Latin and Irish Words for 'Graveyard' in Medieval Ireland

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Abstract: This article considers the primary terms for burial places in the medieval Irish sources. It investigates why the etymology of modern Irish *reilig* differs from terms for graveyards and cemeteries in other major European languages. It is proposed that both the cult of relics and bilingualism played roles in the evolution of the term.

Keywords: graveyard, cemetery, burial, bilingual Latin, Old Irish, *coemeterium, reilic, fert,* cult of relics

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Introduction[1]

In medieval Ireland, words for places where the Christian dead are buried (such as O.Ir. *reilic*, *rúam*) evolved out of the cult of relics. This is at odds with the semantic development in most other jurisdictions, where such terms evolved along different lines. The three most generic terms for a communal burial place in modern European languages (with Indo-European roots) are cognates of *graveyard* (Norwegian *gravplass*, Croatian *groblje*), *churchyard* (German *Kirchhof*, Dutch *kerkhof*, Danish *kirkegård*),[2] and *cemetery* (French *cimetière*, Spanish *cementerio*, Italian *cimitero*, Polish *cmentarz*, Slovak *cintorín*).[3] Terms meaning simply 'burial place' are also common.[4] *Graveyard*

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[1] Warm thanks to Dr Anthony Harvey for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. Any remaining mistakes are my own.

[2] Modern Irish *cill* 'church', 'churchyard', is sometimes also used to denote a graveyard.

[3] For a thorough linguistic analysis of all of these terms and their semantic development see Wolfgang Viereck, 'Europas Sprachenvielfalt dargestellt an den Bezeichnungen für "Gottesacker"', in Andrew J. Johnston, Ferdinand von Mengen & Stefan Thim (eds), *Language and text: current perspectives on English and Germanic historical linguistics and philology* (Heidelberg 2006) 375–92.

[4] For example, Dutch *begraafplatz* and *Welsh Claddfa*. Other terms include those signifying a peaceful place (German *Friedhof*, Czech *hřbitov*) and anomalies such as German *Gottesacker*, literally 'God's acre'.

or *gravplass* is easily understandable as an enclosure or place of graves. Grave comes from the PIE root **ghrebh-* 'to dig', 'to scratch', 'to scrape'.[5] The etymology of *church-yard* is evident given that Christian burials predominantly took place in the environs of a church. The most universal term, *cemetery* (with its cognates), discussed in more detail below, has its roots in the Greek 'to lie down' or 'sleep'. Literary expressions of the 'sleep of death' are well attested in Christian, and indeed Greek, sources. The predominant modern Irish term for a communal burial place, *reilig*, evolved atypically compared with most other major European languages. I argue that this may be explained by the fact that we possess medieval evidence in not one but two written languages for medieval Ireland, which has resulted in linguistic complexity in many subject areas. A number of important studies have shown that not only was there a highly developed intellectual scene in early medieval Ireland, but that this culture was deeply bilingual.[6] The learned classes seemed to move between the two languages with relative ease. In order to understand the evolution of terms such as *reilig*, we need to identify the full range of terms concerning communal burial places in medieval Ireland. The bilingual nature of the early Irish sources has produced a large body of words for both burial-places and relics, which can be broadly divided into Latin, vernacular terms borrowed from Latin, and native vernacular terms.[7] This extensive vocabulary can reveal insights into the interactions of the church with pre-Christian culture, the use of both languages by Irish writers, and the cult of relics. Indeed, an appreciation of the cult of relics also sheds light on the development of these terms.

Latin terms

In Late and Medieval Latin the predominant term for a Christian cemetery or graveyard was *coemeterium* (*cimiterium*, *cymiterium*, *cemeterium*) from the Greek *koimeterion* 'sleeping chamber', from *koiman* 'to put to sleep'.[8] This is from

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[5]   Viereck, 'Europas Sprachenvielfalt': 381. The Old English terms for graveyard were *licburg*, 'city of the dead', or *lictún*, 'an enclosure in which to bury people', from Old English *lic* meaning 'body, corpse'. Terms *byrgen-stów* and *lic-rest* were also used. See Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth, edited and enlarged by T. Northcote Toller* (Oxford 1898, repr. 1954). Online resource http://www.bosworthtoller.com/

[6]   See, for example, Jacopo Bisagni, 'Prolegomena to the study of code-switching in the Old Irish glosses', *Peritia* 24–25 (2013–2014) 1–58; Elva Johnston, *Literacy and identity in early medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge 2013); Anthony Harvey, 'Lexical influences on the medieval Latin of the Celts', in Maurillo Pérez González & Estrella Pérez Rodriguez (eds), *Influencias léxicas de otras lenguas en el latin medieval* (León & Valladolid 2011) 65–77.

[7]   The full range of terms is under investigation as part of my current postdoctoral research, funded by the NUI, titled 'The language of relics in Medieval Ireland'. Publication is forthcoming.

