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Title	The Archaeology of Aran
Author(s)	Waddell, John
Publication Date	1994
Publication Information	Waddell, J. (1994) Archaeology of Aran, in J. Waddell, J. O'Connell and A. Korff (eds), The Book of Aran, Kinvara, 75-135
Publisher	Tír Eolas, Kinvara
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/1609

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THE BOOK OF

ARAN

The
Aran
Islands,
Co. Galway

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The
Aran
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Co. Galway

by John Feehan
Cilian Roden
Michael O'Connell
Gordon D'Arcy
J.W. O'Connell
John Waddell
Paul Walsh
John de Courcy Ireland
Anne O'Dowd
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Published by Tír Eolas

First published in 1994 by Tír Eolas,
Newtownlynch, Kinvara, Co. Galway.

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Editorial Policy:

Place-names are normally given in the conventional Irish form as in Tim Robinson's 1980 detailed map of the islands or the more general 1993 Ordnance Survey 1:25000 bilingual map of Aran. In deference to popular mis-usage the large island, Árainn, is rendered as Inis Mór and the islands are collectively called Aran or the Aran Islands.

1st Reprint 1996

2nd Reprint 1999

ISBN 1 873821 03 4 PAPERBACK

ISBN 1 873821 04 2 HARD COVERS

Cover: Anne Korff

Layout and design: Anne Korff

Typesetting: Johan Hofsteenge

Printed by Colour Books

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CHAPTER 5

The Archaeology of Aran

John Waddell

'...a uniquely tender and memorious ground'

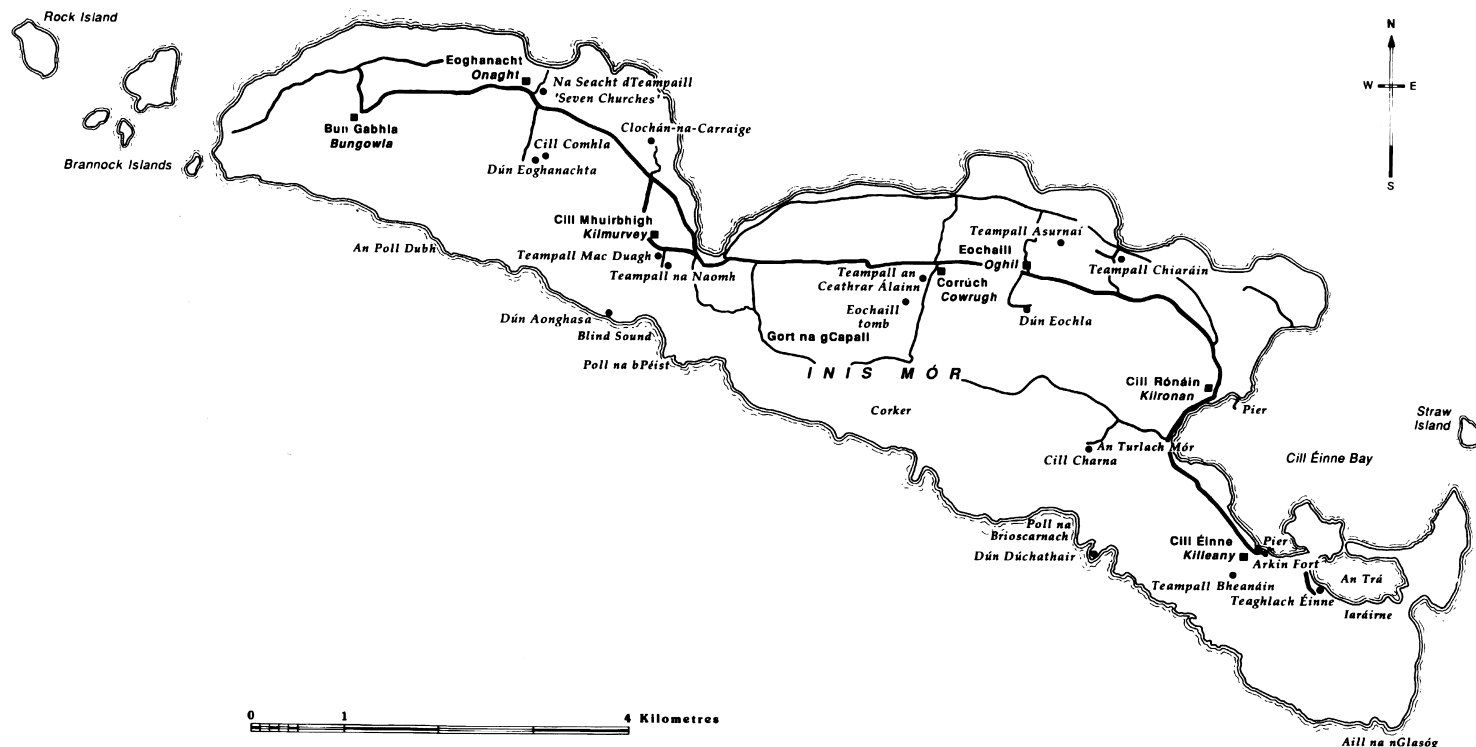
Tim Robinson

Introduction

The bare limestone landscape and the numerous ancient monuments of the Aran Islands have fascinated visitors for many years. The impression of an isolated stony world on the edge of a limitless ocean has only accentuated the attraction of the great stone forts and early churches, and much sense and much nonsense has been written about them.

The stone forts, for instance, have been variously considered as the last defences of a people driven to the western extremities of the known world by successive invaders from the east and as the remnants of a formidable barrier to a threat from a lost Atlantic continent to the west.¹ Even the very name Aran has generated woolly speculation. Fanciful suggestions include its derivation from *Ard-Thuinn* meaning 'height above the waves' or even from Aaron, the brother of Moses! However, the name derives from *ara*, the Irish word for kidney, which has come to mean the loins or back and the name, as in *druim*, has thus been given to a ridge of land.²

The three islands, Inis Mór or Arainn, Inis Meáin, the middle island, and Inis Oírr, the eastern island, lie north-west to south-east across the mouth of Galway Bay and are geologically an extension of the limestone terrain of the Burren in Co. Clare. Some writers³ have romantically stressed the geographical isolation of the islands but it is worth noting that Inis Oírr is only about eight kilometres from Clare and Inis Mór only a little further from the coast of Connemara. Others have been struck by the sparse vegetation and great expanses of exposed limestone, and have emphasized the barrenness of the islands: 'nothing to strike the eye at first sight but a cold, hard, barren mass of sea-girt stone'.⁴ But Aran is much more than bare stone. The limestone lies in clearly defined strata gently sloping to the south-south-west towards the Atlantic.⁵ From the north-east, from Galway Bay, this layering appears as a series of sheltered limestone terraces descending to the sea, and it is on these terraces that the majority of the early ecclesiastical monuments are to be found (Illus. 5.1). Large areas of the upper plateau are particularly exposed to Atlantic rain and wind and here especially extensive tracts of bare limestone occur. Again, however, appearances are deceptive, a little glacial drift occurs, and, just as in the Burren, a



thin soil here and there on the limestone supports innumerable patches of valuable winter grazing. According to Roderic O'Flaherty in 1684: 'among these stones is very sweet pasture, so that beef and mutton are better and earlier in season here than elsewhere ...'.⁶ Indeed, as in the Burren too, the early prehistoric inhabitants of Aran would probably have had to contend with a landscape rather different from that of today. The less exposed parts of the islands in particular probably supported considerable pine and hazel, as well as some oak, elm and other trees.

Antiquarian visitors to Aran

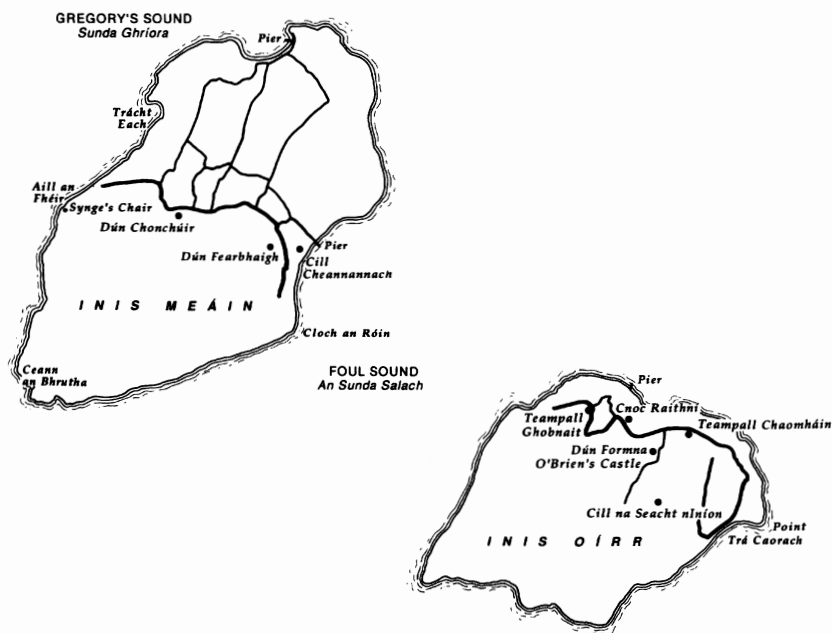
Roderic O'Flaherty, Galway historiographer and one of the last great Gaelic scholars of the seventeenth century, was the first to publish an account of the traditional history of Ireland from the earliest times for the English reader. His *Ogygia seu rerum Hibernicum chronologia*,⁷ which appeared in London in 1685, drew the attention of the learned world to three of the great Aran forts including 'Dun Aengus, a great stone-work without cement which might contain in its area two hundred cows, on an

Illus. 5.1. Map of the Aran Islands showing principal sites and monuments.

amazing eminence of the sea with cliffs of a stupendous magnitude ...'. The celebrated Welsh antiquarian Edward Lhuyd visited Aran in 1700 during his tour of Ireland but, sadly, little survives of the material he gathered. He did comment on the frequent occurrence of the maidenhair fern and a sketch plan of the fort of Dún Eochla is preserved.⁸

Just over a century elapsed before there was any renewed interest in the islands' antiquities. The nineteenth century witnessed a succession of famous visitors. George Petrie studied the forts and churches in 1821 and some of the drawings he made then appeared in the revised and expanded version of his famous

essay on the origin and uses of the round towers in Ireland which was published in 1845. He has been described as 'the father of sound Irish archaeology' because as one historian succinctly put it 'he succeeded in taking the subject of Irish antiquity out of the hands of the crack-pots'.⁹ John O'Donovan and William F. Wakeman visited Aran in the Summer of 1839 in the course of their work for the Ordnance Survey of Ireland.¹⁰ O'Donovan's numerous notes preserved in the Ordnance Survey letters have provided many later writers with material about the islands' archaeology. William Wilde was in Aran in 1848 and discovered fragments of two high crosses there.¹¹ He was followed, a few years later, by Samuel Ferguson, who drew the attention of a wide audience to the major monuments of the three islands in two articles in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1853.



The British Association for the Advancement of Science met in Dublin in 1857 and Wilde was president of its Ethnological Section. After the Dublin meeting he led a famous excursion of some seventy participants to Aran in early September.¹² Most of the great names of nineteenth century Irish archaeological studies were there, some of them already familiar with the wealth of Aran's antiquities. For, as Wilde declared, 'the Western Islands of Aran contain the greatest number of Pagan and early Christian monuments – military, domestic, ecclesiastical, and sepulchral – which can be found within the same area in Europe'. Those present included George Petrie, Eugene O'Curry, Samuel Ferguson, Margaret Stokes, and John O'Donovan. The proceedings culminated in an evening banquet in Dún Aonghasa. Among the speeches, those of Wilde, O'Donovan and O'Curry, in Irish, urged the people of Aran to protect their monuments.

It was also resolved that a book should be published on the islands' ancient remains to serve as a lasting memorial to Wilde's services as director of the expedition. Sadly this never happened though Wilde did produce a short three-page pamphlet the following year.¹³

Many subsequent visitors to the islands have commented on their extraordinary wealth of ancient monuments. Chief among these are Dunraven and Westropp. Edwin, the third earl of Dunraven, studied and photographed some of the major sites, both stone forts and churches, in the late 1860s and his work was edited for posthumous publication in 1875 by Margaret Stokes.¹⁴ This is the first extensive photographic record of the islands' antiquities. Thomas Johnson Westropp visited Aran in 1878 and on many subsequent occasions. He published a valuable series of papers including a general account of the antiquities for the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland in 1895 and a detailed study of Dún Aonghasa in 1910.¹⁵

George Henry Kinahan, of the Geological Survey of Ireland, was another 19th century scholar to study these ancient monuments. He was a keen antiquarian and regularly recorded archaeological sites he noticed in the course of his geological work. He collaborated with the Rev. William Kilbride, Rector of Aran, in 1866, in a study of clochans or stone huts and other settlements on Inis Mór, and Kilbride himself published an account of other monuments in 1869 in which he records one of the earliest excavations of one of the clochans.¹⁶

No doubt the fame of the Aran monuments and the numerous publications they prompted throughout the 19th century were the main rea-

sons which encouraged the taking of many of them into State care. The fort of Dún Aonghasa, for instance, was made a National Monument in 1880 and in the following years it and a number of other forts and churches were tidied up and partly restored by the Office of Public Works.¹⁷

The earliest dateable traces of human occupation then known were discovered in 1885. The Rev. Denis Murphy, a visitor to Inis Oírr, persuaded the Clerk of Works engaged in the Office of Public Works' restoration of the O'Brien Castle at Formna there to investigate a low mound called Cnoc Raithní on the sea shore not far away. They discovered a Bronze Age cremation burial in a pottery urn which dates to about 1500 BC.¹⁸

The summer of 1895 saw the first of several excursions by sea around the coast of Ireland by the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.¹⁹ That July they visited the three islands and it was this excursion which prompted T.J. Westropp's study published in the Society's *Journal* for the same year.

The new century, as we have seen, saw further important work by Westropp, as well as visits by noted scholars such as R.A.S. Macalister²⁰ and H.S. Crawford²¹ who were particularly interested in the many early Christian remains there. The Rev. Dr P. Power, Professor of Archaeology in University College, Cork, courageously wrote a short guide to the antiquities of Aran in 1926 'compiled ... for most part from twenty five-years old memory'. The same year also saw the appearance of another pamphlet on the ecclesiastical remains of Inis Mór.²² Fr M. O Domhnaill devoted considerable space to the ancient monuments in his *Oileáin Árann* of 1930. T.H. Mason, a Dublin optician

and a talented photographer, published a book on *The Islands of Ireland* in 1936 and wrote a short account of the antiquities of Inis Oírr two years later.

J.R.W. Goulden, a Dublin school master and amateur archaeologist, undertook a number of visits to the islands in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He published several short accounts of some minor monuments and over a three year period from 1953 to 1955 excavated three ancient settlement sites on Inis Mór.²³ Liam de Paor published a study of the high crosses of Clare and Aran in 1956. Few general accounts of Aran have ignored the archaeology. True, John Millington Synge's famous *The Aran Islands* first published in 1907, has little or nothing to say about the remote past of Inis Meáin or the other islands, but most books have devoted some space to the islands' remarkable collection of forts and churches, often relying to a considerable extent on the work of O'Donovan and Westropp. In the 1960s and 1970s works such as P.A. Ó Síocháin's *Aran – Islands of Legend*, Daphne Pochin Mould's *The Aran Islands*, Leo Daly's *Oileáin Árann* and Antoine Powell's *Oileáin Árann – Stair na n-Oileáin anuas go dtí 1922* in the early 1980s all included accounts of the archaeological monuments.²⁴ The 1970s also saw some detailed archaeological survey²⁵ and in 1975 Tim Robinson published the first results of his cartographic work on Aran, presenting a remarkable record of settlement and monuments, and an accurate rendering of the Irish placenames. He followed this with his superb book *Stones of Aran* in 1986 which must rank as the finest evocation of the islands' past and present ever written.²⁶ The early 1980s saw further archaeological fieldwork on the islands, this time by the Galway Archaeological Survey under the

auspices of the Office of Public Works and the Department of Archaeology, University College, Galway. This survey, under the direction of Paul Gosling, recorded over 230 ancient sites.²⁷ In 1992 a programme of research on the great stone forts, initiated by the Discovery Programme, began with archaeological excavations at Dún Aonghasa.²⁸

The three Aran Islands comprise about 11,000 acres, or about 4500 hectares, and it is fair to say that few other parcels of land of comparable size in Ireland are so rich in ancient remains, and none has inspired so much literature, archaeological or otherwise.

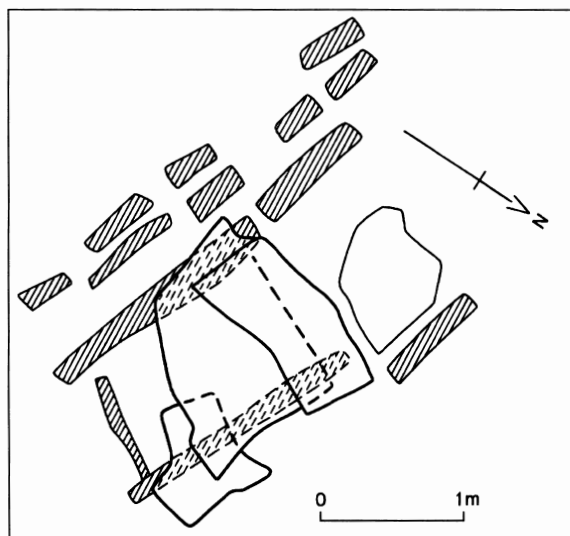
Early Inhabitants

With evidence for early farming communities in the Burren of Co. Clare and in Connemara about 4000 BC, it is very likely that Aran was settled at least by that date. The coastal and island distribution of many early stone tombs shows that coastal seaways were an important means of communication in early times when, no doubt, skin boats, ancestors of the modern curragh, were widely used. No archaeological trace of these supposed earliest inhabitants have yet been identified, however, and the first certain traces of activity on the islands may date to about 2500 BC. As is often the case in the west of Ireland, it is the funerary record which offers the earliest indication of a human presence. In the Neolithic period (4500-2500 BC), early farming groups, while living in impermanent timber houses, still preferred to build durable megalithic or great stone tombs to contain the bones of their ancestors. Several examples of a late type have survived on Aran. The best preserved is in Eochaill on Inis Mór.



Illus. 5.2a. Megalithic tomb at Eochaill viewed from the eastern rear end: built about 2000 BC, it faces the setting sun.

Illus. 5.2b. Plan of megalithic tomb at Eochaill.



Eochaill Wedge Tomb

This monument is situated on a low grassy ridge south-west of Teampall an Ceathrar Álainn (Illus. 5.2). What seems at first glance to be a rather roughly built box of limestone slabs is in fact carefully constructed to a plan common in the north, west and south-west of Ireland. In plan, the tomb is lower and narrower at its eastern rear end and a little wider, and higher, at its western front. This wedge-shaped plan gives the tomb type its name: it is a wedge tomb now consisting of two large slabs on either side, an end stone and three overlapping roof slabs. There is a line of outer walling on the south. It may once have been covered by a cairn of stones but little of this survives. Like most examples of its class, the tomb faces approximately west towards the setting sun.

Excavation of examples elsewhere, mainly in the northern half of the country, has revealed that the bones of a number of individuals, often cremated, were placed in these megaliths. Few objects were ever deposited with the remains of the dead: fragments of pottery are the commonest find. This pottery suggests these tombs were mainly used between 2200 and 1500 BC. Somewhere in the Eochaill area, there is presumably a small settlement of the period awaiting identification and the tomb and cairn may once have served not just as a repository for the bones of selected members of the community, perhaps some sacred ancestors, but also as a visible symbol of the people's territorial rights and as a focus for ritual activities some (given the orientation of the tomb) perhaps associated with a cult of the setting sun.

There may have been at least two other tombs of this sort on Inis Mór, one at Corúch and the other at Fearann an Choirce, but no trace of them survives.²⁹

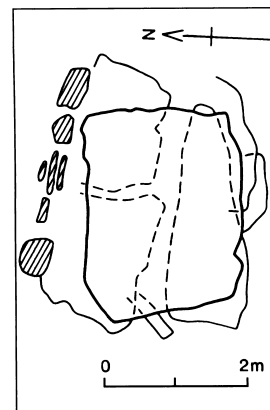
Ceathrú an Lisín Wedge Tomb

A ruined wedge tomb survives near Baile an Mhothair on Inis Meáin (Illus. 5.3). It is situated on fairly bare limestone land with a view of the Clare coast to the east. The side slabs have collapsed to the south with the roof stone lying on top of them. The size of the side stones suggests that the monument was higher at its western end, so like its counterparts in Eochail, in Clare and elsewhere, it faced westward. A line of typical outer walling is visible on the north and no trace of cairn remains. Another similar tomb may have stood some 400 metres to the west in the 19th century but nothing survives.²⁹

A collapsed megalithic structure in Ceathrú an Teampaill on the north-west coast of Inis Meáin may be another wedge tomb: it was a more or less rectangular structure just under 3 metres in length and its long axis does lie east-west (Illus. 5.4).

The existence of at least half a dozen megalithic tombs on the islands is indicative of a small but significant population around and about 2000 BC. There is a large number of these wedge tombs in the Burren in Co. Clare and presumably there were close reciprocal contacts between the islands and this part of the mainland at this early date. As in the Burren, it is likely that the island subsistence of these early inhabitants was based to some degree on stock-raising: sheep and goat and cattle though sea-fishing and shell fish probably contributed to the economy as well.

There is very little other evidence of the activities of the tomb builders: it is quite possible, however, that two axeheads of polished stone date to this period. Two of these (Illus. 5.5) were found in 1961 on Inis Oírr when digging a pit for road building material near Cill Ghobnait and a third comes from a shell mid-



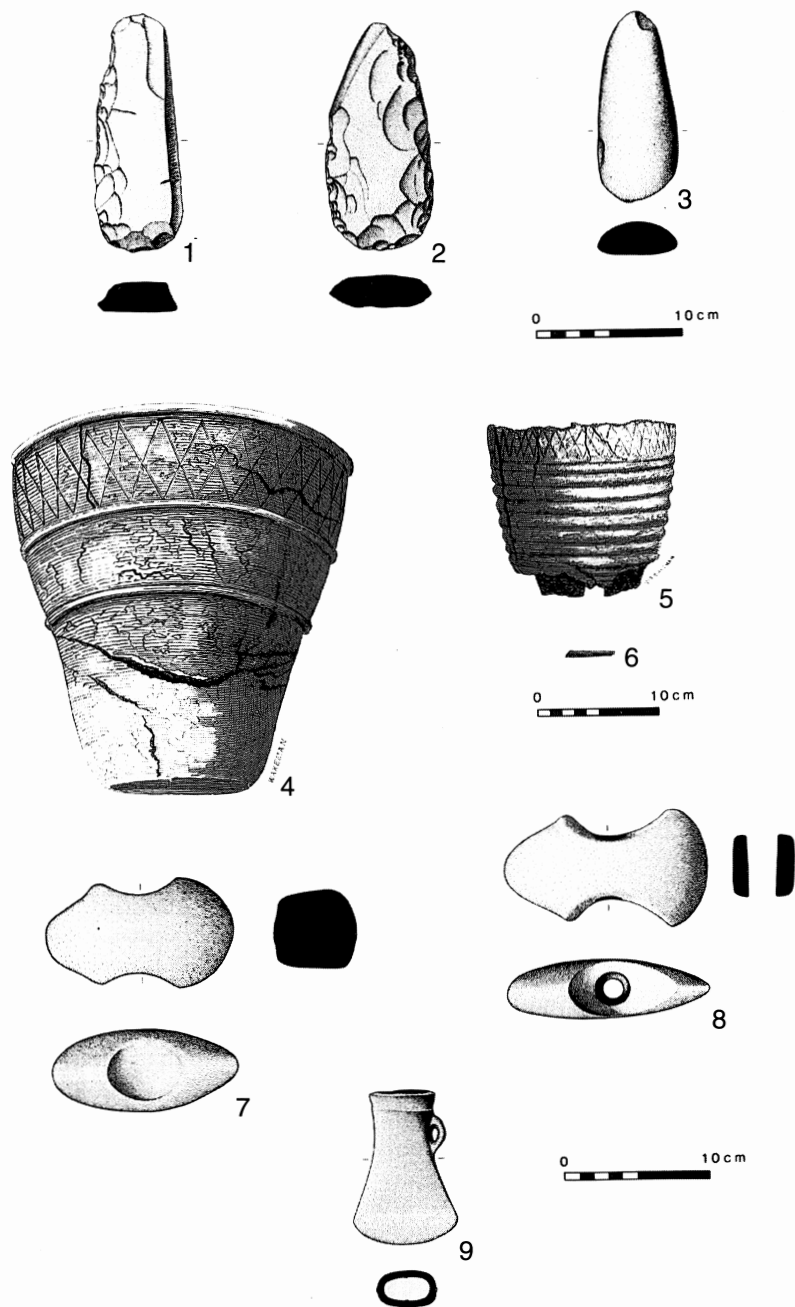
den on Inis Meáin. Made of various sorts of polished stone, implements such as these would originally have been mounted in a wooden haft. They were probably mainly used for felling small trees, though more lethal usage is not impossible.³⁰

Illus. 5.3a. A collapsed megalithic tomb at Ceathrú an Lisín, Inis Meáin.

Illus. 5.3b. Plan of megalithic tomb at Ceathrú an Lisín.

Illus. 5.4. Collapsed megalithic structure at Ceathrú an Teampaill, Inis Meáin.





Illus. 5.5. Some archaeological finds from Aran and Clare: 1-2. Polished stone axeheads found near Cill Ghobnait, Inis Oírr. 3. Polished stone axehead found in a shell midden on Inis Meáin. 4-6. A Bronze Age cordoned urn, a second smaller pottery vessel and a bronze pin (?) fragment from Cnoc Raithní, Inis Oírr (after Wakeman). 7. An unfinished stone 'battle-axe' found near Baile an Lurgain. 8. A complete 'battle-axe' from nearby Teergonean in Co. Clare. 9. Socketed bronze axehead from Formna.

The Cnoc Raithní Burial

In 1885 a low mound close to an Trá on Inis Oírr was examined by a visiting clergyman, Rev. Denis Murphy, S.J., and the Clerk of Works who was then completing the Office of Public Works' restoration of O'Brien's Castle nearby. Only rather cursory accounts of this early unscientific excavation exist. According to the Rev. Murphy:

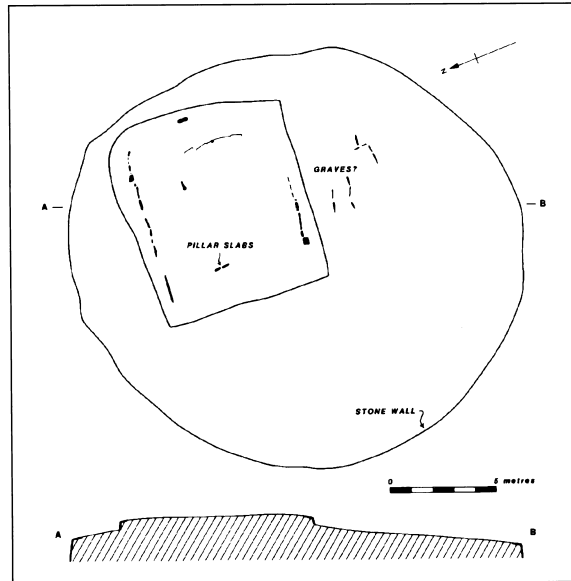
'a mound or hillock close to Tragh Kiera... was found to be surrounded, at a depth of some ten feet from the surface, by the foundation of a thick wall, roughly built of large stones, without any sign of mortar... When the foundations were laid bare, and the whole circle of the cashel was opened up, on digging a little into the mound inside this wall, we came on some tall stones, four feet in height set on end, and enclosing a circular space of about five feet in diameter. We set about clearing away the sand between them, and at a depth of three feet from the top of them and ten feet from the surface of the mound we came on the smaller of the two urns. We removed the sand around it very carefully, hoping to be able to raise it whole and without a break from its position. But when it was touched, ever so gently, it fell to pieces, as if it were made of sand. These we put together carefully bit by bit ... Continuing the search within the same stone circle, we soon came on another and larger urn ... The contents of both urns were bones, a substance like charred peat, and sand. The sand will have fallen in owing to pressure from above ...'.

