Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society

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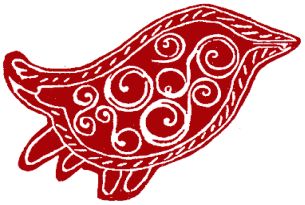

Title: Review: "Making and meaning in insular art: proceedings of the fifth international conference on insular art held at Trinity College Dublin, 25-28 August 2005", ed. Rachel Moss (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007)

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the background rationale for dealing with the archaeology of these road schemes.

These summary publications are, of course, to be welcomed, but it has to be recognised that they constitute only the tip of the iceberg of the data that has been recovered on these schemes. The official term is that the sites have been 'preserved by record'; the reality is that they have been excavated and no longer exist. The full publication of the most important of the sites is not negotiable, and all the final reports need to be made available in a form which can be accessed and interrogated by everyone who is interested in Ireland's past.

Elizabeth Shee Twohig

Rachel Moss, ed. *Making and Meaning in Insular Art. Proceedings of the fifth international conference on Insular art held at Trinity College Dublin, 25-28 August 2005*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007. Pp. 352. €65. ISBN 978-1-8518298-6-6.

This richly-illustrated volume contains most of the papers delivered at the fifth international conference on Insular art, held at Trinity College Dublin in August 2005. The inaugural conference of the series, held at University College Cork in 1985, as part of the Royal Irish Academy's bicentennial commemorations, was followed by conferences in Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff. The Dublin conference was organised by Rachel Moss, lecturer in medieval art and architecture in the Irish Art Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, who also both expertly edited and contributed a paper to the volume under review.

The various contributions provide a rich and thought-provoking overview of the development of Insular art, over the period 500-1200. While some papers revisit subject matter addressed at the first conference, others reveal new approaches and benefit from technical progress made in the meantime. As might be expected, the papers are mainly concerned with the artwork of stone crosses, metalwork and manuscripts, supplemented by studies of church architecture.

In his paper 'Artistic identity and the Irish scripture crosses', Roger Stalley pinpoints some characteristic features of Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice which enable him to identify other examples carved by the same master. New laser scanning technology enables Conor Newman and Niamh Walsh to explore the iconography of the possibly seventh-century slab at Carndonagh, Co. Donegal, whose marigold decoration can now be seen as representing complex references to the doctrine of the cross. Peter Harbison explores the manner in which classical tradition influenced the depiction of animals on Irish high crosses, many of which can be traced back to the Physiologus Bestiary, although Rome appears to have been the ultimate source for most of the representations. Animal ornament on a rediscovered portion of a Pictish cross slab is also discussed by Isabel Henderson, while Nancy Edwards examines similarities between the Early Medieval sculpture of south Wales and Ireland, pointing to the importance of cultural, religious and political contacts across the Irish Sea. Gifford Charles-Edward's paper on the 'Insular display capitals and their origins' draws on evidence from stone and manuscript sources, indicating the loss of much valuable material made of wood.

Metalwork receives due attention. Lawrence Nees discusses the transmission of the influences at work on the Sutton Hoo belt mounts, with particular reference to the need for further enquiry into Frankish and Italian models. Mark A. Hall places some recently discovered fragments from Perthshire in their topographical and historical contexts. Anna Gannon examines Anglo-Saxon zoomorphic pins and shows that even diminutive objects can throw light on the culture of which they form part. Niamh Whitfield discusses motifs and techniques of filigree, tracing the Insular examples back to Classical filigree and late Roman animal ornament. Griffin Murray contributes a paper on the characteristics and distribution of the impressive corpus of Insular-type crosiers, particularly of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and identifies a number of work-shops within Ireland. Paul Mullarkey discusses the figural iconography of the *Soiscéal Molaise* and Stowe Missal book shrines, two of eight surviving from Ireland. As some of the

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shrines' panels are now missing, a coherent iconographical programme is difficult to establish. The symbols of the four Evangelists on the front of the *Soiscéal*, although widespread in Irish manuscripts, rarely appear in stone sculpture, and Mullarkey suggests that they were based on a manuscript of eighth- to ninth-century date..

Two of the manuscript studies in the volume are concerned with the Book of Kells: thanks to new photographic technology, Bernhard Meehan was able to examine the figure of Satan on the Temptation page more closely, while Heather Pulliam shows that marginal anthromorphic images are not mere droleries, but can be interpreted as commentaries on the text. In her paper on the *Incipit* pages of the Macregol gospels, Carol A. Farr draws attention to the contemporary situation at Birr in the early ninth century, and wonders whether the manuscript's decoration reflects the monastery's role as a meeting place of secular and royal powers. Jennifer O'Reilly looks at the inscriptions on the Crucifixion image of the Durham Gospels, which are unique among Insular Gospel books, and shows how these were intended to comment on the human and divine nature of Christ. Carol Neumann de Vegar shows that the depiction of canon table arcades is more than mere architectural imagery, but carries a deep message referring back to Jerusalem. Tessa Morrison examines the representations and meaning of gestures and numbers, concentrating especially on the Christian blessing in Insular art. The study of manuscripts is taken beyond its usual time frame in Colum Hourihane's article, which contains a discussion of Insular symptoms in the Late Medieval Period. The 'Gothic' period of the fourteenth- and fifteenth centuries experienced a revival of pre-invasion period stylistic characteristics, showing that the more antiquated the appearance, the more powerful the illustrations were thought to be.

