The Swastika at Ennis—Symbol of the Resurrection

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In 1990, Ennis celebrated 750 years of its history: about 1240-41 Donnchadh Cairbreach Ó Briain, King of Thomond, invited the Franciscans to Ennis and consequently the Friary there was founded (frontispiece). The Friary is noted for its many outstanding stone sculptures, not least those from the late 15th century MacMahon Tomb one of which is a panel depicting the Resurrection. On it is carved a swastika which, it is argued here, can be interpreted as (a) representing a Christian cross, and (b) as a sun symbol; in fact, as a symbol of the Resurrection.

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Not everyone knows, though many do, that Ennis boasts its very own swastika, a very special and apparently unique one having a distinctive and rather unusual connotation. It can be seen on one of the marvellous stone carvings of the MacMahon Tomb erected by More Ní Bhriain, and now, since 1843, rebuilt into the Royal or Creagh Tomb (Illus. 1). The carvings of this altar-like tomb at the eastern end of the northern side of the choir of the Franciscan Friary include panels depicting the Arrest of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane on the western face, the Flagellation, the Crucifixion and the Entombment of Christ on the southern face, and the Resurrection of Christ on the eastern face; it is on the latter panel that the swastika appears.

These panels are, as has been clearly discussed and proven by the late John Hunt,[1] all locally-made adaptions in stone of fifteenth-century alabasters such as were made at Nottingham, in England, and which were widely exported from there to many parts of Europe, including Ireland.[2] The Ennis carvings can be dated, on historical and artistic grounds, without any difficulty to between 1460 and 1470, though Hunt, himself, seems to have preferred the later date. Now plain grey in colour, they would undoubtedly have been originally painted, probably with colours similar to those still surviving on many of the alabaster prototypes, such as can still be seen on the alabaster panel depicting a very similar Resurrection scene now in the National Museum of Ireland.[3]

The series of five panels on the MacMahon Tomb have been frequently illustrated, the first major versions being probably the drawings, adequately accurate though not very attractive, by Thomas Johnston Westropp,[4] the noted Clare antiquary of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while the latest and best are probably the excellent photographs published in John Hunt's monumental work on *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture,*[5] that depicting the Resurrection being no. 6 of the former (Illus. 2) and Plate

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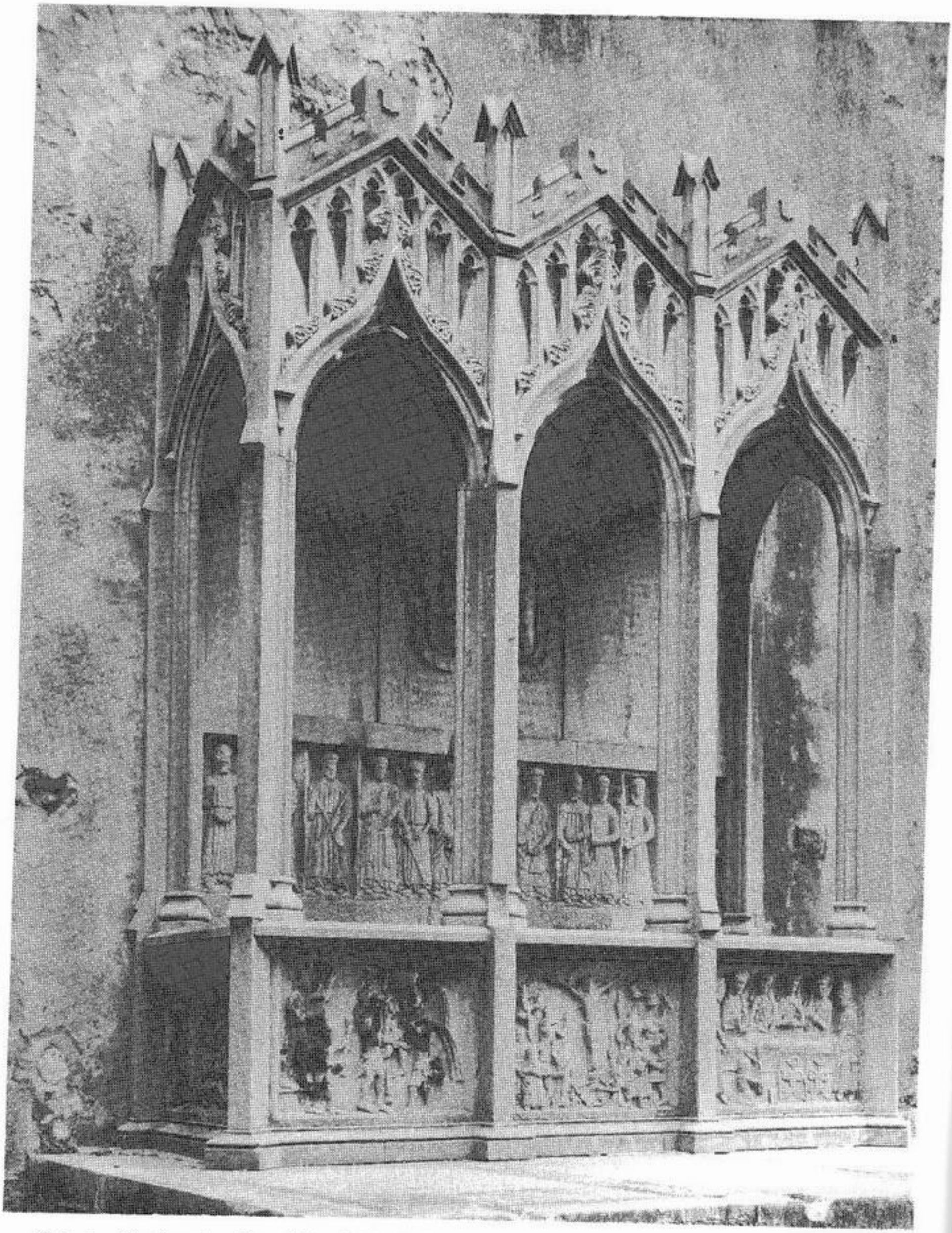
[1] J. Hunt, *Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture,* Dublin and London 1974, vol. I, pp. 122-123; J. Hunt, "The Influence of Alabaster Carvings on Medieval Sculpture in Ennis Friary", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.,* 17(1975): *Féilsgríbhinn Éamoinn Mhic Giolla Iasachta,* pp. 35-45.

[2] J. Hunt and P. Harbison, "Medieval English Alabasters in Ireland", *Studies,* Winter 1976, pp. 310-321.

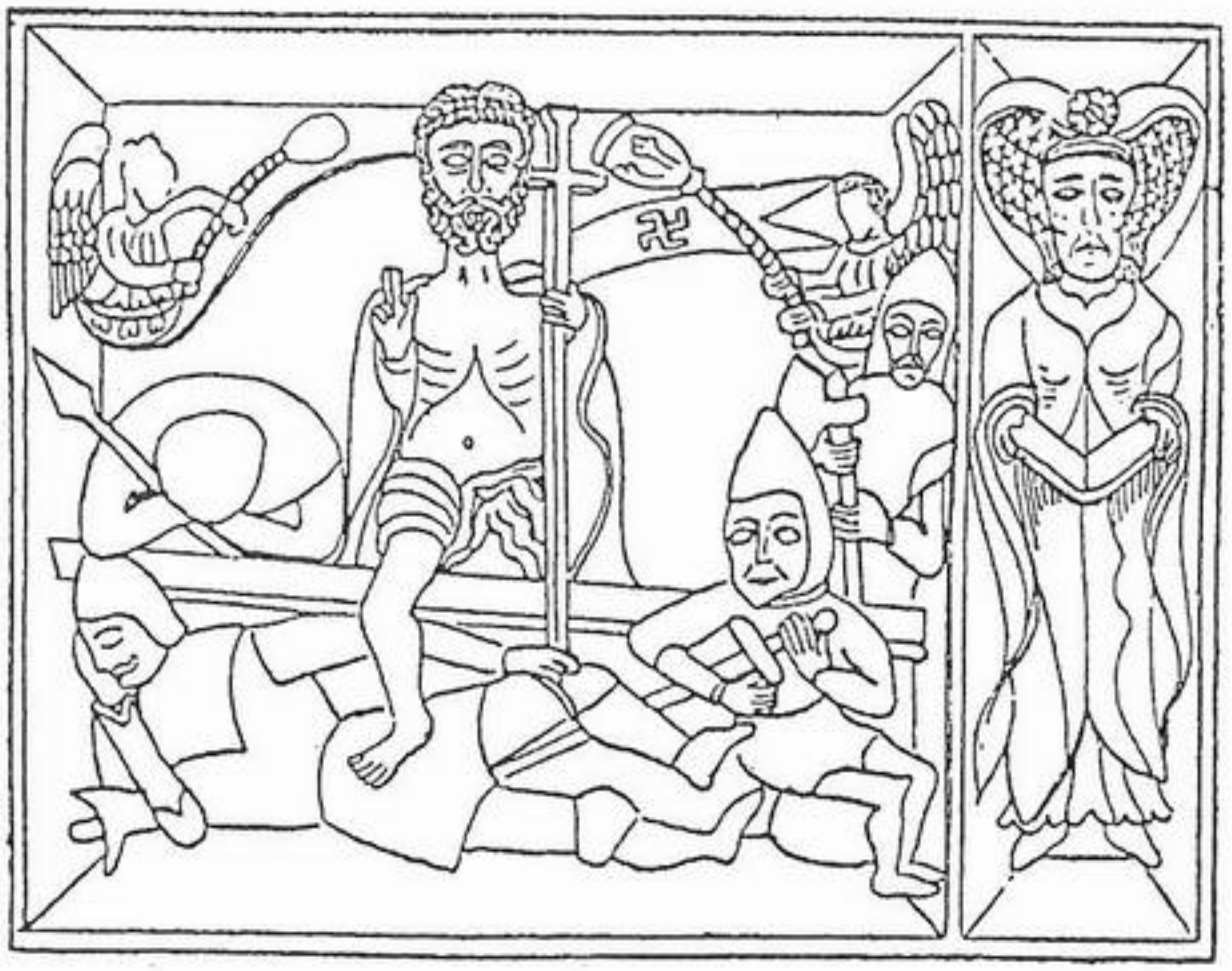
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 317, Fig. 7; Nat. Mus. Reg. No. 852-1884.

