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The Social Roles of the Early Irish Monastery of Kildare and Its Paruchia within the Kingdom of Leinster

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THE SOCIAL ROLES OF THE EARLY IRISH MONASTERY OF KILDARE AND ITS PARUCHIA WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF LEINSTER

By
Bridgette K. Slavin

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
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Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their unending encouragement and belief in me, even when I had none. To my mother for giving me the opportunity to follow my dreams, which led me to The Medieval Institute; my
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tears; and finally in memory of my father, who has reminded me that there are more
important things in life than writing a master’s thesis.
Monastic settlements in early medieval Ireland were active: politically, socially, economically, and spiritually. While an ascetic life was ideal, these communities were in fact often lively participants in the secular affairs around them. Yet, detailed studies of ecclesiastical social structure and its economic and political influence on early Irish society have been, for the most part, not attempted while disagreements concerning organization continue to haunt scholars of the early Irish church. Moreover, as Cónman Etchingham aptly points out in his recent publication, *Church Organisation in Ireland, AD 650 to 1000*, detailed studies of individual religious communities will bring to light many of the intricacies of medieval Irish church organization. Consequently, it is my hope that by examining the methods of social control exercised by the monastic community of Kildare between the seventh and eleventh centuries, I can detect patterns that will benefit the continuing study of the church in early medieval Ireland. By social control, I mean the manner with which Kildare attained and maintained its position within the larger social, political, and economic domain of the kingdom of Leinster.
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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The monastery in early medieval Ireland served far more than a pastoral ministry. Indeed, as I propose to show below, Irish monastic settlements were firmly rooted in the social organization of their native culture. In addition to providing spiritual guidance, these religious communities actively contributed to the political, economic, and social affairs of early Irish society. By looking specifically at the monastery of Kildare and its approach toward social control, I will be able to pinpoint some of these particular contributions that so intimately connected this religious house to the secular activities of the kingdom of Leinster.

I set out to write this thesis with two goals in mind. The first, and more general, was to provide an overview of the social organization of the Church in early Irish society. My purpose in doing so was to examine the influence one institution had on the other. I found that the best approach to acquire this information was to analyze the relationship between a specific religious house and the secular governing body most closely associated with it. Thereby, I came to my second objective, which was to examine the methods of social control used by the monastery of Kildare both within its paruchia and the kingdom of Leinster. By social control I mean the manner in which the monastic community attained and maintained its position in society. The issue of social control highlights the nexus between two sections of a society. In this
case, the junction is between the Irish church and secular society. Public institutions, such as the Church, imposed measures of control to sustain balance in the common social hierarchy, particularly through the maintenance of important relationships. This thesis will show that through enforcing social control, the Irish church stepped outside of its sacral functions and into the realm of temporal and secular concerns and customs. As a result of the power and revenue acquired through ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the bonds between the religious and secular worlds became increasingly intertwined. Through the study of social control, the important role that the Church played in Irish society is highlighted. Moreover, I have found that detailed investigations, such as the one below, do in fact provide the support necessary for the larger issues regarding the nature of the Church and early Irish society that scholars continue to discuss.

Social Control

Scholars have employed various methodologies in examining social control in the medieval and early modern periods. My interest in the Church’s application of social control stems directly from Patrick Geary’s work on the liturgical ritual for the humiliation of relics in the Middle Ages. Geary’s work examined the important role a patron saint played in the feudal relationships of monastic communities in the high Middle Ages. Moreover, medieval monasteries created holy boundaries that offered
both protection and power. In *Negotiating Space*, Barbara H. Rosenwein discussed the history of sacred spaces through an examination of immunities and exemptions. Rosenwein points out that a combination of religion and land (both important elements of medieval society) allowed religious communities to acquire status and prestige. From this influential standpoint monasteries developed alliances with noble families and were thereby able to manipulate their position to gain and maintain power.²

Similarly, Penelope D. Johnson examined the social role of the abbey of La Trinité over 150 years. By surveying cartularies, visual and literary works, liturgy, and ritual, Johnson was able to determine La Trinité’s social contributions, such as feudal ties and obligations, charity, hospice, and healing, in addition to its primary goal of spiritual salvation.³ Likewise, Eva Österberg and Dag Linström compiled a focused study of social control in medieval and early modern Swedish towns. Österberg and Linström examined court documents to determine just how the law codes were interpreted in both capital and rural towns. From these records they were more accurately able to determine what crimes and systems of justice were common during this period. Through this analysis, they found that passing a sentence in both

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rural and urban centers worked to resolve conflict and restore social order without causing harsh punishment or ruin to those involved.4

The topics of crime and social control are also joined in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, a collection of essays edited by Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace. In this collection, scholars examined the connection and influence between law and literature regarding social control and crime using such sources as legal treatises, statutes, court cases, court poems, romances, canonical texts, and comic tales. Overall, these essays demonstrate that, in time, the state replaced the family as an agent of justice.5 Barbara Hanawalt gathered another group of essays around the theme of social control, coupled with gender in “Of Good and Ill Repute.” Drawing upon anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism, this collection of essays questions the role of reputation in the preservation of social order in medieval England.6

While no specific study on social control in early medieval Ireland has yet been accomplished, Lisa Bitel, in her work, *Isle of Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland*, examined the social context of early Irish monasteries. Bitel interconnected history, anthropology, and archaeology in her interpretation of sources, mainly hagiographic, to explain the monastic world in early medieval Ireland. According to Bitel, the major connection between monasteries and

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layfolks was the religious community’s patron saint, to whom the monks controlled physical and spiritual access. What is more, the monks directed the power of the saints for their own good as well as the profit of their secular neighbors. In return for this mediation between the spiritual and secular realms, monasteries received benefits. Furthermore, as shown in the works of Rosenwein, Geary, and Johnson, Bitel’s study points to the important alliances and social contributions that marked the influence of monasteries in secular society.

While each study may vary in methodology, all demonstrate that the examination of social control in any given society provides invaluable information regarding that society’s norms and values. Such investigations provide insight into the activities and standards of a community, including details regarding crime, status, control over space, ritual, violence, negotiation, and economics. Yet, these studies also demonstrate that measures of social regulation varied in aggressiveness. The underlying similarity linking these methods of control together is the important function they served in the maintenance of vital social relationships. By investigating smaller communities, such as Kildare, it is possible to determine what role each social group played in the formation and execution of public standards and structure.

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7 Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca:
Organization

This thesis, "The Social Roles of the Early Irish Monastery of Kildare and its Paruchia within the Kingdom of Leinster," has a multilevel purpose and is organized from general to specific information. Therefore, prior to focusing directly on the monastery of Kildare, I will provide a survey of early Irish social and ecclesiastical organization. In Chapter One, I will begin with a brief survey of the Old Irish Law tracts in which much of the material concerning the social organization of early Irish society is found. In addition to discussing the formation of various law schools, I will examine the interrelationship between ecclesiastical and secular legal institutions, and therefore shed light upon the ongoing dialogue between lawyers and clerics in early medieval Ireland. In Chapter Two, through an analysis of the Old Irish laws, I will outline the framework of early Irish social organization. This outline will establish the social bonds that determined the political, economic, and jural functions of Irish society. I will include a discussion on the varying methods of social control used by competing dynasties between the fifth and eleventh centuries. Furthermore, I will expand upon this general sketch to illuminate the intimate connection between ecclesiastical and secular social structure in Ireland at that time. After laying the groundwork of Irish social organization, I will examine the formation of the early Irish church in Chapter Three; a study will focus on the historiography of early Irish monasticism and the nature of the paruchia.
From this overview of the Church and early Irish society, I will move on to the more specific study of the monastic community founded by St. Brigit at Kildare in Chapter Four. Through the hagiography of St. Brigit, my investigation will include a brief narrative of Brigit’s community, and a study of the development and function of the Kildare paruchia. This section will focus on the important role St. Brigit played in the maintenance of Kildare’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In Chapter Five I will investigate Kildare’s involvement with the province in which it dwelled. First I will provide a short history of Leinster, based on the annal records and genealogies of medieval Ireland. Thereafter I will examine once again the important role St. Brigit played in the formation and preservation of the vital relationship Kildare had with the dynastic family of Leinster. The success of both institutions relied greatly on the balance of this alliance. Finally, in Chapter Six, the information gathered from the secular and canon laws concerning the structure of early Irish society will be re-examined and compared to the hagiography of St. Brigit to highlight the social role of the monastery. Kildare maintained pivotal relationships with both ecclesiastical and secular powers in early medieval Ireland, and was therefore extremely influential in matters of jurisdiction and negotiation. Moreover, the monastery of Kildare fulfilled more mundane, yet equally important, roles in the lives of its community and clients, acting as patron, mediator, providing hospice, charity, and spiritual guidance.
CHAPTER ONE

LAW TEXTS

Much of the material concerning the social, political, and economic organization of early Ireland is found in the Old Irish law texts, which were compiled sometime in the seventh to eighth centuries AD. The extant legal material—Fergus Kelly claims one third is lost—survives, "often incompletely and corruptly," in copies dating from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Most of the judicial manuscripts can be found at the British Library, the Bodleian Library, and the libraries of Trinity College, Dublin, and the Royal Irish Academy. The law tracts contain three prominent features: the basic text, composed predominantly in prose but including verse, an interlinear gloss, and a commentary. The majority of the laws have been translated (often inaccurately) and published in the *Ancient Laws of Ireland (AL)* vols. I-V, Dublin 1865-1901. Many of these texts have been reedited and published by

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9 *The Ancient Laws of Ireland*, ed. W. N. Hancock, et. al., 6 vols. (Dublin and London, 1865-1901), vol. IV, p. 50. From this point on I will refer to *The Ancient Laws of Ireland* as *AL*. 

8
Rudolf Thurneysin (in German), and Daniel A. Binchy, who gathered the remaining material, untranslated, in his six-volume *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*.  

Moreover, variation occurs in the law tracts. For example, regarding the illegal injury of a person by another, the law tract *Bretha Crólige* states that the individual who inflicted suffering is responsible for the maintenance of the injured victim, which includes covering the expense of nursing the wounded person back to health at the home of a third party. Another legal text, *Crith Gablach*, claims that the practice of sustaining the impaired party was replaced with compensatory fines. Scholars suggest that these inconsistencies between the law texts indicate either a difference in the date of compilation, a divergence in local custom, or the heavy influence of Christianity. Overall, however, this collection of legal material demonstrates a rather unified approach to the organization and maintenance of early Irish society.  

Scholars have identified two predominant law schools in the Old Irish period; one comes from the northern regions and the other from the south of Ireland. The most important collection of laws is the *Senchas Már*, or literally, “the great tradition.” Also known as the *brehen* laws (named after the *brehen*, or lawyers), the

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10 *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, ed. Daniel A. Binchy, 6 vols. (Dublin: Institiud Ard Leinn Bhaile Atha Cliath, 1978). From this point on I will refer to the *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* as *CIH*.
Senchas Már was most likely compiled at a law school in the Northern Midlands. The tracts from the Senchas Már most important to this study of secular social organization include:

- *Bretha Comaithchesa*, which is concerned with the relationship between neighbors.
- *D'Fodlaib Cineoil Tuaithi*, which deals with the kinship ties among the members of the *cenel* (clan).
- *Cain Aicillne*, on base-clientship.
- *Cain Sóerraith*, on free-clientship.
- *Cetharshicht Athgabalae*, on distraint.
- *Córus Béscnai*, on status.
- *Dire*, on honor-price.
- *Bretha Crólige*, on sick maintenance and *wergeld*, or compensation for death.

The second significant law school identified by scholars is the Nemed school, which was found in the southwest kingdom of Munster. Binchy classifies the Nemed legal collection as a "poetico-legal" institution. This group of texts focuses

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16 The text refers to the monasteries of Munster and Cork, as well as the "pre-eminence of the king of Munster." Kelly, *A Guide*, p. 246.

primarily on the obligations, status, and rights of men skilled in the arts, particularly poets. The *Nemed* texts most important to this study include:

*Uraicecht Becc*, on status.

*Bretha Nemed toisech*, concerning clerics, poets, and other professionals.

The *Nemed* material makes a complex distinction between *nemed* and non-*nemed* (privileged and non-privileged respectively) as well as between *sóer* (free) and *dóer* (bond or base) individuals. The tract *Uraicecht Becc*, unlike the *Senchas Már* material, mentions facets of the druidic tradition, indicating that, however fewer in number than their Christian colleagues, druids were accounted to be among the lowest of the lords and continued to hold some measure of prestige into the eighth century.

According to Nerys Patterson, the political traditions of the north and midlands varied in structure from those of the southwest. In the territories of the north and midlands, the Úi Néill dominated “through a branching dynastic clan structure.” The dominating class in Munster (later given the unified title the *Eoganacht*), however, held a confederacy in which the title of high king was shared among a number of allocated clans rather than passed down by a dynastic tradition. Patterson attributes these variations to the manner in which wealth and power were

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18 See section “*Nemed, Sóer, Dóer*” below.
19 *CIH*, vol. V, p. 161 includes druids among wrights, blacksmiths, braziers, whitesmiths, leeches, and lawyers.
gained.\textsuperscript{21} In the southwest, prestige was achieved through skills in music and magic. In fact, the importance of skilled craftsmen and learned individuals is demonstrated by the fact that the \textit{Uraicecht Becc} attaches the same description, \textit{ollam}, to a king, poet, and bishop.\textsuperscript{22} In the north and midlands, however, power was gained through success in warfare and status; and in the east (with which Kildare can be associated) through agriculture and domestic skills.\textsuperscript{23} Whereas in the north and midlands, society was stratified on a basis of control over land and livestock (what Patterson calls an “agro-pastoral” system), in the southwest, individuals gained power through control over artisans (“agro-artisanal” system). Therefore, the \textit{Nemed} legal school was based on an exchange of skilled services, “with the jurist and the king both being expected to play a role in mediating the social standing of individuals by correctly evaluating the worth of manufactured objects, as well as raw materials.”\textsuperscript{24}

Distinct from these two schools, yet equal in importance for this study, is \textit{Crith Gablach}, another text concerning status. According to Kelly, the style and presentation of \textit{Crith Gablach} does not fit with those of either the \textit{Senchas Már} or the \textit{Nemed} schools.\textsuperscript{25} Where \textit{Crith Gablach} was written is hard to determine, however, references to a Saxon raid on Brega (in modern Counties Meath and Louth) as well as

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{21} Patterson, \textit{Cattle-Lords}, p. 42.
\item\textsuperscript{22} \textit{AL}, vol. V, p. 113.
\item\textsuperscript{23} Patterson, \textit{Cattle-Lords}, p. 41. See also Alwyn Reese and Brynley Reese, \textit{Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales} (New York, 1961), pp. 118-45.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Patterson, \textit{Cattle-Lords}, pp. 42-43.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Kelly, \textit{A Guide}, p. 246.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
to the *Cáin Adomnán*\(^\text{26}\) indicate a Meath/Southern Ulster region. Yet, such location suggests that the *Crith Gablach* was compiled closer in proximity to the *Senchas Már* than *Uraicecht Becc*.\(^\text{27}\) Although these legal sources are similar in many aspects, three significant variations exist between *Crith Gablach* and *Uraicecht Becc*, which also reflect a regional difference of compilation. First, and most significant, *Uraicecht Becc* depicts social rank in relation to the skilled arts. *Crith Gablach* (similar to the *Senchas Már*), however, discusses status in a clan-based social system that focuses on the relationship between individuals' land and chattel holdings.\(^\text{28}\)

According to *Crith Gablach*, only males inherited chattels and land.\(^\text{29}\) It does not deal with the landless, craftsmen, druids, poets, and priests. Instead, all ranks in society were assessed by an individual's honor-price, which in turn, was dependent upon the person's placement in terms of inheriting land and cattle, not upon skills in crafts, learning, or martial strength. According to *Crith Gablach*, an individual's honor-price also determined his/her oath-value, merit as a witness, legal capacity to accept or deliver fiefs in clientship, ability to act as surety, to lay claims to damages, to have rights to and obligations of hospitality and protection.\(^\text{30}\) *Crith Gablach* divides society's socially entitled individuals (therefore excluding slaves and non-natives)

\(^{26}\) Written in Old Irish, *Cáin Adomnán* ("the law of Adamnan") is associated with *Lex Innocentium* ("law of innocents") which the *Annals of Ulster* record were brought to Ireland from Iona in 696 (=697) by St. Adomnan. See Kelly, *A Guide*, p. 281. *Annals of Ulster*, trans. and ed. by Gearóid Mac Niocall and Seán Mac Airt (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 54, 57. From now on, when referencing these annals, I will provide the abbreviation for the title, *AU*, and the year of the entry.


\(^{28}\) Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 9.
into two classes: *oes dana*, or people of the arts and learning; and *aire*, lords, freemen, land-owners, and farmers.\(^{31}\) These classes were considered so distinct that one could not attain honor-price, and therefore rank, as a land-owning cattle farmer (*bóaire*) and be a member of the skilled craftsmen segment of society.

The second variation between these two texts is their use of the term *feni*. Patterson points out that *Uraicecht Becc* interprets *feni* as “free and privileged/nemed,” a rather marked difference from the term’s meaning in the *Senchas Már*, in which *feni*, “a commoner, or land-holding farmer,” is distinguished from the nobility.\(^{32}\)

The Church and Secular Law

By the time the secular laws were written down, within the seventh and eighth centuries, the Irish church was triumphant over paganism. Clerics, who had by then taken on the role formerly held by the druids and *filid*,\(^{33}\) certainly influenced the written laws of Ireland. Men skilled in crafts and learning, as we have seen, were

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\(^{29}\) *AL*, vol. IV, p. 69 deals with the inheritance among *comaithches*. See also Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 39.

\(^{30}\) *AL*, vol. IV, pp. 298-340.

\(^{31}\) *AL*, vol. IV, pp. 298-328. See also Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, pp. 39-40. *Crith Gablach* ranked the *aire* members of society in a linear fashion, from the youngest members of a farming family up to the legal representative of the *feni* (agnatic kin-group). The various ranks of these farmers are known collectively as *grad jhene*. From the lower level of farmers, *Crith Gablach* continued to grade the lords, known as *grad fhilatha*, whose rank in society was determined by their ability to enfeoff the former in client-based relationships. On the other hand, according to *Uraicecht Becc*, the rights of craftsmen, unlike even the highest lord of a *feni*, extended beyond the borders of the *feni* lands.

\(^{32}\) Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 40.
given rights that extended beyond the boundaries of their tuathal lands. This possibility, as well as the potential movement of clerics, particularly from the southwest to the patrician schools of the northeast, suggests the further possibility that those individuals, and therefore their ideas, involved in compiling the laws moved about and remained in contact with their colleagues. This hypothesis is demonstrated by the hagiographical depiction of a highly mobile clergy, and certain annal entries that record the ratification of the ecclesiastical cáin. Particularly of interest is the Cáin Adamnáin, which was issued in an attempt to protect clergy and women from violence. After the introduction of Cáin Adamnáin (in 697 AD), Munster accepted the no longer extant Cáin Phátraic (736 AD), which required a fine to be paid by the violator, not to the victims, but rather to the patrician monasteries.

The Patrician schools reacted to and influenced the formation of social control in the north and midlands of early medieval Ireland. The author of Crith Gablach depicts sensitivity to a region ridden with warfare. Crith Gablach makes reference to Cáin Adamnáin, which indicates the possibility of an association somehow with the familia of St. Columba (namely Iona, Kells, or Derry). Columba, Adomnan's predecessor as abbot of Iona, was involved in the diplomacy that led to the separation

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33 The fili, or poet, was the only lay professional to enjoy full nemed status. According to Kelly, the fili's most important function was satirical praise. Kelly, A Guide, p. 43.
35 According to Kelly, cáin (gen. sing. cana) is “promulgated law (as opposed to féinechas customary law), regulation, rule, written law. Tribute, fine,” A Guide, p. 305.
36 See note 26.
37 Cáin Phátraic (“the law of Patrick”) is recorded in the year 736 (=737) as Lex Patricii tenuit Hiberniam (“the law of Patrick took effect in Ireland”). See Kelly, A Guide, pp. 281-82.
38 Cáin Adamnáin is referred to as Recht Adamnáin in Crith Gablach. CIH, vol. II, p. 569.
of the Scottish *Dal Riata* from its direct ties to Ireland (settled at the Convention of Drum Cet in 575 AD).  

A further connection to the society of Dal Riata is demonstrated in the law tract *Senchas fer nAlban* (seventh century), which "enumerates the branches of the ruling clans of the Scottish Dal Riata, the number of houses in clientship to them, the expeditionary forces that they could muster for naval operations, and the contribution of groups of clients to these musters."  

*Cřith Gablach* appears to spell out the exact relationship between status, power, honor-price, property, and jural-function modeled in the earlier tract on Dal Riatan society (*Senchas fer nAlban*).  

