Twelve apostles for Ireland

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As the least Romanized part of Europe, early Christian Ireland preserved till the Anglo-Norman invasion several unique cults, traditions, and religious concepts. The one under consideration here are the twelve apostles of Ireland, a barely examined group of Irish saints, that nonetheless appear in a number of texts. The article deals with the origins, development, and decline of this cult as evidenced in the sources of different types, using the narrative approach, which contributes to our understanding of church life and politics in Ireland in the ninth-twelfth centuries

Keywords: Irish church, Irish saints, apostles, Clonard, Finnian, Columba, Patrick, Ciaran, Brendan, Molaise, Comgall, Ruadan, Cainech

Двенадцать апостолов Ирландии

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Христианская традиция в Ирландии, наименее романизированном регионе Европы, вплоть до англо-норманнского завоевания сохраняла некоторые уникальные богословские интерпретации, культы и обычаи. Среди них выделяется представление о двенадцати апостолах Ирландии, проходящее сквозь целый пласт источников, однако практически

не описанное и не исследованное. В данной статье поднимаются вопросы о происхождении, развитии и исчезновении этого культа, не имеющего аналога в материковой Европе, в контексте политических и культурно-интеллектуальных процессов, повлиявших на его развитие.

Ключевые слова: Ирландская церковь, ирландские святые, апостолы, Клонард, Финниан, Колумба, Патрик, Кьяран, Брендан, Молез, Комгалл, Руадан, Кайнех

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EARLY Christian Ireland (ca. 500–1100) often draws the attention of researchers interested in the history of the medieval church, canon law and local Christian traditions, since it is widely considered to be the least Romanised part of the medieval Christian world. Some theological and legal concepts, originating from Greco-Roman Christianity, were handled in Ireland so peculiarly that, along with the local pagan culture, which influenced Irish rites and texts, they even allowed researchers till the end of the twentieth century to speak about the Celtic church or even Celtic Christianity. These terms are now considered dubious. Still, studies of the Irish religious texts reveal many unusual forms of religious knowledge and beliefs and contribute to our understanding of the variety of church traditions in the Early Middle Ages. This article focuses on specific creation of Irish religious thought that may eventually be evidence of one of the ecclesiastical narratives that existed in the pre-Norman Irish church, namely the concept of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland.

The notion of "Twelve Apostles" is unique in the history of Western Christianity. Aside from the Irish apostles and the early modern "Twelve Apostles of Mexico" (the Franciscan Twelve), this concept does not appear in medieval texts. The Franciscan Twelve, however, are venerated together as a missionary community, who, like Biblical apostles, founded a new local church. They belonged to the same order and were co-workers in their mission.

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The Irish apostles are of a different nature: though they are honoured as saints, only a few of them were known as missionaries (among whom only St. Patrick is often referred to as the "missionary of Ireland"). Strangely, they have little in common, and according to some one version not all of them were even contemporaries. These features raise several questions: Why were these saints grouped together and honoured as such a rare and questionable division of saints? How widespread was this idea? Was there a specific person or institution behind it? What role does St. Patrick, the only widely accepted apostle of Ireland, play in this context?

This strange union embraces some of the most prominent Irish saints, both highly venerated by people and profoundly examined by the researchers. In the broadest version it includes Finnian of Moville[1], Finnian of Clonard, Columba/Colum Chille, Columba of Terryglas, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Ciaran of Saigir, Molaise of Daminis, Comgall of Bangor, Cainech of Ahadbo, Brendan of Birr, Brendan of Clonfert, Ruadan of Lochra, and Patrick[2]. The monastic confederations, founded by St. Columba, St. Finnian of Clonard, and St. Ciaran of Clonmacnois were the most influential in early medieval Ireland (along with the St. Patrick's monasteries). Yet, their commonality and indeed union received little attention in historiography. Aside from the one clear fact, provided by the sources, that the saints, known as the twelve apostles of Ireland, were believed to have studied at Clonard under St. Finnian's wise guidance[3], researchers pointed to the vague nature of this union and its absence from official Latin church texts[4]. Even the time frames for the existence of this cult are uncertain as well as the way it developed and apparently vanished from the textual sources after a church reform in the twelve century and the Anglo-Norman invasion[5].

[1] To avoid inconsistencies in onomastics, I will use Anglicized writing and names of the abbeys.

[2] For the list of the saints see Grosjean, P. (1955) "Édition et commentaire du Catalogus sanctorum Hiberniae secundum diversa tempora ou de tribus ordinis sanctorum Hiberniae", Analecta Bollandiana 73: 316–322.

[3] Gratton-Flood, W.H. (1907) "The Twelve Apostles of Erin", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. I. New York: Robert Appleton Company.

[4] S.v. (2011) "12 Apostles of Ireland", in *Ó Riain, P. A Dictionary of Irish Saints*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

[5] Flannagan, M.T. (2010) *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century,* p. 15. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer Press; Hughes, K. (1954) "The Historical V*alue* of the Lives of *St Finnian* of Clonard", *The English Historical Review* 69: 372.

The twelve apostles of Ireland appear in various types of sources, both ecclesiastical and secular, but exclusively in the vernacular: these are lives, genealogies, sagas, hymns and liturgical texts, including a martyrology in Old Irish language. However, only St. Ciaran's lives and a short text from St. Brendan the Navigator's hagiographical tradition give a glimpse on the mundane life of the twelve apostles and their relations. Sometimes these saints are also designated as "St. Finnian and his disciples" or "the chief saints of Ireland", rather than as apostles. But as the circle of names suggests, these are just the other definitions for the same cult. I intend first to discuss each of the three definitions separately and then to investigate their correlation.

