

On the Dating of some Early-medieval Irish Crosiers

By RUTH JOHNSON

IN 1955, Máire MacDermott presented a paper to the Royal Irish Academy on the crosiers of St Dymphna and St Mel and 10th-century Irish metalwork, in which she explained, and then attempted to fill, the gap in Irish ecclesiastical metalwork between the 9th and 11th centuries. A review of subsequent literature shows that this gap has since re-opened, with a continuing and sometimes circular debate over the crosiers' dating and typology. This article re-examines the dating evidence for the pre-Norman crosiers, drawing on comparative material from recent excavations in Dublin.

Approximately fifty early-medieval Irish crosiers and crosier fragments are known to date. The majority of these were listed by H. S. Crawford,¹ whilst a few other fragments, which have since been identified as Irish, were more recently listed by Cormac Bourke.² It is widely accepted that pre-Norman Irish crosiers span the period from the 8th century to the 12th century A.D. A group of Scottish crosiers have recently been shown to relate to the Irish tradition in terms of their structure and decoration and together they form a distinctive Hiberno-Scottish group within Europe in this period.³

FORM

Irish crosiers are composite artefacts but the basic construction comprises a wooden staff or shaft at the core, covered by sheet-metal casing and a crook mounted on top of the shaft (Fig. 1). The joints between the sections of metal casing are covered by three or four cylindrical or bi-conical knops, as necessary, and the lengthwise seams are covered by metal binding strips. At the lower end of the shaft there is often a metal ferrule while at the top there is a crook, consisting of a metal casing, often in two halves. The gap in the underside of the crook casing is joined by a metal binding strip and the gap along the top is usually surmounted by a

¹ H. S. Crawford, 'A descriptive list of Irish shrines and reliquaries', *J. Royal Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 52 (1922-3), 163-73.

² C. Bourke, 'Irish croziers of the eighth and ninth centuries', 166-73 in M. Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art* (Dublin, 1987), at p. 166.

³ P. E. Michelli, 'Four Scottish croziers and their relation to the Irish tradition', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 116 (1986), 375-92, at p. 375; id. 'The inscriptions on pre-Norman Irish reliquaries', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 96C (1996), 1-48.

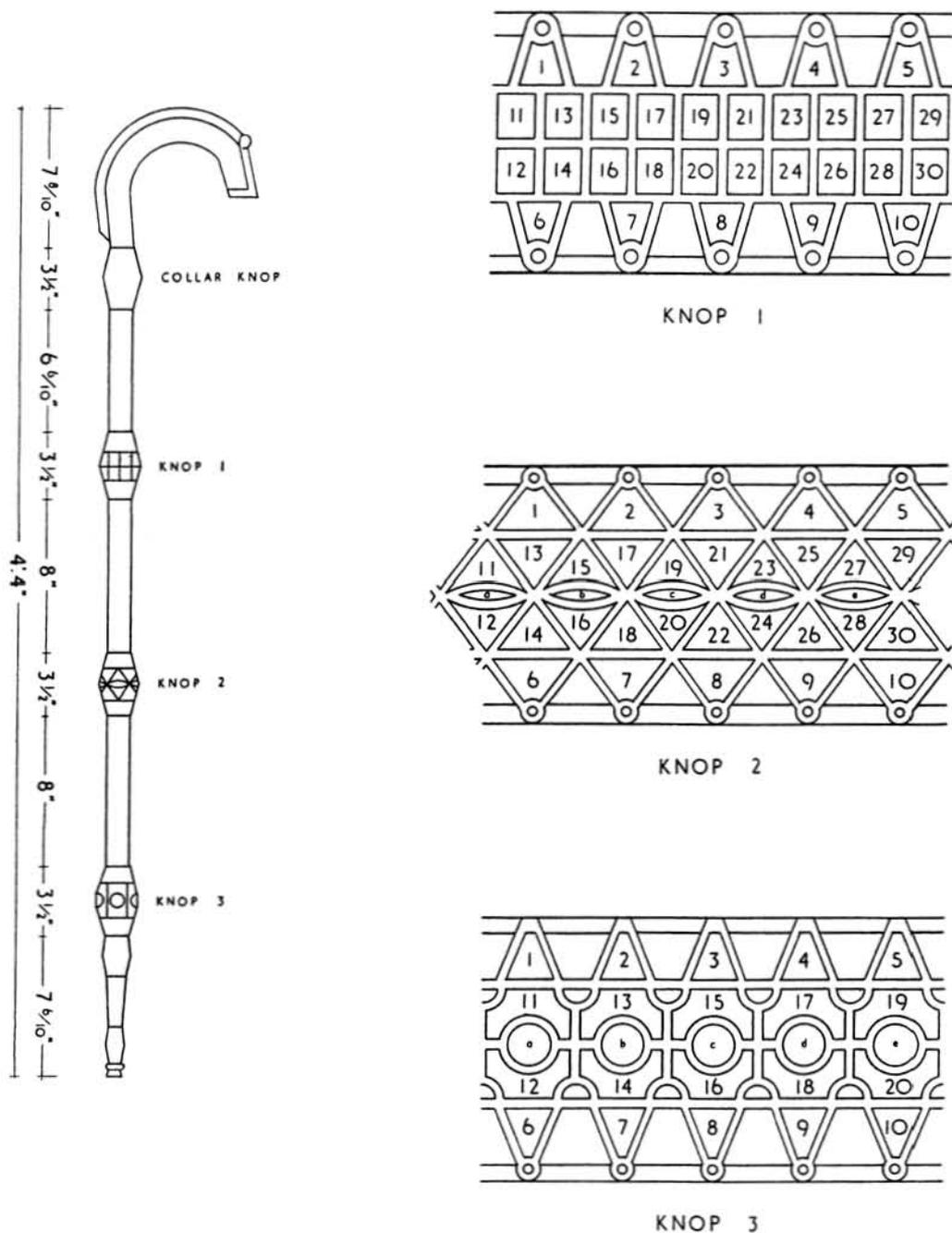


FIG. 1

British Museum crosier: diagram showing layout of shaft knops. Not to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

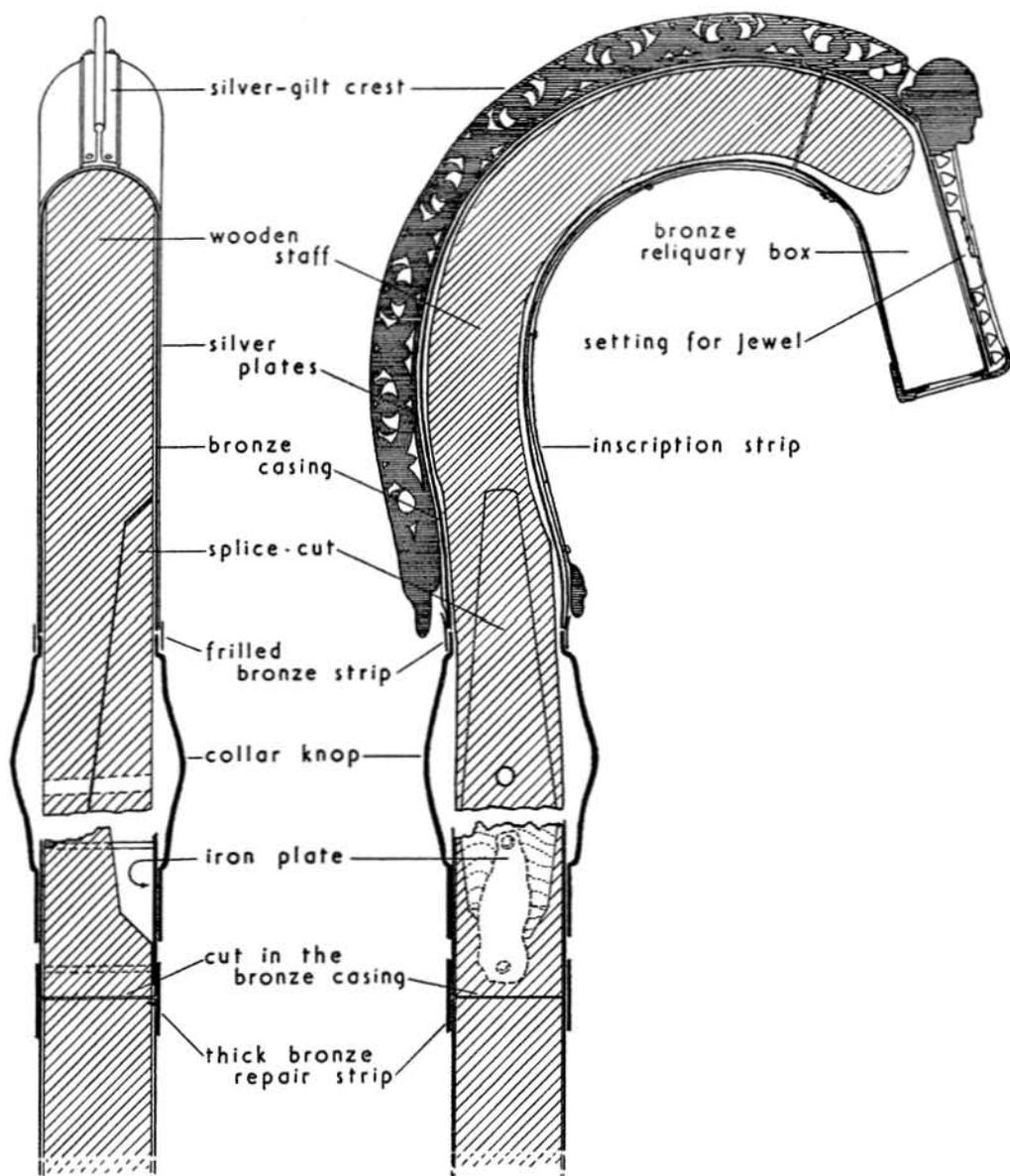


FIG. 2

British Museum crozier: diagram showing structure of crook. Not to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

decorative crest (Fig. 2). The terminal of the crook usually has a pendant drop, which may be hollow to contain a relic or reliquary box. Two basic crook shapes for Irish croziers have been noted by P. E. Michelli:⁴ one is angular in profile and the other horseshoe-shaped. The Hiberno-Saxon 'crozier terminal' (possibly a

⁴ Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3.

horn terminal and therefore irrelevant here), which was found at Helgö in Sweden, is of entirely different form and should be considered an oddity.⁵

Certain structural aspects have been noted as early or late in the period of crosier manufacture. Bourke has argued that a study of the earliest Irish crosiers reveals a diversity of form and that the familiar 'standardised' form as outlined above was only evolved after a century of development.⁶ He also suggests that the drop was not utilised as a repository for a relic before the beginning of the 9th century. This raises the question of whether the earlier crosiers were in fact reliquary shrines, or merely ceremonial in function. It is possible that the wooden staffs which form the core of early Irish crosiers were revered in their own right as the relics of the saints.

Michelli has argued that the angular crook-head is the earlier of the two forms of Hiberno-Scottish crosier, continuing in use until the early 11th century when it was concurrent with an intermediate or transitional type. Both were eventually replaced by the horseshoe-shaped form.⁷ The angular shape of Irish crosiers of the Viking Period fits with the representations on stone-carvings at Killadeas and White Island in Co. Fermanagh, Monasterboice in Co. Louth, the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise in Co. Offaly and on the Market Cross at Kells in Co. Meath.⁸ Michelli has suggested that the separate drop is a feature of all surviving crosiers made prior to the mid-11th century. In all the early examples, the crest terminates some way behind the drop. These earlier crosier drops, however, lack two features common to the 11th- and 12th-century examples, i.e. the raised openwork frame around the drop-face and the raised human mask found at the top of later drops.⁹

As Bourke has shown from comparison of three intact specimens,¹⁰ Irish crosiers were of two lengths, the shorter of which measured approximately 1 m, as evidenced by a crosier found in the River Bann in Co. Antrim. The longer crosiers are represented by two other complete specimens both of which measure approximately 1.3 m in length (the British Museum crosier and the Prosperous crosier). Crosiers or staffs of different lengths are depicted in early-medieval stone sculpture and although it is almost certain that crosiers functioned as pastoral staffs, any significance apportioned to the different lengths is unknown.

The 11th and 12th centuries were a period of re-enshrinement in Ireland, in common with contemporary practices in Continental Europe. As a result, many of the crosiers which exist today are multi-period and require careful consideration to establish the original and later features of their structure, decoration and inscriptions, before any attempt can be made to date them. Before Máire MacDermott's analysis of the different periods of the British Museum (Kells) crosier, scholars had tended to date reliquaries according to the most easily

⁵ See S. Youngs (ed.), *The Work of Angels: Masterpieces of Celtic Metalwork, Sixth to Ninth Centuries AD* (London, 1989), cat. no. 147.

⁶ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, 166.

⁷ Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 389.

⁸ F. Henry, *Irish Art during the Viking Invasions* (London, 1967), 114.

⁹ Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 380.

¹⁰ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, 172.

recognised ornamental feature, with the result that many were attributed almost indiscriminately to the 11th century, despite differing widely in the style of the rest of their ornament.¹¹

INSCRIPTIONS

A number of Irish crosiers, like other reliquaries, carry inscriptions naming the people involved in their manufacture or refurbishment, a practice which goes back at least as far as the 10th century.¹² Three crosiers of the early-medieval period have surviving inscriptions which have received recent consideration by Michelli.¹³ These are the crosier of St Dympna, the British Museum crosier and the Lismore crosier. According to Michelli, the purpose of incorporating inscriptions was to establish an object as a legitimate work of art for future generations by apportioning it a place, a time, an author and a cause for invention. A study of the inscriptions on a group of twelve pre-Norman Irish reliquaries has revealed that they generally followed a clear formula, naming the commissioner of the object in the most prominent position, followed by the name(s) of any involved parties and ending with the name(s) of the craftsman or craftsmen involved in the manufacture.

It has been argued by David Wilson that there is only one primary method of dating Anglo-Saxon ornamental metalwork of the period A.D. 700–1100 and this can be equally taken to apply to Irish metalwork of the same period, i.e. when the name of a known historical person is inscribed in a primary position on the object in question. If these two main criteria are met, Wilson states: 'There can be little doubt that such an object was manufactured during the life-time, reign, episcopate, etc., of the person mentioned.'¹⁴ In the case of multi-period artefacts such as crosiers, it is therefore very important to begin by establishing that a particular inscription is primary, i.e. relating to the commissioning of the object, and not referring to refurbishment or repair. Secondly, it is necessary to identify with certainty the person or persons named in the inscription by reference to contemporary documentation.

According to Michelli, in the early-medieval period, only those of high rank and with family connections to a relic were entitled to commission a reliquary for it. The possible identifications for the commissioners of early-medieval Irish reliquaries can thus be narrowed down. Further, only those persons of high rank with political connections to the commissioners and/or the relic could appear as interested parties in the middle part of the inscription. Little is known of the actual metalworkers, who were of relatively low status and were not often mentioned in the Annals. Thus, the name of the craftsman is usually of little use when attempting to date an object, whereas the names of the commissioner and the interested parties are much more likely to be identifiable in the historical sources.¹⁵

¹¹ M. MacDermott, 'The crosiers of St Dympna and St Mel and tenth century Irish metalwork', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 58C (1957), 167–96, at p. 168.