In response to the violence-ridden society of the northeast depicted in *Cřith Gablach*, the authors of this law text, most likely Christians, possibly sought to legitimize the power behind the Uí Néill. Written in the regions associated with the Uí Néill and Armagh, *Cřith Gablach* directs that the military elite (Uí Néill) use their power and wealth as a means to control and stabilize society, whereby they will acquire legal rights and high status. Therefore, the desire for land and power among the Uí Néill was transformed into a legal method of social control in which the clan-system was used as the vehicle of distribution. Regardless of the exact origin of these texts, the reaction to the militaristic influence on society common in *Cřith Gablach*, *Cáin Adomnáin*, and *Senchas fer Alban*, is markedly

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40 Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 48.

different than the ritual-artisan-based structure and method of social control found in the *Nemed* school of the southwest.\textsuperscript{42}

Moreover, the “Introduction” of the *Senchas Már* portrays a legal system that attempts to combine pre-Christian and Christian legal customs. Indeed, the “Introduction” states that a new precedent was set with the coming of Christianity. Accordingly, in all lawsuits, the inhabitants of Ireland were expected to follow the moral obligations of the Church in addition to the judgment of the secular lawyer (i.e., *brehon*).\textsuperscript{43} For example, whereas retaliation was the only rule exercised on the island prior to conversion, after the coming of Patrick, forgiveness was also expected to be included in sentencing.\textsuperscript{44} In the case of homicide an individual was put to death only if his/her *éric* (“body-fine, fixed penalty”) could not be paid. Once a death sentence was warranted, however, forgiveness and retaliation worked together in the execution of the criminal, who was considered to be forgiven and sent to heaven through death.\textsuperscript{45} Further, the “Introduction” establishes that the written secular laws were approved by Patrick and other ecclesiastics: “What did not clash with the Word of God in the written law and in the New Testament, and with the consciences of the

\textsuperscript{42} Patterson points out that the influence of the Patrician school and northeastern laws is further reflected in treatment of status in *Uraicecht Becc*, which states that a jurist who judged the skills of an artisan was slightly lower on the scale than a jurist who was knowledgeable of the technical language, *berla feni*, of the *fénechas* (“customary law, traditional law”). Patterson argues that the variation in meaning of the term *feni* between the material of the north and south suggests the southwest had a slightly homogenized, yet corrupt understanding of the *fénechas*. According to Patterson, this variance in definition indicates that prior to the northern influence, the southwest did not include the concept of *fénechas* in social order or control. Rather, the judges of the southwest were assessors of skilled arts, or *filid* (poets), who regulated society primarily through ritual. See Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{43} *AL*, vol. I, pp. 6-8.

believers, was confirmed in the laws of the Brehons by Patrick and by the ecclesiastics and the chieftains of Erin; for the law of nature had been quite right, except the faith, and its obligations and the harmony of the church and the people.
And this is the Senchas Mor.\footnote{AL, vol. I, p. 14.}

The degree to which the Church influenced the secular laws of Ireland is a question that has received a varying response from scholars. Kathleen Hughes argues in her famous work, \textit{The Church in Early Irish Society}, that the Church had a general influence on secular law: “The general effect of Christianity upon Irish law was to modify it without dislocating it: its rigidity was reduced, and the result was a strengthening of native institutions.”\footnote{“Ni din nad taudcaid fri breitir n De rect litri ocus nufiadnaire, ocus fri cuibrena cresion, conairged in ord breitem-nacta la Patraic ocus eclaisi ocus flaite Erenn; do-neoch robbt dir rect aicnid [uile] ingi cretium, ocus a coir ocus comuaim n-Eclaisi fri tuait. Conide Senchus mar insen.” AL, vol. I, pp. 16-17.} Thereby, Hughes places more emphasis on the influence of the Church than on society. Similarly, Patterson portrays a changing social landscape in which the social structure of the Uí Néill with the support of the Patrician schools came to dominate the social and legal framework of early Ireland. Patterson’s interpretation of the formation of early Irish laws slightly differs from the view held by Kelly, which assumes that the Old Irish laws depict a preliterate tradition that was passed on and eventually copied after the introduction of Latin letters by the Church. Both scholars, however, acknowledge the influence of the Church.

Donnchadh Ó Corráin investigates the relationship between canon and secular laws in more detail. According to Ó Corráin, the legal traditions of the early Irish secular and ecclesiastical worlds were in flux. Ó Corráin argues that while the formulation of secular law owes much to the canonists, so canon law reflects the secular institution. Ó Corráin demonstrates the closeness between the canon and secular lawyers by a passage from the Collectio Canonum Hibernensis which deals with a princeps departing from his monastery. The secular laws also imagine the possibility of an individual leaving or being removed from the church. On such practical problems as property and service, with which the lawyers are concerned, Ó Corráin shows a similarity in the division of property and the model of arrangement between this canon and other secular laws. The Latin phrase dimidium seminis in pecoribus (the exact meaning of which is unclear) is common to the idea expressed in secular law through the term indoth, which according to Ó Corráin means, “young cattle” and “seems to be used by the secular lawyers in reference to the offspring of

50 “De eo, qui dat locum alicui, si separati fuerint, hoc modo separabuntur. Sinodus Hibernensis: “Placuit, ut princeps, qui se ipsum non dedit aut sua, sed tamen servabit ecclesiae, si ejectus fuerit, aut voluerit abscedere, dimittat dimidium seminis in pecoribus ecclesiae, et quod ei datum, relinquat intactum, nisi quod necessitas loci exegerit ab eo, et quod secum intulit, tollat. Si ipse dominatricem aut ministros conduxit, in sua parte erunt, si vero causa loci conduxit, cum parte loci exibunt, et omnes oblationes alienorum inter principem et ecclesiam dividuntur in separatione; sed si princeps saceros catholicus sit, omnes autem labores, quos ille fecit, et omnia loci ornamenta, loci erunt, et quidquid ipse laborans impenderit, de substantia loci non reddet, exceptis rebus maximis et propriis, id est, specialibus ecclesiae vasis. Alis vero placuit, quod in primo anno sparsit, quando egenus fuit, in separatione non reddet.” Collectio Canonum Hibernensis, ed. Hermann Wasserschleben, Die irische Kanonensammlung (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1885), p. 173. From this point forward I will refer to the Collectio Canonum Hibernensis as CCH.
51 AL, vol. III, p. 70 claims that if an individual leaves the church, he must pay the full honor price to the church to which he belonged.
cattle born within a determined period, such for example as the period during which a contract was in force. The term used specifically in Cáin Lánamna, deals with the division of property upon a divorce in "a marriage of equal contribution": "A third of all yield (torad) except handiwork [of a woman] goes to [the owner of] the land; a third of the cattle born during the duration of the marriage to [the owner of] the stock from which they sprang; a third to [whomsoever supplied] the labor."53 Ó Corráin argues from this that the compiler of the canon had in mind the idea of indoth in regard to the division of property that was held in common.54

Similarly, Gearóid Mac Niocall claims that canon and secular law influenced each other. He maintains, however, that the influence of the Church on Irish secular law was "superficial and insubstantial."55 Instead, according to Mac Niocall, substantial influence was exercised in the opposite direction, from secular society on the Church. The influence of the Church is clearly seen in the Córus Bésenaí, which states that a man can leave property to the church, and is further supported by a passage in the Collectio which states that a man should bequeath one third of his property to the Church at death. Nevertheless, Mac Niocall argues that the secular jurists were unsympathetic to the demands of the Church, requiring a man to attain the permission of his kin prior to handing over anything. Disagreeing with Hughes’ argument for the Church’s influence on the secular legal material, Mac Niocall argues

that the impact of Irish law on the Church served to modify and soften the rigid ecclesiastical institutions.\footnote{Mac Niocall, “Christian Influences,” pp. 153-154.}

Rather than focusing specifically on the emphasis and direction of one legal institution on the other one, we may perhaps do better to focus on the flux between the two, as has Ó Corráin. The inclusion of the language and social obligations of the Church in the laws points to the great presence of Christianity in the construction of early Irish secular legislation. Moreover, the continuous flow of influence between the Old Irish and canon laws suggests that the Church played an important role in the formation and enforcement of social control in early Ireland. The variation of the law texts combined with the textual discourse between the legal material of the religious and secular worlds portrays the gradual acculturation of the Church into Irish society.

CHAPTER TWO

CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Although variations occur in the Old Irish laws, the legal material depicts a relatively homogeneous outline of social organization in early medieval Ireland. In order to understand the methods of control used by a particular community (such as Kildare) within a larger society, it is important to first establish that culture’s shared norms and social order. In the present chapter I will delineate the standards of early Irish social organization as depicted in the secular laws. I will examine, in addition, the place of the Irish church within that framework. Furthermore, I will sketch the methods of social control used by the varying dynastic powers to maintain their position of authority in society.

Early Irish Social Organization

The structure of Irish society between 400 and 800 AD is dimly lit indeed. Prior to the sixth century the only contemporary documentation available concerning early medieval Ireland are *ogam* inscriptions carved into stone. The lack of a written
record for the early centuries makes it nearly impossible to determine whether or not
the social and political position of the traditional tribal society either continued or
replaced systems of control and organization during the following period. Yet,
through studying the heroic tales of saga literature and significant linguistic shifts,
scholars have attempted to outline the basic foundations of Early Medieval Ireland.
Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, building on the work of scholars preceding him and supported by
those coming after him, argues that new and expansive dynastic families dispossessed
the traditional tribal society, marginalizing the ruling clans and replacing them with
new, more aggressive leaders.\(^\text{57}\) The early Irish sagas, particularly the *Táin Bó
Cuailnge*, portray a society in which power and status were attained primarily via
ownership of land and livestock.\(^\text{58}\) While it is impossible to know whether or not the
events in the sagas are based on historical occurrences, recent archaeological finds
support the theory of aggressive action in the borderlands of the north.\(^\text{59}\)

Both the landscape of Ireland at this time and the social bonds of its
inhabitants consisted of a series of divisions. According to Francis J. Byrne, early
medieval Ireland was separated into five *coiced* (literally "one fifth"), or provinces:

\(^{57}\) Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400-1200* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), pp. 41-43. Ó Cróinín quotes Francis J. Byrne: "Irish history between the seventh and tenth centuries presents us with the spectacle of a tribal society being transformed by the introduction of a dynastic polity to a state wherein territorial lordship replaces hegemony over the tribes as a political principle"; from Francis J. Byrne, "Tribes and Tribalism in Early Ireland," *Eriu* 22 (1971), p. 162.


\(^{59}\) Archaeological excavation has revealed a large oak palisade (2.7 miles) as well as other earthen works, estimated from c. 100 AD, which indicate systems of demarcation and defense. See Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 45, and Chris Lynn, "The Dorsey and Other Linear Earthworks," in *Studies on Early Ireland, Essays in Honour of M.V. DUignan*, ed. B. G. Scott (Belfast, 1982), pp. 121-8.
Ulaid (Ulster) in the north, Laigin (Leinster) in the southeast, Muma (Munster) in the southwest, Connachta (Connacht) in the northeast, and Mide (Meath) in the midlands. Byrne argues that the division of the country into fifths was considered a tradition from a timeless past. Ö Cróinin agrees that memories of an earlier era may have persisted into the sixth century. Furthermore, Byrne estimates that between the fifth and twelfth centuries the five provinces of Ireland held approximately 150 kingdoms at any given time. Although the total population for this period remains speculative, a number of just less than half a million has been proposed.

Tuath

Early Irish social organization was founded on a gradation of rank and status connected through bonds of clientship and kin. The fundamental territorial unit was the tuath, which is commonly translated as “tribe” or “petty kingdom.” If the figures for Ireland’s total population mentioned above are accurate, then no tuath could have exceeded 3,000 individuals. One law tract states that no true tuath can exist without a king (rí), a poet (filid), an ecclesiastical scholar (ecnæ), or a clergyman (eclias). The center-point of a tuath was its king (rí tuathe), to whom all

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61 Ó Cróinin, Early Medieval Ireland, p. 45.
62 Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 46.
63 Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 7.
64 Fergus Kelly, A Guide, p. 3.
freemen owed allegiance, hospitality and paid a tributary tax. In addition to paying tribute, freemen were obligated to provide military and political support to their king. The king could, at any time, summon his retainers together for a slógar - a military hosting, either defensive or offensive, against another tuath; or an énach - an assembly with a potential social, commercial, and political agenda.

Likewise, the annals indicate that monastic houses (including Kildare) engaged in military exploits, against both other monasteries and secular opponents. Monasteries engaged, however, in battle generally only in defense or out of obligation, unlike the Irish clans who used military conquest as a primary means for social control. This is not to say that monasteries did not benefit from such conflicts, for members of an ecclesiastical settlement were usually closely connected through kinship ties to a secular tuath. Moreover, the responsibilities of the rí tuaithe extended beyond the maintenance of social order within his own tuath; he was also expected to establish and uphold relationships with other tuatha. The relationships between tuatha were upheld primarily through bonds of clientage, one rí tuaithe being the client of another king of a neighboring, more powerful tuath. The subject king accepted a gift from the superior ruler and in return paid a tribute and, when necessary, handed hostages over to his overlord.

Tuathal kings also made treaties to

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maintain peaceful relations. One type of treaty, cairde,\textsuperscript{72} allowed legal redress to victims of the crime committed by a member of the other tuatha. The crimes deserving redress included: “killing or wounding, robbery with violence, theft, house-breaking, rape, arson and satire.”\textsuperscript{73}

The ri shared many responsibilities with the leaders of the church. One of the most interesting parallels between a king and abbot arises with the issues of succession and inheritance. According to the theory presented by Eoin MacNeill, eligibility to the title of king was maintained within the derbfine (“true kin”).\textsuperscript{74} The derbfine consisted of all the male descendants of a common great-grandfather in an agnatic (paternal) kinship line. Recently, Bart Jaski has proposed that there were more requirements than kinship ties regarding the succession of kings in early Ireland. Jaski argues that in addition to being the member of the king’s derbfine, the qualifications for inheritance also included seniority and such characteristics as the lack of blemishes or any other mark that could instigate satire. According to Jaski, the employment of all three rules was not consistent in choosing a king; they were however, all considered important factors.\textsuperscript{75} Moreover, the succession to an abbacy reflected the secular model of kingship. Abbatial succession passed first to the kindred of the patron saint (fine érluma). If there were no candidates among the saint’s descendants, then the monastery was to look to the kindred of those

\textsuperscript{72}Kelly, \textit{A Guide}, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{73}CIH, vol. III, p. 791.
\textsuperscript{74}Eoin MacNeill, \textit{Phases of Irish History}, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{75}Jaski, \textit{Early Irish Kingship}, pp. 169-70.
who owned the land on which the monastery stood (fine griain) to fill the vacant position, until a fit person of the saint’s kin could be found.76

Furthermore, certain tracts on status portray an ecclesiastic elite whose rank and economic power rivaled and at times even superseded those of the secular kings. According to one such tract, *Uraicect Becc*, both a king and an abbot possessed the rank of *aire-forgaill*, “lord of superior testimony”; this was the highest grade among the aire (“freeman,” “lord”), and entailed maintaining feudal relationships with forty clients.77 This concept of ecclesiastical privilege is further supported by the text on distraint, which reveals that the evidence of three men of the cloth, a sui78 (learned cleric), a bishop, and a deorad,79 or hermit, stands above all others, including a king. Moreover, another legal tract on status, *Crith Gablach*, claims that bishops and abbots were nobler than secular lords because “the King stands up [to salute them] by reason of religion.”80 Therefore, even the highest secular powers were expected to pay tribute to ecclesiastic leaders. In fact, as will be seen in Kildare, churchmen were often of royal lineage, at times even bearing the title of king, which indicates the importance placed upon the church by secular powers. Such a combination of legislative mediation and high status suggests the potential power of ecclesiastical leaders and the religious centers they represented in early medieval Ireland.

76 “Whenever there is not one of that tribe fit to be an abbot [fine érluma], it [the abbacy] is to be given to the tribe to whom the land belongs, until a person fit to be an abbot, of the tribe of the patron saint, shall be qualified”; *AL*, vol. II, p. 72-73. See also Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship*, pp. 229-232.
The Fine

A less inclusive group than the tuath was the cenél, or clan,81 which centered on ties of kinship. Descending even further into the kin group from the cenél was the fine, a branch of the cenél; however, the relationship between the two is not thoroughly defined by the legal sources. Each kin-group maintained much legal authority over its own members. The fine worked as a corporate body, with each group owning and regulating its own land, called the fintiu.82 Every legally acknowledged adult member of the fine held some responsibility for the upkeep of the fintiu. He could own land independently from the kin-group and could dispose of it at his will; however, the selling of kin-land required the agreement of all kin members.83 If a male kin-member fulfilled all social requirements, including the successful farming of his share of the fintiu, it was possible for him to annul a contract issued by another kin member.84

Property was inherited, to a large extent, in turn from the father, and to a lesser degree, from the mother.85 In addition to direct inheritance from parents, individuals could expect, at various and unpredictable points in their lifetime, to inherit dibad, or “land that passed into collective inheritance when a gelfine died

81 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 239.
85 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 259.
86 Inheritance, however, was subject to the individual’s support by and cooperation with his/her agnatic (paternal) kin group, and was thus controlled by the individual’s reception by other members of the kin group. 87 The laws continuously tie the rights of inheritance to the responsibility and obligations of the agnatic kin members. This is particularly so in the matter of crō (or “body-fine”). 88 Unlike an individual’s honor-price, which was determined by rank and distributed bilaterally, i.e. through both the maternal and paternal lines, crō remained a fixed price of seven cumals (or seven slave women, the equivalent of twenty-one cows), and was distributed only among agnate members. According to Patterson, seven cumals must have been a rock bottom price, for the sources indicate references to payments of vast tracts of land and herds of cows in efforts to curtail vengeance. 89

Under certain circumstances social behavior was enforced by individuals who were esteemed the authority, such as a chief to a base client, a father to an unemancipated son, or an abbot to a monk. With regard, however, to administering the payment of crō by all kin members and the disbursement of dibad, members with higher status and therefore greater authority were obligated to enforce collective responsibility. The laws stipulate an interdependence between crō and dibad in which kin were expected to provide economic and legal support. For example,

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86 A gelfine, or geillfine, consisted of descendants of the same paternal grandfather, and therefore a slightly smaller group than the derbfine, who as mentioned earlier, are connected through a common paternal great-grandfather. See MacNeill, Phases, p. 157; and Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 379.
87 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 259.
88 Crō is the equivalent of wergeld, which is a germanic word for an indemnity paid by a slayer and his kin or other associates, to relatives and sometimes the lord and associates of the slain man; a payment to ward off vengeance. See Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 378.
89 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 262.
regarding the payment of cró by a fine member: "Fines are shared after [the manner] of inheritance and wergeld. Inheritance and wergeld are divided after [the manner] of sharing fines." If kin members failed to provide support by withholding cró, the potential result would be vengeance, possibly on innocent distant relatives, if the slayer chose to flee. By making the ability to inherit dibad contingent upon the payment of cró, or wergeld, therefore, control could be fairly well maintained over the support of the kin group. Indeed, this form of social control not only furthered the church’s promotion of peace and brotherly loyalty, it also provided a means which induced followers, who were mostly blood related, to remain under the authority of their chief, or in relation to this study, the leader of a monastery.

Interestingly, the laws draw a parallel between a monastic community and a fine. For example, in the law tract, Córús Bésenaí, the monastic community is grouped together with the fine in a discussion on the responsibilities of a tribe (fine):

“Cach fine, cach manche, cach andoit, iar nurdligid” (“Let every tribe, every monastic tribe, every ‘andoit’ church tribe, be in their proper right”). While the editor took liberty in translating cach manche as “every monastic tribe”, the grouping of fine with both manche and andoit suggests that the compilers of the legal text considered the ecclesiastical groups to function under the same guidelines as a fine. The establishment, however, of a group of non-related individuals organized on the basis of kinship ties was not exclusive to monastic communities.

91 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 259.
Comaitches

Just as the agnatic social corporations were strengthened by the control of kin through inheritance and the distribution of collective wealth, political and economic entities were established in such a way as to function under the same model of kinship. These groups of unrelated individuals, known as *comaitches*, were organized for agricultural production. While blood ties were not a requirement of acceptance, *comaitches* were bound by the legal constraints of kinship. According to Patterson, the “integration [of *comaitches*] into the legal framework of the clan system suggests the advance of social control by a war-oriented elite.”94 The legal tract, *Breatha Comaitchesa Andso*, suggests that *comaitches* were established originally for the disbursement of patrimony among kin: “Whence does co-tenancy arise? From several heirs. In what manner is this? The heirs, in the first place, partition their shares and their possessions, and each of them guards against the other, and each of them gives a pledge of indemnification to the other.”95 Patterson infers that it was most likely heirs, who had been pushed out or to the side along with other dissident members of a clan, who were then established as a community under a chief. In turn, these communities were bound by the same responsibilities and obligations of kinship that existed in those groups based on blood relations.96

93 The translator of the tract on Comaitches, *Breatha Comaitchesa Andso*, renders *comaitchesa* as “Co-tenancy”; *AL*, vol. IV, p. 69.
94 Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 54.
95 *AL*, vol. IV, p. 69.
96 Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 55.
A monastic settlement was also set up following the pattern of a fine. In fact, similar to the comaithches, the leaders, or other high-ranking members of the monastic community, were often related to the leading dynasty in either the tuath or the province. Indeed, a change in dynastic leadership in secular organization was often accompanied by a change in leadership in an area’s major ecclesiastical establishment; a situation that will be discussed more thoroughly below regarding Kildare. Further, the pretense of kinship under which members of the comaithches interacted was similar to the familial bonds expressed by members of a monastic community. Monastic language included terms such as pater, frater, and familia. A monastic familia, however, was composed of more than monks who performed the office in the church. Monastic settlements usually incorporated a variety of positions, including priest, abbot, bishop, a scribe, and the remaining members of the monastic community, both religious (who had taken vows) and lay (non-clerical tenants and guests). The monastery may have consisted of monks, nuns, or as in the case of Kildare, both. Larger monastic establishments practiced crafts and provided other temporal services through their lay occupants, while the community’s spiritual needs were met by its religious members. The material wealth and population of these communities varied. Monastic communities served as a refuge for all members of society in times of crisis, such as the Viking invasions, situations that brought wealth into the settlement. Moreover, the individuals bound to a monastic community were subject to a penitential regime, including a rule of monogamy and periodic sexual

abstinence. Overall, monastic communities functioned like secular kin-based (and in the case of *comaithches*, proto kin-based) settlements when dealing with temporal affairs. Just as social control was exercised from within a *fine*, among its members, a monastic community provided regulations for behavior which lay and religious alike were expected to follow.

