

Hinba Revisited: A New Attempt to Trace St Columba's Lost Monastery

Beatrice Widell

Discerning the location of St Columba's unidentified monastery, Hinba, known from Adomnán's hagiography the Vita Columbae, has been the quest of numerous scholars over the last century. These attempts have generally looked at the etymological meaning of the place name and traced it in the area of Dál Riata, the medieval Irish kingdom in today's Scottish county of Argyll and Bute, in which St Columba's monasteries were located. Nevertheless, the earlier identifications have failed to account for the spiritual and experiential aspects of both the literary and physical landscape, nor have they considered that hagiographies were written with another worldview. Arguably, examining Adomnán's cognitive landscape would provide an alternative approach to Hinba's location that may produce a more feasible suggestion. The aim of this paper is to explore the medieval monastery's location by creating a cognitive map of Adomnán, which will be merged with the archaeological landscape. This paper suggests that the site of Kilmaha, located on a peninsula in Loch Awe, could possibly have been Hinba, by linking similarities in its archaeological landscape to the spiritual descriptions in the Vita Columbae.

Introduction

The fragmental remains of early medieval monasticism in today's county of Argyll and Bute in western Scotland are remnants of the Irish saints and monks who inhabited the area, which then belonged to the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata (c.550-850). The landscape is today characterised by Gaelic place-names, church dedications and archaeological remains of monasteries, many of them founded by the Irish saints and monks who come to dominate the landscape (e.g. Fisher 2001; Lowe 2008). Without doubt, the most famous medieval Irish saint in Scotland was St Columba (d. 597) who arrived to Dál Riata in AD 563 with twelve monks and founded a monastery on the island of Iona which developed into a powerful monastic settlement (e.g. O'Sullivan 1998). His life as a saint is depicted in the hagiography, *Vita Columbae* (hereafter VC) written by the abbot Adomnán (d. 704). Adomnán portrays Columba's saintly life alongside his performed miracles, prophecies and visits by angels and divinity.

Besides describing Columba's transcendental powers, Adomnán also discloses some information on the geographical surroundings of his life; for

instance, Columba's journeys in Dál Riata and Britain, the places where he demonstrated his supernatural powers and also the many monasteries he founded in western Scotland (2.46) and in Ireland (2.2). One of Columba's monasteries, Hinba, arguably played an important role in the Christian conversion of Argyll considering its regular citing in VC, but has never been identified with certainty, despite multiple attempts to locate it. Such endeavors have frequently situated the monastery on Hebridean islands adjacent to Iona, since Hinba constantly is referred as an *insula* throughout the hagiography. No study, however, has involved a deeper analysis of the spirituality of Adomnán's landscape terminology and descriptions in VC, and ignored the fact that hagiographies were written with another worldview and include potential allegories (e.g. Lees and Overing 2006). Instead, VC has been seen as a factual text when interpreting the archaeological evidence and landscape, part of a broader trend in northern Britain and Irish archeology where, as a rule, the spiritual perceptions of places has rarely been given credence (e.g. Thomas 1971; Herity 1995). It has even been argued, by A. McMullen, that place-names were mainly used in hagiographies as a propaganda to

express the power of the *paruchia* or see (McMullen 2014). This neglect of the religious mindset in VC and its contexts of Hinba encourages an alternative approach to the identification of the monastery, where Adomnán's spiritual landscape perceptions are taken into account. Building on an earlier paper on the spiritual landscapes of Argyll (Widell 2017), the purpose of this paper is to explore Hinba's location by contextualising Adomnán's notions on spiritual places and integrating this with analysis of the archaeological landscape. A cognitive map of Adomnán will be constructed, based on his mental geography and spiritual notion on places in VC, which in turn will allow speculation on how his spiritual surroundings can be integrated with the landscape. It should, however, be mentioned that there is little credibility that Hinba's location can be identified with confidence, due to the scarcity of evidence. This paper offers instead a new perspective and suggestion of the monastery's location to the debate, which will provide further insight into medieval Argyll and the extent of Columba's power in western Scotland.

Hinba in the Past and Present

William J. Watson (1926) argued, by studying the etymological meaning of *Hinba* - the Irish 'inbe', meaning 'incision', that Jura was the location of *Hinba*, considering that the geographical shape of the island is reminiscent of an incision (Watson 1926, 83). In addition, Watson subsequently interpreted the name of *Hinba*'s possible detached monastery of *Muirbolc Mar* (3.23) as a 'sea bag', which he asserted referred to the lake upon Jura (Watson 1926, 83). After Watson's contribution, other Hebridean islands have been proposed as the site of *Hinba*, for instance W.D. Lamont (1978; 1980) suggested Gunna was the most probable option. Lamont opposed Watson's attempt by identifying on the role of *Baithene*, an abbot of *Hinba*, tracing his monastic power in the hagiography and geography of the area. Notably, Lamont mentioned in his analysis that in the VC there is a significant concentration of spiritual events that relate to *Hinba*, although he did not develop his observation further (Lamont 1980, 22). Some years later, Richard Sharpe (1995, 306-8) claimed that Oronsay was the most likely location of *Hinba*, as his interpretation of *Muirbolc Mar*, as an emptying of the tide, is found on the island of Oronsay. From this, he suggested that Oronsay's medieval priory might be a later monastic replacement

of the former monastery at *Hinba* (Sharpe 1995, 308).

The latest published research on *Hinba*'s location was by Pamela O'Neill, who by incorporating both the hagiography and the archaeological evidence in the search consequently argued that the island of Canna was the most likely location (O'Neill 2008, 38). In an onomastic analysis, she compared a wide range of Irish sites named '*Muirbolc*' in the landscape and concluded that a majority of those sites were located near landscapes with waterfall characteristics (O'Neill 2008, 38). Commenting on the earlier suggested islands' lack of convincing archaeological evidence, O'Neill also identified a series of sites with richer ecclesiastical archaeological remains on Canna that could have been *Hinba* and *Muirbolc Mar*. Furthermore, O'Neill associated the topographical characteristics of the landscape of Canna with monastic activities to strengthen the hypothesis (O'Neill 2008, 36).

