating for the oratory, includes it in the first volume of her trilogy on Irish art which covers the period up to 800. However, when discussing two oratories of Gallarus type in the monastery on Skellig Michael (co. Kerry), she says:

'This monastery which has survived Norse raids and the assaults of the sea wind, seems, raised towards the sky on the top of a bare rock, surrounded by the empty wilderness of the western ocean, to embody all the aspirations of the time.'³⁰

The temptation is certainly strong to equate these primitive buildings with

²⁸ M. and L. De Paor, *Early Christian Ireland* (London, 1958), p. 58.

²⁹ Estyn Evans, *Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland—a Guide* (London, 1966), p. 130.

³⁰ F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period to 800 A.D.* (London, 1965), p. 50.

the asceticism of the earliest period of Irish monasticism, but has it lulled us into a false belief? What dating evidence have we for Gallarus? Little or none, other than circumstantial evidence. Hill is the only author quoted above (other than Pococke whom we may dismiss) who unequivocally supports a date later than 800, though Champneys and the De Paors also allow for this possibility. All others strongly support a date before 800, and it is now time to examine the validity of their arguments. These can be conveniently summed up under seven headings.

1. *Similarity to 'pagan' buildings.*

As the 'pagan' monuments, such as forts and houses, to which Gallarus has been compared, have not definitely been identified as pre-Christian, and could quite as easily belong to the Christian period, this argument cannot be used to imply that Gallarus must be close to the pagan period in point of time. Although the same techniques may be common both to these 'pagan' buildings and to Gallarus, it should not be forgotten that techniques such as corbelling are timeless and can last over a long period: Newgrange had a corbelled roof in 2500 B.C. and the same principle is used in the Dingle peninsula to build 20th-century beehive huts.

2. *There is no mortar in the walls.*

In the earliest accounts this was stated to be the case. Dunraven said that he found a 'hard whitish stuff' between the joints which he explained was the result of percolation of water (see above, p. 39). That it certainly is not. I have been kindly informed by Dr. John Jackson that the stone with which the oratory was built comes from the Upper Silurian Dingle beds which are non-calcareous, so that no lime could ever have leached out of it. The 'whitish stuff' must undoubtedly be mortar; this is confirmed by Leask who says that it was not used as a *structural* medium, but as an internal pointing to the stonework (see above, p. 41). It does, however, seem likely that even if it was never visible in the wall facings it was used as a structural medium for the interior of the wall at least.

3. *It was erected by the founder of the monastery, whose hut lies beside it.*

There is as little evidence for the truth of this statement as there is to say that St. Kevin built all the churches at Glendalough—or St. Patrick the cathedrals at Armagh.

4. *It stands beside an early pillar.*

Oratories of Gallarus type at Gallarus itself and on the Skelligs are accompanied by cross-inscribed slabs of Early Christian type (PL. v, A), which, according to Henry,³¹ could be as early as the 7th century. O'Kelly³² has dated the Church Island slab c. 650–750, though the latter date is connected with Leask's date for Gallarus. Considering the primitive nature of the buildings within the same

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54 ff.

³² *Op. cit.* in note 26, p. 128.

enclosure, this argument could indicate an early date for the oratories. But it cannot be taken as proof. Because the oratory is near the pillar does not necessarily mean that both are contemporary. High crosses at other monastic sites in Ireland are not necessarily contemporary with the churches beside them.

5. *It dates to a period when the rounded arch was used in stone.*

Macalister pointed out that Gallarus belonged to a period when the rounded arch was known and 'is not likely to be older than the seventh century at furthest' (see above, p. 41). The round-headed window at Gallarus (FIG. 14) shows

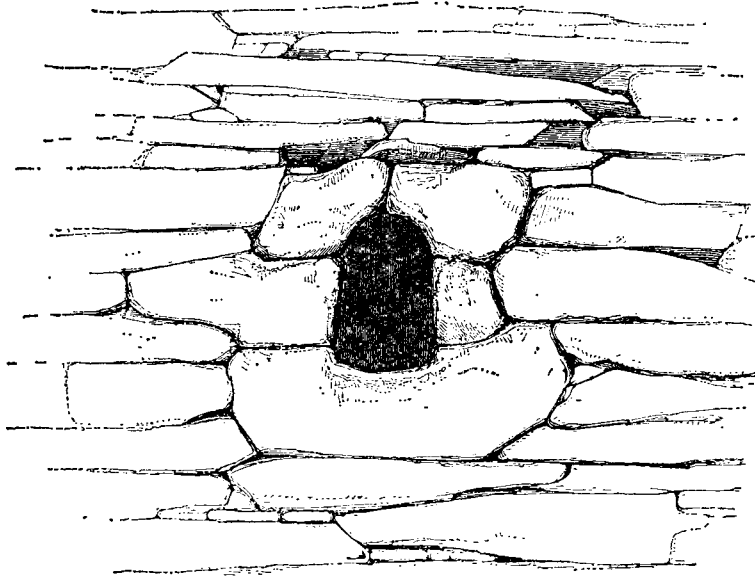


FIG. 14
GALLARUS ORATORY, CO. KERRY
Round-headed E. window (pp. 44, 52)

After Petrie, op. cit. in note 6, by courtesy

that the first part of Macalister's statement is correct, but there is no positive evidence to show when the arch was first used in church building in Ireland. It could have arrived with Christianity, or it could have been introduced after the 7th century. If we knew when the round arch was introduced into Ireland, the chronology of the earliest stone churches in Ireland would be less problematical.

6. *Because of lack of wood this must be the first church on the site.*

That the areas along the west coast of Ireland where oratories of Gallarus type are found did not have wooden buildings has been disproved. It came as rather a shock to Henry to find wood used in a building on Inishkea North

(co. Mayo).³³ Closer to Gallarus O'Kelly found traces of a wooden church beneath a stone oratory of Gallarus type on Church Island, and he believed that, because of the large numbers of burials oriented in the same way as the wooden church, it must have been in use for an appreciable time.³⁴ Henry has suggested that such churches, or at least those on islands, may have been built with drift-wood,³⁵ but McCracken has shown that *c.* 1600 wood still existed along the shores of Tralee Bay and Brandon Bay at least as far west as Brandon Mountain, which is only a few miles from Gallarus.³⁶ It seems likely that Ireland was more heavily wooded in 600 than it was in 1600 after Elizabethan felling. Even today wood is found in sheltered clusters within a mile or so of Gallarus. It is quite possible therefore that wood grew in areas where oratories of Gallarus type are found, and the argument that such oratories must have been the first churches built on the site because there could have been no earlier churches of wood is manifestly untrue. Similarly, the suggestion that Gallarus was contemporary with wooden churches in other parts of the country where wood was plentiful cannot be proved.