[4] On page 147 of T. J. Westropp, "Ennis Friary and the O'Brien Tombs", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland,* 25(1895), 135-154.

[5] J. Hunt, *op. cit.* (1974), 237-241.



Illus. 1. The Royal or Creagh Tomb, Ennis Friary, incorporating panels from the MacMahon Tomb. (*Photo:* Office of Public Works, Ireland)



Illus. 2. The Resurrection panel from the MacMahon Tomb, Ennis Friary, as drawn by T. J. Westropp (figure on right is generally thought to be of More Ní Bhriain who had the tomb erected).

241 of the latter (Illus. 3). The swastika can be clearly seen in both illustrations, though it is somewhat too large and slightly misplaced in Westropp's drawing; his depiction of the battle-axes of the two soldiers in the foreground also demonstrates the inaccuracy of detail in this drawing.

The panel shows Christ stepping out of the tomb onto a sleeping soldier, with two angels, one on either side, swinging censers which, presumably, were not only to honour the risen Christ but also perhaps to put the four armed guardians of the tomb to sleep. Christ blesses the viewer with His right hand and holds a two-pointed pennon or pennant[6] on a staff-like Latin cross[7] in His left hand. The swastika is centrally placed in the lower half of the pennon. It is executed in relief, an important fact as it proves without contestation that the symbol is an original feature.[8]

But why did the anonymous Irish sculptor place a swastika on Christ's triumphantly-held standard? An equal-armed cross would seem to be a more appropriate symbol and, indeed, a 'cross gules' was often used as proper to Resurrection scenes. However, the Irish artist had two good reasons, one of which is that the swastika is a recognised, if rarely

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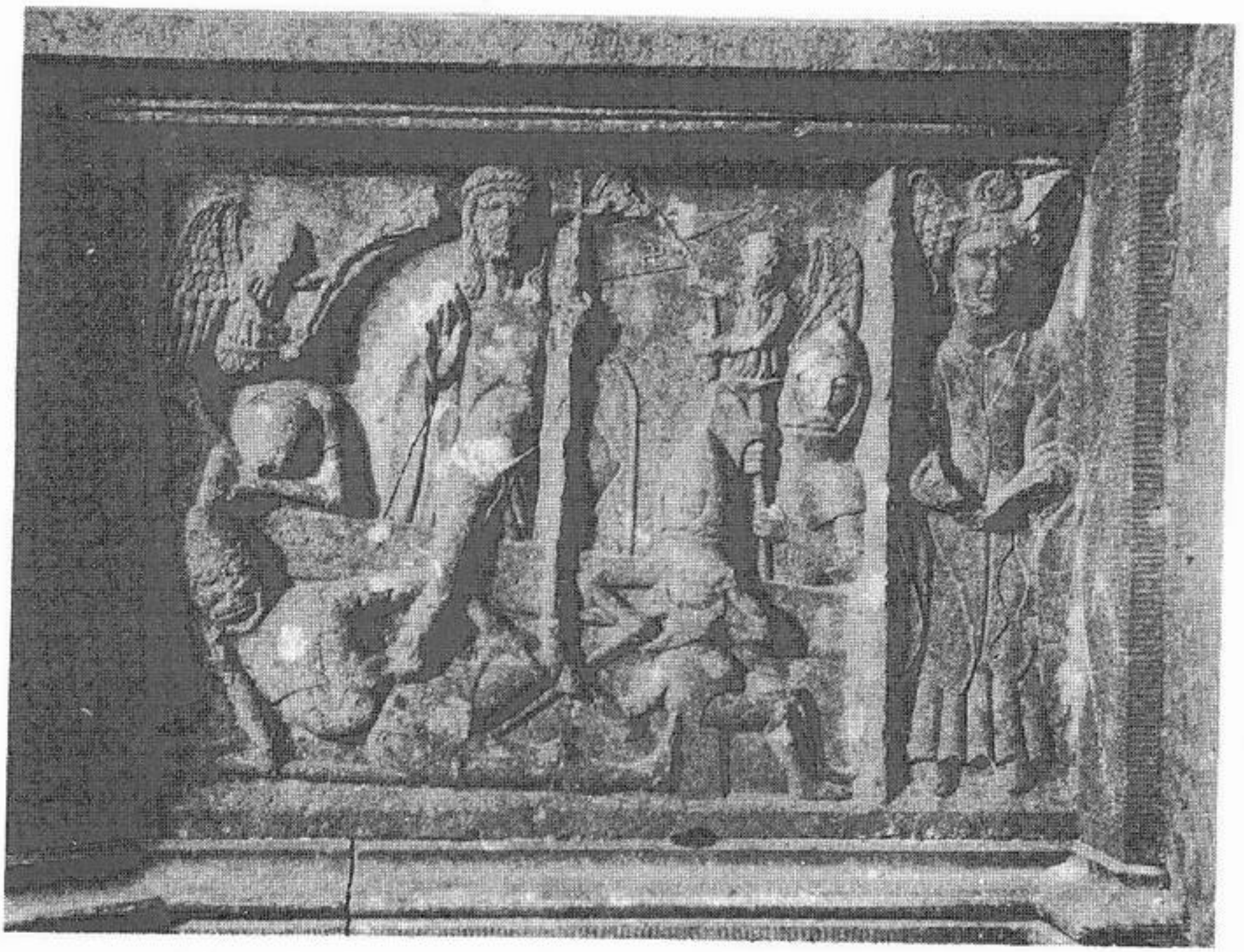
[6]Hunt describes this as a labarum, which he glosses as "Flag shown held by Christ in Resurrection scenes named from standard carried by Constantine the Great" (*op. cit.*, 1974, p. 267). However, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* describes a labarum as "Constantine the Great's imperial standard with Christian added to Roman-military symbols; symbolic banner" while it describes a pennon (or pennant) as a "Long narrow flag, triangular or swallow-tailed...", which term therefore seems not only perhaps more appropriate here but also is more generally understood.

[7]The long staff-like cross may perhaps represent to some extent the great cross which reached to the sky at the moment of resurrection, as described in the Apocryphal Gospel of St. Peter.

[8]Worth emphasising, as mindless vandals have occasionally within recent years attempted to efface or otherwise deface this swastika, apparently in the mistaken belief that the symbol has necessarily Nazi or other unpleasant connotations—just as visitors to Dublin during and after the last World War used to misunderstand the name and symbol of the Swastika Laundry.

used form of the cross.[9] Wakeman, a noted Irish antiquary of the last century, quoted the Revd. James Graves, one of the founders of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, as stating that "the early Christians, finding this symbol in common use, employed it as a disguised cross in times of persecution".[10] This belief was accepted by most authorities on such matters, including the renowned Scottish antiquary Romilly Allen who stated, concerning the swastika, that "although originally a pagan symbol found on early Greek coins and pottery, and on the feet of Buddha, [it] was adopted at an early period by the Christians, and is to be seen on the paintings of Diogenes Fossor and the Good Shepherd, of the fourth century, in the catacombs at Rome. . . but it was never a common Christian symbol".[11] More recent authorities tend likewise to play down its use as a Christian symbol of early Christianity: "From the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. it appears in the Roman catacombs, but apparently without any symbolic or Christian reference";[12] "It



Illus. 3. The Resurrection panel from the MacMahon Tomb, Ennis Friary.
(*Photo:* Office of Public Works, Ireland)

[9] See not only most books on Christian symbolism but also, *inter alia,* dictionaries such as *Virtue's Simplified Dictionary,* London (early 1930s) which on page 232 illustrates it as such.

