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Re-conceptualizing the Irish monastic town

Melanie C. Maddox

For Irish ecclesiastics, biblical inspiration and Romanisation led them to see the civitas as a holy locus of spiritual/moral and geographical/communal authority that welcomed a multitude of people to its communal lands. When considering the monastic town debate, there can be no doubt that the locations called civitates by Irish ecclesiastics are the most important sites of the time period. Civitates like Armagh, Clonmacnoise, Glendalough, Iona, and Kildare were loci that attracted large numbers of people, as well as being centres of both secular and religious power. These sites are also the ones most commonly used in efforts to prove or deny the validity of monastic towns. This article will focus on both vernacular and Latin sources that were either written before or concurrently to the development of tenth-century Viking towns in Ireland. It will suggest that within the wider debate, arguments to date have missed the point of what these loci meant to the Irish and it will provide a conceptual qualification for a civitas. This can then provide a piece of the puzzle in addressing the problems found in the debate over monastic towns and urbanization in Ireland.

Introduction

One of the most rudimentary problems in the debate over monastic towns and urbanization has been the plethora of vocabulary used by different scholars in the discussion of definitions. Modern terms such as ‘city’, ‘town’, ‘monastic town’, ‘proto-town’, and ‘proto-urban’ have been just a few of the different choices in vocabulary used. Some scholars, like Howard Clarke and Annegret Simms, acknowledge that certain terms often have ‘no consistency of usage’.¹ Even though most of the terms just mentioned have been used in an attempt to qualify specific locations as urban, non-urban or on their way to being urban, it is clearly a fact that a word can have a number of meanings and it is not always guaranteed that different scholars choose to use the same word in the same precise manner.² Hence, when reading the secondary literature regarding monastic towns and urbanization, one is confronted with terms such as city and town being brandished about in what appears to be an imprecise fashion. Chris Wickham notes that even in using the terms ‘city’ or ‘town’ one is open to involving ‘a set of cultural assumptions

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that need to be made explicit in order to be controlled'.³ Although undoubtedly not the first, I would like to suggest a return to a simplified approach in which modern terms and their nuances are avoided, as much as possible, by restricting the vocabulary of our discussions to the terms used specifically within the primary sources, letting those sources provide us with their own terms and definitions and in doing so revealing what early medieval cultural assumptions the Irish had about their *civitates/cathraig*.

Not all scholars accept the use of the term *civitas* to describe Irish ecclesiastical settlements. R. A. Butlin writes that the term 'monastic *civitates*' is used inaccurately to 'describe the larger monastic communities'.⁴ Another example of the wariness put into the value of the term *civitas* is B. J. Graham's criticism of describing monasteries as 'cities', based on the use of the term *civitas* in hagiographical texts, as a word without conceptual or definitional qualification.⁵ Butlin and Graham's concerns should be firmly kept in mind while considering the value of the term *civitas* to the urban debate and the use of the term monastic town. Disregard for the use of this term should be reconsidered, but while doing so placed in its correct context. Indeed, the term *civitas*, and its vernacular equivalent *cathair*, can be found throughout a wide range of saints' lives, annals, poetry, law tracts and martyrologies, which show the two terms to be synonyms.⁶ Care should rightly be taken of which ecclesiastical settlements are actually called *civitates* and the time periods in which this occurs. When looking at early Irish history and the monastic town debate, there can be no doubt that the locations called *civitates* by Irish ecclesiastics are some of the most important sites in forming a better understanding of the time period. *Civitates* like Armagh, Clonmacnoise, Glendalough, Iona, and Kildare were loci that attracted large numbers of people, as well as being centres of both secular and religious power. These ecclesiastical centres had a diversity of individuals within their boundaries, from the ecclesiastics of the sacred centre to monastic tenants and various types of visitors. These sites are also the ones most commonly used in efforts to prove or deny the validity of monastic towns. When taking these points into consideration, it is important to realize that the correct context is not to come to what sets of urban criteria these loci incorporate to make it what we see as a city or monastic town, but rather what the Irish themselves viewed them to be and how their own cultural assumptions effected their ideals. Only then can a piece of the puzzle to the debate on monastic towns and urbanization in Ireland be answered.