7. *Early Irish architecture progresses from the beehive hut to Gallarus and from there to churches with upright walls and stone roofs.*

Almost all authors since Petrie agreed that this was the correct evolution of the earliest Irish church architecture in stone, Champneys being the only person really to express his reservations (see above, p. 40). But a succession of absolute dates is necessary to confirm any typological series of development, and any typological evolution must represent a logical development of the type without any outside influence. But, as Champneys remarked (see above, p. 40), absolute dates are lacking for early Irish churches—with a few exceptions mentioned below. We cannot with any certainty identify any existing buildings with those mentioned in historical sources until the 10th century. Nor does it appear likely that an oratory such as Gallarus came to be built without any outside influence. The suggested development implies that the use of features such as doors with inclined jambs and round-headed windows in stone were invented in remote areas on the west coast of Ireland whence they spread over the whole country. But while the origin of the lintelled doorway with inclined jambs cannot be localized, it seems unlikely that the round-headed window was invented in the Dingle peninsula as it was often used by the Romans and Saxons. Similarly, the south window in the oratory on Church Island³⁷ is unlikely to have been first used in Ireland in an oratory of Gallarus type, as it appears alien and indeed detrimental to the construction of the sloping side walls. The windows in these oratories suggest that some outside influence was at work, so that at least two of the prerequisites of a true typology remain unfulfilled.

Nor is it easy to make a case for the logical development from a beehive hut

³³ F. Henry, 'A wooden hut on Inishkea North, co. Mayo', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, LXXXII (1952), 178.

³⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 26, p. 117.

³⁵ *Loc. cit.* in note 33.

³⁶ E. McCracken, 'The woodlands of Ireland *circa* 1600', *Irish Hist. Stud.*, XI (1959), 271 ff., particularly map 1 and p. 280; *id.*, *The Irish Woods since Tudor Times* (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 36-7.

³⁷ *Op. cit.* in note 26, p. 65.

through Gallarus oratory to a stone church with upright walls and a stone roof. Few would deny that the corbel technique used in Gallarus is an adaptation of the corbel principle found in the beehive huts. But it is not easy to believe that the series started in a beehive dwelling with a round interior and developed logically without any outside influence to a square interior and thence to a rectangular corbelled church. Even more difficult to believe is a logical development—again without any outside stimulus—from Gallarus to a church with upright walls and a stone roof. For Leask the two closest links in the chain were Gallarus and the small oratory of St. Molua which originally stood on Friar's Island in the R. Shannon and which has now been re-erected near by at Killaloe (co. Clare) (FIG. 13).³⁸ But it was Leask himself who discovered that the chancel of St. Molua's oratory (the only part to have had a stone roof) was later than the nave which had no stone roof.³⁹ A possible conclusion is that stone-roofed churches were not necessarily the earliest stone churches in Ireland, or, put another way, the earliest stone churches in Ireland did not necessarily have stone roofs. If this is correct, then both Gallarus and the chancel of the oratory of St. Molua should presuppose the existence of earlier churches without stone roofs. This suggestion is strengthened by consideration of Trinity Church, Glendalough (co. Wicklow), which started as a simple nave-and-chancel church with corner corbels to support what must have been wooden roof-rafters. Later an annex was added to the west end which, in contrast to the nave and chancel, had a stone roof from which a round tower projected, as in St. Kevin's kitchen, also in Glendalough. Remnants of this stone roof still remain, but the round tower has completely vanished and is only known from old drawings made before it was blown down in a storm in 1818. Even though no exact dates are possible either for the nave and chancel or for the annex with round tower, this church provides further proof of the priority of wooden over stone roofs and also confirms the comparatively late date of the Irish stone-roofed church (see below, p. 49).

But even if there were some connexion between the stone roofs at Gallarus and at St. Molua's oratory, need the latter be derived from the former? The two roofs seem more likely to be two expressions of the same principle, and thus to be cousins rather than parent and offspring. Henry implies this⁴⁰ when she suggests that Irish vaulted stone roofs, such as that of Cormac's Chapel in Cashel (co. Tipperary), are not a purely local development deriving from the boat-shaped dry-stone oratories. The stone roof of St. Molua's oratory could have been an independent development, or it could have come from another source, such as St. Kevin's kitchen, Glendalough, St. Columb's house, Kells (co. Meath), or from one of the many churches which no longer exist. St. Columb's house has sometimes been identified with a stone church (*doimliac*) at Kells which was 'broken' by the foreigners in 920.⁴¹ This *doimliac* could conceivably be the same building

³⁸ *Op. cit.* in note 23, pp. 27 ff., fig. 8.

³⁹ H. G. Leask, 'Further notes on the church', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, LIX (1929), 25 ff.; *id.*, 'The church of St. Lua, or Molua, Friar's Island, co. Tipperary, near Killaloe', *ibid.*, LX (1930), 130.

⁴⁰ F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period, 1020-1170 A.D.* (London, 1970), p. 150.

