

OGAM STONES IN SLIGO AND THEIR CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: Fieldwork by two members of Sligo Field Club has led to the identification of two ogam stones at Corkagh Beg, the first so far identified with certainty in Co. Sligo. This paper discusses these new discoveries in the light of the ogam stones from north Connacht.

In the current national catalogue of Irish ogam stones (Macalister 1945) there are no ogam stones listed for County Sligo. In October 1976, however, Jack Flynn, the newly appointed Chief Agriculture Officer for Sligo and member of Sligo Field Club, learned from Micheal Noone of Beltra, Instructor in Agriculture, of the existence of a cross-marked pillar¹ on a ringfort on Seamus Gilligan's land at Corkagh Beg in the parish of Templeboy, some miles west of Ballisodare, Co. Sligo. Together they examined the stones and accepted the cross pillar as a genuine monument. Soon afterwards Flynn brought archaeologist and member of Sligo Field Club Martin A. Timoney to the site. Timoney remarked in his notebook entry for that site visit on 16th October 1976 that one of the long prostrate pillarstones had five notches on it, but ogam was not suggested, at least not in the notebook. The second stone did not even get a mention. Naggng doubts led to some return visits but it was not until 5th June 1983 that a small group of Sligo Field Club members, Timoney, Flynn, Des Smith, Aodhán O'Higgins and Brían Ó Súilleabháin, properly cleared the stones to a get a good look at them, to do rubbings and to photograph them. The sandstone pillarstone seemed to have ten letters, seven, two and one. Brían Ó Súilleabháin suggested that one word seemed to be the word ICNAS and, based on this, Aodhán O'Higgins argued that it might be a reference to the father of St Patrick's disciple, Brón mac Icne otherwise known as Bishop Brón of Kilaspugbrone. The second ogam stone at Corkagh Beg was again rejected at this stage as being dubious. Research by Timoney continued for some years, with encouragement including a site visit by Colm Lankford. Other possible Sligo

ogam stones, Church Island in Lough Gill and an odd ogam-like addition to a cross-in-circle on a pillarstone at Kilturra, were re-considered. In May 2002, Pat O'Brien of Sligo Field Club drew attention to O'Rorke's citation of a nineteenth-century tradition that ogam characters were said to exist on the buried end of the pillarstone known as *Clogh an Easpuig* on the ecclesiastical site at Killeran, though O'Rorke gives Kilellin, Ballydawley, just north of Ballygawley village, Co. Sligo (O'Rorke II, 247).

Timoney told me of the Corkagh Beg stones in May 2002 after which I visited the stones in the company of Dr. Colmán Etchingham of NUI Maynooth and Timoney was kind enough to send me his records of the stones. In the following paper, the discussion of the Corkagh Beg and Church Island stones draws extensively on Timoney's accumulated research file including exchanges of letters with Siobhán de hÓir of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and Professor Próinséas Ní Chatháin of University College, Dublin. My own contribution is to place these monuments within the context of other ogam stones, both the national corpus in general and more specifically those from north Connacht. A list of the north Connacht stones is given in the appendix.

THE OGAM ALPHABET

The Ogam alphabet was the invention of an Irishman at some point during the period of the Roman Empire. It was developed by somebody acquainted with the Latin alphabet and was designed to represent the sounds that were then current in Irish. Our earliest records of this alphabet are to be found on stones, generally 1m to 2m in length with Ogam letters being inscribed along the edges of the monuments. On linguistic criteria, these stones are dated to approximately the fifth to mid-seventh century A.D.

On the stones, the alphabet consisted of

nineteen letters as illustrated in figure 1. Laying the alphabet out in this fashion, makes it fairly clear that the original inventor of the Ogam alphabet produced 4 groups of 5 letters: one to five strokes to the right of the edge, one to five strokes to the left, one to five diagonal strokes crossing the edge and one to five strokes in the centre. It is important to stress, however, that it

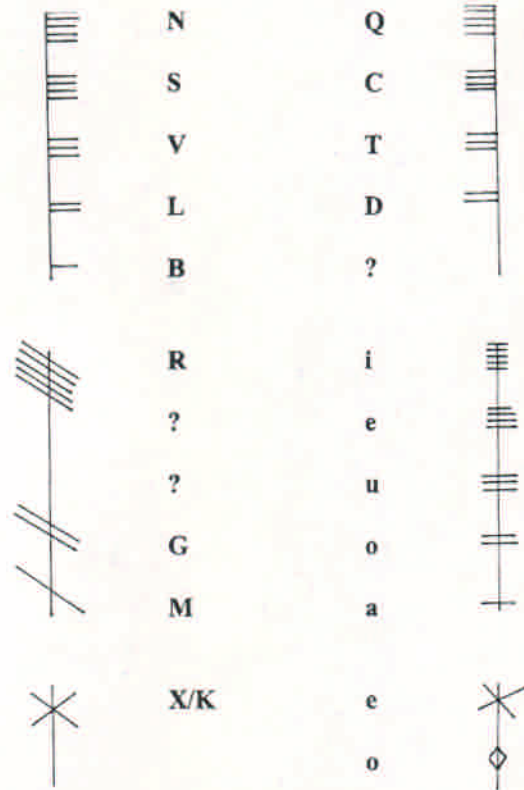


Fig. 1. The Ogam alphabet symbols

is not the *original* Ogam alphabet which we have on the stones but a modification of it. Two symbols do not appear to be used on the stones (McManus 1986, 25): one stroke to the left and four diagonal strokes crossing the edge.² Looking at the layout of the alphabet, it seems clear that these letters must once have existed for if the inventor was creating symbols for a mere 18 letters, he would surely not have had symbols of one, two and five diagonal strokes whilst skipping the 4-stroke symbol and, possibly, the 3-stroke figure. In addition, there are additional letters, known as *forfeda*, which do not fit into the scheme of 4 groups of 5, and these *forfeda* had been introduced before the creation of our earliest stones.³ In the period of the stone carvings, the most common *forfeda* consisted of two diagonal strokes cutting the edge >< which can be either a consonant X (approximately 14 examples) or a vowel (11 examples, confined to Cork and Kerry) (McManus 1991, 79). It seems

logical, therefore, that there is some gap in time between the invention of the alphabet and its appearance on the stones.

The alphabet is used on the stones to carve personal names which invariably are in the genitive case, *i.e.*, belonging to person X. What exactly belonged to the individual is not always specified; there is one category of approximately twenty inscriptions which begin with the word ANM 'name belonging to X'. Another inscription, written in the Latin alphabet rather than Ogam but apparently belonging to the same period, begins LIE or 'stone belonging to X' (McManus 1991, 51). In the cases where no possession is specified, the two alternatives generally canvassed are burial marker or memorial of X or, conceivably, land or territory belonging to X (Plummer 1923).

