

Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due —a review article

H. E. KILBRIDE-JONES*

Etienne Rynne (Ed.), Figures from the Past: Studies in Figurative Art in Christian Ireland, in honour of Helen M. Roe, The Glendale Press for the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland, Dublin 1987, pp. 328; ISBN 0-907606-44-X. Price: £29.95.

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This large format (A4 size), well produced and illustrated *Festschrift*, edited by Etienne Rynne, Professor of Archaeology at University College, Galway, is a timely offering to the nonegenarian Miss Helen Maybury Roe, a very able and forthright lady who deserves well of it for the half century of hard work she has put into her studies of figurative art in Ireland. The long list of her publications, ably compiled by Richard Haworth, which is included in the book provides ample evidence of Miss Roe's devotion and dedication to her subject. It is a reflection on our present-day society that she has had to wait so long for recognition: first lady President of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (1965-68), membership of the Royal Irish Academy (1984), and now this *Festschrift*—had she not been blessed with robust health, she might have died unheralded, except for the glowing obituaries by knowledgeable colleagues which will no doubt appear in time. This reviewer would like to add his own personal tribute to Miss Roe's devotion not only to her chosen subject but to her friends as well.

The contributors to this book have done her proud. First there is a brief but compact and all-embracing biographical note by her neighbour and long-time friend, Dr. Joseph Raftery, and then follows "Opening a Window on the Past" in which Ellen Prendergast has contributed a very personal appreciation, touching in its sincerity and which perhaps sets the general tone of the book's contents. The twenty-two papers which follow were originally read at a Seminar organised by the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland to mark Miss Roe's ninetieth birthday, and the success of that occasion is transmitted to this book, in which these papers are printed in two sections: 'Early Christian and Romanesque Ireland' and 'Medieval and Post-Medieval Ireland'.

Ann Hamlin starts the ball rolling with "Some Northern Sundials and Time-keeping in the Early Irish Church". She describes and fully discusses four sundials, clearly distinguished from the better-known Anglo-Saxon specimens by being standing pillars inscribed with D-shaped dials at the top of the shaft; unfortunately none is datable with certainty. Time-keeping in the early Church is also discussed at some length.

At Carrowntemple, Co. Sligo, finds of fourteen inscribed stone slabs are illustrated and described in detail by Patrick Wallace and Martin Timoney. The slabs are important for the reason that they were all found within the same ecclesiastical enclosure and are originals of their form. Decoration varies from simple crosses, one or two with box-like finials, to interlacing (five slabs), a Maltese cross and a Greek key-pattern. On the reverse side of one of the slabs with interlacing is a curious figure of a man, inscribed to look like a

*90 St. George's Street, Saint Paul's Bay, Malta.

representation of a primitive god—or a space-man—von Daniken cry your heart out! Seemingly, the most important are the two slabs with inscribed roundels, each contained within a three-sided rectangular shape, and containing decoration similar in all respects to the escutcheon and print decoration of the Early Christian bronze hanging-bowls. There is a triple spiral pattern comparable with that on the Hitchen disc, which is itself similar to decorated roundels seen on a carpet page in the Book of Durrow. The second roundel is similar to the Willoughton print pattern, except that three triple spirals have been dropped and their places taken by interlacing in the form of knots, again comparable with others on the same carpet page in the Book of Durrow. For this reviewer a seventh century date seems appropriate for these Carrowntemple roundels, which contrasts with the eighth century date suggested by the authors.

The four anthropomorphic gold filigree panels discussed by Michael Ryan in his "Suggested Origins for the Figure Representation on the Derrynaflan Paten" show two bearded and long-haired figures with their backs turned to each other, which are of eighth century manufacture. Mediterranean rather than Germanic influences are suggested here, while the paten itself, of which they are part, is claimed to be based on Roman originals.