For Irish ecclesiastics, biblical inspiration and Romanisation led them to see the *civitas* as a holy locus of spiritual/moral and geographical/communal authority that welcomed a multitude of people to its communal lands. Because of this, care was taken through biblical example to conceptually divide these locations into several areas of

varied sacredness. This article will focus on both vernacular and Latin sources that were either written before or concurrently to the development of tenth-century Viking towns in Ireland, from about the end of the sixth century to AD 900. The purpose of this article is not to compile a complete historiography of the urbanization debate, since this has been done in numerous academic papers.⁷ It is also not the purpose of this article to provide a definitive conclusion for or against the use of the term monastic town. Instead this article will suggest that within the wider debate, arguments have missed the point of what these important loci meant to their inhabitants and *familia*, and it will provide a conceptual qualification for what a *civitas* was. This in turn can provide a piece of the puzzle in addressing the problems found in the debate over monastic towns and urbanization in Ireland.

When writing in praise of St Columba, in his poem *Amra Choluimb Chille*, dated c. 597/598, Dallán Forgaill notes, ‘he was a terror to the devil, to whom Mass was a noose. By his mighty skill, he kept the law firm. Rome was known, order was known, knowledge of the Godhead was granted to him’.⁸ Looking at the passage from the poem, the reader might question what Dallán meant by Rome and order being known? How did Dallán, and other Irish ecclesiastics of his time, view Rome and the *civitates* of the past? What was the model of how their own *civitates* should be? I have argued previously that when looking at the sources it becomes clear that Irish ecclesiastics partook in the collective religious symbolism of the wider Christian church when using biblical inspiration in the ideal of the *civitas*.⁹ Irish ecclesiastics used mental imagery of the Jerusalem in Revelations 21 as a didactic tool to help the faithful give form to their understanding of biblical meaning, the Celestial *Civitas*, and the topography of their own communities.¹⁰ While sharing God’s celestial building plan, the *civitas* has replaced the older biblical examples of the Tabernacle and Temple through Christ’s sacrifice. An example of this can be found in the eighth-century law tract *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*. Book 43.2 of the *Hibernensis* states:

every [*civitas*] of refuge is laid out with its [*suburbana*]. ... In like manner, every [*civitas*] was given to the priests with its [*suburbana*] ... for feeding the flocks of the priests ... Ezechiel, measuring the [*civitas*] at a certain time, measures 1000 paces but at another time, 1000 paces to the east ... the Temple of Solomon had an enclosure around it in which he who would do wrong would perish.¹¹

This book of the *Hibernensis* gives one example of the attempt to align the layout of the Temple and to that of a *civitas*. For Irish ecclesiastics, biblical inspiration led them to see the *civitas* as a holy place of refuge that through its status attracted a large community to itself, was a place where law was kept and was meant to be a moral guide to all.¹² Because of this, care was taken through biblical example to divide these locations into several areas of varied sacredness; allowing individuals into different areas of the community based on their worthiness. Of course,

Jerusalem and the Temple were not the only model of what a *civitas* should be. On occasion, writers focussed on Rome as the focal centre of the western Church; a place where the authority of Christianity was inherited by saints like St Kevin through St Peter.¹³ One way that this can be seen is through the use of the loanword *rúam* for *civitates/cathraig*, like Glendalough and Kildare in the ninth-century *Martyrology of Óengus*, or Patrick's desire to build a new Rome at *Ess Ruaid* in the *Tripartite Life of St Patrick* written c. 830.¹⁴ Catherine Swift points to the fact that when Roman customs and ideals were transmitted throughout the Empire, as it increased in size, the ideal of a *civitas* with its boundaries, settlement types and the liberties it benefited from were open to 'interpretation' by the peoples adopting them.¹⁵ She notes that the use of Latin by the writers of the early eighth-century *Hibernensis*, 'presented an amalgam of Christian and indeed of Roman tradition to ... [the] medieval Irish audience'.¹⁶ I would add that this applies to all of the early Irish sources mentioned in this article. For the authors of early Irish sources, Jerusalem and Rome were exemplars of a *civitas*, performing the role of religious leadership to the Christian people. For the Irish, the urban *civitas* of the Roman Mediterranean was merged with the Irish Church's *familia* and the *civitates* of the Bible, to provide a clear template of how these saints and their sacred loci will lead their *familia* to heaven. These templates have a firm foundation in the Irish texts before AD 900.