[8]   Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Short, *A Latin dictionary* (Oxford 1879) 358, 'coemeterium = κοιμητήριον (a sleeping-chamber; hence), *a churchyard, cemetery, burying-ground*'; Charles du Fresne

the PIE root *kei- 'to lie, rest'.[9] An early example of this term is Tertullian's account, at the end of the second century, of an incident in which a space was miraculously made for a body within a tomb ('in coemeterio') already occupied by another corpse.[10] The term *sepulcretum*, 'a place of graves' is rarely used.[11] Even though large cemeteries were relatively common in Late Antique Rome,[12] most early Christian authors continued using the term *sepulcrum* 'grave', 'tomb', 'sepulchre' to refer to graves and burial-places, and did not tend to mention collective burial grounds at all.[13] The Hiberno-Latin texts seem to follow this model. In the eighth-century collection of Irish church canons, the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, *sepulc(h)rum* denotes graves, tombs and burials as would be expected,[14] but it is also clearly used in the sense of a communal or collective burial, more akin to a cemetery.[15] Book XVIII (*De Iure Sepulturae*) is concerned with proper burial and issues of jurisdiction over dead bodies.[16] It sheds light on the interface between burial in ancestral graveyards and church cemeteries in early medieval Ireland. While the canons do warn against burial amongst the wicked,[17] *CCH* also acknowledges the importance of ancestral cemeteries: 'Sinodus Romanus decrevit: Vir sive mulier in suo paterno sepulcro sepeliatur. Dicitur enim: Maledictus omnis homo, qui non sepelitur in sepulcro patrum suorum' (The Roman Synod decreed: man or woman should be buried in their paternal cemetery. For it is said: cursed is everyone who is not buried in the grave of his fathers).[18]

du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis*, 10 vols (Graz, 1883–1887; repr. 1954) II 388 'Locus in quo humantur fidelium corpora'.

[9] Viereck, 'Europas Sprachenvielfalt': 375–76.

[10] J. H. Waszink (ed), *Tertulliani De Anima* (Amsterdam 1947) 69 §51,7.

[11] Lewis and Short, *A Latin dictionary*: 1676 sepulcretum *a burialplace, cemetery*.

[12] There are disagreements amongst scholars as to when exactly Christians had separate cemeteries. See Eric Rebillard, *The care of the dead in Late Antiquity*, translated by Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings & Jeanine Routier-Pucci (Ithaca 2009) 7–11; Yvette Duval, *Chrétiens d'Afrique à l'aube de la paix constantinienne: les premiers échos de la grande persécution* (Paris 2000); Nicola Denzey Lewis, 'Reinterpreting "pagans" and "Christians" from Rome's late antique mortuary evidence', in Michele R. Salzman, Marianne Sághy & Rita L. Testa (eds), *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome* (Cambridge 2016) 273–90.

[13] See, for example, Isidore, *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford 1911) XV 11; On Augustine, see Bernard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb (eds), *De Civitate Dei*, CCSL 47-48 (Turnhout 1955) II 20, XX 21, XXII 21.

[14] CCH 15.3 (43), 30.3 (103), 32.22 (117), 44.8 (176), 50.2 (208), 66.9 (237).

[15] CCH 18. esp. 18.2 (56), 18.4 (57), 18.5 (57).

[16] CCH 18 (55-59).

[17] CCH 50.3 (208-09). For further discussion, see Elizabeth O'Brien, 'Pagan and Christian burial in Ireland during the first millenium AD: continuity and change', in Nancy Edwards & Alan Lane (eds), *The early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford 1992) 130-37: 135.

[18] CCH 18.2 (56). On the role of saintly graves and remains in early Ireland see Máire Herbert, 'Hagiography and holy bodies: Observations on corporeal relics in pre-Viking Ireland', in *L'Irlanda*

Muirchú and Tírechán both refer to graves as *sepulc(h)ra* but use no Latin term to refer to a communal burial ground.[19] Crucially, however, both writers use Irish burial terms for such places, discussed below. There are a couple of episodes in the *Book of Armagh* where graveyards are clearly evoked, without a specific term being used. A graveyard or churchyard is implied by Muirchú's description of the meadow of the Christians ('herbosso loco Christianorum'), part of Patrick's early settlement beside Armagh, where there is now the 'fertae martyrum' (burial-ground of the martyrs).[20] Indeed, the author of the *Vita Tripartita* uses the Irish term *reilic* ('graveyard') to describe the same place.[21] In his account of Patrick's disciple Bruscus, Tírechán describes how that priest, after his death, haunted another holy man because he was 'alone in a solitary church, a church deserted and empty': 'solus sum in aeclessia in diserto, in aeclessia relicta ac uacua'.[22] After three nights of this dream, the holy man took 'an iron shovel and dug up the moat of the grave and took the bones of holy Bruscus with him': 'arripuit […] trullam ferrumque et sepulcri fossam fodiuit et portauit ossa Brusci'.[23] The scene clearly takes place within the graveyard at Bruscus's deserted church, but unfortunately no specific Latin terminology is used. The *Liber Angeli* describes the layout of Armagh including the 'sargifagum martyrum', which is glossed as 'duferti martar' and which may be equated with Muirchú's 'fertae martyrum'.[24]

Adomnán also uses the term *sepulcrum* to refer to graves and tombs, but does not refer specifically to a communal burial ground or churchyard.[25] On the other hand, Adomnán's English contemporary Bede does use the term *cymiterium*, in reference to the church graveyards of Lindisfarne and Barking.[26] The composer

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e gli Irlandesi nell'alto Medioevo: Spoleto, 16-21 aprile 2009, Settimane di studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 57 (Spoleto 2010) 239-57.