1. Chief saints of Ireland

The unity of the church of Ireland is a debatable question. However, the sources of the ninth through twelfth centuries preserve the term *ardnaoimh/ardnoeb Herennd*—the chief saints of Ireland. This idea is explicitly reflected in a verse from the Book of Leinster (part of *Comainmnigud Noem Herend So Sis*)[6]:

> The Uí Néill under the protection of Colum,
> It is not the shelter of a bramble.
> Under the protection of Finnian of Magh Bile
> Are all the Ulaid.
> Under the protection of Ciaran the tribes of Connacht
> Without a division.
> The Dal n Araide, the noble, the illustrious (?),
> Under the protection of Comgall.
> The Lagin will be under the protection of Brigit
> Fame and wealth.
> Munster with its fruits,
> Under the protection of Ailbe.
> The chief saints of Eire with their monks,
> Their journey is
> Every path in the world they share,
> All under Patrick's

Here the saints are only six and are (including St. Patrick), chosen on a territorial basis: these chief saints are the patrons of the greatest

[6] Brosnan, D.T. (1912) "Comainmnigud Noem Herend So Sis", *Archivium Hibernicum* 1: 361.

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kingdoms (*tuatha*) that reign over Ireland. Four of them are also among the twelve apostles of Ireland. But why these very saints were selected and what lies behind the definition *chief saints*?

Aside from the chief saints of Ireland as a whole, we often find the chief saints in the sources of particular region. Normally, they stand important in the legal texts, where they act as guarantors. A notable example would be the so-called West Munster Synod, a forgery of an uncertain date, possibly created in the ninth century[7], that reports about a treaty, made by the Munster *tuatha*, and their oath to the Eóganacht kings. As guarantors of the agreement the chief saints of Munster were present, among them Ciaran of Clonmacnoise and Brendan of Clonfert[8]. They witnessed the agreement and took an oath in favour of the king of Cashel. The convention is fictional, welcoming at the same time saints from the sixth and seventh centuries but the text strives not for a historical but for a propagandistic goal. The lasting validity of the treaty is sustained by the authority of its guarantors.

The other instances of legal mediation, to the best of my knowledge, comprise:

canon law—*Cáin Eimine Bain, Cáin Adomnáin;* while *Cáin Eimine Bain* was valid only in Leister, so it was attested by the local Leinster saints and nobles[9], the *Cáin Adomnáin* (preserved in a ninth-century tract[10]) was relevant for the whole of Ireland and was guaranteed by the sun and the moon, Christ's apostles, St. Gregory, two Patricks and a number of fifth- to seventh-century saints: two Ciarans, two Finnians, Mobi, Momaedock, Cartach, Senan, Fechine, Killine of Lorach et al[11]. The extended recension of the text contains additional names of clerics and abbots, particularly successors of Patrick, Columba, Finnian, Ciaran, Ruadan, and Brendan[12];

7 O Buachalla, L. (1952) "The Contribution Towards the Political History of Munster 450–800 AD", *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 57: 78; Wooding, J.M. (2011) "The Date of 'Nauigatio S. Brendani Abbatis'", *Studia Hibernica* 37: 13.

8 Brendan of Clonfert, Brendan of Birr, Mochuta, Finnian Cam, Nessan, Luigid, Lachtine, Coemgen. See Meyer, K. (1912) "The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories", *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 8: 315–316.

9 Poppe, E. (1986) "A New Edition of Cain Eimine Bain", Celtica 18: 46.

10 Meyer K. (ed.) (1905) *Cain Adomnain*: An Old Irish Treatise on the Law of Adamnain, p. viii. Oxford.

11 Ibid., p. 13.

12 Ibid., p. 18–21.

an episode from the Irish life of St. Naile, where the chief saints of Loch Erne, including St. Sinchell and St. Comgell, guarantee a fee-payment to the Cill Naile[13];

a saga *Tromdámh Guaire* ("Guaire's burdensome company")[14], probably originating from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. This instance deserves more detailed examination, as it represents a literary episode in its final stage of development and shows how the idea of chief saints could be integrated into an existing storyline. In this case we deal with a commemoration of a convention at Druim Cett around 575, where Irish kings and Irish *filids*[15] reconciled with each other and made an agreement, which forbade the *filids* from blackmailing the kings through unfair satire. In its shorter version from the introduction to a poem *Amra Choluimb Chille* St. Columba plays the role of mediator between the rival sides[16]. According to another recension of the same text in Rawl. B502, St. Columba is accompanied by 50 famous saints, from whom 11 are named: two Ciarans, Comgell, Mobi, Cainech, Molaise, two Finnians, two Brendans[17]. In the *Tromdámh Guaire*, king Aed appeals to this agreement. Retold by him, this story includes saint Columba, two Ciarans, two Finnians, Senach, Ruadan, two Brendans, Mocholmoc, Comgell, Dalua and Cailen, who step in as guarantors for the kings[18]. The wider circle of names supports the extensive influence of the account: from a local story, important for the Uí Néills and St. Columba's cult, it becomes much more widely relevant[19]. The list of names here corresponds

[13] "Betha Naile", in Ch. Plummer (ed.) (1925) Miscellanea Hagiographica Hibernica: vitae adhuc ineditae sanctorum Mac Creiche, Naile, Cranat, p. 110. Bruxelles.

[14] Ó Coileáin, S. (1977) "The Making of Tromdám Guaire", *Ériu* 28: 48; Thurneysen, R. (1921) *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, p. 251. Saale: Georg Olms Verlag; Carney, J. (1979) *Studies in Irish Literature and History*, p. 188. Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies. The earlier dating is argued by Thurneisen, Meyer and Carney. The story itself must have been created no later than the early 9th century: *Bondarenko,* G. (2009) "*Oral Past and Written Present* in 'The Finding of the Táin'", Ulidia 2: 19–20.

[15] *Filids* were poets and guardians of the past, who came from the pre-Christian times, but maintained their significance. They were believed to possess power to bless or to damn with their poetry.