¹² R. O Floinn, *Irish Shrines and Reliquaries of the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 1994), 38.

¹³ Michelli (1996), op. cit. in note 3, 1.

¹⁴ D. M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art from the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest* (London, 1984), 3rd ed., 5.

¹⁵ Michelli (1996), op. cit. in note 3, 11–12.

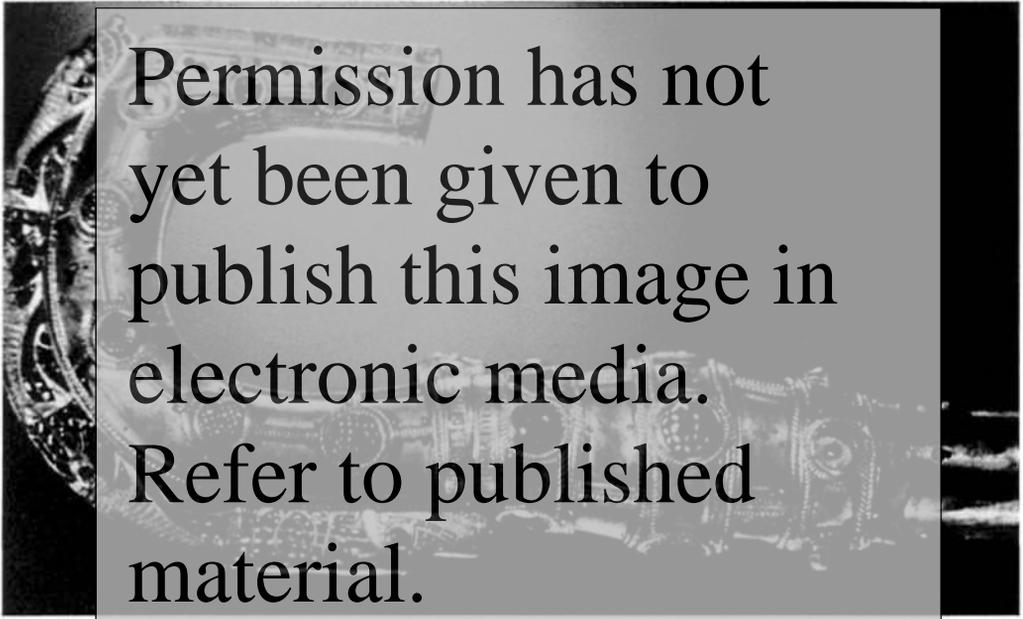


FIG. 3

Crosier of Lismore. Not shown to scale. *Photograph © National Museum of Ireland.*

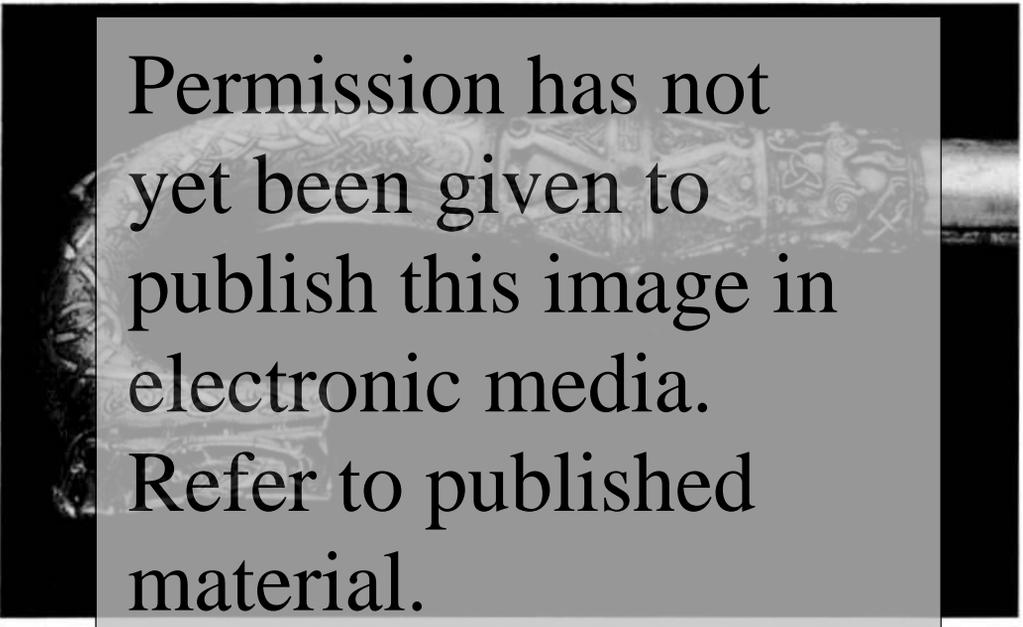


FIG. 4

Crosier of Clonmacnoise. Not shown to scale. *Photograph © National Museum of Ireland.*

Despite the fact that three Irish crosiers are furnished with inscriptions, the dates and provenance suggested are somewhat doubtful. The Lismore crosier (Fig. 3) was found during the opening of a blocked doorway at Lismore Castle, Co. Waterford. It is generally agreed that it bears the name of an abbot of Lismore who died in 1113, as well as the name of the craftsman, Nechtan, who made it.¹⁶ However, Michelli has recently suggested that the commissioner's identity has not been satisfactorily established although she offers no other alternative.¹⁷ The identification of the persons named on the British Museum or Kells crosier¹⁸ are much disputed. The inscription, which is rendered in ordinary Irish majuscules, reads OR DO CONDUILIG OCUS DO MELFINNEIN and may be translated 'Pray for Cú Dúilig and for Máel Finnéin'. G. Petrie identified these as the names of two ecclesiastics of the monastery at Kells, who died in 967 (AU and AFM) and 1047 (AFM) respectively.¹⁹ An alternative identification was later proposed by MacDermott for Cú Dúilig as a member of the Eóganacht of Cashel whose obituary cites him as *rigdamna* (royal heir) of Cashel in 1039 AI.²⁰ MacDermott also suggested that Máel Finnéin be identified as Maelfinnia, a bishop of Emly, who died in the same year according to the same source (AI). Michelli has recently argued in favour of MacDermott's identification of Cú Dúilig as the commissioner of the inscription but rejects her identification of Máel Finnéin on the basis that the position of this name in the inscription indicates that he was the craftsman and is therefore unlikely to have been named in the Annals.²¹ The inscription on the British Museum crosier, which runs up the binding strip inside the curve of the crook, is clearly secondary, possibly supplementing the original inscription which is now lost. It is likely to have been added during the repair and refurbishment of the crosier, giving a *terminus ante quem* of 1039 for this work. The inscription on the crosier of St Dymna, although contemporary with the rest of the object, is so worn that the name of the person who commissioned it is illegible. Only the name of the craftsman and a comment on the difficulty of the work involved in its manufacture can now be gleaned from the inscription.²² Finally, conservation work on the crosier of St Mel revealed further evidence for an inscription consisting of six letters, where MacDermott had recognised only two.²³ The inscription on this crosier has never been discussed and is not listed by Michelli.

DATING

With so little firm chronological evidence provided by a consideration of the inscriptions, form and archaeological associations of Irish crosiers, we are forced

¹⁶ Ó Floinn, *op. cit.* in note 12, 27.

¹⁷ Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 21.

¹⁸ This crosier will be referred to as the 'Kells' Crosier for the purposes of this paper, after F. Henry, *op. cit.* in note 8.

¹⁹ G. Petrie, (ed. M. Stokes), *Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1872 and 1878); Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 19.

²⁰ M. MacDermott, 'The Kells Crozier', *Archaeologia*, 96 (1955), 59-113, at p. 109.

²¹ Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 21-2.

²² Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 10.

²³ W. A. Oddy and I. M. MacIntyre, 'St Mel's crozier — technical examination and report on conservation and restoration in 1971-2', *J. Royal Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 103 (1973), 35-45, at p. 41.

to rely heavily on art-historical methods to determine their relative dates. Although it has been established that all crosiers of Irish type fall between the 8th and the early 12th century, the dates of individual pieces continue to be widely disputed. It serves here to summarise the three different schools of thought concerning a small 'intermediate' group of crosiers which have been dated variously to the late 9th, early 10th and early 11th centuries by different scholars. These are the Kells (British Museum) crosier, the crosier of St Dymphna and the crosier of St Mel. This is followed by a discussion of the unique crosier found at Prosperous, Co. Kildare.

The provenance of the 'Kells' crosier in the British Museum is unknown. The first record of its existence is a letter from Cardinal Wiseman to Dr Russell of Maynooth in 1850 which describes how the cardinal acquired it at an auction of the effects of a London solicitor. The crosier had apparently been left in the solicitor's chamber by a previous occupant.²⁴ Little can be said, therefore, about its origin except that it is Irish. Nevertheless, as we have seen, two places have been suggested by previous scholars for its manufacture on the basis of its inscriptions, i.e. Kells, Co. Meath, and Cashel, Co. Tipperary. The evidence given in support of each of these provenances is discussed below. The crosier of St Dymphna belonged to its hereditary keepers, the O'Luans/Lambs, until its purchase by Petrie in 1835. It is provenanced to Tednavet, Co. Monaghan, and is now on exhibition in the Treasury of the National Museum of Ireland.²⁵ The crosier of St Mel is preserved at a Diocesan College in Longford. It was found in the mid-19th century in the cemetery attached to the Protestant church at Ardagh, in close proximity to the site of the old Cathedral of St Mel.²⁶

In this case study, three scholars have been chosen as representative of the different views on dating. These are Bourke, who preferred a late 9th century date, MacDermott, who argues for a date in the early 10th century and Michelli, who places all three in the early 11th century.²⁷

THE KELLS (BRITISH MUSEUM) CROSIER

It is logical to begin with MacDermott's thesis as she was the first scholar to consider the three crosiers in detail. MacDermott began with an in-depth structural examination of the Kells crosier, including a consideration of Kendrick's notes and drawings of the internal features which were revealed when the crosier was first cleaned, and was thus able to identify work of different periods.²⁸ MacDermott's first period, which she dates to the late 9th or early 10th century, includes the staff, the inner casing of the crook (Fig. 5), the shaft casing, the three lower knobs and the three remaining binding strips (Fig. 6). At a later stage, she contended, the crosier was deliberately desecrated, the staff and casing were cut through and the collar knob and binding strip were lost or stolen. MacDermott proposed that in the 11th century, the crosier was repaired and refurbished; the old casing of the crook was filed down to fit inside a new silver casing furnished with an ornamental

²⁴ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, 59.

²⁵ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 11, 169.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁷ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in notes 11 and 20; Michelli, *op. cit.* in note 3; Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2.

²⁸ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, 59-60.

crest, a new binding strip bearing an inscription and a reliquary box. At this stage, one of the binding strips was repaired and the shaft, like the crook, was probably fitted with an outer casing, indicated by a series of nail holes. According to MacDermott, the foot or ferrule was added before the crosier was later stripped of its silver outer casing. At this time, she argues, an attempt was made to remove the crook, causing damage to the collar knob. The relic was also removed from the reliquary box, the gem removed and the binding strip bearing the inscription cut through. Finally, repairs were made to the collar knob (Fig. 7) and to the binding strip bearing the inscription.²⁹

Whether the dates are correct or not, the basic sequence proposed by MacDermott for the structural evolution of the Kells crosier still appears likely today, primarily because she applied a more scientific archaeological approach to establishing the crosier's structural and stylistic development. One minor point can be made, however, in criticism of this scheme. MacDermott suggests that the crook was remounted the wrong way around in the 11th century. This seems quite unlikely because no other Irish crosier of the 11th century has the binding strips along the outside of the shaft. The craftsman who made the silver crook casing, crest and reliquary-box was working in the mainstream of Irish crosier manufacture at this time and would surely not have made such an obvious blunder in its reconstruction. It is suggested instead that the crook was remounted in this position at a later date, possibly in the final phase of repairs.

Once the structural development of the crosier had been sufficiently established, it could no longer be dated to a single period on the basis of the inscription and the decoration of the collar knob. MacDermott thus attempted to assess the relative dates of different parts of the shrine according to stylistic considerations. She recognised that despite minor differences in motif, the three lowest knobs show a uniformity of style (Figs. 8–13). All have their ornament in panels surrounded by raised borders and certain motifs are found on more than one knob. She suggested that the differences in motif could be attributed to the tastes of individual artists in the same workshop rather than to differences in date. The remains of the animal patterns and interlace motifs found on the inner crook casing were sufficiently close in style to link them to those on the three lowest knobs and the binding strips. The range of motifs identified on these parts of the crosier includes spirals, interlace patterns, a stiff vegetal pattern, birds seen in profile and quadrupeds. The latter are also seen in profile and are shown either singly or in pairs, sometimes contorted to fit triangular or sub-rectangular panels. Each discrete pattern from Period I was photographed and drawn for reference.³⁰ From this study, MacDermott noted that, at this first stage of development, the Kells crosier would have closely resembled that of St Dymphna in terms of its ornamentation and structure.

Armed with the structural and ornamental details and a *terminus ante quem* provided by the later inscription for the earliest phase of the crosier, MacDermott then attempted to date the ornamentation using art-historical comparisons. She

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77–8.

³⁰ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, figs. 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.



