

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

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The first point - and probably the most important - that has emerged from the papers (1) to which we have listened today must surely be the diversity of forms that are covered by the term 'monastery'. I do not refer specifically to the contrast between the great Northumbrian monasteries discussed by Rosemary Cramp and those of the Celtic tradition. The former were in touch with and reflect contemporary Continental ideas and technology; the latter derive from an older tradition, largely dominated by native technology. I refer rather to the great differences within the Celtic tradition itself. Within this tradition we have ranged from important and active sites like Iona and Inisceiltra to the almost inaccessible islands like Skellig Michael and the stacks off the northern islands of Scotland. It is scarcely reasonable to expect that the archaeological phenomena will show much in common between the 7th century 'city' of Kildare, of which we have a contemporary description, and tiny settlements such as Church Island, Valencia or Ardwall Island off the coast of Galloway, both of which have been fully explored. Moreover we have been discussing developments spread over more than half a millennium during which conditions were continuously changing.

It is against this background that we must view the contributions to which we have listened. It is against this background that they must be evaluated. A single instance will suffice. Play has been made with the meat bones in the midden at Iona and the contrast with the more ascetic dietary of the Anglian monasteries. This midden was found under burnt debris, which 'it seems unreasonable to avoid calling... 9th century destruction'. Why not 10th century destruction? The Annals of Ulster record the massacre of the abbot and fifteen monks under the year 986. The midden could then fit into the period c. 900, when Iona probably suffered the fate of many Irish monasteries - 'and the place where Ota, the wife of Turgeis, used to give audience was upon the altar of Clonmacnois'. Moreover not all Celtic monasteries were ascetic all the time. St Davids represented the most ascetic tradition in Wales. Bishop Morgeneu lapsed. He was murdered by the Norse and his spectre appeared lamenting 'I ate flesh and am therefore become carrion'. The history of the Celtic monastery is infinite in its variety and this variety inevitably came back to me as I listened today to the different phenomena disclosed by field survey and excavation. It is clear that we must tread carefully in seeking a norm by which to judge

sites.

It does seem, however, that certain patterns, certain distinctions are beginning to emerge. The contrast between monastery and hermitage is something real. I use these terms deliberately in preference to the 'eremitic monastery' that has figured in some of the papers. Adamnan uses the phrase 'the place of the anchorites' (*locus anchoritarum*) of Muirbulmar, the settlement to which Virgnous retired to live as a soldier of Christ after many years strenuously spent among the brethren. Elsewhere he speaks of Cormac seeking a hermitage (*eremum*) across the trackless waves. The picture of the hermitage is becoming clearer both because excavation on an adequate scale is easier and because the surface remains, being ex hypothesi less accessible, have been less damaged. But the danger of relying too heavily on surface indications was well illustrated by Michael O'Kelly's account of Church Island, where a wooden oratory and a cemetery with thirty three inhumations preceded the stone oratory and enclosure wall that form the most prominent remains.

The monastery, in the more restricted sense in which I am using the term, is more difficult to grasp. Many of the greater sites like Armagh or some of the Northumbrian monasteries are today hemmed in by urban development. Even where this complication does not arise the excavation of the large area involved on a site like Iniscealtra or Lismore - over ten acres was suggested at Lismore - is a daunting prospect and the small glimpse we have had of the work at Iona serves to emphasize the difficulties of building up an adequate archaeological picture. Cogitosus describes 7th century Kildare as a city and it is clear that the 'monastery' spread beyond the ecclesiastical centre. The same is probably true of other important sites. A later comparison is perhaps useful. Towns like St Albans grew up as suburbs of the great monastery. In all large centres and probably in many lesser ones we must expect to find an element that is not ecclesiastical. How then can a monastery be identified on purely archaeological grounds? How can it be distinguished from a secular site? The problem is further complicated by the recorded gifts of royal or princely sites to monastic founders. Emphasis has been laid on the church and the cemetery and rightly so; these are essential elements in any monastery. They also occur in hermitages and on sites that were probably never monastic. The problem has been touched on more than once today, but no firm guidelines have emerged from our discussions.

The problem was directly faced by Ian Burrow with reference to Tintagel.