[16] "Amra Choluimb Chille", in J. H. Bernard, R. Atkinson (eds) (1898) *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*. Vol. 1, p. 162. London: Henry Bradshaw Society.

[17] Stokes, Wh. (1899) "*The Bodleian* Amra Choluimb Chille", Revue Celtique 20: 138.

[18] Joynt Maud, D. (ed.) (1931) *Tromdámh Guaire*, p. 5. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

[19] Its popularity is emphasized both by the number of preserved manuscripts — 10, with different provenances — and allusions to other sources.

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partly with other chief saints' mentions and resembles the 12 apostles of Ireland. Interestingly, the same transformation underwent a story about St. Ruadan's confrontation with king Diarmaid, which will be discussed below.

All in all, the texts of the ninth to thirteenth centuries designate several saints who are considered the most prominent and authoritative and may act on behalf of the Irish church in affairs with secular leaders. The names of the saints can vary, but the core includes the representatives of certain monasteries: Finnian, Ciaran, Columba, Ruadan, Brendan or their successors, who, while participating in negotiations, could have brought the relics of their patrons to confirm their authority[20] — hence the saints were physically present at the conventions.

Finally, the term *ardnaoimh* is also found in the liturgical texts: it probably determined the order of the non-local saints' names in the litanies. This is how it is presented in the Missal Stowe, an eighth- or ninth-century liturgical collection, likely composed by the *Céilí Dé*[21] in Tallaght[22]. The names of the apostles, fathers of the church and early Christian saints come first, followed by Patrick, Ailbe and Irish saints of the sixth and seventh centuries. Their sequence is based on some other principle rather than chronology; they could be listed according to their rank and status, headed by two Finnians, two Ciarans, two Brendans, two Columbas, Comgell, Cainech. Moreover, five names later comes St. Ruadan. Noteworthy here is also a possible connection of this missal to the *Céilí Dé*, who were engaged in literary and intellectual activities. Texts of their production also incline towards embracing saints and church sites from the whole island.

All these examples suggest that at least from the ninth century onwards, there emerged a tendency to distinguish a number of Irish saints, mostly from the sixth century, and thus to create an overall Irish pantheon of the *ardnaoimh*. This pantheon partly coincides with the Finnian's disciples and the 12 apostles of Ireland. Such *terminus post quem* is no surprise: the early ninth century was a time of decisive

[20] Lucas, A.T. (1986) "The Social Role of Relics and Reliquaries in Ancient Ireland", *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 116:12.

[21] *Célí Dé* or the culdees ("God's vassals") was a monastic and ascetic movement with a centre in Tallaght, active primarily in the late eighth-ninth centuries. Among its famous members were the founder and teacher St. MaelRuain and Oengus, the author of the Martyrology of Oengus. The movement encouraged ascetic practices and literacy.

[22] Warner, G.F. (ed.) *The Stowe Missal: MS. D. II. 3 in the Library of the Royal Irish Acade*my. Vol. 2, p. xxxiii. Dublin: Henry Bradshaw Society.

processes involving major parts of the island, such as establishing the power of the high-kings, the first Viking raids, the final turn to the Roman rites, and the revival of monastic and ascetic life.

2. Finnian and his school

According to K. Hughs, the cult of St. Finnian as a universal teacher must have mostly taken its shape and have spread beyond the borders of Meath by the ninth century[23]. If so, it was already happening under the rule of the Uí Néills, the most powerful dynasty of the northern half of Ireland, who also reigned over Armagh and Kells. St. Patrick was venerated as the missionary of Ireland and its judge on the *dies irae*, while Columba was the patron of Uí Néills. Finnian needed his place among the greatest saints of Leinster.

As a tutor (*oidi*/*aite*) Finnian acts in many sources, mostly hagiographical[24], and their chronological and territorial variety implies that this concept became widespread. Usually, one or two disciples are mentioned, however, in a couple of texts, originating mostly from the middle Ireland, Finnian is presented as a tutor of the saints from all over Ireland, most significant for different Irish *tuatha* and church sites[25], including patrons of Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster as well as of the two main dynasties: Uí Néills and Eóganachts. The longest list of Finnian's disciples — 14 persons — occurs in the *De tribus ordinibus Hiberniae* from the Salamanca codex and the *Vita Finniani*[26]. Nine names correspond with the names of Irish apostles and eleven are attested elsewhere as chief saints of Ireland (see the attached at the end table 1).

[23] *Hughes,* K. (1954) "The *Cult of St Finnian* of Clonard from the Eighth to the Eleventh Century", *Irish Historical Studies* 9: 25.

[24] Irish und Latin lives of St. Finnian and Ciaran (of Clonmacnoise), Irish life of Columba, Irish and Latin lives of St. Ruadan and Columba of Terryglas, Voyage of the Ui Corra, De tribus ordinibus sanctorum Hiberniae.

[25] "Vita Sancti Finniani", in W. W. Heist (ed.) (1965) *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi,* p. 101. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes; "Betha Findein Cluana hEraird", in Wh. Stokes (ed.) (1890) Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore, p. 79. Oxford: Clarendon Press; "Betha Chiarain Saigre", in Ch. Plummer (ed.) (1922) *Bethada Náem nÉrenn*, *Lives of the Irish Saints*. Vol. 1, p. 108. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[26] Two Ciarans, Colum Cille and Columba, two Brendans, Mobhi Clarinech, Laisren, Mugenok and bishop Senach. Catalogus sanctorum Hiberniae mentions the same names in the same order: "De tribus ordinibus sanctorum Hiberniae", in *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice* olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi, p. 82.