After the stones ceased to be produced, medieval Irishmen continued to be interested in the Ogam alphabet and further modifications were introduced over time. Versions of the alphabet occur in ninth-century Irish manuscripts now in Berne and in Saint Gall, Switzerland, as well as in the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster* and in the later grammatical tracts *In Lebor Ogaim*, 'The Book of Ogam', and *Auraicept na nÉces*, 'The Scholar's Primer'. In these various manuscript sources, the alphabets all vary, with a number of different symbols being used and different meanings attached to the same symbols. Exactly why medieval Irishmen continued to modify the Ogam alphabet in this way is not absolutely clear but the existence of these many later medieval versions explains why modern scholarship is not consistent in its rendition of the alphabet. (Compare for example, the version of the alphabets published in the Dingle Archaeological Survey (Cuppage 1986, 248) with that published for the neighbouring barony of Iveragh (O'Sullivan & Sheehan 1996, 240)). From the point of view of archaeologists, however, the important thing to note is that these manuscript versions of ogam symbols all differ in certain key respects from the ogam alphabet found on the stones.

THE DATING OF OGAM STONES

Because stone is an inorganic substance, we cannot date it with any of the newly developed scientific dating techniques such as radiocarbon dating or dendrochronology. Thus the only dates which archaeology can provide for ogam stones is through excavating and dating the context in which they are found. The majority of ogam stones, however, were found in the

nineteenth century long before the advent of scientific archaeology. Furthermore, when they were found, the vast bulk of the stones were discovered in secondary contexts, where they had been used as building stones and lintels, built into souterrains, ringforts, churches, outhouses and other structures. Of the stones which may have been in their original context when found, seven were found on a sandy knoll, known as Cill Mhic Uíleáin, on the south shore of Smerwick harbour. A sandstorm in the late eighteenth century exposed the stones, in addition to a further possible ogam fragment, a cross-inscribed stone, a number of graves and quantities of bone. The ogams appear to have been set out in a rough semi-circle on top of the mound and there were the ruins of several houses apparently between the mounds and the sea (Cuppige 1986, 250-251). Another stone, which commemorates a priest, was found at the elevated gap between Mount Brandon and Masatiompan, on the Dingle peninsula, apparently buried upright in peat (Macalister 1945, 140-141). Both of these discoveries appear to imply that the stones were erected by a society which had some knowledge of Christianity and this suggestion is strongly supported by the overall distribution of ogam stones. Fionnbarr Moore has shown that the largest category are the one hundred and thirty three stones which come from sixty-five ecclesiastical sites; these can be compared with the one hundred and thirty ogam stones built into forty-five souterrains, fourteen ogams from mounds or small enclosures, seven from stone rows and three from ringforts (Moore 1998, 23). There are also a number of ogam stones which are carved with crosses where the crosses appear contemporary with the carving of the inscription (Swift 2001).

Other stones appear to belong to an earlier burial ritual, most particularly the stone which is located at Island, in Co. Mayo, which currently stands on a low, apparently artificial mound. This may be an Iron Age burial mound or barrow of the type found at Carrowjames in Co. Mayo, Grannagh in Co. Galway, or Rathdooney Beg in Co. Sligo (Raftery 1994, 189; Mount 1998, 21). A recent excavation of a similar barrow on Kiltullagh hill on the Roscommon-Mayo border, has produced two centrally located inhumations with radiocarbon dates, to two standard deviations, from A.D. 410 to 675. No standing stone was found on the Kiltullagh barrow although the excavators concurred with the suggestion, made originally by H.T. Knox in 1913, that a near-by standing stone may once have been located on top of the barrow (Robinson *et al.* 2000). An earlier excavation,

around the current location of the standing stone, found an extended inhumation, running east-west from the base of the stone with the head to the west (McCormick *et al.*, 1995). This inhumation produced a carbon date, to two standard deviations, of A.D. 406-532.

The Kiltullagh evidence implies that Iron Age ring-barrows may have continued to be used for inhumations as late as the seventh century A.D. and that they were most probably still in use in the period following the adoption of Christianity. If the inhumation excavated by McCormick was intentionally located at the foot of the standing stone, this implies that burials marked by standing stones and located some 4 metres away from a ring barrow, could belong to the fifth century A.D.⁴ Thus it is possible that the standing stone, near-by ring barrow and fifth-sixth century inhumations at Kiltullagh, provide a context for the barrow at Island, which has a standing stone, carved with an ogam inscription, currently lying on its surface.

The occurrence of Iron Age and Christian burials on the one site has been found in the excavations at Ballymacaward, in the parish of Kilbarron, in Co. Donegal. Here the primary monument was a cairn, possibly of Bronze Age date, which was subsequently augmented by a level layer of stones, charcoal and cremated bone. This extension appears to date to the second or first century B.C. Five slab-lined graves were then inserted into the monument in the fifth century A.D. whilst other inhumations, in unprotected graves, belonged to the seventh century A.D. (O'Brien 2000, 26-27). These seventh-century graves appear to be Christian for they lay orientated in an east-west direction with their heads to the west. No grave goods were found and at least one appears to have been buried in a shroud (Richards 1999, 174-176).

Sligo, too, has produced a cemetery containing burials of both Iron Age and Christian type, within a promontory fort at Knoxspark in Ballysadare parish. Here two cairns, between 3m and 5m diameter, contained cremation burials and were surrounded by burials in pits. These included some 51 extended inhumations, three crouched and three flexed burials. In most cases, the heads were orientated to the west or south-west. One double burial, of two adult males, apparently buried at the same time, appears to date to between the eighth and tenth centuries A.D. (Mount 1995, 78-79).

Overall, then, the archaeological evidence implies that ogam stones belong to the period of conversion when Christian burial rituals were being practised by some people in Ireland but where they had not been accepted by all (Swift

1997, 27-48). Excavation of cemeteries in the north-west suggest that Iron Age burial sites continued to be used by the Christian population in some instances and this period of overlap would seem to provide the most useful context in which to place the erection of ogam stones. More specific archaeological dating will only come about when an ogam stone is excavated in its original context. In its absence, the only method of dating left is to analyse the language found in the inscriptions. Irish is particularly well suited to this type of analysis in that it changes over time and these changes can be used to differentiate earlier versus later inscriptions.

Without going into excessive detail, the three basic linguistic divisions of the ogam corpus are entitled: pre-apocope, pre-syncope, and post-syncope (Fig. 2). Apocope is the term for the loss of the final syllable of words which is the first major development which we see on the stones. McManus dates its onset to the beginning of the sixth century although it takes some time to be accepted by all carvers. In general, however, pre-

no trace of that middle syllable are termed post-syncope and this is the type of Irish which is revealed in the earliest Irish documents of the seventh century. Thus, in summary, pre-apocope inscriptions tend to belong to the fifth century; pre-syncope inscriptions are likely to be sixth century and post-syncope inscriptions belong to the very late sixth century or early seventh century (McManus 1991, 92-7; Swift 1997, 47-69). This is an abbreviated version of a more complex process and there are complications. There is some evidence, for example, that the fifth-century style was seen as the convention which should always be used on the stones, even when the language had moved on and developed later forms. The dating of apocope and syncope involves juggling probabilities rather than precise facts and as a method, linguistic analysis cannot provide precise dates for specific stones. In the absence of archaeological data, however, this type of relative linguistic categorisation provides us with the best dating method currently available.