⁴¹ *Annals of Ulster*, I (ed. W. M. Hennessy, Dublin, 1887), *sub anno* 919 *alias* 920.

as the *cille* or *templum* completed in 813,⁴² though we have no confirmation that the *cille* or *templum* was a stone rather than a wooden church. But the use of a barrel vault at St. Columb's house at such an early date would certainly be unusual. It should be noted that, of the other churches using this mode of construction to support an attic and so prevent the stone roof from sagging, three are of the 12th or early 13th century (Cormac's Chapel, Cashel; St. Flannan's oratory, Killaloe; and St. Doulagh's Church, Malahide, co. Dublin), while the others (St. Kevin's kitchen, Glendalough; St. Mochta's house, Louth;⁴³ and St. Molaise's house, Devenish, co. Fermanagh⁴⁴) are as yet undatable, though Henry has recently said that there is no reason why they should be much earlier.⁴⁵ It might be mentioned here that one of the latest uses of the corbel technique in Irish church construction in Ireland was as late as the 15th century, when it was used at Ardrass (co. Kildare).⁴⁶ But, if St. Columb's house is not to be identified with the stone church destroyed in 920, and is as late as the 11th or 12th century (which is quite likely), it could still have formed a model for the chancel roof at St. Molua's oratory. But another and geographically more satisfactory model is that of the 12th-century oratory of St. Flannan, also at Killaloe, although it is, of course, impossible to say which of these two oratories is the earlier. We simply cannot say whence the impetus came which led to the building of the stone roof at St. Molua's, but I suggest that Gallarus is not the only place whence it could be derived. A monastery like Kells, in contact with places overseas, is more likely to have been the source for the development of better building techniques in Irish stone-roofed vaulted churches than those areas washed by the treacherous Atlantic seas on the west coast of Ireland. The development of the stone roof therefore need not necessarily logically progress from Gallarus to St. Molua's oratory, and indeed the evidence from the latter suggests that stone churches without stone roofs existed before those with them. Stone churches without stone roofs could have existed in Ireland before Gallarus was built, so that considerable doubt must be cast on the logicity and indeed the correctness of the typological sequence of development proposed by earlier authors.

A detailed study of the literature on Gallarus reveals that the opinions of earlier authors were taken over almost in their entirety by later writers, who apparently never stopped to consider whether what they were copying from earlier accounts was founded in fact. The notion that Gallarus is one of the earliest church buildings in Ireland began with Smith in 1756 and is still current. So also is Petrie's conception of the development of early Irish church architecture from the beehive hut through Gallarus to the church with upright walls—the development from the apparently primitive to the apparently more advanced. Despite Champneys' warning,⁴⁷ these old ideas have cemented themselves into

⁴² *Ibid.*, sub anno 813.

⁴³ *Op. cit.* in note 23, pp. 27 ff.

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 40, pl. iv.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150. See also C. A. R. Radford, 'Devenish', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, xxxiii (1970), 58, who also pleads for a 12th-century date for St. Molaise's house.

⁴⁶ Omurethi, 'The stone-roofed church at Ardrass', *J. co. Kildare Archaeol. Soc.*, vi (1909-11), 411 ff.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.* in note 17, p. 31 f.

almost complete acceptance. Methodologically, however, understanding of Gallarus has possibly been obscured by clinging to the pre-Darwinian belief in a Darwinian idea of a natural typological evolution in Irish ecclesiastical architecture without taking either the human or geographical element into account. Whatever the true place of Gallarus in Early Christian architecture in Ireland, appreciation of it has probably been fogged by equating an apparently primitive building technique with earliness in time—a supposition which, though widespread, still awaits proof.

It has been suggested above that most of the older arguments marshalled in favour of an early date for Gallarus are at worst wrong, and at best unproven. The fourth argument (see above, p. 43 f.)—that Gallarus stands beside an early pillar—is the only one which bears serious consideration, though it cannot be proved. Other lines of inquiry, however, could lead to a slightly later date, though these depend, at least to some extent, on how we visualize the origin of Gallarus—as a development from a wooden building, as an adaptation of the corbel technique (or as a combination of both), or as imitating a foreign model.

If we accept that the earliest Irish churches were made of wood, which seems probable from the literary sources, what then of Smith's suggestion that the shape of Gallarus resembles huts made of wattles (see above, p. 36)? If the unusual shape of the oratory was copied from a wooden building, then it could be argued that Gallarus was built at a time when stone began to be the prime material for building churches, but while the memory of wooden churches was still alive. Unfortunately we do not know when wooden churches went out of use in Early Christian Ireland.⁴⁸ Even those found by O'Kelly on Church Island⁴⁹ and by De Paor at St. Mel's Church, Ardagh (co. Longford)⁵⁰ are not datable; all that can be said is that they are earlier than the stone churches which were built over them. However the early annals give some valuable information about the dates of some of the earliest known stone churches in Ireland. We can probably dismiss the references in late sources to the use of stone churches in St. Patrick's time in the 5th century as being unreliable, though St. Cianán, who was in the entourage of St. Patrick, is credited with having built the first stone church in Ireland. In any case the custom of building stone churches does not appear to have become widespread until many centuries later. The earliest reference to a stone church in Ireland seems to be that of 788 when there was a quarrel in Armagh in which a man was killed in the doorway of a stone oratory (*in hostio oratorii lapidei*).⁵¹ The same annals, under the year 813, refer to a stone church at Kells, while in 839 they report that the stone churches (*doimliacc*) at Armagh were burned. In 920 a *doimliac* was burned at Kells, and in the same year an equal

⁴⁸ *Annals of Ireland, Three Fragments copied from Ancient Sources by Dubhaltach Mac Fírisigh* (ed. J. O'Donovan, Dublin, 1860), pp. 178–9, mention under the year 868 that Queen Flanna had many men in the wood felling and cutting timber in preparation for the erection of a church at Kildare in honour of St. Brigit. Under the year 891 *Annals of Ulster* refer to *duirtheachs* (presumably meaning wooden churches) which were uprooted by a great wind. Even as late as the 12th century St. Bernard tells of an *oratorium* of wood erected by St. Malachy of Armagh: *op. cit.* in note 6, p. 344.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.* in note 26, p. 58 f.