Peter Harbison examines two rather neglected inscribed stone slabs, in an article entitled: "The Date of the Crucifixion Slabs from Duvillaun More and Inishkea North, Co. Mayo". These are situated on two small islands off the Belmullet Peninsula. At Duvillaun More there is an inscribed crucified Christ against a background of an inscribed cross (Illus. 4:1). Curiously, the thighs are each decorated with the kind of curved turn-in one normally associates with stylised palmettes in openwork to be seen on the ovoid escutcheons. The Duvillaun examples are not spirals. Less well detailed are similar ones on the chest. The Inishkea North slab also has an inscribed Christ, again in front of an inscribed cross (Illus. 4:3). Here spirals occur at the tops of the thighs. Both this and the previous slab are unique in Ireland, and both show a loin-cloth clad Christ. Harbison looks to a Breton Carolingian source for the inspiration leading to these designs, an inspiration totally distinct from that which was responsible for the Irish high crosses. He places both Crucifixion slabs somewhere in the ninth century, but this date is open to question. The Maltese cross described on the reverse side of the Duvillaun slab (Illus. 4:2) is of a type that is common in Chorca Dhuibhne, and is found sporadically up the west coast as far as Donegal: at Reask, Co. Kerry, there are three Maltese crosses, one being flanked by peacocks, all found within an ecclesiastical enclosure occupied from the fifth to the seventh centuries, but this occurrence at Duvillaun More cannot be used as an argument for dating since there is no guarantee of contemporaneity with the Crucifixion scene. However, the Inishkea North cross-slab proves to be a better guide to dating. The spirals shown on the thighs are more in keeping with those seen on the Soiscél Molaise book-shrine and on the book-shrine of the Stowe Missal, both of which are of eleventh century date, and again on the Clonmacnoise crozier (early twelfth century) made at a time when there was some sort of revival of interest in spirals, generally out of favour since the eighth century. This suggested later date finds corroboration in the occurrence on the Inishkea North slab, on both sides of the cross-head, of edged crosses (termed by Harbison crosses within crosses) which occur abundantly on the silver plate forming the back of the Shrine of Saint Patrick's Bell, which is of early twelfth century date. This is a very distinctive type of cross, not to be confused with any other. The matching of these crosses once more brings into the open the association between sculptors and metalworkers, existing since the days of the Turoe Stone, suggesting that artificers were both sculptors and metalworkers. The style and design of the layout at Inishkea North are reminiscent of Irish metalwork of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which seems to be an appropriate period for the Crucifixion slabs under consideration.

"In the Middle of Two Living Things: Daniel or Christ?" is the late Dr. A. T. Lucas' offering in which he explores the Daniel and the Lions theme, and he concludes that representations on the high crosses can be interpreted as either Daniel in the Lions' Den or as a prefiguration of Christ, P. Ó hÉaillidhe has contributed an excellent and useful account of the Oldcourt, Bray, Co. Wicklow, cross-base, which is little known. Michael Herity, in the seventh article of the first section, has come down from his prehistoric Olympian heights to roam among the crosses of Disert Diarmada (which was founded in AD 812 by Diarmait Ua h-Aedo Roin) with an eye to worrying about the affiliations and date of the High Crosses there. He is concerned mainly with the various scenes which occur on both crosses, and with their comparisons elsewhere, and he discovers that virtually every scene can be paralleled on crosses of the sculpture group dating to 900 or to the next quarter century, though nine of these scenes are also depicted on the Moone Cross, which dates c.800 or earlier. The romp comes to an end in front of the panels of conjoined spirals on the base stone of the North Cross, which are not discussed by Herity but which fit in better with the date of the Moone Cross. Few will readily agree with Herity's suggested dating.

Liam de Paor's is a much more authoritative and workmanlike contribution; he deals with the Tihilly and Kinnitty High Crosses and related sculpture. He writes elegantly and to the point, and his drawings are truly excellent. Both are split frame crosses, with similarities to others distributed through Louth to northern Ireland, and form a distinguishable group. A feature which both of the crosses discussed have in common is the disc at the crossing containing six spirals set around a central spiralled boss. The device is found in Scotland, which raises the matter of the Scottish relationship of Irish crosses. These relationships are discussed at length, with descriptions of some of the Scottish crosses. de Paor thinks either that Irish sculpture went north to Iona, or that Ionian sculpture came south to the Suir Valley. The Tihilly and Kinnitty High Crosses provide a glimpse of the development of the Irish High Cross as it approached its mature form. He dates the Kinnitty cross very closely, to shortly before AD 862, on the basis of two inscriptions on it which were fully revealed by rubbings made by Domhnall Ó Murchadha and are published here for the first time—de Paor also gives reasons why Muiredach's Cross, Monasterboice, might be dated before 867 and Flann's Cross, Clonmacnoise, after 879.

There follows a short article on "A Carved Stone Head from Killaspuglonane, Co. Clare" by D. L. Swan, in which he argues for a Romanesque date, thus identifying yet another Co. Clare site of that period.