These attempts to locate *Hinba* have seemingly been shaped by the conventional concept of 'island monasteries', partially due to *insula* but also by the presence of several Irish island monasteries and the appearance of islands in Irish mythology. Such preconceptions have left the search for *Hinba* unsuccessful, however, and it should be considered that as a medieval religious text the VC cannot be expected to present the truth literally and must instead be contextualised and problematised in its former mindset. As a consequence, these attempts have failed to address the effects of *Hinba*'s sacred nature in the text and physical appearance. The medieval landscape narratives would undoubtedly have been shaped by the spiritual experiences of the physical landscape since landscapes are shaped by symbolism, experience and narratives (Tuan 1977; Tilley 1994; Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Lees and Overing 2006). Places are not just the mark on the map, but involve senses and experiences and the landscape is intimately related to emotions, such as memories, belonging, and time (Tilley 1994; Nash and Children 2008). Adomnán had credibly experienced various places and landscapes of Argyll, or heard other monks' experiences before chronicling them in the VC; his religious sense of places and landscapes also shaped his literary portrayals of *Hinba*. This underscores the importance of exploring how and why place-narratives were created in Adomnán's mind and further how they are presented in relation to the rest of the landscape and might be explored in the archaeological evidence.

Before delving deeper into the spiritual landscapes and portrayals of *Hinba* in the VC, some consideration should be made of the potential challenges of using

medieval texts. Medieval literature was written with another worldview and under other circumstances; the VC was partly written to proclaim the Christianisation of the landscape. Reading the text without acknowledging the width and impact of the religious faith makes the narratives appear imaginary and inaccurate. However, its content was harmonised with the prevailing mindset among Adomnán and the monks. Their world must be viewed, as the theologian Thomas O'Loughlin points out, as: 'both as a physical space and as a theological reality... another foreign, past world...' (O'Loughlin 2007, 40). One way of addressing the difficulties is arguably to place the narratives in established traditions of thought, for instance, Sandra Duncan has emphasised the importance of involving Biblical references when studying hagiographies, otherwise, she argued, we will never be able to fully understand the contents of hagiographies (Duncan 2000). It is therefore crucial to incorporate the cognitive mindset of the medieval religious landscape and its idealism on various levels when studying the VC. That is, we must attempt to see the landscape from the hagiographers' perspective – embedded in Christian values and senses, where the marginal between spirituality and mentality was non-existent (Ward 1982, 66).

Adomnán's Spiritual Landscapes

In order to comprehend Hinba's spiritual context in the VC, we should consider the roots and circumstances surrounding Adomnán's authorship. For Adomnán, Iona was located in the outskirts of the continent (e.g. 3.23). He, as well as Columba, were *peregrinis* who had left Ireland to pursue their religious lives as *milites Christi* on Iona, cut off from the continent (2.39, 2.46). However, Adomnán's geographical interest extended beyond the British Isles; prior to composing the VC, Adomnán wrote *De Locis Sanctis* (DLS), a narrative on the holy places in the Middle East, that had been conveyed to him by Arculf, who had travelled there. In DLS, Adomnán presents important Christian, Biblical and historic places in the Mediterranean area. These sites are related either to a certain holy object or a supernatural event, marked in the landscape; the place was created both physically and mentally by the supernatural. For instance, Adomnán mentions a site known for its holy cloak that the Holy Virgin Mary had woven (1.12). This literary and cognitive fabrication of sacred topographies that Adomnán

conveys in the text implies his interest in using landscapes and topographies to spread the Christian faith. It is possible that he was influenced by writings of, for instance St Jerome's *Liber Locurum*, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, St Anthony, and John Cassian (Aston 2000, 61; O'Loughlin 2007, 23-4; 2012). These church fathers were part of a literary tradition of sacred topographies with the purpose of spreading the message of eternal life and Christian salvation (O'Loughlin 2007, 22-3).

Originally, Christian sites were not shaped or created by geographical factors, but rather what happened in certain places – an events-*topos* relationship (Markus 1994; Sheldrake 2001, 7, 37 ff.). One example that illustrates this relationship is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which was built where Christ had been crucified and buried; it could not have been built elsewhere since there was a distinct bond between the event and the *topos* (Smith 1987, 86). Adomnán's descriptions in the VC and DLS of sacred topographies of Argyll are, remarkably, similar to this traditional Christian notion on topographies; after Columba had performed a supernatural action Adomnán refers to these expressions of the supernatural forces as 'events' in the aftermath (e.g. 1.48, 2.38, 2.39). In the example below, there are visible traces of how events created places and were used for the salvation in the VC:

'When St Columba was staying for a few days on the island of Skye, he struck with his staff a patch of ground by the seashore in a particular place, and said to his companions: "Strange to tell, my dear children, today, here in this place and on this patch of ground, an old man – a pagan but one who has spent his whole life in natural goodness – will receive baptism and will die and be buried." Only an hour later – look! – a little boat came in to land on the shore, bringing in its prow a man worn out with age. He was the chief commander of the warband in the region of Cé. Two young men carried him from the boat and set him down in front of the blessed man. As soon as he had received the word of God from St Columba, through an interpreter, he believed and was baptized by him. When the rite of baptism was finished, as the saint had predicted, the old man died on the same spot and they buried him there and raised a mound of stones over the place. It is still visible there today by the seashore. The stream in which he had received baptism is even today called by the local people "the water of Artbranan" (VC 1.33).

This example demonstrates Adomnán's and the monks' perceptions of sacred topographies; they

were created by Columba's supernatural actions and remembered mentally and monumentally in the landscape. Undoubtedly, Adomnán was heavily influenced by the Christian literary tradition of sacred topography, as he created a network of holy sites in Dal Riata by linking supernatural powers with places that developed into a sacred geography, collectively memorized by the monks in the VC.