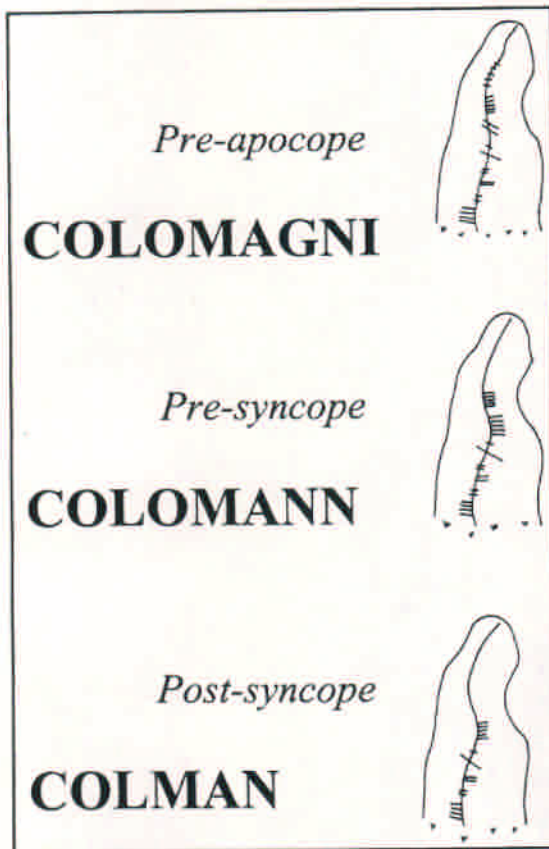


Fig. 2 - The Ogam linguistic sub-phases

apocope stones belong to the fifth century. The second big development is syncope which is the loss of a middle syllable in three-syllable words, a feature which begins around the middle of the sixth century and spreads during the second half of the sixth century. Inscriptions where there is

THE CORKAGH BEG OGAM STONES

The site of Corkagh Beg consists of an area of raised ground, possibly a raised ringfort, and a standing cross-pillar on which a Latin-style cross is carved on the western face, in the lower section of the pillar. Some fifty metres to the east are three prostrate stones which are currently embedded in the topsoil and two of these are inscribed with ogam inscriptions.

Stone 1 (figs. 3 - 6) is a rectangular stone, squared off at one end and tapering somewhat at the other. It is 1.93m in length, 0.43m wide at the squared off end and 0.32m at the other end. At the moment approximately 0.12m of the stone's depth is exposed but its current position is not original. The inscription is found on the western face, on the upper edge of the stone, beginning 0.65m from the narrower end.



Fig. 3. Corkagh Beg Ogam Stone No. 1, from the narrow end. Photo: Martin A. Timoney

The first four letters of the inscription are very clear and reading up the stone, from narrow to wide end, they read as follows:

- M (a long diagonal stroke running across the line of the edge)
- A (a tear-drop shaped notch on the upper edge)
- C (four strokes running down the western face)
- I (four clear notches along the edge with a probable fifth which has been damaged by flaking stone).

Separated by a small gap from these letters are two strokes running down the western face, shortened at the lower end by the missing flake. If complete, this would be a D; if strokes were



Fig. 4 - Corkagh Beg Ogam Stone No. 1, from the broad end.
Photo: Martin A. Timoney

missing, it could be a T, C or Q. The strokes are very worn and in 2002 we could only see two definite examples. This was also the view at the time the stone was raised in 1983, as suggested by photographs and rubbings in Timoney's research file. In Timoney's notebook of June 1983, however, he recorded a four-stroke letter C.



Fig. 5. The central part of the inscription on Corkagh Beg Ogam Stone No. 1. Photo: Martin A. Timoney



Fig. 6 - The central part of the inscription on Corkagh Beg Ogam Stone No. 1. Photo: Martin A. Timoney.

Timoney (pers. comm.) says that none of the people present in 1983 had any proper knowledge of ogam so contradictions between readings were inevitable; their next task after being certain that there was ogam at Corkagh Beg was to find someone who knew ogam and could read the inscription properly.

The section of the stone, from the letter M to the D/C was approximately 0.20 m. long. There was then a gap of approximately 0.35m followed by a single faint vowel notch (A) and two strokes running up from the edge, a putative L. Again these strokes were too shallow and worn to be positive about their identification. We saw nothing more in our visit of May 2002 and it appears that nothing more was visible at the time of the 1983 rubbing in the research file which amalgamated these two letters (AL) into a three-stroke letter V. Timoney's 1983 notebook, in contrast, records these letters as a single central stroke letter A, followed by a four-stroke letter S. The 1983 notebook reading also depicts a gap followed by a two diagonal stroke letter G and what they read as a single stroke to the left. Neither of these letters were seen by ourselves in 2002 nor in the 1983 rubbing. The single stroke to the left appears particularly doubtful as no example of this symbol is known on the stones (see above) and it seems more likely that, if this stroke exists, it is a remnant of a two, three, four or five stroke symbol to the left (D, T, C or Q). Finally, both the 1983 rubbing and Timoney's notebook records a further sequence of five vowel strokes (= I) at the top of the stone and a photograph was taken of chalk marks depicting this letter at the time.

We thus have three readings:

1983 notebook:	MACI C.... AS....G.... I
1983 rubbing:	MACI D....V...I
2002 reading:	MACI D....AL...

It has to be said that the initial word MACI is quite clear and has been read as such by ourselves, by the earlier investigators and by Professor Próinséas Ní Chatháin of the

Department of Old Irish (who was shown unchalked photographs by Martin A. Timoney from 1983). The other strokes are all debatable and the rubbing of the stone from 1983 has not clarified matters. Because of the attractiveness of the possible association with Bishop Brón, it is worth noting that no reader of the stone has found clear evidence in favour of ICNAS. The 1983 notebook reading comes closest but not only does it show no sign of the N; its reading of both the C and the AS requires us to insert strokes which were not visible to others who have examined the stone.