FIG. 5

British Museum crozier: ornament of inner casing and crook. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

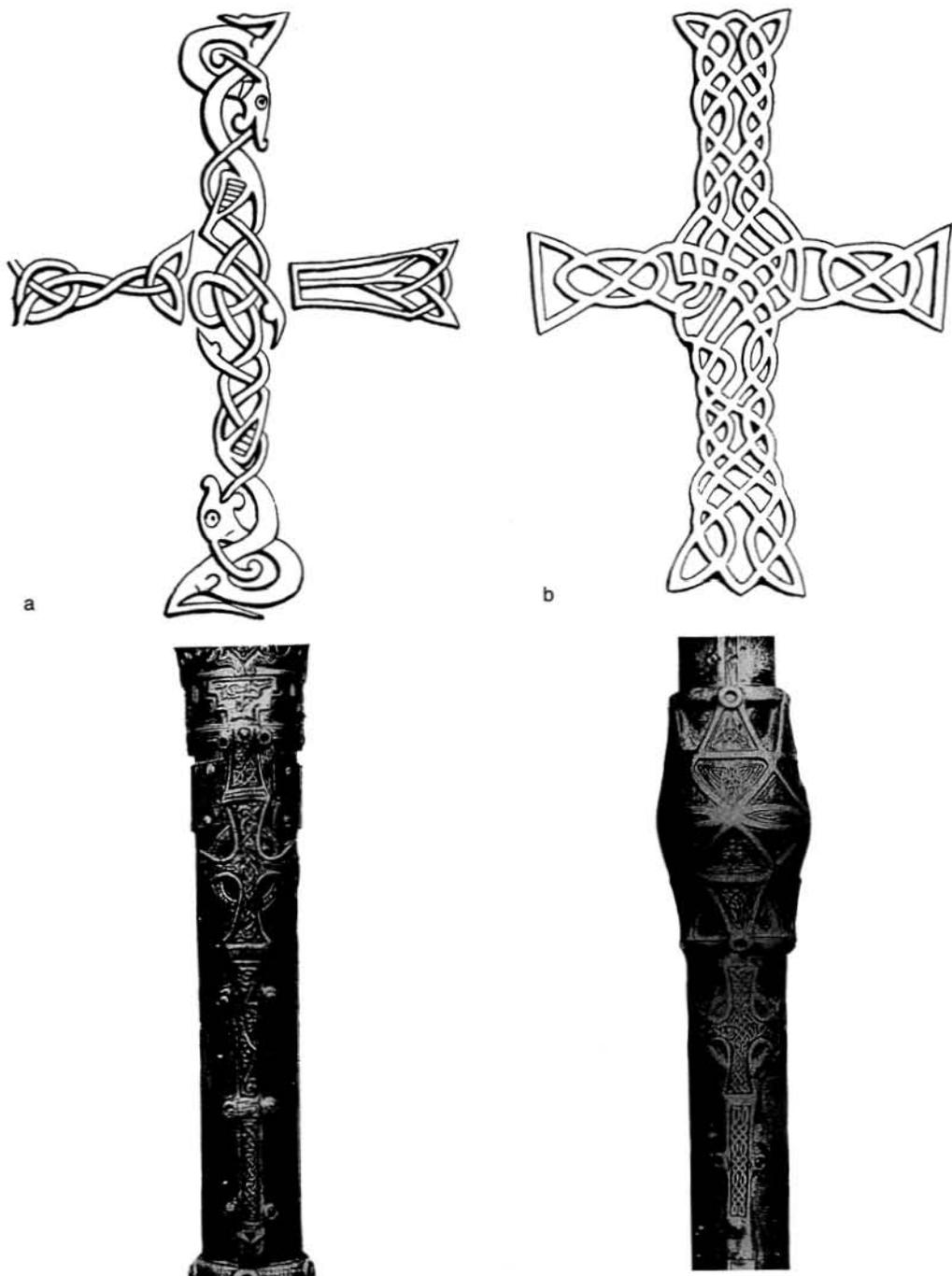


FIG. 6

British Museum crosier: ornament of the binding strips. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

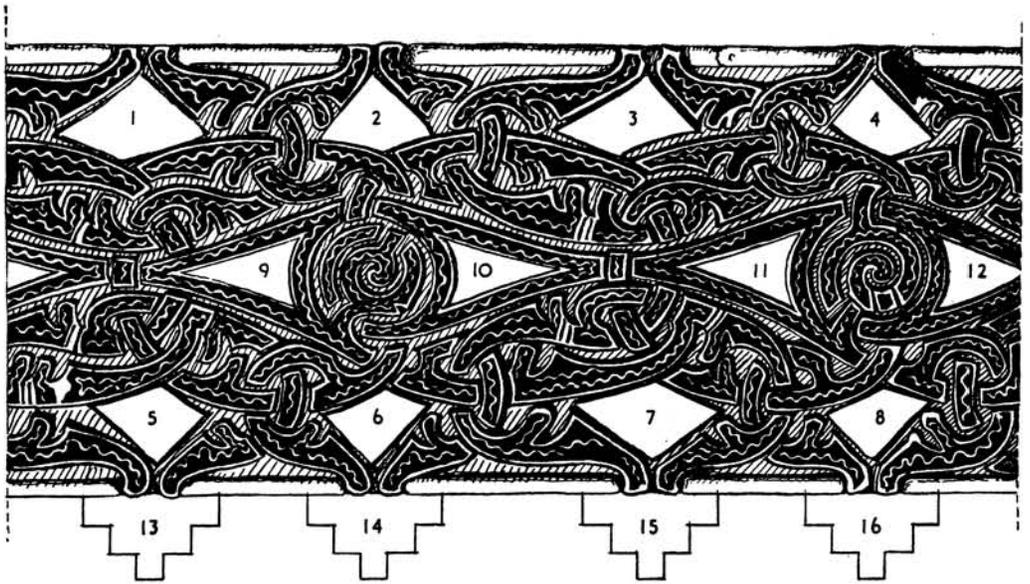


FIG. 7

British Museum crosier: ornament of the collar knob. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

dismissed an early date in the 8th century through the absence of the chip-carved effect which is used extensively in 8th-century metalwork such as the 'Tara' Brooch (Fig. 14). Another reason for dismissing an early date was what she considered to be the 'inferior quality' of the decoration on the crosier in relation to works of art such

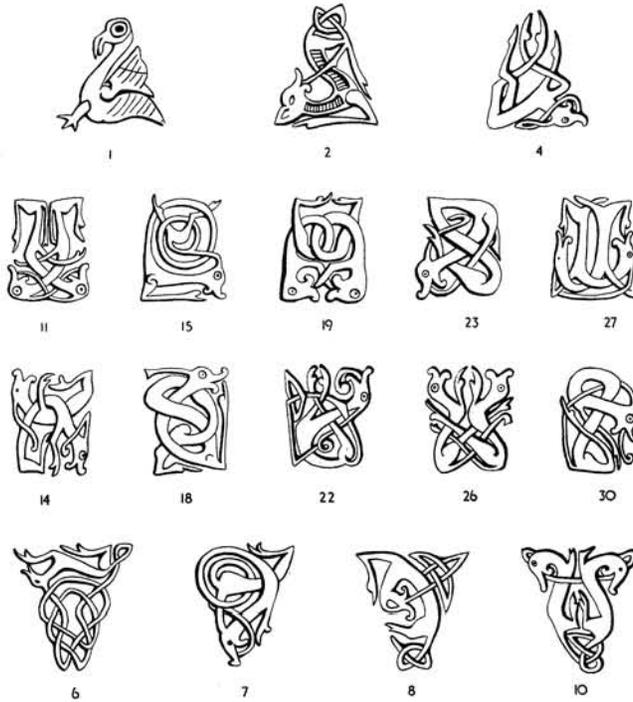


FIG. 8

British Museum crosier: animal patterns from knob 1. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

as the Book of Kells, particularly in terms of the interlace which she considered to be 'degenerate'. Nevertheless, she recognised that the style of decoration was descended from an 8th-century Irish repertoire and that it was purely Insular, showing no signs of Scandinavian-influence in the animal ornament. The inventive and lively animals on the Kells crosier, she argued, were quite unlike those on the Scandinavian-influenced metalwork of the 11th and 12th centuries. According to MacDermott, the latest occurrence of this native style of animal decoration is to be found on the *Soiscél Molaise*, the first period of which could be dated by inscription to the early 11th century, thus giving a *terminus ante quem* for the crosier.

Having established that the animal style represented on the crosier, although native in origin, was not typical of 8th or 11th century metalwork, MacDermott attempted to refine her dating. Despite a lack of firmly dated material from the 9th century in Ireland, she was able to find a selection of pseudo-penannular brooches of 9th-century date bearing animal ornamentation in a style closely related to that of the Kells crosier.³¹ She also noted a connection between some of the crosier panels and certain objects decorated in the Anglo-Saxon Trewhiddle style, examples of which were firmly dated to the late 9th century by their inclusion in a

³¹ MacDermott, *op cit.* in note 20, 81–2: e.g. Killamery.

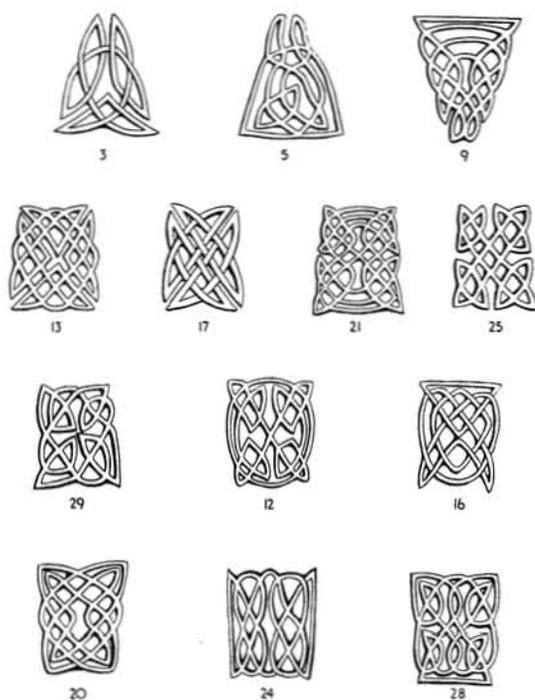


FIG. 9

British Museum crosier: interlace patterns from knop 1. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

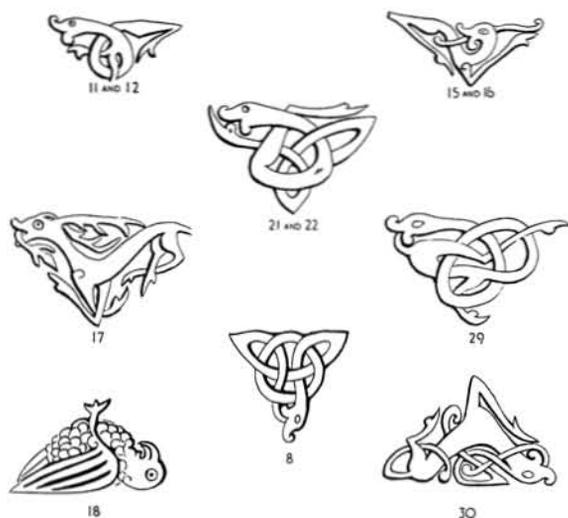


FIG. 10

British Museum crosier: animal patterns from knop 2. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

coin-dated hoard. MacDermott believed that the accents of Trehiddle ornamentation in the crosier's decorative scheme, such as the division into panels and contorted lively animals, pointed to a common inspiration in 8th-century Hiberno-Saxon metalwork, with different developments arising from the same prototypes. Careful to emphasise the native character of this period of the crosier's decoration,

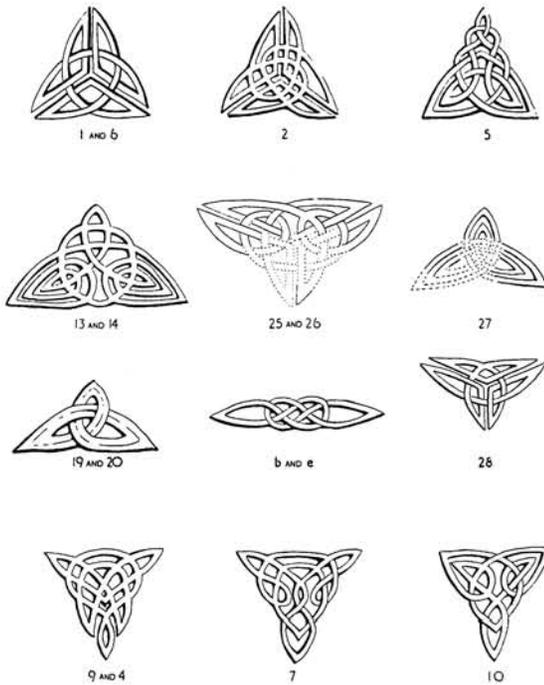


FIG. 11

British Museum crosier: interlace patterns from knop 2. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.*

MacDermott suggests that the artists were open to minor borrowings from Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian sources.

From comparison with late 9th-century Irish brooches and Anglo-Saxon metalwork, MacDermott concluded that the first period of the Kells crosier represented a continuation of the native metalworking tradition into the early 10th century, despite a falling off in quality and techniques, such as chip-carving and filigree, stating that:

10th-century metalwork as we now define it has firmness and verve in the animal ornament and depends for its effects on the imaginative and skilful arrangement of the animal bodies and their lively and cheerful personality rather than in exquisite delicacy of embellishment pursued to infinite lengths.³²

The recognition of this distinct style enabled MacDermott to define a group of related pieces of Irish metalwork including the crosiers of St Dymphna (Figs. 15–16) and St Mel (Figs. 17–21), the *Soiscél Molaise* and several pseudo-penannular brooches. Conversely, she argued that the Prosperous crosier, bossed penannular brooches and thistle brooches, although of similar date, must stand apart from this style, having Scandinavian influences in their decoration. Finally, she suggested that the high crosses of the same period (i.e. the 10th century) were decorated in yet another separate tradition according to their medium and function.

³² MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, 110.

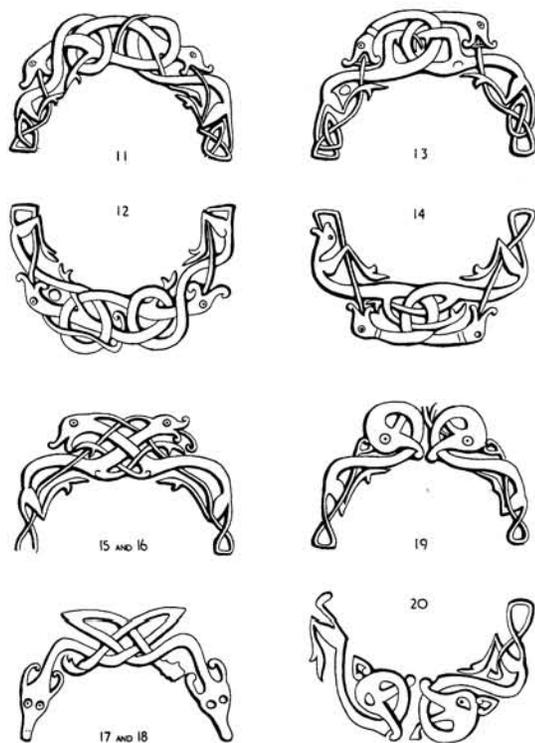


FIG. 12
British Museum crosier: animal patterns from
knop 3. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after*
MacDermott, 1954.