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The cult of Finnian has also an interesting feature concerning his similarity to Patrick and apostle Paul, namely that Finnian is considered to have been a second Patrick, the *restitutor* of the once abandoned faith. It is written directly in Finnian's Irish life[27], while the more formal Latin life gives only a reference to the text *De tribus ordinibus sanctorum Hiberniae* — a text from the ninth or tenth centuries[28], which briefly recounts the history of Christianity in Ireland. It describes three stages of Christianisation, according to the three orders of saints. The second one is said to have taken its roots in *Brittania* through Finnian, fostered by Gildas, Cadoc and David[29]. Finnian restores the faith and spreads it forth (in a primarily monastic form). This may of course be a personal view of the author but the general idea as well as Finnian's likeness to apostle Paul remains relevant for the hagiography. Along with St. Finnian, his disciples must have been distinguished as saints who laid the basis for the monastic church.

3. Apostles of Ireland

The discussion around this last and most intricate category should begin with a brief glance at the meaning of the very term "apostle" (*apostolus* — Latin form; *apstal, esbul, axal* — Old Irish forms) in Early Christian Ireland in comparison to that in the Roman tradition. Its significance for the ecumenical church rests particularly on the apostolic origin, essential for every independent local church tradition and legislation of local bishops, which determines the extremely limited number of saints, deserving this title. Firstly, there is the primary apostolic community, bearing the name of twelve apostles traditionally, although including St. Paul as the thirteenth, whose acceptance (and self-acceptance) opened the number and granted several future saints an opportunity to be honoured as apostles. Along with them, the *Acta apostolorum* once described Barnabas, Junia and

[27] "Betha Findein Cluana hEraird", in *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore,* pp. 77, 83.

[28] *Grosjean,* P. "*Edition* et *commentaire* du *Catalogus* sanctorum Hiberniae secundum diversa tempora ou de tribus ordinis sanctorum Hiberniae", pp. 297, 300.

[29] "De tribus ordinibus sanctorum Hiberniae", in *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice* olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi, p. 82.

Andronic as apostles[30]. All the following cases of apostolic recognition originate from influential Christian authors and liturgical sources rather than Scripture — thus they are not entirely canonical. The list of the 70 apostles became stable in the fifth-sixth centuries. In the eighth century Bonifatius and in the ninth century Cyrillus and Methodius were entitled to the apostolic rank as missionaries. From that moment, the ecclesiastical usage of the term *apostolus* has been entangled with a specific saint's service, namely the mission. And although throughout its history the church has produced a number of apostles, there has never been among them anyone similar to influential preachers like Iohannes Chrysostomus or exorcists or mystics.

The Irish religious texts adopted the common attitude both towards the number twelve as a quorum necessary to found a church[31], and the term "apostle"[32] as a missionary. At least from the sixth century[33] only St. Patrick is usually honoured with this title. However, several texts bear traces of a more specific interpretation of the term "apostle":

the Irish life of St. Ciaran relates that "sochuidhi immorro do macuibh bethad etir apstala 7 desciplu in Coimdedh, osin ille rocomhaillset"...("many sons of life among the Saviour's apostles and disciples from that time till now accomplished..."), where the *macuibh bethad* refers to all the true Christians;

indirect evidence may be drawn from the usage of the word *apostolicus* in the Lives of St. Finnian of Clonard, St. Enda of Aran and St. Columba as a definition for St. Faichne, St. Finnian and St. Columba, which is incorrect, because none of these saints actually attained the bishopric status. The case of St. Columba seems more interesting. Columba is called *apostolicus* only once: in an episode, where he resurrects a boy. This is the only resurrection performed by him (Vita Columbae, II, 33)[34];

[30] "Apostel", in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (1950). Vol. 1, pp. 553–554. Stuttgart.

[31] Reeves, Wh. (ed.) (1874) *Life of Saint Columba, founder of Hy, written by Adamnan*, pp. lxxi-lxxii. Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas.

[32] Reeves, Wh. (ed.) (1874) "Introduction", in *Life of Saint Columba*, p. lxxi-lxxii.

[33] See on the so called Secundinus's hymn: Charles-Edwards, T.M. (2000) *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 182. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[34] On the Columba's hagiographical dossier, his rank and his connections to other saints see Zhivlova, N. Yu. (2019) *The World of Saint Columba: Early Medieval Ireland and Britain through the Eyes of the Monks of Iona*. 2nd ed. Moscow: YASK Publishing House (In Russ.).

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in the Life of St. Senan (from the Salamanca codex, approx. before the ninth century)[35] people ask St. Senan to resurrect a boy but he responds that the ability to resurrect the dead belongs to apostles alone. Then the crowd exclaims

May only the apostles possess such virtue, but all the people know for sure that you are also an apostle, who has a divine conversation with the angels in heaven[36].

After that St. Senan finally resurrects the boy. Obviously, the apostolic rank is here believed to be open to other saints and connected with special abilities, incl. resurrection of the dead.

Taking this into account, let us look at the evidence for the twelve apostles of Ireland in the sources. These sources include saints' lives, commentaries on the Oengus's martyrology, and sagas. Their interpretation is difficult because of imprecise dating. Irish homiletic lives, according to the prevailing number of studies, could have been created in the ninth through tenth centuries in their core and edited in the eleventh century[37]. The lives of St. Ciaran and St. Finnian belong presumably to some Anglo-Norman authors, who have worked on the adaptation of Irish saints' cults for the Roman service in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries[38]. The commentaries on the *Félire Oengusso* (Oengus's Martyrology) were ascribed by P. Ó Riain to 1170–1174[39]. The language and the political accents of the saga *Fled Dúin na nGéd* ("The banquet of the Fort of the Geese") indicates at early twelfth century, but its sources may be older[40].

[35] Kenney, J.F. (1966) *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: an Introduction and Guide*, p. 365. New York: Octagon.

[36] Esto solis apostolis sit hec virtus possibilis, scit omnis certe populus quod et tu sis apostolus, cuius sancta est in celis conversacio cum angelis: Vita sancti Senani, in *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae ex codice* olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi, pp. 312–313.