[10] W. F. Wakeman, *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland,* 21(1890-91), 355.

[11] J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism in Great Britain and Ireland,* London 1887, p. 97.

[12] F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 2nd edit., London 1967, p. 1326.

had a prominent place in the various forms of Buddhism, and in Hinduism and Jainism. Christianity took it over as a form of the cross and used it in a Christian signification. However, it has never been a favoured Christian symbol''.[13] When used in early Christian contexts, it was probably intended as a crypto-Christian symbol, offending neither believer nor non-believer. It is clear, furthermore, that in Christian times, at least, the way the swastika was depicted, turning clockwise or anti-clockwise, *deiseal* or *tuathal,* is wholly without significance.

The swastika has many meanings and apparently originated in distant antiquity in the Indian world.[14] The word itself is a Sanskrit term, *svastika,* derived from *svasti,* meaning well-being, luck, fortune, which in turn derives from *sú,* good and *astí,* being.[15] The actual symbol, although often used and to be interpreted as a sun symbol (see below), is primarily looked upon as a *porte-bonheur,* a bringer of good fortune[16]—it was, for example, used among Saxon and other Germanic peoples on weapons as a device ''to bring the possessor of the weapon luck and protection in battle''.[17]

Quite apart from its interpretation in early Christian times as an alternative method of representing the cross, many other interpretations have been suggested for the swastika, particularly for its use in pagan contexts. These include suggestions ''that it represents a revolving wheel, and symbolises the great sun god. . . that it stands for the lightning wielded by the omnipotent Deity, whether this deity be the Manu, Buddha, or Brahma of the East, or the Thor or Zeus of the West''.[18] Wakeman informs us that ''this symbol was borrowed by the Early Christians from the sacred books of the Persians; that it was in fact, the swastica, the signum salutis which the Buddhist priests used to mark on the forehead of their neophytes''.[19] The swastika is chronologically and geographically very widely distributed, being known not only in the places mentioned in the quotations above but also *c.*4000-3000 B.C. on vases of Mussiân Tepe, near Susa, in Elamite country, the ancient kingdom east of Babylonia in the mountains between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea (*i.e.* in Iran), at the Bronze Age site of Alaca Hüyük in Anatolia, at Troy somewhat later, about 1000 B.C. among the Germanic tribes, in the Far East, including China and Japan,[20] and even in the Americas and Africa in which places it may have had an independent origin.[21]

While the swastika does not seem to have been known in Ireland in pre-Christian times, it occurs on pagan Celtic artifacts of Early Iron Age date from Britain and from continental

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[13] *The New Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. 13(SCU-TEX), New York 1967, p. 829.

[14] While this is the generally accepted area of the swastika's origin, an alternative suggestion was put forward by Thomas A. Mason who wrote: ''The swastika had arrived in Gaul by the 3rd century B.C. It would appear probable that it originated at a very early date in the Danube Valley, whence it spread throughout Europe. It migrated through the Balkans to Greece, which country seems to be responsible for its introduction to the East'' [*J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland,* 75(1945), 161].

[15] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary.*

[16] Miranda J. Greene, however, reverses the importance of its symbolic meaning, stating that ''the swastika seems primarily to have been a solar motif. But it may. . . sometimes have taken on a more generalised symbolism of good fortune and well-being'' (*Dictionary of Celtic Myth and Legend,* London 1992, p. 204).

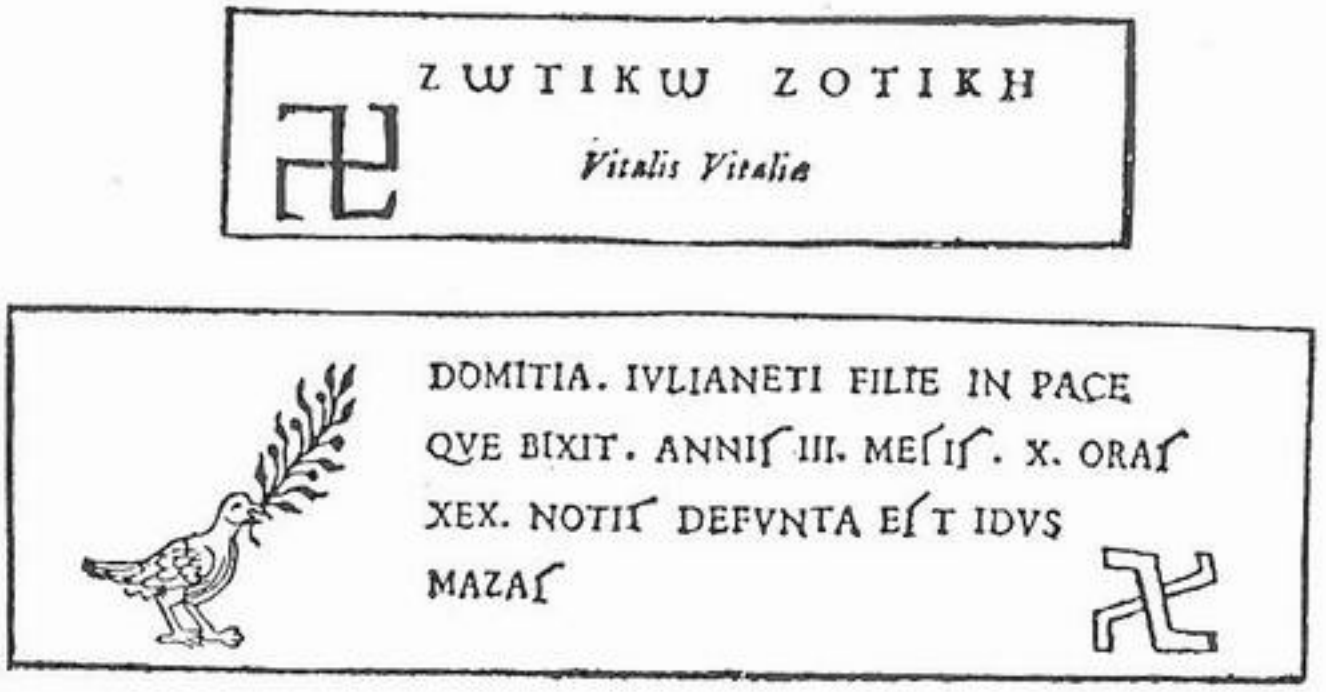
[17] P. Gelling and H. E. Davidson, *The Chariot of the Sun,* London 1969, p. 149; fig. 62, for instance, shows a swastika on a sword-pommel from a 6th century Anglo-Saxon grave at Bifrons, Kent.

[18] T. E. Hulme, *The History, Principles and Practice of Symbolism in Christian Art,* London and New York 1909, p. 220.

[19] W. F. Wakeman, *loc. cit.,* quoting from the Rev. C. Graves, *Trans. Roy. Irish Acad.,* 27(1877-86), 41.

[20] Cross and Livingstone, *loc. cit.*; for reference to the Alaca Hüyük and Troy examples see Dorothy Watts, *Christians and Pagans in Roman Britain,* London and New York 1991, p. 203.

[21] *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), *loc. cit.*



Illus. 4. Three Christian inscriptions with swastikas in the Roman catacombs.

Europe. Its earliest appearance in Celtic contexts is on Hallstatt material, where its presence has been described as "another common Hallstatt take-over from the trans-Alpine repertoire",[22] a comment which seems justified, witness its appearance on the earlier urn from Este, in northern Italy (see below, p. 14). In Hallstatt times it is found, for instance, not only on bronzes such as girdle-plaques, but also on textiles, including those from the princely graves of Hochdorf and Hohmichele, both in south-eastern Germany and both dating from the mid to late sixth century B.C.—those from Hochdorf are of wool and are imports from North Italy, while the textiles from Hohmichele include those of wool and true Chinese silk, the earliest record of silk in Europe and which probably arrived via Trace and Scythia rather than Greece,[23] perhaps giving us a hint as to the route taken by the swastike idea from the Middle East to North Italy and Central Europe.

These Hallstatt swastikas have no relevance to Ireland, other than to indicate the possible route by which the motif was introduced to the Celts. However, the motif continued in use among them, and occurs on many late La Tène artifacts, some of which are culturally related to Irish material. Perhaps the best-known of these latter swastikas is that carved on the decorated pillar-stone from Kermaria, near Pont-l'Abbé, Finistère, in Brittany,[24] dating to about the fourth or third centuries B.C., which stone has often been compared with the well-known Turoe Stone, near Loughrea, Co. Galway. From Britain, too, some Early Iron Age swastikas are known from late in the period, the two best-known being

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[22] J. V. S. Megaw, *Art of the European Iron Age,* Bath 1970, p. 45, no. 7.