STONE 2 (fig. 7 - 8), lying immediately to the east of stone 1, is approximately 1.90m in length. It is 0.30m wide at its northern end and some 0.28m at the southern end. The stone is not in an original position. A small piece, roughly 0.08m by 0.05m, is missing from the southern end. The only clear part of the inscription is found on the eastern edge, 0.60m from the southern end and approximately 1m from the north. (If the inscription follows the normal arrangement of ogam stones, it should be running from the bottom of the stone and counter-clockwise around the top as it faces the reader; the reading

should therefore be from what is now the northern end.) It consists of seven clear strokes running down the eastern face; the exact length of these was difficult to determine owing to a pronounced horizontal crack, 1cm to 2cm, which cut through them. The Sligo Field Club felt these letters were dubious while in 2002, we read them as a possible two-stroke letter D, followed by a five stroke letter Q. We also thought we could detect a single possible vowel stroke with the resultant reading being A...DQ. Removing lichen from the rest of the face we came across other possible individual strokes along its length but nothing which was indisputably a letter.

The only dating evidence for either of these stones is the linguistic analysis of the word MACI on the first stone. This is the genitive case of the word for 'son', the word which later became Old Irish *maicc*. In its earliest possible form, the word was spelt MAQ(Q)I with a letter Q but during the early period of erection of ogam stones, the sound Q /k"/ fell together with the sound C /k/ in Irish so that both symbols could be used to designate the one sound. This development takes place prior to the onset of apocope and is thought to belong to the later fifth century (Jackson 1953, 139-143; Wright & Jackson 1968, 299; McManus 1991, 77; Swift 1997, 54-55). This means that the Corkagh Beg stone must, therefore, post-date this development.

At first sight, the existence of the final I in MACI suggests that the Corkagh Beg ogam stone can be closely dated, belonging to the period after the falling together of Q and C and prior to the onset of apocope when the I would have been lost. Unfortunately this is not necessarily the case. This word for 'son' is the most common word in the entire ogam corpus and perhaps, because of this, carvers of ogam inscriptions often keep the older spelling even where the rest of the inscription shows that apocope has taken place in the spoken language (McManus 1991, 81-83). This practice had largely died out by the time of the post-syncope inscriptions of the seventh century when MACI had generally become MAC or MAQ.⁵ On the other hand, if the final letter of the inscription is I as suggested by the 1983 notebook, the 1983 rubbing in the research file and the photographs taken in the 1980s, this would appear to imply that whatever the second name was, it too shows pre-apocope spelling. Overall, therefore, the



Fig. 7. Corkagh Beg Ogam Stone No. 2. Photo Martin A. Timoney.



Fig. 8. The inscription on Corkagh Beg Ogam Stone No. 2. Photo: Martin A. Timoney.

Corkagh Beg MACI stone seems to belong to the later fifth century or the sixth century and is more likely to have been erected in the earlier part of that time-scale.

From its position on the stone, it appears that the MACI stands at the beginning of the inscription. This implies that in this case the word 'mac' is not functioning here as the word for son but as the beginning of a personal name. There is a category of Irish personal names which are compounds: the first word being *mac* and the second being a divine name, the name of a tree or a word associated with trade. In these names, *mac* probably had the meaning of devotee or the like. Examples are names such as *Mac-Erce* 'devotee of the divinity Erc', *Mac-Cuilinn* 'devotee of the holly tree' or *Mac-Táil* 'devotee of the adze' (McManus 1991, 108-109). It seems probable that the Corkagh Beg inscription commemorates a name such as this.

OTHER NORTH CONNACHT OGAM STONES

The Corkagh Beg ogam stones belong to a small group of ogam stones which is isolated from the main bulk of ogam stones in the south-west of Ireland in the counties of Cork, Kerry and Waterford (Fig. 9). This north Connacht group are found in Mayo (nine possible examples of which two seem dubious), Leitrim (one example) and Roscommon (three examples), as well Sligo (two Corkagh Beg stones and a doubtful example from Church Island; see catalogue entry below). Of these, three have clear ecclesiastical associations while two other possible candidates also have ecclesiastical connections: Cloonmorris in Leitrim, found on a church site; Kilmannin, built into a church building and Kilgarvan, also found on a church site. One of the dubious Mayo examples, Dooghmakeon, is said to be carved along the edge of a standing stone bearing a large Maltese cross on the flat face. Having examined the stone, however, I could find no traces of the inscription and Macalister indicates that he was doubtful about it. The Church Island stone is built into the inside of the doorway of a ruined medieval church.

Four of these ogam stones have been found as isolated field monuments while a fifth, at Drummin in Co. Roscommon, is part of a two stone-row. Two, at Rathcroghan, were built into a dry-stone entranceway to the cave of Crúachan and a third, at Rusheens East, was found lying on a dwarf wall, surrounding a holy well. One, discussed already above, at Island in Began parish, now lies prostrate on what appears to be an Iron Age barrow.

There are two distinct sizes of ogam stones involved: nine are 2m or smaller whilst two others are 2.80m and 3.30m in height, respectively. It is probably significant that these larger stones are both found as isolated field monuments. They may represent re-used prehistoric standing stones or, perhaps, stones which had a different function from the smaller examples.

Judging by the inscriptions, the ogams of this north Connacht group were erected throughout the period these stone monuments were being produced. Five inscriptions are pre-apocope or probably fifth-century in date, including the Island stone on its barrow, the new stone from the medieval church at Kilgarvan, Rusheens East and the two inscriptions from the cave at Rathcroghan. A sixth, from Drummin in Co. Roscommon, looks to be late fifth century in that it has lost what would have been the final S (*CUNOVATOS > CUNOVATO); this is a development which occurs immediately prior to the onset of apocope (McManus 1991, 93, 176). The site of Tullaghaun has produced what looks to be a defective pre-apocope inscription; it now reads QASIGN[I] MAQ... Although there is no trace of the final I of QASIGNI today, there is a gap of the right size and it seems likely that this is also a pre-apocope inscription. These seven inscriptions of early type are concentrated in the south-eastern sub-group amongst the north Connacht stones, from the neighbouring baronies of Costello, Co. Mayo, and Castlereagh, Co. Roscommon. The exception is Kilgarvan, immediately to the east of Ballina, Co. Mayo.

The stone from Cloonmorris, in Leitrim may belong to the intermediate pre-syncope phase (approximately sixth century) for it still has the medial vowel U in QENUVEN. Careful study of the stone by Mac Neill at the time of its discovery, however, makes it clear that the edge of the stone had flaked away immediately below the N (Mac Neill 1909a, 134) so it is possible that the original inscription had more letters, indicating a pre-apocope origin. In favour of this suggestion is the fact that the initial element in the name QENU - correctly uses Q rather than the later C which replaced it. The modern Irish equivalent is *ceann* 'head' but it is known that it originally would have been spelt **qen*-paralleling the P-Celtic *penn* in Welsh (McManus 1991, 121). On the other hand, the medial U reflects the gradual weakening of this sound prior to its loss in syncope (it would originally have been an A) and this might suggest a slightly later date (McManus 1991, 117-118).

The stone from Kilmannin has both LUGADDON and LUGUDEC with no final

ending. Both words are post-apocope but both retain their medial vowel, implying a pre-syncope date. In fact, LUGADDON with its medial A never lost its medial vowel, becoming *Lugáed* in the nominative and *Lugedon* in the genitive, so this particular word is not useful for dating purposes (McManus 1991, 117). Given its association with the pre-syncope LUGUDEC, however, it seems likely that this inscription belongs to the sixth century.