[37] Kenney, J. F. The *Sources for the Early History of Ireland, p.* 379; Sharpe, R. (1991) *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, p. 22. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Kehnel, A. (1997) *Clonmacnoise—the Church and Lands of St. Ciaran. Change and Continuity in an Irish Monastic Foundation (6th to 16th Century)*, pp. 17–18. Münster: Lit Verlag; Hughes, K. The Historical *Value* of the Lives of *St Finnian* of Clonard, p. 359. This opinion was questioned by P. Ó Riain, but his arguments were not widely accepted: *Ó Riain,* P. A *dictionary of Irish saints*, pp. 169, 173, 320.

[38] Hughes, K. *The Historical Value* of the Lives of *St Finnian* of Clonard, p. 366–367; Kehnel, A. *Clonmacnoise—the Church and Lands of St. Ciaran*, pp. 16, 26.

[39] Ó Riain, P. (2000–2001) "The Martyrology of Oengus: the Transmission of the Text", *Studia Hibernica* 31: 236

[40] Herbert, M. (1989) "Fled Dúin na nGéd: a Reappraisal", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 18: 75, 79.

3.1. Hagiography

All the lives under consideration, namely the Irish lives of saints Columba, Finnian, Ciaran and a shorter text about Brendan the Navigator, include a description of the apostles' study at Clonard, but other details differ. Strangely enough, this concept is absent from the hagiographical traditions concerning other saints. In order to complete an overview of the twelve apostles' scarce presence in the hagiography I will now bring the relevant facts from the saints' lives together.

Table 2[41]

Ciaran		**Columba (Colum Cille)**	**Finnian**		
Betha Chiarain Cluana meic Nois Brussels, 4190–4200	Betha Chiarain Cluana meic Nois, Book of Lismore	Betha Choluim chille, Book of Lismore	Betha Fhindein Cluana hEraird Brussel 2324–2340	Betha Fhindein Cluana hEraird Book of Lismore	Vita sancti Finniani, codex Salamanticensis
Twelve apostles working on a mill	Twelve bishops working on a mill in Clonard	Each bishop working on a mill in Clonard	Twelve apostles coming to Clonard	Twelve bishops coming to Clonard	The same episodes; Finnian's disciples are not called apostles or bishops; no number of the disciples

[41] In the table are put together Old Irish lives of three saints: St. Finnian, St, Ciaran of Clonmacnois, St. Columba (Colum Cille),—and the Latin life of St. Finnian. There are all preserved in the later manuscripts: Book of Lismore (late 15th c.), two Brussel manuscripts, copied by Michael O'Clery (Mícheál Ó Cléirigh) in the middle 17th c., and the Salamanca codex, written in the first half of 14th c.

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Ciaran	Columba (Colum Cille)	Finnian		
Metrical list incl. 13 people: two Finnians, two Columbas, Ciaran, Cainech. Comgall, two Brendans, Ruadan, Ninnidh, Mobi, Molaise[42]	No list and no number	No list	No list	Listed in the text as Finnian's disciples: Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Ciaran of Saigir, Colum Cille, Columba of Terryglas, Cainech, Molaise, Ruadan, bishop Senan, Brendan of Birr, Brendan of Clonfert, Mobi Clarinech, Ninnidh, Mugenok of Cill Cumle
Ciaran is called an apostle several time in the introduction[43]	A metrical interpolation from a hymn, calling Columba "thrice fifty times noble, more high-born than every other apostle "[44].			

Following observations can be drawn from these examples:

The Lives of St. Finnian and St. Ciaran most consistently support the idea of twelve apostles studying under St. Finnian. Also, they are quite close in terms of composition and figures of speech[45].

[42] Da Finnian, da Colum caidh,
Ciaran, Cainnech, Comghall cain,
da Brenainn, Ruadan colli
Ninnidh, Mobi, mtí; c Natfraich

.i.Molaisi.

[43] "Betha Chiarain Cluana meic Nois", in Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore, pp. 117–118.

[44] "Soer tri coecca uaisli ina gach apstal" ("Betha Choluim chille", in *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, p. 29).

[45] Aside from the very homiletic form, obviously common figure of speech is the phrase about the relics, which are preserved in honour and perform miracles; saint's right to judge the Irishmen; description of the saint's society in heaven; parallels between the

Both lives read "bishops" instead of "apostles" in their versions from the Book of Lismore. This alteration may have occurred due to the diocesan reform of the twelfth century, when Clonard and Clonmacnoise became centres of bishoprics and their founders were reconsidered to have been bishops[46]. On the other hand, the Anglo-Norman writers may have found the idea of Irish apostles too confusing and consequently changed them to bishops and later left them out. A hint that the composers of the Irish lives in the Book of Lismore were familiar with the idea of the Irish apostles is to be found in the Life of St. Columba, who is called the most noble of the apostles — apparently, the Irish apostles are meant, among whom Columba, a descendant of Cenel Conall, was by far the most highborn.

The idea of Irish apostles must have preceded the creation of homiletic lives, as a verse from St. Ciaran's life reveals. Interestingly, the same verse comes up in the *Corpus genealogiarum* (number 402 in the Ó Riain's edition) and in the commentaries on the *Divisio apostolorum* (15. July) in *Felire Oengusso*[47]. Here it appears after a quatrain with the names of biblical apostles. The latter comes probably from the *Liber hymnorum*[48]. For the verse with the names of Irish apostles some unknown source must have been used: the commentator is not acquainted with other material from the Ciaran's life[49].

The composers of the earliest poems, liturgical texts and saints' lives are not aware either of the idea of Irish apostles or of these saints' studying together at Clonard. Some saints, like Finnian of Moville, Brendan of Birr, Ruadan or Cainech were evidently never believed to have been tutored there.