Spiritual and Moral Ideal

In his *Martyrology of Óengus*, Óengus contrasts between the thriving numbers of individuals in the ecclesiastical *cathraig* with the old remnants of the pagan past that have lost all but its structural remains.¹⁷ Óengus compares how 'Tara's mighty [*borg*] perished at the death of her princes: [while] with a multitude of venerable champions the great Height of Machae [Armagh] abides'.¹⁸ He also notes how 'Rathcroghan ... has vanished with Ailill offspring of victory: fair sovranity over princes that there is in the [*cathair*] of Clonmacnoise'.¹⁹ When referencing the new Romes of Christianity, Óengus writes that 'Aillenn's proud [*borg*] has perished with its warlike host: great is victorious Brigit: fair is her multitudinous [*rúam* (Kildare)]'.²⁰ In the following section, Óengus noted that 'Emain's [*borg*] it hath vanished, save that its stones remain: the [*rúam*] of the west of the world is multitudinous Glendalough'.²¹ Óengus then tells how 'the old [*cathraig*] of the pagans ... are waste without worship', while 'the cells that have been taken by pairs and by trios ... are Romes [*rúama*] with multitudes, with hundreds, with thousands'.²² These sections from the *Martyrology* give the impression of a Christian community growing with the rise of its citizenry, while the pagan past is abandoned to time.

Óengus described the *Martyrology* itself as ‘a [*cathair*] of protection, to sing it without weakness: ‘tis a strong rampart without slowness against men, against devils’.²³ The strength of a *civitas/cathair* is a common theme throughout the Irish sources. Not only could a strong *civitas/cathair* be a sacred locus or text, but also an individual. An example of Christ being compared to a *cathair* can be found in the *Glosses of the Pauline Epistles*, a group of explanatory glosses that can be dated by the hand of the first scribe to c. AD 700.²⁴ The text cites Ephesians 3 where it notes ‘how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel’.²⁵ In the margin of the manuscript the Irish scribe wrote in response ‘i.e. the apostles, then, first have come into the building, and the prophets; ye afterwards. Christ then, is the [*cathair*]: the saints who are united in Christ they are the citizens’.²⁶ Besides Christ being described as a *civitas/cathair*, there is evidence of others being described as such. In the *Life of St Brigit*, written c. AD 675, Cogitosus writes of Brigit’s power by mentioning the tale of how a ‘chaste woman fled in fear to St. Brigit, as she would fly to the safest [*civitas*] of refuge’.²⁷ Another example comes from the Latin alphabetical ‘Secundinus’ Hymn’, written in the sixth or seventh century. The composer of ‘Secundinus’ Hymn’ used the term *civitas* to describe St Patrick as ‘the light’. He wrote that Patrick ‘is a great and burning evangelical light of the world, Set upon a candlestick, shining unto the whole world; A strong [*civitas*] of the king, set upon a hill, in which is much store of the riches of the Lord’.²⁸ The last three examples show individuals who are focal points for their followers to the community of Christians. Christ gives all believers access to be citizens of God’s *civitas*, Brigit provides the faithful with protection like a city of refuge and Patrick provides an access point to God’s kingdom. In a similar light to Patrick, St Columba can also be seen as a focal point for reaching God’s kingdom. In the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, Dallán writes that Columba’s work ‘poured out saints towards ladders for the [*Cathair* (i.e. God’s Celestial *Cathair*)]’.²⁹ Dallán most likely used as his source the biblical account of Jacob’s dream at Bethel, found in Genesis 28. The passage reads:

and he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And ... the Lord stood above it and said, ‘... the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad ... and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves’.³⁰

In this passage, God grants Bethel to Jacob and his descendants, making it the centre of Jacob’s efforts to spread Christianity, in effect making it a location where heaven and earth meet. Dallán chose this biblical tale in order to communicate the idea that through Columba’s efforts, Iona had become a location through which access to the Celestial Jerusalem is possible for Columba’s *familia*. This motif can be seen to continue

into the twelfth century.³¹ Another way we can find Irish *civitates* attached to their *familia* is in the *Annals of Ulster* use of the formula ‘X, abbot/*princeps*/*airchinnech* of Y, and other *civitates*’. The intriguing part of the entries that use this formula, is their reference to ecclesiastical settlements and their detached *familia*.