A third stone from Aghaleague, with the word MAQ-ACTO has two examples of the post-apocope spelling MAQ. The associated word ACTO is likely to be a u-stem noun with a genitive ending in a long 'O'; in the case of words ending in a long 'O', the final 'O' was not lost in the process of apocope (McManus 1991, 116). On the whole, it seems likely that this stone is later sixth or early seventh century in date.

There are two other late stones (late sixth or early seventh-century), each enigmatic in their own way. Corrower has an inscription .Q CERAN on the left hand side while the second part of the inscription, on the right-hand side reads AVI ATHECETAIMIN. This last is a phrase which has been translated tentatively by Patrick Sims-Williams as 'descendant of the original rent-payers'. (Sims-Williams 1992, 50) and he would date this inscription to the very end of the ogam period, possibly as late as A.D. 700. The second late stone is the famous stone from Breastagh, in the parish of Templemurry. This too has two inscriptions but only the second is comprehensible. It reads MAQ CORRBRI MAQ AMMLLO..TT.. Here, in addition to the shortened form MAQ, the medial vowel in CORRBRI has been dropped making this a clear example of a post-syncope inscription.

Of these later stones, only the Kilmannin inscription belongs to the south-eastern subgroup in east Mayo and Roscommon. The others come from three parishes in northern Mayo: Lackan, Templemurray and Attymass while the somewhat ambiguous stone at Cloonmorris forms an outlier in the parish of Mohill in south Leitrim. It is also worth noting that these later stones are the larger of these north Connacht stones, being 2m (Aghaleague), 2.80m high (Corrower) and 3.30m high (Breastagh) respectively. The exception here again is the Cloonmorris stone which, as discussed above, is not definitely a post-apocope inscription. It is possible that these later inscriptions were thus deliberately designed to have a more monumental function than the earlier stones; that they had less of an individual grave-marker and more of a territorial boundary function. This seems particularly plausible in the case of the

Breastagh stone for Eoin Mac Neill has suggested that the final name is an earlier version of the personal name *Amlongaid*, the name used of the ruling dynasty of this area in the later seventh century, who gave their name to the barony of Tirawley (Mac Neill 1909, 332).

In terms of formulae used, six of the north Connacht inscriptions use the X MAQ[I] Y formula or 'belonging to X son of Y'. This is the most common formula on ogam stones, occurring on approximately sixty-one inscriptions in Macalister's corpus. As in the national corpus of ogam stones as a whole, this formula is used in inscriptions of all periods from the north Connacht area.

There are also two north Connacht examples of single names occurring on their own: DOTAGNI in Kilgarvan and CUNOVATO in Drummin. There are some 29 examples of these single-name inscriptions in the national corpus and their dating appears confined to the period before syncope. In other words, this fashion of single names without mentioning the father or other ancestors is a feature of the fifth and sixth-century stones. In terms of location, the two stones with this formula in north Connacht come from an early ecclesiastical site and from a two-stone row.

A third formula occurs at Island where the inscription reads X AVI Y with *avi* being the earlier form of the word *Uí* or descendant, a word which is used to describe the ruling dynasty (So, for example, you have the Uí Néill kings of Tara, descendants of Níall Noígiallach or Niall of the Nine Hostages). This is one of the rarer ogam formulae, occurring only twelve times in Macalister's corpus and, like the single names, it appears to belong to the earlier period of ogam-stone production (McManus 1991, 52, 79-80). The stone from the Island barrow, therefore, which reads CUNALEGI AVI QUNACANOS, commemorates a member of a local ruling dynasty in the fifth century.

There is no unambiguous example of a fourth formula involving the use of the word MUCOL, later *moccu*, a word which has often been translated as tribe or community (Mac Neill 1907; Charles-Edwards 2000, 96-100). It is possible, however, that the unfinished word MU... on one of the stones from Rathcroghan and the odd MO...CQU from Kilmannin may have originally represented forms of this word.

Finally, one should note that there are two, possibly three, examples of the *Mac-* names in the north Connacht group, apart from the probable example at Corkagh Beg. Of the two clear examples, the first is Aghaleague where the initial name is MAQ-ACTO while the second, at

Breastagh, is MAQ-CORRBRI. The third and less clear-cut example is perhaps the most interesting in that it appears to be (MA)Q CERAN 'devotee of Ciarán' from the site of Corrower in Attymass. It seems probable that this is a reference to St Ciarán of Clonmacnoise for Bishop Tírechán, writing of early churches in north Connacht in the later seventh century A.D., makes it clear that the community of Clonmacnoise held land in south Sligo and surrounding areas at that period (Bieler 1979, 143). All three of these MAQ(I)-names, unlike the Corkagh Beg example, show the post-apocope spelling MAQ rather than the earlier MACI.

CONCLUSIONS

The Corkagh Beg stones represent an important addition to the national corpus of Irish ogams for up until now, only the extremely doubtful example of Church Island had been found in Sligo. (The other two possibilities, from Kilturra and Killeran are even less convincing.) Corkagh Beg's location, in the parish of Templeboy, north of Skreen church, represents an easterly extension of the small group of stones already known from the hinterland of the Moy estuary. The close proximity of the Corkagh Beg stones with a cross-carved pillar also coincides with the ecclesiastical associations of three north Connacht stones: from Kilgarvan near Ballina and (further south) from Cloonmorris and Kilmannin churches.

Examination of the Corkagh Beg stones produced only one readable word: MACI although there are traces of other letters to be seen. The position of MACI at the beginning of the inscription makes it likely that here this word is being used in the sense of devotee rather than son but in the absence of the rest of the inscription, we cannot be sure of what or of whom the dead man was a devotee. The spelling of the word implies that this stone was carved in the later fifth or sixth centuries A.D.

In terms of size, the Corkagh Beg stones are on the large size for north Connacht stones, being between 1.90m and 1.93m in height. This is similar to the stone at Tullaghaun in the parish of Annagh but contrasts with the seven of the north Connacht stones which are under 1.50m in height. The tallest of these north Connacht examples are Breastagh at 3.30m high and Corrower at 2.80m. It must be remembered of course, that the Corkagh Beg stones would originally have been standing upright and thus they would have appeared somewhat shorter. In the case of the MACI stone where the inscription begins some 0.6m from the base of the stone, the

part of the stone standing above ground level may only have been 1.3m high. Given the extremely patchy evidence for stone no.2, we cannot tell how much of it was buried but the surviving letters are 1m from the base.