[19] For Muirchú, see Ludwig Bieler (ed & trans), *The Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 10 (Dublin 1979) 62-123: 120 (II 12), Tírechán, *Collectanea*, in Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 122-67: 137 (16. 10).

[20] Muirchú: I 24. 2 (108). For *fert* see discussion below. See also eDIL *s.v.* 1 *fert*; Elizabeth O'Brien & Edel Bhreathnach, 'Irish boundary *ferta*, their physical manifestation and historical context', in Fiona Edmonds & Paul Russell (eds), *Tome: studies in medieval Celtic history and law in honour of T.M. Charles-Edwards* (Woodbridge 2011) 53-64.

[21] Kathleen Mulchrone (ed), *Bethu Phátraic* (Dublin 1939) i 2707 (136).

[22] Tírechán 16. 9 (136–37).

[23] Tírechán 16. 10 (136–37).

[24] *Liber Angeli*, in Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 184-91: §31 (190–91). See also Bieler's comment, 241.

[25] Alan O. Anderson & Marjorie O. Anderson (eds & trans), *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, rev. ed. by Marjorie O. Anderson (Oxford 1991) I 20 (46), III 23 (224). For *sepulcralia* 'funeral rites' see III 23 (230).

[26] Bertram Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors (eds & trans) *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English people* (Oxford 1969) III 12 (252) and III 17 (264) re Lindisfarne; IV 7 (356) and IV 10 (364) re Barking.

of the *Old English Martyrology* clearly understood the term *cymiterium* in the more general, or developed, sense of a church, as he repeatedly translated it as Old English *mynster*,[27] when incorporating material into his martryology from the *Liber Pontificalis*.[28] The eight entries mentioning *mynster* refer to popes buried or resting in Roman cemeteries or catacombs, such as the catacomb of Callixtus on the Via Appia.[29] As pointed out by Christine Rauer, Anglo-Saxon glossators usually referred to a *coemeterium* in the more narrow sense of a burial ground or cemetery.[30] The *Liber Pontificalis* sheds light on these variant uses of the term *coemeterium/cymiterium* and perhaps on the lack of early Irish references. In this text, *cymiterium* refers to Roman catacombs and communal burial sites, but the term is also equated with a type of *basilica* in the biography of pope Marcus ('basilicae quem cymiterium').[31]

Eric Rebillard explains that originially *coemeterium* was used to refer to Roman churches erected in memory of the martyrs and not communal cemeteries. Therefore, while the meaning of *coemeterium* as a communal Christian burial ground may have evolved out of an original sense of an individual tomb or collection of them, it would be more correct to view the two meanings as co-existent and subject to regional variations.[32] Richard Krautheimer has made a detailed study of the archaeological evolution of these buildings and the similarities and distinctions between *martyria*, *coemeteria* and *basilicae*.[33] He broadly describes the Roman *coemeteria* as covered burial grounds, whether above or under ground, distinct from the 'cemeterial basilicas' of the late fourth to sixth centuries which were built over the tomb of a martyr.[34]

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[27] For Old English *mynster*, see Sarah Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a review of terminology', in John Blair & Richard Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral care before the parish* (Leicester 1992) 212–25.

[28] See Christine Rauer, *The Old English Martyrology, edition, translation and commentary*. Anglo-Saxon Texts 10 (Cambridge 2013) 1–3 for a discussion of a ninth-century date of composition; Louis Duchesne (ed), *Liber Pontificalis* i (Paris 1955).

[29] Rauer, *Old English Martyrology*, 42 §10 (*LP* 147), 48 §2 (*LP* 164), 54 §28 (*LP* 148), 108 §91 (*LP* 143), 152 §143 (*LP* 154), 154 §147 (*LP* 155), 196 §202 (*LP* 202), 199 §205 (*LP* 141). For the catacomb of Callixtus, *LP*: 147 Anteros, 148 Fabian, 154 Stephen, 155 Sixtus, 202 Callistus. See also Christine Rauer, 'The Old English Martyrology and Anglo-Saxon glosses', in Rebecca Stephenson & Emily V. Thornbury (eds), *Latinity and identity in Anglo-Saxon literature* (Toronto 2016) 73–92: 86.

[30] Rauer, *Old English Martyrology*, 233.

[31] *LP* 202.

[32] Rebillard, *Care of the dead*, 5. Modern Welsh, *mynwent*, 'cemetery, graveyard', seems to convey this meaning of a tomb or monument. Similar terms in Ireland like *memoria* and *memra* are beyond the scope of the current article.

[33] Richard Krautheimer, 'Mensa-Coemeterium-Martyrium', *Cahiers Archéologiques* 11 (1960) 15–40; reprinted in *Studies in early Christian, medieval, and Renaissance art* (New York 1969) 35–58: 44.

[34] Krautheimer, 'Mensa-Coemeterium-Martyrium', 44.