### Rank and Honor-Price

Central to the organization of early Irish society was the division of individuals into named ranks, which were allocated a certain honor-price known as *lóg n-enech*.\(^98\) Social order was hierarchical and unequal in early medieval Ireland.\(^99\)

Here I will discuss rank first by indicating the legal implications surrounding honor-price and then by explaining the standards by which rank was determined.

According to the social structure of early medieval Ireland, an individual’s rank was influenced by personal wealth (mainly in property), age, and gender. One’s rank, in turn, determined his/her honor-price. *Lóg n-enech*, literally “the price of a person’s face,” was the amount paid as *dire*, “reparation,” for any assault that lessened an individual’s social honor.\(^100\) The payment of *dire* varied in accordance with the rank of the victim and severity of the offense. Therefore, the retribution for an offense to an individual of high rank was greater than that of the same offense

\(^{98}\) Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 181.


committed against someone of a lower status. According to *Crith Gablach*, *dire* ranged from 14 *cumals* for a provincial king to a yearling heifer for an adolescent boy living on his father's property. A woman's *dire* was essentially one half that of her social male peer. Honor-price was payable for: *guin*, or physical assault; an attack on an individual's social connections, such as kin and dependents; damage to personal property; and the humiliation due to satire, or social ridicule.

Consequently, anyone either victimized who did not receive reparation or judged guilty who did not provide compensation, lost honor. Such circumstances reduced these individuals to the condition of outcasts, resulting in both the loss of honor-price and a substantial decline in social protection.

In addition, *dire* determined an individual's potential social privileges and legal ability. Individuals with a higher honor-price were considered to be more accountable in legal matters - the oath and witness of a highly ranked individual carried more weight than those of a person of lower standing. The legal tract, *Di Astud Chirt Ocus Dligid*, states that "any grade which is lower than another is oversworn, any grade which is higher than another overswears." Similarly, an individual could not bind a contract for an amount greater than his honor-price, nor could he act as surety above this price.

102 *CIH*, vol II, p. 443-444.
104 Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 182.
106 *CIH*, vol. IV, p. 1118.
While the law tracts define the status of secular members of a *tuath*, they also helped to shape and define the legal, and therefore socio-political, status of clerics. In fact, according to *Crith Gablach*, the division of social order derived from that of the church; “for it is proper that for every order which is in the church there should be a corresponding one among the people.”\(^\text{107}\) Therefore, just as there are seven grades of chiefs, and poets, so there are seven grades of the church: “a lector, a janitor, an exorcist, a sub-deacon, a deacon, a priest, and a bishop.”\(^\text{108}\) The laws, moreover, do not differentiate between the status of a bishop and an abbot, “because an equal honor-price is, according to the path, cut out for him [bishop] and for the abbot, i.e. for the ‘airchinnech.’”\(^\text{109}\) The status of churches, however (and those who ruled over them) was subject to some variation: “It is the same with the grades of the church, according as are the grades of the churches to which they belong, though degrees have not been conferred on themselves, if their qualification at least is good.”\(^\text{110}\) Therefore, individuals were graded “according to the dignity of the church to which they belong.”\(^\text{111}\) This being the case, a high bishop (ollam, perhaps archbishop) and head of a great monastic house, such as Emly, coincided in rank with a provincial king: “An ollam high bishop, just as much [honor-price as a provincial king]; a great ollam of ‘cain’-law, just as much; in the same way as *Imlech Ibair* [Emly, Co. Tipperary] received, or great Cork or Munster.”\(^\text{112}\) The highest grades of churchmen,

\(^\text{107}\) *AL*, vol. IV, p. 297.
\(^\text{108}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 23.
\(^\text{109}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 23.
\(^\text{110}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 55.
\(^\text{111}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 55.
\(^\text{112}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 113.
“a bishop, and a doctor of laws, and an ‘erenach,’” who dwell in a church of “dignity” receive fourteen *cumals* in honor-price which is the equivalent of a provincial king.\(^{113}\) According to the laws, these three positions could exist in three separate persons, or be embodied in one.\(^{114}\)

The status of clerics, however, could be affected by their behavior, which is addressed with severity in the law tracts. For example, the legal text, *Di Astud Chirt Ocus Dligid*, claims that a “stumbling [unchaste] bishop” will be “degraded” (from his *nemed*-status), because “every bishop is bound to purity.”\(^{115}\) Yet, other law texts (influenced by the penitentials) allow clerics the opportunity to atone for their errors through penance. This is particularly true in cases regarding a fall from chastity.

Given a choice, a cleric who “has fallen into sin while in holy orders” and impregnated a woman may either return to the laity, and thus assume responsibility for his child, or regain proper standing in the church through penance, in which case he is freed from all responsibility for the child.\(^{116}\) Therefore, through the secular legal material we can see a flux of influence between Irish society and the Church.

The laws indicate that the Church adopted the concept of status (and its potential loss) in its organization. On the other hand, the laws also point to the effect of the Church on social structure through penance, as in the case of the unchaste cleric. Once again we see an ecclesiastical institution working within the social framework of its native society.

\(^{113}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 55.
\(^{114}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 55.
\(^{115}\) *AL*, vol. V, p. 459.
The most important distinctions in rank were between members of society who were *nemed*, or "privileged," and those who were non-*nemed*, "unprivileged"; and between those who were *sóer*, or "free," and those who were *dóer*, "bound" or "unfree." The traditional meaning of *nemed* is "sacred, holy"; the word is related to *nemeton*, a Gaulish cognate that was used of sacred places. This indicates that the title *nemed* carried with it a respect for religion as well as its medieval interpretation of privilege.\(^\text{117}\) According to the laws, the most important categories of *nemed* in society included the king, lord, clergy, and poets.\(^\text{118}\) According to Kelly, lords (*fiaith*), whose rank was closely tied to their ability to maintain clients (*céilí*), invariably constituted the highest numbers in this group.\(^\text{119}\) Members of the *nemed* class had special legal rights. For example, a *nemed* could retain cattle or other measures of wealth from their clients, in order to enforce legal or social obligations from the latter. Clients or other lower status individuals, on the other hand, used ritual means, such as fasting, to bring a *nemed* individual to justice.\(^\text{120}\)

Below the *nemed* were the non-*nemed* freemen (*sóer*); this included the majority of the adult male population. A non-*nemed* individual was allocated his own honor-price and had moderate legal standing: he could own and sell land and cattle,

\(^{118}\) *CIH*, vol. VI, p. 2225.
act as surety or a witness, attend assemblies, bear an oath, and make contracts.\textsuperscript{121} The law tracts indicate two ranks of non-\textit{nemed} groups: the \textit{ócaire} and the \textit{bóaire}, who, according to Kelly, can be “equated respectively with the 'small farmer' and 'strong farmer' of 20th century Ireland.”\textsuperscript{122} The \textit{ócaire} (“young freeman”) had an honor-price of three \textit{séts}, or one and a half milch cows, and was the client of a lord for whom he provided services and food renders in return for eight cows.\textsuperscript{123} If an \textit{ócaire} succeeded in acquiring enough land, cattle, and other wealth, he would move up in rank to a \textit{bóaire} (“cow freeman”) whose honor-price equaled five \textit{séts}.\textsuperscript{124}

Beneath the non-\textit{nemed} freemen in rank were the \textit{dóer}, or unfree. Just as women did not have an honor-price in their own right, but rather were estimated through their male social peers, so the honor-price of a \textit{dóer} was proportioned to the man to whom he/she was bound. Groups among the \textit{dóer} included the \textit{fuidir}, or “semi-freeman/tenant at will”; the \textit{senchléithe}, “hereditary serf”; the \textit{mug}, or “male slave,” and \textit{cumal}, “female slave,” who were regarded as merely the property of their lord.\textsuperscript{125}

According to Irish canons, the church played a significant role in the ransoming of slaves. In fact, one of the canons claims that the Church “holds the power of loosing and binding.”\textsuperscript{126} When the church freed an individual (captive)
from bondage, it replaced the bonds of fetters with the bonds of penance.\textsuperscript{127} If, by chance, the former captive should commit a wrong-doing while still under penitential restriction, the church was not held accountable; whereas a secular “master” was held responsible for the crimes of his bondsman.\textsuperscript{128} Yet, the church required certain stipulations regarding the ransoming of slaves. For example, if a monk ransomed a captive and distributed the money without the permission of his abbot, the cleric was either to be excommunicated or to undergo three years of penance.\textsuperscript{129}

Not only were individuals ranked as either free or unfree, a church could also be designated as \textit{sóer} or \textit{dóer}. Such a distinction influenced the social rights of both the church (as exercised through its leaders) and the members of the church. The Irish canons recognize churches that were both \textit{libera} (“Ecclesia catholica libera est ab omni censu” [“the catholic church is free from all tribute”])\textsuperscript{130} and \textit{sub censu regis} (“under the tribute [tax] of a king”).\textsuperscript{131} The canons further indicate that a church \textit{sub censu regis} was not worthy enough to free captives. According to Richard Sharpe, the distinction between a \textit{sóer} and \textit{dóer} church lies in its ability to receive tribute from either secular monastic clients and/or from other churches under the \textit{paruchial} system of organization.\textsuperscript{132} A \textit{sóer} church, as we will see with Kildare, served as patron to clients, both secular and other lower status (\textit{dóer}) religious communities,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{127} \textit{Liber} XLII, \textit{De ecclesia et mundo}, Cap. 25, \textit{De quaerentibus pecunias vituperandis}, “Patricius: Si quis redemptionem captivi inquisierit in plebe suo jure, sine permissione abbatis, meruit excommunicari.” CCH, p. 169.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} \textit{AL}, vol. I p. 233.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} \textit{CCH}, p. 169.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} \textit{CCH}, p. 79.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{CCH}, p. 170 = \textit{CIH}, vol. I, pp. 43, 29.
\end{itemize}
and therefore received benefits. Instead, a dóer church offered tribute, most likely in the form of material goods and hospitality, to either a king or a sóer religious house.

Clientship

Power and status in medieval Ireland were attained by means of land and livestock, as we have seen above. The lord provided for his clients in two ways: he forwarded a fief of livestock, land and returnable goods, and gave an oath on his clients’ behalf declaring that they would obey the laws of the region, including religious (cain) law. For example, according to Crith Gablach, an aire coisring,133 “lord of obligation, head of kin,” is so called “because he binds people, king, and synod in behalf of his tribe (cheniuil, more accurately “kin”), in their rights and safety by verbal engagements. But they concede to him leadership, and a right to speak before (or for) them. He is the family-chief then; he gives a pledge for his family to [the] king, and synod, and professional men, to restrain them in obedience to the law.”134 In return, the lord received food-rent, services, and increased status.135 The example above demonstrates how the bonds of clientship often crossed the ties of kinship. In this case, the relationship between the aire coisring and his tribe is expressed in terms of a lord and his client, an association in which each party upholds a certain responsibility and is assigned a specific rank. Yet clientship was not confined to members of the same fine or tuath. In fact, client-based contracts most

often extended beyond the ties of kinship. Furthermore, clientship moved through society in a vertical motion, as it brought together members of various ranks.

Overall, the laws indicate two types of client: the base client (*ceile giallnae*); and the free client (*sóercheile*).\textsuperscript{136}

An early Irish monastery functioned in a similar fashion. In addition to the Church’s extensive ownership of land, an abbot, bishop, or *coarb\textsuperscript{137}* of a religious establishment, like a secular lord, issued land and livestock to his monastic clients in return for food renders and services, placing the monastery in the economic realm based on clientship.\textsuperscript{138} The term *monach*, a derivative of the Latin *monachus*, is traditionally the vernacular form for a monk in the laws, yet instances occur in which *monach* also refers to a client of the monastery (however, they are more commonly known as *manaig*).\textsuperscript{139} For example, one of the more burdensome duties of a free client is *manchuine*. According to Kelly, the term is rather abstract and a derivative of *monach*. Yet, Kelly points out, just as *monach* came to mean both “monk” and “monastic client,” in terms of free clientship, *manchuine* developed to indicate the “rents and services due to a monastery from its clients.” What is more, in time it included “the rents etc. due to a lord from his clients,” including the personal attendance and hosting of a lord as well as its basic meaning, which is “the calling of

\textsuperscript{134} AL, vol. V, p. 317. \\
\textsuperscript{135} AL, vol. V, p. 317. \\
\textsuperscript{136} For more information on base and free clients, see Kelly, *A Guide*, pp. 29-33. \\
\textsuperscript{137} A *coarb* (from *coMárba*) is an heir. AL, vol. VI, p. 158. \\
\textsuperscript{138} AL, vol. III, pp. 32-42 deals with relationship between the church and laity. \\
\textsuperscript{139} In a footnote, Kelly argues, “Compare the later use - in both Ireland and Scotland - of the term *scolóc* (angl. *scolóic*) ‘scholar, monastic student’ to refer to the lowest grade of church tenant.” Kelly, *A Guide*, p. 39.
a monk to monastic life.” A manaig, however, was in a slightly different situation than a client (céile) as his lord (the church) was essentially an institution that will never die. Therefore, unlike the céile, the manaig’s subjection (and benefits) were permanent. In fact, the legal position of the mug (slave) was slightly improved by the intercession of the church on his behalf. The freedom gained by a slave through the actions of the church essentially transformed his station into the slightly higher status of a free manaig. The manaig, moreover, constituted a genuine economic class whose relationship to their monastic patrons reflected native Irish social customs.

In addition to the benefits acquired from the manaig, the church had other opportunities to gain revenue. According to the law tract Córus Béscnai, monastic communities, unlike the tuathal settlements, received offerings for their spiritual guidance, such as tithes, bequests, first fruits and firstlings from the laity. Indeed, if one is to accept the Irish Penitentials at face value and accept that individuals actually carried out the penances assigned them for their transgressions, then through the enforcement of penance, the church acquired further wealth. For example, according to the Penitential of Finnian, if a layman commits adultery, after a penance of three years (going unarmed, but for a staff, and not living with his wife), he is expected to present the church with money “for the redemption of his soul and the fruit of his penance,” as well as “make a feast for the servants of God.” Only then

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143 The Irish Penitentials, ed. and trans. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), p. 87. From this point forward I will refer to The Irish Penitentials as IP.
will he be allowed communion and released from his penance. Therefore, not only did the church receive compensation for its methods of social control, but certain members of a community enjoyed a free meal!

In many ways, the authors of the Old Irish laws saw the relationship between the Church and secular society in the terms of clientship. The legal text, *Bretha Nemed toisech*, claims that to draw up a valid contract, the Church must supply “good considerations,” her monks be devout, her leaders honest, the seven grades of clerics must be properly sanctioned; and they must fulfill their responsibilities of baptism, communion, mass, requiem for the soul, and preaching the gospel. As in secular relationships, grants made to the church varied according to the individual’s dignity. Additionally, if clerics failed to uphold their responsibilities and maintain proper behavior, the contract between the laity and Church was considered broken. For example, according to one Heptad, the following churches are not entitled to *dire*:

“a church by which every form of person is refused food, a church of which there is made a den of thieves; a church of which there is made a place of sin; a church in which there is an ‘erennach,’ a layman, and that without rebuke by the abbot.”

Also, if a cleric misused the offerings of a layman, the bonds between the Church (which he represented) and the laity were invalidated. For example, clerics were

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144 *IP*, p. 87.
146 *CIH*, vol. VI, p. 2211.
147 *AL*, vol. III, p. 43.
148 *Erennach* is an alternative form of *airchindech*, “the lay chief of ecclesiastical lands; he was ‘a layman, but had primum tonsuram,’” *AL*, vol. VI, p. 35.
149 *AL*, vol. V, p. 118.
150 *AL*, vol. V, p. 129.
not allowed to use the bequests of laity as the payment of “éric for crimes.”¹⁵¹ This demonstrates that clerics were expected to pay for their offences in the same manner as the secular ranks of society (i.e. through the payment of éric).

From both the secular and ecclesiastical legal material it is possible to glimpse a Church whose practical and worldly concerns, such as property, social maintenance, inheritance, clientship, and status reflect the structure of secular Irish society.

Methods of Social Control in Medieval Ireland

Variation occurred in the secular law tracts, as we have seen. These discrepancies in the legal traditions point, moreover, to diverging methods of social control between the northern and southern regions of early Ireland. According to the extant secular laws, society in the northeast was stratified on the basis of control over territory and cattle, while in the southwest, it was based on control over artisans and skilled crafts ("agro-pastoral" vs. "agro-artisanal"). Through the Senchas Már material, we see that in the northeast the most prominent method of social control of the elite class was the use of distraint, or the forcible seizure of cattle. While distraint remained a common method of control over lower ranks, according to Uraicecht Becc, an additional method not found in the Senchas Már is the use of ritual shaming, which, ironically, seems to have been directed at the elite (nemed) by lower ranked

¹⁵¹ Al., vol. V, p. 129.
individuals. Also found only in *Uraicecht Becc* was the ritual tabooing of implements and actions associated with a certain craft or profession. For example: “to distrain a smith, tie a withe [flexible twig] about his anvil and give notice that he is not to work any material on it until he shall have done right by you.” Therefore, in the Southwest, social order appears to have been maintained by the learned individuals who would have overseen these rituals; Patterson claims this may have extended the existence of druidism into the eighth century in this region. More important to this study is the potential influence such priority accorded to ritual might have transferred from the druids to the Christian clergy. Indeed, as we illustrated above, the early Irish church influenced, and in turn was influenced by, the secular laws in which such rules of enforcement were laid out. In addition, the Church regulated the behavior of its adherents through penitentials and canon law. Such methods of social control demonstrated by the Church illustrate the temporal functioning of monastic settlements, which as we have seen, maintained many of the same responsibilities as Irish society at large. Similar to the ceremonial acts of social control mentioned above as characteristic of the southwest, the enforcement of penance by the Church reflects the use of ritual observances to maintain order. In fact, one secular method of acquiring redress from a *nemed* individual was through

152 *CII*, pp. 365-367=AL, vol. I, pp. 104-106. *Di Chetharsclicht Athgabála* contains a section on fasting (*troscaid*). The idea was to pressure the higher ranked individual into cooperation. The fast, engaged by the plaintiff, generally took place from sundown to sunrise, rather than a fast until settlement. When fasted against, the *nemed* individual agreed to cooperate by appointing a surety (*rath*) or presenting a household article as a pledge. If a *nemed* did not concede to a properly held fast, he lost his ability to receive *dire*, thereby losing his legal rights. See also Kelly, *A Guide*, pp. 182-83, and Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 44.

fasting. The annals show examples of the Church using this procedure as a means to ward off evil deeds. For example, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, in 786, penance was performed throughout Ireland to prevent a fire that had been seen in a vision at Clonmacnoise. 155

In the northeast, however, social control was not achieved via ritual, but rather through the exclusion of individuals from the privileges of clan membership. Instead of ceremonial prohibition, the payment of fines (mostly in cows) was required to compensate for an individual's illegal action, thereby reducing his/her honor-price (and therefore rank and ability to participate legally in society). Nevertheless, as Patterson points out, common factors, which inevitably led to a more unified system of stratification, existed in both regional methods of social control. 156 In both systems, social status was hereditary. In addition, the high degree of stratification required for skill in craftsmanship was easily adapted into the highly stratified social structure. Patterson argues that the predominantly agnatic clan-system did not dominate Irish society until the emergence of militaristic dynasties that superimposed their political system on the indigenous areas. The Eognachta of the southwest were not as territorially aggressive as the Úi Néill in the northeast and the midlands, a factor that possibly allowed the “agro-artisanal” system to continue for a greater length of time in the Munster region. The militaristic clan system that dominated the northeast and midlands and eventually (by the ninth century) the southwest, depended heavily on raiding, which required the leaders to force groups into a political structure

154 Patterson, *Cattle-Lords*, p. 45.
in which the dependent communities were coerced into supporting the military activity of the elite through clientship.  

Methods of social control were complex in early medieval Ireland. Generally, it was the kingroup which enforced and regulated responsible behavior such as care of dependents, sexual restraint, and economic obligation. Monastic settlements, moreover, often adhered to the same patterns of social organization as did secular settlements. In fact, at Kildare, the bonds of kinship play a particularly important role regarding the monastery’s position of authority.

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155 AU 786.3. The annal also records fasting in 772 “for fear of fire,” AU 772.6.
156 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, p. 45.
157 Patterson, Cattle-Lords, pp. 46-8.
Before discussing the social role of the monastery of Kildare, we need to map out the organization and status of the church and its leaders within the social framework of medieval Ireland. Irish church organization has indeed been a hotbed of scholarship over the past century. This ongoing debate revolves around the change-over of a diocesan corporation established by St. Patrick and his disciples into a predominantly monastic structure; and the definition and nature of a *paruchia*. In describing the Irish church I will discuss each of these topics along with their historiography.