⁵⁰ L. de Paor in a lecture to the Royal Irish Academy, 7 November 1969.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.* in note 41, *sub anno* 788.

fate befell a church at Tuilen, probably to be identified with Dulane (co. Meath).⁵² The *Chronicon Scotorum*⁵³ tells of the foundation of the church at Tuamgraney (co. Clare) in 964, and there is further mention of a *damliac* at Armagh in 996.⁵⁴ It will be noted that the references to stone churches in the 8th and 9th centuries are associated with places of special importance—Armagh and Kells. Armagh, being the seat of the most important bishop, is likely to have had one of the more spectacular churches in Ireland. The existence of a stone church at Kells is understandable as the monastery had just been refounded by monks who had fled from the Viking raids on Iona and who would have sought a greater permanency for their church by building it in stone. The first references to stone churches in smaller monastic foundations such as Tuilen and Tuamgraney are no earlier than the 10th century. The existing church at Tuilen which may be identifiable with the church burned in 920 (though the door appears to have considerably later decoration) is small, whereas the oldest part of Tuamgraney Church founded in 964 is larger. Perhaps the churches grew larger as time progressed. One further piece of evidence is suggested by the church at Killinaboy (co. Clare). In the west gable the exterior stones are arranged to form a two-barred cross with the ends of the upper arms in the shape of capitals. These are paralleled on Ottonian crosses of c. 970–980,⁵⁵ though one of the latest examples is on a cross said to have come from the tomb of Edward the Confessor, of 1066.⁵⁶ This could suggest a date between 980 and 1066 for the building of the earliest existing part of the stone church at Killinaboy. It seems, therefore, that the custom of building churches in stone began to spread in Ireland in the 9th century, became more common during the 10th, and was the standard type by the 11th, leaving the way open for the magnificent Romanesque churches of the 12th century. If the gradual change from wood to stone took place around 900 (though the pace of change would presumably have differed from area to area), Gallarus was possibly built around this time in imitation of existing wooden buildings. But this argument, of course, only holds water if the building of Gallarus conformed to a pattern of development common throughout the rest of the country. If, on the other hand, the evolution of Gallarus took place totally independently of other stone church building in Ireland, we are at liberty to see Gallarus as being the petrification of a wooden prototype which could have been built at any time during the Christian era.

Whether or not Gallarus is an adaptation of a wooden building, it appears that the corbel principle was adapted from a building technique used in beehive huts, although it was unsuitable for a rectangular building. Perhaps its builders wanted to imitate already existing stone churches in other parts of the country but naturally followed local traditions and built in the same technique as that used in existing beehive huts, rather than in the new method of building, i.e. with

⁵² *Ibid.*, sub anno 919 alias 920.

⁵³ *Chronicon Scotorum* (ed. W. M. Hennessy, London, 1866), sub anno 964.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 41, sub anno 995 alias 996.

⁵⁵ Cf., e.g., the Lothar cross in Aachen (H. Kohlhaussen, *Europäisches Kunsthandwerk, vorromanik und romanik* [Frankfurt, 1969], pl. 38), or the Matilde cross.

⁵⁶ I am grateful to Mr. John Hunt for information on the cross in the wall of Killinaboy Church and its parallels.

upright walls and roofs made of inflammable material, which was used where beehive huts were not known. If Gallarus is the result of such an adaptation, then stone churches with upright walls must have existed elsewhere in Ireland before Gallarus was built, and this would imply a date possibly after 900 for Gallarus.

Henry has suggested that the oratories of Gallarus type might in some way be connected with certain boat-shaped structures in southern France.⁵⁷ But as the datable examples of these French buildings are not earlier than the 17th century it seems wiser not to derive Irish oratories from them in the absence of any French parallel contemporary with Gallarus, let alone much earlier. It seems more reasonable to accept Gallarus as a local development in the west of Ireland.

The distribution of oratories of Gallarus type and affiliated structures (Appendix, p. 59; FIG. 15) is limited to the coast from Kerry to Mayo. More than half of the surviving examples lie on islands which are so wild that they are now deserted. It is possibly more than mere coincidence that one of the few areas in the country where the Irish language survives after it has largely gone out of everyday use in other regions is that part of co. Kerry where Gallarus lies. The area cherishes old traditions which have perished elsewhere. Gallarus could be regarded as the product of a cultural backwater, were it not that, as the massacre of the Spaniards at Dunanóir in Smerwick Harbour in 1580 and the presence there of Spanish fishing boats today show, western Kerry has long had links beyond the seas. (The Dingle peninsula has had its great moments, such as when the Romanesque church was built at Kilmalkedar, or when the 19th-century railway octopus reached out to Dingle, and even in 1969 when it formed the backdrop for a modern international film set.) Few other types of churches exist in those areas where oratories of Gallarus type are found, the only obvious exceptions being the Romanesque church at Kilmalkedar (an 'exotic' under any circumstances) and 'St. Michael's Church' on Skellig Michael. In the absence of other normal rectangular stone churches with upright walls, oratories of Gallarus type may have been their local substitute. If we accept the date of the earliest stone churches as c. 900, then this argument, too, could lead to a date after 900 for Gallarus.

But let us return to a consideration of certain individual features of Gallarus and other oratories of the same type to see whether they can shed any further light on the date of Gallarus.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

DOORWAY (FIG. 16)

The lintelled doorway with sides narrowing towards the top cannot be dated independently. It is common in many of those Irish stone churches, which are almost certainly earlier than Romanesque, but it need not necessarily be early. The lintelled doorway at Aghowle (co. Wicklow)⁵⁸ belongs basically to the same type as the Gallarus doorway except that it is surrounded by a Romanesque

⁵⁷ F. Henry, 'Early Irish monasteries, boat-shaped oratories and beehive huts', *J. co. Louth Archaeol. Soc.*, XI, no. 4 (1948), 296 ff.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.* in note 23, p. 84, fig. 44.



FIG. 15

DISTRIBUTION-MAP OF GALLARUS-TYPE ORATORIES IN IRELAND (pp. 50, 59)

Open circles indicate uncertain sites.

pellet moulding, probably of the 12th century. The S. doorway of the monastery at Inishmaine (co. Mayo) (PL. v, B) is also lintelled and, if it was not taken from an earlier church, must belong to *c.* 1200 when the monastery was founded. There is also a similar doorway not far away on Church Island, Lough Key (co. Roscommon). Lintelled doorways were therefore in use in Irish churches until *c.* 1200; on the evidence of its doorway alone Gallarus could date any time before 1200. On Bishop's or St. Brendan's Island, off the coast of co. Clare, north of

Kilkee, there is an oratory, apparently of Gallarus type, with a doorway in the S. wall (FIG. 17).⁵⁹ The first dated example of a S. doorway in an Irish church is that at Cormac's Chapel, Cashel, completed in 1134. This feature occurs in very few of the apparently pre-Romanesque churches, and even where it does, as in St. Molua's oratory at Killaloe, it is incorporated in a chancel which was built later than the nave. The existence of a S. door in the oratory on Bishop's Island, possibly of 12th-century date, could imply an equally late date for Gallarus.