Early Irish writers may have understood the term *coemeterium* as a formal martyrial tomb structure of a type, described above, which did not exist in Ireland before the seventh century.[35] Alternatively, the earliest Irish authors may not have been familiar with the term at all. The earliest mention of a *coemeterium* in an Irish text seems to be that in the *Nauigatio S. Brendani abbatis*,[36] which has been dated to the mid-eighth century by David Dumville, and more recently by Jonathan Wooding to 'a date entirely within the ninth century'.[37] In this text Paul the Hermit tells St Brendan that when he was living in the monastery of St Patrick he was in charge of looking after the cemetery: 'Fui nutritus in monasterio sancti Patricii per quiquaginta annos et custodiebam cimeterium fratrum' (I was brought up in the monastery of Saint Patrick for fifty years where I looked after the cemetery of the brothers).[38] This seems apt, considering one of the first literary references to a cemetery (indeed, our first in Greek) also concerns the care of a cemetery. Hippolytus writes, in the third century, that Callixtus was brought back from exile by Zephyrinus and given charge of the cemetery — 'eis to koimeterion'.[39]

Subsequent mentions of the term *coemeterium* in Irish texts are much later. The *Annals of Ulster* mentions a 'cemetery of the kings' at Armagh *s.a.* 935: 'Concobur m. Domnaill, ridomna Ailigh, mortuus est 7 sepultus est in cimiterio regum i nArd Macha' (Conchobor son of Domnall, royal heir of Ailech, died, and was buried in the cemetery of the kings in Armagh).[40] This site was appar-

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[35] However, compare Irish *leacht*, a rectangular dry stone, open air, altar-like burial structure. See Jerry O'Sullivan & Tomás Ó Carragáin, *Inishmurray: monks and pilgrims in an Atlantic landscape* (Cork 2008); Niamh Wycherley, *The cult of relics in early medieval Ireland* (Turnhout 2015) 199–213: 102–07.

[36] This is the earliest Irish example cited in Anthony Harvey & Jane Power (eds), *The non-classical lexicon of Celtic latinity,* i, A–H (Turnhout 2005) 146–47, and I have not found an earlier reference.

[37] David N. Dumville, 'Two approaches to the dating of *Nauigatio Sancti Brendani*', *Studi Medievali* 29 (1988) 87–102: 97; Jonathan M. Wooding, 'The date of the *Nauigatio S. Brendani abbatis*', *Studia Hibernica* 37 (2011) 9–26: 26. He also provides a succinct summary (10–15) of previous scholarly attempts to date the text.

[38] Carl Selmer (ed), *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis* (New York 1959) 26, ll. 51–52 (73); John J. O'Meara (trans), *The voyage of Saint Brendan* (Dublin 1978): 63.

[39] Hippolytus, *Refutatio*, 9.12.14. Rebillard, *Care of the dead*, 3–7, demonstrates that traditionally this evidence has been exaggerated. Famed nineteenth-century archaeologist Giovanni Battista De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea Cristiana*, 3 vols (Rome 1864–1877), used the evidence of Hippolytus to bolster his argument that there were large Christian burial sites by the third century under the control and care of the church. However, Rebillard shows that there was no central administration of the church over communal Christian burial sites and that Hippolytus only indicates that Callixtus was given responsibility for one single *coemeterium*.

[40] The entry was added as a marginal note *s.a.* 935 by the original hand.

ently the burial site of the Cenél nEógain kings during the tenth and eleventh centuries.[41]

The term *coemeterium* features in the *Life of Macartan*, from the fourteenth century *Codex Salmanticensis*, where it denotes the graveyard at Macartan's settlement in Clogher, which St Patrick decreed would be a place of resurrection into heaven: 'atque de eius sacro cimitherio plurimi ad beatam resurgent vitam' (and from its sacred cemetery many will rise again to beatific life).[42] In other *Lives* contained in the same codex the authors seemed unaware of this term, perhaps indicating the different dates in which the original texts were composed. For example, in the *Life of Fintan of Clonenagh*, it is claimed that Fintan buried the heads of some murdered people in his monks' cemetery in the hope that they would benefit from the prayers of monks.[43] The phrase used here is 'inter sepulcra monachorum' (among the graves of the monks).[44] Similarly, in the *Life of Munnu* of Taghmon, the saint stresses that all buried in the graveyard in the vicinity of the saint were assured of heaven.[45] The author used comparable descriptive phrases to the *Life of Fintan*, such as 'inter monachos tuos' (among your monks) and in 'loco sepulchrorum' (in the place of graves), rather than an explicit term for a cemetery.[46] Arguments have been made for early dates for these two texts, so they may date to centuries earlier than the *Life of Macartan*, which could account for the different terminology used.[47] An intriguing alternative in some of the later Hiberno-Latin *Lives* is the obscure term *leuiciana*, which seems to denote a cemetery or burial place associated with a monastic foundation.[48]

In an Irish late medieval tract on Latin declension the Latin term *simitherium* is glossed in Irish as *reilic*,[49] which is the primary Irish term for a graveyard or cemetery (*reilig*) in modern Irish.[50]

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[41] See AU 1064, 1166; AFM 933, 1149, 1155, 1188.

[42] *Vita S. Maccarthinni episcopi Clocharensis*, in William W. Heist (ed), *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae, ex codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi,* Subsidia Hagiographica 28 (Brussels 1965) 343–46: §1 (344). Charles Doherty, 'The earliest cult of Macartan', *Clogher Record* 19 (2006) 43-69: 66.