A Question of Ecclesiastical Organization

John Ryan and Kathleen Hughes are by far the two most influential scholars in twentieth-century research on the early Irish Church. In his work, *Irish Monasticism: Origins and Early Development*, Ryan proposes that the majority of clerics who assisted St. Patrick in the conversion of Ireland were, by and large, not
monks but secular clergy, bishops and priests. Through an investigation of the Irish annals and the *regulae* and *vitae* of St. Patrick and other early saints of Ireland, he points out that abbots are rarely mentioned in the written documents associated with the conversion, whereas the names of bishops occur frequently in the annals during this period. Ryan thereby argues that monasticism was not an influential means of church organization or administration until well after the death of Patrick. Ryan asserts, however, that after the third decade of the sixth century administrative authority changed in Ireland and monasteries came to be "regarded as the predominant element in the Irish Church" and "the whole system of ecclesiastical government was affected. Jurisdiction was no longer confined to bishops (not even to bishops who were likewise abbots), but was exercised also by persons who did not possess the higher order." According to Ryan, this alteration was a response to the increasing severity of discipline and to reform in liturgical and organizational practices inspired by the works and lives of Sts. Gildas and David.

Kathleen Hughes, in her work, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, also supports the traditional view of Irish church organization. She asserts, however, that the transformation from an ecclesiastical jurisdiction dominated by bishops to a primarily monastic administration did not progress as quickly as had previously been believed. Like Ryan, Hughes argues that in the fifth to sixth centuries monasteries

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in Ireland were developing but had not yet become important to ecclesiastical organization.Hughes asserts that Ireland's ecclesiastical organization was modeled after church structure in Gaul and Britain, led by bishops and also including people obligated by monastic vows. According to Hughes, the canons dating from the sixth century and attributed to Patrick include some of the earliest extant Irish ecclesiastical legislation. At that time, Hughes argues, "the canons quite unambiguously show a church under the rule of bishops." Again, like Ryan, Hughes claims that it was with the establishment of the great monastic foundations in Ireland, such as Kildare, that the authority of the church shifted from the bishops to the abbots. Hughes supports her argument with examples from the annals, the Book of Leinster, and the Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae. She draws attention to the shift in ecclesiastical titles in the annals and the Book of Leinster. Where episcopus was more common in the fifth and sixth centuries, references to abbas dominated the texts after the seventh century. Hughes also argues that authors of the later saints' lives assumed that the sixth century was a time of great monastic foundations, further indication of change within the Irish church.

Adherents of the traditional view of Irish church organization did not make a distinction between the direction of temporal (worldly concerns such as the

163 Hughes, The Church, p. 50.
164 Hughes, The Church, p. 33.
165 Hughes, The Church, pp. 49-50.
166 Hughes, The Church, p. 50.
167 Hughes, The Church, p. 57. Hughes references the following canons attributed to Patrick concerning bishops (she refers to them as Pa. I; Pa. II): Pa. I 6, 7, 23, 24, 27, 30; Pa. II 6. These canons can be found in IP, pp. 54-58, 190.
168 Hughes, The Church, pp. 68-70.
distribution of food, cattle, and property) and pastoral (ministry of the sacraments) authority within the church. Richard Sharpe, on the other hand, argues against the traditional view of early Irish church organization in his article, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland." Rather than advocating a direct administrative transition from bishops to abbots as do Ryan and Hughes, Sharpe proposes a shift towards a *coarbial* system of jurisdiction. According to secular law, the office of *coarb*, the “heir” of the patron saint, was maintained and passed down among the descendants of the saint. Such appointments could often be considered political, a point which will be investigated in more detail below regarding Kildare. Moreover, according to Sharpe, the title of *coarb* “is neutral in its ecclesiastical significance and provides a convenient label for the controller of the church temporalities.” Sharpe argues that the *coarb* may have held a combined position of jurisdiction over the temporalities of both the ecclesiastical community and the lay folk associated with it. As the growth of the early monastic settlements expanded into ecclesiastical towns, the *coarb*’s position changed to encompass only the lay population while the abbots retained control over the strictly monastic enclosures, leaving the *coarb* with control over the lay temporalities. According to Sharpe, this argument begs for scholars to seek continuity in the sources rather than radical change: “[The function of the *coarb*]

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169 See n. 132.
171 “Fine erloma gebur in eagluis cein bes damna apaid do fine erluma; cin co roibe act raimmeatluid dib, is ait beirius in apdaine” (“The tribe of the patron saint shall succeed to the church as long as there shall be a person fit to be an abbot of the said tribe of the patron saint; even though there should be but a psalm-singer of them, it is he that will obtain the abbacy”). *AL*, vol. III, p. 72-73.
depends on the increasing scale of the church's temporalities, and in particular on the political control over people which property rights conveyed. It is this which is the essential peculiarity of the Irish church, but it does not come about by revolutionary change." 173

Therefore, Sharpe proposes there emerged three offices whose functions developed out of a combination of the spiritual needs of the church and such secular considerations as political alliances, kinship ties, and property. The first office was that of bishop, whose authority pertained to pastoral jurisdiction, the ministry of sacraments and supervision over the clergy. The second office was that of the abbot, whose authority constituted only the governance of the monastic community. And finally, there was the coarb, who held temporal jurisdiction and whose title was hereditary. Furthermore, according to Sharpe, the bishop, abbot, and coarb existed side by side. Their roles remained constant throughout the early centuries of the church rather than changing dramatically from a diocesan to a monastic system of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Sharpe argues for a secular approach to the study of Irish church administration, pointing out that the coarbship was a political force controlling people and property. 174

Like Sharpe, Cólman Etchingham is also skeptical of the traditional model of early Irish church organization. While his argument is akin to Sharpe's, Etchingham diverges from the former's theories on a few points. Through an examination of applicable sources, particularly the Collectio Canonum Hibernensis, Etchingham


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recognizes, as does Sharpe, that three offices could wield potential jurisdiction in the early Irish church; namely the bishop, abbot/abbess, and the princeps/coarb.\textsuperscript{175}

Etchingham points to a looseness in terminology regarding church administration and these three titles. Yet, where Sharpe indicates the specific function of each of these offices, Etchingham asserts that these three positions were interchangeable in their oversight of ecclesiastical administration. Regarding bishops and \textit{principes}, he claims, "The respective profiles of the bishop and \textit{princps} in the \textit{Hibernensis} indicate that sacramental power and specific pastoral functions are peculiar to the bishop as a member of the clerical order but the administration of property may be undertaken by either bishop or \textit{princps}."\textsuperscript{176}

As for the title \textit{abbas}, Etchingham argues that the \textit{Hibernensis} portrays both an ecclesiastical office, the superior of the \textit{monachi},\textsuperscript{177} and a secular role, the supervisor of temporalities. For example, in making a connection between the titles of \textit{abbas} and \textit{princps} in the \textit{Hibernensis}, Etchingham points out: "...so a \textit{monachus} shall presume to alienate nothing \textit{sine permissu abbatis}, 'without the abbot's permission,' but if anyone dwelling \textit{sub censu regali aut abbage}, 'under royal census [tribute] or under an abbot,' should make a bequest in the knowledge of his \textit{dominus}, 'lord,' and if no objection be raised within

\textsuperscript{174} Sharpe, "Some Problems," pp. 266-68.
\textsuperscript{176} Etchingham, \textit{Church Organisation}, pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{177} Etchingham, \textit{Church Organisation}, pp. 55. See \textit{CCH}, Liber XXXIX, \textit{De Monachis}, Cap. 4, \textit{De eo, quod non oportet monachum fieri sine abbate}, pp. 149-51; Cap. 6, \textit{De monachis fugientibus susceps vel non susceps}; Cap. 8, \textit{De eo, quod debet monachus dare abbatiam acquisita}, p. 150; Cap. 12, \textit{De eo, quod debet monachus abbatem valde malum deserere}, p. 151; Cap. 16, \textit{De eo, quod non oportet monacho cellam construere sine abbatis permissive}, p. 152.
two days, it may be revoked thereafter.” 178 Therefore, Etchingham claims, not only are the functions and titles of bishop and princeps interchangeable, but according to the canons, the titles of abbas and princeps are synonymous. As for a monk: "the monachus is visualized primarily not as a monk in the conventional sense, but as a property-holding tenant or servitor who is a socio-legal dependent of the abbas or princeps." 179

Moreover, regarding the organization of the early Irish church, Etchingham concludes that the function of the princeps, which was essentially both temporal and pastoral, was practiced by leaders who could either be bishops or abbots, or both. 180 Like Sharpe, Etchingham claims that the office of bishop continued in importance alongside that of abbot into and after the eighth century, a view that opposes the traditional model of a change in ecclesiastical organization from primarily episcopal to abbatial. 181

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178 Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 56. See CCH, Liber XLI, De commendationibus mortuorum, Cap. 8, De degente sub censu nihil commendante, p. 160; Cap. 9, De degente sub censu sua commendante, p. 160.
179 Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 57.
Paruchia and Familia

Closely related to the debate over episcopal versus abbatial jurisdiction in the early Irish church is the discussion concerning *paruchiae*. James F. Kenney, in his work, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical, An Introduction and Guide*, promotes the traditional model of early Irish church organization, namely that the Irish church was peculiar in its organization, and that “monasticism was the basis of the Irish system.”¹⁸² According to Kenney, during the second half of the seventh century a radical shift took place within the Irish church in which the administrative power shifted from the bishop to the abbot. Kenney turns to the secular law to support the authority of the abbot, who as the laws attest, was the heir, or *comarba (coarb)* of the founding saint. According to Kenney, “if the same saint founded several churches these formed a league or congregation, *paruchia*, under the rule of the abbot of the mother church, usually the place of the saint’s ‘resurrection,’ that is, where his body was buried.”¹⁸³ The monks associated with the *paruchia* made up the *familia*, or *muinter*, of the founding saint. Most importantly, Kenney argues that the *paruchia* was not a territorial unit, but rather composed of a number of scattered monastic houses.¹⁸⁴ Ryan, on the other hand, sticks with the traditional definition of the term *paruchia*, which states the *paruchia* is a diocese under the

jurisdiction of one bishop.¹⁸⁵ According to Ryan, within a century of Patrick’s arrival, *paruchia* went from meaning a diocese in the customary sense, “to be used also of districts entrusted to priests or deacons.”¹⁸⁶ Ryan emphasizes that in early Ireland a priest often presided over a *paruchia* whose head church was a monastery, a situation which varied from the traditional meaning of *paruchia* which had been associated with a diocese. The fact that bishops and priests presided over their respective *paruchiae* from monasteries is, according to Ryan, a unique characteristic of the early Irish church.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, in time, the bond between scattered monasteries connected to one mother-house came to dominate the concept of the Irish *paruchia*, as Kathleen Hughes demonstrates.

According to Hughes, by the dawn of the eighth century the Irish church did not conform to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction common on the continent; instead, a particular *paruchial* system was firmly established.¹⁸⁸ Hughes describes the shift in definition of *paruchia* as follows: “Whereas the *paruchia* of the early Irish bishop of the Canons was a small territory, coterminous with the *plebs*, a monastic *paruchia* consisted of scattered houses... The *paruchia* or diocese of the priest-abbot was by no means the same thing as the diocese of the bishop revealed in the early canons.”¹⁸⁹ Hughes argues that a shift from an episcopal rule to a *paruchial* system overseen

¹⁸⁵ In a footnote Ryan provides the greek derivation and meaning of *paruchia* as quoted from Eusebius, “[paruchia] is applied to groups of Christians scattered in various regions but attached to one ecclesiastical centre under one bishop.” See Ryan, *Irish Monasticism*, p. 84, n. 1.
¹⁸⁹ Hughes, *The Church*, p. 63.
predominantly by abbots was set in place by 700 AD.\textsuperscript{190} She criticizes, however, the weight previous scholars placed on the written evidence for this same transformation, namely the annals, and the \textit{Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae}, whose compilers claim the sixth century as the time of the great monastic foundations, and the list of \textit{coarbs} of Armagh found in the \textit{Book of Leinster}. All three sources, Hughes claims, were compiled centuries later and therefore their ability to relay accurate information regarding the jurisdiction of the early church in Ireland should not be given much credence.\textsuperscript{191} She is likewise skeptical of the theories that argue for foreign influence (from the Mediterranean and Gaul) on the early Irish church, for which she claims there is insufficient support.\textsuperscript{192} Hughes more readily attributes the rise of monastic jurisdiction and \textit{paruchiae} to the influence of the social structure in Ireland at this time: “It seems likely that, from their foundation, some Irish monasteries at any rate may have made concessions to the familiar basis of Irish society; that families built churches on their own lands, with their own kin as abbots, or that they retained interests in the monastery.”\textsuperscript{193} Further, Hughes argues that at one time the tribal bishop held a status equivalent to a \textit{rí tuaithe}, but, with the growth of the monastic movement, the rank of the abbot came to match that of the bishop.\textsuperscript{194} Yet while Hughes maintains that the shift in jurisdiction occurred less abruptly than had

\textsuperscript{190} Hughes, \textit{The Church}, pp. 65-78.
\textsuperscript{191} Hughes refers to the work of Paul Grosjean, who upon reediting the \textit{Catalogus}, determined that it was of ninth or tenth century origin, rather than the early eighth century as previously believed by scholars including Ryan. See Hughes, \textit{The Church}, p. 69, n. 5, and Paul Grosjean, “Edition et Commentaire de \textit{Catalogus Sanctorum Hiberniae},” \textit{Analecta Bollandiana} LXXIII (1955), pp. 197-213, 289-322.
\textsuperscript{192} Hughes, \textit{The Church}, pp. 79-90.
\textsuperscript{193} Hughes, \textit{The Church}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{194} Hughes, \textit{The Church}, pp. 80-1.
previously been thought, mainly by Ryan, she fails to provide clear evidence for the "scattered" nature of paruchiae. Hughes compares how the jurisdiction of a paruchia corresponds to the overlordship of a tuath or kingdom, whereas an urban-based episcopal diocese would not fit the framework of Irish society in the early period.\footnote{Hughes, \textit{The Church}, p. 87.}

As he did with the traditional model of early Irish church jurisdiction, Richard Sharpe criticizes the long-standing interpretation of paruchia as a monastic confederation. Sharpe points out two major assumptions associated with the traditional definition of paruchia. First is the parallel of paruchia with a tuath or coiced. According to Sharpe, "Turning to a model of the secular political structure for an analogy to a diocesan or monastic model of the church solves no problems."\footnote{Sharpe, "Some Problems," p. 243.} Sharpe teeters on the border with this issue when he later describes a coarb as "controlling people and property" and "a political force." A coarb, airchindech, or princeps ruled over his manaig so that a church could be a political unit very like a kingdom, and a great church could exercise a power comparable in some respects to that of a provincial overking. Sharpe points out that a large church may be viewed as an ecclesiastical estate; comparing a paruchia, which is perceived to be very loose in definition, with the domain of an overking is, however, dangerous.\footnote{Sharpe, "Some Problems," p. 268.}

According to Sharpe, the second false scholarly assumption associated with paruchia is the notion that early Irish monasteries were "organized in non-territorial confederations."\footnote{Sharpe, "Some Problems," p. 243.} Sharpe argues that this perception, popularized by Kenney and

\footnotesize{195 Hughes, \textit{The Church}, p. 87.  
198 Sharpe, "Some Problems," p. 243.}
Hughes, is simply not accurate. The two paruchiae on which much of this discussion is based are the paruchia Patricii, the information about which derives predominantly from the writing of Tiérechán, and the familia lae, or family of Iona. These two systems of organization differed. The paruchia of Patrick, as seen through the words of Tiérechán, was a non-monastic organizational system. According to Sharpe, “its churches appear to have been secular charges, its head was certainly a bishop who claimed a territorially defined metropolitan power.” Therefore, Sharpe concludes, on the basis of the evidence from Armagh, that the definition of paruchia was proprietary and not necessarily under the jurisdiction of a bishop. On the other hand, the term familia, rather than paruchia, was used to describe Iona and its connection to other monasteries (Durrow and Derry). According to Sharpe, this familia was indeed a confederation of monastic houses. Sharpe maintains, moreover, that there is nothing monastic in the nature of a paruchia, but rather that it is a jurisdictional term in which churches were considered to be secular charges of the mother house whose obligatory role was to minister to its charges in return for alms and the like.

Cólmán Etchingham has some questions about Sharpe’s conclusions. While he agrees with Sharpe’s inference that the practical functioning of a paruchia was not particularly monastic, Etchingham is critical of Sharpe’s separation of a paruchia,

200 Tiérechán, a bishop, wrote a biography of St. Patrick in the seventh century. Tiérechán was associated with a community in the north of Connaught and promoted the interests of the paruchia Patricii in his writings. For more information on Tiérechán, see John B. Bury, The Life of St. Patrick and His Place in History (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971).
201 Sharpe, “Some Problems,” p. 244.
being proprietary and jurisdictional in nature (based on an analysis of Armagh), from a *familia*, or monastic confederation (linked to the Columban houses). According to Etchingham, Patrician and Brigitine texts do not provide proof for Sharpe’s claim that *paruchia* and *familia* are different systems. Instead, he argues, *paruchia* and *familia* are in fact different aspects of the same jurisdictional system, where the term *familia* can be used for one community or for a corporation of affiliates. Etchingham claims, “This dual connotation of *familia* corresponds to the relatively restricted jurisdictional *paruchiae* of individual local churches and to the incorporation of such units in larger jurisdictional hegemonies, such as those of Armagh, Kildare or Lismore…” Ultimately Etchingham concludes that a *paruchia* was a sphere of jurisdiction which was “in principle episcopal and territorially cohesive,” but in practice could be ruled by either an ecclesiastic or a non-cleric. Further, he maintains that a *familia* was not a different type of monastic system, but rather an alternate aspect of the same system in which *paruchial* terminology was used.

Indeed, the terminology in the canons is inconsistent regarding ecclesiastical jurisdiction in early medieval Ireland. The canons directly connect the bishop to the *paruchia* with no correlating references to *abbas* or *princeps*. For example, Liber XLII, *De Ecclesia et Mundo*, Capitula 19, *De divisione parochiae inter episcopos*, provides instructions for the division of a *paruchia* between two bishops. Yet, the
canons do indicate a connection between the *paruchia* and the monastery. One canon claims that neither the *paruchia* nor the church of a monastery should be divided.\(^{207}\) Meanwhile, the canons indicate that abbots and *principes* (who are not specifically defined as secular or ecclesiastical leaders) are clearly associated with the regulation of monks.\(^{208}\) If a *paruchia* could be associated with a monastery (therefore connected with the office of *abbas/princeps*) as well as a bishop, it follows that a bishop, *abbas*, or *princeps* might hold jurisdiction over a *paruchia* from a monastery. Furthermore, in the canons attributed to St. Patrick, a bishop is not allowed to ordain in another *paruchia* “nisi permissionem acceperit ab eo qui in principatu est”; to whom the jurisdiction of the latter might belong is not specified.\(^{209}\) These examples seem to support Etchingham’s interpretation of church organization in Ireland, which calls for relaxed terminological boundaries of the regulating office.

Likewise, the terms *presbyter* and *abbas* are used interchangeably in reference to a deacon who goes wandering without permission. The deacon must obtain permission from his abbot, but will receive penance from the priest whom he has disobeyed. Yet again, the terminology of the canons concerning the *paruchia* contains such vague descriptions as *partes* and *regiones*, along with more specific

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\(^{207}\) Liber XLII, *De Ecclesia et mundo*, Cap. 21, *De ecclesia vel parochia unius monasterii non dividenda*. *CCH*, p. 168. The compilers of this canon chose to include *monasterii* in the title, however, a monastery is not brought up within the text itself.

\(^{208}\) See *CCH*, Liber XXXIX, *De Monachis*, pp. 147-52, and Liber XXXVII, *De Principatu*, p. 140.
terms such as *loca* and *cathedra*. The question of terminology regarding the physical
description of a *paruchia* will be outlined in more detail regarding Kildare below.

The temporal functions of a church and its administrator, discussed in depth
by Sharpe, are also evident in the canons. The relationship between the bishop,
*paruchia* and *plebs* ("common folk") is reflected in the canons, "quodsi ambabus
cathedris equaliter vicinus est, ad eum [episcopum] pertineat, quem plebs elegerit." 210
The potential therefore existed for the *plebs* to select a bishop to head their *paruchia*.
Yet, as we have seen above, a bishop was not the only individual who could claim
jurisdictional authority by the canons. Evidence from the *Hibernesis* suggests that
anyone who held the offices of either *abbas* or *princeps* also maintained a position of
both ecclesiastical and secular importance.

Such inconsistent terminology in the canons regarding the administration of
the church should not be unfamiliar to the scholar of early Irish history in general, for
we have already witnessed in Chapters One and Two the variation in the secular laws
regarding the social structure of Irish society. This inconsistency is particularly
evident in the attempt to determine the influence of the church on secular society. By
acknowledging the variation, however, we begin to uncover the development of an
institution (the Church), as it found its way, so to speak, into a clan-based society. It
is apparent from our examination of the secular and canon laws that there were no
rigid boundaries regarding who held ecclesiastical jurisdiction in early medieval
Ireland. I would propose that, at least in the early years of the Irish church,

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ecclesiastical authority and jurisdiction (including its temporal responsibilities) were understood and indeed exercised in terms of status rather than title. That is to say, that power lay in the status of the position of administrator, rather than in the individual title of *episcopus, abbas*, or *princeps*. Just as it was a person’s status that determined his/her social responsibilities and entitlements in secular Irish society, so it did in the structure of the Church. I will come back to this discussion with regard to the administration of Kildare.