Additionally, *Da apstol decc na Herenn* ("Twelve apostles of Ireland") must be mentioned, a text of the popular genre in Ireland — *Imramma* (Navigations), originating from the St. Brendan's hagiographical dossier, particularly from the tradition of *Navigatio Brendani*. The text obviously underwent some alterations and was

saint and biblical heroes: see "*Betha Fhindein Cluana hEraird*", p. 83; "Betha Chiarain Cluana meic Nois", in *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, p. 134.

46 About this process: *Ó Riain,* P. A D*ictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 542; Flannagan M.T. *The Transformation of the Irish Church in the Twelfth Century*, p. 15.

47 Stokes, Wh. (ed.) (1905) *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé: The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, p. 168. London: Henry Bradshaw Society.

48 Bernard, J.H., Atkinson, R. (eds) *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*. Vol. 1, p. 159.

49 E.g. in the Ciaran's Irish life Ninnidh is the one who asks Ciaran's Gospel, while Finnian promises him a half of Ireland in return, while in the commentaries to the Martyrology it is Columba.

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partly lost. The story begins at Clonard, where St. Finnian throws a feast for the twelve apostles of Ireland, when a wonderful flower is brought to them with the wind from the promised land. While drawing lots, the senior Brendan is chosen to seek this land in the ocean, but the junior Brendan steps in for him.

The basic plot of the *Navigatio Brendani* has been recently dated to no earlier than the ninth century[50] The text includes several metrical interpolations from an earlier poem or poems, a feature, according to Toner[51], most typical for the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

However, neither the language nor the composition enables us to date the text precisely. Also, due to some details in the story, this recension is thought to stand aside from the main course of the *Navigatio Brendani* tradition[52], and thus it may not necessarily originate from St. Brendan's monasteries and centres of his veneration. So, we deal with a later marginal text containing earlier verses. One of them begins with the description of the study of the Irish apostles:

> They were studying for a long while,
> They recited diligently their lessons
> Under Finnian with his scores of cells,
> The twelve apostles of Erin
> (tr. Ch. Plummer)[53]

It may originate from an earlier poem about Brendan, but the Brendan's hagiographical dossier shows incidentally no awareness of the idea of twelve apostles of Ireland. So, the existence of the twelve apostles of Ireland in ecclesiastical sources seems to be restricted to the Finnian's and Ciaran's (and probably also Columba's) monastic confederations (*paruchiae).*

[50] Wooding, J.M. (2011) "The Date of "Nauigatio S. Brendani Abbatis", *Studia Hibernica* 37: 26.

[51] Toner, G. (2005) "Authority, Verse and the Transmission of Senchas", *Ériu* 55: 63, 83.

[52] Kenney, J. F. *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland*, p. 417; "Bethada Náem nÉrenn", in Ch. Plummer (ed.) *Lives of the Irish Saints*. Vol. 1, p. xiv-xv.

[53] "Bator ic foghlaim tréin treall,
Cansat co léir a leighenn,
Acc Finnden co fichtibh ceall
Da apstol decc na hErenn". Ibid., p. 96.

3.2. Sagas

The only saga that mentions the twelve apostles of Ireland, is *Fled Dúin na nGéd* or "The banquet of the Fort of Geese". Here the apostles appear twice. At first the saga mentions the damnation of Tara by St. Ruadan, the twelve apostles of Ireland, and other saints[54]. The story is well known in the vernacular texts. St. Ruadan's life from the Salamanca codex narrates it this way: a man of the king Diarmait mac Cerball was unfortunately killed by Odo, a relative of bishop Senach. Despite Senach's resistance the king arrested Odo to execute him. Then Senach asked St. Ruadan to come to Tara with him and to curse the king. Threatened by Ruadan's curse the king set Odo free. The Irish life of St. Ruadan contains the same episode, but the saint is accompanied there by St. Brendan of Birr[55]. Further development of the plot is found in the lives of St. Molaise and St. Brendan of Clonfert. The former provides Ruadan with several assistants, including Molaise, who try to soften the blow against the king[56]. Finally, in St. Brendan's Irish life, Tara the king is opposed by the chief saints of Ireland, of whom Columba, Ciaran, Finnian and Molaise are listed[57]. Their fast has no effect, but then the king dreams about a tree and twelve woodcutters who try to fell it. The tree stands though until the thirteenth woodcutter comes to help. Diarmaid understands that the woodcutters symbolize the twelve chief saints of Ireland, and the last one is Brendan. Brendan finally appears and the saints prevail at last. The final version of the story, including the twelve apostles, is found in *Fled Dúin na nGéd*. Here we deal with a development of a tale very similar to the one discussed earlier regarding the saga *Tromdámh Guaire*. In this case, however, we also see the next stage of development, where the chief saints turn into the apostles.

The Irish apostles (or again bishops—in the manuscript RIA 23 K 44) appear for the second time in *Fled Dúin na nGéd,* when king Domnall invites them along with the *filids* to reverse the curse and to return the king's nephew Congall. Here the saga also tells us the Irish

[54] "Fled Dúin na nGéd", in J. O. Donnovan (ed.) (1842) *The Banquet of Dun na nGedh and the Battle of Magh Rath*, p. 4. Dublin: Irish Archaeological Society.

[55] "Betha Ruadain", in Plummer Ch. (ed.) *Betha Brennain Cluana Ferta in Bethada Náem nÉrenn (Lives of the Irish Saints).* Vol. 1, p. 323.

[56] *Kenney,* J. F. The *Sources for the Early History of Ireland,* p. 388.

[57] Plummer, Ch. (ed.) "Betha Brennain Cluana Ferta", in *Bethada Náem nÉrenn (Lives of the Irish Saints).* Vol. 1, pp. 88–89.