[43] *Vita S. Fintani abbatis de Cluain Edhnech*, in Heist, *VSH*, 145–53: 15 (149–50).

[44] *Vita S. Fintani* 15 (149).

[45] *Vitae Fintani seu Munnu,* in Heist, *VSH*, 198-209: 20–21 (203–04).

[46] *Vitae Fintani seu Munnu*: 20–21 (203).

[47] The *Vita Maccarthinni* is certainly a later text; see Pádraig Ó Riain, *A dictionary of Irish saints* (Dublin 2011) 413. *Vitae Fintani seu Munnu* possibly dates to before AD 800; see Richard Sharpe, *Medieval saints' lives: an introduction to 'Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae'* (Oxford 1991) 334.

[48] For example, in Paul Grosjean, 'Vita S. Brendani Clonfertensis e codice Dubliniensi', *Analecta Bollandiana* 48 (1930) 99–123: 110. Thanks to Anthony Harvey for bringing this term to my attention.

[49] Whitley Stokes (ed), *Irish glosses. A mediaeval tract on Latin declension.* Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society (Dublin 1860) §691 (22). See also 13.

[50] eDIL *s.v. reilic*.

Irish terms[51]

Deriving from the Latin *reliquiae*, meaning relics or remains, *reilic* is used in medi-
eval Irish texts in two different forms and contexts, due to a semantic split in Old
Irish.[52] In its plural form, *reilci/reilgi*, it is used to refer to saints' relics — a direct
borrowing from the Latin, *reliquiae*, which appears to be a plurale tantum. In order
to understand the evolution of the term in Irish texts, it is worth examining the
uses of the plural term *reilci* here, before delving into an analysis of the singular
reilic. One of the earliest examples of *reilci* is in the eighth century law-text *Bretha
Nemed Toísech*, which states that the qualifications of a good church included both
the tomb of a righteous man (*martarlaic*), and the relics of saints (*reilgi nóeb*):[53]

> *Cair: cis n-é dagfolad sóertho ecalso? Ní hansae: martarlaic fíréoin, reilgi nóeb,
> scriptuir déodae, airchinnech etail [...] Ní biat acht téora selba fuiri .i. selb Dé 7
> selb nóebmartarlaic asa chongbál, selb airchinnig cráibthig comalnathar ríagla
> soiscélai 7 screpto.*

> > What are the good qualifications ennobling a church? It is not difficult:
> > the shrine of a righteous man, the relics of saints, divine scripture, a sinless
> > superior [...] There are only three possessions (claims) (imposed) on it,
> > that is possession by God, possession by the holy shrine of him whose
> > foundation it is, possession by a devout superior who fulfils the rules of
> > the gospel and scripture.[54]

The *martarlaic* was presumably the burial tomb of the founding saint and the
reilgi nóeb may have been required for placement within the church as part of the
consecration rite.[55] These relics could have taken the form of contact relics, such as
brandea, *pignora*, and *sanctuaria* distributed from Rome (and major Irish churches
such as Armagh). An examination of the evolution of the cult of relics in the Late
Antique and early medieval Church in general indicates that these types of Ro-

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[51] Some of the following material is discussed in sections (in various contexts) in Wycherley, *Cult
of relics*. However, it is synthesised and expanded here in order to provide a more comprehensive
understanding of the words for graveyards used in medieval Ireland.

[52] Lewis & Short, *A Latin dictionary*, 1558: *Reliquiae*, 'the remains, relics, ashes of a deceased
person; esp. of a body that has been burned.' The semantic development in Old Breton appears to
parallel that of Old Irish. The singular *releg* for cemetery occurs only in placenames, and the plural
relegoù is used to denote relics. Thanks to David Stifter for bringing this to my attention.

[53] Liam Breatnach, 'The first third of the *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, *Ériu* 40 (1989) 1-40: 8-9 §3.
Written in the second quarter of the eighth century in Munster, according to Breatnach, 'Canon
law and secular law in early Ireland: the significance of *Bretha Nemed*', *Peritia* 3 (1984) 439-59: 457.

[54] *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, 8-9, 11 §3.

[55] See Wycherley, *Cult of relics*, 57, 113–15.

man martyrial contact relics were considered just as potent as parts of the actual body of the saint. Gregory the Great was shocked when Constantina, wife of the eastern Emperor Maurice, requested the head of St Paul, or some other portion of his body, in order to endow her newly built church with a worthy relic.[56] Gregory refused and explained that the custom in Rome was to put a *brandeum* in a box, which was then placed next to the body of the saint. This item, claimed Gregory, was just as powerful as the saint's corpse itself. Indeed, he recounted how Pope Leo dealt with disbelievers. He proved the authenticity of these cloths by severing one with a scissors and blood flowed from the cut.[57] The device of distributing items such as *brandea* in place of corporeal relics came to be common practice, Avitus of Vienne, for example, successfully petitioned the pope for filings from the chains of St Paul, on behalf of the Burgundian prince Sigismund, even though local corporeal relics were available.[58] Similarly, Stephen of Ripon's eighth-century *Life of St Wilfrid* records that the Anglo-Saxon bishop procured many relics during visits to Rome and even received the relics of St Andrew from the pope and used them in the dedication of his monastic foundation at Hexham.[59]