This account is accompanied by drawings of both pottery vessels by W.F. Wakeman who also recorded the fact that a small piece of bronze about 1.6cm long (the pointed end of a pin or an awl) was found in the smaller one.³¹ Judging from Murphy's description a large mound, apparently of sand, was removed, in whole or in part, to reveal a circular stone wall at a depth of 3m. Within this circular area, a circular stone-built grave about 1.5m in diameter and about 90cm deep contained two pots each containing fragments of cremated human bone. The larger of the two is a fine example of a Bronze Age Cordoned Urn dating to about 1500 BC (Illus. 5.5). They are so named because they invariably have two or more raised mouldings or cordons around the exterior of a somewhat bucket-shaped body and one broad zone of simple geometric ornament below the rim. A few examples are known elsewhere in Co. Galway and in Co. Mayo but urns of this type are mainly found in north-eastern Ireland and in Scotland. It is possible that individuals accorded this sort of burial were privileged in some way – a large pottery urn may have been some mark of status and only certain members of the community may have been honoured with formal burial and a ritual which demanded the building of a large cremation pyre somewhere on Inis Oírr three and half thousand years ago.

A low mound known as Cnoc Raithní, the hill of ferns, is usually identified as the location of these two Bronze Age cremations. It is a roughly circular mound surrounded by a drystone wall some 21m in diameter. The mound is flat-topped and has, in its southern half, a number of protruding slabs which seem to be traces of a couple of long slab-lined graves. To the north of these possible graves a small sub-rectangular mound with a drystone kerf sits on top of



Illus. 5.6a. Cnoc Raithní, Inis Oírr: burial mound. The circular mound has several stone settings in it which may be pre-Christian graves. It may have produced a Bronze Age burial dating to 1500 BC. The site was restored in the 19th century.



Illus. 5.6b. Plan of Cnoc Raithní burial mound.

the oval mound. What appears to be a rectangular setting of slabs protrudes from the flat top of this feature and two upright slabs stand near its western end (Illus. 5.6). This is a puzzling monument, there is certainly no trace of the circular cremation grave and how much of either the large mound or the small rectangular mound is due to 19th century restoration work is uncertain. Long slab-lined graves are often dated to the early Christian period and it is

possible that Cnoc Raithní is a complex multi-period structure, a prehistoric site re-used at a later date.³²

One stone object from Inis Oírr may be probably contemporary with the Cordoned Urn burial. This is an unfinished stone 'battle-axe', a casual surface find in 1970 near Baile an Lurgáin (Illus. 5.5). If finished it would have resembled an example from Teergonean townland on the nearby Clare coast. Highly polished, with a relatively slender perforation for a wooden haft, these objects were hardly offensive weapons as their fanciful name implies. It is generally believed that they had some ceremonial role and were possibly symbols of prestige.

Activity on Aran in the later Bronze Age, around and about 800 BC. is indicated by one other Inis Oírr find. This is a bronze socketed axehead (Illus. 5.5) found just 20cm below the surface in a field at Formna.³³ It would originally have been mounted in a bent wooden haft and the loop may have served to take a leather thong to bind the two together. Early occupation on the site of the great fort of Dún Aonghasa on Inis Mór dates to this period as well.

The Stone Forts

The half a dozen great stone-built forts on the Aran Islands are splendid examples of their kind and they have captured the imagination of numerous visitors since at least the 19th century. This type of fort is well known in western Ireland in particular, from Donegal to Kerry, and quite a few fine examples occur in Co. Clare, but the special attraction of the Aran monuments lies in great measure in their dramatic and relatively remote location.

Two of the forts stand apart from the rest, for Dún Dúchathair and the famous Dún

Aonghasa, both on Inis Mór, are situated on the cliffs of the inhospitable Atlantic coast and seem to many to confront the unknown hazards of an immense ocean.

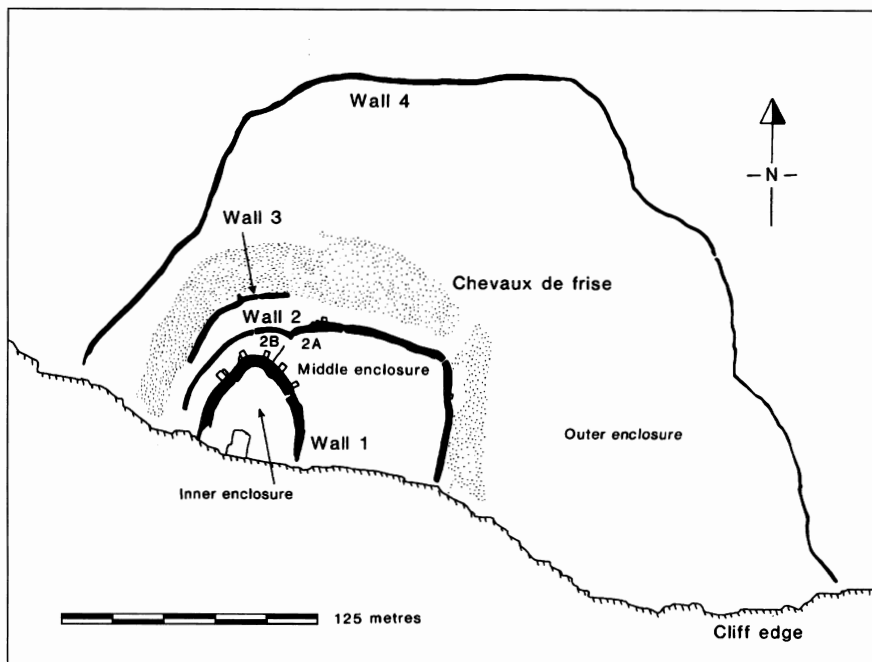
Dún Aonghasa

'...the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe'

George Petrie

The great fort of Dún Aonghasa stands on the edge of a sheer sea cliff nearly 100m high and also dominates the lower lands of Cill Mhuirbhigh to the north-east (Illus. 5. 7-8). Today the eye of the visitor is caught at once by the imposing stone wall of the inner fort, an almost semi-circular enclosure on the cliff edge. But the monument is much more complex than that, it has outer defences enclosing a

Illus. 5.7. General plan of Dún Aonghasa (after Cotter).



total area of 5.7 hectares (14 acres) and may have been modified more than once in ancient times as well as being restored in the 1880s. The crude buttresses which now support the ramparts at various points are recent additions.

Illus. 5.8. Dún Aonghasa: 'the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe'. The great wall of the inner fort and two of the three outer ramparts are visible, as is the stone chevaux-de-frise.





Illus. 5.9. Rampart of inner fort with sidelong flights of steps to the right of the mural chamber.

Illus. 5.10 opposite page. Entrance to inner fort viewed from the interior with vertical flights of steps to the right.

Illus. 5.11 opposite page. Westropp's sketch plan of the rampart of the inner fort showing the terracing and the presence of internal faces.

Inner Fort

The stone-built rampart of the inner fort is about 4m high at present but in the 1830s parts of it were up to 5.5m high. It has a slight external batter, that is it slopes inwards from base to top to give greater stability and has a maximum thickness of over 5m. The low, narrow, lintelled entrance is on the north-east; its innermost section is an unroofed passage.

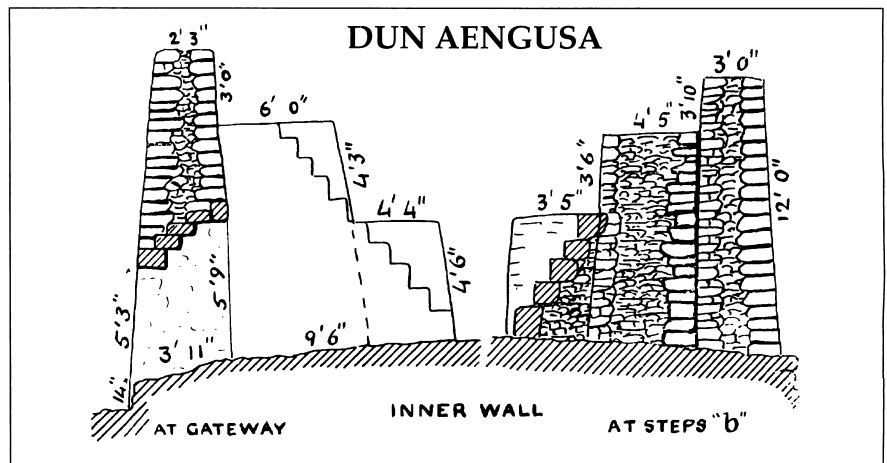
The interior is of irregular U-shaped plan, with an average diameter of about 47m and now open to the Atlantic at the southern cliff edge. Presumably the enclosure was once an oval or

at least D-shaped with a wall or rampart on this seaward side. No written records survive to testify to its original shape and it seems likely that part of the fort collapsed into the sea in the remote past. The inside of the rampart is terraced and, in the northern half of the enclosure, half-a-dozen sets of stone steps give access to the two levels of terracing below the parapet (Illus. 5.9-10).

Here we are confronted with the problems posed by the 1880s restoration, for no records seem to have been kept of what was then found and what actually prompted the construction or reconstruction of the features visible today. That there were terraces and steps is not in doubt, however. Though the monument was very dilapidated and the walls ruined (as Dunraven's pre-restoration photographs show³⁴) internal features were visible. Petrie who first visited it in 1821 refers to 'a level terrace at the height of 6 feet from the ground' and O'Donovan noted that this rampart 'is made up of three distinct walls built up against each other, each wall faced with stones of considerable size ... The two external divisions are here raised to the height of 18 feet, but the internal division is at present only 7 feet high ...'.³⁵ The construction of the rampart in sections, with several internal wall faces (Illus. 5.11) may reflect various phases of additional walling. The purpose of such internal facing in ramparts is not clear: some may be an attempt to give greater stability but some may indeed be due to the addition of extra walling just to give a more massive appearance to the structure. In any event the fort we see today is the result of a number of refurbishments in ancient times, long before the restoration work of the 19th century. Samuel Ferguson, writing in 1853, has offered the clearest of the all-too-brief pre-restoration accounts of the interior: 'At the

right, on entering, are the remains of a flight of steps conducting to the lower banquette, the form of which is with difficulty traceable among the masses of fallen stone. One or two other indications of stairs may be detected, but were it not for the very distinct construction of the rampart in three concentric sections, one would be at a loss to understand the principle of the construction. On ascending the mound [of stones], however, the three concentric walls are seen in perfect distinctness, the middle one rising through the ruins of the other two, save in one or two points, where the exterior envelope still stands to near its original height'. Thus the two internal terraces visible today are likely to be approximate representations of what there once was.³⁶

The original number of stone steps is problematical.³⁷ Clearly the short straight flight of steps to the right of the entrance (to the north as the visitor enters) is original, Ferguson noted it as we have seen. Both straight and sidelong flights of steps were noted in 1878,³⁸ and the pair of sidelong flights of steps on the north-west is probably original too.³⁹ To what extent the other straight flights of steps, the one on the north leading from the lower to the upper terrace, and the pair to the south of the entrances (running from ground level to the lower terrace and from there to the second terrace) reflect original features is not known. They may have been figments of the restorers' imagination, perhaps even built just to facilitate the modern visitor. This seems unlikely, however, because what little evidence there is, from pre-restoration accounts of Dún Aonghasa as well as from other restored Aran monuments, be they forts or churches, suggests that while walls may have been rebuilt and consolidated and some much ruined flights of steps may not have been recognised, few, if any, invented features were added.⁴⁰



The only visible feature in the enclosure is a natural rectangular platform of limestone about 60cm high abutting the edge of the cliff, its purpose is unknown. There is also a small rectangular chamber in the western wall at ground level just south of the lower sidelong flight of steps.

On the outside there are several vertical joints in the rampart, these are usually considered to represent the construction of the wall in sections by different groups of labourers and have been identified in other stone forts elsewhere.

Outer Defences

Some sort of modification seems to have been done to some of the outer defences. These outer works now comprise two stone ramparts, a fragment of a third and a stone *chevaux-de-frise*.

Beyond the inner fort, the middle enclosure is formed by a long irregular rampart with one terrace and one internal medial facing. The terrace of this middle rampart is an original feature, it was recorded by Petrie and Ferguson, for instance, neither of whom record steps or more than one entrance.⁴¹ Westropp noted no steps either in 1878 so the flight of steps by the north-eastern entrance may not be ancient. It does not follow that every terraced stone rampart had to have stone steps, the former presence of wooden steps and walk-ways is a possibility. On the north there is a lintelled entrance and another unroofed passage-like entrance on the north-east. A third occurs on the north-west and faces an entrance in the fragment of rampart which survives some 14m away at this point.⁴²

The fragment of rampart is roughly similar in



Illus. 5.12. 'Like infinite head-stones of the dead': the stones of the almost impenetrable chevaux-de-frise impede the approach to the middle and fragmentary ramparts.

construction to the middle rampart, it has one terrace in places, one surviving entrance and no surviving steps. Petrie, however, records '2 flights of steps'.⁴³

Chevaux-de-frise

Immediately outside this fragment on the west and north and beyond the middle rampart on the north and east is one of Dún Aonghasa's most noteworthy features. This is the stone *chevaux-de-frise* which more or less extends in a great band 15 to 38m wide around the fortifications from cliff to cliff; some of the stones are up to 1.75m high (Illus. 5.12). The name *chevaux-de-frise* is used to describe wooden stakes or upright pointed stones placed in the ground outside a fort to hinder attackers and it is said to derive from spikes used by Frisians to impede enemy cavalry in the late 17th century.⁴⁴ Though now much ruined in places this defensive work is an impressive sight and must once have formed an almost impenetrable obstacle to anyone approaching the outer defences: when first erected the limestone pillars must have been a razor sharp deterrent to any attacker and since the terrain in any event precluded mounted assault their purpose must have been to impede an attack on foot on the middle rampart. Today they stand, a relic of a long forgotten threat, and, in the words of Samuel Ferguson, 'arranged round the base of the fortress, like infinite head-stones of the dead'.⁴⁵

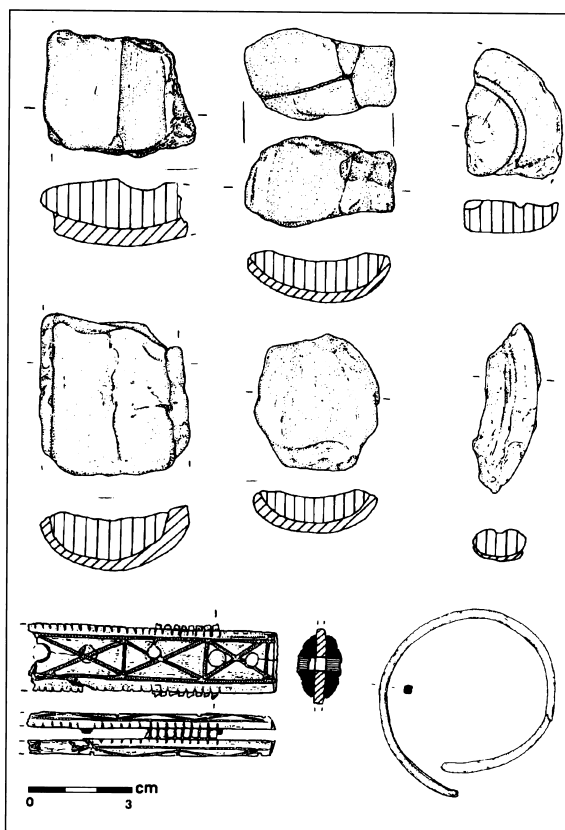
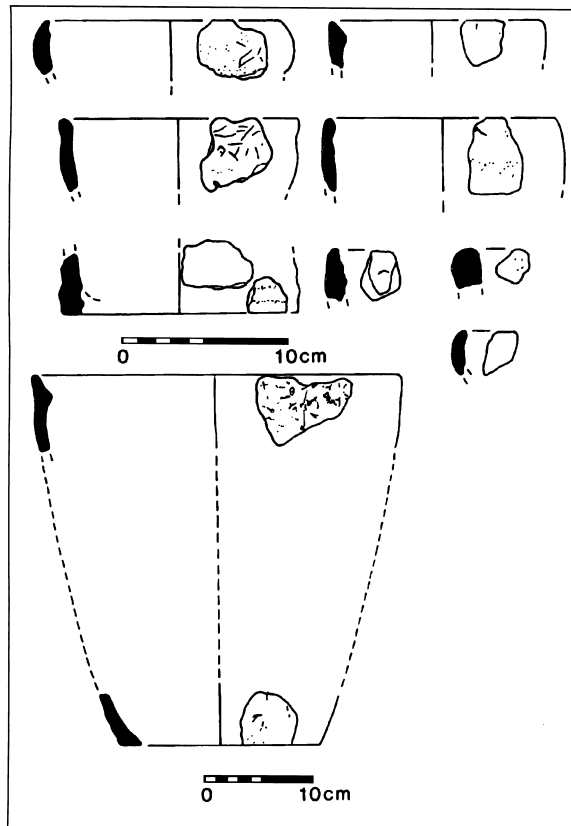
The outer wall at Dún Aonghasa is a modest and dilapidated structure which was originally at least 2m thick and still has, on the north, a lintelled gateway; it may have had a medial facing and possibly a terrace.⁴⁶

A glance at the plan of the fort as it is today clearly shows that the middle rampart falls into three sections. The length on the west and

north-west is concentric both with the inner rampart and with the fragment. It is possible that these two sections once continued east and south to form a great oval trivallate fort. But there is no trace whatever of such a continuation on the ground and no one knows, of course, how much of the cliff has disappeared into the sea over the centuries. The existence of the fragment and the abrupt change in direction in the middle rampart do indicate some modification.⁴⁷ At a guess the original fort may have been a D-shaped cliff fort like the well-known stone fort at Cahercommaun, in the Burren, in Co. Clare.

Excavation

Excavation in the inner enclosure has demonstrated that the site was first occupied in the later Bronze Age about 800 BC. The foundations of circular huts have been found along with fragments of plain pottery vessels and broken pieces of clay moulds for the casting of bronze swords, spears and axes have been found (Illus. 5.13): the bronze casting in particular implies that this may have been a settlement of some importance at the time suggesting as it does the presence of specialised craftworkers such as weapon smiths. Other objects found date to the early Christian period 500-1000 AD. Traces of several circular hut foundations have also been discovered as well as animal bones (mostly sheep and some cattle) and bones of birds and fish. It is also possible that the site was occupied through the Iron Age, a brooch of this period was discovered in the last century, but other evidence for this is scanty. It is likely that the earliest settlement in the later Bronze Age was enclosed by a stone rampart, this being eventually superceded by the later walls visible today (for at least part of the inner wall overlies this early occupation).



Illus. 5.13. Left: sherds of plain pottery vessels of later Bronze Age date found at Dún Aonghasa. Right: fragments of clay moulds for various bronze objects including a spearhead, swords and rings or bracelets. The bronze bracelet on the lower right is probably of prehistoric date but the bone comb dates to the early Christian period occupation at the site (all after Cotter).

Dun Angeus

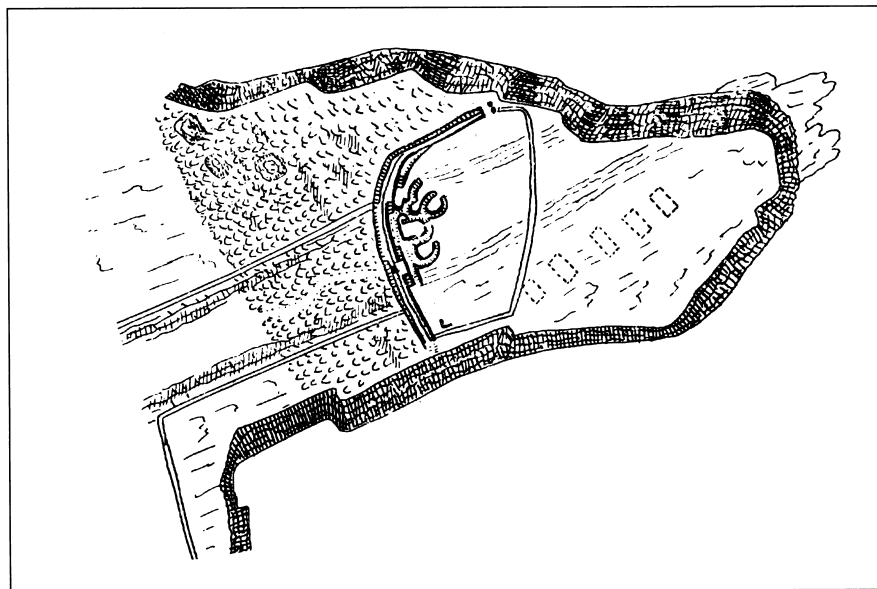
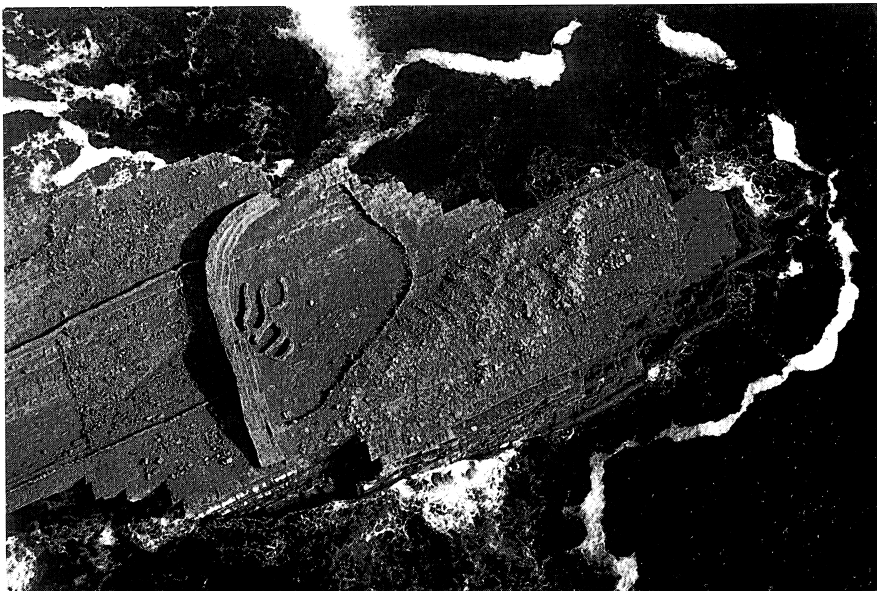
Many of these strange dry-stone structures are to be found on the West coast and on the islands. Dun Angeus is the most important. It is a half-circle which rises in tiers around an arena where the rock has been levelled out and which has been exactly cut in half by the cliff edge. The drop is sheer and breathtaking. Splinters of basalt set into the ground at an angle form a chevaux de frise which bars access and which has given support to the theory that this is a military monument. Dun in Gaelic does in fact mean fortress. This seems absurd: whoever is inside can see absolutely nothing of what may be going on outside. There are no loopholes or crenellations to give a view of the approaches. To climb the outside wall without making a sound would be child's play. It would be equally simple to throw the defenders, taken by surprise from behind, into the void. I am more inclined to think that this is an amphitheatre for solemn inaugurations, seasonal rituals, or for those druidic gatherings where a concert of lamentations accompanied the plunging of the setting sun into the ocean. Since textbooks are as slow to die as myths, people persist in describing these structures as 'forts'. A Professor from Galway who shares my doubts and who I had questioned about this simply told me that it takes a long time to get something into the head of an Irishman and even longer to get it out.

Translated (with original spelling of 'Dun Angeus') from Nicolas Bouvier, *Journal d'Aran et d'autres lieux* (1990).

Dún Dúchathair

Just 3.5 miles away is another remarkable stone fort on the Atlantic cliffs. This is a promontory fort known as Dún Dúchathair or 'the black fort'. Here a much eroded promontory is heavily defended on its landward side by a stone rampart and *chevaux-de-frise* (Illus. 5. 14-15). As in other forts of this promontory type a neck of land is cut off by a rampart, in this instance a massive curving stone construction over 6m high and 5m thick now with two main terraces and several sidelong and vertical flights of steps. Early pre-restoration accounts are brief and unsatisfactory and it is difficult to be certain if terraces and steps are all original.⁴⁸ There was probably at least one terrace and there are the last traces of an entrance through the rampart near its eastern end but almost all evidence has disappeared with the collapse of parts of the cliff.⁴⁹

If questions about the number of terraces, the doubtful presence of steps and the position of an entrance still remain, there is no doubt about the existence of some stone huts in the interior of the fort for several can still be seen today. The stone foundations of at least four conjoined and roughly oval huts lie just inside the central part of the rampart. It is debateable how ancient these are but they were probably remodelled or partly rebuilt in the 19th century restoration. There were others in one or two lines running the length of the promontory but only faint traces of them exist today. O'Donovan recorded in 1839: 'inside the wall are rows of stone houses of an oblong ... form but now nearly destroyed, one row extending along the wall and built up against it, another running from north to south for a distance of about 170 feet where it originally branched into two rows, one extending south-west as far as the margin of the cliff, and the other to the



Illus. 5.14. Both the aerial view and Westropp's sketch plan of Dún Dúchathair show the ruined chevaux-de-frise on the left and a series of different forms of hut sites on the promontory within the fort.

south-east to the opposite margin, these two rows thus branching from the main row are nearly washed away by storms...'. There is also a small chamber in the rampart recalling the similar one in Dún Aonghasa.

Outside the rampart are the remains of a very ruined *chevaux-de-frise*. Many stones are fallen and its full extent is difficult to determine. It seems to have been built of lower and less closely set stones than that at Dún Aonghasa.