[23] *Ibid.*; for comment and excellent, coloured illustrations of the relevant Hochdorf textile fragments see H.-J. Hundt, "Les Texiles de la Tombe de Hochdorf, de surprenants témoignages sur les anciennes techniques artisanales" in *Trésors des Princes Celtes,* Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris 1987, pp. 137-146, Figs. 183, 191 and 194.

[24] J. Waddell, in B. G. Scott (ed.), *Studies on Early Ireland, Essays in Honour of M. V. Duignan,* Belfast 1982, p. 24, fig. 1, pl. 1.

undoubtedly the metal examples in the red-studs on the Battersea Shield[25] and the punched swastika on the horn-cap/yoke-terminal from the Llyn Cerrig Bach Hoard, Anglesey,[26] in North Wales, both probably datable to shortly before or shortly after the Birth of Christ. When discussing the Llyn Cerrig Bach swastika, Savory (*loc. cit.*) calls it "a magic symbol", while Fox (*loc. cit.*) states that it has a "magico-religious character" and quotes Paul Jacobsthal, the great and acknowledged expert on Celtic art, as remarking that "The rôle of the swastika in Celtic art is modest apart from the cases where it forms part larger compositions", citing the decoration on the helmet from La Gorge Meillet, France, as an example.[27]

The swastika also appears in Roman times, perhaps mainly as a decorative motif but occasionally with magico-religious or symbolic meaning. It occurs on mosaics, sometimes as part of a running decoration and, more rarely, as an individual motif, for example the three swastikas in the floor of the dining-room of the Roman Villa at Lullingstone, Kent, in south-eastern England. The fine Lullingstone mosaics date from the first half of the fourth century A.D.,[28] and although the villa ended up as the home of Christians the scene in the dining-room mosaic being "The Rape of Europa" indicates that it belongs to the pagan period of occupation—the official guide-book goes so far as to suggest that the swastikas "were probably included as magic symbols to avert evil from the house and its inhabitants".[29] A strange swastika, executed in niello (a blackish silver sulphide composition) inlaid in the centre of a third-century silver Roman plate, found in the Treasure from Chaourse (Aisne, in north-eastern France) is likewise pagan.[30]

Probably the best known use of the swastika in an early Christian context are those carved on a Christian tomb in the Roman catacombs (Illus. 14).[31] Another early Christian example, but in North Africa rather than a truly Roman context, is on a late fourth century Christian Basilica on the road from Sétif to Ras el Ouad, in Algeria.[32]

Although the swastika was apparently unknown in pre-Christian Ireland, it does occur in the Early Christian Period. It is, for instance, found on a few early cross-slabs. The best-known of these are the cross-inscribed ogham-stone from Aglish, Co. Kerry[33] (Illus. 5), the ogham-inscribed pillar from Inishvickillane, a small island off the Kerry coast, with a cross on each of its four faces, one of which crosses is described as "a swastika motif, elongated to resemble a cross" (Illus. 6),[34] on the two pillars from Cloon Lough, Glencar,

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[25] J. Brailsford, *Early Celtic Masterpieces from Britain in the British Museum,* London 1975, pp. 25-31, illus. 24-28 and 33-34; I. M. Stead, *The Battersea Shield,* London 1985, Figs. 4-6, Pls. II-III, VI and VIII-X.

[26] Sir. C. Fox, *A Find of the Early Iron Age from Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey,* Cardiff 1946, p. 15, Pl. XV:41; H. N. Savory, *Guide Catalogue to the Early Iron Age Collections,* National Museum of Wales, Cardiff 1976, p. 33, Fig. 13:4.

[27] Running, linked meanders such as this, often consisting of interlocked stepped- or T-shapes are not being included in this discussion, however, as they seem generally to provide as much fortuitious as deliberate swastikas—they are frequent on Roman mosaics, Welsh High Crosses, and Irish Early Christian metalwork; indeed, they occur even recently, witness the mosaic floor of the entrance hall of the National Museum of Ireland!

[28] E. Sammes, *Discovering Regional Archaeology: South-Eastern England,* Shire Publications no. 183, Aylesbury 1973, pp. 56-57, Pl. 12; J. C. M. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain,* London 1962, Pl. 229.

[29] G. W. Meates, *Lullingstone Roman Villa,* London 1963, p. 27.

[30] S. La Niece, *Antiqs. J.,* 63(1983), 285, Pl. XLII.

[31] The upper two are from Hulme, *op. cit.* (fn. 18), Figs. 112 and 113; the LEONI IN PACI slab is from F. Goodman, *Magic Symbols,* London 1989, Fig. 110.

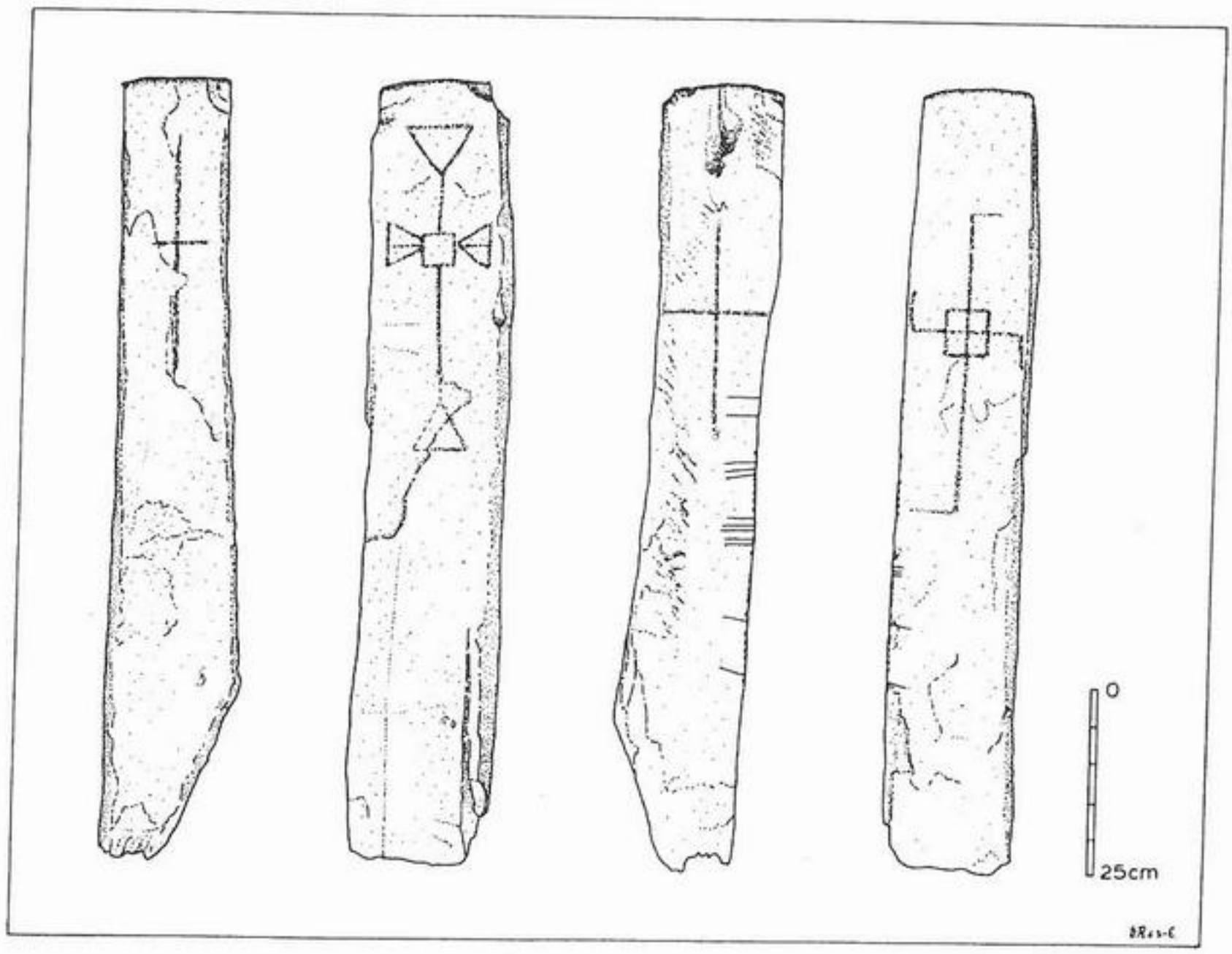
[32] Rt. Rev. C. Graves, *Trans. Roy. Irish Acad.,* 27(1877-86), 46.

[33] N. O'Connor, in M. Ryan (ed.), *Treasures of Ireland: Irish Art 3000 B.C.-1500 A.D.,* Dublin 1983, pp. 115-116.