THE CROSIERS OF ST DYMUNA AND ST MEL

In a subsequent paper, MacDermott expanded her discussion of this comparative material with a detailed analysis of the ornament on the crosiers of St Dymuna and St Mel, concluding that they each show a degeneration of the repertoire noted on the Kells crosier and are thus slightly later.³³ This paper included an eloquent essay considering the evidence for the deleterious impact of the Viking wars on native ecclesiastical metalwork of the period. This new approach caused MacDermott to postulate that a strong native tradition must have lived on throughout the 10th century to enable it to contribute to the mixed style current in the 11th and 12th centuries. In turn this suggests that the supposed hiatus in the 10th century is due to the lack of recognition and firm dating of extant pieces, rather than of diminished production at that time.³⁴ Additionally, MacDermott refers to annalistic references to the enshrining of relics during this turbulent period, suggesting a sudden increase in production may have been required to replace items lost during raids on monasteries which in turn caused the decline in quality observed on the three crosiers. Finally, she attempted to put the style into its wider perspective by proposing a degenerating typological sequence for other metalwork of the late 10th to early 11th century, with the Romanesque

³³ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 11, 167.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

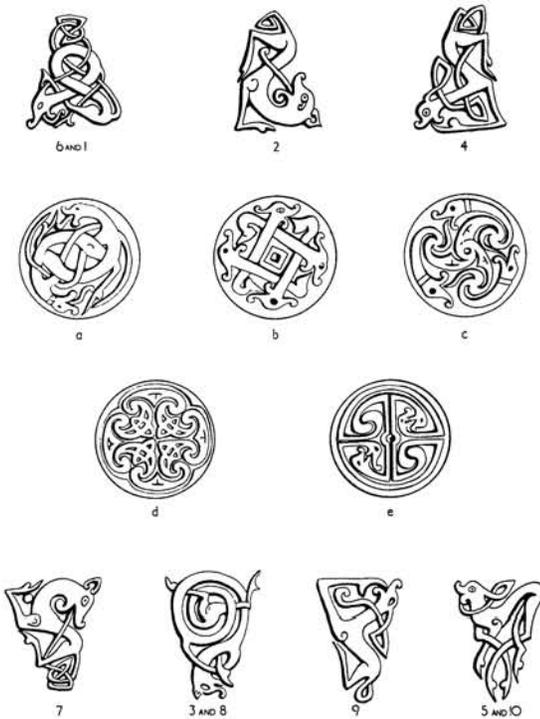


FIG. 13
British Museum crosier: animal and spiral
patterns from knop 3. Not shown to scale.
Drawing after MacDermott, 1954.

doorway at Killeshin, Co. Laois, representing in stone the last appearance of animals related to the Kells crosier style. This was followed by a sequence of material displaying a regeneration of techniques and styles in response to the introduction of Scandinavian influences from the mid-11th to early 12th centuries including St Mura's Crosier, the *Corp Naomh* and *Clogán Óir* Bell-Shrines, the Shrine of the Stowe Missal, the crosiers of Inishfallen and Clonmacnoise (Fig. 4), St Cuilleán's Bell Shrine and culminating with the crosier of Lismore.³⁵

Discussion

A reconsideration of early Irish crosiers has led Bourke to state that there is evidence to suggest that all three crosiers studied by MacDermott should be assigned a late 9th-century date.³⁶ The main thrust of his argument is that the original idea for the division of the crosier knops into ornamental fields is less likely to derive from the Anglo-Saxon Trewhiddle style than from an immediate native background in pseudo-penannular brooch decoration of the 9th century. Although Bourke accepts some degree of southern English influence in the animal ornament on the crosiers, he argues that certain scholars have overstated the Anglo-Saxon contribution to the point of having a preference for England as the source for this style.

³⁵ Ibid. 193.

³⁶ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, 170.

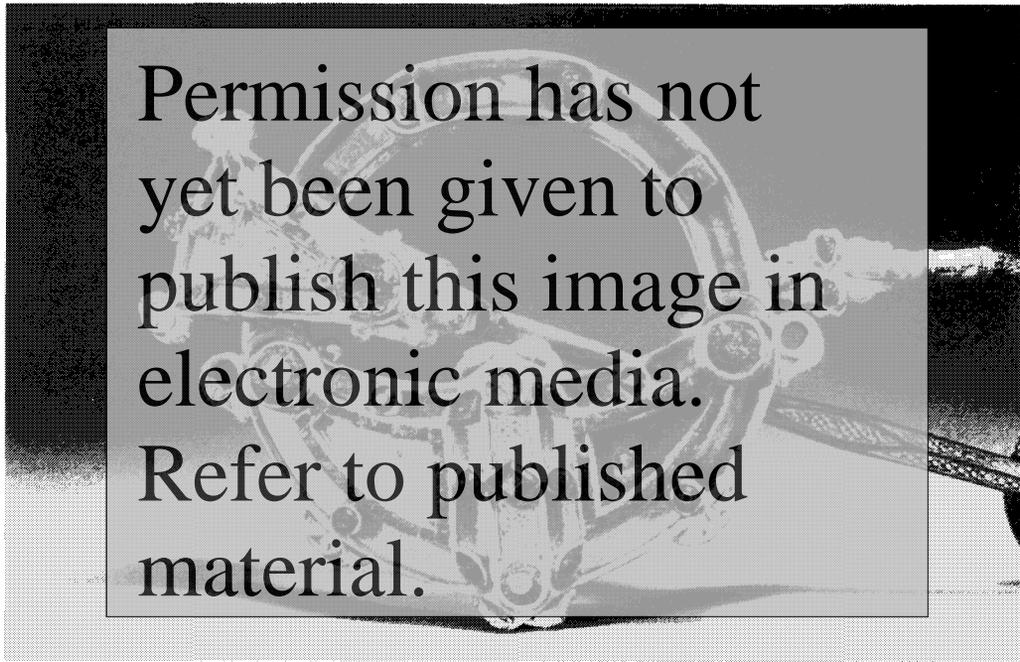


FIG. 14

Tara brooch, Bettystown, Co. Meath. Not shown to scale. *Photograph* © National Museum of Ireland.

Like MacDermott,³⁷ Bourke noted that a crook fragment from Ireland, now in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh (NMAK D1), shared a number of ornamental features with these three crosiers, particularly on the margins of the knobs in the use of pendant triangles united at the tips by a narrow circumferential band. According to Bourke, Irish crosier knobs show a sequential development. He noted that some early crosiers were provided with cylindrical expanded knobs, which were of three different kinds: (1) those divided medially, (2) those bearing small panels and pendant triangles, (3) those bearing panels in rows. In Bourke's sequence, the form of knob found on the crosiers of St Dymphna and St Mel, the Kells crosier and the NMAK fragment are all of the second type and may all be of 9th-century date. He noted that the knob on the unprovenanced (NMAK) crook fragment, like the lowermost knob on St Dymphna's crosier, was not divided into panels. In both these cases they are divided at their widest point into two halves by a narrow band. This feature is shared by the Prosperous crosier, the chip-carved knob from Hedeby, Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany, and the uppermost knob of a crosier from Durrow, Co. Offaly, all of which are assigned an early date by Bourke.³⁸ The crosier from Prosperous, Co. Kildare, is traditionally dated to the 10th century because of the meander pattern on the knobs (Figs. 22–4). Bourke, however, makes a strong case for assigning it to the early part of the 9th century.

³⁷ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 11, 175.

³⁸ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, 171.

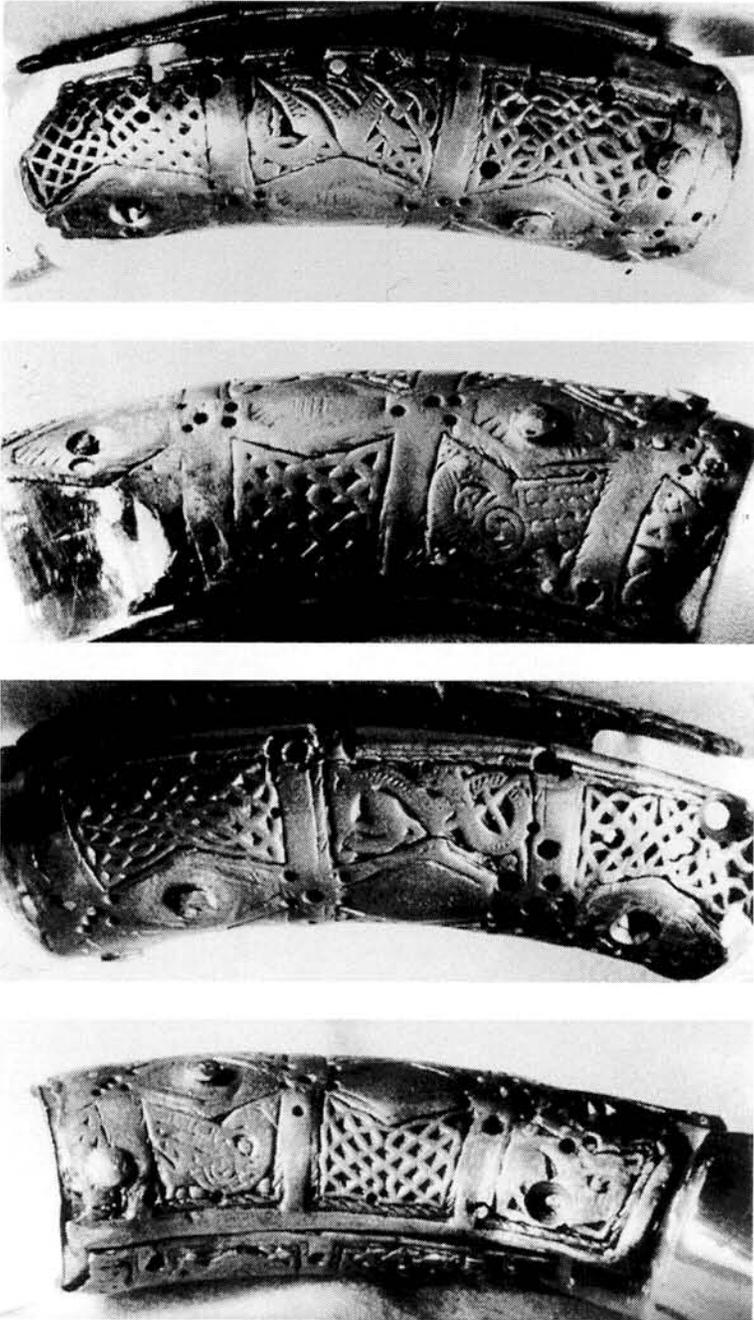


FIG. 15

St Dymphna's crosier: crook. Not shown to scale. *Photographs after MacDermott, 1957.*

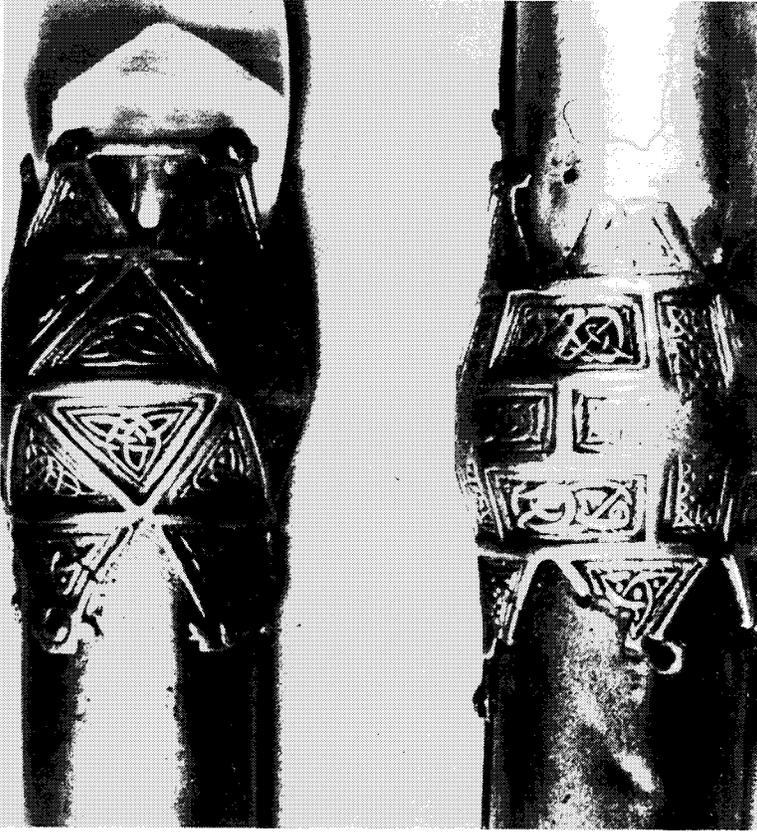


FIG. 16

St Dympna's crozier: knop. Not shown to scale. *Photograph after MacDermott, 1957.*

He argues that its zoomorphic decoration shows strong connections with that of the Irish object from Helgö, Sweden, and several other pieces of 8th-century metalwork, all of which relate in turn to the art of the Book of Kells.³⁹

Finally, Bourke asserts that the animal ornament on the crook of a crozier from Inishmurray, Co. Sligo, is related in style and thus contemporary with the Kells crozier and the croziers of St Dympna and St Mel, all of which he assigns to the late 9th century.⁴⁰ He claims that the earliest evidence for the inclusion of relic cavities is provided by the Inishmurray crozier and the crozier of St Mel, which, in their original construction were furnished with a means of access to the interior of the drop as an integral feature.⁴¹

In her paper on Hiberno-Scottish croziers, Michelli maintains that in Ireland the angular form of crook, with an almost perpendicular drop, tends to be early.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁰ C. Bourke, 'A crozier and bell from Inishmurray and their place in ninth-century Irish archaeology', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 85C (1985), 148–68.

⁴¹ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, 172.

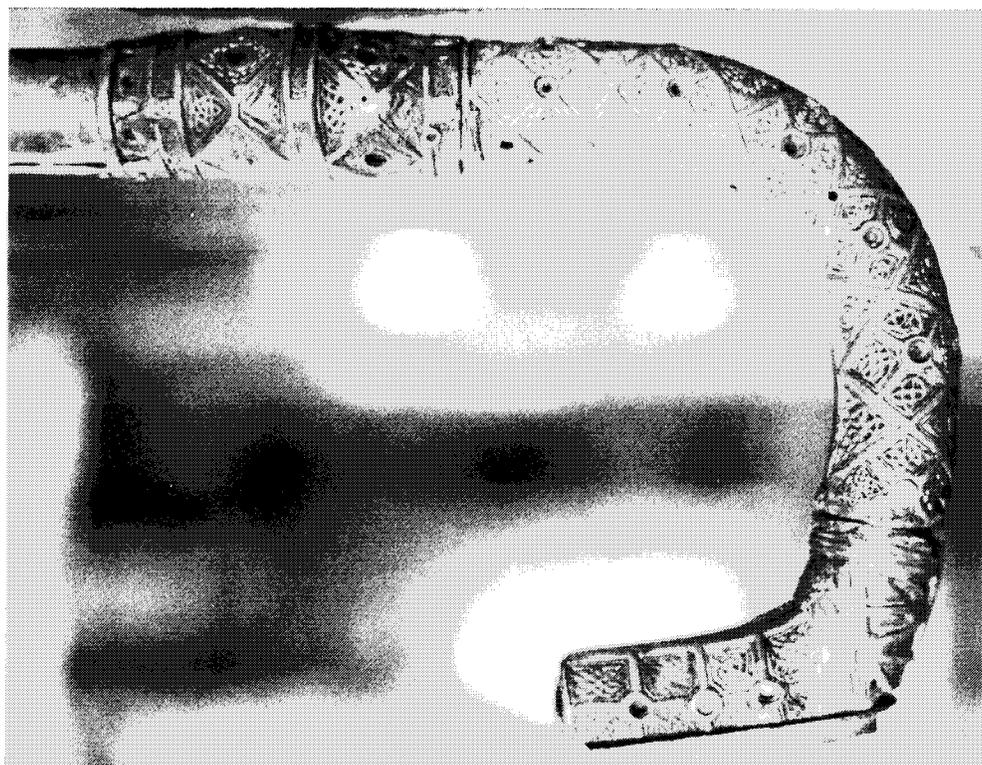
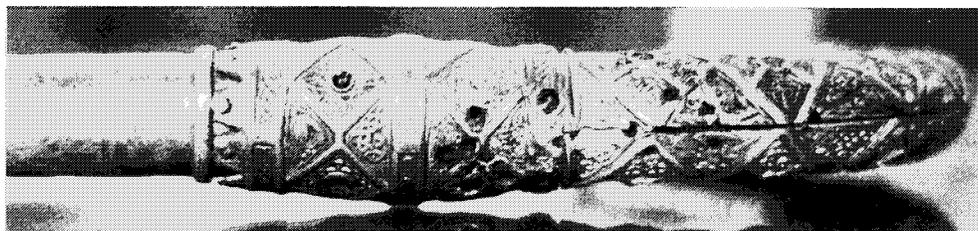


FIG. 17

St Mel's crozier: crook. Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs, taken with permission of St Mel's Diocesan College, Longford.*

For this and other reasons, she regards the Prosperous crozier, crozier fragments from the River Bann, a crozier fragment in the Ulster Museum and a portion of a crozier from Shankill, Co. Antrim, as 10th-century or earlier in date.⁴² Two other Irish crosiers, those of St Mel and St Blathmac, with angular crooks are assigned by Michelli to the early 11th century. According to Michelli, the panels of interlace on St Mel's crozier have low inner frames which are unparalleled on other 10th-century Irish metalwork. Michelli notes that this and other shared features can,

⁴² Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 380–5.