*Illus. 5.15. Dún Dúchathair:
a classic example of a
promontory fort.*

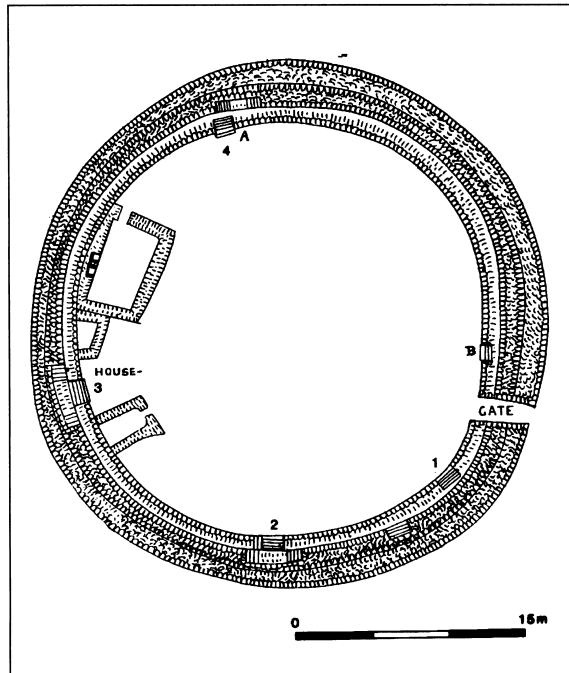


Dún Eoghanachta

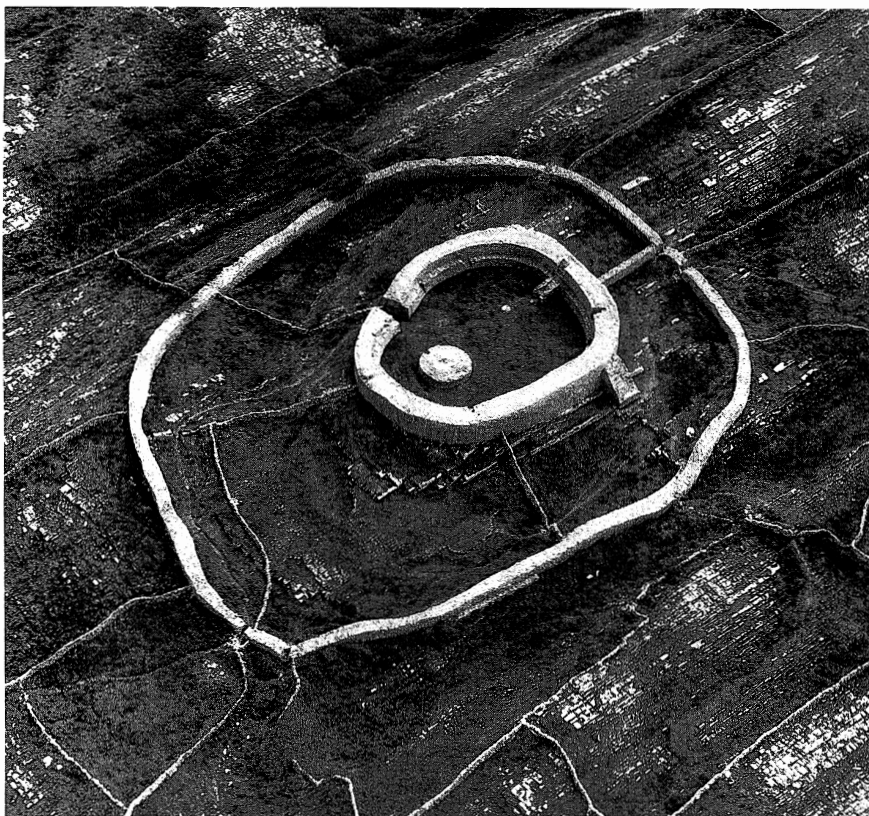
Like the remaining forts on Inis Mór, Dún Eoghanachta is situated on one of the limestone terraces overlooking the north-eastern and eastern parts of the island. It dominates both a wide area west of Cill Mhuirbhígh and the much ruined early ecclesiastical site of Cill Comhla on the terrace below. The fort is an imposing example of a relatively common type of circular stone-built cashel (Illus. 5.16). It has an internal diameter of about 27m enclosed by a massive rampart some 5m high and over 4m thick built of large limestone blocks many laid transversely. It is a triple wall with two internal faces and one terrace below the parapet.⁵⁰ The entrance, on the south-east, was 'nearly destroyed' in 1839 when O'Donovan visited the monument. It was rebuilt in the restoration of the 1880s. Five sets of straight steps give access to the lower terrace and one set of straight steps and three sets of pairs of lateral flights lead to the parapet. Three of the lower steps were recorded by Petrie who noted only one set of steps leading from the lower terrace to a second terrace. O'Donovan noted four sets of lower steps. It seems probable therefore that most, if not all, of the lower straight steps visible today are original features. The sidelong flights now running to a parapet were not noted by Petrie or O'Donovan but the former's plan suggests two terraces below a parapet.⁵¹ In the interior there are the remains of three sub-rectangular stone huts against the western rampart and the largest of these has two niches in one wall.⁵²

Dún Eochla

Dún Eochla is a fine oval stone fort with an outer rampart located in a commanding situation on the north-eastern limits of the highest



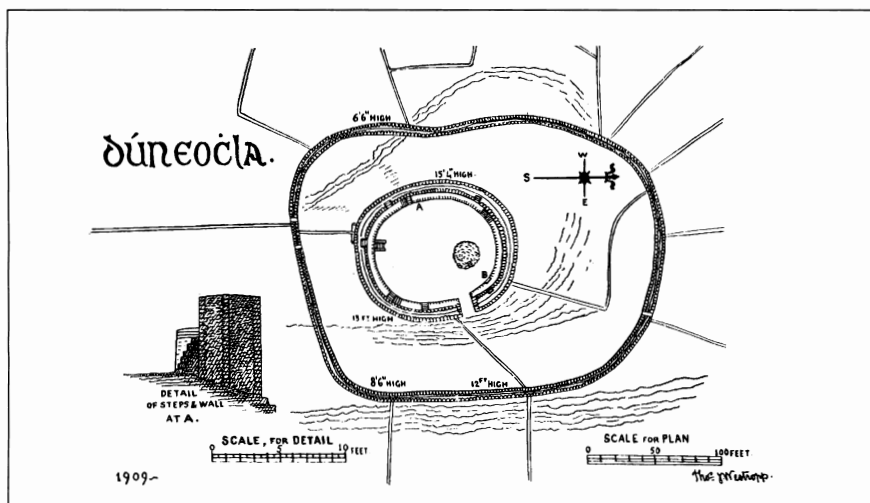
Illus. 5.16. Aerial view of Dún Eoghanachta and Westropp's sketch plan.



Illus. 5.17. Dún Eochla: oval stone fort with an outer rampart. The drum-shaped pile of stones in the interior is the result of 19th century restoration. Westropp's sketch plan shows the terracing and steps.

ground on Inis Mór. The great inner fort stands on a natural terrace but its smaller outer rampart, some distance away, runs irregularly along a low ridge on the east and through more low-lying grassy ground elsewhere (Illus. 5.17). The inner enclosure is similar in size to Dún Eoghanachta with internal diameters of about 28m by 23m and with a rampart up to about 5m in height and 3.5m in thickness. Again the rampart is a triple wall with two internal faces recorded by several earlier writers.⁵³

As at Dún Eoghanachta there is now one terrace below a broad parapet and several straight flights of steps (some with a lateral flight) give access to the terrace. A number of straight flights also lead to the parapet from the terrace. It is difficult to reconcile these various steps with the very few earlier accounts of this rampart in pre-restoration days. According to O'Donovan, only three sets of steps were visible in 1839: on the south-west a straight flight of steps leading to the terrace, on the south a lateral flight of steps running from the terrace to the top of the parapet (this flight is described as running to the left), and finally on the north-east, within 6m of the entrance, a straight flight up to the terrace from the ground.⁵⁴ The rampart was nearly destroyed on the north-east but reasonably well preserved in other places; the inner wall segment was apparently much damaged on the east. The oldest known sketch plan of Dún Eochla (and indeed of any Aran monument) suggests that much of this destruction may have occurred in the 18th century. The complaint of O'Donovan and Wilde that rabbit hunters were primarily to blame for the dilapidation of forts like Dún Aonghasa in the early 19th century may hold good for the preceding



century as well. One sketch plan dating from Edward Lhuyd's visit to Aran in 1700 is preserved (Illus. 5.18)⁵⁵ and shows that at that time the inner fort had two terraces below a parapet with three straight flights from the ground to the lower terrace and two pairs of opposed lateral flights of steps leading from the lower to the upper terrace. There was a possible hut against one wall in the interior and the outer rampart had one terrace and one straight flight of steps leading to it.⁵⁶ The differences between the measurements of the rampart in 1700 and those taken by O'Donovan in 1839 and the respective descriptions suggest that most of the parapet had collapsed in the intervening period.⁵⁷ In its original condition the inner fort at Dún Eochla must have been an imposing sight indeed.

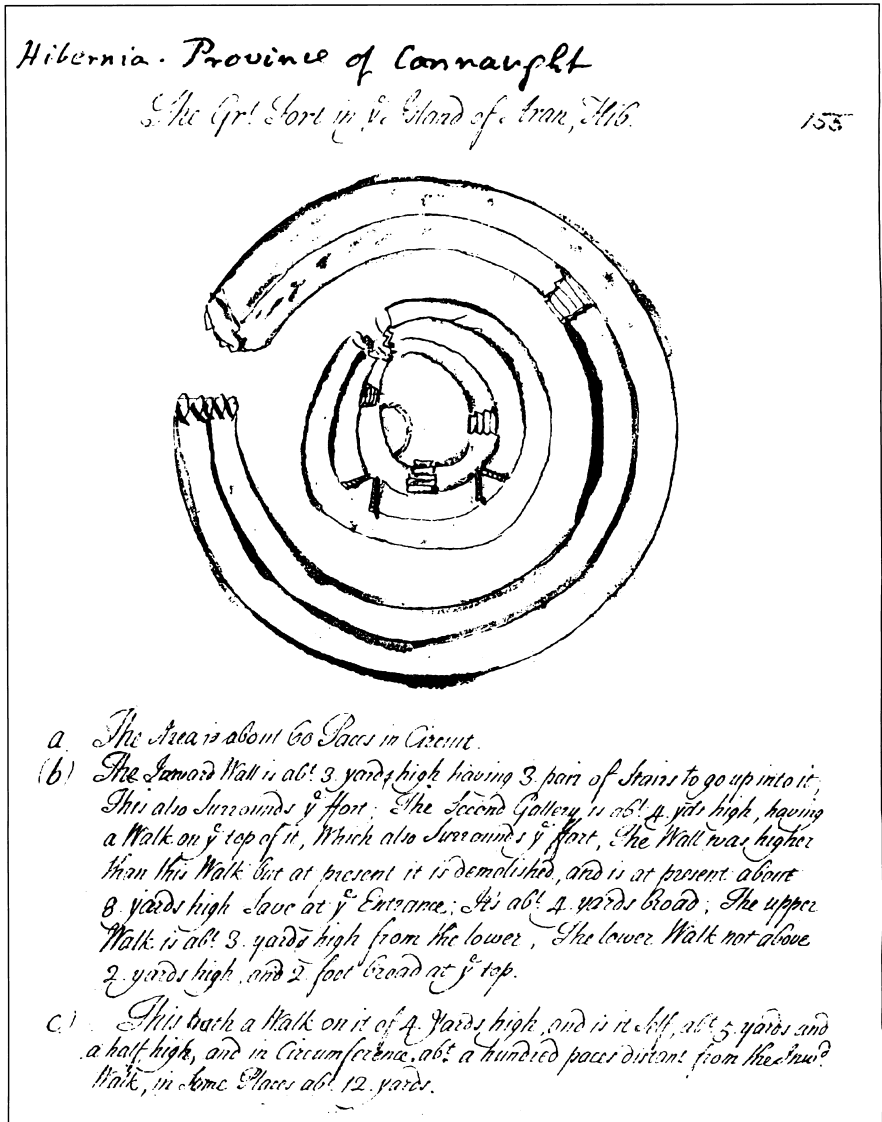
Today there is no trace of any hut in the interior. A large drum-shaped pile of stone is the result of some tidying-up in the last century.⁵⁸ The outer rampart retains traces of its terrace but no steps survive and the original entrance is destroyed.

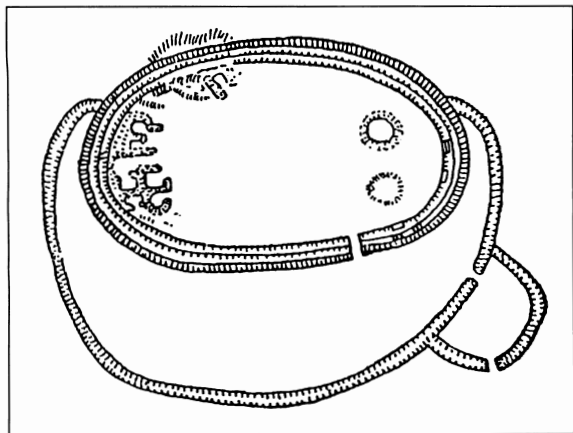
Dún Chonchúir

Dún Chonchúir is the largest of the two stone forts on Inis Meáin and occupies a prominent position overlooking a large part of the island. The fort is a great oval enclosure about 69m north-south and 35m east-west internally with a low cliff on its western side providing some natural defence. A large outer enclosure on the east with a further smaller outwork on the north-west offer additional protection⁵⁹ (Illus. 5.19).

The oval enclosure is defended by a massive rampart which, with a maximum height of some 6m. and a thickness in places of over 5m, is larger than that of the inner fort at Dún Aonghasa. Again this is a triple wall with two

Illus. 5.18. The earliest depiction of any Aran monument is a sketch plan of Dún Eochla dating from Edward Lhuyd's visit to Aran in 1700. Now in the British Library, it shows that the outer rampart had at least one flight of steps and that the inner fort had both vertical and sidelong flights plus two terraces below the parapet.





Illus. 5.19. Dún Chonchúir, the largest stone fort on Inis Meáin, has two additional out-works protecting the eastern side of the massive oval enclosure. These and the remains of various hut sites in the interior were recorded by Westropp in a sketch plan.

internal faces recorded by earlier writers. Before restoration there were two terraces below a much ruined parapet with traces of several straight flights of steps leading to both terraces. At least one of the flights was a lateral one from the lower to the upper terrace. Today it is obvious that the rampart has been quite irregularly reconstructed with different levels only occasionally reflecting the original three-fold construction with two terraces. In some places the outer segment of the rampart is lower than the middle section and this reflects the greater collapse of parts of the outer section in the last century.⁶⁰ While some vertical and lateral flights of steps are original features it is impossible to determine how many of the three dozen or so different sets of steps now to be seen should be so considered. The entrance on the north-east was quite ruined in the last century and has been rebuilt.

In the interior there are the remains of a number of stone huts partly rebuilt on their old foundations, they were greatly ruined in 1839.⁶¹ Outside the oval enclosure a number of vertical divisions are visible in the rampart's outer face; there is one joint to the right of the entrance. Joints of this sort are generally believed to reflect the building of such walls in separate sections; as already noted they are to be seen at Dún Aonghasa and elsewhere.

The eastern outer enclosure may have been a later addition to the fort. Though early sketch plans show the wall of this crescent-shaped area joining the fort's rampart on the north-west and south-east, there is no indication that they were ever bonded together. The outer wall was much collapsed in the last century but has traces of a terrace.⁶² Attached to this enclosure on the north-east is a fairly substantial addition of sub-rectangular plan.⁶³

Dún Fearbhaí

Dún Fearbhaí is the smaller of the two stone forts on Inis Meáin (Illus. 5.20). On the south-eastern side of the island, it is situated on a low sloping hill commanding the area of Baile an Mhothair.⁶⁴ One rampart, almost straight on the east and west and more rounded on the north and south, encloses an area of almost sub-rectangular plan measuring about 27 by 23m. According to O'Donovan the rampart was a triple one, as he put it, having 'three distinct divisions built up against each other, and faced with stones of considerable size'. It is difficult to be certain but it seems to have only two sections with an average total width of just over 3m and an external height varying from 3 to 5m. The inner section forms a narrow parapet approached by four sets of steps in the west, north, north-east and south-east; these are combinations of vertical and lateral flights. There are several lateral flights on the south including one running from the terrace to the top of the parapet. O'Donovan only records three sets of steps however, all seemingly giving access to the terrace on the west and on either side of the entrance on the north-east and on the south-east. The entrance was virtually destroyed at this time and, like some of the flights of steps, was reconstructed some fifty years later.

Dún Formna

O'Brien's Castle on Inis Oírr is surrounded by a stone rampart (and there may be the remains of a second outer wall): it has been suggested that this is a much modified earlier stone fort.

Who built the great forts?

The half dozen large stone forts are by no means the only forts or enclosures on the

islands: a number of other smaller monuments of this sort also survive. However, the great forts have naturally attracted the most attention, and beg the obvious questions about purpose and date.

Early legend attributes the construction of some of these forts to a group of defeated *Fir Bolg* who, along with others of their kin, were driven westwards to Connacht in pre-Christian times. Aonghas and Conchúir, two of the sons of Umor, are credited with the great forts on Inis Mór and Inis Meáin respectively which bear their names. Some scholars have thought that these *Fir Bolg* were related to the *Belgae* of Gaul and southern Britain and thus a date in the second or first century BC for these forts seemed a reasonable possibility.

Illus. 5.20. Dún Fearbhaí on Inis Meáin is a small sub-rectangular fort with terraced rampart and steps.



The romantic legend of a dispossessed people forced to the western limits of the known world has inspired more than one passage of purple prose. For instance: 'Granted that stones are the commonest objects of the bare, rocky Aran islands, and that ample material for the building of these gigantic constructions twenty times over is there available for the picking up, the question still remains, why did any company think it worth their while to build them in such a desolate place? And the only reasonable answer which presents itself is, that the essential germ of the story transmitted to us by the medieval scholastic historians is true, whatever we may think of its specific details: they were the last shelter of expelled refugees, fleeing from some rapacious conqueror. Driven, step by step, back to the western coast and to the islands beyond, they here made their final stand, by no mere conventional metaphor but in grim, literal reality, "between the devil and the deep sea". Nothing but massacre, or drowning in the Atlantic deeps, awaited them outside their island fortresses: in desperation they heaped them up these vast walls, to shield them from the fury of the tempest that had burst upon their country and their kindred'.⁶⁵

Legend, romantic or otherwise, is no sure guide. An inextricable mix of fabricated or mythologised history and historicised myth has bequeathed us a story of a *Fir Bolg* colonisation of Aran cast in terms of a traditional migration model, a recurring feature of early origin tales. Even if the existence of a *Fir Bolg* people is conceded, something that is by no means certain, then this migratory tale may be just as much a literary invention as the account of the journeying of the Sons of Míl from Spain.⁶⁶

The archaeological evidence is more helpful, though not as informative as we would wish. For a number of reasons the forts have often

been labelled Iron Age, the *Fir Bolg* legend being but one factor in this dating. The presence of a *chevaux-de-frise* at Dún Aonghasa and Dún Dúchathair is another significant feature. Stone and wooden versions of this unusual defensive measure have been sporadically recorded in late prehistoric times in parts of Central and Western Europe. A small number of stone forts of irregular plan in north-central Spain and in northern Portugal have stone *chevaux-de-frise* usually around just part of their defenses. Dating evidence is meagre but dates from the 6th century BC or earlier to the 4th century BC have been suggested.⁶⁷ Seven examples are known from Wales and Scotland and traces of what may have been a wooden one have been excavated outside a hill-top fort on the Isle of Man.⁶⁸

Archaeological excavation at Dún Aonghasa has demonstrated that at least one of the Aran forts was lived in and possibly strengthened in early Christian times and that their beginnings may, at least in the case of this fort, lie in the later Bronze Age.

It is a reasonable supposition that the great forts at least were planned and built by chieftains of wealthy communities. Considerable labour was involved in their construction, whether by slaves or freemen. The reasons for building them may have been complex. Necessity may have been partly responsible: some may have been intended to serve as defended settlements or even as general refuges for use in times of danger (and since prolonged siege warfare was probably neither customary nor practical, questions of internal water supply are irrelevant). If, as seems possible, sheep, cattle and fishing were the basis of an economy supplemented to a significant degree by the fruits of piracy, stout defences may have been all the more necessary. It is not impossible that they were also the focus for

some occasional ceremonial activities though it is unlikely that this was ever their primary function.⁶⁹

The imposing scale of the great forts, however, may indicate another equally compelling necessity: they may in part be expressions of social self-assertion by the chieftains who built them, a necessary demonstration of rank. Indeed, in early Ireland, one of the duties due to a chieftain was help in the construction of the rampart of his fort and the size and complexity of its construction might be a reflection of the numbers of a lord's clients or vassals and certainly was a reflection of his status. As an early law tract says: 'It is then that he is king when ramparts of vassalage surround him'.⁷⁰

Here we may have an explanation for the vertical joints visible in the ramparts of some Aran forts (and stone forts elsewhere in the country), perhaps they were built in sections over a period of time as part of the fixed amounts of manual labour due to a lord. This sort of situation might encourage the construction of additional facings to thicken ramparts and even encourage the proliferation of forts, some for habitation, others perhaps for other purposes such as cattle enclosures or centres for craftsmen for example.

The occupants of forts like Dún Eochla and Dún Eoghanachta presumably derived some of their wealth from the limited pasture the islands had to offer but it is hard to imagine that this was a sufficient basis for the wealth and tribute implied by one or more great forts. It seems likely that the interests of the island's chieftain or chieftains extended into Co. Clare (where similar stone forts are well known) and, more significantly, to the coastal seaways of the west coast. The strategic location of the Aran Islands, controlling coastal traffic northwards and southwards, must have added to their economic and political importance. Two thousand

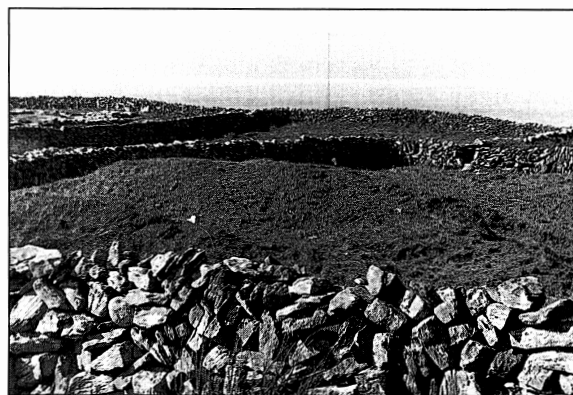
or more years ago large sailing currachs were probably a common sight on this western coast. Wooden galleys with oars and sail were probably known as well. It may not be too far fetched to see some of the Aran forts, at least, as the stony memorials of long forgotten chieftains who once exacted tribute along part of the western coast and who, perhaps occasionally, indulged in a little profitable piracy.

Minor Forts and Other Settlements

Aside from those great forts with traces of clochans in their interior, there is abundant other evidence for ancient settlement on the Aran Islands, notably on Inis Mór. This evidence is much less imposing, however, consisting for the most part of a few ruined, small enclosures and a number of collapsed houses or clochans.

Dún Beag

The small enclosure south-west of Corróch aptly called Dún Beag is a good example of the former. It is situated on a fairly prominent



Illus. 5.21. Many low oval grass-covered mounds of stones on Aran are the remains of collapsed dwellings. This is a large example north-west of Dún Beag.

hillock overlooking Fearann an Choirce and Port Mhuirbhígh to the north-west. Of sub-rectangular plan, it measures about 70 by 36 metres overall and is enclosed by a rampart surviving only in places and then as a low stony bank now obscured by field walls. On the north-east a roughly quadrilateral annex is enclosed by another wall in an even more ruined condition which is also obscured by a more recent field wall. A blocked-up entrance with a stone lintel now incorporated in the field wall may be an original feature.⁷¹ Within the large oval enclosure there are two small circular depressions on the west and a low oval mound on the south-west which may be the remains of huts or collapsed clochans.

Baile na mBocht

The area in Eochaill townland, south of Corróich, between Dún Beag and Dún Eochla is littered with ancient remains. The name Baile na mBocht, village of the poor, has been given to at least part of this area for many years.⁷² The Eochaill wedge tomb is situated just east of Dún Beag but east of this again lie dozens of grassy mounds many of which may be the remains of collapsed houses or clochans of uncertain date. Over twenty examples have been recorded here (Illus. 5.21) along with a number of enclosures. A maze of field walls now make access to this area very difficult. These walls often run across the surviving mounds and it is possible that many mounds have been removed in field clearance and the stones of many others have been used for wall building.

This ancient settlement was first recorded in 1866 by G.H. Kinahan of the Geological Survey.⁷³ Among a range of miscellaneous monuments he noted a number of cnocans (or hillocks) which he considered to be the col-

lapsed remains of clochans or beehive cells covered with clay. These were often low, somewhat oval mounds with a depression in the centre. Sometimes they were almost kidney-shaped or had the appearance of two conjoined mounds. A few triple mounds are recorded.

Small circular mounds could be prehistoric burial mounds and indeed a conjoined pair on Inis Oírr were tentatively identified as such in the 1930s.⁷⁴ In fact some archaeological excavation in Baile na mBocht in the 1950s has demonstrated that some (if not all) of these mounds are the remains of collapsed dwellings. J.R.W. Goulden, a Dublin school teacher with an interest in archaeology, excavated three sites which he labelled 'Oghil I', 'Oghil II' and 'Oghil III'.⁷⁵

The first of these, 'Oghil I', was a roughly oval, stony, grass-grown cairn about 14m across and just over 1m high. Excavation revealed an area of stone paving, traces of a fire, several arrangements of upright slabs, and a low stone wall beneath the cairn but no clear traces of hut foundations were discovered. Fragments of animal bones, of cattle and sheep, and large quantities of shells, notably limpet were found. A few stray pieces of human bone were also recovered but the general impression was that this was a settlement site of some sort where meat and shell fish were consumed.

Clear and unambiguous evidence for dwellings were found, however, in the two other mounds. 'Oghil II' (Illus. 5.22) was another oval, stony, mound about 17m in maximum dimensions and 1.40m in maximum height. The foundations of two circular huts were found beneath this pile of stone. In Goulden's opinion a later hut has been constructed inside the remains of an earlier one. The larger hut circle had a diameter of 6.40m internally. A hole in the centre of the floor was probably for a timber post to give support to a conical roof

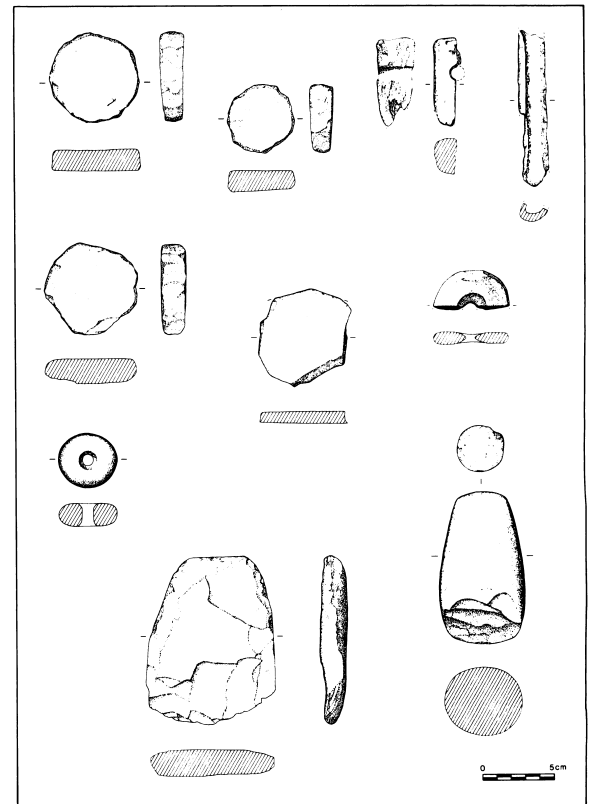
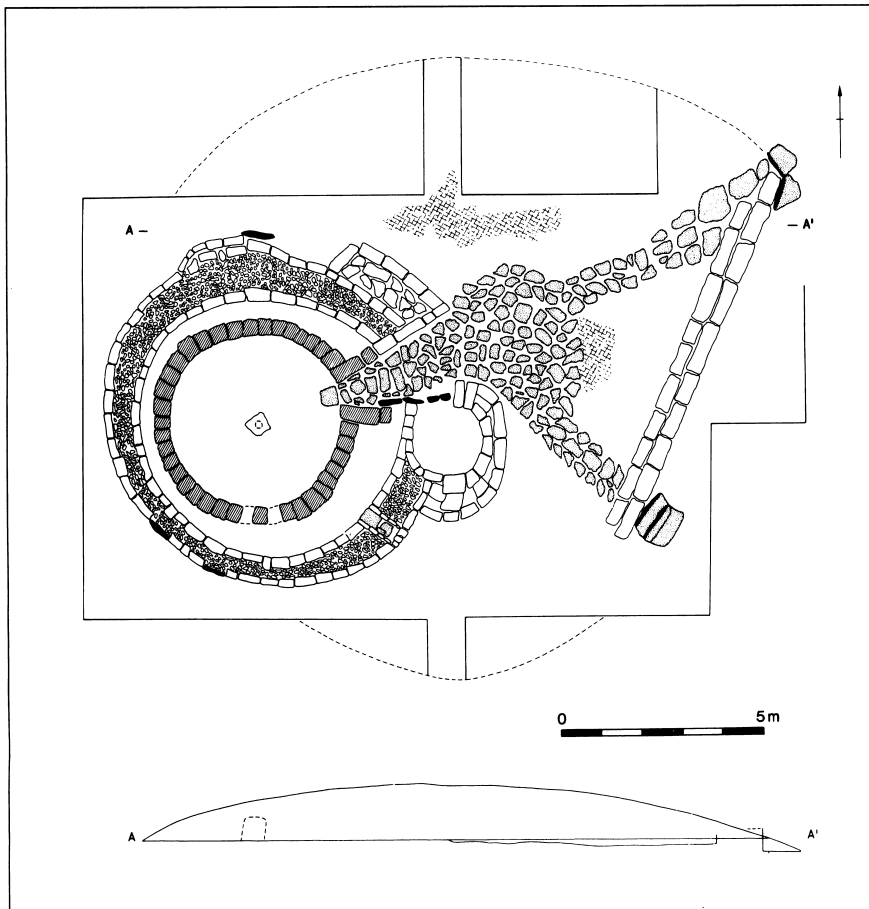
Illus. 5.22. 'Oghil II': the stone foundations of two circular houses, one later with a paved entrance and apparently built within the remains of the earlier. Finds included several small and enigmatic stone discs, a fragment of a bone handle, a bone scoop(?), stone spindle whorls and polished stone axeheads.

which was almost certainly thatched. The small rectangular and circular structures on the east may have been additions for storage purposes. Numerous animal bones and sea-shells were found, discarded on the spot by the inhabitants. Some small shells of the sort which attach themselves to the edible sea-weed, dulse, suggest that this may have been part of the diet too.