A date of late fifth or sixth century A.D. for at least one of the Corkagh Beg stones coincides with that of the majority of the north Connacht stones. Five of these are definitely pre-apocope or fifth-century in date; two more are probably pre-apocope and one is possibly so. These early stones tend to be found in the south-eastern subgroup of north Connacht stones, in east Mayo and Roscommon while a further possible example was located at Cloonmorris in Mohill. In addition, at least one pre-apocope stone is found near Ballina. This last stone, on the northern edge of the distribution of earlier, pre-apocope ogams from Connacht, is found on an ecclesiastical site which makes the association of the Corkagh Beg stones with a cross-carved pillar more significant. On the basis of our information to date, it is possible to speculate that Kilgarvan and Corkagh Beg may have been erected by Christian communities of the later fifth or sixth centuries A.D. Given the clear evidence that burial places such as Ballymacaward and Knoxspark continued in use from the prehistoric into the Christian period, however, this cannot be stated conclusively for it is possible that these sites only acquired Christian significance after the ogam stones were erected.

Of the early stones in the east Mayo and Roscommon group, the majority are found either in re-used contexts or as isolated field monuments but the stone from Island is found on what appears, from field survey, to be a prehistoric barrow. Its inscription makes it clear that it commemorated a man belonging to the local ruling dynasty. A second early inscription, from Drummin, appears on a two-stone row and this is a type of monument which is also found with inscriptions of early date at Rathglass in Carlow and Cotts, in Co. Wexford. Such two-stone rows may, therefore, also be Iron Age monuments on occasion although it is normally thought that stone rows are a Bronze Age phenomenon (Ó Nualláin 1988). Given these associations with monuments of prehistoric style, there is no strong evidence to associate the majority of the early east Mayo and Roscommon ogams with Christianity. On the other hand, the rather later inscription from Kilmannin, belonging to the transitional pre-syncope phase, was found built into a church while the possible pre-apocope stone from Cloonmorris, in south Leitrim, was found in a churchyard. This might

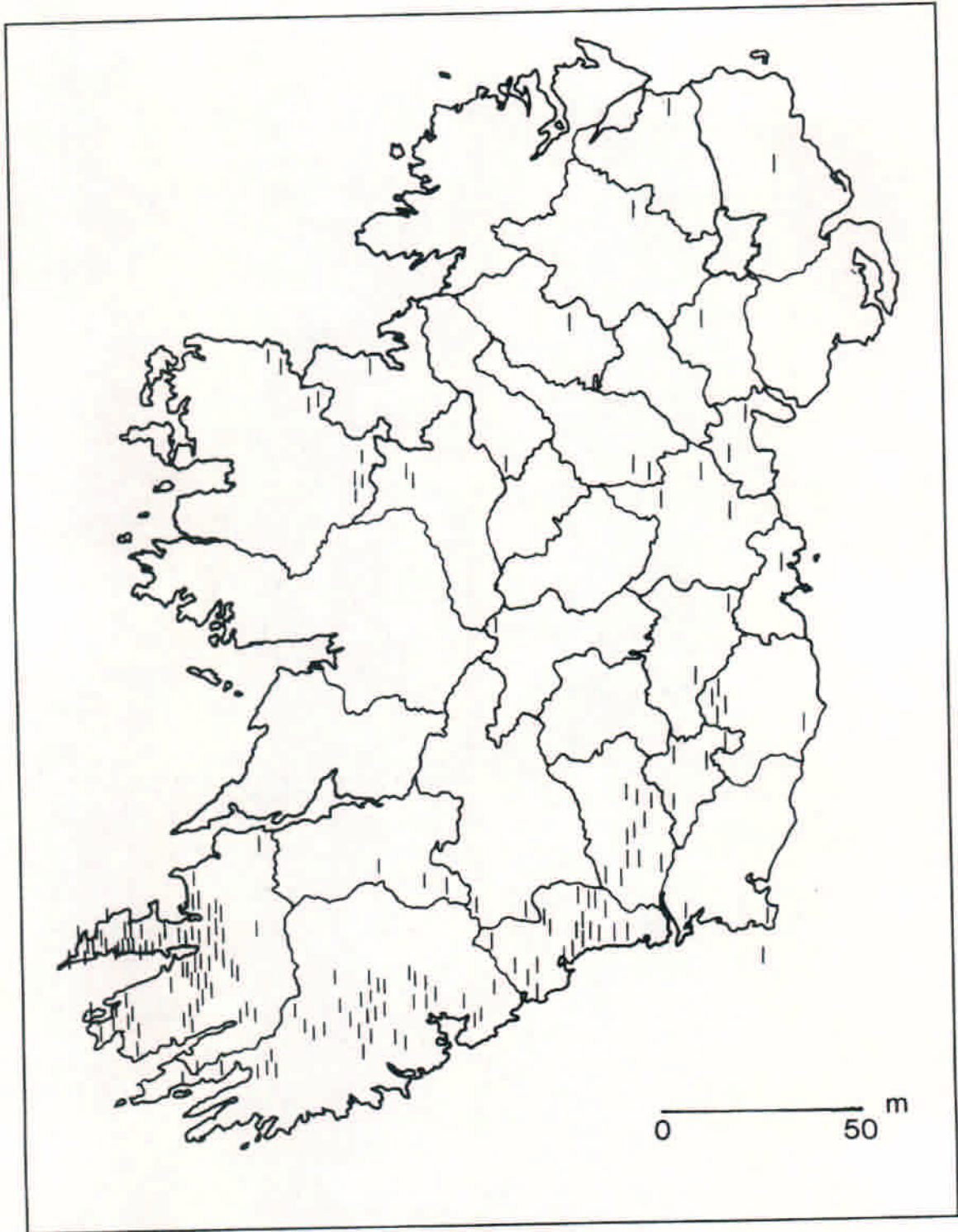


Fig. 9. Confirmed ogam sites in Ireland

imply that the custom of erecting ogam stones was introduced into the Castlereagh/Costello area when the prevailing burial mode was still a non-Christian one and it was only subsequently that ogam stones began to be erected on what became Christian sites. One could speculate, therefore, that within the broad time-frame of late fifth to sixth centuries, the Castlereagh/Costello stones are slightly earlier than the pre-apocope stones further north at

Kilgarvan and Corkagh Beg.

As already mentioned, the latest stones from north Connacht appear to be taller than the average and may have had a different function from the earlier inscriptions. It is noteworthy that in at least two cases, at Corrower and Breastagh, there are difficulties in reading parts of the inscription and that they do not appear to use the stock formulae which are the norm in the national corpus as a whole. One of the stones, at

Breastagh, may have an early version of the name *Amlongaid*, the name of the ruling dynasty which gave its name to the barony of Tirawley and this would support the theory that, in this case, we are looking at a stone which functioned as a territorial marker rather than as a simple memorial of a burial.