It is time to turn our focus away from the general nature of the Church and early Irish society, to a more specific look at the social role of the monastery of Kildare in the kingdom of Leinster.

\[^{210}\text{See n. 208.}\]
A monastery’s patron saint formed the center of all social relationships between the monks and communities, both lay and ecclesiastical, outside of the monastic enclosure. Members of a monastic community were linked as part of the saint’s *familia*. In turn the monks, and particularly the abbots, controlled both spiritual and physical access to the saint’s relics. Through the practices of prayer and ritual, the ecclesiastical community maintained a relationship with the patron saint and thereby directed the saint’s power to promote the needs of the monastery and its benefactors. Moreover, monastic leaders inherited the authority of the saint and were therefore regarded as valuable allies to many.\footnote{Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 11-12.} This chapter will investigate the important role the persona of St. Brigit played in the establishment of Kildare and the maintenance of the monastery’s ecclesiastical relationships. The hagiography of Kildare’s patron saint is rich with examples of St. Brigit’s importance in creating and retaining prestige, power, and protection for the monastery. Through a combination of the *vitae* of St. Brigit and Irish ecclesiastical law, I will examine below three
methods of social control utilized by the monastery of Kildare: the creation of sacred space, relics, and the *paruchia*.

**St. Brigit and the Monastery of Kildare**

Standing on the north of the Liffey plains, the monastic community of Kildare was situated at the political center of the kingdom of Leinster, whose seat of kingship lay only seven or eight miles from the monastery at the hill-fort of *Ailenn.* Kildare was founded by St. Brigit sometime in the late fifth or early sixth century. Although Brigit’s hagiographic record is rather substantial (six *vitae* survive today), little from historical information on her life is available. Brigit lived in the late fifth and sixth centuries and therefore was possibly a contemporary of Patrick. The

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Annals of Ulster record the year 452 for Brigit’s birth and c. 525 for her death.\textsuperscript{215} According to her hagiographers, Brigit was a member of the Forthairt Airbrech from Leinster. The saint’s mother was the slave of her father, Dubtach,\textsuperscript{216} who, by the demand of his jealous wife, sold his bondswoman,\textsuperscript{217} but not the child she was carrying.\textsuperscript{218} The holy infant was born at sunrise on the threshold of a doorway, her mother having one foot in and the other outside the house.\textsuperscript{219} After living with her mother, who was a Christian, for much of her youth, Brigit returned to her father as a young woman and took the veil along with a small number of other girls.\textsuperscript{220} Under the supervision of a bishop -- whose identity varies among her hagiographers -- Brigit established a double monastery at Cell-dara (modern-day Kildare). The bishop oversaw the sacerdotal functions of the monastery, while daily administration was completely in the hands of the abbess.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{215} \textit{AU} records 524 (\textit{quaes}); 526 (\textit{dormitatio}).

\textsuperscript{216} \textit{Vita I}, 1.1 (\textit{AASS}, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 118) “Fuit quidam vir nobilis, Laginensis genere, Dubtachus, qui emit ancillam nomine a Broetsech... Concupiuit autem illum dominus suus Dubtachus, et dormiuit cum ea: quae concepit ab eo in utero.”


\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Vita I}, 1.3 (\textit{AASS}, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 119) “…venit quidam magus de nepotibus Neil, Deo inspiratus, et emit ancillam Dubtachii sed tamen ille non vendidit partum, quern habebat illa in utero.”


\textsuperscript{220} In \textit{Vita I} and \textit{Bethu Brigte} Brigit receives the veil from the patrician bishop Mel. \textit{Vita I} 3.16 (\textit{AASS}, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 120), “Aliae vero octo virgines acceperunt velamen simul cum Brigita...” \textit{Bethu Brigte}, 17 (p. 6) makes brief mention of the account, “Alia die .vii. cum virginitus tenere velamen vadit ad locum in lateri Crochan Breg hEli possitum, ubi putaret habitare Mel episcopum.” Cogitosus, in \textit{Vita II}, has Brigit solely anointed by Mac Caille, bishop of Kildare, and not by a Patrician bishop: “…ad Episcoporum sanctissimum beatae memoriae Mac kalle perrexit. Qui caeleste intuens desiderium et pudicitiam, et tantum castitatis amorem in tali Virgine, pallium album et vestem candidam super ipsius venerabile caput imposuit.” Cogitosus, in writing \textit{Vita II}, completely omits any detail about Brigt's early life, allowing only that her parentage was noble and of Leinster stock: \textit{Vita II}, 1.3 (\textit{AASS}, Feb. I, vol., p. 129) “Sancta itaque Brigita...de bona ac prudentissima prosapia, in Scotia orta, patre Dubtacho et mater Brothex genita; a sua pueritia, bonarum rerum studiis inoleuit.”
While the *Vitae* of St. Brigit provide little detail about her life, they do reveal quite a bit about her legend. Her miracles, both prior to and after taking the veil, contain mythic elements such as fire and fertility, as well as domestic concerns like food, brewing, and tame animals.\(^{222}\) It has been suggested by some that the hagiographers of St. Brigit of Kildare transferred to her many of the qualities of the Celtic goddess of the same name, the patroness of learning, the arts, and healing.\(^{223}\)

For example, the saint’s feast day, February 1, coincides with *Imbolc*, one of four

\(^{221}\) According to Cogitosus, Brigit was given control not only over the monastic community at Kildare, but also over the entire *parochia*. *Vita II, Prologus* (*AASS*, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 129). In *Bethu Brigte* Brigit is consecrated with the orders of bishop by the patrician bishop Mel who states, “Haec sola... ordinationem episcopalem in Hibernia tenebit virgo,” *Bethu Brigte*, 19, p. 6. Kildare is mentioned only once in *Vita I* as *Cella*, *Vita I*, 6.43 (*AASS*, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 123). According to Sean Connolly, she is granted land for a church near Patrick’s dwelling place in Mag Inis, “Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae,” Sean Connolly, ed., *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* (1989), p. 29. This is not supported by the *Vita Prima* of the *Acta Sanctorum*. Possibly other manuscripts consulted by Connolly for his edition contained the name. It is, however, apparent that the authors of these two lives varied in their placement of Brigit. Cogitosus allot her more power, centralized in Kildare, while the authors of *Vita I* and *Bethu Brigte* portray a strong relationship between Brigit, Patrick, and his bishops with little emphasis on Kildare. For a female, even a saint, this high position in the church is very unusual, yet Brigit shares this trait with St. Radegund, who was consecrated as a deaconess: “Qua ille contestatione concussus, manu superposita consecravit diaconam,” Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis Reginae*, 2.10 (*AASS*, Aug. II, vol. 2, p. 70), BHL 7048.


major holidays in the pagan Celtic calendar.\textsuperscript{224} While such mythic qualities may have influenced Brigit's cult, her hagiographers successfully transform them into religious attributes that reflect the presence of the Holy Spirit and imitate the acts of Christ portrayed in the gospels.\textsuperscript{225} The theological themes that dominate the “Lives” of St. Brigit are faith, charity, and obedience. Indeed, the saint performed many of her miracles through prayer and fasting.\textsuperscript{226} A debate has existed among Brigitine scholars over the past century regarding the date and position within the tradition of the primary \textit{Vita} of St. Brigit.\textsuperscript{227} Three \textit{vitae} lie at the core of this question: the anonymous \textit{Vita I (Vita Prima)}, so-called after its initial placement by the Bollandists in the \textit{Acta Sanctorum}; \textit{Vita II}, self-ascribed by Cogitosus, placed second to \textit{Vita I} by the Bollandists; and \textit{Bethu Brigte}, the Old Irish-Latin account of Brigit which is neither reproduced in the \textit{Acta Sanctorum} nor listed in the \textit{BHL}. The accounts of

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{225} The majority of biblical references occur in relation to Brigit's acts of healing. These citations are almost exclusively from the New Testament. For example, Brigit's shadow heals a disabled woman in \textit{Vita I}, 5.38 (\textit{AASS}, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 123). “…Et cum illa tetigisset umbram, surrexit…” from Acts 5.15, “…et ponenter in lectulis ut gravis et veniente Petro saltim umbra illius obumbraret quemquam eorum”; after being healed by Brigit's shadow the woman exclaims, “Gratias ago Deo, quia quando tetigi umbram tuam, O Sancta Dei, sanata sum statim, nihil dolens,” taken from Mk 1.24, “dicens quid nobis et tibi Iesu Nazarene venisti perdere nos scio qui sis Sanctus Dei.” The author is providing authenticity to Brigit's miracles by using words from the Bible; particularly the New Testament to strengthen her likeness to Christ.
\textsuperscript{226} The majority of her miracles are good works of charity and healing. Obedience is also demonstrated by the submission of untame animals, such as a fox, wild boar, and a flock of ducks, to her. Examples of this monastic virtue can be found in \textit{Vita I}, 16.100, \textit{Vita II}, 4.23 (Brigit tames a wild fox); and \textit{Vita I}, 16.102, \textit{Vita II}, 4.21 (Brigit blesses an untamed boar, who as a result, becomes domesticated). (\textit{AASS}, Feb I, vol. I, pp. 133, 138).
\end{quote}
these three “Lives” differ, however slightly, in style and agenda. To clarify the
sequence and motivations behind the compilations of the Vitae of St. Brigit it is
necessary to understand these variations. Geographic and demographic detail lessens
from Bethu Brigte - Vita I - Vita II respectively. Bethu Brigte has survived in only one
manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 512 f. 31r, col I-f. 35v, col. I.228
It is closely related to Vita I, with which it shares approximately thirty-seven
episodes. Bethu Brigte, dated to the ninth century, is written predominantly in Old
Irish with bits of Latin (approximately one quarter) dispersed among the text.229 In
addition to containing Old Irish, Bethu Brigte stands out among the other Vitae for its
highly descriptive narrative, which provides many geographic and personal names.230
Bethu Brigte is an unfinished work, yet its similarity to Vita I has suggested to some
that, if finished, it would have reached the length of the latter which is by far the
longest of the extant Vitae.231 This close connection between Bethu Brigte and Vita I,
as well as the obvious fact that Bethu Brigte is a partial translation from an earlier

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228 See Ó hAodha, ed., Bethu Brigte, pp. ix-xxv.
229 According to Ó hAodha, this hybrid Life stems from the Old Irish interlinear gloss of an earlier
Latin Life. Ó hAodha also dates the non-extant source to the 8th century (Ó hAodha, ed., Bethu Brigte,
p. xxv).
230 For example, in Vita I Brigit's suitor is referred to as quidam vir honorabilis (Vita I, 3.15, AAASS,
Feb. I, vol. I, p. 120), whereas he is given the name Dubtach moc Chu Lugair in Bethu Brigte (Bethu
Brigte, 14, p. 4). The two Lives slightly differ in geographical detail as well. In the opening
paragraphs Loch Mescaef is not specified in Vita I where it is in Bethu Brigte, 3, p. 1. For further
information on these differences see Ó hAodha, ed., Bethu Brigte, pp. xvii-xviii.
231 See Ó hAodha, ed., Bethu Brigte, p. xix; and Sharpe, “Vitae S. Brigitae,” p. 93. McCone, on the
other hand, speculates that the common source shared between Vita I and Bethu Brigte had the length
of the latter, and that Vita I used another source for the remainder of its material (McCone, “Brigit in
the Seventh Century,” p. 124).
source, has led scholars to conclude that the two lives in fact share a common, no longer extant, source. 232

Standing, however, at the forefront of the debate are Vita I and Vita II. The anonymous Vita I contains neither preface nor colophon and has 129 chapters with two variant endings. 233 Like Bethu Brigte it is both topographical and chronological in structure. Brigit traverses most of Ireland in Vita I and Bethu Brigte, while Kildare is referred to only once. 234 Most notably, these two Vitae show Brigit as a younger contemporary of Patrick and emphasize her relationship with him. Brigit's early life and lineage are given more attention in Vita I than in the other Vitae. 235 Just as the first half of Vita I is closely connected to the whole of Bethu Brigte, the remaining half of Vita I is closely related to Vita II. Indeed, some sentences agree verbatim. 236 The lack of any clearly defined dateable material in Vita I continues to lead Brigitine scholars in circles of debate regarding its origins and place within the manuscript tradition.

Vita II, on the other hand, provides a great deal of information regarding the author, his intent, and the place of production. Vita II contains a prologue in which the author identifies himself as Cogitosus, declares he is writing at the bequest of his

233 Vita Adscripta S. Ultano a. BHL [1455]; b. BHL [1456].
234 An excellent layout of Brigit's travels in Vita I can be found in McCon, “Brigit in the Seventh Century,” p. 111.
235 Bethu Brigte is missing the first folio, however the text’s close literary connection to Vita I suggests that Bethu Brigte would be similar in detail. Cogitosus, on the other hand, pays little attention to Brigit's early life.
236 For a concordance of Bethu Brigte and Vita I see Ó hAodha, ed., Bethu Brigte, p. xvi. For a concordance between Vita I and Vita II see Esposito, “Notes on Latin Learning,” p. 135.
brothers,\textsuperscript{237} and mentions that he has condensed the saint's miracles from another source.\textsuperscript{238} Vita II appears to be an abridged version of miracles performed almost entirely within Leinster. All this makes it apparent that Cogitosus wrote the "Life" from the monastery of Kildare for the purpose of promoting the greatness of its patron saint.\textsuperscript{239} With this as his motivation, Cogitosus does not emphasize the connection between Patrick and Brigit so apparent in her other Vitae. Vita II contains no mention of Patrick and only a brief mention of bishop Mac Caille, who ordained by Patrick and bestowed the veil upon Brigit. Rather, Cogitosus accentuates the alliance between Brigit and Conleath, bishop of Kildare.\textsuperscript{240} In addition, Cogitosus provides a detailed description of the church at Kildare and its riches, particularly the door.\textsuperscript{241}

Luckily, a ninth-century poem about Brigit in Latin hexameters, attributed to a monk called Chilienus, contains a prologue by an Irish émigré Donatus who provides the names of previous Brigitine hagiographers.\textsuperscript{242} The information provided by Donatus has played an enormous role in allowing scholars to date Vita I, Vita II and

\textsuperscript{237} Vita II, Prologus (AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 129) "Me cogitis, Fratres, ut sanctae ac beatae memoriae Brigitae Virginis virtutes et opera, more doctorum, memoriae litterisque tradere aggrediari."

\textsuperscript{238} Vita II, Prologus, 1 (AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 129): "Et ideo pauca de pluribus, a maioribus ac ~eritissimis tradita, sine ulla ambiguitatis caligine..."

\textsuperscript{239} For further discussion on Cogitosus' aims see Sharpe, "Vitae S. Brigitae," p. 106; and McCone, "Brigit in the Seventh Century," p. 109.

\textsuperscript{240} The Vita II of the Bollandists refers to Brigit's coadministrator simply as Sacerdote, qui ecclesias consecraret (Vita II, Prologus, AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 129).

\textsuperscript{241} Vita II, 8.38 (AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 141): "Et cum valua antiqua portae sinistralis, per quam Sancta solebat Brigida in ecclesiam intrare, ab artificibus suis esset cardinibus sita, totam concludere portam instauratam et novam non potuit..."

\textsuperscript{242} Vita III, Prologus, 1 (AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 142) "Ultanus doctor, atque Eleranus ouans, Descriptis multos Animosus nomine libros,..." The Prologus of Donatus is given its own number in the BHL [1459].
**Bethu Brigte.** In the twelfth century two additional *Vitae* were composed, the anonymous *Vita IV*, and *Vita V* by Laurence of Durham. Written records thus indicate that a cult of St. Brigit existed in Leinster as early as the seventh century and had spread beyond the borders of the province by no later than the eighth century.

Brigit’s fame spread to the Continent with the Irish missionaries in the early seventh century and took firm root there. Her popularity in these areas is evident in the numerous references to her in martyrologies, liturgical calendars, and codices from these regions. Therefore, not only was Brigit the *patronus* of Kildare and Leinster, her cult expanded beyond the borders of her native province, thereby establishing a competition with St. Patrick and his devotees at Armagh.

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243 Esposito argues that the common source between *Vita I* and *Bethu Brigte* was written by Ultan, and that *Vita I* itself was written by Aileran (Esposito, “Notes on Latin Learning, pp. 132-140). According to McCone Aileran wrote the source common between *Vita I* and *Bethu Brigte*, while Ultan was the author of *Bethu Brigte*. She ascertains that these two biographers were both from the Southern Uí Néill and wrote after Cogitosus (McCone, “Brigit in the Seventh Century,” p.135).

244 *Vita IV* [1459] is attributed to Animosus by the Bollandists; *Vita V* [1461]. These two Lives provide lengthy accounts of Brigit's miracles; however neither provides any further information regarding the dates of earlier sources.


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Sacred Space

As we saw in Chapter Two, early medieval Irish monasteries were not isolated ecclesiastical enclosures cut off from the rest of lay society. They participated, moreover, in many of the same social relationships as the laity, such as clientship. In fact, archaeological evidence suggests that in early Christian Ireland, monasteries were the precursors to urban centers prior to the establishment of the Norse longphorts. Major ecclesiastical centers supported substantial populations of both lay and religious folk. In his discussion of the medieval parish, Aron Gurevich points out that the parish provided civic as well as spiritual life; it framed the ideological and moral control of the population within. The same can be said of a medieval Irish monastery. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the relationship between the laity and the religious community was founded on the patron saint. The hagiography of St. Brigit portrays the monastery as active in the daily life of the local community. One of the ways in which a monastery defined itself was through the creation of sacred space. The formation of sacred space served two important functions: first, it established the boundaries of the ecclesiastical enclosure; secondly, it called on the patron saint to use his/her powers to protect the community. Therefore all individuals who lived within that space had a relationship with the saint (whose spiritual and feudal responsibilities were placed onto the monastic leader) from whom they were to receive protection. Indeed, a saint’s vita can be viewed as a
written contract outlining the property rights of the monastery.247 Through the formation of sacred space, the monastery solidified its relationship with the inhabitants, limited admittance to whomever was deemed worthy, and controlled access to the more sacred areas such as the church and altar where the saint’s relics were located.248

Just as walls encircled the forts of kings in early medieval Ireland, most monastic communities were surrounded by at least one circular wall.249 In addition to the physical protection offered by the enclosure, monks often delineated sacred space through ritual.250 According to St. Brigit’s hagiographer, Cogitosus, there were no solid boundaries around the monastery of Kildare (at least in the eighth century). He claims, however, that Kildare was confined within invisible lines created by St. Brigit, which he felt were sufficient to protect the community: “In its suburbs, which St. Brigit had marked out by a definite boundary, no human foe or enemy attack is feared.”251 He goes on to explain that Kildare is the safest city for fugitives in all of Ireland, and that the treasures of kings are held there. Moreover, the author claims

251 The translation is by Sean Conolly. *Vita II*, 39 (AASS, Feb. 1, vol. 1, p. 141), “...in cuius suburbanis, quae Sancta certo limite designavit Brigida, nullus carnalis adversarius, nec concursus timetur hostium...”
that Kildare is most notable for its supremacy.\textsuperscript{252} Cogitosus is proposing to his prospective readers that by establishing a relationship with the monastery of Kildare, they will be under the most holy protection and patronage of St. Brigit, whose sanctity is so profound that earthen or stone walls are unnecessary for the protection of the inhabitants. The number of unfortunates who seek and receive refuge at Kildare in addition to the trust and support of kings who keep their treasures within the sacred space illustrates the supremacy of the monastic community.

Many monastic houses possessed stone crosses, in addition to the walls, which marked the area as sacred. According to Cogitosus, St. Brigit did not leave Kildare without any physical marker of her protection and power. The saint miraculously moved a large millstone near the doorway of the church, afterwards people came to that location to venerate the saint and receive miracles.\textsuperscript{253} The millstone both marked and protected the inner sanctum of the church. The pilgrims were allowed to approach the stone, but not enter the confines of the holy space it marked. The inner sanctum of the church contained the holiest possessions of Kildare, the relics of St. Brigit.

Cogitosus, furthermore, provides a detailed description of the church at Kildare. An ornate door opens into the cathedral church, whose walls are painted with various pictures. The body of St. Brigit lay to the right of the main altar and her bishop Conleath to the left. Each saint is housed in precious stones and gold.\textsuperscript{254} The altar marks the most sacred area of the monastic community where "the archbishop

offers the Lord’s sacrifice together with his monastic chapter and those appointed to the sacred ministries.”

As we can see through the intimate descriptions of Cogitosus, the church was the center of ritual at Kildare. The author suggests that all members of the monastic settlement, including the laity, participated; “And so, in one vast basilica, a large congregation of people of varying status, rank, sex, and local origin, with partitions placed between them, prays to the omnipotent Master, differing in status, but one in spirit.”

Once again we see that the patron saint is at the center of the relationship that ties the community together. Cogitosus emphasizes that people of both sexes flocked to Kildare to receive the benefits of the saint’s holy patronage through miracles and protection. Many of these individuals, according to the author, took vows to her, thereby binding themselves to the monastery of Kildare. By controlling access to the relics and memory of St. Brigit, the monastic leaders were able to establish their boundaries, draw new members into the community, in addition to maintaining the relationships they had already established; all of these acts served to promote the prestige of the monastery and bring in revenue.