Nothing was found to give a clear indication of date: finds included tubular antler handles

(presumably for metal knives or awls), a stone spindle whorl (evidence for spinning), a broken hammer made of sandstone, and a chipped and partly polished piece of stone. Another discovery on top of the mound of stones was part of a granite bullaun stone probably used like a mortar for grinding or pounding.

Excavation at 'Oghil III' was a little more informative. Before work began this site appeared to be a low triple mound of stones about 21 by 16m and some 90cm in maximum height. As the stones of the mound were removed the lower levels of a complex three-roomed structure were revealed (Illus. 5. 23-24). Goulden's

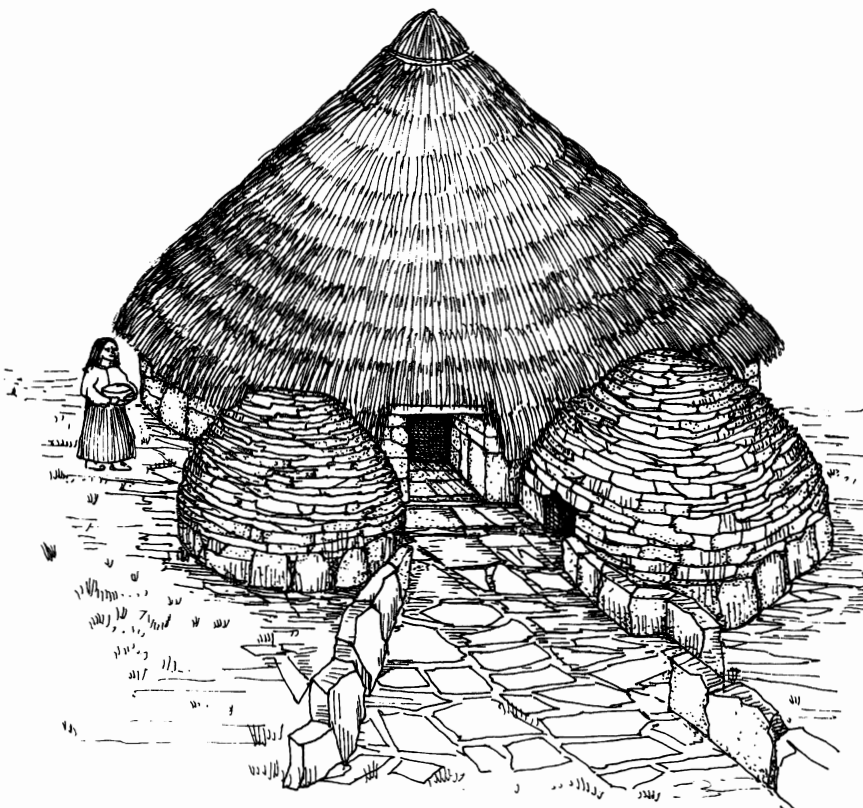
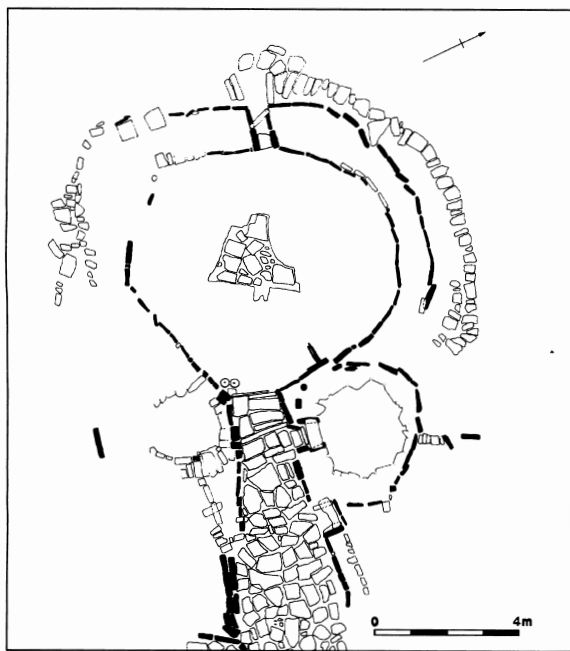


description was brief:

'The dwelling consisted of three almost circular rooms placed roughly like the leaves of a shamrock. Extending eastward like a stem was paving which for much of its length was composed of two layers. The mounds consisted of broken stone and midden material of many kinds. In it there was little stratification except in the lower levels where the only food remains were limpet shells. It would appear that in the earliest period of occupation the inhabitants had either no cattle or insufficient to warrant slaughter. In the later midden material the bones of ox and sheep (or goat) were plentiful and there were some pig bones... one skull, that of a very young pig, was found (the only skull in three excavations). It was possible to show that the two small rooms near the entrance were earlier than the large room which lay to the west. The roofing of the smaller earlier

rooms may have been some form of corbelling but the large room or house must have been thatched. In Oghil II a central hole had been broken in the middle of the floor of the large circular room. In this case a large triangular hole had been broken in the rock. Each of the sides measured almost exactly eight feet in length and it can be assumed that instead of a single pole some sort of tripod was used. The hole had been filled afterwards with rubble and flagged with flat stones. Just inside the door of the western room two rotary quern-tops of sandstone were found. These may have been used to hold the pivots on which the door turned ...'.

Illus. 5.23. 'Oghil III': ground plan and possible reconstruction of an ancient house site excavated in the 1950s in Baile na mBocht.



Other finds included some fragments of plain hand-made pottery, a small iron ring, bone skewers, part of bone handles, a small stone amulet, and several stone pounders. None of these items provide a clear indication of date, though the quern stones, if contemporary with the use of the house, might suggest occupation of the site in the first millenium AD.

Even though many questions remain unanswered about when and how the inhabitants of these house-sites lived, the animal bones, the quern stones for grinding corn, and the sea shells indicate a varied subsistence. More significantly these excavations have demonstrated that some at least of the stony mounds on Aran were dwelling places and not burial mounds as had been thought. These investigations also suggest that not all of these sites are collapsed clochans. Some may have been completely built of stone with beehive-like corbelled roofs, but others like 'Oghil II' and 'Oghil III' probably had low stone walls surmounted by timber-supported thatched conical roofs.

Clochán na Carraige

Completely stone-built examples do survive and the best known is the exceptionally well-preserved clochan in Cill Mhuirbhígh townland called Clochán na Carraige.⁷⁶ Externally this appears to be an oval, stone-built hut, roofed in beehive fashion (Illus. 5.25). Internally, however, its ground plan is almost a rectangle (about 6m by 2.35m) and it has two opposing doorways, one in the middle of the north-west wall, the other in the south-east wall. Each of these doorways is just over 1m high. A narrow window occurs at the south-western end. The walls are well built and over a metre in thickness. The beehive construction or corbelling with its over-sailing slabs is neatly and regularly executed particularly on the interior.



Opposed doors are a feature of the traditional thatched house of the west and north of the country. It is commonly believed that the doorways of this sort were made to allow one or other to be used depending on the direction of the wind. It is also possible that they had a role in indoor milking, a cow entering via the front door and exiting in the same direction via the back door. Whatever the explanation for the origin of this feature, it precludes a central open hearth as Goulden found at Eochail. It is likely that the hearth was placed near one end, possibly the south-western with its narrow window. If this area was the living quarters,

Illus. 5.24. 'Oghil III' during excavation: the foundation wall of the main structure is exposed; the low rear doorway is visible in the foreground.



Illus. 5.25. Clochán na Carraige: the best preserved of the island's clochans has an intact corbelled 'beehive' stone roof.

the north-eastern end may have been for storage or animals. No smoke-hole is visible but with or without one, smoke would have collected in the upper part of the clochan above the level of the lintels of the doors. Here some foodstuffs could have been smoked or fuel stored and dried. This sort of cosy smokiness, though inimical to insects and pests, did not impress one 17th century commentator on the Irish scene, who may have been just a little biased:

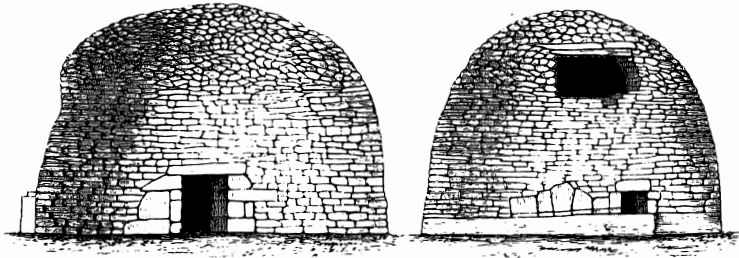
*'Their cabbins full of Dirt, and Smoak
Enough an English Man to Choake.
Of which themselves doe take up halfe,
The rest serves Cow, Sow, Goat and Calf,
Who round the Fire doe in Cold Weather,
Both eate their Meat, and lie together.
Each cabin with two Dore is graced
Like squirrills 'gainst each other placed.
One still is stopp'd with Straw, and Wattle,
When wind on that side House doth rattle,
And when to th'other it is shifted,
Then Dore to th'other side is lifted'.*⁷⁷

Well made clochans, like Clochán na Carraige, are stone versions of a widespread and much less permanent type of dwelling more often than not constructed of wattle and daub, or even of sods or turves, with a thatched roof. The date of this and other Aran clochans is unknown. The discovery of a whale's vertebra in Clochán na Carraige is recorded but obviously offers no clue as to date.⁷⁸ Traces of similar houses of oval plan externally and rectangular plan internally have been found at Keem on Achill Island.⁷⁹ Their date is also unknown but, like Clochán na Carraige, they could have been built in Medieval times or even later.⁸⁰

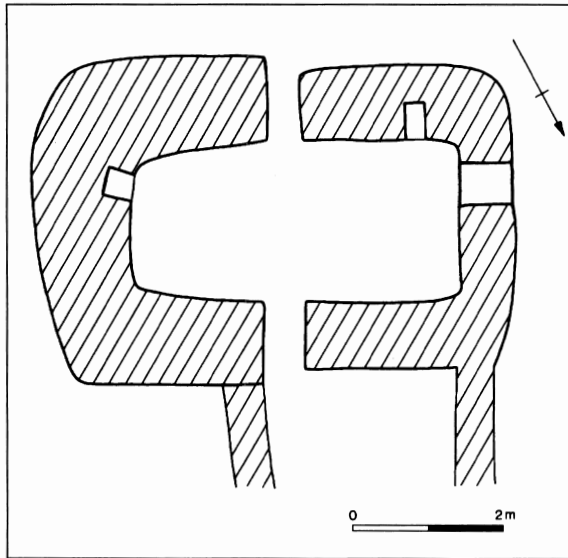
Only a few other Aran clochans are sufficiently well preserved to give an indication of their original plan. Some are similar in design to Clochán na Carraige. Two, west of Dún Eoghanachta, also have more or less rectangular internal ground plans and opposed doorways.⁸¹ The southern example (Illus. 5.26) is the smaller and has two small niches for storage purposes in its southern and eastern walls respectively, and a small window in its western end wall. A sketch published by Kinahan in 1867 shows that the roof had a hole in it at that time but was otherwise intact.⁸² The larger northern-most clochan (Illus. 5.27) was half collapsed in the last century but had at least one window (in the northern wall) and at least one niche (in the western wall).⁸³

Of the other double-doored clochans on Aran, one example deserves mention. This is Clochán an Phúca, the clochan of the ghost, which according to an 1840 drawing had an intact corbelled roof, opposed doors and a usual internal partition just over a metre in height.⁸⁴

Other forms of clochans do occur on Aran: a roofless and more or less rectangular example with just one door lies south-west of Cill Ghobnait on Inis Oirr. Some of the mounds in



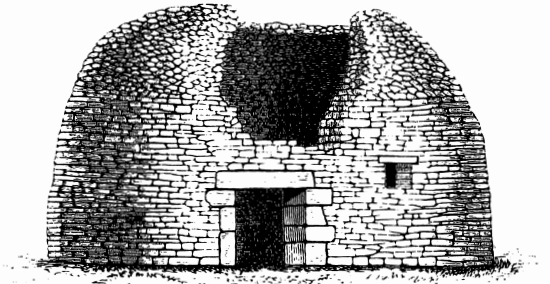
Illus. 5.26. One of two clocháns near Dún Eoghanachta is now ruined and has one or two external walls added to it. It was nearly intact in 1867 when sketched from two angles by George Kinahan.



Baile na mBocht may represent the remains of collapsed circular examples of the sort commonly found in places like the Dingle peninsula, but evidence for a corbelled roof is usually lacking.

These various types of ancient settlements on Aran raise many questions. At present it has to be emphasised that both corbel-roofed structures like Clochán na Carraige and the circular huts excavated in Baile na mBocht are of uncertain date.

Illus. 5.27 below. A second ruined clochán near Dún Eoghanachta is now partly surrounded by collapsed stone-work but the opposed doors and traces of a window in the north-western wall (sketched by Kinahan) are still visible.



Early Christian and Medieval Aran

A remarkable number of ancient ecclesiastical remains is testimony of Aran's importance as a centre of religious ritual and learning in early Christian times from the fifth century AD. The introduction of the Christian religion to Ireland had profound cultural repercussions: new developments in art and architecture and the inception of writing were just some of the consequences. All are represented in the archaeology of early Christian Aran where Christianity may have been first established by Eanna or Enda some time around 500 AD. Reputedly trained in the famous monastery of Candida Casa, Whithorn, in south-west Scotland, he was probably the first to introduce monasticism, in the strict sense, to Ireland.⁸⁵ His monastic rule was one of great severity, a fierce regime of prayer, learning, austerity and mortification. Many disciples were attracted to this ascetic life style and among the more famous followers of Enda were Ciaran of Clonmacnoise and Jarlath of Tuam. Historical facts are few but as with many other early saintly persons legendary and superstitious details are commoner.⁸⁶ It is claimed, for example, that Enda once crossed from Gorumna in Connemara to Inis Mór in a stone boat, a feat which had a somewhat damaging effect on the confidence of a local pagan chieftain named Corban.⁸⁷ Legend also has it that no less than 120 saints lie buried in Enda's foundation near the village of Cill Éinne. Tales like these are a mark of the religious significance of 'Aran of the Saints' for as well as being one of the great centres of early Irish monasticism, it was to endure as a centre of religious activity and popular pilgrimage for over a thousand years.

Cill Éinne

Little survives of Enda's famous monastic establishment. There were once six churches in and about the village of Cill Éinne. Four of these, including a 15th century Franciscan friary, were demolished to provide material for the Cromwellian fort at Arkin. The friary probably stood somewhere south of the village in a sheltered area of good land, perhaps just east of a holy well now called the Friars' Well. To the south irregular grassed-over traces of walls are visible and beyond these there stands the remains of a high cross (see below) and the stump of a round tower, the only one on the islands. Just the lower three metres of the tower survive, standing on a narrow plinth; no trace of a doorway is visible and, as was customary, it presumably was several metres above ground level. To the south is Tobar Éinne, a stone-roofed holy well at the foot of a low limestone outcrop with a crudely built altar or leacht surmounted by a modern cross slab beside it.

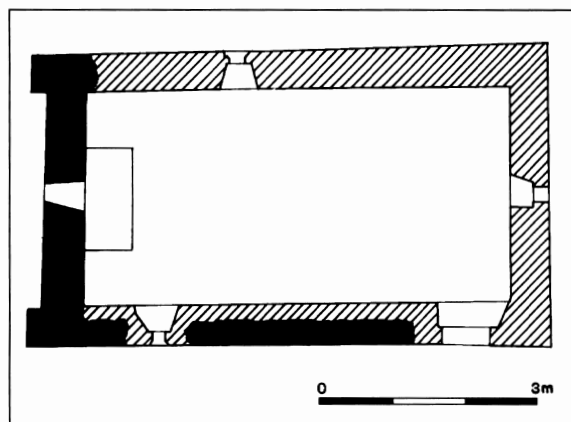
The two churches which do remain, Teampall Bheanáin and Teaghlach Éinne, probably owe their survival to the fact that they are located quite some distance from Arkin Fort possibly at the limits of the monastic complex.

Teaghlach Éinne

The simple rectangular church known as Teaghlach Éinne is located in a large graveyard near the sea-shore. Here was the monastic cemetery and an early oratory, perhaps of 9th century date, which was extended and modified many centuries later. The eastern gable and part of the northern wall are early; two typical and peculiarly Irish features of these primitive stone churches can be seen on its



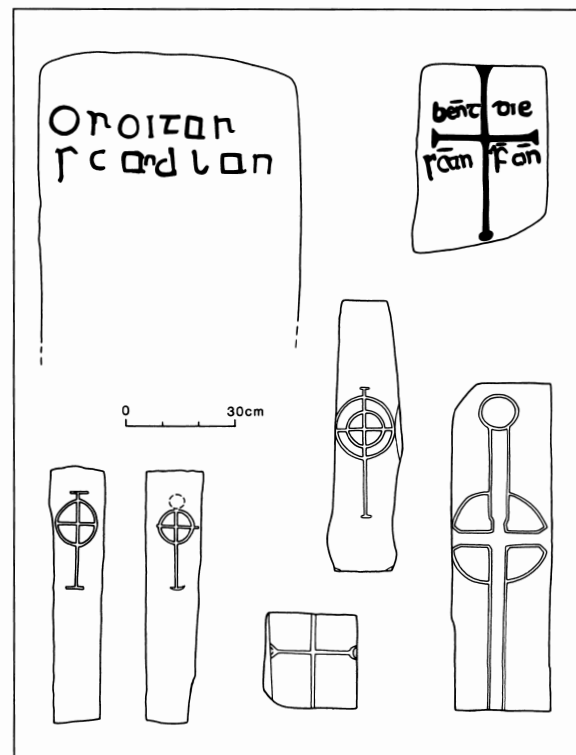
Illus. 5.28-9. Teaghlach Éinne is a two-period church: the eastern altar end and part of the northern wall are early, the rest and the doorway are later.



exterior (Illus. 5. 28-9). Firstly, the side walls project to form *antae*, these projections supported roof timbers and may themselves be translations into stone of the corner timbers of wooden prototypes. Secondly, the wall appears to be built of exceptionally massive masonry. Indeed, nineteenth century writers often referred to this use of roughly dressed large stones as Cyclopean.⁸⁸ In fact in the limestone

regions of the west the impression of great size was usually achieved by placing large flat slabs on edge. The simple round-headed window in this wall is original too and the early church may have had an internal length of about four metres with its doorway in the western gable. At some late date, possibly in the 17th century,⁸⁹ it was extended westwards by almost three metres and a window and doorway constructed in the north wall, which also incorporates, on its exterior just below the window, a large early grave slab laid on edge. This 1.14m long sub-rectangular slab bears an early Irish inscription in two lines which reads OROIT AR SCANDLAN ('Pray for Scandlan') and it presumably once marked the grave of a person of some significance (Illus. 5.30).⁹⁰

Illus. 5.30. Grave slabs at Teaghlach Éinne: two are inscribed and ask for prayers for Scandlan and for Sanctan.



A second inscribed grave slab is now incorporated, along with some other fragments, in a modern altar in the church: an Irish and Latin inscription BENT DIE F AN SCAN is cut in the four quarters of a simple Latin cross with expanded terminals. Several words are contracted as indicated by horizontal lines; expanded the wording reads (moving almost superstitiously *deiseal* or sunwise around the cross) BENDACHT DIE FOR AINM SANC-TAN ('The blessing of God on the soul of Sanctan').⁹¹ History has long forgotten Scandlan and Sanctan of Aran.

Some Medieval carved fragments are also incorporated in the makeshift altar, as are two cross-inscribed stones, a third such stone is now cemented into the wall near the door and a fourth, with a cross on two opposing faces was found in recent excavations.⁹² These were probably simple grave markers.

Among the other objects in Teaghlach Éinne are two granite bullaun stones (presumably for grinding and pounding foodstuffs) and three cross fragments now cemented together.

According to tradition the grave of Enda the founder lay north of the church but today it is obscured by wind-blown sand and by more recent graves. The limited excavations undertaken in the 1980s to clear the accumulated sand from around the church did reveal a possible slab-covered grave but it was not investigated further.

High Crosses

There were at least two limestone high crosses in the ecclesiastical complex. Both were smashed to bits, probably in Cromwellian times, but one fragment of one and five pieces of the other have been found. Where they originally stood is unknown. The first cross is repre-

sented by part of its head: the upper member, the central portion and one arm. It was discovered by Conleth Manning in the 1980s excavation just beyond the eastern gable of the church. The cross head is made of a thin slab only 11cm in thickness and one segment of a thinner ring survives (Illus. 5.31). One face bears part of a crude crucifixion scene: a Christ figure with extended arms wearing a long sleeved garment pleated below the waist has a small hollow in the surviving hand perhaps indicating a nail. On the arm below this hand is a bent figure holding a pole and representing Stephaton the sponge bearer. The head and spear of Longinus are visible on what there is of the opposite arm. The other face of the fragment is decorated with a pattern of knot work within a double frame.

The second cross comprises both the three pieces cemented together in Teaghlach Éinne and two now cemented to a plinth near the remains of the round tower. It is possible to offer a tentative reconstruction of this cross on paper (Illus. 5.32).⁹³ One face bears the enigmatic figure of a hooded and caped individual on a horse which is mounting a step or a slab. Above this there probably was a human figure encircled by a ring of knot-work but only a pair of feet and the hem of a long pleated garment are visible. Below this is a marigold pattern, some knot-work, and a complicated design of interlaced beasts. The other face had a larger human figure carved on it (and this may have been a crucifixion scene). Above and below are various rectangular panels of knot-work, fret-work and, at the base, a design of interlocking C-shaped scrolls. The narrow sides of this cross below the arms were also decorated.⁹⁴ This cross, and the other at Teaghlach Éinne and those at Teampall Bhreacáin beyond Cill Mhuirbhigh, were possibly painted in contrast-



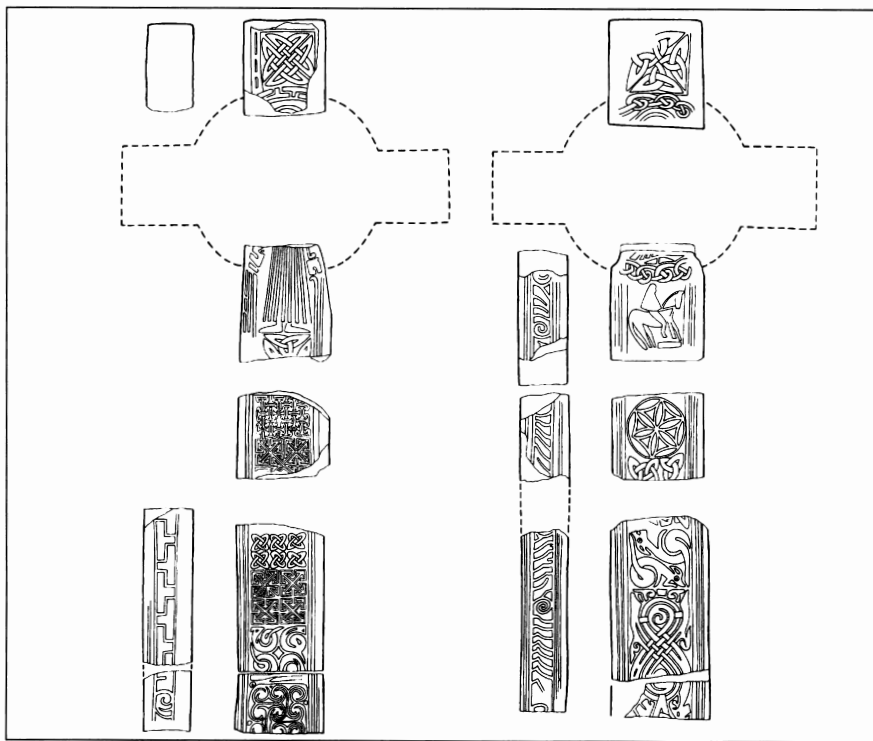
Illus. 5.31. Part of the head of a high cross discovered by Conleth Manning during excavations at Teaghlach Éinne in the 1980s.

Illus. 5.32. Reconstruction of several fragments of the one high cross now located at Teaghlach Éinne and near the remains of the round tower at Cill Éinne.

ing colours in ancient times, and must have been striking features of the Aran landscape.

Teampall Bheanáin

The churches of Aran are generally situated in sheltered and relatively fertile locations on the lower limestone terraces of the north-eastern coast. However, the small oratory of Teampall Bheanáin is an impressive exception. It is believed that it was dedicated to St Benignus, a disciple and successor of Patrick at Armagh.⁹⁵ It stands conspicuously on top of the hill above Cill Éinne and presumably because of its windswept position it is orientated in a north-south direction instead of the usual east-west axis (Illus. 5.33). The simple slab-lintelled door, narrower at the top, is in the northern gable wall and is a type characteristic of early stone churches. Teampall Bheanáin also has the characteristic massive masonry already seen at Teaghlach Éinne; it is one of a number of simple churches without the projecting *antae*, but



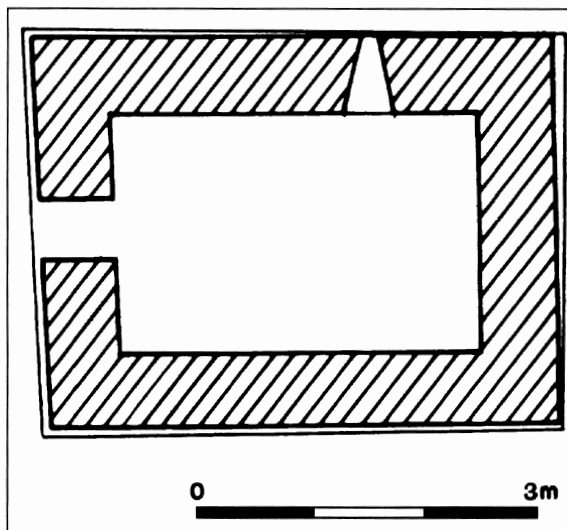
probably once had corbels at the corners to support the timbers of the steeply pitched roof. It may have been built in the 11th century.⁹⁶ There was one narrow window not in the gable opposite the door but in the eastern wall maintaining the tradition of an eastward window. One of the corner stones on the south-east exterior has the inscription CARI carved on it.

A tiny building like this could not have been used for congregational worship of any size and, at most, it could perhaps have held half a dozen people. Perhaps it was the oratory of an anchorite or hermit, or given the importance of the cult of relics in the early church it is conceivable that one of the roles of Teampall Bheanáin may have been to contain a relic of the holy Benignus. The remains of two small stone reliquaries have been found elsewhere on Aran, at Cill Comhla, below Dún Eoghanachta, and at Cill Cheannannach on Inis Meáin.