Another interesting perspective is that the landscapes and places in the VC and *DLS* are portrayed differently; Adomnán's accounts of the places in *DLS* are eloquent and detailed, for instance Armathem which is a 'rough and stony country, with thorny valleys' (1.20) and also his description of Alexandria (2.30). The landscape narratives in the VC, however, are not as detailed. Here, Adomnán uses another terminology where the monks' spiritual experiences comprise the landscape description; for instance, the divine illumination that Columba experiences when he is visited by an angel in Hinba, witnessed by a monk (3.4). The sites were *in situ* experiences of the unworldly. This observation suggests two things: first, that the religiously-experienced landscape in Dal Riata constituted a substantial part of the narratives in Adomnán's cognitive landscape and was crucial for its character and Christianisation. Secondly, that the places in the VC, including Hinba, had an experiential and symbolic significance in the medieval mind that appeared in memory and physical landscape.

This mystical perception of places that Adomnán used in the VC could plausibly be inspired by Irish tales that often incorporate allegorical concepts with both Christian and pre-Christian elements. In the Irish voyage tale *Voyage of St Brendan*, islands were allegorical places characterised by their different senses and events in St Brendan and his monks' inward spiritual journeys (Bray 2000, 8; Moylan 2007). The islands were thus not physical, but spiritual locations in the monks' inner journey to God. For example, the final island that St Brendan reached with his monks is described by its paradisaal attributes of joy, light, and fruit. Landscape features were therefore not used in the narratives to describe physical places, but structured symbolic places along individuals' journeys towards God. Physical concepts, such as islands, existed to allegorically frame the spiritual experience already integrated in medieval thought. This theory is applicable on Adomnán's landscapes in the VC; in light of the earlier analysis, it suggests Adomnán had a complex view of places, both used to spread salvation in the landscape but also on an individual level in the monks' religious lives.

Places were potentially allegorised due to their sacred nature and importance as *loci* in the monks' spiritual journeys, which suggest that physical landscapes and monastic archaeological sites must be framed by spiritual narratives in further studies.

A Hinba of Senses and Memory

The sketching of Adomnán's mental geography above indicated that the places in the VC were fabricated in order to Christianise the landscape and to support the spiritual journeys of the faithful. It was also stressed that Adomnán was influenced by the tradition of sacred topographies and the Irish literary use of geographical features as allegories. The following discussion analyses how *Hinba* was perceived in the spiritual memory of Adomnán and the monks, which will shape its location in Adomnán's cognitive map.

Adomnán mentions *Hinba* seven times in the VC, which makes it the fourth-most mentioned site, after Iona, Ireland and Britain in the narrative (Table 1). The monastery plausibly had the function of a retreat for Columba, as he is recorded as staying for long periods on two occasions. *Hinba* was also visited by four Irish saints and is recorded as a place where penitents lived, both of which add further support to this being an important monastery (1.21, 2.24, 3.17). In the Irish Christian tradition, penitence was perceived as an internal healing for committed sins, a 'medicine for the souls' (O'Loughlin 2000, 50; Thom 2006, 40), and Adomnán describes penitence as a 'healing of the body' elsewhere in the VC (1.29). Furthermore, as mentioned above, *Hinba* might have contained a detached settlement, Muirbolc Mar, which has been ascribed a place for anchorites. Adomnán does not, however, reveal explicitly that it belonged to *Hinba*, which means that it could have been another settlement (3.23).

These notes on *Hinba*'s function certainly characterised the monastery and its memory conveyed through time. Penitential monasteries had probably to be spiritually strong as they were places for internal healing and for building up weakened relationships with God. However, these were arguably not those characteristics that were the most distinctive in the medieval mind; the narratives reveal *Hinba* was the *topos* of a series of supernatural events that, of the same character, only took place in *Hinba* and on Iona. The fact that *Hinba* is the fourth-most frequently mentioned site suggests that it was, as the siting of transcendental events, a highly significant place. For

instance, Columba is approached twice by an angel and ‘celestial lights’ while staying in *Hinba* (3.5, 3.18):

‘On another occasion when St Columba was living in *Hinba*, the grace of the Holy Spirit was poured upon him in incomparable abundance and miraculously remained over him for three days. During that time he remained day and night locked in his house, which was filled with heavenly light. No one was allowed to go near him, and he neither ate nor drank. But from the house rays of brilliant light could be seen at night, escaping through the chinks of the doors and through the keyholes. He was also heard singing spiritual chants of a kind never heard before. And, as he afterwards admitted to a few people, he was able to see openly revealed many secrets that had been hidden since the world began, while all that was most dark and difficult in the sacred Scriptures lay open, plain, and clearer than light in the sight of his most pure heart...’ (VC 3.18)

During the three nights Columba prayed and experienced a supernatural light, he was *given* revelations by divinity, and he did neither drink nor eat (3.18) (O’Reilly 1999, 108; Ritari 2009, 30). Another chapter that highlights *Hinba*’s sacred status is when Columba was attacked by one of the persecutors in *Hinba*, aiming to kill him, by the ‘instigation of the devil’ (2.24). Columba survived the attack because another monk who was wearing Columba’s cowl (‘vestimentum’) stood in the way and the cowl was impenetrable. This notion of a holy piece of clothing emphasises *Hinba*’s sanctity as a place; the supernatural object was part of the narrative that created the sacred memory of *Hinba*. The cowl became an eternal object, impossible to break, that proclaimed that *Hinba* was the *topos* where God had shown his mercy and revealed himself. All together, these events anchored *Hinba* in the landscape and it became a monastic site where the bond between earth and heaven was erased and Columba encountered the divine, in order to spread Christianity and also to reveal the world to come, all of which was witnessed by monks.