Relics of this type may also be indicated by a cryptic entry in the *Félire Óengusso*, which glorifies the feast of the 'nóebreilce núasal' (noble holy relics) on 1 October.[60] The scribe of a gloss on this entry was confused as to whether this recorded the arrival of the relics of the early martyrs Peter and Paul, Stephen, and Lawrence in Armagh, the completion of Máelruain's reliquary, or the bringing of relics to the community of Tallaght.[61]

Another ninth-century Irish reference to the term *reilci* implies that it was used to denote corporeal relics. *AU s.a.* 824 record that Bangor was attacked and the relics of Comgall shaken from their shrine: 'Orggain Benncair ac Airtiu o gentibh 7 coscradh a derthaigi 7 reilgi Comghaill do crothadh asa scrin' (The heathens plundered Bangor at Airte, and destroyed the oak church,[62] and shook the relics of

[56] John M. McCulloh, 'The cult of relics in the Letters and "Dialogues" of Pope Gregory the Great: a lexicographical study', *Traditio* 32 (1976) 145-84: 148-49.

[57] McCulloh, 'The cult of relics in Pope Gregory the Great', 149.

[58] Avitus of Vienne, 'Epistulae', in Rudolf Peiper (ed), *Alcimi Ecdicii Aviti Viennensis episcopi opera quae supersunt*, MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi 6. 2 (Berlin 1883) 35-103: Epistle 29 (59).

[59] *Vita Wilfridi*, in Bruno Krusch & Wilhelm Levison (eds), *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici,* MGH *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* 6 (Hannover 1913) 163–263: §5 (198–99).

[60] Whitley Stokes (ed), *Félire Óengusso Céli Dé: the Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee.* Henry Bradshaw Society 29 (London 1905) 214.

[61] *Félire,* 220.

[62] For *dairthech*, see Conleth Manning, 'A note on the *dairthech*', in Emer Purcell, Paul Mac-Cotter, Julianne Nyhan & John Sheehan (eds), *Clerics, kings and vikings: essays on medieval Ireland in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin 2015) 323–25.

Comgall from their shrine).[63] It is not clear whether the relics were in the church or not. A poem appended to the entry in the annals indicates that *reilgi* here referred to the bones of the saint: 'Bidh fir fir, do dheoin Airdrigh inna righ, berthair mo chnama cen chron, o Benncor bagha d'Oentrob' (It will be true, true, by the will of the High King of Kings, my bones shall be borne without harm, from Bangor of the fighting to Antrim). In the *Vita Comgalli* the saint is portrayed as carrying a container or *chrismale* under his clothes while working in the fields, when the monastery (Bangor) came under attack by 'heathens'.[64] *Reilci* is a rare term in the annals, despite the fact that its Latin counterpart *reliquiae* occurs ten times before the ninth century.[65] However, most of these cases are in relation to the *commotatio* of relics, which appears to have been a unique phenomenon in the eighth century.[66] Once Irish became the predominant language of *AU* in the mid tenth century we might have expected to see references to the term *reilci*. However, burial and the cult of relics has a much wider semantic range in the vernacular than in Latin, and the annalists could employ other terms, such as *mind*.

This range is quite obvious in the *Vita Tripartita*, where many early Irish terms for relics are used and at times appear to be interchangeable. For example, ostensibly the exact same relics are referred to as both *martrai* and *reilci* in an account of Patrick's expedition to Rome and his 'acquisition' of a large number of relics:[67]

> *Et uenit ad Rómmam: 7 peruenit somnus super habitatores Rómae, co tuc Pátraic a folortataid dona martraib. Ructha iarom inna martra sin do Ard Machae, a comarli Dé 7 comarli fer nÉrénd. Is ed tucad and cóic mairtir ar tri fichtib ar trib cétaib, imm relci Petair 7 Póil 7 Laurint 7 Stefáin et aliorum plurimorum, 7 anart and co fuil Críst 7 co folt Maire Ingine. Forácaib Pátraic in teclaim sin huili i nnArd Machae, do réir Dé 7 ind aingil 7 fer nErend. Consélat a martrai ar Pátraic setal etha ód co comarli imbi cu abbaid Rómae.*[68]

> And he came to Rome: and sleep came over the inhabitants of Rome so that Patrick took his fill of the relics. Afterwards these relics were brought to Armagh, by the counsel of God and the men of Ireland. Five and three score and three hundred relics were brought, with the relics of Peter, Paul, Laurence and Stephen and many others. And a sheet with Christ's

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[63] This event is also recorded in AU, *s.a.* 823, AI, *s.a.* 823, and AFM, *s.a.* 822.

[64] *Vita Sancti Comgalli*, in Charles Plummer (ed) *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols (Oxford 1910) ii, 22 (11).

[65] AU, *s.a.* 668, 727, 730, 784, 785, 790, 793, 794, 800.

[66] For *commotatio* and relic circuits in general, see Wycherley, *Cult of relics*: 96–97, 150–58; Colmán Etchingham, *Church organisation in Ireland AD 650-1000* (Maynooth 1999) 5.3.

[67] For *martar/martir* see eDIL *s.v. martir*; Damian McManus, 'A chronology of the Latin loan-words in early Irish', *Ériu* 34 (1983) 21-71: 66; Wycherley, *Cult of relics*, 203.