Excavation in the immediate vicinity has led to the suggestion that a stone-built terrace to the east and just down hill from the church is part of a tiny double rectangular enclosure around the east, south and west of the church.⁹⁷ Part of an early cross slab was found to the south and a rectangular structure immediately to the north was used if not built in the seventeenth century. Pilgrimage activity may be the explanation for some of this occupation.

Cill Charna

Little remains of this church site north-west of Cill Éinne and nothing is known of its history. There are the featureless remnants of a small rectangular church, only the foundations surviving in places. A large cross slab once stood nearby (Illus. 5.34) and there is a blocked up holy well in the vicinity.⁹⁸ It was recorded in the last century that the water in this well was



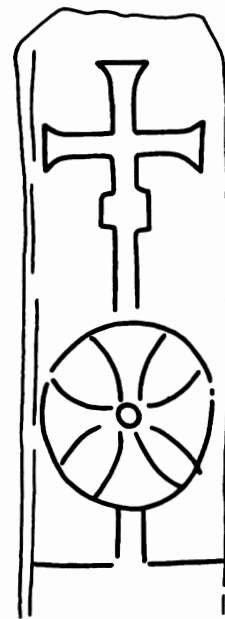
Illus. 5.33a. Plan of Teampall Bheanáin.

reputed to be unboilable and had curative properties; it was also claimed that if dead fish were put in it, they would come alive again.⁹⁹

Cill Rónáin

Nothing is known about Rónán and if there ever was a church site here, nothing survives today. There is now a small rectangular stone-walled enclosure known as an atharla just north of Cill Rónáin, the modern village. The unusual name atharla (of which there are three or four on the Aran Islands) means a grave or a burial place and this was certainly the purpose of one such site near Mainistir Chiaráin. The Cill Rónáin enclosure was featureless in the last century¹⁰⁰ but today it has a small altar in it.

Illus. 5.34. John O'Donovan's 1839 sketch of a large cross-inscribed slab at Cill Charna.



*Illus. 5.33b. Teampall
Bheanáin.*

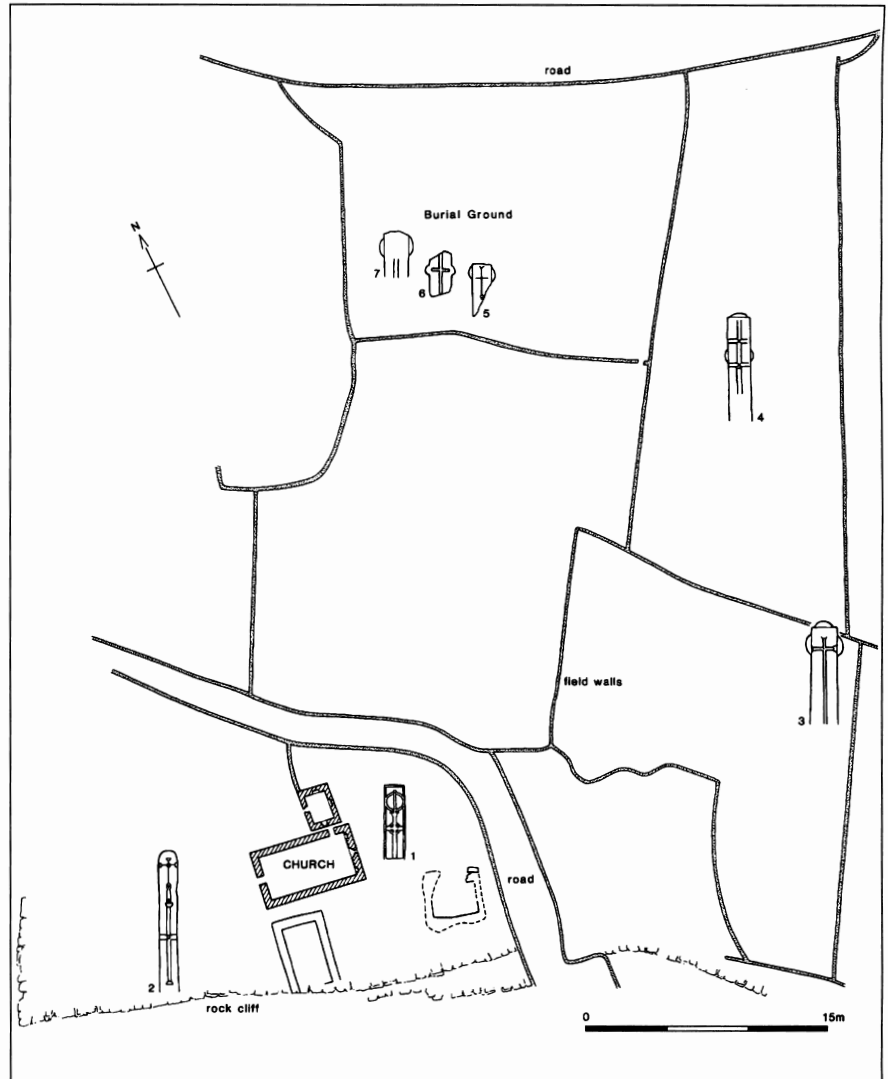


TEAMPUL BENIN, ARANMORE, R.W. 2166.

Mainistir Chiaráin

An interesting collection of monuments does survive at Mainistir Chiaráin, Ciaran's monastery or church. Also known as Mainistir Chonnachtach or Connacht Monastery, it was, according to tradition, founded by Ciaran in the 6th century before he established the great monastic foundation at Clonmacnoise. The principal feature at Mainistir Chiaráin is a well preserved but very simple Medieval church. It is a rectangular structure with a lintelled or trabeate doorway in an archaic style at the west end: the door jambs are chamfered externally and the lintel is decorated with three engraved lines, a vertical line flanked by a diagonal line. There is an arched late Medieval doorway in the north wall. The finely wrought east window is an example of a western version of the Transitional style of architecture in which the round-arched Romanesque gave way to the Gothic with pointed arches and distinctive mouldings. The tall, narrow, round-headed window is widely splayed internally and framed by prominent mouldings.¹⁰¹ Externally and internally the arches spring from corbels or capitals with low relief foliate decoration.

There are the remains of a small square building immediately to the north of the church, a rectangular structure to the south, and another more or less square structure to the south-east (Illus. 5.35). Several interesting cross-inscribed slabs stand nearby. One, a few metres to the north-east of the church, has a small hole near its top: according to one report this 'holed-stone' had curative properties, 'when women are sick their linen clothes are sometimes pulled through the hole. It seems to possess more of a sacred character to the peasantry than the other crosses on the Island'.¹⁰² This may once have been the case but its original



Illus. 5.35. General plan of Mainistir Chiaráin showing the approximate location of a series of cross-inscribed pillars. The three examples in a field to the north are in a small burial ground.

purpose was probably more functional. It has been plausibly suggested that the slab was really a sun-dial: 'the hole is meant to receive a stick thrust into it to serve as a gnomon and mid-day would be marked by the shadow running down the vertical diameter of the circle

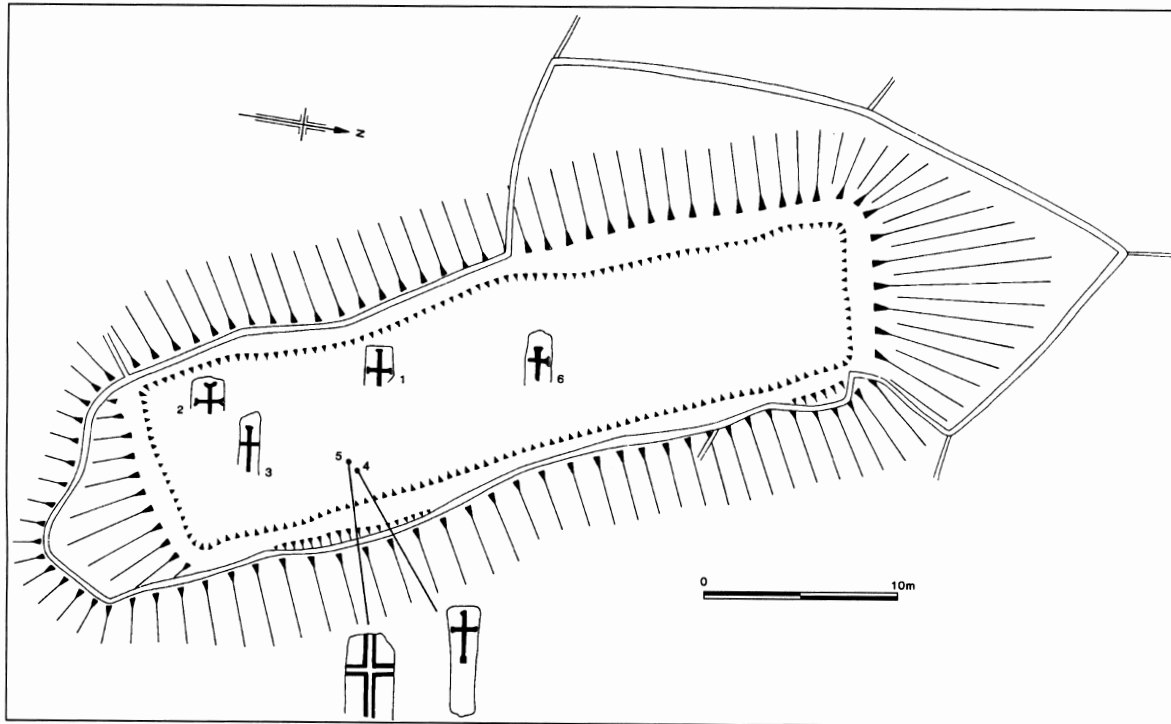
beneath. It is quite possible that the other hours, or at least certain other divisions of the day, were marked on the circumference by means of paint ...'.¹⁰³ The incised cross below does imply a liturgical purpose for this early time-piece (Illus. 12.6).

A remarkably tall cross-inscribed pillar stone stands in a field wall to the west of the church: it has two crosses carved on its eastern face, one above the other. Two unusual slabs stand some distance to the east and north-east: the eastern example has a Latin cross carved on its western face, the north-eastern has a double-armed cross carved on its eastern face; both slabs have bosses protruding from the top and sides giving them a rudimentary cross-like shape. These three stones may have been

boundary markers delimiting the monastic sanctuary to ensure that the limits of the holy ground were clearly marked.

Other upright cross-carved pillar stones may have stood in the general area. A small burial ground some distance north of the church contains fragments of three further cross-inscribed slabs, each with lateral bosses or arms; they have been re-used as grave markers.¹⁰⁴

The southern limits of the church site are formed by a low limestone cliff. To the west of the church at the base of this cliff is a holy well, a water-filled natural hollow in the rock, dedicated to Ciaran. John O'Donovan in 1839 claimed that it was this well which according to legend produced a fish large enough to feed 150 monks.¹⁰⁵



Illus. 5.37. General plan of an Atharla: a burial place for unbaptised children with a number of cross-inscribed stones of possible early date.

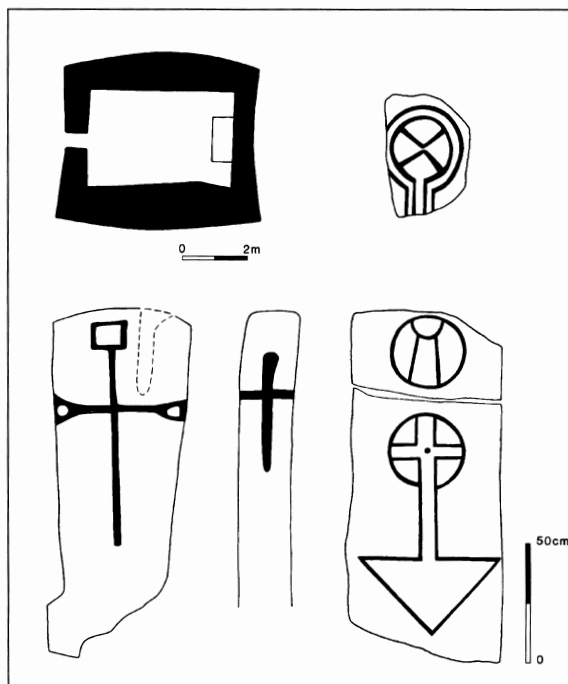
An Atharla

A small burial ground on a hillock near the shore, overlooking Port na Mainistreach, the bay of the monastery, is known as the Atharla. It is long, narrow and rectangular in shape and enclosed in part by a grass-grown collapsed stone wall (Illus. 5.37). A number of small stones protrude through the grass in its southern half – these may mark the graves of unbaptised children for local tradition records that this was its purpose at least in relatively recent times. However it may have a more ancient history for a number of these stones are cross-inscribed (Illus. 5.37:1-6). The simple form of the crosses makes dating difficult but they could conceivably be early. Apart from one small standing pillar stone (4) and one flat slab (5), the stones are all small rectangular blocks of limestone.¹⁰⁶

Teampall Asurnai

The small ruined church, Teampall Asurnai or St Sourney's Church, is situated on a more or less level terrace overlooking a series of fields not far from the coast. According to tradition, Sourney was a female saint who retired to Aran from Drumacoo, near Kilcolgan, Co. Galway.¹⁰⁷ The church is a small rectangular structure with traces of a west door and an east window: the slightly convex shape of the external side walls is an unusual, and seemingly original, feature (Illus. 5.38).¹⁰⁸ Other remains in the vicinity include traces of a featureless, stone built, rectangular structure a short distance to the west of the church. A smaller stone-built rectangle some distance to the east is reputedly the grave of the saint and is traditionally known as 'St Sourney's Bed'; the interior is featureless. Nearby is a slender

rectangular pillar stone with a Latin cross on one face, and fragments of three other cross-inscribed slabs have been identified (Illus. 5.38). St Sourney's Well, to the north-west of the cross-inscribed pillars, is a large granite bullaun stone, not a natural well. It has been said that it is never empty of water though not fed by any spring.¹⁰⁹ A nearby thorn tree has been revered as the saint's holy bush. Sacred trees of various sorts are associated with a number of church sites and holy wells elsewhere in Ireland and there is some evidence to suggest that holy trees may have been a regular feature on early church sites and may reflect the practice of the christianisation of pagan sacred woods or groves.¹¹⁰



Illus. 5.38. Teampall Asurnai (plan) and cross-inscribed grave slabs.

Teampall an Ceathrar Álainn

The small 15th century church known as Teampall an Ceathrar Álainn, the church of the four beautiful saints, lies south-south-west of the village of Corróich. The four beautiful saints after whom it is named were Fursey, celebrated for his missionary work in Britain and on the Continent, Brendan of Birr, Conall and Bearchán. Why these four virtuous persons were commemorated on Aran is not recorded. The church itself is a ruined, simple rectangu-

lar building constructed of carefully selected limestone blocks; it has been partly restored (Illus. 5. 39-40). There is a simple window and a pointed door in the northern wall and a narrow ogee-headed window in the eastern gable above the altar. Outside and attached to the eastern end of the church is a rectangular stone-built 'leaba' which contains five plain grave slabs laid almost contiguously. This grave plot is the traditional 'bed' of the four saints and in the past people slept in it in the belief that diseases would be cured.¹¹¹

Illus. 5.39. Teampall an Ceathrar Álainn viewed from the south-east: the leaba or grave of the four beautiful saints is attached to the end wall of the church.



A few metres south-east of the church is a holy well surrounded by a low stone wall. This apparently is Tobar an Ceathrar Álainn and even up to recent times contained the occasional token offering such as pious medals, rosary beads or buttons. Fish-hooks, iron nails, shells and pieces of crockery have also been noted.¹¹² The playwright J.M. Synge recorded that this well cured blindness and epilepsy and that the blind son of a Sligo woman regained his sight here.¹¹³ It was this miraculous well which inspired his play *The Well of the Saints*.

North-east of the church and half hidden under a field wall is a bullaun stone designated a holy well on the early Ordnance Survey maps. Another bullaun stone is to be found a few fields west of Teampall na Ceathrar Álainn, here too are two tall and quite plain pillar stones and a number of small irregular mounds with smaller associated slabs. These features

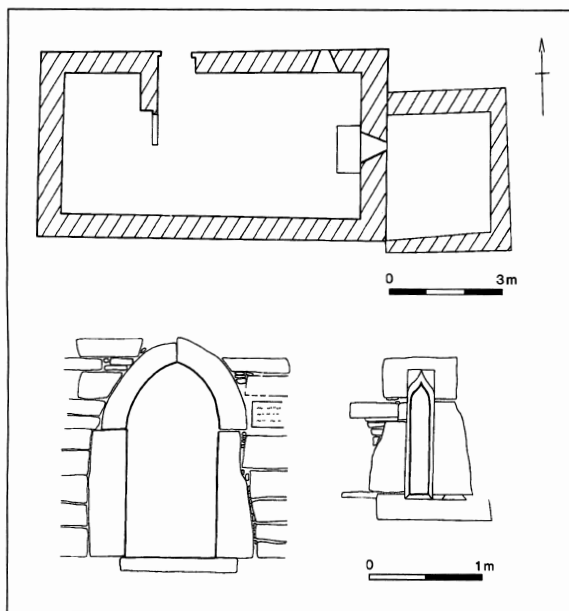
possibly mark the western limits of the ecclesiastical complex.

Teampall Mac Duagh and Teampall na Naomh

Two churches are situated just south-west of Cill Mhuirbhígh. The larger, and more complex, is named Teampall Mac Duagh and dedicated to Colmán Mac Duagh who in the sixth century founded one of the most famous monasteries of Connacht at Kilmacduagh, Co. Galway. The original part of the church has the characteristic features of primitive stone churches (Figs. 5. 41-43): a lintelled or trabeate west doorway with inclined jambs, a pair of *antae* clearly visible at the western end, and the characteristic massive masonry. Like Teampall Bheanáin, this part of the church may have been built in the 11th century.¹¹⁴ At a somewhat later date, possibly in the 13th century, the eastern gable was demolished and a chancel with an arch was inserted between the *antae* here. A stone now lying outside the eastern end of the chancel may be the head of the original east window. The chancel has a tall narrow east window and a smaller southern one. The final phase of alteration occurred in the 15th century when defensive parapets were added to the tops of the chancel side-walls.¹¹⁵

One of the stones of the outer northern wall (near the north-western corner) bears a puzzling low-relief carving of an animal which seems to have a bushy tail, a disproportionately long body and a small head. It has variously been described as a horse, pine-marten or fox: it is most likely a horse.¹¹⁶

A tall cross-inscribed pillar stone stands just west of the church. It is a massive slab over 2m high and it has a simple and fairly crude Latin cross carved on its rougher western face. On its eastern face, however, there is a large, well-

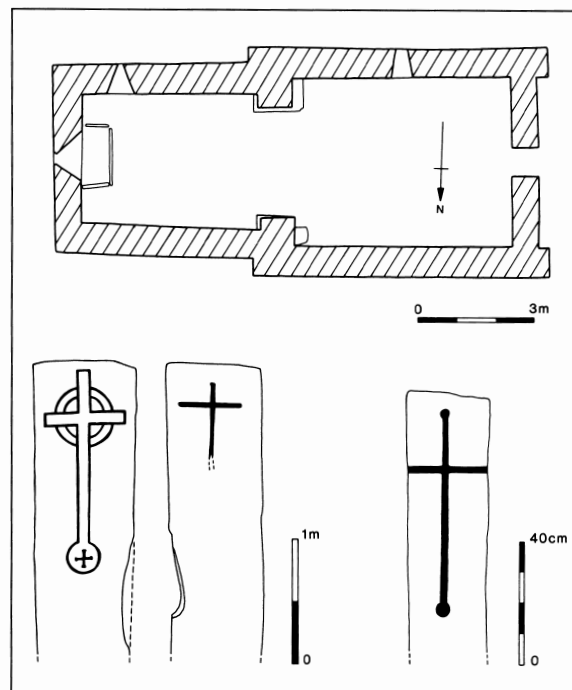


Illus. 5.40. Plan of Teampall na Ceathrar Álainn with details of north door and east window.

carved two-line, ringed, Latin cross. The ringed cross finds its finest expression, of course, in the famous series of High Crosses, and the inspiration for the ringed form of cross head has been much debated. The shape of the Teampall Mac Duagh example is a reminder that the cross within a wreath may have been one of the formative influences. It has also been suggested that this cross with its circular base is a version of the Medieval representation of a cross on an orb perhaps symbolizing the rule of Christ on earth.¹¹⁷

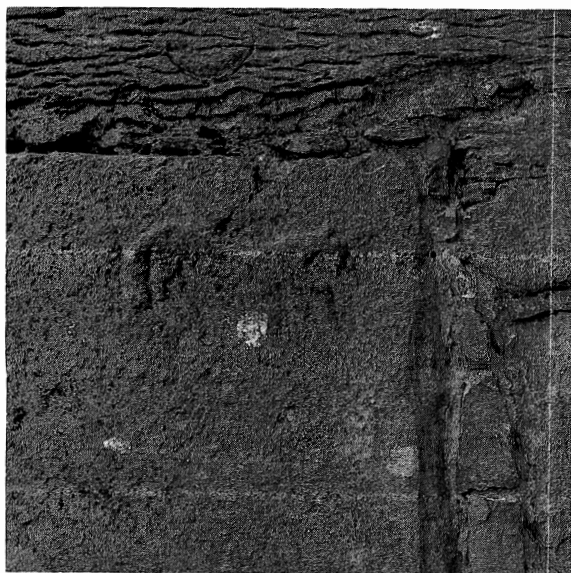
Not far from the church is a walled holy well, Tobar Mac Duagh, and a short distance to the south-east is Teampall na Naomh, the church of the saints. Nothing is known of this very simple rectangular oratory and only the lower levels of the walls survive. East of the church, a curving line of collapsed stone may be the remains of an enclosing wall; on the south a low limestone cliff may have formed part of the

Illus. 5.43. Teampall Mac Duagh: plan of church. Below left: cross-the inscribed pillar. Below right: an early pillar stone in modern graveyard near Cill Mhuirbhig (after Higgins).



Illus. 5.42. A strange carving of a horse is to be seen on one of the stones of the north-west wall of Teampall Mac Duagh.

Illus. 5.41. An imposing cross-inscribed pillar stone stands in front on the west end of Teampall Mac Duagh whose simple lintelled doorway and antae are visible.



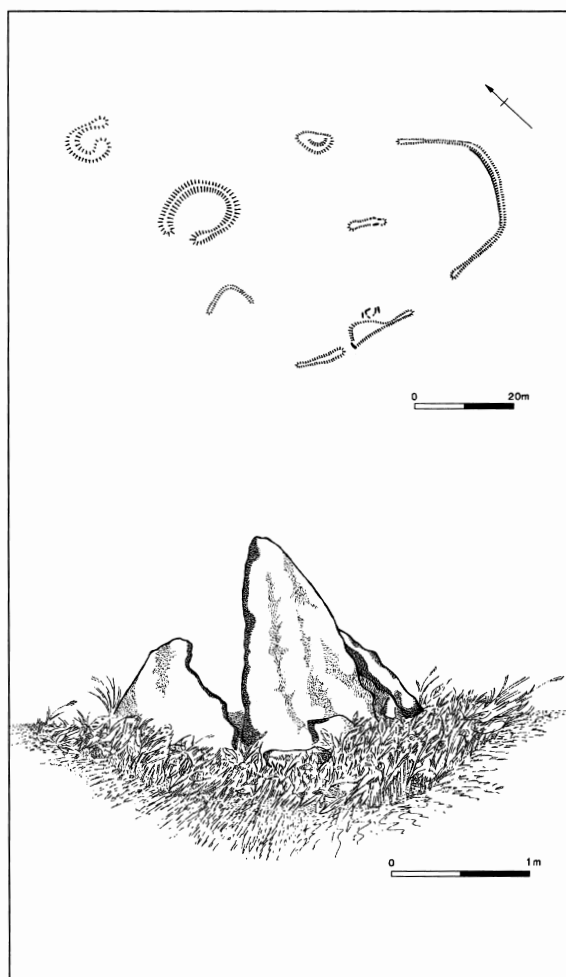
enclosure. This limestone bluff continues west and north-westwards. A 20m long section of a stone rampart of massive construction sits on top of this bluff just south-west of Teampall Mac Duagh: its original line cannot be traced. When George Petrie visited Aran in 1821 about half of this great enclosure survived, the rest having been destroyed when some of the houses of Cill Mhuirbhigh village were built.¹¹⁸ The modern graveyard near the village contains an early pillar stone with a simple Latin cross on it (Illus. 5.43).¹¹⁹

Cill Comhla

Cill Comhla is a small and very ruined ecclesiastical site to the north of the stone fort of Dún Eoghanachta. The remains of an irregularly shaped enclosure, now just a low stony bank of U-shaped plan, lie just below the bluff on which the fort stands (Illus. 5.44).¹²⁰ The full extent of the enclosure is not clear, but it probably surrounded at least two collapsed clochans and, possibly, a small stone church of which only one low wall remains. It certainly enclosed the most significant surviving feature – part of a stone-built shrine or monumental reliquary. The broken remnants of two side-stones and one triangular end-stone are visible, and originally the shrine would have resembled a ridge-tent about 1m high. These slab-shrines are an essentially Irish type of monumental reliquary and they were built to house the bones of some holy person. In some cases a circular hole was even cut in one of the stones to allow the faithful to touch the relics or the sacred earth within. A perforated end-stone of this sort is to be seen at Cill Cheannannach on Inis Meáin.

Who Comhla was is not recorded and no one remembers why his or her bones were venerat-

ed. The relics of a revered saint or the grave of the founder of a monastery were often marked in a special way. One form is the rectangular leaba or saint's bed or grave so often recorded on Aran, the slab shrine is another distinctive form, and both may have been important focus points in the rounds of the Medieval pilgrim.



Illus. 5.44. Cill Comhla: plan (above) of the remains of an enclosure with irregular structures. The remains of the slab-built shrine (below) are situated at the south-west limits of the site.

Na Seacht dTeampaill and Teampall Bhreacáin

The complex of buildings known as na Seacht dTeampaill, or the Seven Churches, near the village of Eoghanacht, probably provides the best illustration of how important the combination of church, well, saint's bed, holy graves, high crosses and cross-slabs may have been for the devotions of both the ecclesiastical community and the visiting pilgrim (Illus. 5. 45-47). Despite the popular name, there are only two churches here, one is Teampall Bhreacáin or St Breacan's Church, the other Teampall an Phoill, the 'Church of the Hollow'. The other buildings which survive all seem to be domestic dwellings.¹²¹

Very little is known about Breacan, he is probably the same person commemorated in the name of Kilbreacan townland, near Quin, Co. Clare.¹²² According to an anonymous 15th century poem, which may be a versified version of a lost life of the saint, he was originally named Bresal and was the son of Eochaidh, king of the Dál Cais of Clare.¹²³ As a bishop his first mission was to Aran perhaps late in the fifth or early in the sixth century. Here he is said to have destroyed a pagan idol, Breacán, taken his name, and converted the pagan sanctuary into a Christian disearth or monastic retreat. In his words:

'I came to Iubhar [of Aran] and established my settlement, everyone was pleased in turn when I expelled the devils.

Fierce Breacán Cláiringneach was in Iubhar before me, I undertook to expel him and I sanctified his place'.

Some other verses of this poem, which is addressed to his kinsman and pupil Toltanach, give a fascinating picture of the activities and preoccupations, saint-like and not so saint-like, of an early holy man:

'I got my seven requests, God was satisfied with my offerings, not least of them was that on an enclosed piece of land He created a sanctuary for pilgrims.

I left this desert and went on a circuit with Ciarán when I performed the functions of my calling at Dooras and at Durlas of the sunny rooms.