FIG. 16
GALLARUS ORATORY, CO. KERRY
W. doorway (pp. 50 ff.)

After Petrie, op. cit. in note 6, by courtesy

ROUND-HEADED WINDOW (FIG. 14; PL. V, C)

The round-headed window at Gallarus unfortunately gives no further help in dating the oratory, though few if any of the surviving Irish round-headed windows appear to be earlier than the 11th century. Somewhat similar though larger windows are found in the secondary chancel in St. Molua's oratory, Killaloe,⁶⁰ and also in the E. gable of St. Macdara's Church (co. Galway),⁶¹ neither of which is closely datable.

⁵⁹ *Illustrated Guide to the Northern, Western, and Southern Islands, and Coast of Ireland* (Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland, antiquarian handbk. ser., VI, 1905), p. 104, with illustration.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.* in note 23, p. 59, fig. 34.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30, fig. 10.

FINIALS

By a rather roundabout method a study of the gable ornaments of Gallarus and similar oratories could also lead to a comparatively late date. Gallarus oratory itself has no finial, although it is conceivable that Pococke's description ('They show a grave with a head at the cross of it & call it the tomb of the Giant') could refer to a finial with a head on it. But as Pococke does not mention the

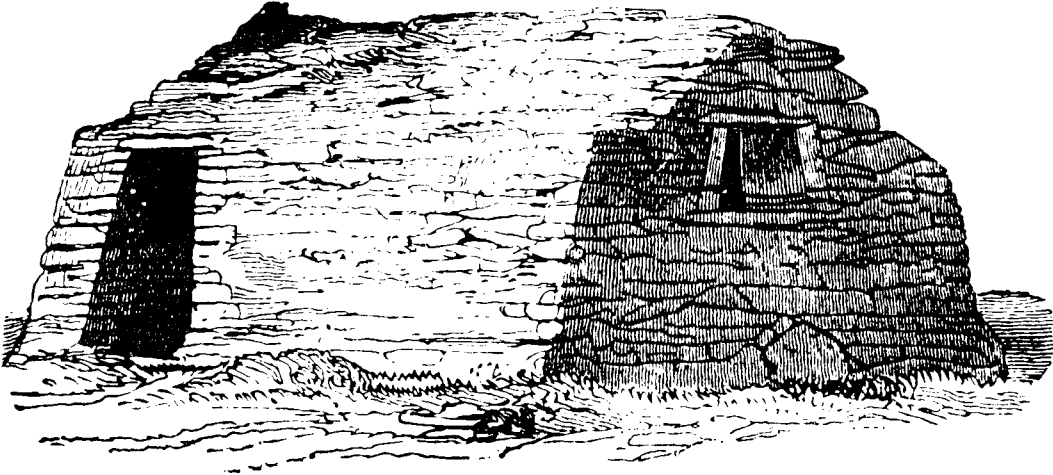


FIG. 17

ORATORY, BISHOP'S IS., NR. KILKEE, CO. CLARE (p. 51 f.)

Note E. window splaying outwards and S. doorway.

After op. cit. in note 59, by courtesy

near-by pillar-stone which has a cross at its head, he may have been confused. However in this connexion Lady Chatterton's description of Gallarus is interesting:

'It is quite perfect, except the large flat stones that formed the ridge of the arch, of which only two remain. These two remaining stones are curious in form, and, I found, were held in great reverence by the peasantry in the neighbourhood, who suppose that on them a peculiar kind of bell was once placed, by means of which alarm could be given to the inhabitants of the village of Gollerus, which is at some distance. In one of these stones there certainly is a circular hollow scooped out of its surface, in which, according to the tradition of the place, another stone was made to play backwards and forwards, producing a sound as loud and clear as that of a bell.'⁶²

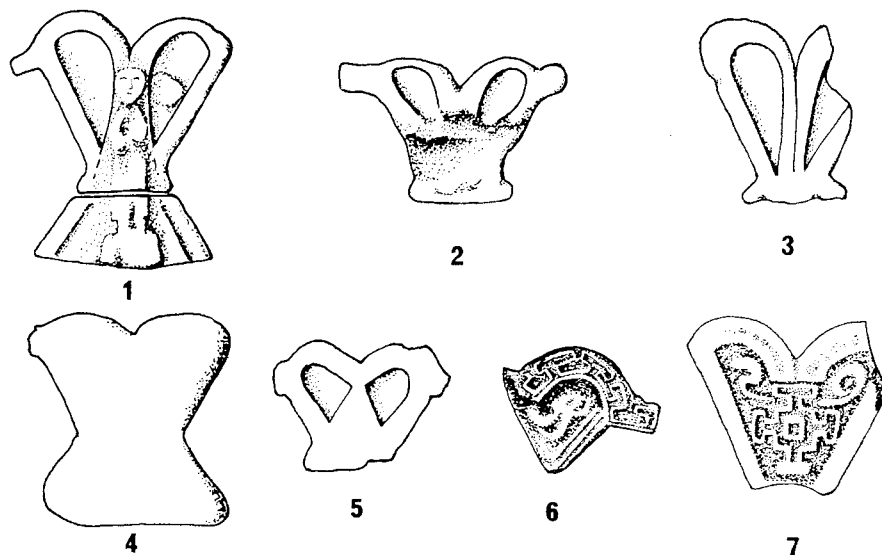
She goes on to tell the story of a boy who climbed up and stole the stone, but as soon as he had done so, he began to swell 'till he would fill the whole house'. When his mother replaced the stone on top of the oratory, the boy immediately resumed his normal size. While no such tradition remains in the minds of the people today,⁶³ perhaps folk tradition in 1838 still remembered the presence of a

⁶² Lady Chatterton, *Rambles in the South of Ireland during the Year 1838*, I (London, 1839), 132 f.

⁶³ An Seabhac, 'Tríocha-Céad Chorca Dhuibhne', part II, supplement to *Béalóideas*, VIII (1938), 114.

finial (in the shape of an upturned bell?), which may once have adorned the top of the gable.