Hinba’s supernatural characteristics are further underscored by its location in the experiential landscape; Columba prophesies that the penitent Neman, when he left *Hinba*, ‘returned to the world’ (1.21). This palpable description locates *Hinba* in the spiritual landscape of Adomnán; it was not part of the world and explicitly so. This topography, the precinct of *Hinba*, was a holy place, part of the salvation landscape that Adomnán created. The outer landscape

was the ‘world’ – the secular space in which *Hinba* was located and the relationship between them created each other’s characteristics. The relationship between place and space is important since the local landscape also created the identity of the monastery (Pickles 2011, 42). Possibly, *Hinba* was located close to water such as the coast or lakes, or another symbolic dangerous topography, considering that water in the VC had connotations of dangers such as monsters, waves, and strong winds (Pickles 2011, 40-2; Widell 2017, 9-11).

Landscape Concepts in Vita Columbae

The above analysis attempted to present *Hinba* from Adomnán’s mindset, involving his perceptions and the events that fashioned *Hinba*’s spiritual narrative. In order to integrate these with the archaeological evidence and physical landscape, a closer look at the narrative is required to explore how the religious experience of place can be traced physically. It was earlier suggested that Adomnán did not describe places in the VC in a similar fashion as in *DLS*, and that his writing was influenced by different literary traditions. Rather, the *Hinba* conveyed through the text was shaped by collected witness accounts of God’s grace and miracles through Columba, a kind of event that mostly took place in *Hinba* and Iona. Iona is, compared to other monasteries, also experienced by Adomnán as holy with multiple supernatural events; there were similar sacral events taking place in Iona, with, for instance, visits by angels (2.44, 3.16) and Columba fighting demons away from the island (3.8). Notably, these two sacred places have a landscape feature in common; they are constantly referred to as an *insula*. Earlier scholars have taken for granted that it means ‘island’, locating *Hinba* on various Hebridean islands. The word has historically had various translations, however, for instance it was used by the Romans to describe apartment buildings (e.g. Storey 2004). In a hagiographic context, the concept has been translated in the seventh-century *Vita S. Samsonis*, as a ‘little monastery’ instead of an island (Flobert 1997, 179; Wooding 2007, 206-8ff.). Furthermore, Jonathan Wooding suggests that the Irish and Welsh use of ‘Ynys’ and ‘Inis’ of inland sites might have influenced their use of the Latin *insula*, expanding its use to also describe mainland sites (Wooding 2007, 208).

As Table 1 shows, a high number of places in VC are called *insula*, however, Adomnán uses it irregularly; another monastery, Tiree, is called *insula*, but also *terra* and is also referred directly as the monastery itself, Campi Lunge. Moreover, the place Oidechan is also

called both *insula* and *terra* on an irregular basis. This is either a mistake by Adomnán or a conscious and deliberate pattern. Considering the structure of the hagiography and Adomnán's other meticulous narratives, I would argue that his use of *insula* had a purpose; the first aspect that stands out is that none of the other places, apart from Iona and *Hinba*, are as sacred as them based on the occurrence of significant miraculous events; in neither of the other places does Columba encounter angels or is given revelations, which, as the former analyses have shown, distinguished the place remarkably in Adomnán's mind. That is, no other place played such a vital role in their religious lives and inward pilgrimage towards God. It suggests that Adomnán used two kinds of *insulae* in the text, depending on the religious sense of the place: a *geographical insula* including either secular or minor islands and an *experiential insula* that was an abstract, sacred place of divine events and significance containing a monastery. Iona and *Hinba* were *experiential insulae* to frame their divine nature and to separate them from the rest.

This spiritual geography employed by Adomnán aligns with the Irish mythological concept of islands, conventionally denoting paranormal places rather than geographical islands. What should be noted, however, is despite their sacred status, Iona and *Hinba* are described in various terms; at Iona, Columba is out

in the landscape (2.44, 3.16), whereas at *Hinba* most events take place indoors (3.5, 3.17, 3.18) or seemingly near the core of the monastery (1.21, 2.24), suggesting it was a small enclosed site. Similarly, Adomnán describes that *Hinba* is 'rowed' to (3.23) and Columba's foster-son Baithene is being kept away from *Hinba* by 'winds' (3.18), which, in the aforementioned literary context and the religious experiences outlined above, would suggest accessing *Hinba* was a rough and long journey – both physically and spiritually. *Hinba* was accessed by interaction with a 'dangerous' topography, as it required the monks to clean their sins before reaching the monastery. This interpretation partially rules out the earlier assumed location, a geographical island, but suggests instead it was a mental island, possibly in the mainland whose geographical location and archaeological context would correspond to the spiritual desert and sacred isolated place. Building upon the hypothesis proposed by Wooding (2007, 206ff), that *insula* had a technical function in the hagiography, this paper takes one step further and argues that the meaning of *insula* must be seen in light of the spiritual experiences of places and landscapes, in order to grasp its meaning in the *VC*; *Hinba*, as an *experiential insula*, was a sacred mental island located in a spiritual terrain that suited its sacred purpose.