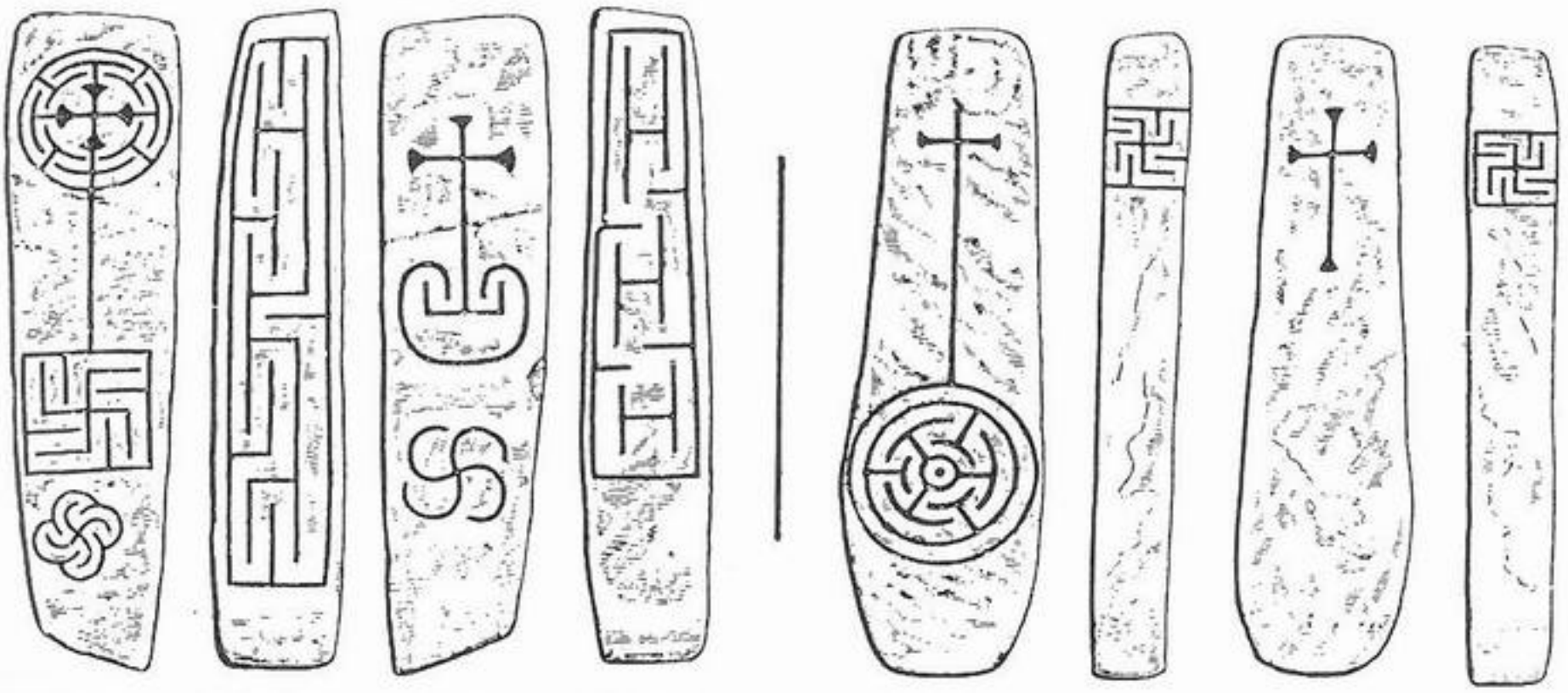
[34] J. Cuppage *et. al., Archaeological Survey of the Dingle Peninsula,* Ballyferriter 1986, p. 301, fig. 176.

Illus. 5. Ogham-stone, with two swastikas and a lance or spear inscribed below an encircled equal-armed cross. Aglish, Co. Kerry.
(*Photo:* National Museum of Ireland)

Illus. 8. Cross-inscribed slab, St. Brigid's Well, Cliffoney, Co. Sligo, as drawn by W. F. Wakeman.



Illus. 6. Ogham-inscribed pillar with a cross on each face, one of which is swastika-like. Inishvickillane, Co. Kerry.



Illus. 7. Two cross-inscribed pillars with framed swastikas. Cloon Lough, Glencar, Co. Kerry.

also in Co. Kerry, where the swastikas (Illus. 7) are framed[35] and the slab from St. Brigid's Well at Cliffoney, Co. Sligo[36] (Illus. 8). The association with St. Brigid, in the case of the Cliffoney cross-inscribed slab, may be significant—her feast-day falls on the first of February, the first day of Spring and thus the renewal of life on the farm, when straw crosses, often of swastika-like form, are made in her honour (see below); this special day was regarded as marking the beginning of a new life, following on dark winter's death,[37] a sort of resurrection in fact (see below, p. 16 for discussion of the swastika as a symbol of the Resurrection). It also occurs on one of the High Crosses at Kilkieran, Co. Kilkenny, most recently dated to the late eighth or early ninth centuries.[38] Versions, not always convincing, occur on other early crosses and cross-slabs in these islands, an interesting comment being made regarding some from Aspatria, in Cumbria, England, and from Glenluce and Craignarget in Scotland, suggesting that the crosses with the "swastika incised upon them may be memorials to Danish converts, who still entertained some superstitious reverence for their pagan symbolism"[39]; this latter remark arises from the fact that the swastika frequently occurs on bracteates, belt-buckles, weapons, and other artifacts from

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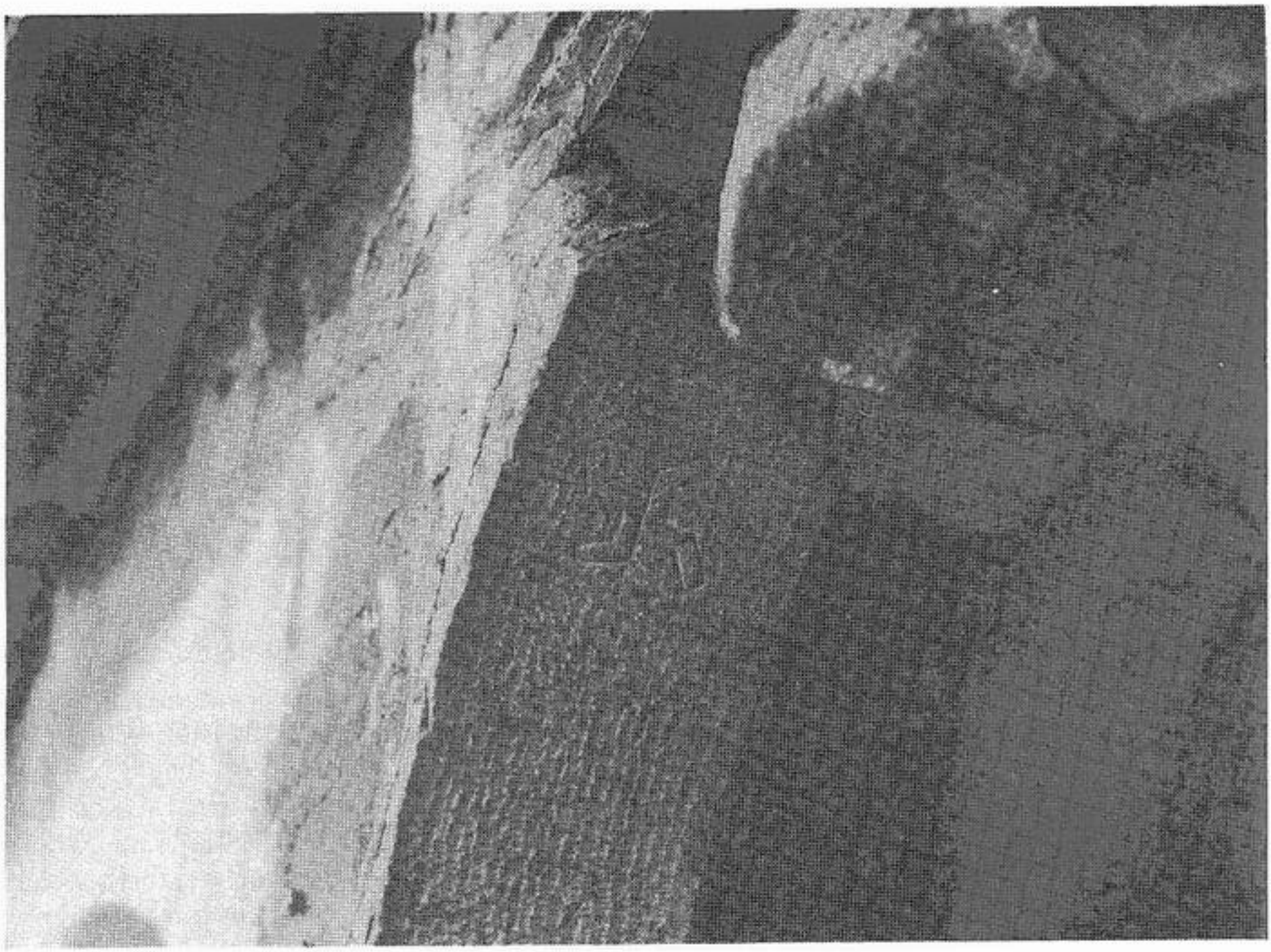
[35] Rt. Rev. C. Graves, "On the Croix Gammée, or Swastika", *Trans. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 27(1877-86), 31-46, Figs. 1 and 2; Graves' Fig. 1,A has been illustrated upside-down by F. Henry in *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period,* London 1940, Fig. 11, and in *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period (to 800 A.D.),* London 1965, Fig. 4.