A dispute arose between me and Ciarán of good understanding, along this boundary wall as far as Durlas I left Dooras without water.

Boldly I cursed the cows of Dooras when they would feel the torment of thirst at the onset of bulling and lactation . . .

My blessing and my lasting blessing on the family of brave Mael Domhnaigh, may their enemies not destroy them provided they pay my taxes.

May the great related family not lack leading men. I am entitled to a full grown pig from every herd from the Clann Mael Domhnaigh. If they give them every single year I will ward off every robber from them . . .

A blessing on the O'Hallorans, over me their power is great, I bequeath well-being to their cows and excellence of entertainment.

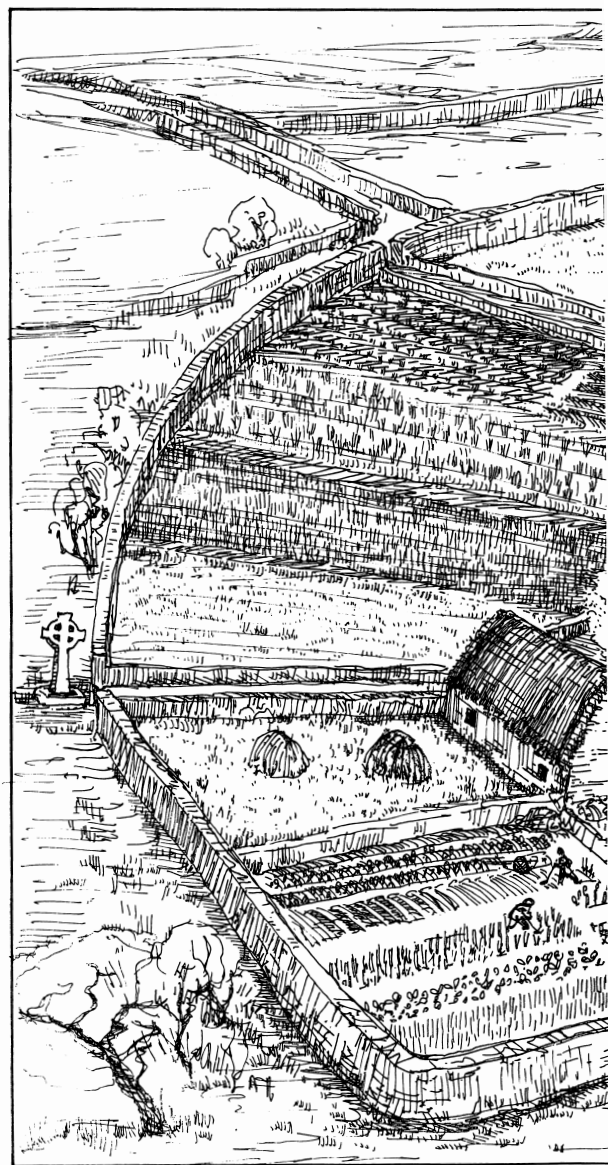
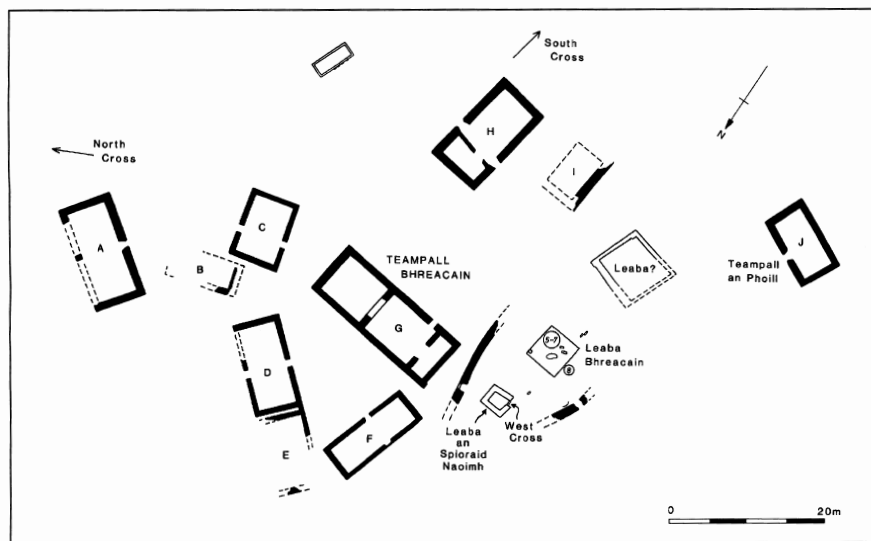
If the stately people of Mael Domhnaigh fail me may their herds of pigs be depleted and their leading men the fewer for it . . .

I am the prophetic Breacán, accomplished son of a king of Munster, telling the story of the western world. Arise, O Toltanach'.

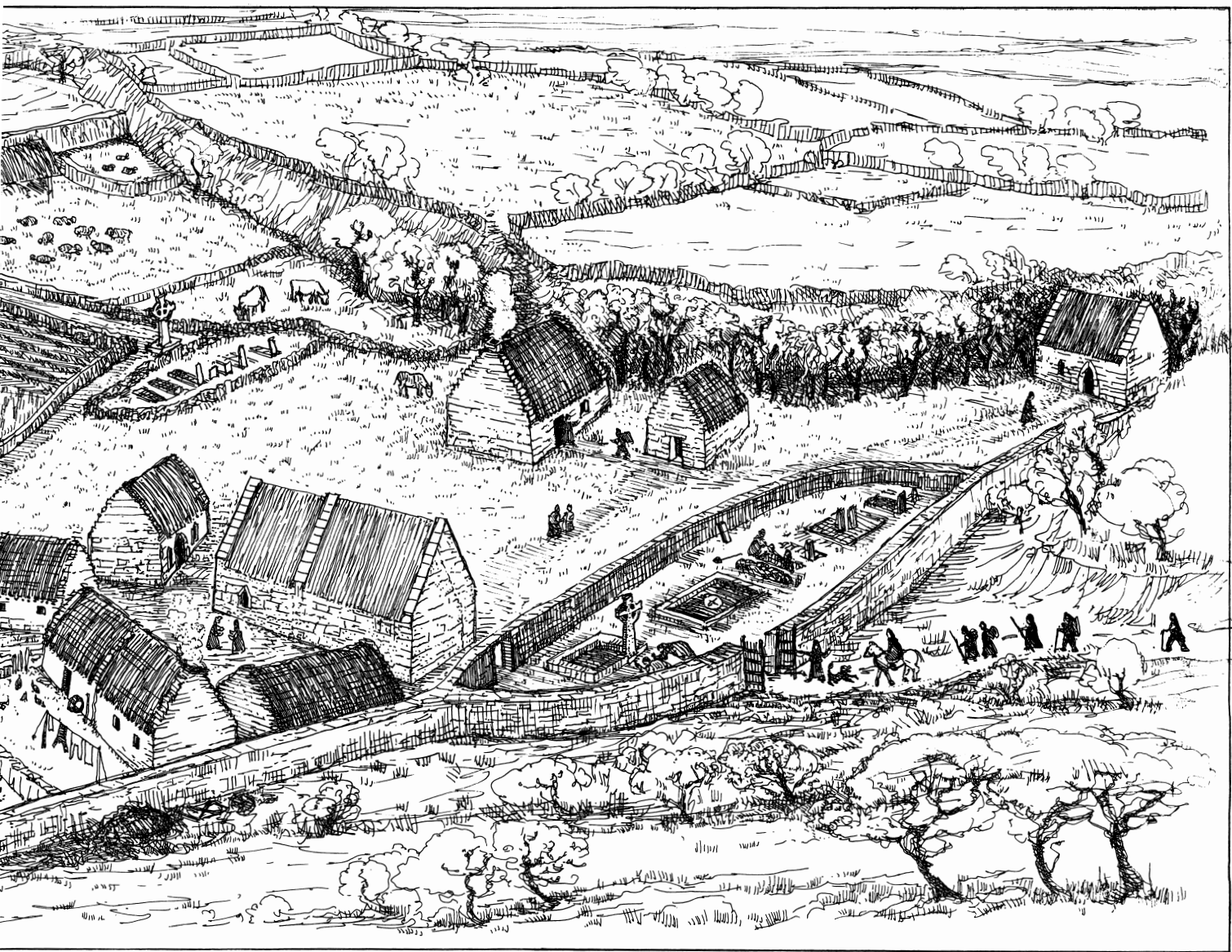


Illus. 5.45. Aerial view of Teampall Bhreacáin: 'the Seven Churches'.

Illus. 5.46. General plan of Teampall Bhreacáin: despite the popular name of 'the Seven Churches' there are only two churches here, one dedicated to the saint, the other known as Teampall an Phoill.



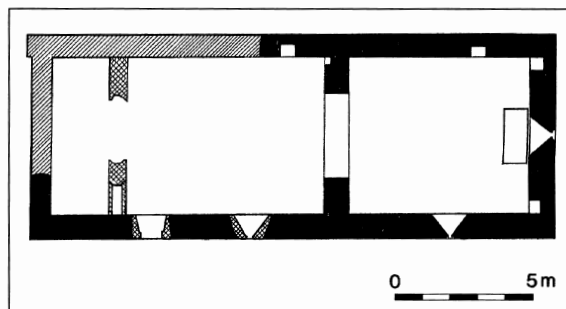
Illus. 5.47. An artist's reconstruction of Teampall Bhreacáin as it may have been in or about the 16th century when it probably was an important pilgrimage centre. Some of the stone houses which survive were probably for the use of visiting penitents and pilgrims.



The church called Teampall Bhreacáin is the largest building on the site and is of various dates (Illus. 5.48). The earliest remains are to be seen in the north and west walls with massive limestone masonry and one of a pair of *antae* surviving. Its original doorway was, presumably, in the south wall. This part of the church predates the 13th century and its stonework is clearly distinguishable from the smaller masonry of the rest of the building. The church was more than doubled in size in the 13th century with the addition of a chancel, chancel arch and a slender Transitional window in the east gable. Minor modifications, in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, included an internal partition wall and the doorway and window now in the south wall of the nave. A stone set in the inside wall of the western gable bears the

inscription OR[OIT] AR II CANOIN (Say a prayer for two canons).

The second church on the site lies to the south-west. The unusual name, 'Church of the Hollow', was its popular name in the 17th century. It is a small, simple rectangular structure with a narrow trefoil-headed window in the



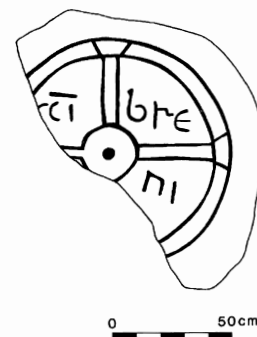
Illus. 5.48. Teampall Bhreacáin, the church of St Breacan, dates to various periods: the earliest part is the north-west corner with one of the antae still in place. Most of the building is a 13th century extension.





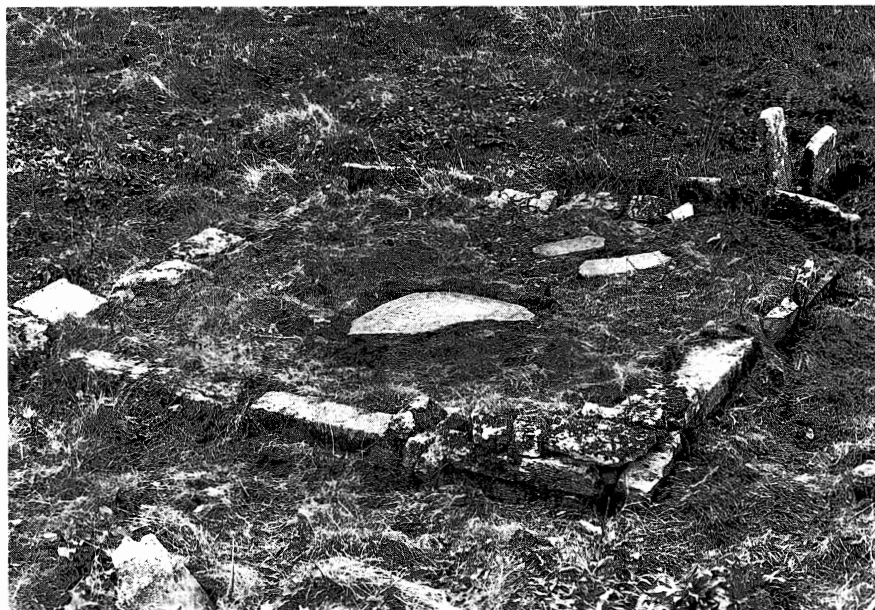
Illus. 5.49. Teampall an Phoill is a simple rectangular church of 15th or 16th century date.

Illus. 5.50. The probable grave of St Brecan is a small rectangular enclosure with part of a large grave slab inscribed with the saint's name.



east gable, a doorway with a pointed arch and a simple window, both in the north wall (Illus. 5.49).

The rest of the buildings in the complex seem to be domestic dwellings of one sort or another. The ogee or trefoil-headed windows and pointed doorways in Buildings C and H indicate that these at least are of later Medieval date. Several (C, D, F, H) have opposed doorways as in clochans like Clochán na Carraige and the more recent traditional thatched houses of the west. Some of these unusually substantial structures may have been the dwellings of the religious community, others may have served as guest houses for pilgrims. These pilgrims would probably have participated in a prayerful circuit of various penitential stations, or leabaí or saints' graves, and indeed other sacred features such as holy wells, trees and high crosses.



The grave of the founder was certainly one important focus of religious activity. A small rectangular setting of stones south-west of Teampall Bhreacáin may be the grave of the saint for among the grave slabs which lie on it is the greater part of a particularly large sub-rectangular grave slab with rounded corners: it bears a Greek cross within a double circle and the remains of an inscription which reads SCI BRECANI (that is Sancti Brecani: [the grave or slab] of St Brecan: Illus. 5.50).¹²⁴ Several other grave slabs are nearby: two bear traces of inscriptions; one which may read ORAIT AR ANMAIN SCANDLAIN (Pray for the soul of Scandlain) is now virtually illegible,¹²⁵ the other reads OR[OIT] AR MAINEACH (Pray for Maineach).

Another rectangular setting of stones to the south may be a second leaba or penitential station. According to one 19th century account 'when any member of a family falls sick, another member makes a promise, that if the sick one recovers, the person promising will sleep one, two or three nights in one of the saints' beds. One bed at the Seven Churches (probably St Brecan's Bed) is said to be occupied pretty regularly'.¹²⁶

To the east, beyond the domestic buildings a rectangular setting of limestone slabs set on edge encloses what appear to be five slab-covered graves with an approximately east-west orientation (Illus. 5.51). Four interesting cross-inscribed slabs stand on its western side but one of these has been moved to this spot since the 1930s. The others are probably in their original positions: one is a slender pillar with a Latin cross with splayed terminals and a base shaped like a pair of bent legs. This may be a representation on stone of a processional cross (perhaps a metal one) set into a stand of some description.

The second is a cross-inscribed slab with the Latin inscription VII ROMANI (Seven Romans). This stone has provoked many theories and some have suggested that it marks the last resting place of seven Roman pilgrims. It has also been argued that it might be dedicatory rather than funerary and erected in honour of the seven martyred sons of Symphorosa who are named in the Irish martyrologies of Oengus and Gorman. Another interesting hypothesis is that it commemorates seven people who favoured the Roman or Continental church in a famous 6th century controversy about matters such as the date of Easter and the proper form of clerical hair-style. Peter Harbison has offered the plausible suggestion that this stone was erected by seven people who had made the pilgrimage to Rome and who had also come to Teampall Bhreacáin.¹²⁷

Illus. 5.51. Four cross-slabs now stand near a grave plot on the south-eastern side of the site. One of these (second from the left) bears the famous VII ROMANI inscription, another is dedicated to Thomas the Apostle.



It is also possible that this slab commemorates the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Their story was one of the most widespread and popular legends of the early Christian and Medieval world: seven young noblemen of Ephesus concealed themselves in a cave to escape the persecution of the Roman Emperor Decius. They fell into a miraculous sleep and awoke several centuries later in the reign of the Christian Emperor Theodosius II. The legend originated in the 5th century and was popular because it affirmed the belief in the resurrection of the dead. It figures in Anglo-Saxon and early Irish literature.¹²⁸

A third slab bears a representation of another processional cross set in a stand and has an inscription, which may read CRONMAOIL, carved on it.¹²⁹ The fourth has a finely carved and elaborate ringed cross with the dedicatory inscription TOMAS AP (Thomas the Apostle);¹³⁰ this slab was moved here from the church Teampall Bhreacáin some years ago.¹³¹

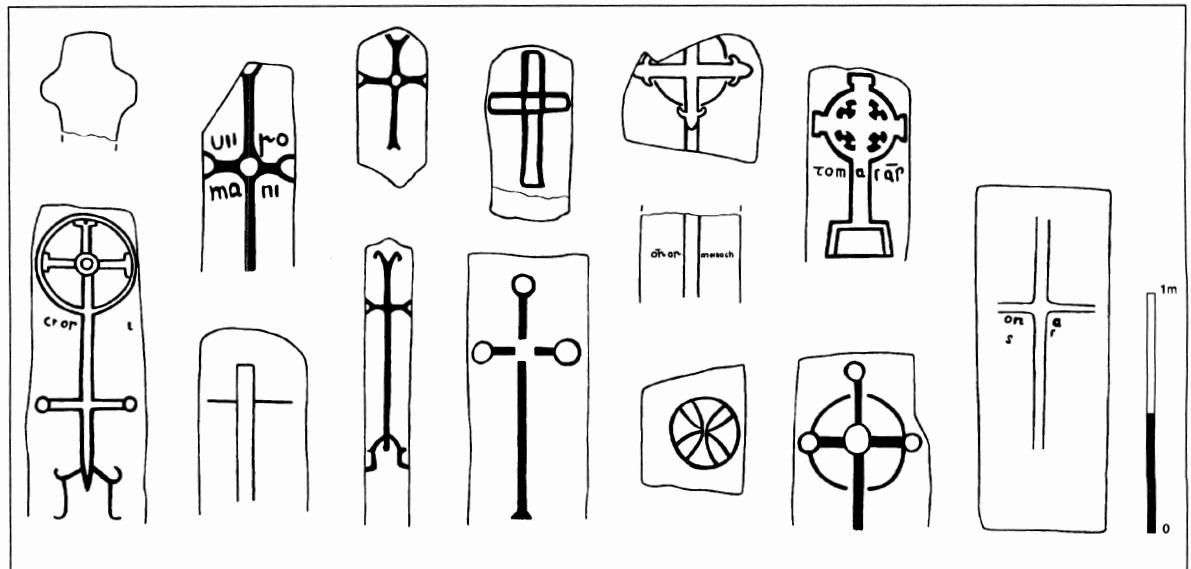
History does not record why this particular apostle should be commemorated on Aran.

A number of other cross slabs, are to be found on this site (Illus. 5.52) and several holy wells are also recorded. Tobar an Spioraid Naoimh, a well dedicated to the Holy Spirit, was venerated in the 19th century; as were Tobar Bhreacáin (dedicated to St Breacan) and a third well to the north of the site.¹³²

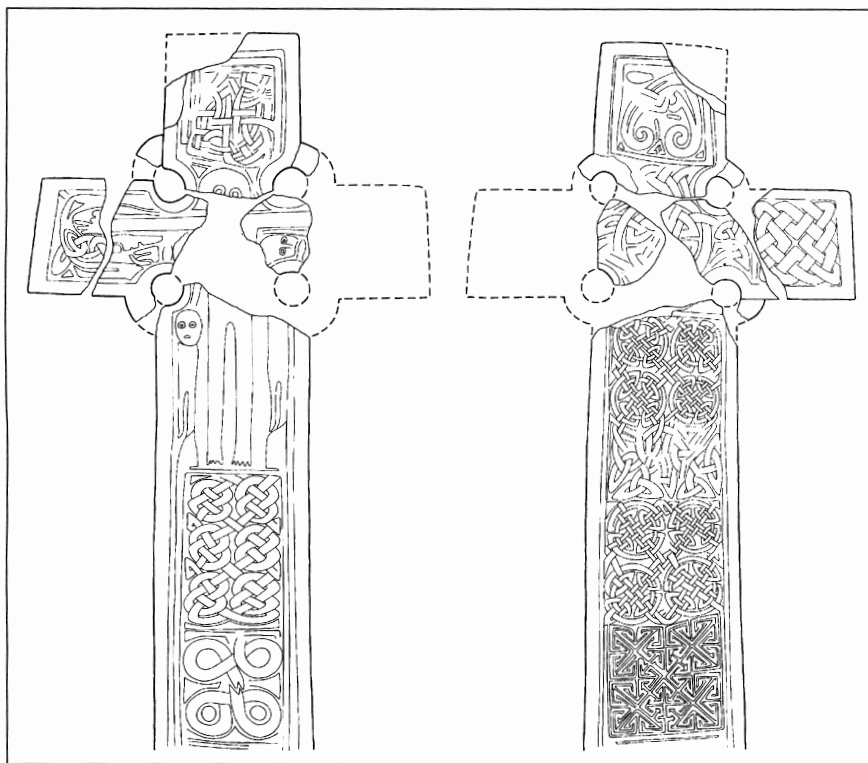
The remains of three high crosses have been found here.¹³³ All were smashed to pieces centuries ago, but in every instance sufficient survives to give a clear idea what they originally looked like.

The shaft of the West Cross stands at one end of the rectangular walled structure known as Leaba an Spioraid Naoimh near Teampall Bhreacáin. Several pieces of the head lie nearby but part of the middle of the cross and one arm are missing (Illus. 5.53). Originally it was just over 2m high with a ringed head, deeply cusped at the angles of arms and shaft. A cruci-

Illus. 5.52. A range of cross-inscribed slabs of different sizes and dates are preserved at Teampall Bhreacáin: some are dedicatory, others may have marked graves.



Illus. 5.53. The shaft of the West Cross stands at one end of a leaba near Teampall Bhreacáin; the fragments of the shattered head lie nearby.

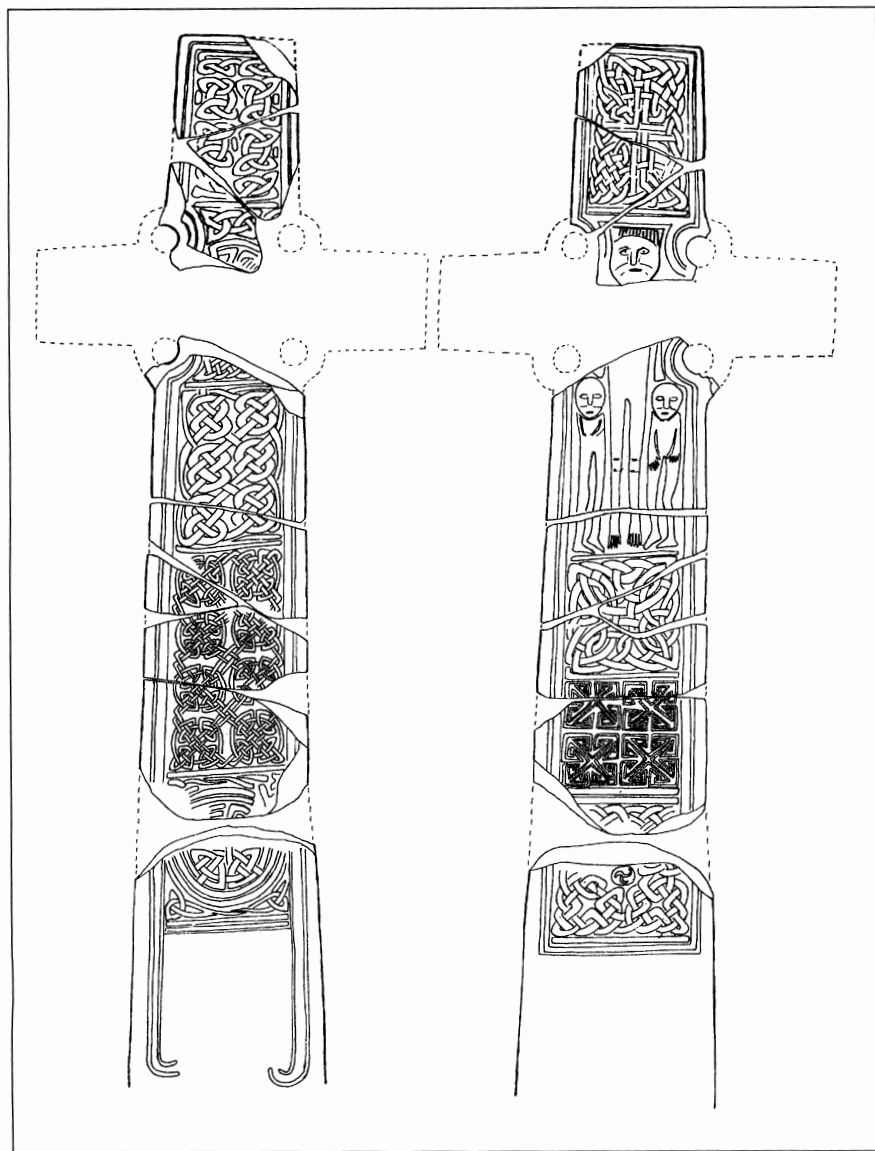


fixion scene is carved on the west face, the figure of Christ being flanked by a pair of smaller figures. Two further human figures are placed horizontally below the outstretched arms. Above is a panel of crude interlace forming a cruciform design, below a panel of thick knotwork and near the base a design comprising a spirally twisted pair of biting animals, possibly snakes. The other face is decorated with panels of interlaced knot-work and one panel of rectilinear fret-pattern.

The basal fragment of the shaft of the North Cross stands at one end of a small rectangular enclosure some distance north-east of Teampall Bhreacáin. Fragments of this cross lie nearby and these were apparently collected among the ruins of the complex in the 19th century. A little of the shaft and the arms are still missing but it is clear that originally this cross, with a height of over 4m and carved from one great limestone slab, must have been one of the most imposing of the Aran high crosses (Illus. 5.54). The figure of Christ is flanked by two figures and there is a poorly executed panel of interlace forming a cruciform design above and a panel of fret design and two panels of interlace below. The other face bears a series of panels of interlaced knot-work.

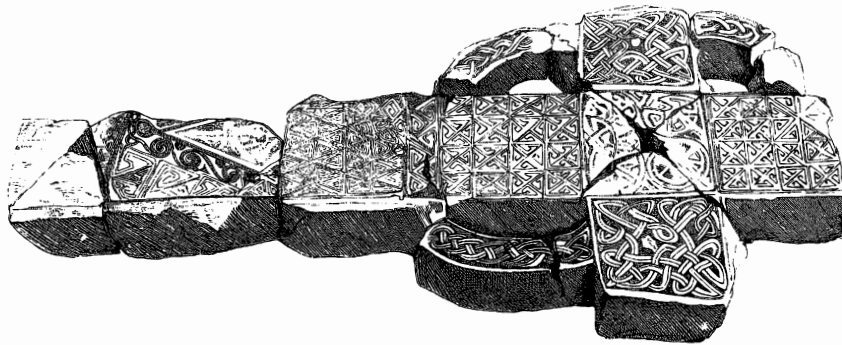
The crucifixion scenes on both of these crosses are fairly rudimentary: the legs of the figure of Christ, for example, are shown but no clothing is indicated. Presumably a painted short tunic or loin-cloth was added and indeed the various decorative panels may have been painted too. The pairs of flanking figures may be representations of the two thieves, or of Longinus the lance-bearer and Stephaton bearing a cup of vinegar. It is impossible to be certain given the absence of detail but the latter pair are more common on Irish crucifixion scenes.

Illus. 5.54. The North Cross at Teampall Bhreacáin was broken into over ten pieces not all of which have been recovered. When it stood over 4m high and when it was painted in contrasting colours (as may well have been the case), it must have been a striking feature of the pilgrims' circuit.