It must be said that the foregoing analysis is based entirely on the north Connacht stones as they are currently known. The discovery of the Corkagh Beg stones, like Gerry Cribbin's recent discovery of the stone from Kilgarvan, makes it clear that there is every possibility that more ogam stones may be found in north Connacht in the future. Some may be found through development whilst others, as in these two cases, will be found through local fieldwork. The national corpus of ogam stones was created through the enthusiasm and interest of those who found the stones on their own land and contacted the authorities; it is still the case that this is the most likely method by which our knowledge of ogam stones and their function in early Irish society will grow. In addition, it is crucial that, when such discoveries are made, subsequent interpretations concentrate on the local context in which the stones are found. No national movement or cultural change happens in the same way and at the same time throughout the country. Dealing with archaeological material on a national level alone means that inevitably one is constructing generalisations about our archaeological past and it is necessary that we move beyond this to create local histories for every part of the country. It is in this context that I offer the foregoing paper as my contribution to the valuable work of the Sligo Field Club.

APPENDIX

Ogam Stones in Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon and Sligo

Cloónmorris, parish of Mohill, Co. Leitrim; Le.037:004; Grid Ref. 20832.28526. Found marking a modern grave in front of a ruined medieval church. It is approximately 0.85m long. On the right-hand angle it reads (from the top down) as QENUVEN; on the left-hand at the bottom, there is a G, followed by a fracture and following T so that it now reads: G..T.....QENUVEN (Macalister 1945, No.2).

Island, Began parish, Co. Mayo; Ma.093:03801; Grid Ref. 14733.28070. Now lying on an barrow. It is approximately 1.58m long with an inscription running from bottom left around top and down right. It reads CUNALEGI AVI QUNACANOS (Macalister 1945, No. 3).

Kilmannin, Began, Co. Mayo; Ma.093:1045; Grid Ref. 14960.28062. Found built into the wall of an old church but now in the National Museum of Ireland. Macalister gives the townland as Kilmannia whereas it should be Kilmannin. It is approximately 1.20m long with an inscription on all four sides, consisting of two pairs, each running from bottom left, across top, and down the right hand side as they face the reader. The first pair reads LUGADDON MAQI LUGUDEC; the second inscription is less clear but has been read as DDISI MO...CQU S...EL (Macalister 1945, No.4; McManus 1991, 65).

Rusheens East, Kilmovee, Co. Mayo; Ma. 073:012; Grid Ref. 15567.29428. Found on wall surrounding a holy well and currently standing in a field, some hundreds of metres from the ruins of Kilmovee church. Macalister gives the townland as Rusheens East whereas it should be Rusheens West. It is approximately 1.20m high with inscription running up the left-hand side. It reads ALATTOS MAQI BR (Macalister 1945, No. 5).

Tullaghaun, Annagh, Co. Mayo; Ma.103:022; Grid Ref. 15402.27539. Found in a field. Macalister gives the townland as Tullaghaun whereas it should be Ballybeg. It stands some 1.95m with the inscription running up the left-hand side. It reads QASIGN[I] MAQ.; the final I of the first word being indicated only by a gap with none of the vowel strokes surviving (Macalister 1945, No. 6).

Corrower, Attymass, Co. Mayo; Ma.040:048; Grid Ref. 12946.31420. Found in a field. It stands some 2.80m high, inscribed on both angles of the north-west face, each running from bottom to top. (This type of arrangement, while not the normal one, is found elsewhere). On the left-hand side, it readsQ CERAN; on the right hand side, ..I AthECETAIMIN with the *th* being Macalister's interpretation of an anomalous symbol (Macalister 1945, No. 7).

Dooghmakeon, Kilgeever, Co. Mayo; Ma. 095:02302; Grid Ref. 07514.27845. A slab with Maltese cross found in the sandhills, some 1.30m in height. Macalister found it impossible to be certain that this was a real inscription; having

examined the stone on two occasions, I would agree that it is a very dubious example (Macalister 1945, No. 8).

Aghaleague, Lackan, Co. Mayo; Ma.014:101; Grid Ref. 11323.33512. Found in a field. It stands 2m high and the inscription is very battered. Macalister read it as MAQ-ACTO MAQ GAR... (Macalister 1945, No. 9).

Breastagh, Templemurry, Co. Mayo; Ma.015:01801; Grid Ref. 11834.33380. Found prostrate in a field. It stands nearly 3.30m high with the inscription carved on two angles). The left-hand side inscription was read by Macalister as L[E]GGSD.....LE\\GESCAD with \\ being the three diagonal stroke symbol discussed above. The right-hand inscription reads MAQ CORRBRI MAQ AMMLLO..TT, with the missing letter being a second possible example of the three diagonal stroke symbol (Macalister 1945, No. 10; McManus 1986, 22-23).

Kilgarvan, Kilgarvan parish, Mayo; Ma.040:031; Grid Ref. 13280.31611. This is a new discovery made by Gerry Cribbin in 2000 on the early ecclesiastical site of Kilgarvan. The stone is 1.40m in length with the inscription reading up the left-hand side and it reads DOTAGNI (Moore 2001).

Drummin, Kilcorkey parish, Roscommon; Ro.015:05102; Grid Ref. 17572.28727. Standing in a field. Two stones, some 1.50m apart, each standing approximately one metre tall. On one is an inscription reading CUNOVATO (Macalister 1945, No. 11).

Rathcroghan, parish of Ogulla, Roscommon; Ro.022:05830; Grid Ref. 17959.28312. Two inscriptions on lintel stones, acting as entrance porch to the natural rock-fissure known as the *Oweynagat*, the Cave of Crúachan in Glenballythomas townland. The ends of both are hidden so dimensions can not be established. One inscription, arranged in two lines, each running bottom to top, reads VRAICCI MAQI MEDVVI; the second inscription, in a single line, reads QREGAS MU..... (Macalister 1945, Nos. 12, 13).

Church Island, parish of Calry, Co. Sligo; Sl.15:09601; Grid Ref. 17483.33393. This is recorded as two or three letters by Sir Samuel Ferguson in 1887 and in more detail by Tadhg Kilgannon in 1926 (Kilgannon 1926, 179). The stone in question is some 0.45m by 0.24m by 0.12m with eight vertical ogam-like characters

inscribed across the flat of the stone rather than along the edge. There is no stem line. This arrangement of ogam characters is also found on later ogam stones such as Maumanorig on the Dingle peninsula (Cuppage 1986, 333) but it is relatively rare. The Church Island stone is built into the inner right side of an entrance door of the church. A cast was made of it in the nineteenth century by Col. W.G. Wood-Martin, the Sligo historian, and submitted to Sir R., *recte* Samuel, Fergusson, who pronounced it to be ogam characters. A group of six Sligo Field Club people, by their own admission none of them experts in ogam, who examined it on 28th August 2002 were not in the least convinced that it is ogam.

Corkagh Beg, parish of Templeboy, Co. Sligo; Sl.13:10802 & Sl.13:10803; Grid Ref. 15174.33482. Found in 1976 by Jack Flynn of Sligo Field Club but not accepted as ogam until June 1983; detailed above.