[36] W. F. Wakeman, *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland,* 15(1879-81), 376 ff., Fig. 2.

[37] "The country people always regarded and do still the advent of *Féile Bríde* as marking the end of nature's sleep during winter and her re-awakening to a fresh activity of life. This is of course exemplified in numerous ways in the animal and vegetable worlds. The mating instincts of animals (beasts and birds) are aroused even to the fishes of the sea. In the vegetable kingdom, signs of budding life are evident, and there is altogether a general re-birth, so to speak, of the natural order in the world"—part of the reply of Michael Corduff, of Rossport, Co. Mayo, to the Irish Folklore Commission's Questionnaire on the Feast of St. Brigid, issued in January 1942 (IFC 903:46); I am grateful to Dr. Séamus Ó Catháin, Roinn Bhéaloideas Éireann, Coláiste na hOllscoile, Baile Átha Cliath, for this reference.

[38] Nancy Edwards, in W. Nolan and K. Whelan (eds.), *Kilkenny: History and Society,* Dublin 1980, p. 39, fig. 2:3, pl. 1,c (p. 37 for dating).

[39] F. Burgess, *English Churchyard Memorials,* London 1963, pp. 81-82; on p. 246 Burgess refers to a swastika [apparently on a headstone] at Thame (Oxon.) as "Among other *curiosa*"!



Illus. 9. Mason's mark in form of a swastika, in the cloisters, Ballintubber Abbey, Co. Mayo.
(*Photo:* Liam Lyons, AIPPA, Westport, Co. Mayo)

non-Roman pre-Viking Scandinavian and Germanic contexts. The swastika also occurs in some Insular illuminated manuscripts of Irish origin or style, most notably perhaps on folio 210v, a cross-carpet page, in the Book of Lindisfarne,[40] datable to between *c.*695 and 721, where they closely resemble those on the Cloon Lough pillars, and likewise turn in both directions.

With the advent of the Viking raids the swastika idea, whether made with straight or curved lines, seems to have disappeared from the Irish repertoire, and only rarely reappears in Late Medieval times, witness the one on the Ennis Resurrection panel and that used as a mason's mark in the fifteenth century cloister at Ballintubber, Co. Mayo (Illus. 9.)[41]

The idea is also found in another form, the classic St. Brigid's Cross made of rushes (Illus. 10), though the resemblance to the swastika seems to this writer to be almost as likely to be fortuitous as intentional. Thomas Mason, noted photographer and part-time

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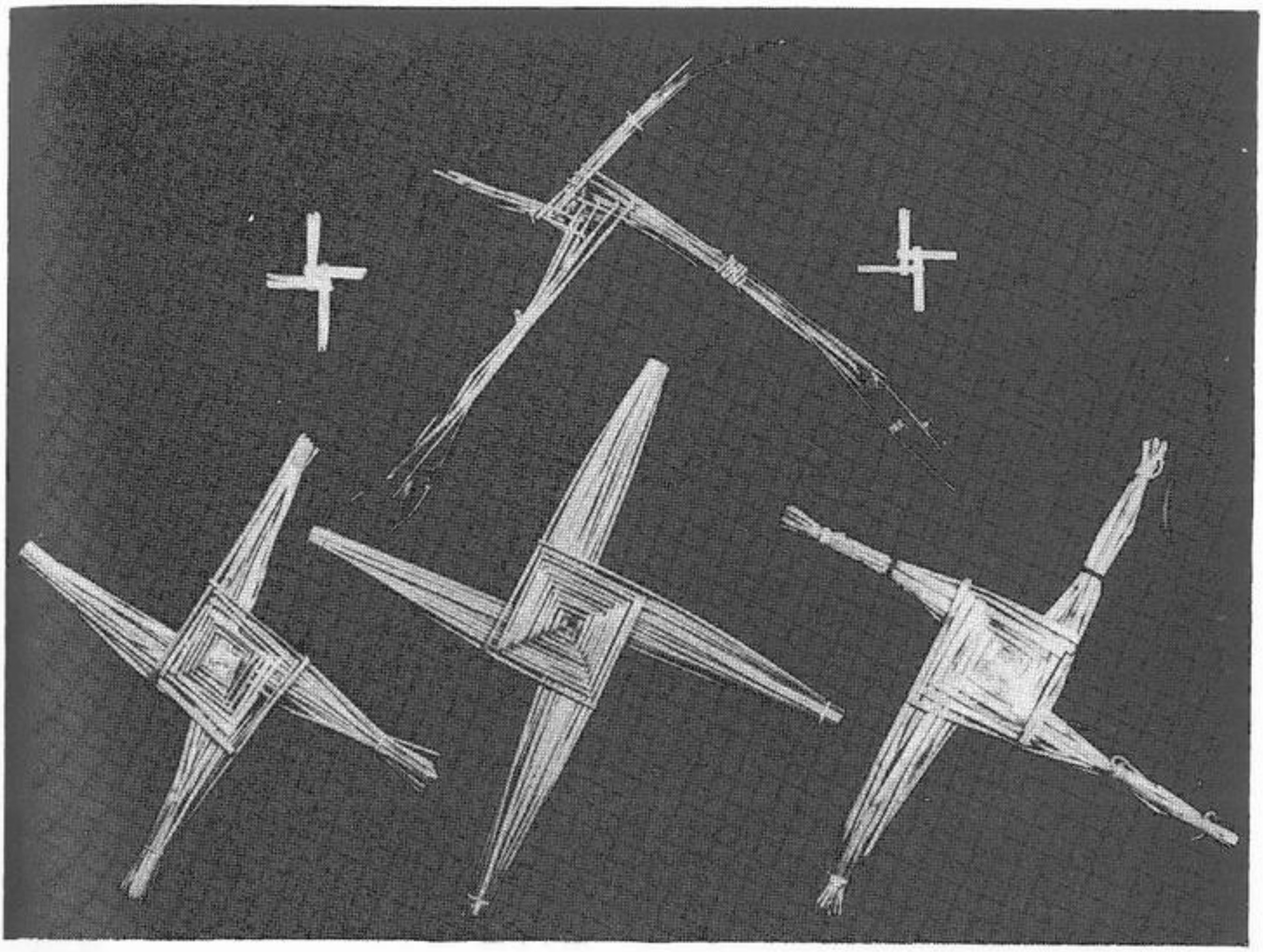
[40] See, *inter alia,* David Brown, "Swastika Patterns" in V. I. Evison, *Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, Essays presented to J. N. L. Myres,* Oxford 1981, pp. 227-240; Janet Backhouse, *The Lindisfarne Gospels,* Oxford 1981, pl. 34 (on p. 56).

[41] I am grateful to the Revd. Frank Fahey, C.C., Ballintubber, for bringing this latter example to my notice and also for kindly supplying me with the photograph used in Illus. 9. This example is more a version of the *crux gammata* than a true swastika, being formed from four separate but conjoined L-like strips (*gamma* is the third letter of the Greek alphabet and looks rather like an inverted T—the French for a swastika, for instance, is *croix gammée,* though *svastika* is also used).