Ragnall Ó Floinn writes about "Irish Romanesque Crucifix Figures" to help redress the imbalance in the evidence between metalworking and architecture in Ireland in the late twelfth century. He catalogues, describes and illustrates sixteen Irish crucifixes and crucifix figures of Romanesque date—an important article which brings home the fact that Romanesque means more than architecture and sculpture. In the final article of the first section of this book, the Editor, Etienne Rynne, looks at "A Pagan Background for Sheela-na-Gigs?" Sheela-na-Gigs are unequivocally medieval in date and are commonly seen built into church and castle (Tower Houses mostly) walls. A Romanesque or a Norman origin has been sought for them; but Rynne believes that proto-types exist in the pagan Celtic Iron Age, with associations with some fertility cult. Illustrations are given of figures from as far back as the fourth century BC to help prove the author's point, seemingly successfully, that the medieval Sheela-na-Gig is, in Ireland at least, combined with a possible goddess of Celtic fertility cult. That they appear so often built into church walls may be a timely reminder to brides or simply represent a cult revival.

The first article of the second part of the book, 'Medieval and Post-Medieval', is by

Fergus O'Farrell, and consists of a re-assessment of "The Inishmurray Statue of St. Molaise", which is of wood and is carved out of a single piece of oak. In "A Misunderstood Gothic Masterpiece: the Cantwell Effigy at Kilfane, Co. Kilkenny", Roger Stalley treats of a stylish and fashionable figure in full armour of the mid-thirteenth century, and one of the best of its kind in either Britain or in Ireland. "The Pictorial Mosaic Tiles from Baltinglass Abbey, Co. Wicklow" are dealt with by Thomas Fanning. Tiles displaying human figures are rare in Ireland and on the whole the two-colour mosaic tiles from Baltinglass relate to rather debased figure designs. David Newman Johnson writes about "An Unusual Amphisbaena in Galway City", a stone carving on which the dragon-like beast has two legs and a human tail-head which is aberrant. Unusual is the fact that the tail-head is androcephalus. This article emphasises the need for a detailed study of dragons and other beasts from the Medieval Bestiary as found in Ireland.

Devotion to the Five Wounds of Our Blessed Saviour is perhaps as old as Christianity itself. In "Irish Sculpture Portraying the Five Wounds of Our Saviour", Margaret Phelan describes six sculptures which portray Christ's Five Wounds. She points out that the events of the Passion, like the scourging and the crowning with thorns, do not appear normally on High Crosses, and she believes that devotion to these matters was perhaps introduced by the Normans. In "A Carved Oak Nursing Madonna from Askeaton, Co. Limerick", Catríona Mac Leod describes and discusses a recently discovered representation of the Madonna and Child, carved from oak, and which dates from the second half of the fifteenth century. She feels that the figure shows French influence, though believes that it is of native Irish workmanship.

John Bradley has been poking into recesses, and he has come up with a fine medieval sculpture of a standing Madonna and Child under a canopy in a recess above the door of the church tower in the village of Ballyhale, Co. Kilkenny. This splendid sculpture had until now remained unpublished, perhaps because it had been hidden under ivy. The carving is out of a single piece of oolite limestone. This reviewer appreciates the feeling that the sculptor put into his work, and he hopes that John Bradley will continue to poke into such areas, for this sculpture is one of only two stone examples of its type surviving in Ireland. It probably dates from the fifteenth century.

Costume is dealt with in Heather King's "Seventeenth Century Effigial Sculpture in the North Meath Area", in which she deals with several Late Medieval carvings of a type so far seldom discussed by Irish archaeologists. Conleth Manning adds to the known number of Sheela-na-Gigs, dealing with probably the only one ever found in an excavation, at Glanworth Castle, Co. Cork—apparently deliberately hidden there in or before the seventeenth century. Nora Ní Shúillíobháin adds an historical footnote on "The Robertstown, Co. Meath, Effigial Grave-slab", one of those already described and discussed by Heather King, while Siobhán de hÓir's "Two Nineteenth-Century Headstones with Early Affinities" complete a very interesting series of articles, always stimulating, readable, and showing the results of much patient research: all done with good taste and with a sense of oneness, inspired perhaps by Miss Roe's and the Editor's forceful personalities. This book should be in everyone's hands, because it will provide hours of pleasant, pleasurable, and instructive reading. *Figures from the Past* is, truly, a very fitting and worthy *Festschrift* for Helen M. Roe, the doyenne of Irish Archaeology.