Footnotes:

1. The cross pillar is on the platform earthwork; while the two ogam stones lie to the east. There was a bullaun stone at the adjacent house to the north, but that has disappeared since the house was demolished before March 1984.

2. A third symbol, consisting of three diagonal strokes crossing the edge, occurs only on two stones and it may be being used of different sounds on each of them (McManus 1986, 19-23; Sims-Williams 1993, 146-7). The earlier of the two stones is no longer extant while the reading of the second is controversial (Macalister 1945, 289; McManus 1986, 22-3). It is for this reason, I have left the symbol of three diagonal strokes out of the discussion.

3. In the following discussion, only the stones found within Ireland are considered. A representation, thought to mean the letter 'p', may occur on the stone from Valencia Island and is also found on two stones from Wales (Sims-Williams 1992, 39). Other supplementary characters were identified by Macalister but these have been subsequently classified as doubtful (McManus 1991, 79).

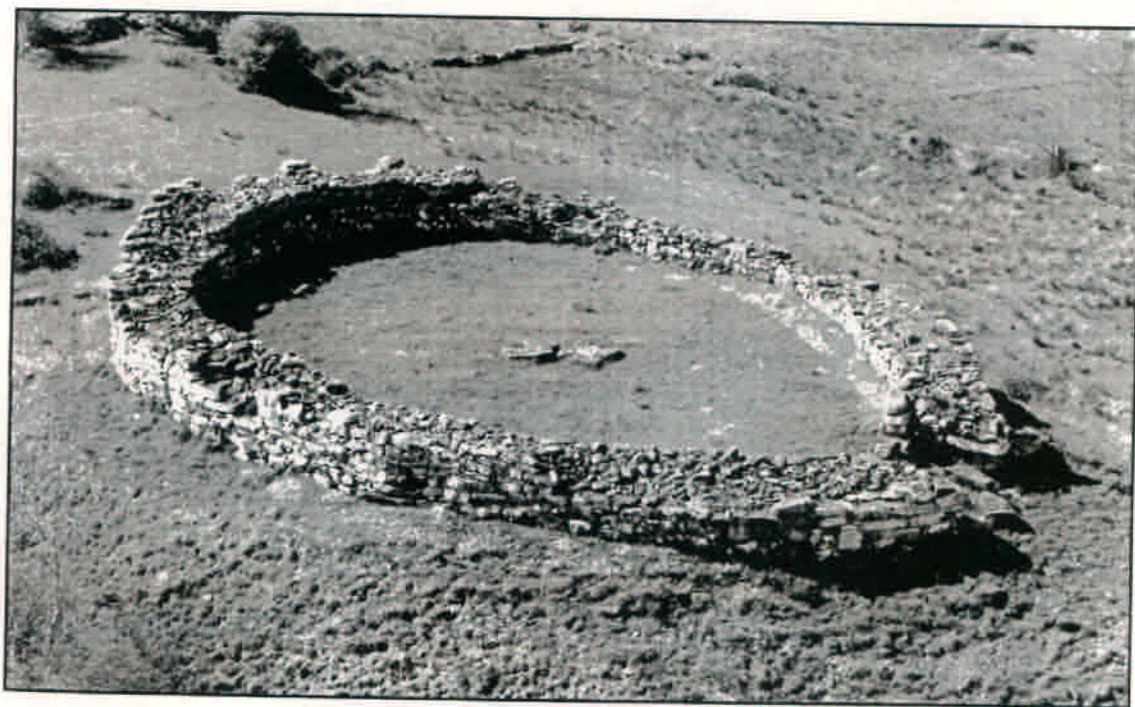
4. The argument that the standing stone may originally have been located on the barrow rather than in association with the burial excavated by McCormick *et al* in 1994, appears based on a) Knox's suggestion and b) the discovery of fragments of sandstone in the central depression of the barrow. The standing stone is also of sandstone, a stone not local to the hilltop itself but found 3 km away. The excavators in 1994, some of whom also took part in the excavation published in 2000, did not find Knox's suggestion convincing (McCormick *et al*. 1995, 95).

5. The relevant stones are those with MACI (CIIC Nos. 76, 94, 121, 137, 187, 235, 267); MAC (CIIC Nos. 83, 90, 127, 256); MAQ (CIIC Nos. 7, 9, 10, 55, 112, 145, 219, 220, 233, 248, 364, 409, 506).

6. *indicates a form that is not attested but has been reconstructed by historical linguists.

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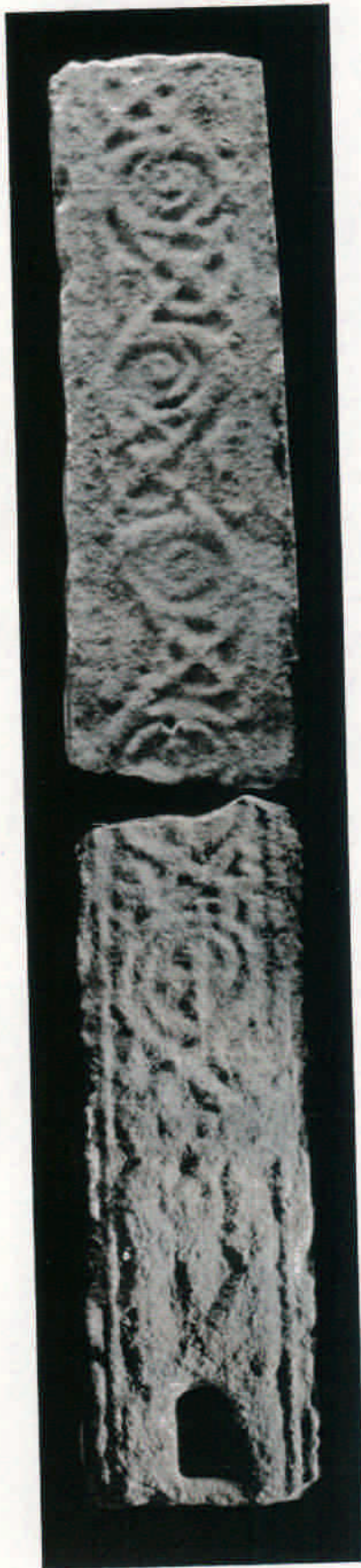
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Cashelore, Ballintogher, Co. Sligo. Photo: Dúchas - The Heritage Service.



Some Sligo Stones



a.



b.



d.

c.

- a. Stone with pre-historic art from Mrs. Chambers' School at Cloverhill, Co. Sligo, now in Sligo Museum
- b. Early Christian slab from Keelty, Co. Sligo; recovered from the Dusseldorf area of Germany thanks to the diligence of several Sligo Field Club members
- c. Two matching sections of shaft of a major high cross exposed within the Church of Ireland church at Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo
- d. "The Elinora Butler Countess of Desmond Stone", found at the Denney's Bacon Factory site, Quay St., Sligo.