Moral fortitude is an important attribute for the Irish *civitas* and for those individuals trying to reach heaven. Irish ecclesiastics saw the path one took to gain access to different layers of the Celestial Jerusalem through worthiness as a hard road, abundant with many dangers and pitfalls. When writing about the *civitas* as moral guide, ecclesiastics used biblical passages to support their concern for a *civitas*’ moral character. The *peregrinus* Columbanus, in AD 610, wrote his *Fourth Epistle* to his disciples from Nantes.³² Columbanus uses the term *civitas* when he warns of great men at risk of damnation. He notes that ‘narrow ... is the gate, and trodden by few is the highway of perfection, which avoids the vices on the left hand, and on the right the evils of vanity and pride. Therefore must we pass by the royal road to the [*civitas*] of the living God’.³³ When writing this Columbanus was thinking of Matthew 7:13-14, which reads ‘enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few’.³⁴ Other Insular ecclesiastics were also concerned with the moral strength of the *civitas*. Concern with unlawful or immoral behaviour was a practical worry for ecclesiastical settlements. The compilers of the *Hibernensis* show concern for theft taking place within a *civitas* and its consequences. Book 28.6 giving Patrick as its authority, lays out the penalties for individuals who steal money ‘from the holy church or within the [*civitas*], where the martyrs and the bodies of the saints sleep’.³⁵ The *Hibernensis* also deals with theft committed by the clergy. It states that, ‘if any of the clergy accept a deposit, and it perished by deceit ... [and] if the deposit is not recovered, the [*civitas*] of refuge will lose its status to defend’.³⁶ The idea of a *civitas* of refuge losing its status based on the actions of its inhabitants can also be found in other Irish law tracts and the Bible. Ecclesiastics were familiar with Ezekiel 5:11, which states ‘surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will cut you down; my eye will not spare, and I will have no pity’.³⁷ The *Hibernensis* also acts as guide to the treatment of those guilty of other crimes.³⁸ Book 26 deals with the judgment of guilty parties at the entrance to the *civitas*. 26.2 notes that the law says ‘[that] every accused man shall be brought to the door of the [*civitas*] and he shall be punished in the presence of witnesses’.³⁹ 26.7 quotes Deuteronomy 21:18-21 that if ‘the defiant son of the father paying no heed to his having been warned, the people of the [*civitas*] shall seize him and take him to the suitable elders and he will be ruined, and you will remove the bad son

from the community'.⁴⁰ Book 26.19 reiterates the point that the guilty party should be removed and banished.⁴¹ These references to treatment of those guilty of crimes add to the obvious concern shown for a *civitas* to retain its status through proper action against those who do wrong within the community.

Vernacular law tracts show similar apprehension over an ecclesiastical settlement losing its status. *Heptad* 1 states the threat posed by a vacant *cathair* or one whose *erenach* 'has refused food to the parties', making both the *cathair* and the *erenach* 'vacant of the law of a church'.⁴² Other law tracts, such as *Córus Béscnai*, add that if a cleric fails in his responsibilities to the laity, the pact between church and laity is void. The law lists the right of laymen to take back their offerings to the church if they are somehow misused by a cleric, as well as the threat of demolishing a church building if there is evidence of its being a 'place of sin or den of thieves'.⁴³ The *Hibernensis* and vernacular law tracts give clear indication that the *civitas/cathair* must be a moral guide and protect itself and its sacred space against immoral behavior.

The compilers of the *Hibernensis* were intent on giving a clear warning to the *civitates* that had lost their way. Book 24.5 addresses the dangerous situation of a *civitas* being ruled by a youth. The compilers gave as examples for their audience Ecclesiastics 10:16 'woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!' and Isaiah 3:4 'and I will make boys their princes, and babes shall rule over them'.⁴⁴ Book 24 does not contain the only biblical quote in the *Hibernensis* to refer to a lost *civitas*, another gives the example of how the Jews fell into forgetfulness, when Jerusalem lost a sufficient number of individuals of good character and that, 'thereupon Christ cried over seeing this [*civitas*], saying: "Woe thee harlot [*civitas*]".⁴⁵ All three of these last quotes refer to a *civitas* that has lost its way. The examples given in this section show a clear imagery of a *civitas* as moral guide. Ecclesiastics acknowledged the slippery slope to gaining access to the Celestial Jerusalem and were quick to use biblical examples to support their warnings for the *civitas* that had let its moral character slip, giving clear reference to *civitates* that had lost their way.