The members of the monastic settlement gained, in turn, spiritual benefits through ritual and proximity to the relics of St. Brigit. Moreover, the sacred space in which they dwelt offered protection and stability. Yet, the popularity and relics of St. Brigit

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were not confined to the monastic community of Kildare. Rather, the charisma of the saint connected Kildare to other ecclesiastical houses and in turn, it became one of the most powerful monasteries in medieval Irish Church organization.

The Parochia of Kildare

The popularity of St. Brigit in early medieval Ireland is obvious from the impressive amount of hagiography devoted to her. Indeed, the parochia of Kildare rivaled that of Armagh, which, according to the hagiography of St. Brigit, it appears to have superseded in the expansion and administration of ecclesiastical authority during the seventh and eighth centuries. One of the most important sources connected to Kildare's jurisdictional functions is the so-called Armagh-Kildare pact which is an alleged agreement concerning ecclesiastical sovereignty made between Patrick and Brigit. This agreement is recorded in the Liber Angeli, written in 807, as an addendum to the Book of Armagh. There it states: "Between holy Patrick and Brigit, the pillars of the Irish, there was so much loving friendship that they had one heart and one mind. Christ accomplished many miracles through him and her. So the holy man said to the Christian virgin: 'My dear Brigit, your parochia will be reckoned as under your jurisdiction in your province, but in the eastern and western part it will be under my control.'"258 Nevertheless, the hagiographic tradition of Kildare does not support this division. According to Cogitosus, Brigit was given
control not only over the monastic community at Kildare, which he proclaims “is the head of almost all the Irish Churches with supremacy over all the monasteries of the Irish,” but also over a *paruchia* which, he claims, “extends over the whole land of Ireland, reaching from sea to sea.”

Cogitosus relates that the fame of Brigit’s miracles drew faithful souls from every province of Ireland to be near the holy woman at Kildare. Realizing that she could not fulfill the sacramental duties of a bishop for the many churches throughout Ireland “attached to her” she sought out Conleath, a hermit, “in order that he might govern the Church with her in the office of bishop and that her Churches might lack nothing in regards to priestly orders.”

Cogitosus makes only one connection between Kildare and Patrick, through her taking the veil from the patrician bishop Mac Caille. In fact, in *Vita II*, St. Brigit does not wander outside the province of Leinster. Unlike the territorial split in the Kildare-Armagh pact, which favored Patrick, Cogitosus allots St. Brigit jurisdictional power over the entire island, but centered it at the monastery of Kildare.

On the other hand, the anonymous author of *Vita I* mentions Kildare only once, as *Cella*. Although *Vita I* supports the deference of St. Brigit to Patrick indicated in the Armagh-Kildare pact, the work does not uphold the territorial division of jurisdiction portrayed by the alleged agreement. There are a few instances

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258 This quotation is from Kathleen Hughes’ translation of the *Liber Angeli* (Hughes, *The Church*, p. 279). The original text can be found in *The Book of Armagh*, folios 20v-22r.
259 *Vita II Prologus*, 4 (AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 129) “…cuius parochia per totam Hibernensem terram diffusa a mari usque ad mare extensa est…”

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in *Vita I* where Brigit assumes a secondary role to Patrick out of respect. For example, in one episode, Brigit delegates a legal decision to Patrick at an assembly at *Tailtiu*. In yet another passage Brigit defers to Patrick regarding the explanation of an apparition: “And Brigit said, ‘Ask Patrick.’ When Patrick heard this he said, ‘You and I are equal. Reveal this mystery to them.’”

Although Brigit yields to Patrick in this stanza, his response indicates that the two peers were equal in authority.

While Brigit takes a slightly subordinate position to Patrick in these episodes, *Vita I* indicates that the saint’s cult and Kildare’s jurisdictional influence expanded beyond the province of Leinster and therefore, like *Vita II*, does not support the Armagh-Kildare pact. Rather, *Vita I* makes connections between St. Brigit and other provinces outside Kildare. This is especially apparent regarding the province of Connacht. According to *Vita I*, while Brigit was born of Leinster stock, her mother was sold to a druid of the Úi Néill, who in turn sold her to another druid from the north. This druid took Brigit’s mother, who is pregnant with the holy infant, to live among the Connachta, to whom he is related. The author of *Vita I* then claims that Brigit holds a large *paruchia* in Connacht: “One day the infant’s voice was heard. She was praying to God and stretching out her hands to heaven. A man greeted her

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and she replied: ‘This will be mine; this will be mine.’ The druid on hearing this said, ‘The answer which the infant has given is a true prophecy, because this place will be hers forever.’ Which later proved true, for today saint Brigit has a large paruchia in those regions.”

As Brigit is the patroness of Kildare, it appears that the author was attempting to demonstrate the breadth of Kildare’s jurisdictional reach. Moreover, Brigit’s connection to Connacht and the Úi Néill are further demonstrated in Vita I when Brigit is called home to Leinster from the regions of the Connachta where she, accompanied by two bishops, had been staying. The author states that “…when they reached the River Sionna they found there near Aith Luan two groups of people waiting, one on either bank, the Úi Néill and the people of Connacht.”

These episodes point out the scope of St. Brigit’s cult and therefore the potential source of revenue that would flow to the monastery of Kildare as a result. The annals give accounts of monastic leaders and their retinues, accompanied by the relics of their founding saints, who traveled across provinces collecting donations and taxes. While such a record has not been found for Kildare, one may assume that similar circuits took place in association with Kildare and the relics of St. Brigit. In addition to drawing revenue, such an itinerant reliquary would help to enforce the jurisdictional primacy of a major monastery, such as Kildare, over smaller churches as well as maintain and attract new clients. It would also serve to draw pilgrims and

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266 Vita I, 1.7 (AASS, Feb. I, vol. I, p. 119) “Meum erit hoc; Meum erit hoc.”
268 Relic circuits appear to have become popular in the mid-8th century. AU 734, 743, 753, 772, 778, 780, 788, 790, 793, 799, 806, 816. For more information regarding the terminology of these relic circuits, see Ó Briain, “The Hagiography,” p. 4-5.
potential initiates to the monastery itself, further increasing Kildare’s level of influence. Overall, the hagiography of St. Brigit portrays a *paruchia* defined by territorial breadth rather than a connection of smaller satellite churches pocketed around the country.

The flexibility of the language regarding Kildare’s authority, which includes titles such as *abbatissa*, *dominatrix*, *comarbae Brigte*, *abbas*, *ap*, *princeps*, *airchinnech*, and *episcopus*, suggests that there were coextensive lines of administration. Both Sharpe and Etchingham have argued for three titles of ecclesiastical authority in early medieval Ireland: the bishop, abbot, and *princeps*. As we have seen, Sharpe allocates different functions to each title, whereas Etchingham claims on the basis of inconsistency of language, that any one of these three positions could have overseen ecclesiastical jurisdiction at any given time. From the annals, we know that such dual positions as *episcopus-abbas* and *presbyter-abbas* existed. The hagiography for Kildare further demonstrates versatility and cooperation between positions of ecclesiastical authority. According to *Bethu Brigte*, Brigit is consecrated to the order of *episcopus* by the Patrician bishop Mel. While she does not receive such exclusive authority in *Vita I*, Brigit’s association with bishops (particularly disciples of Patrick) is clear. The holy virgin travels north to receive the veil from the Patrician bishops Mel and Melchiu, with whom she remains. As a woman, Brigit is

269 *AU* 732, 743, 758, 773, 805, 831, 834, 855, 916, 918, 979; see also Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 90.
270 *AU* 696, 698, 752, 787, 798, 804, 865, 870, 885; *AFM* 830, 850, 886, 905, 955, 967; see also Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 90.
271 *AU* 639, 709, 787, 834, 864, 950; *AFM* 840; see also Etchingham, *Church Organisation*, p. 90.
272 See above, pp. 53-55.
not allowed to perform the sacraments. Therefore Patrick orders that she must not travel without the accompaniment of a priest. According to Cogitosus, however, it is Brigit who chooses to share her authority with the bishop Conleath, a man of Leinster. Cogitosus also points out that Conleath performs the sacramental duties that Brigit cannot. All three of these Vitae indicate that a bishop was responsible for administering sacraments; yet, as we will see below, all of them show Brigit as the primary supervisor over the paruchia of Kildare.

Bethu Brigte illustrates the potential combination of the offices of abbess and bishop. While the reality of a woman being raised to the episcopacy was unlikely, this example demonstrates, first, that the concept of a joint arrangement was acceptable and, second, that St. Brigit was considered a powerful enough figure in the Irish Church that she, and the monastery she represented, held a high ecclesiastical authority. Therefore, according to secular law, anyone who governed the monastery of Kildare as Brigit’s heir would also inherit her status and authority. This heir, as demonstrated by the titles of Kildare’s supervision provided by the annals, may have been a bishop, abbot, or princeps. Furthermore, the hagiography of Kildare demonstrates that the individual in question could be both bishop and abbess/abbot or that administration could be delegated between the two offices. Indeed Brigit, whether by her own account or through obedience to others, is most often portrayed as sharing her control with bishops. What is apparent, moreover, is that it was the

273 John Ryan cites other instances in medieval Irish sources that discuss the investiture of Brigit by Mel. For example, the Liber Hymnorum claims that Mel invested the order of bishop onto Brigit with the understanding that her successors would maintain the rights to the office. Another medieval author
person who as the heir of St. Brigit, held the position of authority at Kildare and supervised the jurisdiction of both the monastery and its *paruchia*, regardless of title.

As we have seen, the hagiography of Kildare does not support the division of *paruchiae* between Patrick and Brigit as depicted in the *Book of Armagh*. What is more, the Armagh-Kildare pact does not entirely follow the stipulations for such a division as promulgated by canon law. According to the canon, *De divisione parochiae inter episcopos*, when a *paruchia* is divided between two bishops, it is the bishop who has held the office longer who divides the territory, and the bishop of lesser duration who selects first which section he wants.\textsuperscript{274} If the compilers of the agreement considered Brigit to be equal to Patrick, as Brigit’s hagiographers clearly did, then Brigit would have been the one to select which section of the island-wide *paruchia* she wanted, rather than accepting what Patrick dictated. The agreement, however, is recorded in a Patrician source, hence supporting the claims of Armagh; moreover, Brigit was a woman and therefore was not allowed to perform the sacramental duties of a bishop, no matter how important she was. The Armagh-Kildare pact demonstrates, more exactly, the power and expansion of the cult of St. Brigit and the *paruchia* of Kildare. So much so, that by the ninth century, Armagh wanted to define a specific territory as its *paruchia*, while respecting Kildare’s power. Regardless of the compilers’ motivations, the Armagh-Kildare agreement, like the hagiography of Kildare, depicts a *paruchia* that was understood through the measure

\textsuperscript{83} argued that the Brigit was alone among all women to be invested as *episcopus*. Yet others considered Mel’s actions as irresponsible. See Ryan, Irish *Monasticism*, p. 183.
of territory rather than a confederacy of houses. The hagiography of St. Brigit and annals indicate that jurisdiction over the monastery of Kildare and its *paruchia* was maintained from Kildare and through the command of the individual who held the position of authority in the name of its founder, regardless of title. These factors, the burgeoning cult of St. Brigit, territorial girth, the resources associated with it, and jurisdictional authority, made the monastery of Kildare an attractive source of power and revenue to the ruling families of Leinster. Indeed, by investigating the interplay between Kildare and the reigning dynasties of Leinster, it is possible to reveal the social role of the monastery in the province.

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274 Cap. XIX, *De divisione parochia inter episcopos*, “Sinodus Sardinensis ait: Equaliter inter se dividant episcopi, ubi ambae partes fuerint, id est alia loca ad illum, alia ad istum pertineant; ita ille dividat, qui plus temporis in episcopatu habet et minor eligat.” *CCH*, p. 167.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE MONASTERY OF KILDARE AND THE KINGDOM OF LEINSTER

In the previous chapters I have outlined the social framework of early Irish society and how the developing Church both influenced and organized itself within this order. In Chapter Four we saw the important role St. Brigit played in establishing and maintaining the status of Kildare and the power of the monastic leader who inherited her responsibilities and authority. Through the holy legend of St. Brigit, Kildare controlled access to the sacred space and holy relics of the monastery and the jurisdiction of its paruchia. Each of these functions attracted revenue and new relationships to Kildare bound in the name of its patron saint. Kildare’s prestige drew secular allies and enemies to it as well as ecclesiastical. Having established the role of Kildare in the ecclesiastical organization of Ireland, the following chapter will analyze the part played by the monastery in the political affairs of the Kingdom of Leinster.
A Brief History of Leinster

Located in the mid to southeast of Ireland, the province of Leinster was a "well defined unit centered on the basins of the rivers Liffey, Barrow and Slaney, cutoff from the midlands by the vast bogs of Offaly and by a zone of forest north of the Liffey, and from Munster by the uplands of Osraige rising west of the Barrow."²⁷⁵ Bordered by the Irish Sea to the east, the coastal areas of Leinster remained of little significance until the ninth-century invasions by the Vikings and their eventual settlements at Dublin, Wexford, Wicklow, and Arklow. The center of political power in Leinster was located on the Liffey plains in the north of the province.²⁷⁶ In the opening centuries of the period with which we are concerned, the kingdom of Leinster experienced a number of changes that ultimately led to the formation of two new major dynasties, the Ui Dúnlainge and Ui Cheinnselaig. The earliest references of Leinster kingship, however, point to the families Ui Garrchon and the Ui Enechgliass. At least two Ui Garrchon kings are mentioned in the annals, Finnchad, who died in the battle of Grannad in 485; and his son, Fraéch mac Findchada, to whom the term ri Laigen ("King of Leinster") is given in 495.²⁷⁷ According to the annals, however, by the dawning of the sixth century power over Leinster shifted into

²⁷⁵ Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 130.
²⁷⁷ For the obit of Finnchad, Al and AU give the same date of 485. For Fraéch, however, the annals differ, with Al giving the date 493 at the battle of Srath Echaill, and AU giving 495 and a different battle.
the hands of the Ui Gabla. Yet the center of power for the Ui Gabla appears to have been on the Kildare-Leix border, which placed them amid cross-fire during struggles between the Leinstermen and their enemies to the north. Apparently, this situation led to the dissolution of Ui Gabla power as they virtually disappear from written record after the early sixth century.

While the dynastic records for Leinster are meager for the fifth and sixth centuries, the struggles of the Leinstermen with their enemies, both within and beyond the boundaries of the province, are clearly evident in the annal entries of the early centuries. The bitterest of Leinster’s enemies were the northern Ui Neill, a ruling dynasty from the province of Ulaid (Ulster). From the beginning of the historical record, the Laigin appear most often on the defensive against the Ui Néill. For instance, according to the Annals of Clonmacnoise, in 427 the high-king, Loégaire mac Néill, defeated the Leinstermen and demanded homage in the form of livestock (known as bóruma) from them. Archaic Leinster regnal poems suggest that the Laigin held a legitimate claim to the title of the high-king of Tara. This sacred position was also claimed by the Ui Néill in the fifth century through the dominion of Niall Noíngiallach (“Niall of the Nine Hostages”) and his descendants, thereby causing tension between the two dynasties. The struggle over the bóruma was ongoing, for in 449 it is written that at the battle of Athdara, the Leinstermen defeated

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278 According to Ó Cróinín, The Ui Gabla were a sub-sect of Dal Cormaic. Ó Cróinín, Early Medieval Ireland, p. 53.
279 AC 427. By the title high-king, I am referring to the high-kingship of Tara; a title which is understood in the annals to be the high-king of Ireland.
Loégaire, who restored their cattle to them after he had been taken captive. The Úi Néill, however, maintained the upper hand; trouble between them and the Leinstermen continued into the next century when c. 513 the plain of Mide (Meath) was wrested from the Laigin by Failge mac Néill. In fact, skirmishes over the bóruma extended into the seventh and eighth centuries. Churchmen were not unaffected by warfare. Both Leinster hagiography and the annals show the saints of the province as fierce protectors and supporters during these conflicts. For example, in 672, the high-king Fynnaghty Fleah “forgave the Leinstermen the Borowe,” at the request of St. Mo-Ling, one of Leinster’s greatest saints and the founder of the monastery of St. Mullins. Yet, this act of the high-king did not put an end to Úi Néill attempts to exact the bóruma from Leinster, for during “The Battle of Allen,” the high-king Fergal mac Máelle Dúin was killed by Aéd, the King of Leinster, “while trying to exact the bóruma in 722.”

Nevertheless, the Leinstermen not only faced threats outside of their borders; infighting is evident in the annals as well. For instance, in 487, the Leinstermen fought among themselves at the battle of Granie (in modern Co. Kildare). Approximately a century later, some Leinstermen engaged in regicide with “the slaying of Brandub son of Eochu, i.e. King of Laigin, by his own kindred.” Indeed,

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280 Byrne refers to archaic regnal poems of Leinster that indicate that prehistoric kings of that province held the kingship of Tara prior to Niall Noingiallach (“Niall of the Nine Hostages”), the founder of the Úi Néill dynasty in the fifth century. Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 142.
281 AC 449. AI places the battle of Áth Dara in 459.
282 AI 513; AU 516, 517.
283 AC 672.
284 Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 144.
285 AC 487.
286 AI 608; AU 605.
two ruling houses emerged out of the external and internal conflict: the Uí Dúnlainge (who were closely connected to Kildare) in the north of Leinster and the Uí Cheinnselaig in the south. By the eighth century the Uí Cheinnselaig lost the struggle for the northern plains to the Uí Dúnlainge. The Uí Cheinnselaig dynasty, however, "built up an isolated hegemony over the south based on Ferns [the monastery of St. Maédoc]." These two ruling houses were closely related, yet skirmishes between the northern and southern regions of the province continued until the Uí Cheinnselaig came to power once again in the eleventh century. For example, in 709, the Uí Cheinnselaig fought against the Fothairt of Leinster (a tuath situated mainly around Kildare in northern Leinster) at the battle of Selg. Overall, the story of the Uí Cheinnselaig is one of intrigue and strife, in which the church was involved.

According to the Annals of Ulster, the king of the Uí Cheinnselaig, Cathal mac Dúnlainge, together with the community of Tech Munna (Taghmon) defeated the inhabitants of the monastery of Ferns, in which 400 of the latter were slain. Two years later, the annals record Cathal’s obit and add the title sencap ("prior") of Ferns to his title, king of the Uí Cheinnselaig. Cathal’s son and heir Cairpre followed his father’s actions and again joined forces with the monastery of Tech Munna to

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288 *AU* 709, claims that the battle was “between Leinstermen,” however, *AU* 709 records, “the battle of Selg in Fortuatha Laigen against the Uí Cheinnselaig, in which fell two sons of Cellach of Cuala.” Tensions arose among the Leinstermen who fought one another only a few years later in 712. Yet again, the Laigin engaged in battle in 789 and 814, and on the latter occasion the Uí Cheinnselaig were overthrown.
289 *AU* 817.5.
290 *AU* 819.5. The term sencap is derived from the Latin secundus abbas and was designated the heir apparent to the abbacy. See Kelly, *A Guide*, p. 360.
overcome the Vikings in 828. Furthermore, prior to reaffirming a hold on the high-
kingship of all Leinster in the eleventh century, two late ninth-century Uí
Cheinnsealaig kings (who were also brothers) became the victims of regicide.

Unlike the Uí Cheinnsealaig, the regency of the Uí Dúnlainge maintained
relative dynastic cohesion. The Uí Dúnlainge traced their origins to Dúnlang and his
two sons Illan and Aillill. The true instigator of the Uí Dúnlainge rise to power,
however, is generally reckoned to be Faélán mac Cólmann. According to the
hagiography of Leinster, Faélán is connected to another popular Leinster saint, St.
Coemgein (Kevin) of Glendalough who was one of several clerics who had fostered
him as a child. Faélán is also closely allied to the monastery of Kildare through
kinship; a fact that will be discussed in further detail below.