Place name	Number of quotations in chapters	Events and characteristics	Naming	References
Iona	52	St Columba's dwelling, supernatural events, 'worldly' decisions, monastery, conquering evil, prophecies, Divine encounters and miracles.	Iona <i>insula</i> , monastery	1.2; 1.4; 1.8; 1.16; 1.17; 1.19; 1.22; 1.25; 1.27; 1.28; 1.29; 1.30; 1.31; 1.32; 1.35; 1.37; 1.41; 1.44; 1.45; 1.48; 2.3; 2.5; 2.14; 2.15; 2.16; 2.24; 2.28; 2.29; 2.30; 2.38; 2.39; 2.40; 2.42; 2.44; 2.45; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7; 3.8; 3.9; 3.10; 3.11; 3.12; 3.13; 3.15; 3.16; 3.19; 3.20; 3.21; 3.22; 3.23
Ireland	47	Columba visits, penitents from Ireland visits Iona, monasteries, Columba's native country, monarchs, conference	Scotia, Oak Grove of Galgach (Derry), Oakwood Plain (Derry), Trioit (Trevet in Co.Meath), Lough Key, Munster, Coire Salchain, Lake Crogreth, Plain of Eilne, Clided, Ard Ceannachte, Leinster, Lough Key, Daire Calgaich, Plain of Breg, Birra, Teltown, Ulster, Ridge of Tomma, Damnonii, Drum Ceatt	Preface I; 1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.6; 1.7; 1.10; 1.12; 1.14; 1.17; 1.18; 1.20; 1.22; 1.29; 1.30; 1.36; 1.38; 1.40; 1.42; 1.43; 1.44; 1.46; 1.48; 1.49; 1.50; 2.1; 2.2; 2.4; 2.5; 2.6; 2.8; 2.14; 2.19; 2.25; 2.36; 2.38; 2.39; 2.40; 2.43; 2.46; 3.3; 3.7; 3.9; 3.11; 3.13; 3.15; 3.17; 3.23
Britain	19	Royalty, Columba travels, 'soujourns', plague, miracles.	Britain, Saxonia, Drum-Alban, Loch Awe, Orkney, Picts, Loch Ness, Glen Urquhart, Dumbarton,	Preface I; 1.2; 1.5; 1.7; 1.9; 1.13; 1.31; 1.34; 1.36; 2.31; 2.34; 2.39; 2.42; 2.46; 2.11; 2.32; 3.4; 3.14; 3.22; 3.23
<i>Hinba</i>	7	Columba visits and stays, supernatural events, murder attempt by Ioan.	<i>Hinba insula</i> , monastery	1.21; 1.45; 2.24; 3.5; 3.17; 3.18; 3.23
Tiree	6	Monks sail from Iona to Tiree, penitents sent there, demons attack, Baithene is the manager.	Ethican land, Ethican <i>insula</i> , Plain of Lunge	1.19; 1.36; 1.41; 2.15; 2.39; 3.8
Oidechan island	1	Columba performs a miracle while still in Iona.	Oidechan <i>insula</i> , land (<i>terra</i>), little land of Aidech	2.14

Table 1. Table showing a few of the sites mentioned by Adomnán in *Vita Columbae*. There are irregular patterns in Adomnán's use of the concept of *insula*. Table: B. Widell.

Adomnán's Cognitive Map

Adomnán's cognitive map, which is a mental representation of his physical environment and how he relates to and perceives places, has been constructed based on the former analyses (Fig 1). It is based on Adomnán's definition of places, that is, how their events were used for the monks' salvation, and spiritual life in the landscape and the amount of witnesses of Columba's powers. *Hinba* and Iona are remarkably the most sacred places that Adomnán mentions, surrounded by places where few miracles happened or were mere secular locations. Another interesting aspect concerns the spatiality of sites; Adomnán mentions few places southeast of Iona, which is peculiar given Columba's travels in Scotland. This might indicate that *Hinba* was located there, which explains its hypothetical location on the map.

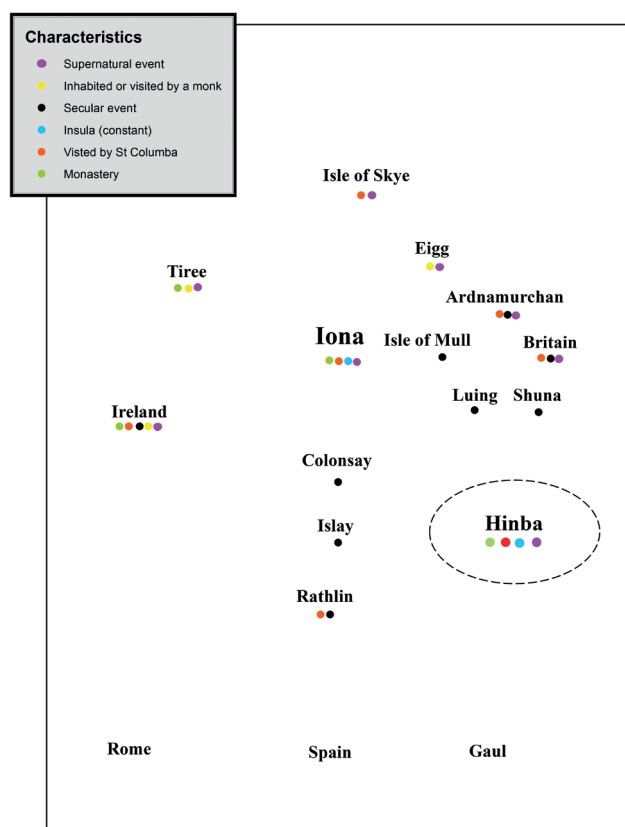


Fig 1
The reconstructed cognitive map of Adomnán from *Vita Columbae*, which illustrates his perceptions of places and spaces. Image: B. Widell

The Archaeology of Hinba

The rich archaeological record of Christianity in Argyll suggests various potential locations for *Hinba*. A distribution map of remains recorded by the Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) as chapels, churches, monasteries, crosses, and enclosures (the debatable *vallum monasterii*) shows the locations of potential constituents of early medieval monasteries (Fig 2) (e.g. Herity 1995; Jenkins 2010). Despite the later dates of multiple sites, this does not discount their potential continuity of Christian worship on the same site. A majority of the remains are located close to water either by the coast or lakes (Fig 3) (see Fisher 2001, 8). In comparison with the cognitive map, the archaeological evidence presents another landscape with, for instance, a large amount of Christian remains in the southeastern area that Adomnán did not mention.