[68] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 2818–2827 (141–42).

blood and also the hair of the Virgin Mary. Patrick left the whole of that collection in Armagh according to the will of God and of the angel and of the men of Ireland. They took away his relics from Patrick […] under direction from the abbot of Rome.

In this extract, the relics obtained in Rome were collectively referred to as *martrai* four times, whereas the relics of Peter, Paul, Stephen and Laurence were specifically termed *reilci*. We know from the Book of Armagh that these particular relics were in the possession of Armagh in the seventh century.[69] Perhaps the author of the *Vita Tripartita* used a different term for the relics of Peter, Paul, Stephen and Laurence in order to stress their importance and single them out in the same manner as Christ's blood and the hair of the Virgin Mary? The term *reilci* is used elsewhere in the text to refer to relics of the elders left by Patrick in Lecan Midi accompanied by some of his household: 'Foracaib Patraic reilgi sruithiu i lLecain Midi 7 fairind día muntir léu im Crumáine'.[70] This statement implies that the relics were required for the foundation of the community, echoing the sentiment expressed in the *Bretha Nemed Toísech*. Roman relics are also referred to as *reilci* in another interesting episode in the *Vita Tripartita*, in which Muinis was sent to Rome on Patrick's behalf and received relics from the pope.[71] These relics are referred to as *reilci* twice, but a third time as *taissi*. This ambiguity between the terms *reilci* and *taisi* (sg. *taise*),[72] is also present in what could be termed a 'stock phrase' that occurs at the end of the second part of the life referring to the honour afforded to Patrick's 'remains and relics' after death: 'Atáat a thaisi 7 a reilci sund co n-onóir 7 airmitin lasin n-eclais talmandai'.[73]

The term *taise* 'dead body', 'corpse', 'remains' is often used to denote saintly relics in the Irish sources. In a copy of the *Vita Tripartita* contained in TCD MS H.3.18, *reilgi* is glossed as *taisi*, which would further imply that the terms were in some respects synonymous, by this stage.[74] Nevertheless, in modern Irish it is *taise* that survives as the term for saintly relics, whereas *reilic* survives primarily in its singular form, denoting a graveyard, and not relics.[75] In theory, it would be helpful to classify the specific types of relics understood by early

[69] Tírechán II 3.5 (122); *Liber Angeli* §19 (186).

[70] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 893–94 (51).

[71] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 912–29 (52).

[72] eDIL *s.v.* 2 *taise*.

[73] *Bethu Phátraic*, ll. 1989–1990 (101). This phrase is repeated l. 2992 (149). The same construction also occurs in the Irish *Life of Finnian of Clonard*. See, 'Betha Fhindein Clúana hEraird', in Whitley Stokes (ed), *Lives of saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford 1890) 75–83: ll. 2775–2777 (83).

[74] See Whitley Stokes, 'Glossed extracts from the Tripartite Life of Patrick', *Archiv für Celtische Lexikographie* 3 (1907) 8-38: 20, no. 46, no. 47.

[75] Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Dublin 1998) 993, 1196.

Irish authors in their use of different terms. It is difficult, however, to differen-
tiate the various meanings without a thorough statistical linguistic analysis of
all the sources.

It is important to appreciate the uses of the term *reilci* in the current discussion
of Irish terms for graveyards, as the earlier and more common form of the term
is actually the singular, *reilic*. Indeed, the earliest reference to the term *reilic* in
the Irish sources is an attempt to explain the meaning and evolution of the word.
Tírechán uses the term in the sense of a grave in an episode referring to the pa-
gan burial of Ethne and Fedelm, daughters of King Loíguire. He writes that the
'heathen' Irish call this burial a *fert* (pagan-style grave mound) but which he says
is a *relic*:[76]

> ... *sepilierunt eas iuxta fontem Clebach et fecerunt fossam rotundam in simili-
> tudinem fertae, quia sic faciebant Scotici homines et gentiles, nobiscum autem
> reli[c ...] uocatur, id est residuae puellarum.*

>> ... they buried them beside the well of Clébach, and they made a round
>> ditch after the manner of a *fert*, because this is what the heathen Irish used
>> to do, but we call it *relic*, that is, the remains of the maidens.[77]

The name of the type of round ditch enclosure, therefore, was being Christianised
from *fert* to *relic* within the Irish language. Or at least this appears to be Tírechán's
explanation for the etymology. A church was built at the site of the *fert*, according
to Tírechán, and became the focus of the cult of relics.[78] The material evidence
shows that, while new burial practices were absorbed and adapted, one native
custom that remained constant was the use of circular ditches and the survival of
ancestral cemeteries.[79] Indeed, excavations at Knoxspark, Co. Sligo, have revealed
non-ecclesiastical burials dating to as late as the eighth to tenth centuries.[80] As
discussed above, *CCH* backs up the material evidence. The Church thus effec-
tively promoted the Christian saint as a replacement for the ancestor by fitting
saintly burials into this ready-made cultural matrix. The term *fert* continued to
be used in Irish texts in relation to place names, especially the famous *Ferta fer*

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[76] Tírechán 26.20 (144).

[77] Tírechán 26.20 (144-45).

[78] Tírechán 26.21 (144).