Communal and geographical ideal

Book 44.5 of the *Hibernensis*, was influenced in its use of partitioning by the Levite *civitates* found in the Old Testament. It records that as part of the ecclesiastical settlement:

there ought to be two or three boundaries around a holy place. The first, into which—save for holy men—we strictly forbid anyone to enter, for into it laymen and women do not chance, unless they are clerics. The second, into which (green zone) we allow entry to crowds of rustic plebes that are not given to much wickedness. The third, into which we do not refuse entry to laymen, killers, adulterers and prostitutes, by permission and custom [?]. Whence they are called: the first most holy, the second more holy, the third holy, conferring their honour by being distinguished <from each other>.⁴⁶

I have argued elsewhere how both Ezekiel 45:4-6 and the *Hibernensis*, 44.5, show a concern to allow access to those who wish it into the community and its land, while maintaining a sacred centre. Biblical references play a major role in Irish understanding of what made a proper *civitas* in the *Hibernensis*.⁴⁷ Book 61 states:

you are blessed in the [*civitas*], blessed in the field, you are blessed in the fruit of the womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your plough-teams and the flock of your cattle and the flock of your sheep, you are blessed in daily work and your holy relics. Blessed you will be when you come in and when you go out.⁴⁸

Like Ezekiel 45:4-6 and the *Hibernensis*, 44.5, book 61, focusses on the close relationship between the *civitas*, its people and the land, along with its mention of the agricultural nature of the *civitas* and the idea of traffic passing to and from the *civitas* and its housing of relics. Like book 44.5, 17.4 of the *Hibernensis* broaches the subject of land given specifically to a *civitas* and its different division and uses. It begins at the centre of the *civitas* by assigning that:

land given the church with relics of the saints ... must have a priest and can only be inhabited by *sancti*, ... [the next] estate near the *civitas* ... can only be occupied by male members of the church community (*familia ecclesiae*), and [the next] estate distant from the church ... can be occupied by people of either sex and even by lay people (*plebiles*), and lastly, property in herds and flocks ... can be granted ... to lay people and monastic tenants (*monachi*).⁴⁹

In essence these examples provide blueprints for the layout of the *civitas*. They clearly refer to the use of land, but also to the reciprocal ‘contract’ recognized in both Latin and vernacular law texts between the church and laity, by way of showing the *plebes* as a part of the community as a whole, while leaving the sacred centre to the *sancti* and relics. This is important considering the diverse makeup of individuals that a text like the *Life of St Brigit* tell us could be found at these sacred loci at any one time. Cogitosus writes of ‘varied crowds and countless peoples ... from the provinces ... come ... [for] the abundance of feasts ... to obtain healing of their ailments ... to stare at the crowds ... [and] bring great gifts’.⁵⁰

The concern that the compilers held for the rights of a *civitas* to self-rule is prominent in the books that employ the term *civitas*. In book 1.12 the *Hibernensis* states that a bishop to be ordained should be ‘chosen from another church, if no one worthy can be found from the clergy of the [*civitas*]’.⁵¹ In his comments about the *Hibernensis*, Charles-Edwards points out that the hierarchy structure portrayed in the book seems to have been ‘an Irish version of the structure of metropolitan provinces already normal on the Continent’.⁵² This is important to the discussion of the *civitas* considering that the early loci described as *civitates* are known to have had bishops. Citing Augustine as its source, 20.2, notes that a province should have ‘ten [*civitates*], one king and three minor authorities, one bishop and other elders, ten judges, for returning judgment to all of the [*civitates*], and if difficulties will arise, they are to

refer to the judgment of all of the ten'.⁵³ The text goes on to assert that difficult cases should be dealt with either within the province or sent on to Rome. This asserting is not unique to the *Hibernensis*. The seventh-century *Liber Angeli* states that if for some reason Armagh could not settle an issue it would then send the issue on to Rome.⁵⁴

The *Hibernensis* also addresses damage to the *civitas*' crops by animals. Book 52.9 states that 'the Irish say: If hens shall destroy either a crop, vine or small garden in the [*civitas*'] surrounding boundaries' seven from the *civitas* will consider the case. If the hens were found to be at fault then the owner was to pay for their damage'.⁵⁵ The text also makes reference to burials within the *civitas* that include man and wife. 18.1 cites biblical examples of men being buried with their wives within the *civitas*.⁵⁶ These last two books quoted help to support the evidence for two aspects of the Irish *civitas*, the former the fact that the *civitas* was agricultural in nature, the latter that certain areas of the *civitas* were set aside for the use of everyone in the community, whether for burial or daily living.