The original position of what is now called the South Cross is not known. Its fragments were collected amongst the ruins in the 19th century and cemented to a plinth of limestone blocks on top of a low limestone bluff, above and to the south of Teampall Bhreacáin (Illus. 5.55). This unfortunate treatment obscures one entire face. The cross itself is broken into at least seven pieces. It has an asymmetrically ringed head and the greater part of the exposed face is ornamented with panels of interlaced knotwork and fret patterns.

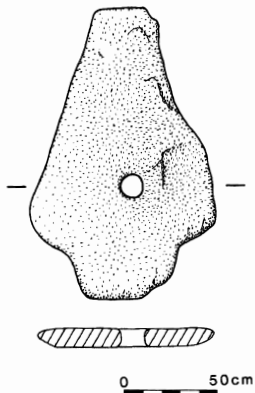
These three high crosses were probably erected in the 12th century; they may well have marked the limits of the ecclesiastical sanctuary and were very probably significant focal points in the circuit of the Medieval pilgrim. The number of stone buildings, cross-slabs and crosses here are eloquent testimony of the former importance of the site, important enough, perhaps, to attract pilgrims who had also been to Rome. But historical references are very few: Aran was one of more than half a dozen holy places which a certain Heneas Mac Nichaill was obliged to visit to atone for having strangled his son in or about 1543. He very probably did his penitential rounds here at Teampall Bhreacáin as well as elsewhere. Aran also figures in a list of places of popular devotion to which Pope Paul V granted papal indulgences about 1607 and this was no doubt a considerable encouragement to both the devout and the superstitious participants in the pilgrimage trade of the period.¹³⁴



Illus. 5.55. The South Cross at Teampall Bhreacáin (after Margaret Stokes.)

Illus. 5.56. Cill Cheannannach, Inis Meáin.

Illus. 5.57. Triangular end-stone of a slab-built shrine at Cill Cheannannach: the hole was made to allow the faithful to touch the relics within.



Inis Meáin: Cill Cheannannach

The principal church site on Inis Meáin is Cill Cheannannach. It lies close to the eastern shore and is protected on the west and south by rocky cliffs. A modern sub-rectangular enclosing wall surrounds a simple rectangular church of sizeable limestone masonry with a lintelled west doorway and a small triangular-headed east window (Illus. 5.56). Projecting corbels, a rare feature on early Irish stone churches, occur at either corner and these (like *antae*) would once have supported the wooden barge boards of the gables. Much of the enclosure is filled with 18th, 19th and 20th century grave slabs



and these graves have probably obliterated other early features.

There was once a slab shrine here, for one end stone survives, but where it originally stood is not known (Illus. 5.57). The surviving stone is interesting, like the Cill Comhla end-stone, it is a flat slab of triangular shape but it has a circular hole near its base and just above a tenon which must once have slotted into a basal piece. The shrine probably held the holy bones of the church's founder. The Northumbrian story of Ultan, 'a blessed priest of the Irish race' who could 'ornament books with fair markings' illustrates what may well have happened here: when the earth had eaten his body, Ultan's bones were disinterred, washed and carried in clean vestments to dry in the sun and then placed 'in the inside of a prepared tomb which stood on the floor of the blessed church'. Who Ceannannach was is uncertain: the son of a Leinster king according to one tradition, a female saint according to another.¹³⁵

It is possible that the name may be a reference to Gregory the Fairheaded, Gríoir Ceannfhionnadh, after whom Gregory's Sound between Inis Meáin and Inis Mór is named.¹³⁶ A holy well, Tobar Cheannannach, lies some 30m north-west of the church.

Very little survives of other church sites on Inis Meáin: only some of the foundations of Teampall na Seacht Mac Rí (the church of the King's seven sons) remains and they are obscured by more recent walling. Atharla Chinndeirge is close by, it is the rectangular leaba of a female saint of this name, and is surmounted by a relatively modern stone cross. Her holy well is a short distance to the south-west.

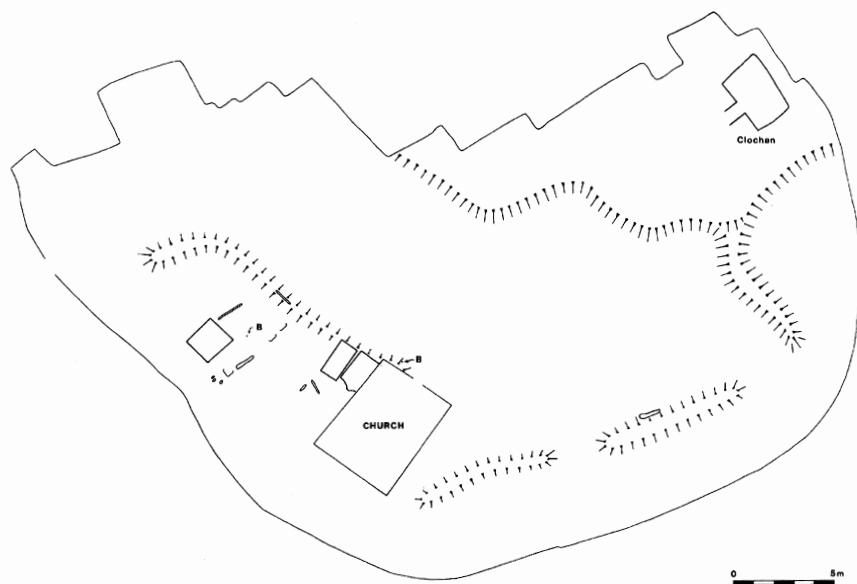
Teampall Mhuire was a small 15th century church but nothing remains of it except a granite bullaun stone (used as a font) and one or

two other fragments now in the modern church nearby.¹³⁷

Inis Oírr: Cill Ghobnait

The church site of Cill Ghobnait on Inis Oírr (Illus. 5.58) is dedicated to St Gobnait of Ballyvourney, Co. Cork, who is still venerated on her feast day there on the 11th February. Why there should be a connection with Aran is not clear though one tradition has it that Gobnait came from Clare, fleeing an enemy and, having spent some time at the Cliffs of Moher, came to Aran.¹³⁸ Even though she is considered to be the patron saint of beekeepers, she obviously cannot be credited with having anything to do with Aran's peculiar bumble bee, *Bombus muscorum smithianus*. The church

Illus. 5.58. Plan of the church site of Cill Ghobnait, Inis Oírr, showing church, clochán, graves and bullaun stones.





Illus. 5.59. The church of St Gobnait and the nearby roofless clochán.



at Cill Ghobnait is a small rectangular building with lintelled west doorway with inclined jambs and a simple east window (Illus. 5.59). It was probably built in the 11th century.¹³⁹ Several stone-built graves lie to the south of the church and there are two bullaun stones nearby. Traces of low stony banks both to the south and north indicate that the ecclesiastical enclosure may have been sub-divided but no trace of an original enclosing wall survives. To the west below a low cliff is a small ruined clochan of sub-rectangular plan; its corbelling survives only to a height of 1.50m and the interior measures a mere 3 by 2 metres. If this was a hermit's cell, of man or woman or both, it was probably one of warm smoke-filled sanctity. Tobar Éinne, a holy well dedicated to St Enda, is situated almost three quarters of a mile to the south-west. In the 1930s religious emblems were still to be seen there, it was said to never run dry and was noted for its miracles.¹⁴⁰

Teampall Chaomháin

At first glance Teampall Chaomháin or St Cavan's Church appears to have sunk deep into a sandy hill close to the north shore of Inis Oírr. In 1684, according to the historian Roderic O'Flaherty, this church and, to the north of it, the saint's tomb with 'a square wall built about it' were situated 'on a plain green field in prospect of the sea'. Since then the church, which must have stood on a low flat knoll, has been inundated by blown sand and surrounded by an accumulation of graves (Illus. 5.60). There are traces of a midden of shell fish in the sand nearby.

The sand has now been cleared away from the walls of the church which is of somewhat more complicated form than usual: it is essentially a nave and chancel building with a trabeate door

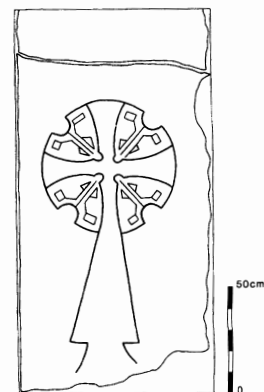
in the west end, and a pointed south door and chancel arch. Westropp thought that these two late features were insertions into a nave and chancel structure of the one date,¹⁴¹ but it is clear that the narrower chancel and the chancel arch are additions, a century or two later, to a smaller rectangular oratory of 11th century date.¹⁴² The west door is now the entrance to a small late annex which is usually considered to have been a sacristy.

The saint's bed or grave is just north-east of the church: originally it was a rectangular arrangement of stone slabs which enclosed a fine cross-slab (Illus. 5.61). These have now been incorporated in a small, modern roofed building. It was here, in the saint's grave, that Roderic O'Flaherty recorded that 'sick people use to lie over night, and recover health of God, for his sake'. He went on to declare: 'I have seen one grievously tormented by a thorn thrust into his



Illus. 5.60. Teampall Chaomháin, Inis Oírr, has been inundated by sand in the past. Today a stone wall surrounds the church in an attempt to exclude the encroaching sand.

Illus. 5.61. The saint's grave north-east of Teampall Chaomháin is marked by a fine cross-inscribed slab now protected by a small building.



eye, who by lying so in St Coeman's burying place, had it miraculously taken out, without the least feeling of the patient, the mark whereof, in the corner of his eye, still remains'. According to O'Flaherty this grave also had the power of adapting itself to the size of every person who lay in it and cures were still being reported here at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁴³

The recumbent cross-inscribed slab on which the faithful lay is the most ornate example on the Aran Islands. A Latin cross, with a splayed shaft on a narrow base, has the four quarters of the cross-head decorated with an unusual and intricate pattern of rectilinear and C-shaped motifs. Various writers have argued that encircled cross designs like this are based on the *flabellum*, a liturgical fan, though why the symbols of fan and cross should be combined is not clear.¹⁴⁴

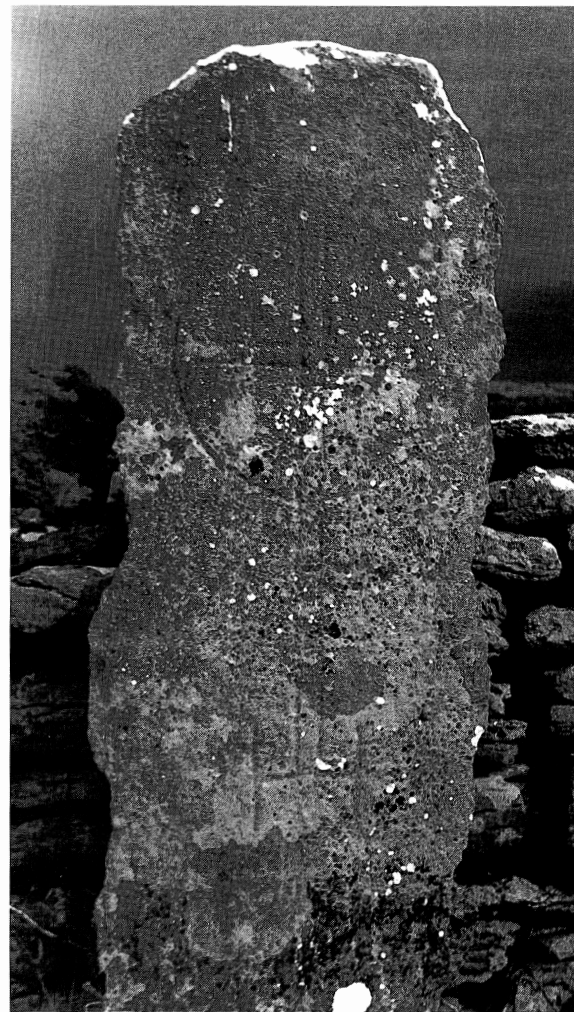
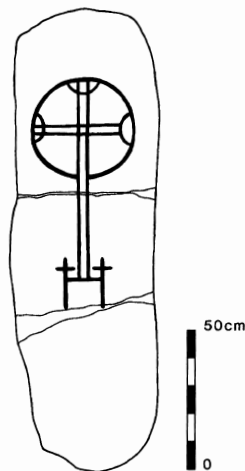
Cill na Seacht nIníon

Cill na Seacht nIníon, or the church of the Seven Daughters, is a puzzling site almost lost in a rocky landscape of small fields in Ceathrú an Chaisleáin south of O'Brien's Castle. The site seems to have been a circular cashel or stone fort modified as an ecclesiastical enclosure. Traces of a substantial cashel wall (with a north-south diameter of about 27m) survive for almost three-quarters of its circumference; this is not traceable on the south and on the east where various walls and small enclosures occur beyond the presumptive line of the original enclosing wall. In the southern part of the cashel there is a rectangular pile of dry masonry presumably a leacht or altar, or penitential station; several stones protruding through the grass nearby may mark graves.

Three conjoined rectangular walled structures

lie outside the line of the cashel wall on the east and the easternmost of these contains a tall cross-inscribed slab sadly broken into three pieces in or about the late 1970s (Illus. 5.62).¹⁴⁵

Illus. 5.62. Cill na Seacht nIníon seems to have been a stone fort modified as a church site of which little survives. A fine cross-inscribed slab is now broken into several pieces by vandals.



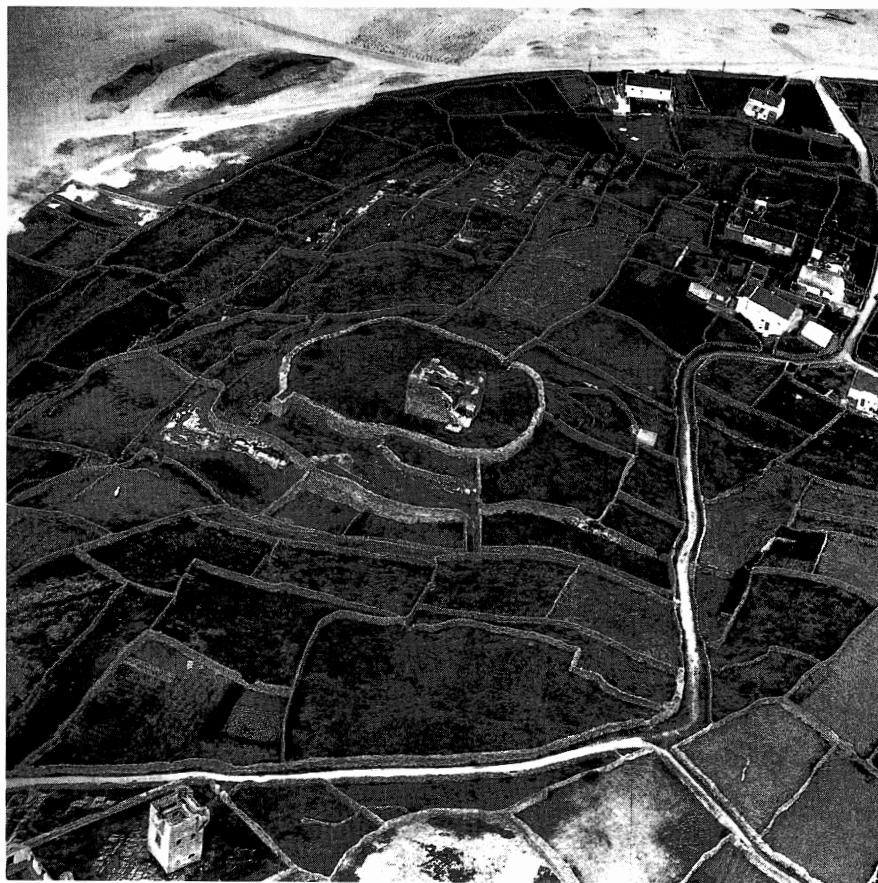
The cross itself is a simple two-line Latin cross with a ringed head, but it is represented as standing on a more or less rectangular base, the sides of which are formed by two small crosses. This may be an echo of the custom of flanking a large cross with two smaller ones representing those of the two thieves.

Almost nothing is known about the Seven Daughters though there is a tradition that they were the daughters either of a British or a Leinster king: the memory of their collective name and these stony remnants are all that survives here. However, their cult was fairly widespread in Connemara where a number of holy wells bear the name Tobar na Seacht nIníon.¹⁴⁶

One other site on Inis Oírr with female associations is the so-called Cathair na mBan ('the fort of the women') which is located near the late 18th century signal tower (one of a number on the western coasts built to warn of a French invasion) south of O'Brien's Castle. Far from being a fort Cathair na mBan appears to be a ruined circular cairn about 13m across; it may possibly be a prehistoric hill-top cairn.

O'Brien's Castle

The most conspicuous monument on Inis Oírr is O'Brien's Castle or Caisleán Uí Bhriain, also known as Dún Formna, formna meaning the top of a hill. The substantial though irregular stone wall which surrounds the castle may be a prehistoric or early historic stone fort modified in the Middle Ages: a sort of bastion of rectangular plan and uncertain date occurs on the west (Illus. 5.63). The entrance is on the north-east and about 17m outside of this entrance some very large stones are clearly visible (for a stretch of almost 25m) in the lower levels of a modern field wall. This may be the remains of an outer wall: perhaps an out-work protecting



the entrance but possibly once surrounding the hill.¹⁴⁷ Only archaeological excavation will tell whether there was once an ancient stone fort on this spot.

Little is known about the history of the castle which commands both the shore below and extensive views to the north and east. It was probably built in the 14th or 15th century by one of the Clann Thaidhg Uí Bhriain, a branch of the O'Briens of Clare, who held Aran since at least the 13th century for it is recorded in 1277 that the merchants of Galway paid this family a tribute of wine to keep the bay free of pirates. For a century or two this and other

Illus. 5.63. O'Brien's Castle (Dún Formna), Inis Oírr. The late 18th century signal tower (built to warn of a French invasion) is visible on the lower left.

O'Brien castles, and O'Brien galleys, must have had an important role in controlling the seaward approaches to the town of Galway.

The castle itself is a small rectangular two-story structure, now ruined particularly on the south; much of this destruction took place in 1652 when Galway (and Aran) surrendered to Sir Charles Coote of Cromwell's Parliamentary forces. Some restoration work was undertaken here in the last century.

The door, in the north-east wall has been modified, but gave entry to a window-less vaulted ground floor chamber with another vaulted chamber on either side: only the side room on the south-east had a narrow window, and it may have been a guard room. As in tower houses elsewhere, the ground floor, ill-lit if lit at all, was used mainly for storage, the living quarters were above. Stairs would have given access to a first floor hall which had windows in all but the north-west wall. From this floor a mural stairway, the steps still to be seen in the ruined south-west wall, led to a wall-walk and parapet and, possibly, to further quarters in an attic below a steeply pitched roof. Whether slated or thatched, this roof was protected by a high crenellated parapet with one narrow opening surviving on the south-east. Alternating slabs of the wall-walk formed gutter and spout and projected externally through the base of the parapet. Though especially necessary in the wet Aran climate this drainage system also served to weaken the parapet and is one reason for its ruinous condition.

The living quarters were not large, the first floor area measures only about 10 by 4.5m and a room above would have been considerably smaller; however, it should not be forgotten that various other structures such as flimsier timber buildings probably stood nearby.

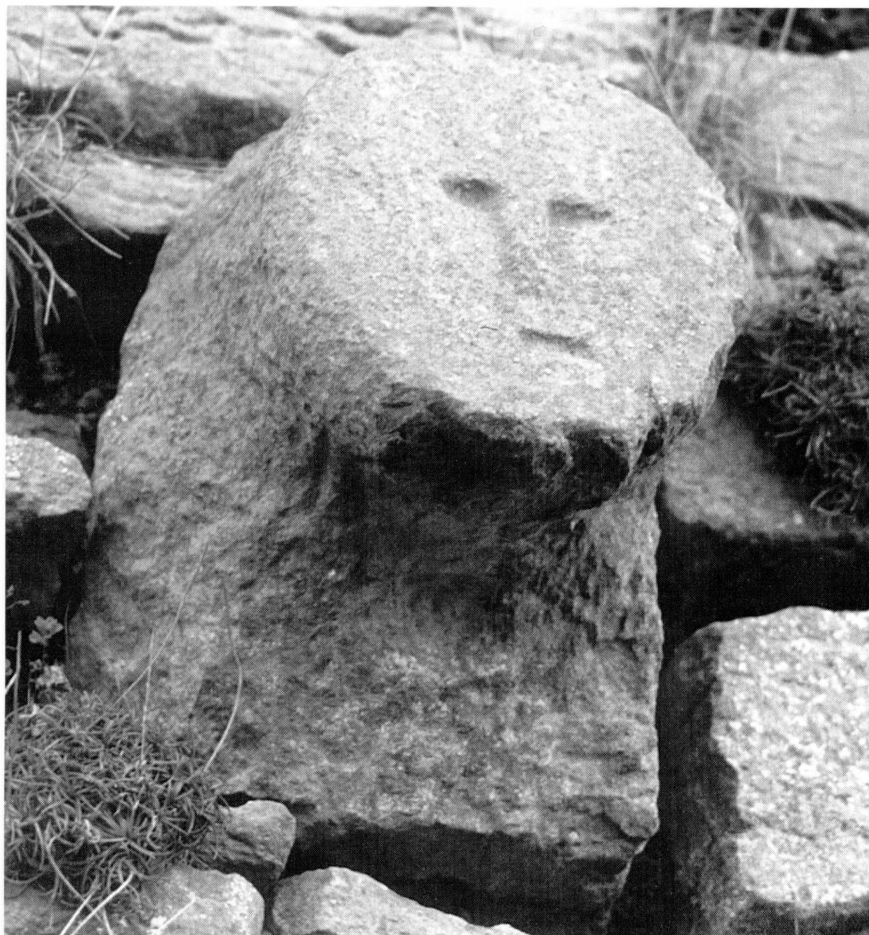
Indeed the remains of several clochans were reported in the enclosure in 1877.¹⁴⁸

Two further minor details are worth noting: apart from the small trefoil-headed south-west window on the first floor, the only carved stones are two projecting corbels each carved with a primitive human face (Illus. 5.64). One stares out towards Galway and Connemara from the north-east wall, the other looks

Illus. 5.64. A protective ritual at O'Brien's Castle? Two primitive stone heads stare blankly from its walls towards Connemara and towards Clare. Were they meant to ward off evil?



blankly out from the south-east wall towards Clare. Their purpose is unknown but they can hardly be just decorative; the schematic depiction of just eyes, nose and mouth is possibly a deliberate primitivism recalling ancient, pre-Christian representations of human heads. Were they placed here as ritual protection to guard some unknown O'Brien from ancient evils far beyond the holy shores of Aran?



Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jane Conroy for the translation of the passage from Nicolas Bouvier's work (reproduced by kind permission of Editions Payot). My thanks too to the many students of archaeology who studied the ancient monuments of Aran with me throughout the 1970s.

Acknowledgements for illustrations (all John Waddell and Angela Gallagher unless otherwise stated)

- Illus. 5.1. Ordnance Survey of Ireland permit no. 5878.
- Illus. 5.2-3. Plans, DeValera and O Nualláin 1972.
- Illus. 5.5. Drawing, Angela Gallagher courtesy of National Museum of Ireland (nos.4-5, W.F. Wakeman).
- Illus. 5.7. Photo, Office of Public Works.
- Illus. 5.8. Plan, Claire Cotter, Discovery Programme.
- Illus. 5.11. Drawing, T.J. Westropp.
- Illus. 5.12. Photo, T.H. Mason.
- Illus. 5.13. Drawing, Claire Cotter, Discovery Programme.
- Illus. 5.14. Photo, Office of Public Works.
- Illus. 5.15-16. Plans, T.J. Westropp, Photos, Charlie Byrne.
- Illus. 5.17. Plan, T.J. Westropp, Photo, Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.
- Illus. 5.18. Plan, British Library, Stowe Mss.
- Illus. 5.19-20. Photos, Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.
- Illus. 5.23 Drawing, John Waddell and Anne Korff.
- Illus. 5.25. Photo, Office of Public Works.
- Illus. 5.26-27. Drawing, G.H. Kinahan.
- Illus. 5.29. Plan, Con Manning, Photo, Office of Public Works.
- Illus. 5.30. Drawing (cross slabs), Con Manning.
- Illus. 5.31. Photo, Jim Bambury, Office of Public Works.
- Illus. 5.33. Plan, Con Manning, Photo, T.H. Mason (courtesy of Ulster Museum).
- Illus. 5.34. Sketch, John O'Donovan.
- Illus. 5.43. Drawing (pillar stone), Jim Higgins.
- Illus. 5.45. Photo, D. Pochin Mould.
- Illus. 5.47. Drawing, Anne Korff.
- Illus. 5.49. Photo, Office of Public Works.
- Illus. 5.54. Drawing, John Waddell.
- Illus. 5.55. Drawing, Margaret Stokes.
- Illus. 5.60. Photo, T.H. Mason.
- Illus. 5.61. Drawing, William Walsh.
- Illus. 5.63. Photo, Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.

1684 for the Dublin Philosophical Society but not then published.

7. Ogygia is a name given by Plutarch to an island west of Britain. O'Flaherty's great work was in Latin and an English translation was published by Hely in 1793.
8. Lhuyd (1712). Campbell (1960).
9. Petrie (1845), (1972).
10. Twenty-three years later, the year after O'Donovan's death, Wakeman (1862) published an engaging account of their Aran adventure. They stayed in Galway with the historian James Hardiman, later librarian of the Queen's College, who generally entertained them at dinner with his personal piper. On Aran they were conscious that they were following in the footsteps of George Petrie, the 'only one true antiquary' to have examined the islands. They visited all the major monuments and on reaching famous Dún Aonghasa, O'Donovan threw his umbrella in the air with an exultant shout and then 'threw himself on the ground and shouted again and again'.
11. Wilde (1858). According to his *Lough Corrib*, he also visited Aran in 1847 when Dún Aonghasa was sketched (1872, 265, and fig.). This sketch of the exterior also appeared in Babington (1858) and Haverty (1859).
12. Haverty (1859). A short preliminary account of the excursion in *The Freeman's Journal*, September 7th, 1857, contains no details of the ancient monuments.
13. Wilde (1858). The name 'Western' or 'Southern' Aran Islands was sometimes applied to the Galway islands by nineteenth-century writers to distinguish them from similarly named islands in Donegal and Scotland.
14. Dunraven (1875).
15. Westropp (1895, 1899, 1902,

1905, 1910, 1910a, 1914).