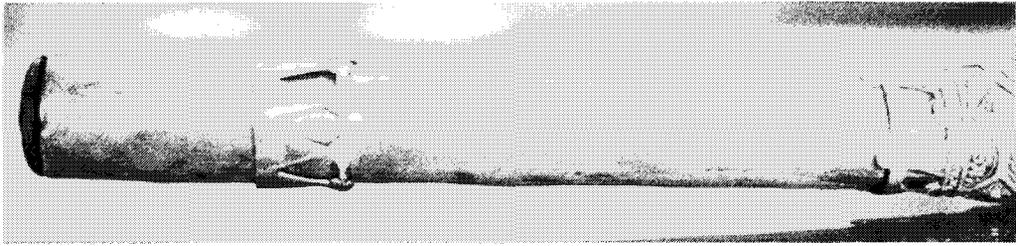


FIG. 18

St Mel's crozier: ferrule and lower binding strip. Not shown to scale. *Author's photograph, taken with permission of St Mel's Diocesan College, Longford.*

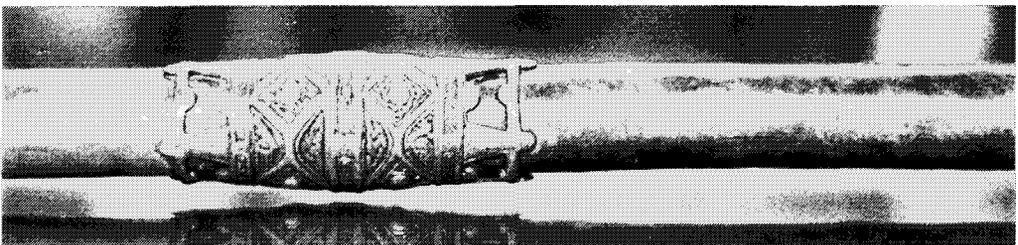
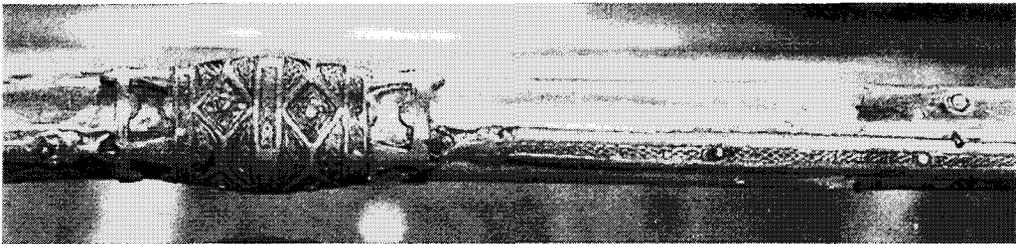


FIG. 19

St Mel's crozier: knobs and binding strips. Not shown to scale. *Author's photograph, taken with permission of St Mel's Diocesan College, Longford.*

however, be found on the crest of the *Corp Naomh* which she dates to the early 11th century by comparison with the *Soiscél Molaise*. St Mel's crozier, she asserts, must also belong to this later date.

Regarding St Dympna's crozier, Michelli notes certain singularities in the treatment of the interlace on the crook and uppermost drop which are shared with

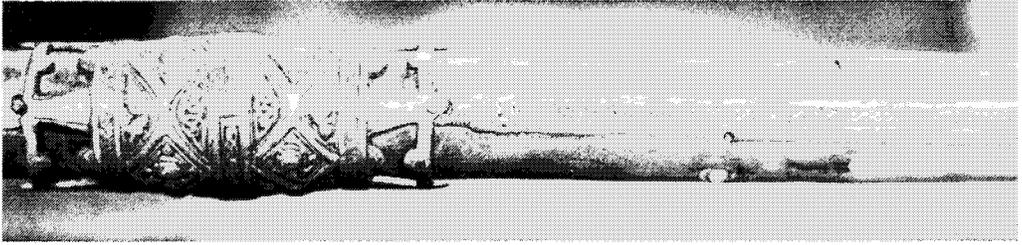


FIG. 20

St Mel's crosier: knobs and binding strips. Not shown to scale. *Author's photograph, taken with permission of St Mel's Diocesan College, Longford.*

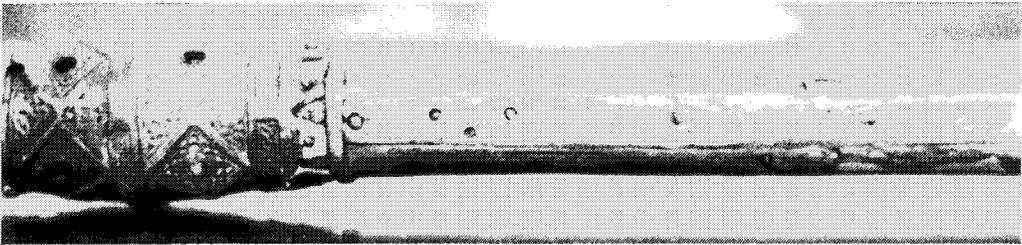
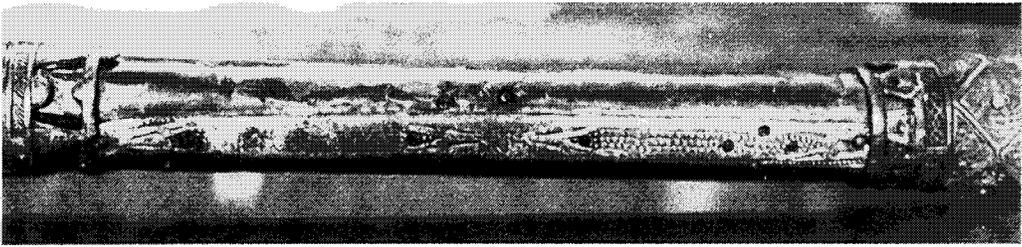


FIG. 21

St Mel's crosier: binding strips. Not shown to scale. *Author's photograph, taken with permission of St Mel's Diocesan College, Longford.*

an unprovenanced drop and with the *Soiscél Molaise*. These are the shallow execution with tightly woven multiple strands of fleshy appearance and the sinuous non-angular weaving which adds emphasis to the elbows projecting into the corner of the field. She contends that an early 10th-century date is most unlikely for St Dymphna's crosier because its cast panels are in no way related to the native

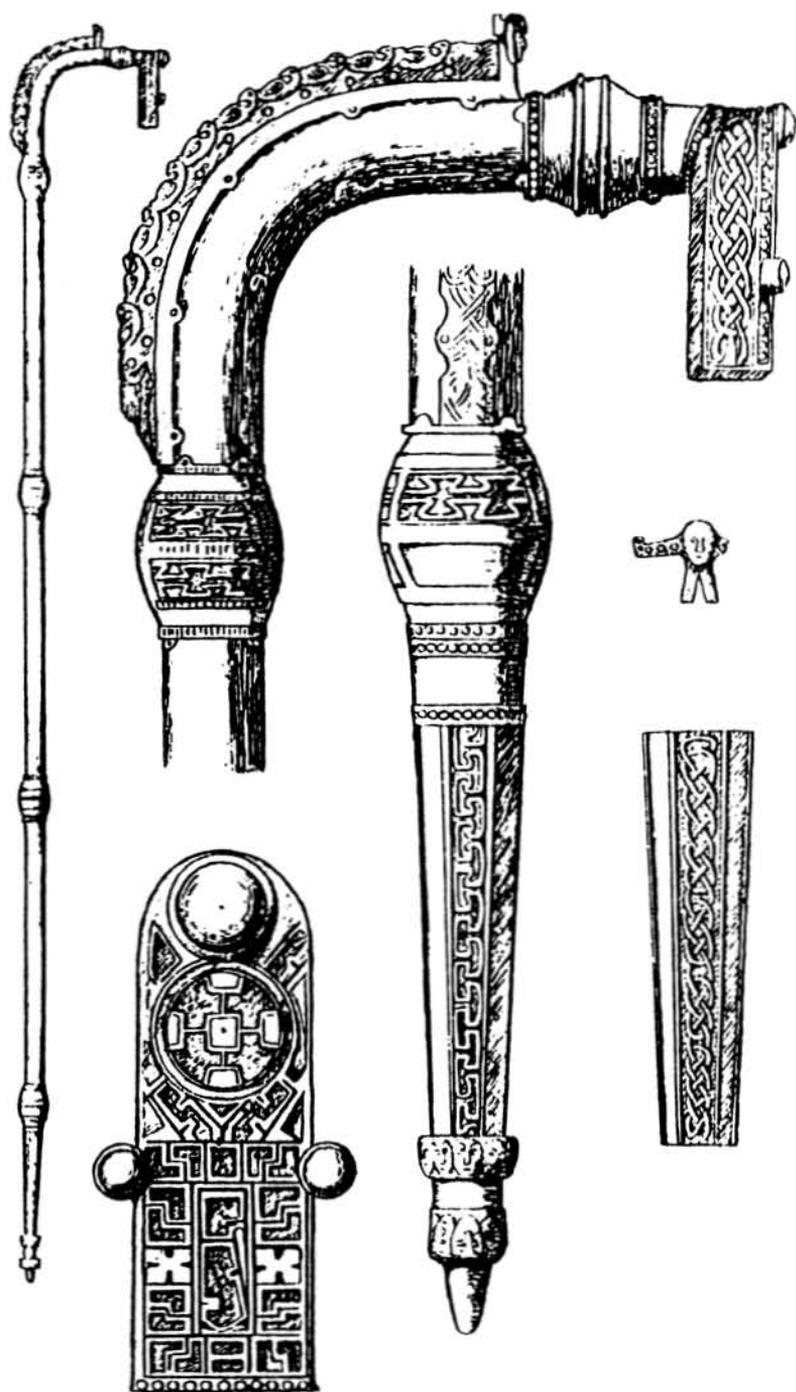


FIG. 22

Prosperous crosier. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after Crawford, 1926.*

tradition of chip-carved work of the 8th and 9th centuries. Instead, an early 11th-century date is proposed, in line with the date allocated by Michelli to the crosier of St Mel. In a more recent article, Michelli re-asserts her position on the date of the crosier of St Dympna, placing it around A.D. 1000, and supports the 1039 date and Cashel provenance proposed by MacDermott for the Kells crosier's refurbishment and inscription.⁴³

Michelli's main line of argument is to show that four Scottish crosier fragments are closely related in their structure and decoration to those from early-medieval Ireland. She argues that this group of metal artefacts demonstrates close contact between the craftsmen of Scotland and the northern part of Ireland in this period, but that the Scottish crosier tradition was 50 to 100 years behind the Irish.⁴⁴ Such a considerable time-lag between the two traditions seems to me most unlikely considering the proximity of the two countries and the well-documented ecclesiastical contacts and connections between Ireland and Scotland throughout the early-medieval period. The Scottish borrowing of ideas may well have resulted in the Scottish crosier-maker running somewhat behind the Irish tradition but a time-lag of 25 years to 50 at maximum would seem more probable. In fact, the existence of any time-lag is scarcely believable.

Although they differ widely in their views on the dating of the various crosiers, MacDermott, Bourke and Michelli do have certain things in common regarding their approach and overview. Firstly, all three writers agree that parts of the Kells crosier and the crosiers of St Dympna and St Mel are closely related in their structure and style and all belong to the same cultural and chronological horizon. Therefore, to date one is to date them all.

Further, none of these commentators considers bossed penannular brooches as relevant to the discussion despite the fact that, like the knops of the crosiers, the surface areas of these brooches were divided into small panels containing contorted zoomorphic representations. This new form of penannular brooch emerged in the mid-9th century and was current in the Irish Sea Province until the early to mid-10th century.⁴⁵

The possibility of links between the decoration of bossed penannular brooches and the Trewhiddle style has been discussed by numerous scholars. Similarly, MacDermott and Bourke both accept links between the Trewhiddle style and the art of the crosiers. Nevertheless, it is clear that MacDermott regards the bossed penannular brooches as 'Hiberno-Viking' and therefore of quite different nature to the native metalwork of the same period, including the crosiers. This is also implicit in Bourke's evaluation of the division of crosier knops into panels, although he does link it to the native pseudo-penannular brooch tradition of the 8th and 9th centuries.

⁴³ Michelli (1996), *op. cit.* in note 3, 1.

⁴⁴ Michelli (1986), *op. cit.* in note 3, 375.

⁴⁵ They are characterised by the use of silver in their manufacture, by their large size and expanded terminals with raised bosses, which are often connected by networks of hatched bands. Each of the fields between the hatched bands may be filled with a contorted zoomorph.