The dynastic cohesion of the Uí Dúnlainge was interrupted by tension
between them and the Uí Néill. According to Tirechán, in his late seventh-century
biography of Patrick, Niall Noingiallach (founder of the Uí Néill) asked to be buried
facing the sons of Dúnlang as men at war. The animosity of the Uí Néill towards
the Uí Dúnlainge stemmed from Leinster’s claim to the high-kingship of Tara. There

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291 AU 828.6.
292 Tadg mac Diarmata was murdered by his kin in 866. His brother followed him in similar fashion in
293 See Appendices B and C for genealogical tables of the Uí Dúnlainge.
294 *AC* records the death of Faélán mac Cólmann in 663. Byrne supports the argument that Faélán was
responsible for the founding successes of the Uí Dúnlainge dynasty. Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 151. Ó
Cróinín, on the other hand, credits Faélán’s brother Mael Umai. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p.
55.
296 “Nam Neel pater meus non sinivit mihi credere, sed ut sepheliar in cacuminibus Temro quasi viris
consistentibus in bello, quia utuntur gentiles in sepulcris armati promptis armis facie ad faciem usque
ad diem erdate apud magos, id est judicii diem Domini. Ego filius Neill et filius Dunlinge im Maistin
is, however, no evidence in the annals to support such a claim by the Ui Dúnlainge. Therefore, the lore passed on by Tirechán suggests a situation prominent in the seventh century rather than the fifth (when Niall Noíngiallach died). Byrne argues that the Ui Dúnlainge, however, were assisted to power by a faction of the Uí Néill, the Clann Cholmain from Mide, who were battling with the Sil nAédo Sláine of Brega for the kingship of Tara. 297 Both the Clann Cholmáin and Uí Dúnlainge appear to have risen to power in their respective provinces around the same time. Indeed, there is no written record that the first Clann Cholmáin high-king, Domnall Midi, attacked Leinster during his twenty-year reign. 298 This alliance provided the Laigin only a brief respite, for in the late eighth century the first Clann Cholmáin high-king’s son, Donnchad, asserted suzerainty over Leinster. Peace between the two factions was sought again by Bran, the king of Leinster who asked for Donnchad’s aid in a battle against Munster. 299 According to the Annals of Ulster, Bran married Donnchad’s sister Eithne as a token of peace. Unfortunately the couple was slain a year later by Finnechta Cetharderic (“four-eyes”), who was a member of another faction of the Uí Dúnlainge. 300

From the mid-eighth to mid-eleventh centuries, therefore, the Uí Dúnlainge asserted regnal hegemony over the entire province of Leinster. The title of rí Laigin

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297 Both of these dynasties were descendants not of Niall Noíngiallach, but of his great-grandson Diarmait mac Cerball (high-king 544-465). Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 87.
298 See Byrne, Irish Kings, pp. 154-56 for more on the possible connection between the Clann Cholmáin and Uí Dúnlainge.
299 AU 794.6.
300 AU 795.1.
alternated between three strands of the Úi Dúnlainge dynasty, each descending from one of three sons of Murchad (reigned 715-27): Dunchad (founder of the Úi Dunchada); Faélán (Úi Fhaéeláin); and Muiredach (Úi Muiredaig). Subsequently, Bran (of the Úi Muiredaig) was murdered by his own kinsman Finnechta, who thereby brought the Úi Dunchada strand of the Úi Dúnlainge dynasty to the forefront of Leinster politics. What is more, Finnechta continued the Úi Dúnlainge connection to Kildare, where the annals claim he passed away in 808. The struggle with the Úi Néill and Úi Dúnlainge resumed, however, with the new high-king, Aéd Mac Neill, who managed to depose Finnechta for a few years. Although Finnechta regained his kingship over Leinster, the position of the Úi Dúnlainge had been weakened.

The presence of the Northmen further impaired the Úi Dúnlainge hegemony, particularly after the Vikings settled at Dublin in 841. Moreover, the presence of the Vikings invited opportunism in other dynasties seeking to rid the Úi Dúnlainge of their monopoly over Leinster’s throne. From the mid-ninth to the end of the tenth century, the kings of Osrainge challenged the Úi Dúnlainge claim to the kingship, often with the aid of the Vikings. Finally, in 1036 Donnchad Mac Gilla Patraic, king of Osrainge, displaced the last Úi Dúnlainge ruler and was proclaimed ri Laigin; an act which led the way for the Úi Cheinnselaig to return to power in 1072.

302 See MacNeill regarding the distribution of kingship.
303 *AU* 808.6.
304 *AU* 797.
305 Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 163.
Leinster and Kildare

The Uí Dúnlainge maintained close connections with the monastic community of Kildare, as we mentioned above. Indeed, St. Brigit of Kildare was a member of the Forthairt, who were considered a subject tribe of Leinster rather than a separate ruling kingdom.\textsuperscript{306} The bonds between the dynastic rulers and the important monasteries of Leinster were tried and tested through the tempestuous politics of the province during the early medieval period. The dynastic family of the Uí Dúnlainge, founded by Fáelán MacClomain, dominated the Liffey region from the seventh to the eleventh centuries and therefore claimed the high-kingship of Leinster. The significant connection between the kingship of Leinster and Kildare began with Fáelán’s alleged marriage to Sarnet, daughter to the King of the Fothairt, the group of people associated with St. Brigit’s lineage.\textsuperscript{307} Ideally the Fothairt would have claimed rights to Kildare as descendants of their holy patroness. According to the Senchus Máir, “the tribe of the patron saint shall succeed to the church as long as there shall be a person fit to be an abbot of the said tribe of the patron saint; even though there should be but a psalm-singer of them, it is he that will obtain the abbacy.”\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{306} The term Fothairt stems from the Old Irish, \textit{fortuatha}, or “foreign people.” \textit{AC} actually records a genealogy of St. Brigit in 522, the year attributed to her death. “This St. was of noble decent. She was of Leinster, Descended of Eochy ffinn (of whom I had made mention before) who was brother to king Conn Kedcatagh as may apeare thus: St. Bridgett was daughter of Duffagh, who was son of Dreivne, who was son of Breasall, who was son of Deine, who was son of Conly, who was son of Artkir who was son of Carby Nia, who was son of Cormacke, who was son of Enos who was son of Eocha fynn afores, who was son of K. felym Reaghtwar and Brother of king Conn Kedcahagh.”


\textsuperscript{308} \textit{AL}, vol. III, p. 72: “Fine erloma gebur in eagluis cein bes damna apaid do fine erluma; cin co roibe act raimcetluid dib, is iat beirius in apdaine.”
This law illuminates two potential interests. First, it claims that essentially any member of the patron saint’s tribe who is also a member of the community, even a psalm-singer, ought to become the next abbot. This concept of hereditary rights within an ecclesiastical family parallels the heritable claim to the title of king in secular society, which was not designated to one heir, but rather could be claimed from a select pool of individuals, referred to as a *derbfine*, who were related to a common man.\(^{309}\) Secondly, and more specific to Kildare, it is possible that it was through this union that Fáelán gained control of the church of Kildare.\(^{310}\) And indeed, after Fáelán’s claim to power, no member of the Fothairt, with one exception, ruled at Kildare.\(^{311}\) Moreover, during Fáelán’s reign as king both his brother and nephew held the position of abbot of Kildare. Regardless of whether the marriage actually took place or is a hypothetical occurrence, it emphasizes the importance the dynastic family placed on the authority of Kildare.

Indeed, Fáelán’s descendants continued to maintain familial ties with Kildare. Two centuries later, Fínnechta, King of Leinster, himself died at Kildare in 808.\(^{312}\) His sister died as abbess of the monastery in 831. Two brothers, a nephew, and a grandnephew of Fínnechta, who all held the position of abbot at Kildare in the ninth century, in turn followed her.\(^{313}\) By the time of his death in 885, Fínnechta’s great-

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\(^{309}\) Patterson defines a *derbfine* as follows: “in a personal kindred, ego’s second-cousins and their ascendants; also used loosely for kin, as compared with other associates,” *Cattle-Lords*, p. 379.

\(^{310}\) See Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 154.

\(^{311}\) *AU* 964, Muirenn, *Abbatissa Cille-Dara*.

\(^{312}\) *AU* gives the date 808; however, *AFM* gives 802.

\(^{313}\) See Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 160.
grandson, Lergus, had united the titles of ri Laigin and princeps of Cille Dara.\textsuperscript{314} It becomes clear that by the ninth century in the province of Leinster, the succession of the abbacy of Kildare was more or less determined by the family who retained the power of government.\textsuperscript{315}

From what we have seen regarding the authority and benefits associated with the paruchia of Kildare and the cult of its patron saint, it is quite understandable why the kings of Leinster would desire to maintain close connections, if not complete control, over the monastery. While the king of Leinster might not have acquired wealth directly, by having familial connections to the monastery, he certainly gained power and prestige through the alliance. What is more, the dynasty, which he represented, profited as well. By governing Kildare and its paruchia, the ruling dynasty of Leinster acquired additional resources, such as tithes, first fruits, and revenue from relic circuits, as well as the dues and food renders owed to the monastery by its clients. According to the Annals of Ulster, in 875 the bishop of Kildare was also the superior of at least two other churches.\textsuperscript{316} In addition to the influx of assets belonging to the monastery, the ruling dynasty also gained another measure of jurisdiction through the authority of the paruchia. We recall from the discussion in Chapter Four of Kildare and its paruchia, as seen through the hagiography of St. Brigit, that the temporal administration of the monastic community and paruchia was under the charge of Brigit (and therefore her heir)

\textsuperscript{314} AU 885.
\textsuperscript{316} Ferna and Cell Achaid, AU 875.
while sacramental ministry was performed by the bishop. Interestingly, the annals indicate that the positions within Kildare that the Uí Dúnlainge occupied were those of administration: abbess, abbot, and princeps. From what I can ascertain, the bishops that occupied the see throughout the reign of the Uí Dúnlainge were not related to the dynastic family. Moreover, if my assertion is correct, it appears that the Uí Dúnlainge attempted to maintain positions of worldly administration, indicating that these titles indeed demonstrated an enviable amount of control. Therefore, whatever means of social control Kildare used over its community and land was beneficial to the ruling house of Leinster. Regardless of the holiness of St. Brigit and her foundation, the monastery of Kildare did not go unscathed in the political friction both within and outside the borders of Leinster.

As Felim Ó Briain points out, a change in the ruling dynasty of a province was often accompanied by a change in the abbatial succession at the wealthier monasteries under royal dominion. These shifts of power occasionally brought about bloodshed when the members of the community connected to the former ruling sect resisted the change in governance.\(^{317}\) Indeed, Leinster dynasties were known to use violence to maintain control over the monastery of Kildare. One case in point was Cellach mac Brain, king of Laigin, who in 833, “routed the community of Cell Dara in a battle in their monastery, [in which] many were killed, on St. John’s day in the autumn 29 August.”\(^{318}\) This battle occurred after Cellach gained the title of King of Leinster and

\(^{317}\) Ó Briain, “the Hagiography,” p. 3.  
\(^{318}\) AU 833.6.
with it introduced a new strand of the dynastic line, known as the Úi Muredaig.\textsuperscript{319} Cellach, however, died the following year. Thereafter, for three years, unrest reigned not only in Leinster, but also over the whole of Ireland, during which time the country saw two high kings, Niall (who conquered and proclaimed kingship over Leinster), followed by Feidlimd (one of the five post-Patrician high-kings to come from Munster).\textsuperscript{320} Apparently, during this intermittent period of disorder, the monastery of Kildare came under the abbacy of Forannán, who was also the abbot of Ard Macha. Yet, only three years (836) after being attacked by their own king, “the oratory of Cell Dara was seized by Feidlimd through force of arms from Foronnán, abbot of Ard Macha, and the congregation of St. Patrick; and they were disrespectfully blockaded.”\textsuperscript{321} According to the \textit{Annals of Ulster}, the monastery was attacked and nearly burned down the same year by the Northmen.\textsuperscript{322}

Although clergy were exempted from warfare in 804,\textsuperscript{323} the slaughter of clerics in battle continued to be recorded in the annals. With the coming of the Norse, however, local kings and monasteries seem to have decided more often to work together to fight the foreign threat rather than against one another.\textsuperscript{324} In 828, in the south of Leinster we see the king of the Úi Cheinnselaig join forces with the

\textsuperscript{319} Prior to Cellach’s attack on Kildare, the abbots or \textit{princeps} of the monastery had continuously been among the Úi Dunchada members of the Úi Dúnlainge. Between c. 885 - 955, the Úi Dunchada again had close kinship ties with the administrators of Kildare.

\textsuperscript{320} \textit{AU} 835.1, 836.3.

\textsuperscript{321} \textit{AU} 836.3. Foronnán was not the only superior of Kildare to have come from beyond the borders of Leinster. In 865, the abbot of Kildare and Iona, Cellach son of Aillil, died in Scotland, \textit{AU} 865.2. As noted in Chapter Three, it was between 830-c. 870 that the Úi Néill (who are associated with Armagh and Iona) had a hand in Leinster politics.

\textsuperscript{322} \textit{AU} 836.5.

\textsuperscript{323} \textit{AU} 804, “This year, moreover, the clerics of Ireland were freed by Aéd Oírnide, at the behest of Fothad of the canon, from the obligation of attendance on expeditions and hostings.”
monastery of Tech Munn to defeat the Vikings. The important role monasteries played in the response to the invasions of the Northmen can also be seen through material remains. One of the outstanding features of most major monastic houses, counting Kildare, are round towers, which fulfilled a number of purposes, including being a lookout for Viking attacks and most likely a place of refuge during a siege.

Ecclesiastical involvement in secular warfare is likewise addressed in saints’ lives. The hagiographic tradition of Leinster portrays the kingdom’s holy men and women as fiercely loyal to their secular benefactors, who were willing to use their divine powers to protect or further the cause of their royal patron. The hagiography of St. Brigit points out the relationship between the patron saint and her benefactors. As patronus of Kildare, St. Brigit is responsible for the protection of those who have bound themselves in some fashion to the monastery. On one occasion St. Brigit grants the king of Leinster a long life and victory in every battle in return for the freedom of a slave. While engaged in a battle with the people of Mag Breg (Úi Neill), the king tells his men to pray to St. Brigit for assistance, “that the saint may fulfill her promises. Whereupon the king immediately saw saint Brigit going before him into battle with her staff in her right hand and a column of fire blazing skywards from her head. Then the enemy were routed and the king and his

324 See Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 149.
325 *AU* 828.
326 See Byrne, *Irish Kings*, p. 140.
household gave thanks to God and Brigit.” After the death of this same king, Brigit assists the Leinstermen once more against the Uí Néill. Apparently her blessing of victory remained with the king’s corpse, which was placed on a cart during the battle. The Leinstermen rallied around the cart and won the battle.

Another example of Brigit’s support in battle is found in the poem, “The Battle of Allen.” According to this verse, the high-king Fergal mac Máele Dúin was killed by Aed, the king of Leinster, in 722 while trying to wrest the bóruma. Colum Cille, however, was unable to help the Uí Néill because Brigit “appears above the Leinster army, striking terror into the Northern hosts.” By this account, it appears that the author is claiming supremacy of St. Brigit and Kildare over Columcille and the monastery of Clonmacnoise, which was closely connected to the Uí Néill. This is also a direct attack against the Uí Néill claim to collect the bóruma from the Leinstermen. In these episodes both the ecclesiastical and secular leaders of Leinster are portrayed as working together to claim authority. It seems apparent, however, that the position of Kildare in this account was uncompromised, while the Leinstermen required the assistance of St. Brigit to achieve their goal; the result of the author’s clerical bias. Yet, it represents, however symbolically, the symbiotic relationship between Kildare and the ruling dynasty in establishing and maintaining positions of power in early Ireland.

330 Byrne, Irish Kings, p. 144.
Through the propaganda of hagiography, the spiritual power of St. Brigit and her monastery of Kildare are portrayed as a potent asset to the rulers of Leinster. Clearly, Kildare was perceived as a vital political pawn not only by the ruling house of Leinster, but also by other provincial dynasties. The location of Kildare in the northern portion of the province could have been a strategic political point in the line of communication from the north to the south of Ireland. Therefore, whoever maintained control over Kildare could potentially impact the flow of information and resources on the north-south borderlands of Leinster and Ulster, a situation that made the monastery attractive indeed.
CHAPTER SIX

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE MONASTERY OF KILDARE

Thus far we have seen the substantial influence the monastery of Kildare had on two major institutions of early medieval Ireland: the Church and dynastic kingship of Leinster. The associations the monastery held with both were initiated and maintained through the persona of its patron saint, St. Brigit of Kildare. Through the cult of St. Brigit, the monastic leaders of Kildare were able to control the spiritual benefits associated with her, such as sacred space and her relics. Such benefits attracted prestige and therefore patrons to the church, both ecclesiastical and secular. Through these connections, Kildare and its supporters developed a symbiotic relationship from which both parties profited: Kildare gained materially, in reputation, and power; likewise, its benefactors acquired prestige and spiritual (as well as physical) protection through the alliance. In the present chapter I will discuss the social role of Kildare in daily life. Again, we shall see that the control Kildare exerted over its community and guests was expressed in a relationship between the monastery and its clients and executed according to the social responsibilities expected of such a bond in early medieval Ireland. While there are no charters, epistles, immunities, or exemptions for Kildare in this early period under survey,
which would provide specific examples of social control, I will examine the hagiography of St. Brigit, which is rich with prototypes of such social interaction.

Kildare as Patron

The early Irish church played a significant role in shaping Ireland’s socioeconomic landscape. Aside from the Norse *longphorts*, most often it was clerical rather than secular settlements that developed into proto-towns, indicating the long-term influence of these religious centers. We saw in Chapter Two, that one of the most significant methods of social control in early Ireland was enforcement of the rights of client-based relationships. The importance of livestock to the economy of Kildare is evident in the hagiography of St. Brigit. There are a number of episodes in which Brigit receives donations of cattle and/or food. For example, two women bring a cow as an offering to the saint, however the cow’s calf has wandered off. Brigit miraculously calms the cow and predicts the calf’s return. The point of this episode is to emphasize Brigit’s holiness, but it also demonstrates the importance of social ties and clientship through the rendering of cattle. Indeed, the monastic community of Kildare may have used aggressive tactics either to gain clients or to

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331 *Longphorts* were naval camps established by the Norse in Ireland beginning around the mid-ninth century. For more information on *longphorts* see Ó Cróinin, *Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 238.


333 *Vita I*, 5.23 (AASS, Feb. 1, vol. 1, p. 121).
receive their due benefits, for in 824 it is recorded that Kildare attacked Tamlachta; however, the reasons are not provided.\textsuperscript{334}

In fact, the hagiography of St. Brigit illustrates continuously to the audience that binding oneself to the saint offers both protection and profit. For example, according to Cogitosus, the provincial king issued an edict, which called for all of the \textit{tuatha} to come together and build a road. When the other kin groups leave Brigit’s \textit{tuath} the worst area to build upon, the saint comes to the aid of her people and miraculously moves the river that is blocking their way to the area of the indolent \textit{tuath}.\textsuperscript{335} The power of Brigit’s patronage is further demonstrated in another account when the sky above her fields is clear during one harvest while it is raining everywhere else.\textsuperscript{336} In yet another episode, Brigit gives a woman a piece of her girdle so the maiden can return to her people and heal the sick. In return for soothing the sick, the woman receives food and clothing.\textsuperscript{337} Yet only those who were connected with St. Brigit and Kildare could benefit. For in one instance, a mill that has come under the direction of Kildare will not grind the grain of any pagan.\textsuperscript{338}

Brigit’s \textit{vita}e also point out that Kildare not only provided many benefits in its social relationships, but it received goods as well. On one occasion, when Brigit was planning a feast, a man on the way to his king’s banquet got lost and ended up at Brigit’s monastery. The man believed he was sent to the saint by divine providence and therefore gave her all the food he had intended for the king. When the king found

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{Aí} 824.
out, he too sent Brigit a wagon of food and also gave to her the man and his
entourage.\textsuperscript{339} Overall, in each of these examples St. Brigit responds to the needs of
her clients and kin. Each instance demonstrates to the audience that Kildare is a
powerful ally, which will, through the power of its patron saint, provide protection,
profit, and sustenance.

Mediation

In addition to maintaining power through social connections based on the
distribution of land and livestock, both secular and canon law shows that
ecclesiastical leaders in early Ireland participated in legal disputes, yet another
method of social control. According to the Old Irish law tract, \textit{Do fastad cirt ocus
dligid} ("Of the Confirmation of Right and Law"), every kin group, or \textit{fine}, was to
have legal representation of the following: a \textit{conn}, or as the commentary remarks, a
sensible adult, "who speaks on their behalf”; an \textit{eclais}, or church, "which sustains
them”; and a \textit{faith}, or lord, "who protects them."\textsuperscript{340} The canons also address the
issue of qualification for judging secular affairs. According to canon law, "In secular
business, the king, the elder, and the expert should judge."\textsuperscript{341} Interestingly, secular
law substitutes a church for the role of an expert. As this canon in particular is
attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus, a greek patristic, it seems likely that the

\textsuperscript{340} \textit{Do fastad cirt ocus dligid}, \textit{AL}, vol. V, p. 437. See also Patterson, \textit{Cattle-Lords}, p. 278.
compilers of the secular law modeled the canon (as the structure is so similar) and amended it. Such an alteration suggests that by the seventh century, some members of the Church had replaced, or were at least parallel to, Irish lawyers.

The fact that the Church is represented in secular judicial practices also indicates that clergy were involved in the writing of these laws, and therefore influential in matters of secular social control. Likewise, the canons claim that three persons are capable of assessing the affairs of the church: a bishop, a scribe, and those of low secular employment (contemptibilis). The bishop is responsible for calling together the elders and the scribe, the scribe investigates the written record, and finally, the individuals of low secular employment should gather together the experts.342

Yet the annals show that secular rulers also could enforce legal suits against high-ranking members of the Church. While there is no direct evidence of this for the monastery of Kildare, according to the Annals of Ulster, in 831, the abbot of Armagh was dishonored over a legal decision, his followers imprisoned, and his horses confiscated by Conchobor son of Donnchad.343 Yet, as witnessed by the laws, the Church enjoyed relative autonomy. For example, according to canon law, a cleric could pursue his cause without undergoing a legal suit. Furthermore, a member of the

343 AU 831.8.
clergy was not allowed to prosecute in the presence of a secular judge without the
permission of his bishop, nor was he allowed to seek a criminal case in a secular
court. While it was not within the jurisdiction of a secular court to judge a cleric,
canon law declared that the Church possessed the right to judge the laity. The
proposed superiority of the church in legal matters is summed up in a canon attributed
to St. Patrick that states, “Every worldly sage, if he be wise, should not question the
judgments of the Church.”