16. Kinahan (1867), Kilbride (1869).
17. Barry (1886, 490). The Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland, as the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland was then known, made representations to the Board of Works in 1883 about the condition of the Aran monuments: Graves (1883), 175.
18. Murphy (1888).
19. See the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 25 (1895), 239-249.
20. Macalister (1895, 1922, 1949).
21. Crawford (1907, 1913).
22. Scantlebury (1926).
23. Goulden (1953, 1953a, 1955). Waddell (1988).
24. Ó Síocháin (1962), Mould (1972), Daly (1975), Powell (1984). Also to be noted is Messenger (1969), an anthropological study of a thinly disguised Inis Oírr, and O'Sullivan (1976) with brief notes on monuments. More important are *The Shell Guide to Ireland* by Killanin and Duignan (same information in the 1962 and 1967 editions) and Harbison's *The National Monuments of Ireland* (1964), *Guide to the National Monuments in the Republic of Ireland* (1970) and *Guide to the National and Historic Monuments of Ireland* (1992).
25. Waddell (1973, 1976, 1981).
26. Maps: Robinson (1975, Revised editions with greater detail 1980). Book: *Stones of Aran. Pilgrimage* (1986). The first edition of the six-inch (1:10560) Ordnance Survey maps of Aran (Sheets 110, 111, 119, 120) was published in 1841. The last revised editions appeared in 1910 but a very useful 1:25000 (approximately 2 inches to the mile) map was published by the Ordnance Survey in 1993.
27. Gosling (1994).
28. *Discovery Programme Reports* 1, Dublin, 1993.
29. Details of the Eochaill and

CHAPTER 5

The Archaeology of the Aran Islands - John Waddell

Notes

1. Early Irish legend attributes some of the Aran forts to the westward migration of a defeated community of Fir Bolg led by Aonghus whose name is supposedly perpetuated in the great fort of Dún Aonghasa (O'Rahilly 1946). The Atlantis myth is more recent: e.g. Westropp (1912), Day (1903), Ó Síocháin (1962).
2. Ó Máille (1957). See also J.T. O'Flaherty (1825), O'Donovan (1839), Fraser (1922), Ó Móghráin (1945).
3. Burke (1887): 'nation might rise against nation ... but the islanders in happy repose ... would in their isles of peace have happily lived on in blissful ignorance of the painful turmoils that reigned around'.
4. Banim (1891).
5. Kinahan (1871).
6. Hardiman (1846) edited O'Flaherty's *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught*, a work written in

- Ceathrú an Lisín tombs are to be found in DeValera and Ó Nualláin, *Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland*, Vol.III (1972), where the three destroyed sites at Ceathrú an Lisín, Corróich and Fearann an Chóirce, are also noted. The Ceathrú an Teampaill tomb was identified in 1978 and two possible examples are recorded by the Galway Archaeological Survey, one on Inis Oírr, the other at Fearann an Chóirce (which may conceivably be the site thought destroyed). The former is marked 'grave' on Robinson's 1980 map in Ceathrú an Phoillín, the latter is located near the western-most stone shelter (no. 30 on Inis Mór) on the same map.
30. Three axeheads were found and two are preserved in the National Museum of Ireland (1962:104-5): Messenger (1969), Lucas (1964). One from a shell midden on Inis Meáin is also preserved in the National Museum (R2598) as is the bronze socketed axe and the battle-axes mentioned. A stone hand-axe (a primitive hand-held chopper or pounder of chipped stone) was discovered in a crevice among the *chevaux-de-frise* at Dún Aonghasa in 1974 (Murphy 1977); though a genuine artefact probably made over 70,000 years ago, this is a suspect find probably introduced in recent times. There is no evidence of human activity in Ireland at this early date.
31. Murphy (1888) and National Museum of Ireland register 1885:350, Wk. 48.
32. Westropp may have been referring to this strange monument in 1895: 'a curious square enclosure with twenty-seven early graves, each with an edging of flags, while to the west are two pillar stones and an entrance, the whole surrounded by a circular wall, has been uncovered by the wind'. It is difficult to see how twenty-seven graves would fit in the present site and perhaps the figure is a mistake. According to Messenger (1969, 100, and fig. 12) the single 'pookah' of the island resides in this Bronze Age tumulus which became a medieval cemetery. Another illustration is to be found in Ó Síocháin (1962). Other graves of unknown date have been found on Inis Oírr: Barry (1886, 493) records several rock cut graves, one measuring 1.06m by 61cm and containing unburnt human bones, about '80 perches' (400m) north of the lighthouse in Ceathrú an Chaisleáin.
33. Lucas (1958, 120).
34. Dunraven's (1875) plates II and III are reproduced in Powell (1984).
35. Petrie (1972, 248). This, his essay on military architecture, was written in 1833 and 1834. O'Donovan (1839, 118): his description and measurements with his reference to a lower 'internal division' led several later writers to imagine a peculiar sunken way in the middle of the Dún Aonghasa rampart. Wakeman drew a reconstruction of Dún Chonchúir on Inis Meáin with such a lowered central section around the top of its rampart (in Wood-Martin 1902, Vol. 1, 317). Westropp, too, accepted this interpretation but corrected it in his 1910 study when he realised O'Donovan was referring to a lower terrace.
36. Petrie and O'Donovan (note 35) refer to a lower terrace four to seven feet above ground level. An anonymous writer in *The Irish Builder*, 15th August, 1886, 237, writing in part from notes of a visit made in 1877, notes 'the course of the *banquette*, which forms a portion of the eastern side, may be quite plainly discerned'. Westropp (1910, 31) is confident that there were two terraces. Hartshorne (1853) noted one terrace and steps.
37. Neither Petrie's nor O'Donovan's plans show any steps.
38. Westropp (1902, 655) but precise locations not recorded. Petrie (1972, 248) does mention that in 1821 'the steps that led to the parapet are destroyed'. That 1877 visitor's account in *The Irish Builder* (note 36) records simply that 'the traces of stairs are still to be distinguished'. According to Wakeman (1862, 470) in 1839 there were 'several flights of steps leading to the top of wall'.
39. Westropp (1910, 39) has published John Windele's brief notes which refer to 'at the west side, a succession of stairs, just as we find in the inside of Staigue Fort'. Westropp (1910, 31) also declares the pair of sidelong flights visible today to be reset but marked on Petrie's plan. This plan, however (as published in Petrie 1972, 244) shows only a wall chamber at this point). In 1878 Westropp did note 'slopes' with some trace of a terrace here.
40. As far as Dún Aonghasa is concerned, Westropp's initial assessment was harsh (1902, 692) 'the whole fort underwent extensive and in parts injurious repair during its conservation as a National Monument in 1881, and many of the flights of steps date from that time'. His judgement in 1910, after detailed study, was that very little falsification took place and most if not all of the reconstructed features probably had some basis in fact.
41. Petrie (1972, 244). Ferguson (1853, 494). Also Dunraven (1875, 6).
42. All three seem to be original features. Petrie and O'Donovan record only the then ruined north-eastern entrance. Westropp (1910, 26) recorded the lintelled north gateway and the north-west entrance (then a shapeless gap) in 1878; the latter is visible, he argues, in Dunraven's plate III on the left (reproduced in Powell 1984, 15).
43. Also shown on his plan along with terrace and entrance.
44. Literally means 'horses of Friesland'; because they had few horses the Friesians employed pointed timbers sometimes shod with iron to check enemy cavalry charges. Some writers on Dún Aonghasa have used the name *abattis* derived from the military term for a defensive line of felled trees with their branches pointing upwards and outwards.
45. Ferguson (1853, 494).
46. O'Donovan records 'two distinct divisions'.
47. Westropp's (1910, 13) suggestion was that the fragment of rampart originally ran all the way behind the *chevaux-de-frise* from west to east and joined what is now the middle rampart in the area of the north-east gateway. The original middle rampart continued to form an oval concentric with the inner fort. Thus the original plan consisted of at least two concentric ramparts and a third enclosing a larger sub-rectangular space also protected by the *chevaux-de-frise*. At some stage two rampart sections were demolished and the materials used to build what is now the central section of the middle rampart.
48. Westropp (1910a, 182) 'thought' there was 'a terrace' in 1878. Dunraven's sketch plan (1875, facing p. 4) seems to show one terrace and (possibly) two flights of steps but it is far from clear. According to Dunraven the rampart is in two sections with a medial wall facing. The lower plinth is probably of 19th century date.
49. Westropp states that when Petrie visited the monument in 1821 there was a perfect gateway at the end of the rampart to the west but Petrie (1972, 249) merely notes that the passage through the *chevaux-de-frise*

- 'winds in a serpentine and intricate way, narrow, difficult, and tedious to be traced'. O'Donovan (1839, 140) records that an entrance 'in the east side near the margin of the cliff had been destroyed some time before'. He may also be referring to a western entrance when he writes 'to the north-west of this fortress are the evident traces of a similar one, but the cliff has fallen in ...' and then proceeds to describe a stone hut and a wall chamber obviously within the fort.
50. Named after the western part of the island, Eoghanacht, from the Eoganachta of Munster who once ruled Clare and Aran. O'Donovan noted that the rampart had 'three distinct divisions regular faced with stones of considerable size, and which would stand firm independently of each other'. So did Windele (RIA. Ms. 12 K 27, f. 522). Petrie (1972, 246) recorded the two terraces and provides the earliest known sketch plan.
 51. Petrie's plan merely indicates what seems to be one set of straight steps to a second terrace immediately to west of the lower steps on the northern part of the rampart. Dunraven refers to just one terrace.
 52. Dunraven (1875, 11) recorded 'three recesses in the wall [of the fort] about 4 or 5 ft. deep and about the same width, one opposite the door and the other at right angles to it'.
 53. Westropp (1910a, 187).
 53. Westropp's account of O'Donovan's description is confused. Dunraven follows O'Donovan.
 54. British Library Stowe Ms. 21024, f.155. The plan, possibly by Edward Lhuyd (1660-1709), is in a collection compiled by John Anstis (1669-1744).
 56. The sketch plan is merely titled 'The Great Fort in the Island of Aran, Hib.' but the two-rampart plan and most of the measurements given correspond to Dún Eochla. The area of the inner fort is described as '60 paces in circuit' implying a diameter of just over 19 paces. Since the pace in question was certainly the geometric pace (the distance between successive stationary positions of the same foot) which like the ancient Roman pace was about 5 feet, the actual diameter indicated is about 96 feet (29m). The outer rampart is described as being 'in circumference about a hundred paces distant from the inward walk, in some places about 12 yards'. The distance between the two ramparts at Dún Eochla does vary from about 30 feet (9m) to just over 100 feet (30m); presumably the figure of 100 paces is an error.
 57. According to O'Donovan in 1839 the wall was 16 feet (4.80m) high on the east, the lower terrace was 7 feet 9 inches (2.30m) below the top of the rest of the wall, the two divisions of which were of equal height. This terrace was 7 feet (2.13m) above the floor of the fort and 2 feet 6 inches (0.76m) wide. On the west the wall was 13 feet (3.96m) high. Most of the 1700 measurements are broadly similar: the lower wall was 'not above 2 yards high and 2 foot broad at the top'; the second terrace (the top of the wall in O'Donovan's time) was 'about 4 yards high'. However 'the wall was higher than this walk but at present it is demolished, and is at present about 8 yards high save at the entrance'. Such a height (24 feet or 7.30m) may perhaps be an overestimation bearing in mind the maximum height of 5.5m recorded for the inner rampart at Dún Aonghasa.
 58. Noted by Windele in 1854 who described it as 'a great circular pile of stones, the debris of its cloghan now made up regularly by the adjacent light-house people' (RIA. Ms. 12 K 27, f. 524).
 59. Named after Conchúir the legendary brother of the no less legendary Aonghas. Brief published accounts in Dunraven (1875), Westropp (1895) and (1902). The earliest useful description is by O'Donovan in the Ordnance Survey letters (1839). Wakeman drew a fanciful reconstruction (Wood-Martin 1902, Vol. 1, 317; note 35 above).
 60. Ferguson (1853, 93) recorded that 'the outer envelope, as rising higher than either of the others, and having only its own thickness to oppose to the elements, has fallen all round Dun Conor to the level of the second, and in some places below it; so that what formerly constituted the upper *banquette* behind the parapet, now forms the top of the rampart'. He also notes several tiers of steps to both *banquettes* or terraces but does not record their location. According to O'Donovan steps on the north led to the lower terrace with a lateral flight from there to the upper terrace; there was a similar flight on the north-west and a vertical flight to the lower terrace on the west. Dunraven (1875, 7 and plan) also records lateral flights on the west, north and north-east.
 61. Ferguson (1853, 93) also noted the remains of stone huts and thought he saw traces of chambers in the wall of the fort but admitted 'the discoloration of the loose materials renders this a very uncertain speculation'.
 62. Dunraven (1875, 7) claims to have found a narrow doorway in it on the south-east and compared it to that in the outer rampart of Dún Eochla and the middle rampart of Dún Aonghasa.
 63. O'Donovan records the remains of an ancient house or clochan (about 8m by 4m) some 50 paces to the north of the sub-rectangular outwork. Today only an irregular mass of stones can be traced.
 64. Dún Fearbhaí 'is named from the area, An Fhearbhaich, and is also called An Mothar (which is still the usual Co. Clare word for an old fort or cattle enclosure) whence the name of the village below' (Robinson 1980).
 65. Macalister (1949a, 281; also 1935, 58); it is interesting to note that in the 1920s, before the Second World war, he thought tales of Fir Bolg refugees to be highly improbable (1921, 268; 1928, 170).
 66. 'In the scheme of *Leabhar Gabhála* [The Book of Invasions] all that has preceded is merely by way of leading up to the advent of the Sons of Míl, whose descendants, the Gaels, were henceforth to be the dominant people of Ireland. The scholastic provenance of the account of this invasion is obvious: the Sons of Míl came to Ireland from Spain because it was believed that *Hibernia*, the Latin name for Ireland, was derived from *Iberia*, while their father's name *Mil Espaine* is simply the Latin *miles Hispaniae*, "soldier of Spain" in Irish dress' (MacCana 1970, 64). See also McCone (1990, 69ff) who argues that the story of the *Fir Bolg* is broadly based on the tale of the partly subjugated Canaanites of the Old Testament.
 67. Harbison (1968).
 68. Harbison (1971).
 69. Etienne Rynne (1991 and 1992) has argued that Aran forts like Dún Aonghasa were primarily ceremonial centres. See Long (1992).
 70. MacNeill (1923, 305). Kelly (1988, 30).
 71. This enclosure was recorded by Kinahan (1866, 28, no. 28) who noted that it was then called 'The Doon'. He also recorded the lintelled doorway but did not realise it was part of an annex; this door is of dry masonry construction with one lintel slab. It is 96cm wide and 1.25m deep.

72. The name Baile na mBocht was given to an indefinite parcel of land hereabouts in 1590 (Goulden 1953).
73. Kinahan 1866, who recorded the name 'Baile na Sean': village of the ancient ones.
74. Mason (1938).
75. Waddell (1988).
76. First described and illustrated by Petrie (1845) who visited it in 1821 but overlooked by O'Donovan and not marked on the O.S. first edition.
77. From *Iter Hibernicum*, a picaresque, poetic account of Ireland written in 1675, as quoted by Aalen (1966).
78. Leask (1943).
79. Piggott (1954). The Achill huts are believed to be 'booley houses' associated with the practice of transferring cattle to summer pastures. See also McDonald (1992, 145).
80. It has been claimed (in Gosling 1994) that Clochán na Carraige is 'probably of 17-18th century date'. It should be noted, however, that in 1684 Roderic O'Flaherty recorded that 'They have Cloghans, a kind of building of stones layd one upon another, which are brought to a roof without any manner of mortar to cement them; some of which cabins will hold forty men on their floor; so antient that no body knows how long agoe any of them were made' (Hardiman 1846, 68). If stone roofed huts were still used as dwellings in the 17th century O'Flaherty would probably have said so.
81. First briefly described by O'Donovan in the Ordnance Survey letters who just gives general dimensions and notes opposing doorways; the roof of the northern one was 'half collapsed' in 1839.
82. Kinahan (1867) plate VI, figs. k and l. Two short stone walls now forming a sort of forecourt to the northern door are not figured in Kinahan's sketch and are presumably recent.
83. Kinahan's 1867 sketch shows the north door and window; the roof is partly collapsed. In 1972 much of the exterior of the southern wall had also collapsed and it was not possible to ascertain whether two stone-built openings on either side of the site of the door were windows or wall niches. The clochan had been rebuilt by 1984, a southern door constructed and these openings presented as small windows. Two of Kinahan's drawings of the Eoghanacht clochans were reproduced by Brash (1875, 150).
84. Goulden (1955).
85. Ryan (1931); Hughes (1966).
86. Conroy (1870); Scantlebury (1926).
87. Miraculous stone boats are not as rare as one might suspect: legend and topography are scrutinised by Tim Robinson (1986) in his superb account of his circuit of the island.
88. The use of large stones in ancient structures in Greece and southern Italy was attributed to the legendary race of Cyclopes – hence the architectural term. An 1839 sketch in the Ordnance Survey letters and a photograph taken in the 1860s in Dunraven (1875, pl. xli), republished in Powell (1984, 36) and Manning (1985) show that the church is unchanged.
89. Manning (1985, 117): 'the remainder of the church is a late or post-medieval reconstruction which was probably carried out as late as 1666 when Sir Morogh O'Flaherty of Bunowen was buried within it ... For a similar use of an early church as a monastery chapel compare Temple Dowling at Clonmacnoise, which according to a plaque over the door was rebuilt for this purpose by Edmund Dowling in 1689 ...'.
90. Petrie (1878, 18) noted 'in the list of saints given by Colgan, March 22, as belonging to the family of St. Enda of Aran, there is mention made of the father of Flann Febhla, Archbishop of Armagh, who was named Scandlan', and guessed that 'it is not unlikely that this Scandlan, of the same race as Enda, was buried in the church dedicated to this saint in Aran. He died, it may be presumed, in the seventh, or the beginning of the eighth century. The death of his son Flann, is entered by the Four Masters in the year 704, and in the Chronicon Scotorum at A.D. 702'. Also published by Macalister (1949, 5) and Higgins (1987, 153, 383).
91. A number of instances of the name Sanctán are recorded as in Cell Sanctáin or Kilsantel, Co. Antrim (MacNeill 1938) but none are likely to be connected with the Cill Éinne inscription. Also published by Henry (1940, 53), Macalister (1949, 5) and Higgins (1987, 288).
92. Manning (1985).
93. See Henry (1970, fig. 13, 137) who illustrates most, but not all, of the cross.
94. The cementing of the sides of the three fragments to the wall in Teaghlach Éinne has served to obscure some decoration.
95. See Manning (1985) and references therein. The church at Kilbannon, Co. Galway, may be dedicated to the same individual who is commemorated in the first station on the pilgrims' climb of Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo (Harbison 1991) which is traditionally known as Leacht Mhionnáin, St. Benignus' Monument, where several *deiseal* prayerful circuits are made.
96. Charcoal in the mortar of the church has been radiocarbon dated to about the 11th century AD: Berger (1992, 883). For the CARI inscription see Higgins (1987, 151).
97. Manning (1985).
98. O'Donovan may have mistaken these remains for those of two buildings in 1839. He is the first person to record the existence of a six foot high cross slab some 40 paces to the south-west of this church.
99. Haddon and Brown (1893, 818).
100. For the name atharla see Goulden (1953). O'Donovan records an elder tree growing in the centre of the enclosure and notes that there was a well here called Tobar Rónáin.
101. The east window is illustrated in Barry (1886, 491, fig. 2).
102. Wood-Martin (1902), Vol. II, 240.
103. Macalister (1922).
104. The cross-inscribed slabs and fragments have been published by Higgins (1987): nos. 1-7 here are respectively his nos. 91, 98, 56, 57, 54, 110 and 32.
105. Ordnance Survey letters, p. 159.
106. The cross-inscribed stones here numbered 1-6 have been published by Higgins (1987), nos. 22, 27, 21, 15, 48 and 23 respectively.
107. Dunraven (1875, 82) notes that Petrie recorded this tradition. The church has been slightly restored: it was a little more ruined in the early 19th century: Dunraven, pl. XLII.
108. It has been 'partially restored' according to Barry (1886, 491). The convexity of the north wall was noted by Dunraven. For the cross-inscribed slabs see Higgins (1987), nos. 36, 40, 41, 77 and 84.
109. Haddon and Browne (1893, 822); they also record a plain 'holed-stone' near this 'well'.
110. Killanin and Duignan (1967, 60). For sacred trees: see Lucas (1963).
111. O'Donovan (1839).
112. Haddon and Browne (1893, 818).
113. The story is recorded in Synge's *The Aran Islands*.
114. A radiocarbon determination from charcoal in the mortar: Berger (1992, 884).
115. Leask (1955, Vol. 1, 66) has

- published a small plan and a sketch by Westropp.
116. Crawford (1923, 99). A horse is likely: there is a carving of a somewhat similar sway-backed horse (with rider) in Inishmaine Abbey, Co. Mayo (see *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 35, 1905, 7, fig.).
 117. Higgins (1987, 119, no. 94).
 118. Petrie (1845, 449) and (1972, 250).
 119. Higgins (1987, no. 14).
 120. Waddell (1976).
 121. Waddell (1973). It is thought that the use of the name 'The Seven Churches' may reflect a belief that the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse were represented.
 122. An early church now named Carntemple at Noughaval is probably Breacan's foundation: Westropp (*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 22, 1900, 103, 147).
 123. O'Sullivan (1983). The meaning of some words in the poem (like Cláiringneach) is not clear.
 124. Higgins (1987, 145, no. 80). When Petrie first saw this slab in 1821 it was broken but complete. He recorded that it had been found in the early years of the 19th century 'within a circular enclosure known as St. Breacan's tomb, at a depth of about six feet, on the occasion of its being opened to receive the body of a distinguished and popular Roman Catholic ecclesiastic of the county of Galway, who made a dying request to be buried in this grave' (1845, 140). There is no circular enclosure visible today and there is some confusion as to which leaba or grave plot is actually Breacan's grave. To compound the confusion, the 1898 six-inch Ordnance Survey map distinguishes between St Breacan's Bed and his grave but does not clearly indicate their locations: according to O'Donovan in 1839 the grave was located near the remains of a house to the south-east of the church, according to Dunraven (1875) and Westropp (1895) Breacan's Bed lay west of the church with the shaft of a high cross standing at one end (this is the West Cross and Leaba an Spioraid Naoimh), and according to Robinson (1980) Breacan's grave is to be tentatively identified with a rectangular grave plot south-east of the church marked by several slabs including one inscribed VII ROMANII (yet Petrie appears to differentiate between this grave of the 'Seven Romans' and that of the elusive St Breacan). Robinson locates Leaba Bhreacáin some distance to the south (where the South Cross now lies). The identification of both grave and leaba in Waddell (1973) rests mainly on the fact that the inscribed Breacan grave slab was located at this spot in 1972 (where it was quite obscured by vegetation) and was sufficiently heavy not to be easily transported from one location to another. It was there in the last century too (Macalister 1895).
 125. Macalister (1949, 7, no. 538) read the inscription as ORAIT AR ANMAIN SCANDLAIN. Petrie (1845, 22) thought the name was SEMBLAIN. Higgins (1987, 143, 324, no. 50) suggests both SCANDLAIN and SCANDLAN.
 126. Haddon and Browne (1893, 819).
 127. Macalister (1913). One commentator (Ganly 1886) takes six pages of print to say that nothing is known of the 'Seven Romans'. Higgins (1987, 143).
 128. In the *Passio* of Aelfric and in the *Leabhar Breac*. It must be noted that almost all versions of the tale of the Seven Sleepers refer to *Septem dormientes*, calling them sleepers rather than Romans. However, one north European version recounted by the 8th century Paul the Deacon does refer to them as 'Romani'. See M. Huber, *Die Wanderlegende von den Siebenschläfern*, Leipzig, 1910, and E. Honigsmann, *Patristic Studies*, Vatican City, 1953.
 129. Higgins (1987, 147, no. 85).
 130. Higgins (1987, 149, no. 92).
 131. In 1821 on the occasion of Petrie's first visit, this slab was located in the church Teampall Bhreacáin and was recorded there by Crawford (1913, 154). A photograph in Ó Domhnaill (1930, facing p. 168) shows only three slabs at the grave plot, two erect and one recumbent (presumably the CRONMAOIL slab). See also Scantlebury (1926, plates on p. 20 and 23).
 132. Various possible locations; Waddell (1973) for older references; Robinson (1980).
 133. Waddell (1973) and (1981); Harbison (1992a, 169) and references.
 134. Harbison (1991, 52).
 135. Anon (1886, 196). For the story of Ultan and his shrine see A. Campbell (1967), *Aethelwulf — De Abbatibus*: an early 9th century poem by a Northumbrian monk.
 136. Robinson (1986, 22).
 137. An 1839 sketch in the Ordnance Survey letters shows that this simple church had a pointed doorway in its north wall and a narrow window in the east wall.
 138. Ó Domhnaill (1930, 202).
 139. A date suggested by radiocarbon dating a sample of mortar: Berger (1992).
 140. Mason (1938, 199).
 141. Westropp (1895).
 142. Leask (1955, 73). Mortar from the earlier part of the church suggests a date in the 11th century: Berger (1992).
 143. Hedderman (1917).
 144. From a drawing kindly supplied by W. Walsh. For references to the *flabellum* see Higgins (1987, 109).
 145. Mason (1938), 198, pl. xx, fig. 1) shows it intact. Higgins (1987 no. 82, pl. 26B) shows it broken.
 146. Robinson (1990, 28).
 147. There is a fine aerial photograph in Daly (1975, 75), reproduced in Powell (1984, 20) Dunraven (1875, 15) implies the two enclosing walls were visible in the 1880s.
 148. Anon (1887). *The Irish Builder* 1st February, 45 (these are note of a visit made in 1877).

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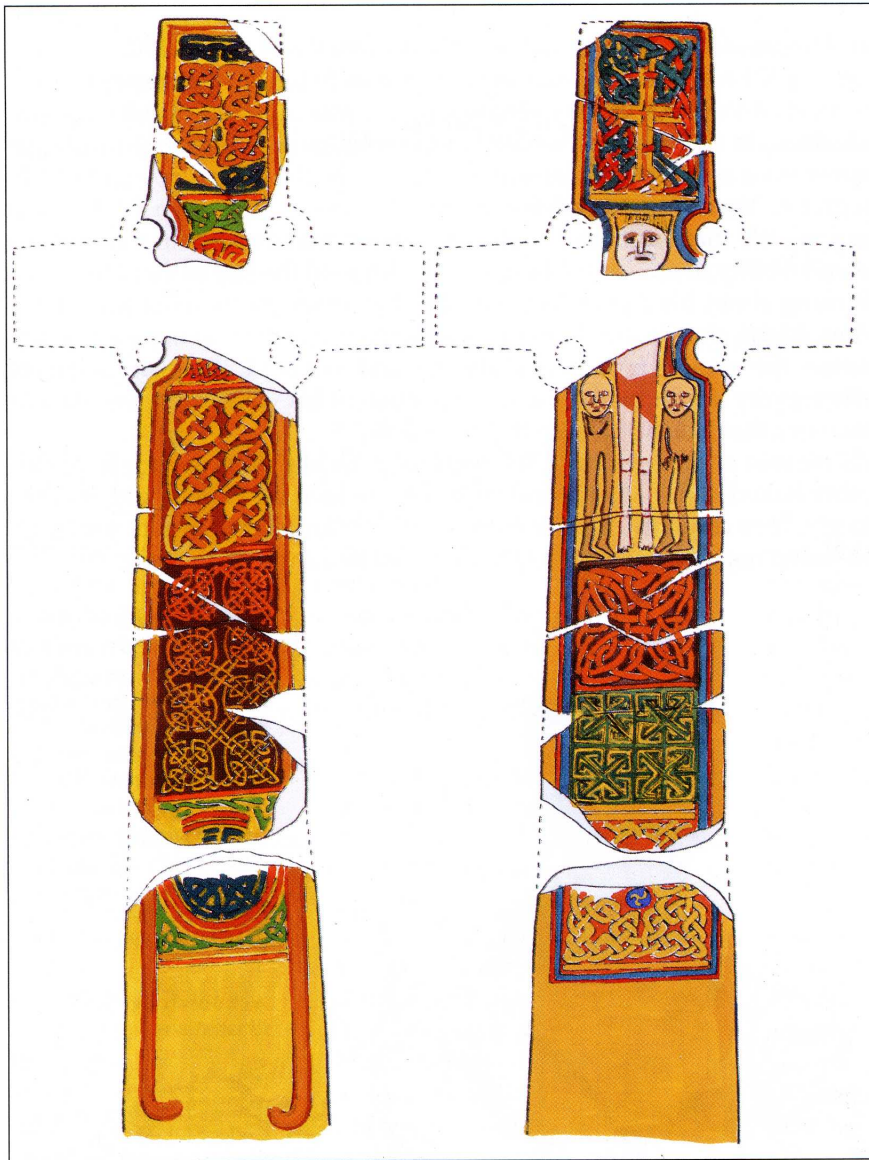
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*Illus. 16.1. North Cross at Teampall Bhreacáin, Inis Mór.
Reconstruction by Anne Korff and John Waddell.*