Several sites have a wealthy archaeological profile hinting at their original ecclesiastical purposes, and are



Fig 2
The distribution of Christian archaeology in Dál Riata with a few dense clusters indicated which include remains of possible monasteries. These could be potential locations of *Hinba*. Image: B. Widell

located both on the mainland and on islands. Most of the potential monasteries in Argyll are gathered in the table below (Table 2) and their characteristics are compared, both in terms of the landscape setting and the material remains, which constitute the criteria of *experiential insula*. Notably, most of the sites that are classified as monasteries by the RCAHMS can be eliminated due to insufficient archaeological remains, such as Crossaig, Innis Draighnich and Annat (RCAHMS, 2016). Furthermore, the prominent island site Eileach an Naoimh can be excluded despite its wealth of archaeological evidence; it was credibly a monastic settlement of some sort, however, the cluster of evidence occupies a small part of the island and do not indicate being particularly secluded, as the descriptions of *Hinba* imply (Canmore, 2016). Instead, it shares some spatial similarities with Iona, although a smaller size, with the potential monastery occupying only parts of the island. The remaining site that fulfils all criteria is Kilmaha, located on the peninsula Rubha na Fidhle in Loch Awe.

Site	Enclosed area in the mainland	Location close to water	Accessed by danger	Cluster of remains
Colonsay	O	O	X	X
Bute	O	N/A	N/A	X
Isle of Mull	O	X	N/A	O
Eileach an Naoimh	O	X	X	X
Kilmaha	X	X	X	X
Killevin	O	X	X	X
Crossaig	O	X	N/A	O
Innis Draighnich	X	X	O	O
Annat	O	X	O	O
Islay	O	X	X	X
Inchmarnock	O	X	X	X
Gigha	O	N/A	O	O
Ardnadam	O	O	O	X

Table 2. A table showing the places from the integration of the landscapes and their relevancy as *Hinba insula*. Each site is valued depending on the *insula* criteria. X means 'yes', O means 'no', N/A when the criteria is undefinable for the place - either because the archaeological features are not in the same context, or the dating is inconclusive. Table: B. Widell



Fig 3

A photograph taken in Argyll displaying its landscape characteristics with the lake and mountainous horizon, which shaped Adomnán's experiences of the landscape Photo: B. Widell



Fig 4

The potential Hinba, Kilmaha, by Loch Awe, in relation to Iona. They are separated by the sea and the mainland. Image: B. Widell

Kilmaha is located on the peninsula Rubha na Fídhle in Loch Awe (Fig 4 and 5). The place-name and archaeological evidence suggest it once was an early ecclesiastical settlement, with, for instance, several early medieval cross-slabs, and a Maltese cross-inscription by a potential landing point (RCAHMS 1975, 149-150). Recent geophysical investigations have revealed a dry-stone enclosure, enclosing a number of sub-oval buildings that could possibly be the remains of the huts and oratory, features that Adomnán mentioned existed in *Hinba* (3.17, 3.18) (RCAHMS 2016; RCAHMS 1975, 149-150). All together, these constituents suggest it once was a small monastery. What is particularly striking with this site is the density of symbolic presence: the number of crosses, in relation to the peninsula's small size, testifies a conspicuous proclamation of Christian space. Crosses, which had multiple functions, such as protection, sanctifying land, and symbolising Christ's presence on earth (Fisher 2001, 8), had clearly similar purposes at Kilmaha; they highlighted the peninsula's sacredness and Christianisation. This would seem a fitting environment for *Hinba*, considering its function as a penitential monastery, which, as was argued earlier, probably required a specific spiritual and sacred setting to heal



Fig 5

A photo depicting the view from Kilmaha, at the tip of the peninsula, facing west. Loch Awe surrounds the peninsula and is visible from most directions. Image: B. Widell

the interior of the penitent. Kilmaha's rich Christian symbolism then suggests this was a suitable setting for such a cause. Any theories concerning potential archaeological finds at Kilmaha should be dealt with cautiously as the site has not been investigated thoroughly, yet its density of crosses potentially reveal its function as a spiritual place instead of the 'working' status of other monastic sites, such as Iona with wood and metal working, and Portmahomack with glass and metal (Carver 2008, 134-5).

The crosses could also have been raised to celebrate Columba's religious experiences there, for instance, his visits by an angel, as Adomnán portrays in the VC that crosses were raised where Columba had prophesied etc. (e.g. 1.45). The cross-slabs even bear some resemblance to crosses in Iona with, for example, ring crosses (see Canmore 2016). Furthermore, the cross-inscription by the landing-point emphasised the will to Christianise the place and to make the approaching or leaving monks attentive of the site's sacredness – a distinct marker in the landscape that also was a protective symbol facing 'the world' that awaited outside the monastic precinct. Similar inscriptions by shorelines have been found in the Hebrides, for instance Aird A' Mhorain on North Uist, which presumably functioned to mark and bless a landing point (Fisher 2001, 8). Aird A' Mhorain, which is a promontory and also contains a holy well, was allegedly also a small early Christian site in the Hebrides, remotely located and difficult to access (Canmore, 2016). In sum, approaching Kilmaha from any direction would have involved visualising and experiencing the powers of the cross, which manifested

the site's distinguished sacred status in the landscape.

Kilmaha's surrounding landscape is scarce of evidence of early Christian activity; there is no linking evidence within a six-kilometre radius. Further south west, on the south side of Loch Awe, is a possible early medieval monastic site, Kilneuir, dedicated to Columba which contains potential remains of an early medieval church and cross base. It has been suggested that Kilneuir was Columba's Cella Diuni, mentioned in the VC (1.31) (Canmore, 2016). The dedication to Columba might suggest Iona's influence must have reached even this mainland area, however, if Kilneuir was in use at the same time as Kilmaha, there was still a significant distance between them. Close to the northwestern part of the south tip of Loch Awe is also the Torran cross, a 3.3-metre-high cross-marked prehistoric stone, dated to the early medieval period (RCAHMS 1992, 210). Being without a proper Christian archaeological context, this cross-marked stone was hypothetically erected to mark a pathway or to sanctify the landscape, as there are prehistoric monuments in the immediate area, such as a dun and cup and ring-marked rocks (Fisher 2001, 9). Approximately five kilometres northeast of Kilmaha are several chapels and churches, such as Innis Errich, Creag A' Chaibeil and Caibeal Chiarain; all of these, however, are dated to much later and do not indicate having been early settlements.