One of the more important roles of the early Irish monastery, as seen through
hagiography, was mediation. Lisa Bitel calls the early Irish monks, “professional
political mediators.” Monasteries provided a safe place to negotiate, while Church
leaders used the powerful reputation of the saint to impose peace, as seen through the
development and enforcement of the cana. The hagiography of St. Brigit provides
a number of examples of mediation between the monastery (represented by the saint)
and the laity. These episodes demonstrate the saint’s ability to put a relationship that
had gone amiss, back into balance. For example, on one occasion a man accidentally
killed the king’s domesticated fox. Enraged, the king orders that the man be put to
death and his family enslaved. St. Brigit finds and tames another fox on the
prisoner’s behalf. Due to the saint’s intercession, the king lets the man go.

Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Two, the Church often played a significant
part in the ransoming of slaves. What is more, the Church often gained followers in

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344 Liber XXI, De judicio. Cap. 26, De judicio clericorum, ut non sit apud iniquos aut apud infideles,
“Patricius ait: Omnis mundialis sapientis, si sapientis sit, non judicet judicia ecclesiae.” CCH, p. 72.
345 Bitel, Isle of Saints, p. 149.
346 See above, Chapter One.
those they helped to set free. St. Brigit’s hagiographers indicate that many
unfortunates sought refuge at Kildare and that the saint was extremely sympathetic to
the plight of the unfree. For instance, according to Vita I, a runaway slave seeks
safekeeping with Brigit who hides the maiden from her mistress, and permits the girl
to join her own followers.  
On another occasion Brigit intercedes between a king
and his servant who had been condemned to death for breaking a goblet. Brigit
gains converts as well through mediation. The saint gives butter (which miraculously
multiplies) to a druid for the freedom of her mother. The druid is so impressed by
Brigit’s holiness that he converts and becomes her follower.

St. Brigit is also portrayed as an intercessor between warring factions in her
vitae. On two occasions she waylays violence by blessing opposing bloodthirsty
parties. In one of these episodes, the warring party finds out that they received
only a vision of war (sent by the saint), and did not actually participate in the killing.
They were so amazed by St. Brigit’s power that they also converted. In fact,
Brigit was not opposed to using more forceful methods of mediation, such as fasting
and cursing. Troscud, or fasting, was a method of distraint laid down in the secular
laws. According to Irish law, the plaintiff used the act of fasting against a person of
higher status to pressure him into conceding to justice. Bitel claims that monastic
superiors used fasting as a means of control against other ecclesiastics, the laity, and

even God. An account in *Vita I* demonstrates the use of *troscud* by both the laity and the saint. A certain leper fasts against a king in order to acquire the king’s spear (which the leper had seen the day before). Brigit considers the leper to be arrogant and in turn fasts against him so that he will eat. In the end, it is the king who chooses to reconcile the situation and gives the saint his spear, who in turn, hands it over to the leper. Once again, Brigit intercedes between two parties and brings balance to the relationship. Fasting, furthermore, is more commonly used as a method of healing in Brigit’s hagiography. By not eating Brigit essentially fasts until God grants her wish, which of course is always consented to.

Unfortunately, there are no documented examples of mediation between the monks of Kildare and lepers, slaves, and kings; or of conversion. The hagiographers of St. Brigit, however, were sensitive to these issues and used the saint’s holy reputation to persuade their audience of Kildare’s strength and success in offering protection. If hagiography does illustrate social concerns and acts of the authors and their patrons, it is possible to assume that the role of St. Brigit in her *vitae* was maintained by the religious of Kildare in early medieval Ireland. The hagiography of St. Brigit certainly implies that the monastery of Kildare played an important role in reestablishing quarrelling parties to their proper place in hierarchy and status through acts of mediation and reconciliation.

Reputation is attached to gender, class, social status, wealth, connections, friends and community.\textsuperscript{356} As we have seen, in early medieval Ireland, an individual’s rank and status determined their social mobility and influence. Maintenance of the social hierarchy was an important aspect of public order. One way in which individuals preserved their positions in society was by exchanging hospitality. There is much emphasis placed on the duty of hospitality in the law texts, including the rights and obligations of bishops and monasteries. For example, any monastery that refuses to house a guest lost its legal status (its buildings could be damaged or destroyed without compensation).\textsuperscript{357} We know that monasteries were active participants in client-based relationships, and therefore had a great deal of control over the production and distribution of food. Moreover, the distinctive role of hospitality in the conservation of social contacts is likewise evident in early Irish hagiography, including that of St. Brigit. A large percentage of the miracles performed by St. Brigit are related to food, particularly in relation to hospitality. These \textit{vitae} illustrate two potential exchanges of hospitality: one in which Brigit is providing; the other when she is receiving. In one example, Brigit visits a woman who wishes to be a good hostess to the saint, but has only one calf to cook and only the wood of her loom to cook it on. Regardless of her meager supplies, she uses them

\textsuperscript{354} Bitel, \textit{Isle of Saints}, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{356} Hanawalt, “Of Good and Ill Repute,” p.1.
\textsuperscript{357} Kelly, \textit{A Guide}, pp. 139-140.
for Brigit's comfort without complaining. As a reward for her generosity, the calf
and loom are miraculously restored to the woman.\textsuperscript{358} In another episode, Brigit is the
guest at the monastery of St. Laisre. It happened that St. Patrick was on his way to
visit the monastery as well that evening. The community was very concerned
because they could not provide for Patrick and his entourage. Brigit declares that
what little food they have (a symbolic twelve loaves of bread, one sheep, and a little
milk) would be enough for all. And true enough, the community of St. Laisre, Brigit,
Patrick, and their respective companies all feasted together with enough to spare. St.
Laisre was so grateful to Brigit that she offered herself and her community to the
saint in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{359} Both of these examples show the compassionate and powerful
patronage of St. Brigit (hence Kildare). Both the woman in the first episode and the
monastic community in the second were rewarded for their faith and loyalty to Brigit.
The prospective audience of these tales would hear that their efforts would be
reciprocated in a relationship with St. Brigit (Kildare). Furthermore, the second
episode demonstrated the maintenance of an ecclesiastical association through food.
The weaker monastery called on the stronger (St. Brigit) to help them through the
potential crisis of not being able to fulfill their duties of hospitality to yet another
important monastery (represented by St. Patrick). What is more, Kildare gained a
new client when the monastery of St. Laisre bound itself to St. Brigit. In addition, the
hagiographer emphasized the prestige of Kildare (and probably explained a real
connection) by having St. Laisre connect herself to St. Brigit, rather than St. Patrick.

It is, however, more often the case that St. Brigit is providing hospitality in her *vitae*. Similar to the miracles associated with sacred space, in these episodes only individuals who are associated with St. Brigit benefit from her power. For example, Brigit was unable to eat the food of a druid because he was not Christian.\(^{360}\)

On another occasion three bishops came to visit Brigit, however the monastery was experiencing a shortage of milk. Regardless, due to the holiness of the saint, one cow produced the same amount of milk as three.\(^{361}\) St. Brigit is also depicted as always being prepared for any unexpected guests. She foretells that the approaching party of Patrick and his followers will be in need of drink and has a well of water dug up for them.\(^{362}\) The saint even provides protection for her guests. Bishop Cellán, while visiting Brigit, asks for her to bless his chariot. When he leaves one of the chariot’s pinions falls out, but the holy man remains unaware, as the chariot does not fall apart.\(^{363}\)

There are two important points apparent in these episodes. First, we see that Kildare (as represented by St. Brigit) uses hospitality as a means of maintaining its relationships, particularly with other ecclesiastics, such as the bishops Patrick and Cellán. Second, once more, the power of St. Brigit and her ability to provide for her followers adds prestige to the monastery. In actuality, the ability to control the distribution of food must have played an important role for the community of Kildare. Without the ability to provide for its clients, the monastery could not expect to gain or maintain dependants. Just as an individual’s reputation was important to preserve, so

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was the stature of a monastery. The hagiography of St. Brigit was written as propaganda to reaffirm the monastery’s ability to provide as patron.

Healing and Charity

Two of the most notable social acts of monastic communities are healing and charity. These aspects of monastic life make up a great portion of miracle stories in the hagiography of St. Brigit. In addition to being an expression of patronage, monks used rituals of healing and charity to create relationships with those outside of the enclosure.

Healing was closely associated with the spiritual power of the patron saint. As mentioned by Cogitosus, people of all ranks and status, regardless of gender, flocked to Kildare to be healed in the presence of Brigit’s holy relics. Oftentimes healing was accompanied by a donation of wealth and food. The recipient, grateful to the saint and in fear of relapse, gave to the monastery, or even joined the religious community. Stories of miraculous cures, therefore, often justified such endowments.364 In one episode a mute girl is brought before St. Brigit. When the saint asks her whether she would prefer to become a nun or be married, the girl responds that she only wants to do as the saint bids.365 On another occasion Brigit

364 Bitel, Isle of Saints, pp. 187-188.
cures two young paralytic women of her own kin with salt and water. After being cured, the girls devote themselves to Brigit and follow her back to the monastery.\textsuperscript{366}

Many of the social roles we have discussed so far in this chapter, such as mediation, hospitality, and food, are closely linked to healing in the \textit{vita}e of St. Brigit. Brigit heals people while she is a guest at other churches.\textsuperscript{367} On one of these occasions the community provides a feast in gratitude for her miraculous help. Regardless of the hospitable offer, Brigit fasts during her feast. Once again, the healing power of the saint while being a guest demonstrates the maintenance of a relationship between Kildare and its satellite churches. In addition, fasting shows Brigit’s strong will power. Choosing not to eat while there is abundance can be seen as an effort to demonstrate power, in this instance, the power of Kildare as the superior religious community.

Furthermore, Brigit is often seen to be a compassionate philanthropist to the poor. There are many examples of charity in the hagiography of St. Brigit. These acts are also closely connected with food and social maintenance. Brigit gives water, butter, cattle, salt, meat, and milk to unfortunates, including animals. In each case she is rewarded for her charity by miracles of multiplication and replacement. When she gave all of the bacon set aside for guests to a hungry dog, the food miraculously reappeared.\textsuperscript{368}

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The hagiographers of St. Brigit emphasized the authority, compassion, and abundance of Kildare through the miraculous actions of the saint. The message they send forth is that St. Brigit is a great benefactress and patroness. By binding oneself to her and her community, all of one’s needs would be met. Through the powerful reputation of St. Brigit, Kildare drew other saints and their communities to them as well as common folk. The monastery offered stability in temporal concerns, healing, refuge, hospitality, and spiritual guidance through ritual due to its profusion of wealth and holiness with its ability to maintain important social ties.

Indeed we have seen that the methods of social control used by Kildare were not aggressive. The monastery maintained its authority through the balance of relationships, both great, such as the dynastic rulers of Kildare, and small, represented by the many clients and guests who lived within its community. These vital relationships were expressed in the person of St. Brigit through acts of healing, hospitality, ritual, and the creation of sacred space. The abundance that the cult of St. Brigit attracted to Kildare and the success of the monastery’s measures of social regulation are best expressed in the words of Cogitosus: “And who can count the different crowds and numberless peoples flocking from all the provinces—some for
the abundant feasting, others for the healing of their afflictions, others to watch the pageant of crowds, others with great gifts and offerings.” 369

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CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the role of the Church in early Irish society on two levels. First, I analyzed early medieval Ireland’s secular and canon laws. From this analysis, the consequential dialogue between the native and ecclesiastical legal institutions emerged. It was possible to determine, to some degree, the organization of the Church and its members within the social framework of early Irish society. Second, I explored the social role of the monastery of Kildare and its paruchia in Leinster. By considering the issue of social control, I found that the importance of Kildare to the economic and political life of Leinster can be determined through the close connection between the monastic family and ruling dynasty.

Much of the material concerning the social, political, and economic organization of secular and ecclesiastical society in early Ireland is found in the Old Irish Law texts. Chapter One outlined the formation of various early Irish law schools and delineated the interrelationship between these secular law schools and the Church. The second chapter demonstrated that the framework of early Irish social organization was founded on a gradation of rank and status. According to the secular laws, each member of society, including clergy (and even churches), was allocated a named rank. An individual’s wealth, age, and gender all influenced his/her status.
The laws issued a certain honor-price to accompany each social rank. In turn, it was a person’s honor-price (hence rank) that determined his/her social obligations and privileges. Individuals with a higher honor-price were considered to be more accountable in legal matters. The fixed amount of honor-price also served as the compensation paid as *dire* ("reparation") for any assault that jeopardized the social standing of an individual. This being the case, the murder of a bishop called for a *dire* of 14 *cumals* (the honor-price of a bishop) to be paid by the transgressor to the victim’s family (in this instance the Church). Moreover, the Church enjoyed additional compensation through penitential acts that, on occasion, included monetary restitution from the sinner.

Furthermore, most social regulation in early Ireland took place within the kin group, or *fine*. The *fine* worked as a corporate body, and was responsible for the distribution and preservation of wealth and property among its members. In addition, the *fine* maintained the internal support of the kin group by making the ability to inherit *dibad* (inheritance distributed among all members of the *fine*) contingent upon the payment of *cro* (a payment to ward off vengeance). It was the responsibility of a criminal’s kin to ensure the payment of *cro*. Therefore, a relative who did not contribute to the issuing of *cro*, could not inherit. Again, there is evidence to suggest that the Irish church followed many of the regulations of secular society. For instance, the Old Irish legal material suggests that monastic settlements (like *comaithches*) worked along the same guidelines as a *fine*. The laws stipulate that the laity were to offer tithes and firstlings to the church. Indeed, just as members of a kin
group did not benefit from the fine’s collective wealth without contributing cro, a monastic client who did not make the proper offerings would not receive the spiritual benefits associated with the religious community.

The working relationships that supported the economy and governed the social obligations of early Irish society were expressed in terms of clientship. A lord provided for his clients and in return he received food renders, service, and increased status. Again, the secular laws indicate that an early Irish monastery functioned in a similar fashion. In addition to the Church’s extensive ownership of land, the head of a monastic community, like a secular lord, issued land and livestock in return for rent and services, placing it in the economic realm based on clientship. Moreover, the laws stipulate that if a cleric failed to behave accordingly or abused his position, the contract between the laity and Church was broken.

By examining the secular and canon laws, we found that the worldly concerns of the Irish church, such as property, inheritance, clientship, social maintenance, and status, all reflect the structure of the native society. The adoption of social customs, such as those just mentioned, point to the gradual acculturation of the Church into Irish society. Furthermore, the degree of similarity between the ecclesiastical and secular legal material points to the textual discourse between these two institutions. Therefore, the obvious flow of influence between the Old Irish and canon law indicates that the Church played a large role in the shaping and enforcing of social control in early medieval Ireland.
Chapter Three outlined a historiography of early Irish church organization. This section focused on two important issues regarding the Irish Church that have received a great deal of attention from scholars. The first discussion was on the subject of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Two schools of thought exist in scholarship of this topic. The traditional school (as it has become known), including the works of John Ryan and Kathleen Hughes, promotes the argument that a shift occurred in ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the sixth century. Pointing to evidence in the annals and early hagiography of Ireland, Hughes and Ryan claim that prior to the period of great monastic foundations in the sixth century, bishops were the primary administrators of the Irish Church. After this period, however, the governance of the church shifted into the hands of abbots. Recently, scholars have begun to question the interpretation of the traditionalists. Richard Sharpe and Cólman Etchingham both argue that there was no significant shift in the importance of the bishop relative to that of the abbot. Rather, they claim that the two offices co-existed before and after the sixth century. Furthermore, Sharpe points to a previously unidentified administrative office, the coarb. Over time, according to Sharpe, the function of bishop came to encompass strictly sacramental ministry; that of the abbot, administration of the monastic community; and that of the coarb, jurisdiction over the laity associated with the expanse of ecclesiastical towns. Moreover, Etchingham argues that the inconsistency of the language surrounding the issue suggests that either bishops or abbots could have administered the church.
The second subject that is important to Irish church organization discussed in Chapter Three concerns the *paruchia*. Once again, there is a division among scholars regarding the definition of a *paruchia*. John Kenney, Kathleen Hughes, and John Ryan, the traditionalists, argue that monasticism was the foundation of Irish church organization. Moreover, they define a *paruchia* as a confederation of scattered monastic houses under the rule of an abbot of the mother church, rather than as a territorial unit supervised by a bishop. Once again, Richard Sharpe and Cólman Etchingham claim that the traditional view of the *paruchia* is inaccurate. Sharpe argues that there was nothing monastic about a *paruchia*, but rather it was a jurisdictional term in which churches were viewed as secular charges of a mother-house. According to Sharpe, alongside the establishment of *paruchia* were *familiae*, which was a term used to connect a confederation of monastic houses such as Derry, Iona, and Kells. Like Sharpe, Etchingham feels that a *paruchia* was not monastic in nature, but territorial.

Moreover, the inconsistency of the language in the canons regarding *paruchiae* and church organization reflects the variation of the language in the secular laws regarding the structure of Irish society. Consequently, this inconsistency in language demonstrates that the administration of the Church could be overseen by various ecclesiastical officials, rather than being allocated to only one. It further demonstrates that the Church was not fully developed at this time, was rather in the process of formation, a formation that meshed with the social framework of early Ireland.
Chapter Four focused on the role of St. Brigit in the development of Kildare and the maintenance of its ecclesiastical relationships. Through an analysis of St. Brigit’s hagiography and the canons, I demonstrated that the cult of St. Brigit played an important part in creating and retaining Kildare’s power, prestige, and protection. The authority of St. Brigit was extended to the leader of the community, who, in turn, controlled access to her relics and the sacred space of the monastery. The hagiography of St. Brigit, furthermore, depicts the Kildare paruchia as a territorial unit of jurisdiction, rather than confederation of scattered houses. The hagiography consistently portrays St. Brigit as the administrator of temporal affairs, assisted by a bishop in sacral ministry. In addition, the language of the annals, supported by the hagiography, demonstrates versatility and cooperation between positions of ecclesiastical authority over the monastery and its paruchia. Overall, the expansive cult of St. Brigit, the territorial girth of and resources associated with the Kildare paruchia, and jurisdictional authority made the monastery of Kildare an attractive source of power and revenue to other churches and the dynastic families of Leinster.

Chapter Five highlighted Kildare’s relationship with the dynastic families of Leinster. Kildare maintained its authority both through the jurisdiction of its paruchia and the support of the provincial kings. Furthermore, the relationship between the secular and ecclesiastical powers benefited the dynastic families as well. By sustaining close ties with Kildare, the ruling house profited from the resources and support of the monastic community. The importance of this relationship is clearly demonstrated in the annal records and hagiography. Knowing the laws of inheritance
regarding the supervision of the monastery, the Uí Dúnlainge joined themselves to the
descendants of St. Brigit in order to acquire authority over Kildare. Indeed, even the
church of Armagh and the Uí Néill had interests in and connections to Kildare.
Moreover, the cult of St Brigit served to protect and legitimize the rights of the
ecclesiastical claims over a *parochia* and of the kings of Leinster. Through the
hagiography of Brigit we saw that Kildare contributed to the economic, judiciary,
political, and social life of Leinster, and to a wider extent, Ireland. The variation in
language regarding the jurisdiction of Kildare also supports the blurred boundaries
and co-extensive lines of administration within the Church and between the
ecclesiastical and secular worlds.

Finally, Chapter Six investigated the social role of Kildare in daily affairs.
The hagiography of St. Brigit shows that the monastery acted as a patron to less
powerful churches and lay folk alike. The hagiographers depict St. Brigit as a
powerful benefactress, who represents the authority if Kildare. Moreover, providing
acts of charity, healing, and by fulfilling the expected social obligations of the *sóer*
church, Kildare attracted clients and acquired additional wealth and prestige. The
hagiography of St. Brigit shows that the monastery sustained these social contacts
through hospitality and mediation, and moreover, may have used more direct means
of control such as cursing and fasting.

This thesis found that methods of social control used by the early Irish
church were not always aggressive. Indeed, Kildare attained and maintained its
authority in early Ireland through the social contacts with clients, other ecclesiastic
establishments and dynastic rulers it formed and nourished. These relationships were founded on the cult of St. Brigit, and often followed the social customs laid forth in the Old Irish Laws. Yet, through the cult of St. Brigit, Kildare had additional means to acquire and sustain influence. By controlling access to the saint’s spiritual power, Kildare’s leader-- who inherited her authority-- regulated its associations and directed the flow of wealth that entered the monastery as a result. The sources showed that, both in Ireland in general, and more specifically in Kildare and Leinster, the institutions of church and state relied upon one another to a certain degree in order to attain and maintain power. This dichotomy suggests that monastic communities in early medieval Ireland functioned on many levels following the social regulations set forth by secular society. The early Irish church was involved in the formation and enforcement of social regulation, to such a degree that monasteries, such as Kildare, were seen as great sources of power and resources by the governing dynasties. Indeed, an early Irish monastery was far more than spiritual refuge, it was a thriving community whose temporal affairs were similar in nature to those of the native polities. Moreover, these monasteries played an important role in the political, economic, and social activities around them. I believe that more specific examples of ecclesiastical social control are available for other monasteries such as Clonmacnoise and Armagh. I believe that many of the more general observations of my thesis, such as the important connection between secular and ecclesiastical families, and the influence of Irish social structure (i.e. kinship ties, clientship, rank and status, etc.) would remain the same. Yet, as we have seen, variation is the standard for the
language of the secular laws. It is possible that methods of church administration, for example, a monastic confederacy versus a territorial *paruchia*, were different in different regions. Perhaps the element of ritual played a more significant role in social regulation in some monastic communities compared to others. It is my opinion that research on the interaction between early Irish secular and ecclesiastical institutions will potentially shed light onto the intricacies of early Irish church and social organization. It is my hope that this thesis has made a contribution to such an effort.
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