His argument that the bank and ditch have at least a defensive potential cannot be gainsaid, but in view of the known donation of royal sites to founders, it does not get us much further. At Tintagel the occurrence of fragments of imported Mediterranean pottery of 5th to 7th century date both in the makeup of the bank and trodden into its surface makes the date of this feature reasonably certain; it is contemporary with the pottery which represents the principal phase of pre-Conquest occupation. The suggestion that the visible pre-Conquest buildings were preceded by a stage with wooden structures contemporary with the vallum and the pottery is not at present supported by evidence and in the conditions of the site proof would probably be difficult to obtain. The comparison with Mawgan Porth is not happy in view of the absence of the bar-lip pottery characteristic of that site. Theoretically a date between 650 and 900 is possible and could be supported by reference to the few fragments of grass-marked pottery and the coin of Alfred. But any real appreciation of the problem must start from an analysis of the buildings and a comparison with other sites known to be ecclesiastical or secular. This has not been attempted in the paper here printed. It must probably be admitted that at present this problem is insoluble. Our identifications are largely based on literary sources and a far larger number of sites excavated on a sufficient scale will be needed before we can speak with any confidence (2).

Perhaps the most common and most easily recognizable feature of a monastic site is the enclosure - the vallum monasterii to use the term found in the Latin sources. This is generally recognizable on the ground or from air photographs. I have already spoken of the transfer of secular sites to monastic founders and some secular sites have enclosures that hardly warrant the term defensive. Moreover there is a further difficulty. We have heard that the enclosure wall at Church Island, Valencia, belongs to the latest phase, implying that originally there was no enclosure. This is a tiny island and it may be that originally the shore was felt to constitute a sufficient vallum. But it does warn us that this feature may not occur everywhere. The point emerged with clarity in Aidan Macdonald's careful topographical descriptions of Lismore and Eigg. And in this connection I would again turn to the 7th century description of Kildare. 'If indeed it is right to call city that place which is enclosed by no circuit of walls, but rather received the name city from the assembly of many men... within its suburbs within the limits marked out by St Brigid herself...'

If the vallum could be insubstantial in the archaeological record, so also

could the buildings within. Wood and turf appear in the texts and it is clear that in the earliest days the church itself could be of timber. This was the case at Kildare and also on Lindisfarne, where a wooden cathedral was built by St Finan. It is perhaps significant in this connection that Rosemary Cramp prefaced her contribution with the remark that no site of the Aidanic church in Northumbria has been excavated. Difficult as the problems have been at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth, those of disentangling wooden buildings from beneath the more sophisticated remains of the Saxon successors would seem even more daunting.

If the church was of timber it is clear that the lesser buildings of the monastic enclosures would also be in perishable materials and would continue to be so even after mortared masonry had become normal for the church. Only the windswept islands of the north and west, where timber is nonexistent or at best scarce, must always have been an exception. There dry built structures of stone must have been the norm. The most important of which we have heard is Skellig Michael, but many other examples readily occur, including those of the northern islands of Scotland, which were considered by R.G. Lamb. For this reason they have received undue weight in the assessment of the problem of Celtic monasticism and even today the balance has hardly been redressed.

Finally we should note that the importance of the cemetery has been more than once stressed in these communications. In Scotland this is tribute to Charles Thomas's important results obtained at Ardwall Island. But a similar theme lay behind the communications from our Irish colleagues. The texts confirm the impression provided by the sites. The importance is both devotional and eschatological. But it must be repeated that not all cemeteries are monastic.

Overall the Forum has provided a review of a variety of archaeological aspects of early monasticism in Britain and Ireland. It has shown how patchy and incomplete is our knowledge and how dependent we still are on the written tradition. This is not necessarily undesirable. Monasticism was essentially a spiritual force and its essence escapes the necessarily material analysis of archaeology. But unexpected lights appear. The bequests of the Venerable Bede - pepper, incense and napkins - have been quoted in this context. I would suggest that the eastern products do at least bear out the contacts suggested by the imported east Mediterranean pottery.

Notes

1. Not all the papers read at the Forum appear in the published volume; others have been rewritten to a greater or lesser extent. My concluding remarks were based on a preview of some of the papers and on notes taken during the course of the meeting. On this basis a series of subject headings were jotted down just before delivery. I have felt it best to adhere to this method and to reproduce with a minimum of alteration what I said in summing up the discussion. I have therefore ignored the seminar held on the following day, except for one footnote. I have retained the informal mould in which my remarks were cast.

2. This was noted in the Seminar with particular reference to Cadbury Castle, Congressbury (Somerset), where extensive excavation spread over a number of seasons has failed to resolve this particular problem.