At present there is a cross at the top of the E. gable. In the earliest illustrations⁶⁴ the cross is omitted. Yet it is presumably the object with a tenon to which Dunraven refers (see above, p. 39), and, as the stone in which the cross rests has a socket in it, it may possibly belong at the top of the E. gable where the Office of Public Works has now replaced it. This small cross (PL. v, c) reminds one of another cross on the gable above the chancel arch in the Romanesque church at Kilmalkedar, less than a mile from Gallarus (PL. iv, B). This has also been placed in its present position by the Office of Public Works. Kilmalkedar Church also has two proper finials. One is at the top of the W. gable (FIG. 18, no. 2; also visible on PL. iv, B);



E.H.

FIG. 18

STONE FINIALS FROM IRELAND (pp. 54 f., 57)

1, Clontubrid, nr. Freshford, co. Kilkenny; 2-3, Kilmalkedar, co. Kerry; 4, Teampul Geal, co. Kerry; 5, Labba Molaga, co. Cork; 6-7, Inishcaltra, co. Clare

Nos. 1-2, 4-7, after Leask, Crawford, Dunraven and Macalister, *opp. cit.* in notes 23, 69, 13 and 70, by courtesy; no. 3, after slide kindly lent by D. Newman Johnson

the other has recently been placed on top of the E. gable of the chancel (FIG. 18, no. 3). The latter may have belonged to the original Romanesque altar niche which was replaced by the present chancel, possibly c. 1200.

Miniature bronze finials were being manufactured in the 8th century, presumably for reliquaries. One without provenience is in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin,⁶⁵ and two D-shaped panels now in the Musée Nationale in

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 1, opp. p. 188; *op. cit.* in note 6, p. 130; *op. cit.* in note 62, p. 132.

⁶⁵ A. Mahr and J. Raftery, *Christian Art in Ancient Ireland*, 1 (Dublin, 1932), pl. 41, 1 a-b; II (Dublin, 1941), 111.

St. Germain were identified by Hunt as belonging to a finial, and are probably of about the same date.⁶⁶ In the Book of Kells, too, a finial adorns the temple at Jerusalem,⁶⁷ while some of the high crosses also have finials, although their form⁶⁸ does not correspond closely with those discussed here.

Finials used in buildings were listed, though not critically examined, by Crawford.⁶⁹ Of these, the finials from Clontubrid, near Freshford (co. Kilkenny) (FIG. 18, no. 1), Labba Molaga (co. Cork) (FIG. 18, no. 5), and the two from Kilmalkedar (FIG. 18, nos. 2–3) consist of two D-shaped panels back to back; fragments from Inishcaltra (co. Clare) (FIG. 18, no. 6) and Killaloe (co. Clare) (PL. VI, A) may also have had the same characteristic. Another finial from Inishcaltra (FIG. 18, no. 7)⁷⁰ is in the form of a heart. The most clearly datable of these finials are those from Kilmalkedar; as the church was modelled to some extent on Cormac's Chapel in Cashel which was finished in 1134, they must be later. Such a date is interestingly confirmed by an unlocalized bronze finial, the only bronze one with two D-shaped panels cast in one piece (PL. VI, B),⁷¹ which has decoration closely paralleled on the cross of Cong of 1123, and so must be of roughly the same date. The datable stone finials with twin D-shaped panels are all 12th-century. The dates of the others are uncertain, though only that from Labba Molaga is likely to be earlier because of the early appearance of the church near which it was found.⁷² The Clontubrid finial (FIG. 18, no. 1) tops a holy well with a roof similar to that at Gallarus; the roof, however, is later medieval and is now covered by a liberal helping of cement. An interesting feature of the Clontubrid finial is that, where the two D-shaped panels meet, a full-length figure stands out in high relief. Traces of a similar figure can be seen on the stone sarcophagus at Clones (co. Monaghan),⁷³ where there is also a high cross. Such full-length figures in relief, with robes almost down to their ankles, appear to become common in Ireland during the late 11th and above all during the 12th century, as can be seen on the high crosses.⁷⁴ An 11th- or 12th-century date for the Clontubrid finial corresponds well with the date for the Kilmalkedar finials. A finial from St. Macdara's Island off the coast of

⁶⁶ J. Hunt, 'On two "D-shaped" objects in the St. Germain Museum', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, LVII, sect. c (1956), 153 ff. What may be a part of the finial from the other gable-end of the same shrine came to light in a 9th-century Viking grave at Gausel in Rogaland: E. Bakka, 'Some decorated Anglo-Saxon and Irish metalwork found in Norwegian Viking graves', *Fourth Viking Congress, York, August 1961* (ed. A. Small, 1965), pp. 39–40, pls. 4–5.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.* in note 23, p. 46, fig. 20 d.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47, fig. 21.

⁶⁹ H. S. Crawford, 'Finial stones', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, XLIV (1914), 171 ff., with illustrations. He omitted a fragment from Killaloe (PL. VI, A), published by T. J. Westropp, 'Killaloe: its ancient palaces and cathedral (part II)', *ibid.*, XXIII (1893), 197, no. 10, and 200. Cf. also the finials from Ardwall Isle (Kirkcudbright), *op. cit.* in note 27, pp. 156 ff., fig. 31. P. Ó. hÉailidhe published another undecorated finial from Saggart (co. Dublin): 'Some unpublished antiquities of the Early Christian period in Dublin area', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, LXXXIX (1959), 204–5, no. 1, with illustration. In this context it may also be interesting to note a window of 12th- or 13th-century date at Inchicronan (co. Clare) with what looks like a finial crowning its exterior hood-moulding: T. J. Westropp, 'The Augustinian houses of the county Clare: Clare, Killone and Inchicronan', *ibid.*, xxx (1900), 135, with illustration.

⁷⁰ Cf. illustrations of this finial in H. S. Crawford, *op. cit.* in note 69, p. 171, and in R. A. S. Macalister, 'The history and antiquities of Inis Cealtra', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, XXXIII (1916), pl. x. Macalister published another heart-shaped finial from Inishcaltra, *ibid.*, pl. xxiv, 10 (98).

⁷¹ *Op. cit.* in note 65, II, pl. 106, no. 3. I am indebted to Dr. Raftery for the photograph of this mount.