The compilers of the *Hibernensis* used their canon to provide an example of how the *civitas*' *princeps* should rule. 36.12 states that the *princeps* should not have a private house within the community, but instead should concern himself with providing others with hospitality.⁵⁷ The service of monks is also addressed, 38.13 states that monks were not to serve at two churches of the *civitas*, but owed their service to the first church they were ordained in.⁵⁸ One entry that shows the *Hibernensis* as a practical guide is 40.1, where the audience is given the tale of monks, who after the death of their *princeps*, had to fight for land next to the *civitas* that the *princeps* had wrongly given away. This tale concludes with an angel who appeared to support the monks' cause.⁵⁹

The books of the *Hibernensis* mentioned in this article show the compilers' apprehension on topics such as the rights of the *civitas* to self rule, the presence of bishops, the connection between the *civitas* and its people, the use of its land, the agricultural nature of the *civitas*, protecting the status of the *civitas*, the right to sanctuary and retention of land belonging to the *civitas*. What becomes apparent is that for the compilers, the *civitas* was a sacred locus, both secular and ecclesiastical, that had a bishop, had the right to provide refuge and was agricultural in nature. Although it was likely to have many visitors and inhabitants freely coming and going, these *civitates* were sacred spaces of high status, that kept their status through guaranteeing moral conduct. Irish vernacular and Latin laws that mention these high-status loci appear concerned about maintaining the settlement's status. More importantly they show that a *civitas* is not a *civitas* without concern for all of its citizenry. This can be seen in the laws that address the moral fortitude of ecclesiastics and laity, and efforts to provide appropriate care and provisions while addressing the geographical needs of all people.

Conclusion: a conceptual qualification of the *civitas* and some thoughts on the monastic town debate

In his seventh-century *Etymologiae*, Isidore of Seville writes that ‘the *civitas* is a multitude of men united by a bond of association, so-called from the citizens ... For although the ... (*urbs*) itself is made by its walls, the ... (*civitas*) gets its name not from stones but from the inhabitants’.⁶⁰ Isidore’s definition of a *civitas* lies at the heart of the Irish understanding of what a *civitas* was. Biblical figures and ecclesiastics are compared with the *civitas*, as a strong, pure, example to the rest of the Christian community. The saints that built the *civitates* were individuals who were said to have earned their place with the saints in heaven and as such were individuals who were examples to the world and access points between heaven and earth. Irish ecclesiastics used their understanding of a *civitas* to help convey to their audience the status of the *civitates* they were writing about, as well as the partitioning for a variety of people. For the writers of the early Irish sources a proper *civitas* was made up of both a centre and the countryside that surrounded it. The centre was the heart of its government, religious and communal practices. It was from the holy centre that the *civitas*’ elite would govern the whole community. These sacred loci provided moral guidance to the faithful, refuge to those who needed it and fused Irish law with ideals found in the Bible. The use of the word *civitas* often indicated an ecclesiastical settlement and its detached *familia*, and they also used *civitas* to indicate important royal sites like Tara.⁶¹

When considering the important features of a *civitas/cathair*, it becomes clear that terms such as monastic town and city should be used with caution due to their risk of generic labelling of sites that in reality could have been quite different to our modern definition of city or town. The suggestion I am making here is that the contribution of Christianity to the ideal of the *civitas/cathair* and the effect it had on Irish culture has been undervalued in the debate over urbanization in Ireland and the ecclesiastical settlements often used to discuss it. The correct context is not to come to what sets of urban criteria these ecclesiastical settlements incorporate to make them what we see as a ‘city’ or ‘town’, but rather what the Irish themselves viewed them to be and how their own cultural assumptions affected their ideals. This is the only way the puzzle to the debate over monastic towns and urbanization in an Insular context can be answered. Currently the question of a lack of urbanization in the pre-Norman period must be viewed as a strong possibility based on academic discussions that have happened to date. Views arguing for an approach that considers the role of religion in how urbanism developed in Ireland could hold the key to how urbanization in early Ireland should be viewed and need to be given further consideration in a multidisciplinary fashion.