The archaeological landscape in Kilmaha's surroundings therefore suggests that it was not a densely-Christianised area contemporary with Kilmaha, but rather an isolated area, both physically and mentally. Compared to the archaeologically-dense areas such as Kilmartin and islands such as Tiree and Colonsay, the landscape surrounding Kilmaha contains few sites where Christianity was proclaimed. This lack of Christian sites proposes that Kilmaha was deliberately established in a desert area, and remained a desert, and where travelling through the landscape to Kilmaha would be experienced as a journey through the profane. A few inscribed crosses at Kilmartin, and Kilfinan by Loch Fyne are similar to the crosses in Iona (RCAHMS 1992:7), which indicates that Iona's power reached even there. However, Kilmaha would still be on the outskirts of Columba's influence and would require a long journey by *currach* and foot to reach it. This marginalisation and landscape dynamics stress that this part of Dal Riata was considered as a *locus horribilis*, a particularly wild desert with terrain that was rough to access sites. It proposes that there was an urge to Christianise the landscape that earlier was 'wild' –

transforming it to a *locus amoenus* (e.g. Pickles 2011), which is suitable considering *Hinba*'s potential function as a penitential monastery and retreat for Columba; the penitents' souls were cleansed simultaneously as the landscape was transformed into sacred space.

Kilmaha's location, on a small peninsula below a steep hill underscores that it was accessed by Loch Awe in the early Middle Ages. There is a modern pathway running down the hill, however, walking it downhill is a lengthy journey and would have taken a considerable time even if there was a medieval path. The landscape is mountainous and difficult to travel upon by foot, instead, Loch Awe was an apt communicative topography for moving in the landscape (Lane and Campbell 2000, 2). As I have argued elsewhere (Widell 2017), travelling across water was an ordeal of faith for the monks, considering the danger it involved, as depicted in the VC. However, it was necessary to cleanse one's sins prior to reaching the sacred land of a monastery. Adomnán's descriptions of *Hinba* propose it would require a long ordeal to reach the monastery; its sacred status was partly created by its relationship with the unsacred land, and the 'winds' keeping Baithene away and the 'rowing' necessary to undertake for Ernan to reach *Hinba*, arguably as metaphors, highlight its isolated and inaccessible location. The lack of Christian evidence surrounding Loch Awe further underscores that the journey to Kilmaha was a long journey through wilderness without any visual manifestations of Christianity. However, the wilderness would have been interrupted by the physically small but rich presence of sacredness in Kilmaha, the potential *Hinba*, where God revealed himself to Columba and Heaven was experienced. Similarly to St Brendan and his inwardly spiritual journey in the voyage tale, the monks could experience a physical journey when travelling to Kilmaha that was linked to their interior process towards God. The long journey to Kilmaha corresponds to the descriptions of *Hinba* and Adomnán's idea of places, where the travelling was important and part of the religious experiences of the landscape. All together, these various approaches and aspects of Kilmaha as an *experiential insula* and potential function as a penitential monastery, suggest it could have been Columba's lost monastery of *Hinba*.

Conclusion

The location of *Hinba* has been given much scholarly attention in the last decade, and researchers have

located the monastery on numerous Hebridean islands. The aim of this paper was to look at the evidence of *Hinba*'s location involving the spiritual motivation behind Adomnán's portrayal of the monastery. It has showed an alternative approach where Adomnán's perceptions and religious experiences of places and landscape were integrated with the archaeological evidence and physical landscape. The proposed site, Kilmaha, a small settlement on a peninsula in Loch Awe, showed potential of having been a significant monastic site, with its dense symbolic presence and location in a vast 'desert'; the water- and islandscapes that characterise the western Scottish landscapes were Irish Christians' equivalent to the Egyptian desert of the Desert Fathers (e.g. Sheldrake 1995, 23-3; Bateman 2009, 149). It showed that the site required such an environment, that is, a dangerous topography and few holy sites in its surroundings, for its purposes as a sacred place in the monks' internal spiritual journey and a penitential monastery. This suggestion changes the map of Columba's influence in Argyll – his power stretched to a more southern point than earlier presumed, and suggests that the various functions of his monasteries, as places of otherworldly encounters and roles in the individual Christian's earthly pilgrimage, influenced its landscape location. It also offers new methodological options for dealing with the early medieval monastic sites in western Scotland; it could add new dimensions to excavated early medieval sites, such as Killeven, Crarae Gardens by Loch Fyne (Kirby and Alexander 2009), set in a new spiritual light where the sites are seen in a broader spiritual network, linking the literary evidence with the archaeological.

Beatrice Widell is currently a Doctoral Researcher at the Dept. of Archaeology, University of Reading, after having been awarded an AHRC Doctoral Training Partnership in 2017. Her research project investigates medieval British soldiers' rituals, by performing analyses of fourteenth century battlefield landscapes in ArcGIS (Geographic Information System) in northern Britain. Her main research interests are medieval landscape archaeology and interdisciplinary studies of the Middle Ages.