Illus. 10. Swastika-type St. Brigid's Crosses.
Top, from left: Clear Island, Co. Cork; Duntry-League, Co. Limerick; Killucan, Co. Westmeath.
Bottom, from left: Burrishoole, Co. Mayo; Carrigallen, Co. Leitrim; Glencolumbkille, Co. Donegal.
(*Photo:* National Museum of Ireland)

antiquary, believed that "it is a Christianised swastika" and also that the custom associated with them "is of pre-Christian origin and is another example of the adaption of a custom which was so deeply rooted that it could not be eradicated by the early Christian missionaries and was taken over by them and given a Christian significance"[42]; he further states that "not merely the crosses but the whole ceremony is a Christianized version of a pre-Christian custom, intimately associated with sun worship and agricultural fertility".[43] The late Professor Estyn Evans supports Mason in this, stating that "rushes are fashioned into protective charms known as Briget's Crosses, a name which illustrates how the church has won over pagan symbols...they are magic symbols of suns...".[44]

Leaving aside the evidence provided by the classic swastika-type St. Brigid's Crosses, the true antiquity of which rests largely on speculation, it would seem that the swastika symbol, while there is no evidence that it reached Ireland in pre-Christian times, certainly was here during the Early Christian and Late Medieval periods. The six or seven centuries

[42] Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 166.
[44] E. E. Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, London 1957, p. 268.

interval between the two periods suggests that the idea was most probably independently introduced each time, though how and from what source it arrived is uncertain. Wakeman suggested at one stage that "the *Swastica* must have been introduced into this country [by *Scoti* returning from Britain] even long before the first Christian missionary, properly speaking, visited our shores",[45] though a decade later he suggested, somewhat differently, that "It was probably introduced into Ireland in or soon after the time of St. Patrick, who was accompanied by ecclesiastics called Romani, either because they were natives of Rome, or had resided in that city".[46] Westropp, while also believing the swastika to be of pre-Christian origin and that it had been used in Ireland in early Christian times, suggested that the symbol had, at a later date, been "re-introduced from the East by the Crusaders", *i.e.* in Late Medieval times.[47]

While the Ennis sculptor undoubtedly intended his swastika on the risen Christ's pennon primarily to represent a Christian cross, one can surely read more into it than that, interpreting it in another way and finding another reason for its association with the Resurrection, one which may perhaps be a little unexpected but which is not only justifiable but also totally comprehensible and acceptable.

Solar connotations for the swastika have already been mentioned, attributions which can be augmented, for example: "It was an emblem of power and good fortune, and in its design may be traced an illusion to the course of the sun";[48] "derived from the pagan sun-wheel".[49] Archaeologically, solar attributions can not only be clearly identified but can be traced back at least as far as the Late Bronze Age. For instance, inscribed on an urn from Este, in northern Italy, and dating from the first half of the last millenium B.C., is a 'match-stick' horse with a slightly complex swastika behind him (Illus. 11:1); much the same sort of swastika occurs on a Villanovan pottery hut-shaped burial urn from Tarquinia, in Etruria, North Italy, which is datable to the ninth century B.C.,[50] while a closely similar arrangement is found on a cremation urn from an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Lackford, in Suffolk, England (Illus. 11:2).[51] An Early/Middle Bronze Age version of the same scene is the well-known sun-chariot found in a bog at Trundholm, in Denmark. This 60cm. long bronze model of a horse drawing a large decorated disc behind it, the latter covered with gold foil on one face (Illus. 12), is generally accepted as representing the pagan Northern concept of the sun being drawn daily on a chariot, by a horse, from East to West across the sky. The combination of horse and swastika[52] is so similar that

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45 Wakeman, *op. cit.* (1879-81), p. 378.

46 Wakeman, *op. cit.* (1890-91), p. 356, quoting from the Rt. Rev. C. Graves, *Trans. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 27(1877-86), 33.

47 Westropp, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Westropp himself, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, occasionally signed his drawings with a swastika and the number 7, though with what meaning or purpose is unknown to me; examples of this can be seen on his drawings of carvings from Rath Blathmaic dated 1894, of his plan of the "Inner Fort" of Dún Aengus dated 1910, and of his plan of Cross Abbey, Co. Mayo, dated 1913.

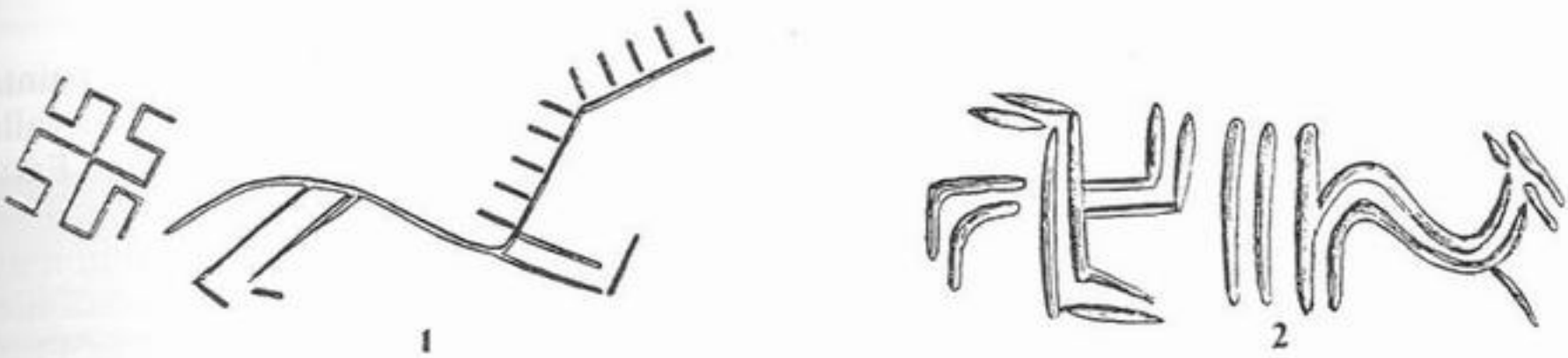
48 Wakeman, *op. cit.* (1879-81), pp. 378-379.

49 H. Child and D. Colles, *Christian Symbols, Ancient and Modern*, London 1971, p. 20.

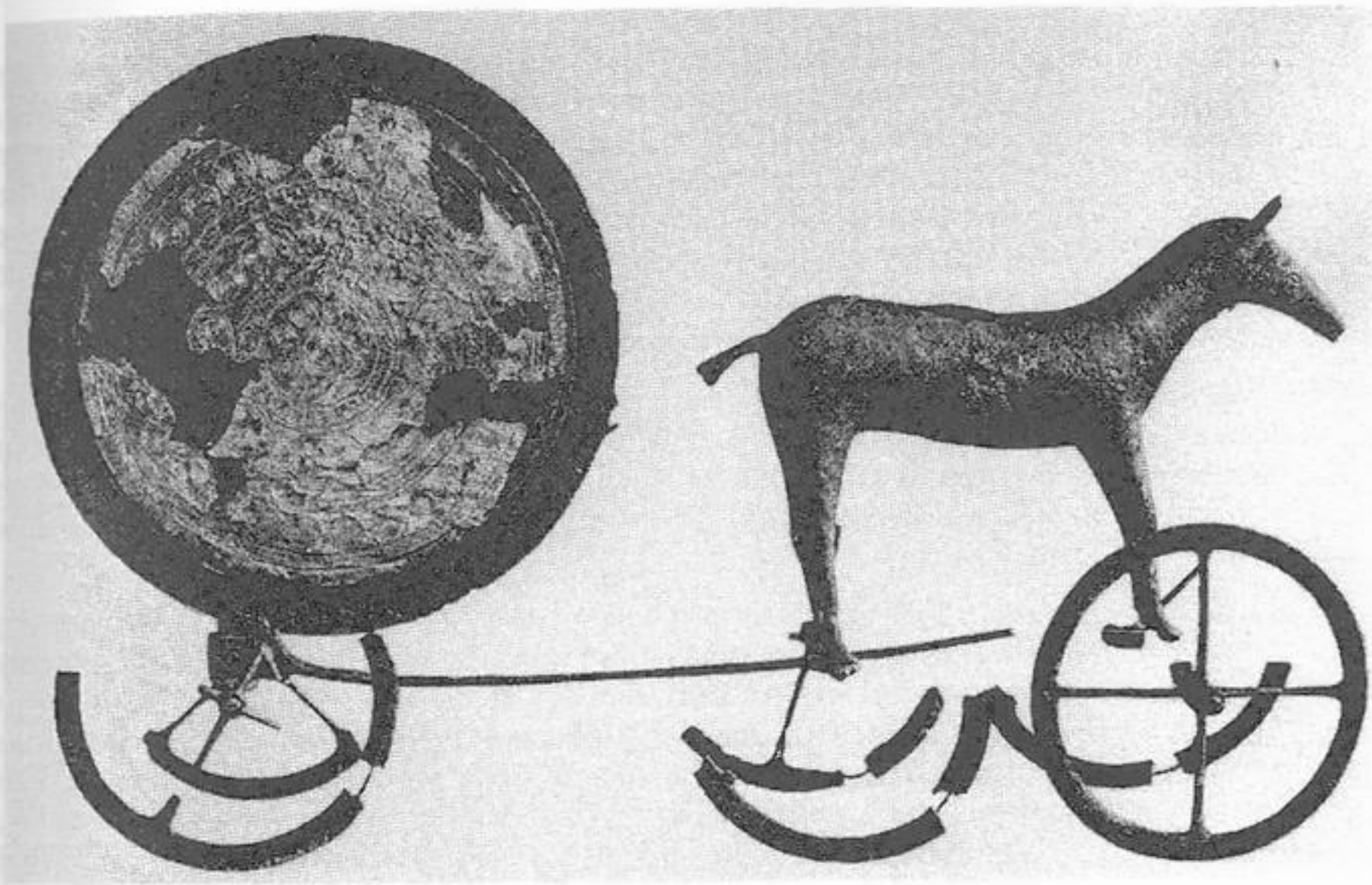
50 D. Randall-MacIver, *Villanovans and Early Etruscans*, Oxford 1924.