⁷² *Op. cit.* in note 13, pp. 62 ff., with illustration, pl. xxxv.

⁷³ *Op. cit.* in note 23, p. 47, fig. 22.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.* in note 40, pp. 123 ff., pls. 52–64.

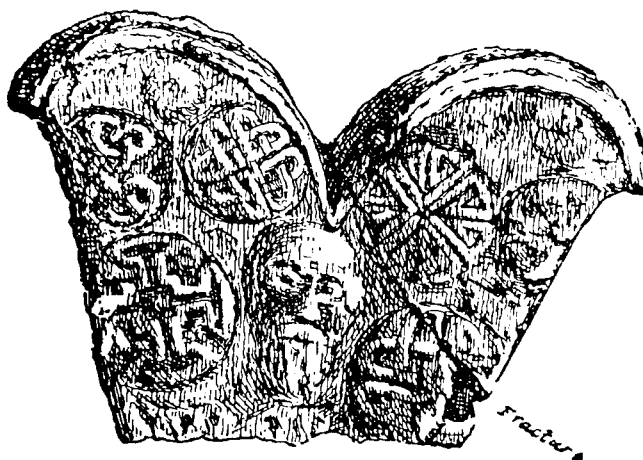


FIG. 19
STONE FINIAL, ST. MACDARA'S IS., CO. GALWAY (pp. 55, 57)
After Bigger, op. cit. in note 75, by courtesy

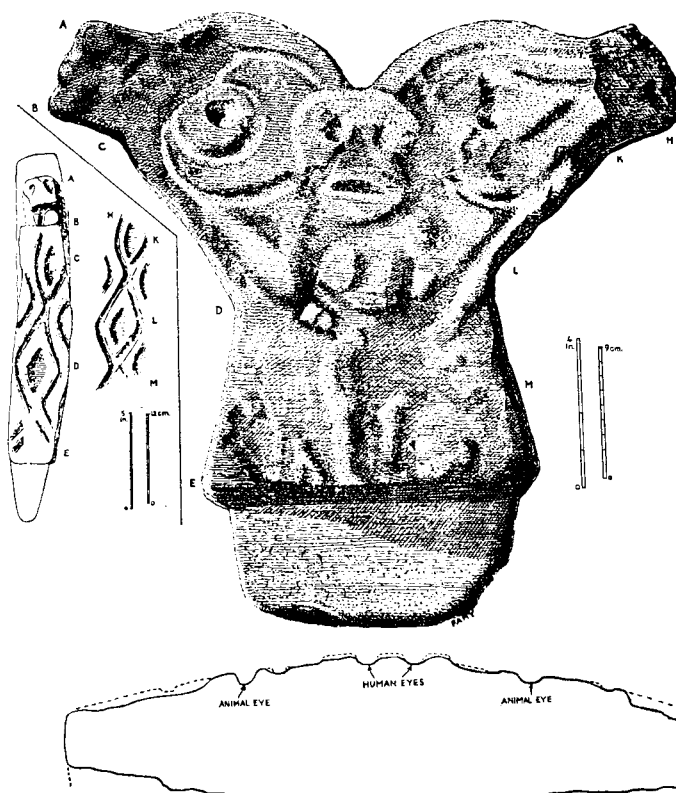


FIG. 20
STONE FINIAL, CHURCH IS., VALENCIA, CO. KERRY (p. 57)
After O'Kelly, op. cit. in note 26, by courtesy

Galway (FIG. 19)⁷⁵ bears a central simple head in relief, which is surrounded by various geometrical ornaments. Neither the near-by church nor the geometrical motifs can at present be closely dated, but a study of the ornaments might help to date them more precisely. More important for our purposes is the fact that a finial, found in the water beside Church Island (FIG. 20)⁷⁶ and probably originally from the Gallarus-type oratory there, bears a somewhat worn full-length figure (Christ crucified?), beside whom are parts of an animal whose eyes contain a reminiscence of the two D-shaped panels on the other finials. For Henry the animal heads are of a type found on metalwork of the 8th century.⁷⁷ But a full-length figure standing somewhat out from the surface (as opposed to the slightly sunken relief of the high crosses) is rather out of context in the 8th century. Figure sculpture is very rare in cos. Cork and Kerry before the introduction of Romanesque architecture. The Bantry pillar⁷⁸ is the only surviving object comparable with a high cross in these two counties, and it is carved in sunken relief. The figure on the Church Island finial is thus alien to the area, and would fit better into the context of high relief carving on the late 11th- and 12th-century high crosses.

Another link in this chain is that only a few miles from Gallarus and Kilmalkedar stands another oratory of Gallarus type, known as Teampul Geal or Teampul (Mancháin (PL. VI, c), and it also has a stone finial (FIG. 18, no. 4). The finial lacks the sunken D-shaped panels and any figure sculpture, but it has the vestigial remains of side-wings as seen on one of the Kilmalkedar finials (FIG. 18, no. 2), now re-erected on the W. gable of the church. Perhaps it was copied from a finial like that at Kilmalkedar without the ornamentation of the latter having been properly understood. Teampul Geal and Church Island are the only oratories of Gallarus type which can, with all probability, be associated with finials. But as the sculpture on the Church Island finial seems to be alien to the district, and as a finial with figure sculpture has been found in another part of the country, it is conceivable that the idea of stone finials was introduced into Kerry from elsewhere. It is possible that Kilmalkedar Church was the purveyor of such finials, at least as far as the Dingle peninsula is concerned; if so, Teampul Geal would be later than Kilmalkedar (though it is possible, of course, that the finials were added to the oratories long after they were built), and belong to the 11th or 12th century, as would Church Island, and also possibly Gallarus. Hill's suggestion of a close similarity between the method of roofing at Gallarus and Kilmalkedar Church could thus take on a new significance.

Finally it should be mentioned that minor trial cuttings carried out by T. Fanning at Gallarus in November 1970, on behalf of the National Monuments Branch of the Office of Public Works, preparatory to drainage works on the site,

⁷⁵ F. J. Bigger, 'Cruach Mac Dara, off the coast of Connamara: with a notice of its church, crosses and antiquities', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, xxvi (1896), 108, fig. 6.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.* in note 26, pp. 94 ff., fig. 7. Cf. also another finial, *ibid.*, fig. 8, no. 3.