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apostles' names in the following order: Finnian of Moville, Finnian of Clonard, Colum Cille, Columba of Terryglas, Cainech, Comgell of Bangor, Brendan of Clonfert, Brendan of Birr, Ruadan, Ninnidh, Mobi Clarinech and Molaise. The list is obviously the same as the metrical one from the Ciaran's life in terms of both contents and the order. Apparently, the author of the text had the verse before his eyes but decided to write it in prose and define the saints more precisely. This aligns with the common tendency, typical for the eleventh and twelfth centuries[58], to explain and edit older texts. What is also of interest is that in both cases there is no trace of Finnian's role as a tutor. On the contrary, the chief saints or the apostles act as a collective epic hero, except for the one or two saints, significant for certain texts: Ruadan, Brendan, or Molaise. The group cult here seems to be held for a representative figure of the church of Ireland: in one case it is the church against the king, in another one — the church and *filids* helping the king. The concrete saints are mostly out of sight.

3.3. Two lists of the Irish apostles

One of the two lists containing the names of the twelve apostles of Ireland in its metrical and prose forms has already been discussed above. A closer look at this list reveals, however, two main features, which give some evidence on its creation and meaning.

There are thirteen names on this list. St. Finnian is counted here together with the other apostles and acts alongside as a tutor. Thus, two originally different concepts, that of thetwelve apostles of Ireland[59], and that ofFinnian as a great religious teacher — are brought together in Ciaran's life.

In this list we find some lesser known Irish saints along with the most famous ones, particularly St. Ninnidh of Loch Erne. This saint occurs in the hagiography exclusively in connection with St. Ciaran of Clonmacnoise[60]. In her study on the St. Ciaran's monastery Clonmacnois, A. Kehnel supposed that the Ninnidh's monastery

[58] Herbert, M. (1989) "The Preface to the Amra Choluim Chille", in D. Ó Corráin, et al. (eds.) *Sagas, Saints and Storytellers*, pp. 67–75. Maynooth: An Sagart.

[59] The parallel between Finnian and Paul is drawn in his Irish life and the Liber hymnorum. The main features of Finnian's cult may have been formed by the beginning of the ninth century, see Hughes, K. "The Cult of St Finnian of Clonard from the Eighth to the Eleventh Century", p. 25.

[60] See the commentary on the Martyrology of Oengus, 9 September; Betha Chiarain, 4140–4150.

was a close ally of Clonmacnoise in the tenth century[61]. Therefore, Ninnidh's name on the list speaks for Ciaran's *paruchia* as a place of its provenance.

Let us now take a look at another list, dealing with the twelve apostles of Ireland — the list of saints *unius moris* from the *Corpus genealogiarum* (which contains the metrical list as well). In P. Ó Riain's edition it is published under number 712[62].

The text offers analogies among Irish saints for different saints and even biblical figures. It dates presumably to the tenth century, but not earlier than 938[63]. The analogies, at least to a considerable extent, are explicable and based on some established tradition, going back to the late seventh century[64]. On the contrary, some later pairings, reflected in the Irish lives, like Abraham — Finnian, do not find support in this list The biblical apostles are provided here with the following analogies: Peter — Patrick, Paul — Finnian of Clonard, Andrew — Columba, Jacob — Finnian of Moville, John — Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Phillip — Cainech, Bartholomeos — Brendan of Birr, Thomas — Brendan of Clonfert, Matthew — Columba of Terryglas, Jacob — Comgell, Simon — Molaise, Thaddeus — Sinchell Junior, Matthios — Ruadan. Obviously, the list of the Irish saints, comparable with the apostles, is almost the same as a metrical list of Irish apostles. The only exception are Sinchell and Patrick, who replace here Ninnidh and Mobi.

What does this difference between the lists tell us? St. Ninnidh's presence in the metrical list has already been discussed. As for St. Mobi, he may be mentioned there due to his relations with St. Columba and St. Finnian: in other hagiographical texts he is either a disciple of both or a teacher of St. Columba. Anyway, his presence in the list corresponds with the idea of the twelve apostles as St. Finnian's disciples.

Quite different picture of apostles provide the names in the list from the *Codex genealogiarum*. St. Sinchell, paralleled to apostle

[61] Kehnel, A. *Clonmacnoise — the Church and Lands of St. Ciaran*, p. 72.

[62] Ó Riain, P. (ed.) (1985) *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae,* pp. 160–161. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

[63] Ó Riain, P. (ed.) "Introduction", in Ó Riain P. (ed.) *Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. xvii.

[64] Ní Dhonnchadha, M. (2010) "The Beginnings of Irish Vernacular Literary Tradition", in *L'Irlanda e gli irlandesi nell'alto medioevo. Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, p. 588.

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Thaddeus, cannot be clearly identified: is it Sinchell of Loch Erne or Sinchell of Kill Achad?[65] The former was considered one of the *ardnaomh* (chief saints) of Loch Erne, the latter is known for his literacy and his influence on the Célí Dé: both deserved this place, both give us nothing to draw conclusions from. St. Patrick's presence in this listis more revealing. St. Patrick is often called an apostle in the lives and hymns dedicated to him, and a chief apostle in the Irish lives of St. Maedoc and St. Coemgen[66]. His inclusion in the circle of Irish apostles would seem logical if it did not change the whole idea discussed above: St. Patrick would then be the leader of the apostles and there would be no way for the apostles to be tutored by St. Finnian. So, St. Patrick's absence in the metrical list of the Irish apostles as well as St. Ninnidh's and St. Mobi's presence there guaranteed the connection between the idea of twelve apostles of Ireland and the cult of St. Finnian as a teacher of the chief saints of Ireland, which lays a proper, quasi-apostolic foundation for the (monastic) church of Ireland.