51 Illus. 11 is taken from *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, 21(1955), 257, Fig. 1. Lackford cemetery also produced other urns decorated with swastiKas—for the largest and most impressive of these see H. R. Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology*, London 1969, ill. pp. 70-71.

52 This interesting combination, though not necessarily in the same arrangement, has also been noted scratched on the face of the 1st century A.D. Roman quarry, "perhaps by Celtic workers", at Bad Durkheim, Germany—see Green, *op. cit.* (fn. 16), pp. 122 and 204. It also occurs on Celtic coins and even on a tiny penny (seat) of AElfwald I of Northumbria (778-788) struck at York—no. 57b in "The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture A.D. 600-900" Exhibition, British Museum 1991.



Illus. 11. 1. Horse with swastika behind, inscribed on a Late Bronze Age urn from Este, North Italy. 2. Horse with swastika behind, inscribed on an Anglo-Saxon burial-urn from Lackford, Suffolk, England.



Illus. 12. Bronze model of a sun-chariot, with gold-foiled disc, from Trundholm, Denmark. (*Photo:* Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen)

the equation of the swastika with a revolving sun can hardly be doubted, accepting which we should perhaps look at the Ennis swastika as a similar representation.

If the Ennis swastika is to be interpreted as a sun symbol then we must explain its relevance to a Resurrection scene. Commenting on the swastikas on the Aglish, Co. Kerry, cross-inscribed ogham-stone Nessa O'Connor, of the National Museum of Ireland where the stone is now housed, stated that "the swastika is a symbol of the resurrection", but without giving us reasons for this belief.[53] Despite a reasonably thorough search through the more readily available literature on the swastika symbol, I have been unable to find support for this statement, though I believe it to be quite correct in the case of the Ennis example at least, though not necessarily so elsewhere. The swastika has, however, been used apparently as

[53] *Op. cit.* (fn. 33), p. 116.

just such a symbol by the artist Art O'Murnaghan in his 'Eire Page' (Illus. 13), painted in 1920-22 for a competition to find an artist to produce a book of illuminations called *Leabhar na hAiséirghe* (The Book of the Resurrection) to commemorate the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequent War of Independence.[54]

The association of the sun with Christ's resurrection is to be found in tradition and folklore rather than in any Biblical or suchlike reference. In Ireland, as also occasionally elsewhere in Europe, there is a long-standing tradition that when the sun rises on Easter Sunday morning it dances with joy to celebrate Christ the Saviour's resurrection.[55] Tradition holds that one should go up to a hilltop or other high place to see the sun dancing just as it rises over the horizon on that morning, but there are alternative, easier methods employed too:

> "Children are normally cautioned not to look directly at the sun with naked eyes and because of this...it was usual to view the early morning sun on Easter Sunday reflected in a pan or tub of clean water, and often a parent or other adult person managed to agitate the surface of the water so that sun appeared to dance and the little ones were not disappointed.[56] Some people set out a tub of water on the evening of Easter Sunday in readiness for this. Others set a vessel of water inside a door or window to catch the sun's rays so that when the surface of the water was disturbed the reflection of the sun 'danced' on the wall or ceiling".[57]

> "The Sun, I was told, dances on Easter Sunday. I watched and saw it dancing on the ceiling; and that early memory remains with me, for divine control was about and Heaven was signalling. The hard fact that there was a cistern near the bedroom window from which sunlight could have been reflected makes no difference; now is now and then was then".[58]

While we have no record of any great antiquity concerning this belief in the dancing Easter sun, it certainly was known from the beginning of the last century and undoubtedly must have been known several generations earlier. Accepting that the swastika was recognised as a sun-symbol in ancient times, and that its angled arms would be an obvious version of the wavy rays any depiction of a dancing sun would have, it therefore can reasonably be accepted that the Ennis swastika had a secondary identity, that of the rising, dancing sun of a traditional Irish Easter morning. This brings the tradition back somewhat more than half a millennium, which thus gives the Ennis swastika an added significance and importance.

To sum up therefore, the swastika on the Ennis Resurrection panel is special in many ways. Not only does it represent a Christian cross but it also represents the dancing sun and as such must truly be regarded as a Symbol of the Resurrection.

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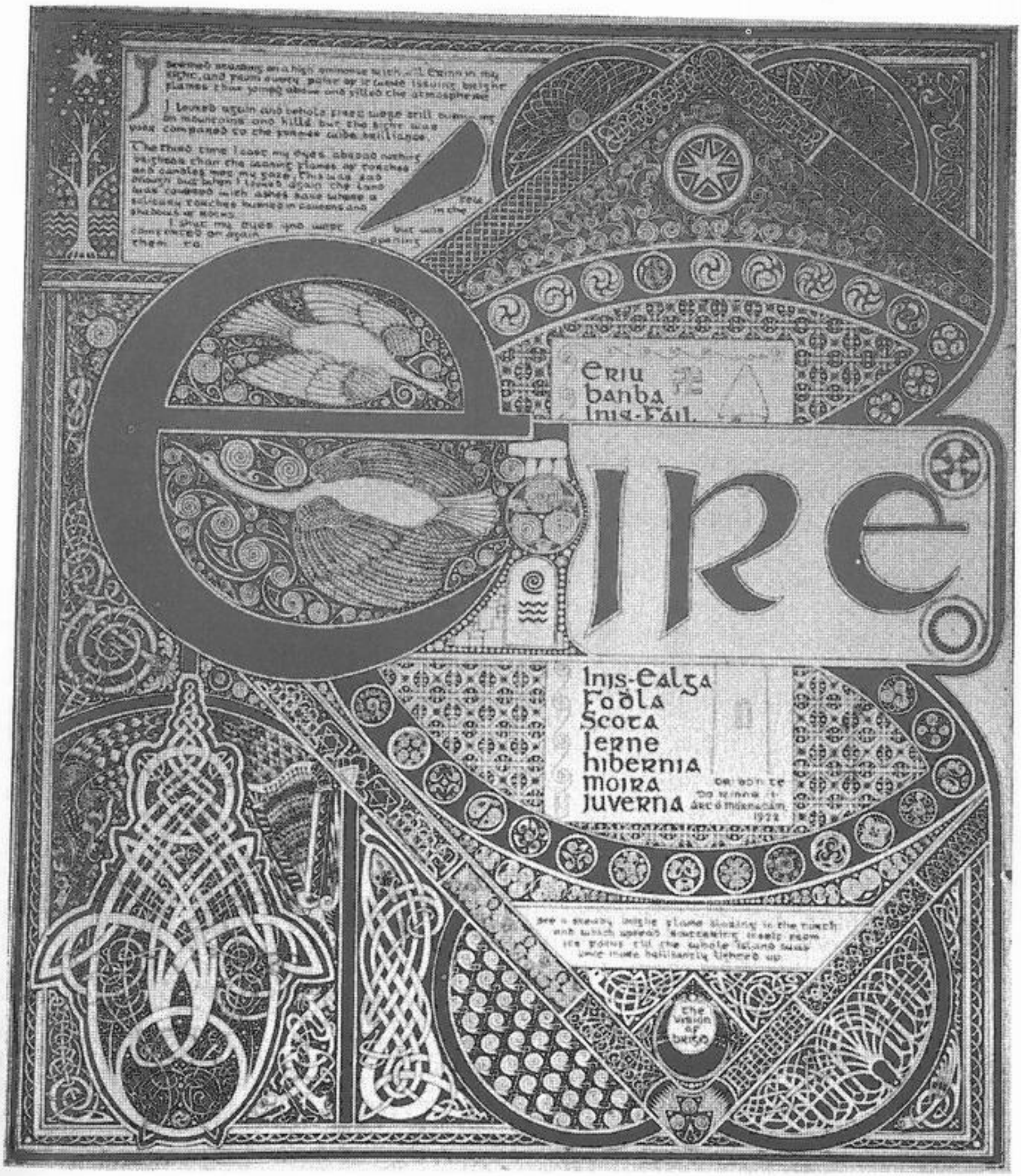
[54] See E. Rynne, "Leabhar na hAiséirghe", *Sample Pages from The Irish Encyclopedia*, Dublin 1988.

[55] K. Danaher, *The Year in Ireland*, Cork 1972, p. 74.

[56] I can vouch personally for this custom—my father used to joggle a basin-full of water for us when we were very young.



Illus. 13. 'Éire Page' by Art O'Murnaghan, painted 1920-22—all in black except for the running spiral scroll, the Round Tower and the swastika which are executed in red dots. (*Photo:* National Museum of Ireland)

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