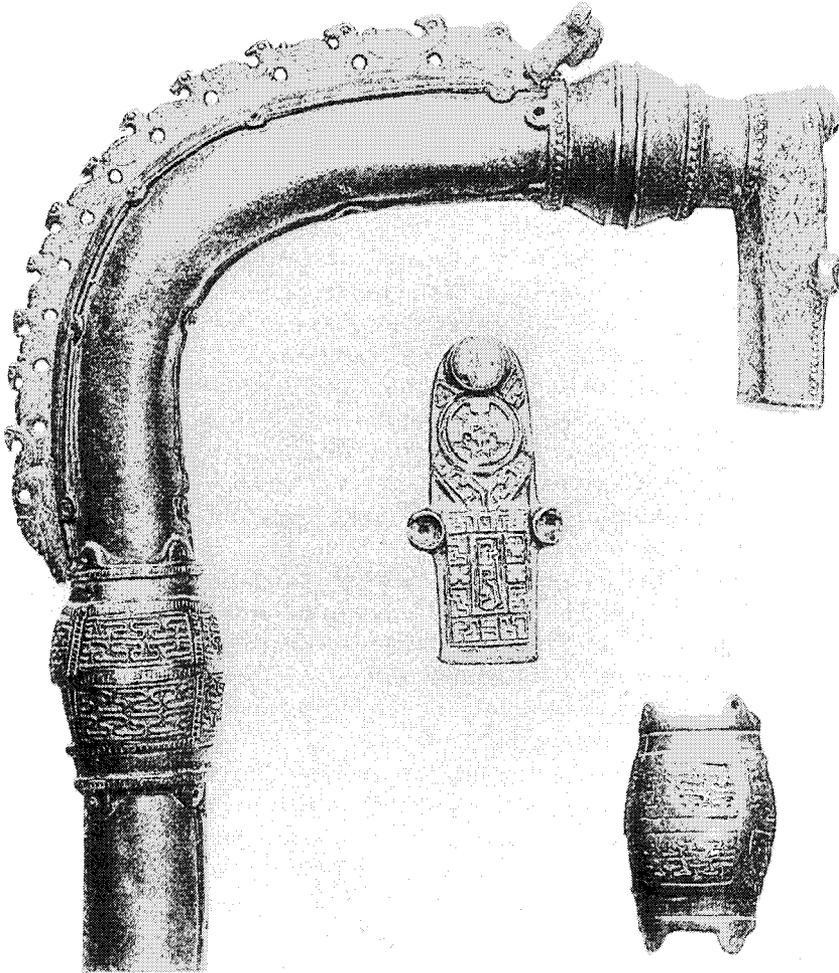


FIG. 23

Prosperous crosier: crook, drop face and knob. Not shown to scale. *Photograph after Mahr, 1932.*

Parallels with motif-pieces

It must be noted that in discussion of the crosiers, only MacDermott draws on the art of the motif-pieces for comparative purposes.⁴⁶ This article is much longer than either Bourke or Michelli's contributions, enabling her to draw on a greater body of comparative material. The decorative range and function of the Irish motif-pieces was the subject of an in-depth study by Uannin O'Meadhra who suggests that there is enough evidence of skilful work on certain objects of this class to suggest that some may have been used in the design of high quality metalwork.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, 86.

⁴⁷ U. O'Meadhra, *Motif-Pieces from Ireland. 2: A Discussion* (Stockholm, 1987), 162.

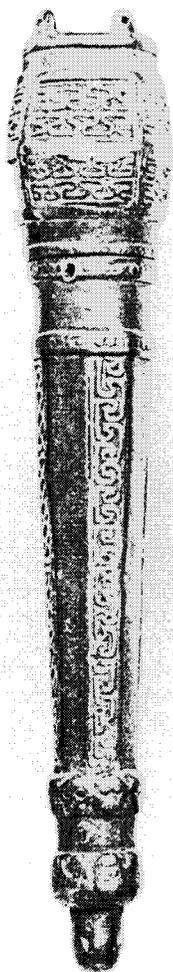


FIG. 24

Prosperous crosier: ferrule. Not shown to scale. *Photograph after Mahr, 1932.*

Since O'Meadhra's original corpus of Irish motif-pieces was collated in the 1970s a large number of new motif-pieces has come to light, mainly from recent excavations at Fishamble Street and Christchurch Place but also from Little Ship Street, Dublin.⁴⁸ The majority of these pieces await publication but it has been recognised that many share zoomorphic and interlace decoration with items of high-quality ecclesiastical Irish metalwork, including the Kells (British Museum) crosier. For the first time, contextual dates have been afforded to several of these recently excavated motif-pieces from Dublin (this work was begun by D. Caulfield and continued by the present writer). These motif-pieces are important because of their stylistic association with metalwork which is of disputed date and provenance. Unlike most metalwork of the period, the motif-pieces are dated by archaeological

⁴⁸ L. Simpson, pers. comm.

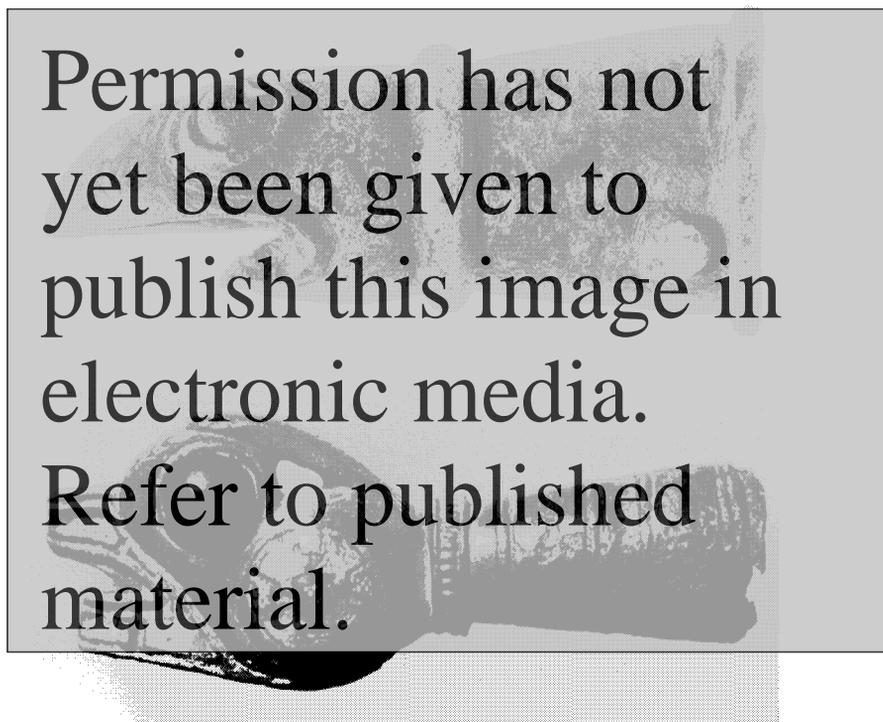


FIG. 25

Copper-alloy zoomorphic terminals. Not shown to scale. *a.* (BM 1992, 4-5, 1) photograph © British Museum. *b.* photograph © Ashmolean Museum.

association and may be even be accurately provenanced to individual workshop sites.

Several motif-pieces from Christchurch Place (NMI E122:16274, E122:15234, Fig. 26; E122:15928, E122:11584) have zoomorphic panels which are very close in style to the animals identified by MacDermott on the Kells crozier. The finely carved bone motif-piece, NMI E122:16274, was found in a layer of organic material in the north-west compartment of house CP253/1 which the excavator, B. Ó Ríordáin, dates to the first half of the 11th century.⁴⁹ This piece is decorated on three sides with a wide variety of interlace patterns and a quadruped shown in profile. The latter has a backward-looking head and open jaws each terminating in a lobed curl, from which a long tongue projects. The fore-leg has a spiral hip-joint and the creature terminates in a foliate tail. In many ways, this creature resembles the animals on knop 1 of the Kells (British Museum) crozier.⁵⁰ The remaining repertoire on this piece is of interlace motifs in rectangular, round, triangular and semi-circular fields. Several other motif-pieces (NMI E122:16375, E122:16463 and

⁴⁹ H. K. Murray, *Viking and Early Medieval Buildings in Dublin* (BAR Brit. Ser., 119, Oxford, 1983), 204.

⁵⁰ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, fig. 9.

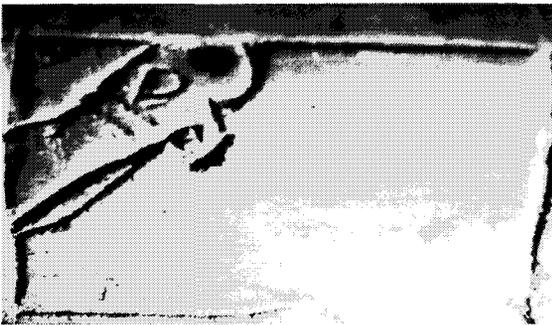
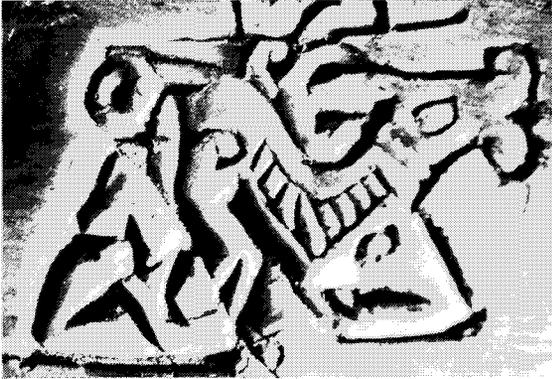


FIG. 26

Details of bone motif-piece (NMI E122:15234) from Christchurch Place, Dublin. Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs.*

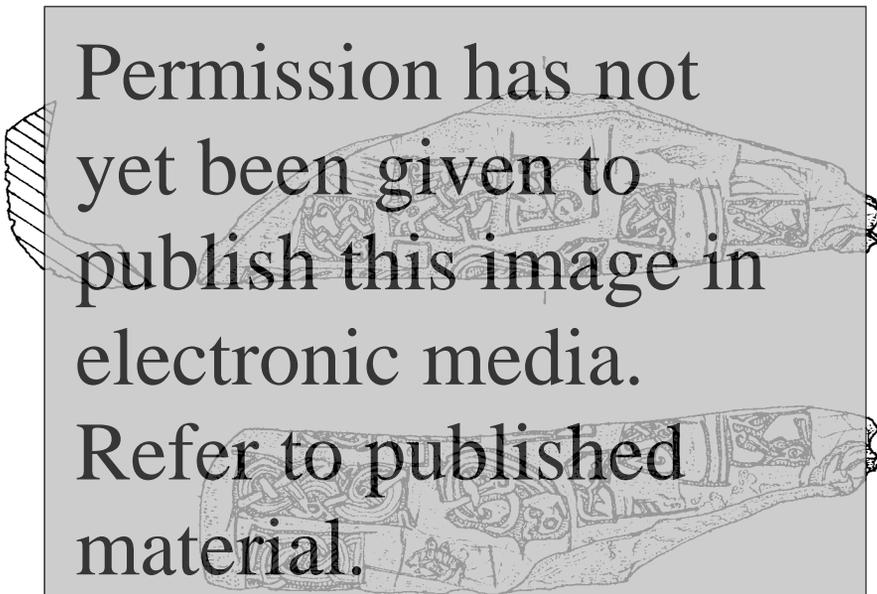


FIG. 27

Bone motif-piece (NMI E122:16264) from Christchurch Place, Dublin. Not shown to scale. *Drawing © National Museum of Ireland.*



FIG. 28

Details of animal ornamentation on a bone motif-piece (NMI E.122:16264) from Christchurch Place, Dublin.
Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs.*



FIG. 29

Details of animal ornamentation on a bone motif-piece (NMI E122:16264) from Christchurch Place, Dublin.
Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs.*

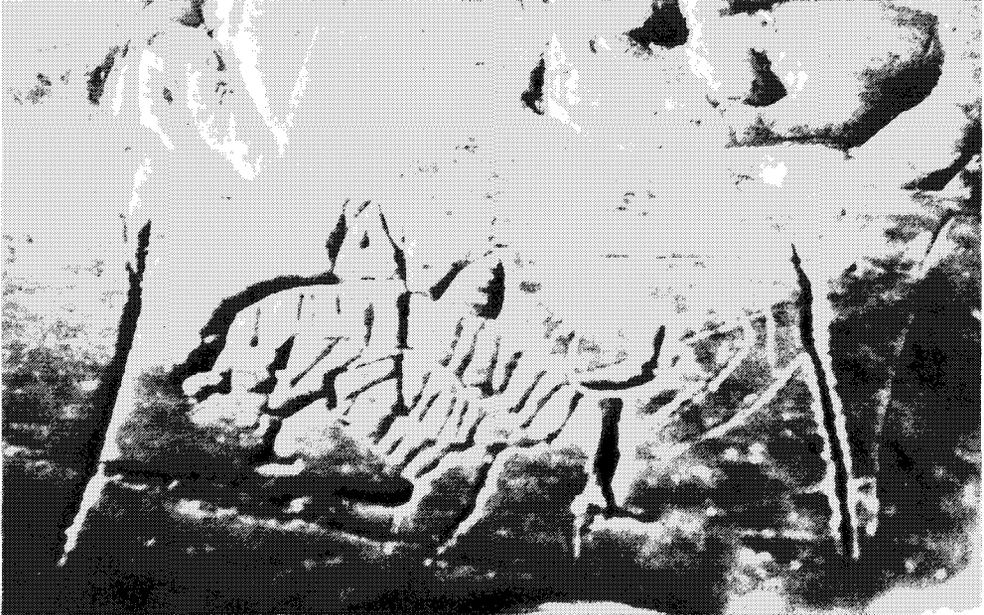


FIG. 30

Details of animal ornamentation on a bone motif-piece (NMI E122:16264) from Christchurch Place, Dublin.
Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs.*

E122:16264; Figs. 27–30) were recovered from this house, one of which bears animals relating to those on the *Soiscél Molaise* (NMI E122:16264).

The most striking similarity with the Kells crozier and the art of the motif-pieces from Christ Church Place is provided by a piece which, unfortunately,

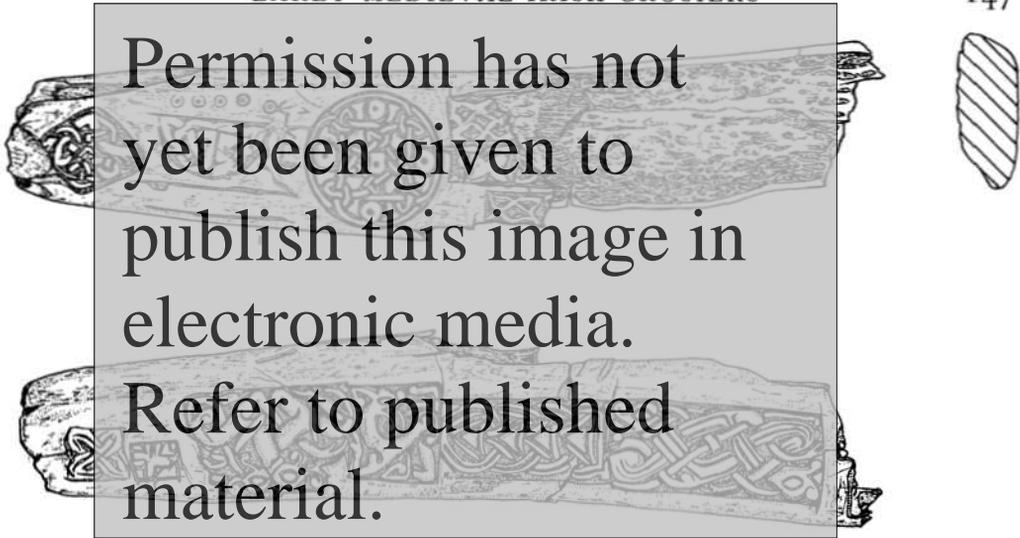


FIG. 31

Bone motif-piece (NMI E122:6567) from Christchurch Place, Dublin. Not shown to scale. *Drawing © National Museum of Ireland.*

cannot be dated firmly by the writer but probably belongs to the early 11th-century horizon on the basis of its high site registration number (e.g. NMI E122:15234; Fig. 26). This bone piece has one finished zoomorphic representation and another which is incomplete. The finished animal is lively and crisply carved. Shown in profile, it has spiral hips, a laddered body, open jaws, a band across the neck, an interlaced head lappet and tail and two-toed feet. Butted up against the hindquarters of the creature is a triquetra motif. This animal shares many attributes with a creature on knob 1 of the Kells crosier.⁵¹ Most of the other patterns on the piece are simple triquetra knots and duplexes at different stages of completion.