Bibliography

- Adamnan, 1958, *De locis sanctis*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, Dublin
- Ashmore, W, & Knapp, AB (eds), 1999, *Archaeologies of landscape: contemporary perspectives*, Malden (Massachusetts)
- Aston, M, 2000, *Monasteries in the landscape*, 2nd ed, Stroud
- Bray, DA, 2000, 'Allegory in *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*' in J Wooding (ed), *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*, Dublin, 175–186
- Bateman, M, 2009, 'The Landscape of the Gaelic Imagination', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 15(2-3), 142-152
- Carver, M, 2008, *Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts*, Edinburgh
- Clarke, CAM, 2006, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700-1400*, London
- Duncan, S, 2000, 'Signa de Caelo in the Lives of St Cuthbert: The Impact of Biblical Images and Exegesis on Early Medieval Hagiography', *The Heythrop Journal* 41(4), 399– 412
- Fisher, I, 2001, *Early medieval sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands*, Edinburgh
- Flobert, P, 1997, *La vie ancienne de saint Samson de Dol*, Paris
- Herity, M, 1995, *Studies in the Layout, Buildings and Art in Stone of Early Irish Monasteries*, London
- Jenkins, DH, 2010, 'Holy, holier, holiest': *The Sacred Topography of the Early Medieval Irish Church*, Turnhout
- Jones, R, & Semple, S (eds), 2012, *Sense of place in Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford
- Kirby, M, & Alexander, D, 2009, 'Excavations of a Monastic Settlement and Medieval Church Site at Killeven, Crarae Gardens, Mid Argyll', *Scottish Archaeological Journal* 31(1/2), 61–105
- Lamont, WD, 1978, 'Where was Adamnan's Hinba?' *Notes and Queries of the Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research* 7, 3–6

- Lamont, WD, 1980, 'Hinba once more', *Notes and Queries of the Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research* 12, 10–15
- Lane, A, & Campbell, E, 2000, *Dunadd: An Early Dalriadic Capital*, Oxford
- Lees, CA, & Overing, GR (eds), 2006, *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, University Park, Pennsylvania
- Lowe, C, & Atkinson, D, 2008, *Inchmarnock: an early historic island monastery and its archaeological landscape*, Edinburgh
- Markus, RA, 1994, 'How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, 257–71
- McMullen, A J, 2014, 'Rewriting the ecclesiastical landscape of early medieval Northumbria in the Lives of Cuthbert', *Anglo-Saxon England* 43, 57–98
- Nash, G & Children, G (eds), 2008, *The Archaeology of Semiotics and the Social Order of Things*, Oxford
- Moylan, T, 2007, 'Irish Voyages and Visions: Pre-figuring, Re-configuring Utopia', *Utopian Studies* 18(3), 299–323
- Ó Carragáin, É, & Ó Carragáin, T, 2011, 'Singing in Rain on Hinba? Archaeology and Liturgical Fictions, Ancient and Modern', in E Mullins & D Scully (eds), *Listen, o Isles, Unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, Cork, 204–215
- O'Loughlin, T, 1996, 'The View from Iona: Adomnán's Mental Maps'. *Peritia, Journal of the medieval academy of Ireland* 10, 98–122
- O'Loughlin, T, 2000, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World, and God in early Irish Writings*, London
- O'Loughlin, T, 2007, *Adomnán and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama*, London
- O'Neill, P, 2008, 'When Onomastics Met Archaeology: A Tale of Two Hinbas', *The Scottish Historical Review* 87(223 Part 1), 26–41
- O'Reilly, J, 1999, 'The Wisdom of the Scribe and the Fear of the Lord in the Life of Columba', in D Broun & TO Clancy (eds), *Spes Scotorum: Hope of Scots: Saint Columba Iona and Scotland*, Edinburgh, 159–214
- O'Sullivan, J, 1998, 'More than the sum of the parts: Iona: archaeological investigations 1875–1996', *Church Archaeology* 2, 5–18
- O'Sullivan, D, 2001, 'Space, Silence and Shortage on Lindisfarne: The Archaeology of Asceticism', in H Hamerow & A McGregor (eds), *Image and Power in the Archaeology of Early Medieval Britain. Essays in Honour of Rosemary Cramp*, Oxford, 33–52
- Pickles, T, 2011, 'Anglo-Saxon Monasteries as Sacred Places: Topography, Exegesis and Vocation', in J Sterrett and PW Thomas (eds), *Sacred text, Sacred space: Architectural, Spiritual, and Literary Convergences in England and Wales*, Leiden, 35–56
- Ritari, K, 2009, *Saints and Sinners in Early Christian Ireland: Moral Theology in the Lives of Saints Brigit and Columba*, Turnhout
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1975, *Argyll: an inventory of the ancient monuments. Vol. 2, Lorn*, Edinburgh
- Seaman, A, 2009, 'Situating Nature: Christian perceptions of the Natural World in Medieval Europe', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 24(2), 141–155
- Sharpe, R, 1995, *Adamnan of Iona, Life of St Columba*, Harmondsworth
- Sheldrake, P, 1995, *Living Between Worlds – Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality*, London
- Sheldrake, P, 2001, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity*, Baltimore
- Smith, JZ, 1987, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago
- Storey, GR, 2004, 'The Meaning of "Insula" in Roman Residential Terminology', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 49, 47–84
- Thom, C, 2006, *Early Irish Monasticism: An Understanding of its Cultural Roots*, London
- Thomas, C, 1971, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain: The Hunter Marshall lectures Delivered at the University of Glasgow in January and February 1968*, Glasgow
- Tilley, C, 1994, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*, Oxford

Tuan, YF, 1977, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, London

Ward, B, 1982, *Miracles and the medieval mind: theory, record and event, 1000-1215*, London

Watson, WJ, 1926, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, Edinburgh

Widell, B, 2017, 'The Monastic Lifeworld: Memories and Narratives of Landscapes of Early Medieval Monasticism in Argyll, Scotland', *Landscapes* 18(1), 4-18

Wooding, J, 2007, 'Island and Coastal Churches in Medieval Wales and Ireland', in K Jankulak & J Wooding (eds), *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages*, Dublin, 201-28

Web resources

Archaeological reports from the *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland*:

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/39314/crossaig> (last viewed 03.03.16)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/23478/annat> (last viewed 03.03.16)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/23680/innis-draighnich> (last viewed 03.03.16)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/22361/garvellachs-eileach-an-naoimh> (last viewed 03.03.16)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/23138/kilmaha-rubha-na-fidhle> (last viewed 03.03.16)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/21664/iona-iona-abbey> (last viewed 03.03.16)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/10335/north-uist-aird-a-mhorain> (last viewed 03.03.17)

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/22788/kilneuair-st-columbas-church-and-churchyard> (last viewed 03.03.16)