NOTES

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- 2 F. T. Wainwright, *Archaeology and place-names and history: an essay on problems of co-ordination* (London, 1962), p. 13.
- 3 Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: europe and the mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford, 2005), p. 593.
- 4 R. A. Butlin, 'Urban and proto-urban settlements in pre-Norman Ireland', in R. A. Butlin (ed.), *The development of the Irish town* (London, 1977), p. 22.
- 5 B. J. Graham, 'Urban genesis in Early Medieval Ireland' in *Historical Geography Jn.*, xiii.1 (1987), p. 7.
- 6 For a discussion of this see Melanie C. Maddox, 'Finding the City of God in the lives of St Coemgen: Glendalough and the history of the Irish celestial civitas' in Charles Doherty, Linda Doran and Mary Kelly (eds), *Glendalough: city of God* (Dublin, 2011), pp 1–21.
- 7 Rebecca Wall Forrester, 'Studying early medieval urbanization: problems and possibilities' in Vicky McAlister and Terry Barry (eds), *Space and settlement in medieval Ireland* (Dublin, 2015), pp 34–47.
- 8 Dallán Forgaill, 'Amra Choluimb Chille' in Thomas Owen Clancy and Gilbert Márkus (trs), *Iona: the earliest poetry of a celtic monastery* (reprint, Edinburgh, 1997), iv, pp 106–107.
- 9 Maddox, 'Finding the City of God', pp 1–21.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Translation taken from Catherine Swift, 'Forts and fields: a study of "monastic towns" in seventh and eighth century Ireland' *Irish Archaeology Jn.*, ix (1998), p. 113. Roy Flechner, 'A study and edition of the *collectio canonum hibernensis*' (2 vols, unpublished Ph.D., University of Oxford, 2006), i, 43.2.
- 12 The *collectio canonum hibernensis* will be referred to as the *Hibernensis*.
- 13 Maddox, 'Finding the City of God', pp 19–21.
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- 15 Catherine Swift, 'Forts and fields', p. 112.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 17 Bernard Wailes, 'The Irish "royal sites" in history of archaeology' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, iii (1982), p 5; Pádraig Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the saints: a history of Irish martyrologies*. Subsidia Hagiographica, xxvi (Bruxelles, 2006), p. xviii; Françoise Henry, *Irish art in the Early Christian period (to 800 A.D.)* (London, 1965), pp 41–42.
- 18 Óengus, 'Martyrology of Óengus', prologue 165.
- 19 *Ibid.*, prologue 177.
- 20 *Ibid.*, prologue 189.
- 21 *Ibid.*, prologue 193.
- 22 *Ibid.*, prologues 205 and 209.
- 23 *Ibid.*, epilogue 149.
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- 30 Genesis 28:12–14.
- 31 See Maddox, 'Finding the City of God', pp 1–21.
- 32 G. S. M. Walker (ed.), *Sancti Columbani opera* (Dublin, 1970), p. xxxviii.
- 33 Columbanus, 'Epistulae IV' in Walker, *Sancti Columbani opera*, iv.6.
- 34 Matthew 7:13–14.
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- 36 Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, 29.5.
- 37 Ezekiel 5:11.
- 38 Maddox, 'Finding the City of God', p. 10.
- 39 Swift, 'Forts and fields', p 113. Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, 26.2.
- 40 Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, 26.7.
- 41 *Ibid.*, i, 26.19.
- 42 *Heptads I*, in Robert Atkinson (ed), *Ancient laws of Ireland* (6 vols, Dublin, 1865–1901), v, pp 120–1.
- 43 Fergus Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin, 2001), p. 42.
- 44 Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, 24.5.
- 45 *Ibid.*, i, 43.12.
- 46 Translation taken from Roy Flechner, Email to author (8 June 2008). For Latin see *Hibernensis*, i, 44.5. Another translation based on Wasserschleben's edition can be found in Swift, 'Forts and fields', pp 110–111. *CCH*, xlv.5. Roy Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, 17. Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 258.
- 47 Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, pp 29–32.
- 48 *Ibid.*, ii, 61.
- 49 *Ibid.*, i, 17.4. For translation see Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Aidan Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish' in *Peritia* iii (1984), p. 397.
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- 51 Flechner, 'A study and edition', i, 1.12.
- 52 Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The pastoral role of the church in the early Irish laws', in John Blair and Richard Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral care before the parish* (Leicester, 1992), p. 65.
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- 55 Flechner, 'A study and edition', ii, 52.9.
- 56 *Ibid.*, i, 18.1.
- 57 *Ibid.*, i, 36.12.
- 58 *Ibid.*, i, 38.13.
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