Motif-piece NMI E122:15928 is also extremely important in this context because it displays a variety of animals including single animals in triangular fields similar to those found on the Kells crosier and paired animals related to the Jellinge style. Almost exactly identical to the paired animals on this piece is a panel on another motif-piece, NMI E122:16060, which has been dated by archaeological association to the mid-11th century. Finally, motif-piece NMI E122:11584, which was found in a 10th-century pit at Christ Church Place, has been shown by Ó Riordáin to relate closely to the animal style of the Kells crosier.⁵² Other notable pieces sharing this type of animal ornament include NMI E122:6567 (Fig. 31) which can only be dated loosely to before A.D. 1300, and NMI E122:9270 (Fig. 32) from an uncertain context.

Apart from animal ornament, certain other aspects of the decoration of the Kells (British Museum) crosier are paralleled by motif-pieces from Dublin. For

⁵¹ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, fig. 9.2.

⁵² B. Ó Riordáin, 'Aspects of Viking Dublin', 43–5 in H. Bekker-Nielsen, P. Foote and O. Olsen (eds.), *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress* (Odense, 1981), esp. fig. 4.

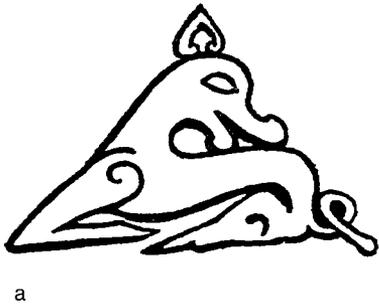


FIG. 32

- a. Animal ornamentation from British Museum crozier. Not shown to scale. *Drawing after MacDermott.*
 b. Detail of animal ornamentation on a bone motif-piece from Christchurch Place, Dublin. Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs.*

instance, the fret pattern on the inner portion of the crook is similar to that on a piece from Winetavern Street NMI E71:16976 and details of the interlace on the inner crook are found also in the motif-repertoire, for example on NMI E122:11001.⁵³ Having established a strong connection between certain aspects of the art of the Kells crozier and the Dublin motif-pieces of the late 10th and early 11th centuries, it is necessary to examine also what is not paralleled. In particular, the earliest period of the Kells crozier, the crozier of St Dymrna and particularly that of St Mel all have panels of bird ornament which is not found anywhere amongst the considerable sample of motif-pieces from Dublin.⁵⁴ The croziers also

⁵³ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, fig. 3.

⁵⁴ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, figs. 9.1 and 11.18; *id.*, *op. cit.* in note 11, figs. 1a, 4.1 and 4.5, 5.2 and 6.1-3.

bear foliate motifs, spiral ornamentation and zoomorphic triskeles⁵⁵ all of which are virtually absent from the Dublin assemblage.

The evidence provided by the motif-pieces show that the lively style of quadruped exemplified by the earliest phase of the Kells crosier was still as vigorous and energetic as ever in the early 11th century and had not degenerated to the extent which MacDermott had supposed. The absence of certain characteristics in the motif-piece repertoire which made up the style of the crosiers would lead the current writer to caution against suggesting a Dublin workshop for the crosiers. I would, however, argue that the Dublin motif-pieces represent a continuation of a style which evolved in the mid-10th century and continued into the first half of the 11th century when it contributed to the art of the *Soiscél Molaise*.

The Dublin motif-piece evidence for the continued existence of the vigorous animal style in the late 10th and early 11th century causes the writer to reject Bourke's early dating for this group of crosiers. Further, if we accept MacDermott's Cashel identification for the refurbishment of the Kells crosier and the addition of the inscription in 1039, it would suggest that the first period of the crosier cannot be dated much later than the beginning of the 11th century. A mid- to late 10th century date for the style epitomised by the crosier and its counterparts would therefore seem more likely.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that this animal style developed from a strong native tradition best represented by a group of 9th-century pseudo-penannular brooches, enlivened by influences from the Anglo-Saxon Trewhiddle style. The occurrence in early 11th-century levels in Dublin of a bone motif-piece bearing Trewhiddle style ornament (NMI E122:9732; Fig. 33) may suggest that there was some delay in this style being embraced by Irish workshops. Equally, it may be reflective of the continuation of certain selected decorative elements: in short, another example of the eclecticism of the Irish artist in the late 10th and early 11th centuries (a saddle bow and motif-piece from York, both of which are decorated in variants of the Trewhiddle style, are placed in the late 9th century).⁵⁷ Finally, it is suggested here that the origin of the division into panels, found on the bossed penannular brooches, is the same as for the decorative division of the crosier knops and crooks, both of which stem, in the writer's opinion, from the decoration of 9th-century pseudo-penannular brooches combined with influences derived from contact with styles current in the south of England in the 9th century.

Summary

In summary, an analysis of recently proposed dates for the Kells crosier and the crosiers of St Dymphna and St Mel reveals a return to the tendency to polarise decorated artefacts backwards or forwards towards 'fixed' dating points in the 8th and late 11th and 12th centuries. It is as difficult to accept these dates now as it was for MacDermott when they were proposed by earlier scholars, such as Crawford.

⁵⁵ MacDermott, *op. cit.* in note 20, figs. 8 and 13a-c and e; *id.*, *op. cit.* in note 11, figs. 3.5, 4.4 and 6.5-6.

⁵⁶ This includes the crosier from Inishmurray, Co. Sligo: cf. Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 40.

⁵⁷ Cf. L. Webster and J. Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture A.D. 600-900*, (London, 1991), cat. nos. 253-4.



FIG. 33

Details of animal ornamentation on a bone motif-piece (NMI E122:9732) from Christchurch Place, Dublin. Not shown to scale. *Author's photographs.*

This is primarily because the reason for the gap in the 10th century has still not been adequately explained. Further, the new comparative evidence provided by context-dated motif-pieces and other excavated decorated material from Dublin must be recognised.

The work on the motif-piece parallels from Dublin was preceded by O'Meadhra who independently arrived at the same conclusions regarding the crosiers; her reasoning is summarised thus:

I do not support a 9th-century date for this style and interpret its chronological development differently from MacDermott on the basis of the range of motifs and the stratigraphical dating of the motif-pieces at Christ Church Place, Dublin. On the 'Kells' crosier we can see besides 11th-century(?) foliage on the upper binding strip, two panels where Scandinavian type forward pointing eyes occur on otherwise purely Irish animal motifs.

On this basis, O'Meadhra is in favour of an early 11th-century date for the manufacture of the Kells crosier. However, the distinctive pointed eye which O'Meadhra considers to be a diagnostically late feature introduced through contact with Scandinavian styles of the 11th century occurs at a much earlier date in the corpus of wood from Dublin; for example, a zoomorphic chair terminal, which belongs to James Lang's 'West Viking' style of woodcarving, was found in building level five at Fishamble Street, dating it to the middle of the 10th century.⁵⁸ Thus, there is no reason to assume that the animal style of the Kells crosier, with its eclectic mix of Anglian and Scandinavian minor elements, was not already fully developed by the second half of the 10th century.

⁵⁸ J. T. Lang, *Viking-Age Decorated Wood: A Study of its Ornament and Style* (Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81, Ser. B, 1, Dublin, 1988).

Finally, it should be noted that the motif-pieces from Dublin which provide decorative parallels for the crosiers come from 10th- and 11th-century levels. This does not disprove an earlier date for the style as this is the date of the levels on the sites excavated before the 1990s. Until recently, there was little evidence for occupation and artistic activity in Dublin during the 9th century. However, Linzi Simpson's excavations at Temple Bar appear to date from this earlier period and have also produced a number of bone motif-pieces, none of which have ornamentation comparable to the crosiers.

Another complete crosier deserves consideration here, as it is believed to be the earliest item of Irish ecclesiastical metalwork which shows Scandinavian influence in its style of decoration.

THE PROSPEROUS CROSIER

The Prosperous crosier (Figs. 22-4) is one of several Irish crosiers of the early medieval period which have survived in an almost intact state. It was found c. 1840 in a bog near the village of Prosperous in Co. Kildare and may have thus belonged to a prominent ecclesiastic of the locality. It is now in the care of Clongowes Wood College in Co. Kildare and was shown to the writer by kind permission of Father Dermot Murray and Father Kieran Hanley. The crosier was the subject of an undergraduate thesis by Philomena Tomany at the Queen's University, Belfast in 1977. A thorough description of the Prosperous crosier, which was prepared by Tomany as part of this thesis was subsequently revised by McNeill and illustrated with photographs by Hartwell for publication. This important description should be read in conjunction with the following discussion.⁵⁹

Prior to Tomany's study, the crosier was mentioned in several publications but had never been fully described, leading to erroneous conclusions on its structure, decoration and the techniques involved in its manufacture. It was first referred to in a short journal article in 1861 by J. O'Laverty.⁶⁰ Crawford later included a brief description in his paper on Irish shrines and reliquaries⁶¹ and Adolf Mahr and Joseph Raftery's two volume work included the best photographs of the crosier published to date.⁶² Raftery placed it in his Hiberno-Viking style of decoration and dated it to c. A.D. 1000, although it is difficult to establish exactly why this date was proposed.⁶³ MacDermott considered it to stand apart from the crosiers of St Dymphna, St Mel and the Kells (British Museum) crosier. She found strong parallels amongst the Manx crosses for the meander pattern which forms the main decoration on the knops, strengthening its placement in the 10th-century

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Dr Tom McNeill for providing access to both the paper and the photographs for reference purposes when I was researching this paper. The crosier was later sent to the Ulster Museum for conservation work where it was consolidated and mounted on a perspex plate for stability. Nails which had been used to repair a break in the staff were removed at this time and the crosier was displayed as part of a temporary exhibition at the Ulster Museum before its return to the College.

⁶⁰ J. O'Laverty, 'An ancient Irish crosier', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 9 (1861), 51-6.

⁶¹ H. S. Crawford, 'A descriptive list of Irish shrines and reliquaries', *J. Royal Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 52 (1922-3), 151-76, at p. 168.

⁶² A. Mahr, *Christian Art in Ancient Ireland, Vol. I* (Dublin, 1932), pl. 73:5, and pp. 74-5; J. Raftery, *Christian Art in Ancient Ireland, Vol. II* (Dublin, 1941), 145-6.

⁶³ Raftery, loc. cit. in note 62.

Hiberno-Viking milieu. In 1967, Françoise Henry, following Raftery's description, mistakenly described the crosier knobs and ferrule as enamelled when in fact the only enamelling is found on the face of the drop. She noted the unusual shape of the crook when compared to other Irish crosiers of the early-medieval period and attempted to explain this by suggesting that the crook had been repaired with fragments of a dismantled crosier.⁶⁴ The most recent published discussion of the Prosperous crosier is by Bourke.⁶⁵ He argued that the crosier is of only one period and attempted to place it in the 9th century through comparison of its ornamentation with the art of the Book of Kells.

Such an important piece must be fully described here in order to establish its structure, style of decoration and, ultimately, its date. The description in the appendix is necessarily heavily reliant on the findings of Tomany, McNeill and Hartwell. Incorporated with their findings are the writer's own observations made as a result of viewing the object first-hand and from a study of the detailed photographic record made by Hartwell.⁶⁶

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic ornamentation

Bourke compared the Prosperous crosier with an unusual 8th-century crook from Helgö in Sweden and a zoomorphic terminal now in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 25b).⁶⁷ He argued that this small group of related objects has connections with the art of the Book of Kells and should belong to the early 9th century. Bourke cited an example of a human head surmounting the top of a capital volute in the Book of Kells as a parallel for the head on the crosier crest (Fig. 22). This evidence is interesting as a precedent for the position of the head mounted on a curved terminal but by no means provides an absolute stylistic parallel for the horned head on the crosier. Horn-headed humans also occur in pagan Celtic metalwork such as the Gundestrup Cauldron which dates to the 1st century B.C. In this case, however, the horns point upwards and are clearly meant to represent the antlers of a stag. The shape of the various heads found on the crosier are all similar to that on the context-dated Ballinderry game-board which may help to confirm the 10th-century date proposed by Raftery.⁶⁸ Further, the horn is treated with ring-and-dot patterns which is a typical motif on 10th-century metalwork from Dublin, although ring-and-dot patterns also occur on earlier material, particularly spindle-whorls.

Enamelling and glass settings

The drop face (Figs. 22–3) is the only portion of the whole crosier which bears enamel and glass inlays, despite Raftery and Henry's contrary assumption that the shaft knobs and ferrule were also originally filled with enamelling.⁶⁹ These

⁶⁴ Henry, *op. cit.* in note 8, 116.

⁶⁵ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, 166–73.

⁶⁶ Thanks to Dr McNeill for his lively discussion of the structural and stylistic aspects of the piece and to Mr Hartwell for allowing access to his photographs.

⁶⁷ S. Youngs (ed.), *op. cit.* in note 5, pl. 55.

⁶⁸ See R. Johnson, 'Ballinderry Crannóg: a reinterpretation', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 99C/2 (1999), for a discussion of this site.

⁶⁹ Raftery, *op. cit.* in note 62, 145; Henry, *op. cit.* in note 8, 116–17.

polychrome features are more reminiscent of the 8th century than the 9th and 10th centuries when amber was becoming more frequently used for inlays in place of blue glass, and enamels were less commonly used. Nevertheless, rigid geometrical enclosures or cloisons filled with red enamel are found on certain disc mounts which have been attributed to the 10th and 11th centuries. James Graham-Campbell has noted close parallels in mid-9th- to late 10th-century contexts in the Isle of Man, Ireland and Norway for a late Celtic enamelled harness mount from Galson, Isle of Lewis.⁷⁰ This evidence indicates that simple geometric enamel designs in one or two colours continued to be produced in Insular workshops during the Viking Period.

While the Prosperous crosier has been dated by Bourke to the 9th century, the form of some of the enamel cells may equally be in keeping with a late 10th- or early 11th-century date. Enamelled disc-mounts, such as that found in a 10th-century context at High Street Dublin (NMI E43:2340) also bear rectilinear and stepped fields filled with red enamel.⁷¹ A conical mount (NMI E172:2798), found under collapsed wattle on the floor of a house in building level 12/13, a mid-11th-century context at Fishamble Street, is also decorated with a rectilinear grid of red enamelling. Its pattern resembles that on the cast hinge of the *Soiscél Molaise* as well as the work on the Prosperous crosier. Other examples of this type of enamelling have been found in 11th-century contexts at Christchurch Place (NMI E122:14689). The rigid geometrical monochrome enamelling of the 10th and early 11th centuries is later replaced by finer polychrome enamels in the 12th century, as epitomised by the Cross of Cong school.⁷² On balance, however, the polychrome enamels and blue glass inlays on the drop face are more suggestive of an early, than a late date for this component.