Memory or recreation of the past is also at the core of Tomás Ó Carragáin's paper which examines aspects of pre-Romanesque churches. As the stone buildings were thought to represent the simple wooden churches built by the saints themselves, their details were often consciously retained. This was particularly the case in the twelfth century when some of the newly-founded diocesan centres thought it opportune to remind the reformers of their inheritance of a long tradition. Rachel Moss also concerns herself with the conservatism of the Romanesque period, looking in particular at the symbolic connotations of the splendidly-adorned portals and wing finials, and suggesting that such decorations, seemingly influenced by metalwork shrines, may have tried to emulate the sacredness of the relics they contained. Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh, using legal texts, looks at the circumstances under which the medieval *saor* worked, making the point that he may have been part of the travelling retinue of kings, and thus throwing light on the question of transmission. It was thanks to the interest of antiquarians from the late eighteenth century onwards that Insular studies first came to the fore, and this is brought out in Jane Hawkes' paper on R.G. Colligwood, whose contribution laid the foundations of a scholarly approach to Anglo-Saxon sculpture.

Overall, the papers provide welcome insights into the artistic and intellectual milieux in which buildings and artefacts were produced during the period *ca.* 500-1200. In particular, they display a thorough knowledge of the transmission of models and sources of inspiration and show that the Insular world, far from being geographically remote, maintained long-distance contacts, and was well aware of continental models. While the motifs, and means of manufacture, may have arrived from abroad, the material was quickly absorbed into native approaches, which gives Insular art its specific quality. Moreover, the ease with which motifs were adapted into differing media to be used to convey both ecclesiastical and political messages becomes increasingly apparent. The single most significant model, as brought out in a number of contributions, was and continued to be, Jerusalem, references to which could be found in Irish church building, in stone carving, in metal work and in manuscripts. It is here that the inter-disciplinary approach bears most fruit.

Munster in general, and Cork in particular, receive only rare mention. This is partly due to the near-absence of early scriptural High crosses, although the many inscribed stones would merit inclusion. There is no doubt about the province's

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proficiency in metalwork, as the Ardagh and Derrynaflan hoards prove, while, for example, the Book of Dimma, connected to Roscrea and the recently-found Faddan More psalter, both from Co Tipperary are rare manuscript survivors. The richness of Romanesque architectural remains, particularly from counties Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Tipperary and Waterford shows the importance of this area during the twelfth century. However, only fragmentary remains can be found in county Cork, and here particularly in the north Cork area. Romanesque metalwork, such as the crosiers of Rath, Dysert O'Dea, Lismore and Dunloe ('Inisfallen'), and the shrine of St Lachtín's arm, possibly fashioned at Cashel, complement the picture. With rare exceptions, such as the Annals of Innisfallen, few manuscripts of the period seem to have survived, although the Cloyne cross may have adorned the book cover of a now lost manuscript.

It was not the aim of the publication to present an exhaustive survey. Instead it provides exciting insights into the fascinating associations between the antique, classical, early medieval, Continental, and Insular worlds.

Dr Dagmar Raedel Ó Riain

Local History Review, vol. 13 (2007), published by the Federation of Local History Societies. Pp. 90. ISSN 0790-4665.

This issue of the *LHR* presents an interesting collection of articles on a wide range of topics. Of interest to Cork readers perhaps is 'Exodus from Mallow Workhouse' by Carmel Caplice about the effect of the First World War on the inmates of the workhouse who were moved to Millstreet as the premises were requisitioned for a barracks for the 16th Division. 'The severe winter of 1946/47' by Pádraig Laffan illustrates the hardship endured by people of the time and details the poor weather including ice floes in Dublin and the SS *Irish Plane*, the largest ship in the Irish fleet, running aground off the Cork coast; temperature records show that, except for 1881, this winter was the hardest with the lowest minimum air temperature -17.2° at Sligo on March 3 1947. Frank Taaffe (hon. editor) brings eight books useful to the study of local history to the readers' attention. Other contributions include 'Gleanings from *Finn's Leinster Journal*' (Edward J. Law); 'Local histories – a necessary complement to a nation's story' (Hugh W.L. Weir); 'North Kildare and 18th century distillation' (Pat Given); 'Saint Brigid' (Adrian Mullowney); 'The Pickled Earl' (Brian McCabe); 'Frederic William Burton' (Myra English); and 'Grangegorman Female Penitentiary 1850-1860' (Clare M. Ring).

Margaret Lantry

John Borgonovo *Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society': The Intelligence War in Cork City, 1920-1921*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007. Pp. x + 198. €25. ISBN 978-0-7165283-3-3.

Intelligence wars are, by their nature, murky affairs; the historical record, where and when it exists, is blurred by layers of propaganda, lies, obfuscation, illusion, delusion, confusion and self-justification, which allows ample space for those with agendas, hidden or otherwise, to make mischief or further muddy the waters. In this important contribution to the study of the Irish revolution, and the conflict in Cork in particular, John Borgonovo appears unburdened by any obvious agenda other than service to Clio. He examines in detail the shooting of thirty-three civilians by the IRA in the city in 1920-21, twenty-six of whom were killed, within the broader context of the intelligence war between the IRA and the British forces.

The opening chapter sets the immediate context with a treatment of the shadowy 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society', which emerged in the city in the autumn of 1920. It was almost certainly a tag of convenience used by members of the Crown forces to issue threats and carry out reprisals against the increasingly effective and popular republican movement in Cork. Confusion arises because the IRA also used the term in reference to a suspected civilian spy ring of Cork loyalists, a

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