⁷⁷ F. Henry, 'Early monasteries, beehive huts, and dry-stone houses in the neighbourhood of Cahirciveen and Waterville, co. Kerry', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, LVIII, sect. c (1957), 152.

⁷⁸ J. N. A. Wallace, 'Carved stone pillar at Bantry, co. Cork', *N. Munster Antiq. J.*, II (1941), 153 ff., with illustration; P. Johnstone, 'The Bantry boat', *Antiquity*, xxxviii (1964), 277 ff., pl. xlv.

yielded no finds or evidence of features or activity which might shed light on the period of construction and use of the oratory. In the course of excavation it was ascertained that the projecting foundation plinth on the N. and S. sides also juts out beyond the E. side of the oratory.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

Various lines of approach have certainly not led to any one date for Gallarus. The context of the early monasteries, such as Gallarus, those on the islands of Skellig and Oilean tSenaig,⁸⁰ and the pillars found in them, are possibly the strongest arguments for an 8th-century date. My special plea for a later date is rather forced and entirely speculative, but my purpose in suggesting that Gallarus could be even as late as the 12th century is to abandon the age-old idea that the 8th century is the latest possible date. In the absence of a more reliable chronological pointer the date of Gallarus must rest entirely on circumstantial evidence, and remains an open question although I lean towards a date later than that heretofore accepted. But if Gallarus cannot be proved to date from the 8th century and could even be as late as the 12th, then there is no longer any reason to believe that it represents the oldest type of stone church in Ireland and the first stage in the evolution of Irish church architecture in stone. Instead it may well have been a local variant confined to the west coast of Ireland and divorced from the mainstream of structural development in Irish ecclesiastical architecture.

Irish stone churches could have developed not from Gallarus but from another source. Certain features in these early stone churches, such as their small size (more compatible with wooden construction), the use of *antae* (copied possibly from wooden beams), and even the lintelled doorways, suggest that wooden churches had a considerable part to play in moulding the form and details of the earliest Irish stone churches, which began to become common *c.* 900. Leask has wisely suggested that the Viking invasions may well have hastened the change from wood to stone.⁸¹ But the idea of building churches in stone could have come from Irish monks who had seen Saxon stone churches in England. If this were so, then it is quite conceivable that the change from wood to stone started in eastern Ireland, which is nearest to England, whence it could have spread westwards. Whether or not Gallarus should be seen as a last outpost of such a movement from east to west is a question which will probably never be answered. The suggestion is offered as a tentative and unproven alternative to seeking the origins of early Irish church architecture on Skellig Michael and in the Dingle peninsula with a consequent movement eastwards.

⁷⁹ I am grateful to Mr. Tom Fanning for supplying me with this information and for permission to publish it.

⁸⁰ But diagonal tooling akin to that on Irish Romanesque and early Gothic buildings on some of the stones strongly suggests a 12th-century date for this oratory at least.

⁸¹ *Op. cit.* in note 23, p. 2.

APPENDIX

ORATORIES OF GALLARUS TYPE (FIG. 15)

CO. KERRY

Ballywiheen (not mapped)

Church Is., Valencia: M. J. O'Kelly, 'Church Island near Valencia, co. Kerry', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, LIX, sect. c (1958), 61

Gallarus

Illaunloghan: F. Henry, 'Early monasteries, beehive huts and dry-stone houses in the neighbourhood of Cahirciveen and Waterville, co. Kerry', *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, LVII, sect. c (1957), 96 ff., fig. 16

Kildreelig: *Ibid.*, p. 111, fig. 19, pl. xxii

Kildreenagh, Loher townland: *Ibid.*, pp. 142 ff., no. 16, fig. 25

Kilkeaveragh: *Ibid.*, p. 98 f.

Killabuonia (two oratories): *Ibid.*, pp. 101 ff., fig. 18, pls. i-ii

Killobarnaun: *Ibid.*, p. 67 f., pl. xxi b

Kilmalkedar: Edwin, third earl of Dunraven, *Notes on Irish Architecture*, I (1875), 58, pl. xxxii

Oilean tSenaig, Magharees Is. (originally two oratories): *Ibid.*, p. 37, pls. xxxi-ii; *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, xxvii (1897), 291; E. R. Norman and J. K. S. St. Joseph, *Early Development of Irish Society* (1969), p. 94, fig. 52

Scariff Is.: *Op. cit.* under Kildreelig, p. 145 f.

Skellig Michael (two oratories): *Ibid.*, pp. 113 ff. with bibliography, fig. 20, pl. xlvii

Teampul Geal (Teampul Mancháin): *Op. cit.* under Kilmalkedar, p. 57, pl. xxxi

Temple Cashel: *Op. cit.* under Kildreelig, p. 106, no. 9, pls. xiii-iv

CO. CLARE

St. Brendan's Is.: W. F. Wakeman, *Handbook of Irish Antiquities* (2 ed., 1891), p. 147, with illustration

CO. MAYO

Duvillaun More: F. Henry, 'Early Christian slabs and pillar-stones in the west of Ireland', *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, LXVII (1937), 272

Inishglora: *Op. cit.* under Kilmalkedar, p. 40, pl. xxiii

UNCERTAIN SITES

CO. KERRY

Baslickane: *Op. cit.* under Kildreelig, p. 141 f., no. 14, fig. 24

Beginish: *Ibid.*, p. 56

Fahan: *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, xxvii (1897), 306

Feaghmaan West: *Op. cit.* under Kildreelig, p. 90 f., fig. 14, pl. xxv b

Inishtooskert: *National Monuments of Ireland* (Dublin, 1964), p. 95, no. 63 (2)

Inishvickillane: *Loc. cit.* under Fahan

Keelmalomvornny: *Op. cit.* under Kildreelig, p. 107, no. 10

Killelton: M. Hickson and P. J. Lynch, *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, xix (1889), 114 ff.; xxii (1892), 82 and 426; xxviii (1898), 306

Killoe: *Op. cit.* under Kildreelig, p. 73, pl. xxi a

Templecloonagh, townland of Lateevemore (not mapped)