Abstract ornamentation

The meander on the shaft-knops is a relatively simple motif, and could occur on artefacts of various dates. Nevertheless, its use in Ireland is relatively limited. Prior to the excavations in Dublin, this motif was believed to be of Manx origin, being common on early Scandinavian cross slabs from the Isle of Man but otherwise having few parallels in Ireland, one notable exception being an 8th-century slab from Clonmacnoise.⁷³ The Dublin excavations have shown that the pattern was in use in Ireland in the 10th century.

The pattern is found on several items of decorated wood from Ireland which are considered by the writer to belong to the 10th century. For example, the meander is found on a knobbed-rod from Cavan and on a wooden bird-shaped dipper of unknown provenance (NMI R1700/WK248). The lobed meander or T-fret is probably of Scandinavian origin or, at least, West Viking, as it occurs with

⁷⁰ J. A. Graham-Campbell, 'A late Celtic mount from Galson, Isle of Lewis', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 116 (1986), 281-4.

⁷¹ A. T. Lucas, *Treasures of Ireland: Irish Pagan and Early Christian Art* (Dublin, 1973), no. 8.

⁷² R. Ó Floinn, 'Schools of metalworking in eleventh and twelfth century Ireland', 179-87 in M. Ryan (ed.), *Ireland and Insular Art* (Dublin, 1987), at p. 186.

⁷³ C. Bourke, pers. comm.

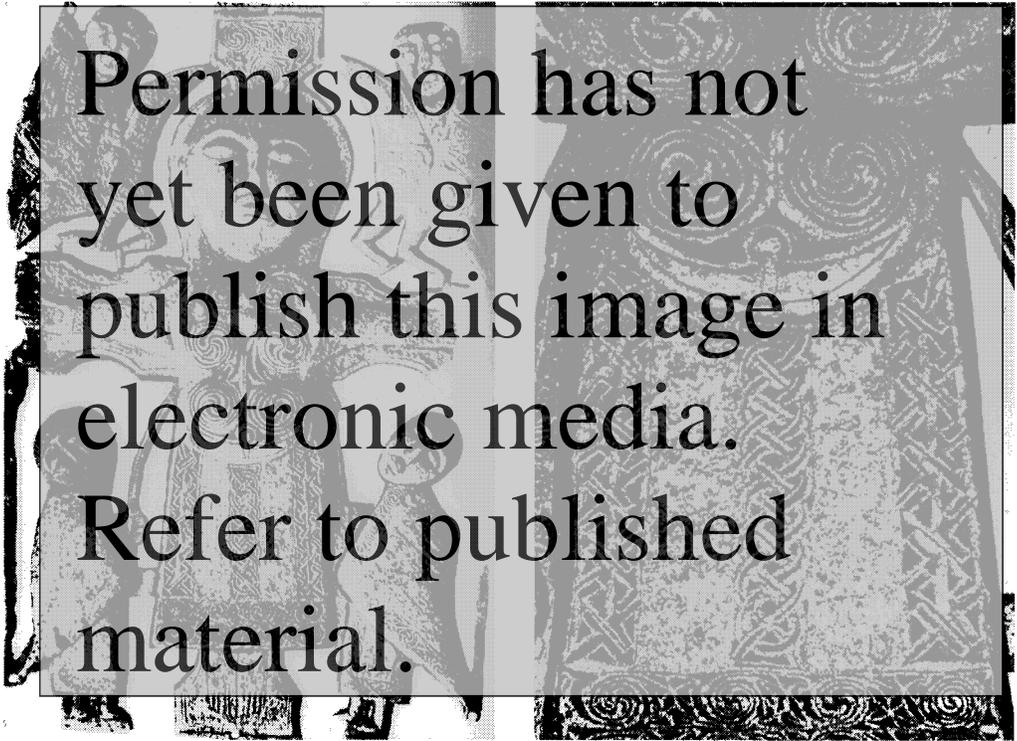


FIG. 34

Crucifixion plaque from Athlone. Not shown to scale. Photograph © National Museum of Ireland.

frequency in Manx sculpture of the 10th century.⁷⁴ This style of meander is also quite common in 10th-century Anglo-Scandinavian stone carving in northern England — as at Lastingham in North Yorkshire,⁷⁵ and occasionally occurs in Irish monumental sculpture of the early medieval period. Its manner of execution on the Prosperous knops is very unusual. The craftsman has attempted to carve out the lines of the ornament around a pattern laid out using drilled dots. This manner of carving is more suited to stone sculpture or wood carving than to metalworking and has resulted in an irregular and untidy pattern. This poor workmanship is at variance with the quality of casting in the crest.

The binding strips covering the seams in the shaft casing are decorated with finely engraved interlace and diagonal T-fret patterns (Fig. 22). Diagonal fret patterns commonly occur in Irish art from the 8th century, for example on the Athlone Crucifixion Plaque (Fig. 34). As both these motifs found on the shaft casing and binding strips have a long history in Irish art they are normally of little use for dating purposes. However, there are certain details which would imply that they were executed in the 10th century. Firstly, the median-incised bands of the

⁷⁴ P. M. C. Kermode, *Manx Crosses* (London, 1907 and 1994), pl. xxxii, cat. no. 77A, Ballaugh; pl. xxxiii, cat. no. 78c, Treen church, and Nappin, Jurby.

⁷⁵ J. T. Lang, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. Vol. 3: York and Eastern Yorkshire* (Oxford, 1990), figs. 575 and 580.

interlace are commonly found in West Viking stone sculpture and motif-pieces of 10th-century date. Secondly, there are pellet fillers in the background between the bands on the binding of the underside of the crook. These two details are found on cord-plait interlace patterns on a broken bone motif-piece from an early 10th-century level at Fishamble Street (E172:16153 & E172:8249).⁷⁶ It is notable that this particular piece also displays diagonal fret patterns and meander patterns in its repertoire which appear to have been carved using a similar technique to those noted on the crosier. The remaining interlace patterns on the crosier are relatively unambitious.

Diagonal fret patterns continued in use in Irish art until the 11th century. They are found in manuscripts spanning this date range such as the Lichfield Gospels, the Book of MacDurnan, the Cotton MS Vitellius FXI and in the Southampton Psalter.⁷⁷ They occur in stone sculpture at Monasterboice, Co. Louth, and Kilree, Co. Kilkenny.⁷⁸ The metal mounts on the wooden horn from Lough Erne are treated with a similar pattern in fine engraving.⁷⁹

Cross forms are found on the binding strips and on the face of the drop. The Latin cross which is found engraved on the binding strips has squared arm terminals and is median-incised. Variations on this type of cross are found on grave-slabs at Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly.⁸⁰ These crosses are not easy to date in Ireland as they are of a simple form which was current over a long period. The only clearly dated example from Clonmacnoise belongs to the late 8th century. The enamelled cross form on the drop face is relatively unhelpful in providing a probable date for the piece. It is an equal-armed cross of five units with squared arm terminals set within a circle. In Insular metalwork and enamelling, equal-armed crosses of this type are rare.

Crosses of similar form, though not enclosed in a circular field, occur from the 7th century in manuscripts, such as the Book of Durrow folio 1^v. Turning again to Clonmacnoise for parallels, there are several similar crosses engraved on grave-slabs of various dates.⁸¹ Bourke has cited enamelled crosses on certain artefacts which provide parallels for the cross on the Prosperous crosier, including a circular mount from Cramond, Midlothian, (RMS FC 302), an oblong plaque from Helgö, Sweden, a hinge-plate from a house-shaped shrine from Denmark, several Irish mounts and plaques and an animal-head terminal in the Ashmolean Museum.⁸² He proposed a date in the late 8th or early 9th century as the main period for this type of enamelled decoration.

⁷⁶ R. Johnson, Viking Age Bone Motif-Pieces from Fishamble Street, Dublin (unpubl. undergraduate thesis, 1993, University College London), cat nos. 4a–b.

⁷⁷ J. J. G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts, Sixth to Ninth Century* (London, 1978), cat. nos. 70, 73 and 74.

⁷⁸ P. Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland — An Iconographical and Photographic Study* (Bonn, 1992).

⁷⁹ D. M. Waterman, 'An early medieval horn from the River Erne', *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 3rd Series, 32 (1969), 101–14.

⁸⁰ P. Lionard, 'Early Irish grave-slabs', *Proc. Royal Irish Acad.*, 61C (1961), figs. 10.4, 10.14 and 10.18.

⁸¹ Lionard, *op. cit.* in note 80, fig. 10.10.

⁸² C. Bourke and J. Close-Brooks, 'Five Insular enamelled ornaments', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 119 (1989),

Techniques

The choice of techniques employed in the decoration of the crosier is somewhat difficult to explain. The binding strips and casings are produced in the manner typical of Irish crosiers of the period, using hammered sheet metal and incised ornamentation. The knobs and ferrule are cast, again a common method for producing a three-dimensional metal object in this period. The major divergence is the way that plates of metal were decorated by hand, cut out and set into recessed panels on the knobs and ferrule. Inlaid silver foil, gold filigree panels and enamelled plates were a feature of composite Irish metal artefacts in the 8th and early 9th century, such as the Moylough Belt-Shrine, and continued to be used in the kite-brooches of the early 10th to 12th centuries. These inlays were used to great effect because of the resulting contrast in colours and textures when set against a copper-alloy background. This technique was not noted on any of the buckles or strap-ends of the period studied by the writer. However, a number of 11th-century crosiers have panels of cast ornament inset into recesses in knobs and in some cases, both the panel and its receiver are made of copper alloy. It is possible, therefore, that these panels may have been overlaid with silver or gold foil to create contrast and to accentuate the relief or false-relief effect of the cast decoration.

Further, the decoration of the inset plates consists of frets, meander and interlace in false relief. For such simple motifs it would undoubtedly have been easier to create the decoration in the mould prior to casting and to finish it off with post-casting engraved work and either niello or a non-metallic inlay. The technique which the metalworker has employed to execute the decoration on the inset plates is subtractive and relates more closely to bone-carving, carving in wood or in stone than to metalworking. Unfinished bone motif-pieces from Fishamble Street, Dublin, reveal a similar method of carving ornamentation in false relief to that used on the crosier. Here, points are marked out with a tool and cutting begins around these points. This is continued until the main features of the design are left standing proud of their background. Analysis of detailed photographs also suggests that the plates on the knobs were originally decorated as one piece before being cut up and shaped to fit the numerous recessed panels in the knobs.⁸³

McNeill has suggested that these features may be a reflection of poor and/or inexpert workmanship.⁸⁴ He points out that the craftsman was faced with two problems when approaching the knobs and the ferrule, i.e. the need to cast a three-dimensional piece and the need to apply false-relief decoration to it. An inexpert metalworker may have decided to separate the two problems and deal with them in turn. However, the person who cast the ferrule had no difficulty in casting decoration in high relief, as is evidenced by the rows of raised human heads. This brings up a number of questions which are very difficult to answer. Firstly, was the inset decoration contemporary with the casting work? If it was contemporary, is it the work of the same hand? If it is assumed that it was both contemporary and of

⁸³ Raghnaill Ó Floinn (pers. comm.) has pointed out that several crosiers of 11th- and 8th-century date had plates of cast ornament set into fields in cast knobs for contrast in texture and colour.

⁸⁴ T. McNeill, pers. comm.

the same hand, then it becomes necessary to consider why a craftsman who was capable of casting three-dimensional objects with high relief ornament chose not to cast the false-relief decoration at the same time. Was this the work of a craftsman trained in a different medium? Was he working from a model provided by another panelled crozier and attempting to recreate the effect using the only methods he knew?

This brings us to the problem of the crook (Fig. 23). The crest of the crook is by no means a masterpiece of Irish metalwork though it is capably executed and neatly worked. Similarly, the crook-knop is a competently cast three-dimensional object. The drop is a conglomerate of different materials, techniques and styles, none of which are notable for their excellence, though all are effective enough and display a certain amount of skill in their execution. If we assume the crozier to be of a single period, these features might be taken to reflect a late attempt to recreate the composite polychrome metalworking tradition using a combination of both new and declining techniques, styles and materials. In short, the Prosperous crozier might be seen as a transitional and possibly regional piece to be placed between the early 9th century and the late 10th century.

Structure

The bi-conical knop above the drop (Fig. 23) is different in character to the knops on the shaft. It is smaller, more exaggerated in its bi-conical form, more expertly cast and plainer than the shaft knops, being decorated only with transverse bands of beading. The type of beading on the crook-knop links it stylistically to the drop which also displays this feature. These two pieces, along with the tube that joins them, may have belonged to an earlier crozier which was dismantled, or already fragmentary and were incorporated as components in the construction of a 'new' crozier. This may go some way to explaining the unique and awkward shape of the crook. Alternatively, these pieces may have been added to the crozier after the loss of the original drop, in preference to the construction of completely new parts. In a conjectural reconstruction, if the crook-knop is removed and the drop is moved back to fit directly below the end of the crest, the crozier's awkward profile is immediately improved. It is thought by the writer that this may have been the originally intended position of the drop. Thus the existing drop and crook knop may originally have belonged to a different, earlier crozier, perhaps dating to the mid-9th century, and were reused in the construction or repair of the Prosperous crozier, the decoration of the main elements of which is more suggestive of a 10th-century date.

Summary

The Prosperous crozier is something of an enigma. The proportions of the shaft are elegant, yet the profile of the crook-end is awkward. The range of techniques noted in the crozier's manufacture is ambitious and yet the quality of workmanship is variable, at times even poor. If we ignore the strange addition of the knop and tube to the crook, the crozier conforms in shape and size to the basic Irish type. The layout of the panels on the knops can be compared with that on the

Inishmurray crosier, a knop from Lund and the Lemanaghan crosier's knop, but the choice of motif within these panels is purely abstract and repetitive.⁸⁵ The style of the enamelled and glass ornament on the drop face is more in line with Irish work of the 8th and 9th centuries. The motif-piece parallel from Fishamble Street helps us to place the abstract work in the early 10th century. The crosier should therefore no longer be considered a product of a Manx workshop, although there are West Viking links in the layout and choice of decoration. As already stated, a full technical examination of the piece is required to determine the internal structure of the crook, the metallurgy of the different components, the identification of metallic or non-metallic inlays and of the colours in the now decayed enamels.⁸⁶

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⁸⁵ Bourke, *op. cit.* in note 2, fig. 3.

⁸⁶ Some analysis of both metallic and non-metallic samples from the Prosperous crosier was carried out by the British Museum. The latter included the black material which, it seems, cannot be niello and are probably corrosion products. An unpublished report on analysis of the crosier, including X-rays by the Royal Victoria Hospital, was carried out in 1984 when the crosier was on loan for some months to the Ulster Museum. They showed the staff peppered with nails and the nature of the repair before the carpet-tacks were removed. At this time, the crosier was also the subject of an interesting drawing by Deirdre Crone. I would like to thank Cormac Bourke for drawing my attention to this important information.