What kind of picture can be drawn then from the list, found in the *Liber genealogiarum*? The most prominent places of Peter and Paul are here taken by St. Patrick and St. Finnian. Even if there are traces of such comparison in hagiography, this decision apparently points at similar significance of these two saints for the Irish church and probably also at the partnership of their monasteries. A special place belongs to Columba (Colum Cille), who is compared to the apostle Andrew, Jesus's first disciple and Peter's brother. Some other analogies are also noteworthy and explainable, like Brendan — Thomas, both known for long sea journeys. But these three names — Patrick, Finnian, and Columba — head the list and may tell us something about the intention behind its creation.

If we sought to establish the period of the closest relations between normally competing[67] Armagh (St. Patrick's monastery), St. Finnian's Clonard, and Iona/Kells (both St. Columba's centres), the annals would suggest either early ninth or mid-tenth century. Twice, in 927

[65] Ó Riain, P. A D*ictionary of Irish Saints,* p. 565; Kenney, J. F. The S*ources for the Early History of Ireland*, pp. 475–476.

[66] Charles-Edwards, T. M. *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 12, 182; Bieler L. (ed.) (1979) *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, p. 122. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

[67] Hughes, K. (1966) *The Church in Early Irish Society*, p. 113. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

and in 998, the Annals of Ulster mention the deaths of the abbots MaelBrigte and Dubdaleithe, who led both Armagh and Kells. The ninth century, in its turn, was the time of the closest relationship between Clonard and Armagh. They were shortly united in the early ninth century under abbot Eogan (d. 834). Moreover, in 851 and 859, the abbot of Clonard, Suarlech, got to welcome the abbot of Armagh on behalf of the church of Meath. Politically, this period appears rather compelling: 1) Clonard apparently attracted close attention of the Uí Néills[68] and was eventually occupied by them; 2) Armagh faced Viking aggression; 3) a little earlier, in 807, Kells was re-founded by the monks from Iona, who fled after a Viking strike on the island. Then, for the first time the centre of the Columba's paruchia, one of the most powerful rivals of the St. Patrick's confederation, arose just at the side of weakened Armagh. And by the middle of the ninth century all three monastic and political centres, Armagh, Kells and Clonard, found themselves within the borders of the Uí Néill high-kings' domination. This situation must have required a new hierarchy of the most celebrated Irish saints and their monasteries — a process that seems to have reached its final form by the tenth c., as reflected in the *De tribus ordinibus sanctorum Hiberniae*[69]. Clonard and Armagh may have also participated in the *Céilí Dé* movement, which encouraged literacy and production of vernacular ecclesiastical texts.

The period did not last long though: while Armagh found itself temporarily connected to Kells, Clonard since the beginning of the tenth century remained in a stable union with Clonmacnoise (s. also under 951 in Ann. of Ulster). One may wonder if the concept of the two founders of the Irish church, Patrick and Finnian, gave at that time way to the idea of Clonard as an *alma mater* of the greatest saints and establishers of Irish monasticism. An idea that was written down took its shape in the Finnian-Ciaran circle.

[68] From 775 on (see Annals of Ulster, Annals of Clonmacnoise).

[69] *De tribus ordinibus sanctorum Hiberniae* is a presumably tenth- century text, that describes the history of Christianity in Ireland, dividing it in three periods, characterized by three orders of saints. St. Patrick is told to have brought faith to Ireland, founding a church of bishops, then, however, the light of Christianity was lost. Finally, the faith was restituted by St. Finnian, who had been taught by three British saints Cadoc, David and Gilda. He and the other saints of his circle are thought to have founded monastic church of Ireland.

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Conclusion

In the early ninth century the church of Ireland experienced some integration processes, centred in Leinster, that were partly reflected in the creation of an overall Irish pantheon of saints. The Ceili De movement may have participated in this process or even launched it. The idea was applied in intra-monastic relations and affairs between church and secular subjects, while securing the church laws, promoting them to the whole Ireland, composing common liturgical texts etc. Due to the complex political situation, this tendency seems to be handled mostly in the monastic circle of Armagh-Clonard-Kells. Their changing relations have probably resulted in the reassessing of the history of the Irish church and the hierarchy of its saints with an accent on the role of the chief saint of Ireland, who were likened to the apostles — ecclesiastical basement stones of any local church tradition. At the same time St. Finnian's cult as a great monastic teacher gained particularly importance. His mediation between the church in Britain with its Roman rites and the Irish monasticism was valuable as it laid a new foundation of the Irish church. Later, in the ninth century the union between Clonmacnoise and Clonard may have reframed the very essence of the concept. Many Irish apostles were known to have studied at Clonard, and thus they were all considered disciples of Saint Finnian. They entered several saints' hagiographical dossiers under the name of the "Twelve apostles of Ireland". The Anglo-Norman invasion and the end of the vernacular church tradition led to erasing of the dubious concept of Irish apostles and of Finnian's special role from the hagiographical texts. Peculiar forms of this idea are found, however, in the sagas and poems, where they continued to exist for some time.

Table 1 (highlighted are the saints present in all the lists)

Saint	Church	Died	One of the 12 apostles*	Finnian or his disciple	One of the chief saints of Ireland**
Patrick	Armagh	457/492	+	_	+
Finnian	Clonard	549	+	+	+
Finnian	Moville	576	+	_	+

Saint	Church	Died	One of the 12 apostles*	Finnian or his disciple	One of the chief saints of Ireland**
Columba—Colum Cille	Iona/Kells	597	+	+	+
Columba	Terryglas	549	+	+	+
Ciaran	Clonmacnoise	544	+	+	+
Ciaran	Saigir	530	_	+	+
Brendan	Clonfert	577	+	+	+
Brendan	Birr	571	+	+	+
Cainech	Achad Bo	600	+	+	+
Comgell	Bangor	601	+	+	+
Sinchell	Cell-Achid	?	+	_	_
Ninnidh	Inis Muge Sam (Loch Erne)	530?	+	+	_
Molaise	Daminis	564	+	+	+
Ruadan	Lochra	584	+	+	+
Mobi	Glasnevin	544	+	_	_

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