[79] Elizabeth O'Brien, 'Pagan or Christian?' Burial in Ireland during the 5th to 8th centuries AD',
in Nancy Edwards (ed), *The archaeology of the early medieval Celtic churches* (Leeds 2009) 135-54:
149.

[80] Charles Mount, 'Excavation of an early medieval promontory fort and enclosed cemetery at
Knoxspark, Co. Sligo', in Christiaan Corlett & Michael Potterton (eds) *Death and burial in early
medieval Ireland in light of recent archaeological excavations* (Dublin 2010) 187–216.

Feicc, possibly near Slane or Navan,[81] and the *Ferta Martyrum* at Armagh.[82] This indicates the importance of such burial mounds to the community. Indeed, the texts are not shy in describing pre-Christian style burials. Both Tírechán and Adamnán describe cairn type burials where a mound of stones is placed over the body of the deceased.[83]

The use of the term *reilic* to denote a burial ground is intimately connected with the practice of swearing oaths on relics, mentioned frequently in the vernacular laws. The eighth-century legal text *Cóic Conara Fugill*, for example, reveals that witnesses took an oath over relics or at a saint's grave: 'tri .xx.(fichit) fer do martra imon comraiti' (sixty men at a saint's tomb about the deliberate act).[84] This practice continued the pre-Christian custom of swearing in cemeteries. An early law tract on *tellach* 'legal entry' outlines the importance of *fertae* as boundary markers.[85] The text describes the procedure to be used by a person who claims a piece of land in virtue of hereditary right. Integral to the process is the role of the *fert*, which the claimant must walk over to access the land. The implication made by the text is that this act is only safe for the claimant if, indeed, he is a descendant of the man buried in the *fert*, as the buried man would repel outsiders, not kinsmen.[86]

Within the context of oath taking at graves and on relics, it is clear to see how the term *reilic* became synonymous with a cemetery.[87] There are a number of explicit references in the law texts. An interesting element is the instruction that the strength of the oath could be amplified by increasing the number of cemeteries involved or of people and/or relics present. *Cóic Conara Fugill* refers to the doubling of the number of persons swearing in the cemetery: 'diablad luchta fira docum

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[81] Muirchú I 15.2 (84); I 16.1 (86); Tírechán 8.2 (130); *Félire*: 238. Scholars have disagreed as to the exact location of *Ferta fer Feicc*, though it is traditionally associated with Erc of Slane. For a discussion of the arguments and possible locations, see Catherine Swift, 'John O'Donovan and the framing of early medieval Ireland in the nineteenth century', *Bullán* 1.1 spring (1994) 91–103; Catherine Swift, 'Pagan monuments and Christian legal centres in early Meath', *Ríocht na Mídhe* 9,. 2 (1996) 1–26.

[82] Muirchú I 24.2 (108). The site is discussed at length in *Bethu Phátraic*: 136–42. See also *Bethu Phátraic*, l. 845 (50).

[83] Adomnán *Vita Columbae*: I 33 (86); Tírechán 38 (152–53).

[84] Rudolf Thurneysen (ed), *Cóic Conara Fugill* (Berlin 1926) §52 (38).

[85] This text is given the later title of *Din Techtugad*, CIH 205.22–213.37. See Fergus Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin 1988) 280; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh kinship* (Oxford 1993).

[86] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Boundaries in Irish law', in P. H. Sawyer (ed), *Medieval settlement* (London 1976) 83–87.

[87] See also the instructions in *Ríagal Phátraic* that a bishop is responsible for each church keeping their graveyard, 'relec', clean. Relevant section ed. and trans. in Colmán Etchingham, 'Bishops in the early Irish Church: a reassessment', *Studia Hibernica* 28 (1994) 35–62: 46–47

reilgi'.[88] Furthermore, glosses in the Old Irish law tract *Di Astud Chirt 7 Dligid* (On Confirmation of the Rights and the Law) show that a child of questionable parentage whose mother is dead may be received into his father's tribe if he offers seven *cumal*s, each *cumal* having the force of an oath.[89] However, if the *cumals* are not forthcoming the boy could instead offer his oath at seven cemeteries: 'do-mbeir fo secht religaib'.[90] An oath cementing a contract could be sworn at one cemetery, but an oath concerning one's role in a matter of personal injury had to be sworn at three: 'Cach fír fogla uile ag teoro reilg; Cach fír chuir 7 cunnartha ic aonrileg' (Every oath respecting injury must be taken at three cemeteries; every oath respecting contract and covenant at a single cemetery).[91] The language clearly distinguishes between the efficacies of the different 'relics'. Three *minna* were equal to three cemeteries in this regard: '7 o bet tri minnadh saine …and, gabait greim tri relec' (but if there be in the place three separate relics, they have the force of three cemeteries).[92] The text elaborates that '[no]cho dlegar minna aili do beth foran ulaid, 7 da rabait, geibit greim reilgi uili' (there is no need for other relics to be on the tomb, but if there are such, they all have the force of cemeteries).[93] It seems in this case that one could ostensibly reduce the amount of footwork required by swearing on *minna* on top of the tomb, within the cemetery. Ultimately, oath taking on relics became the norm in Ireland to the extent that the term *mind* 'insignia', 'symbol of office', relic', 'venerated object', developed the secondary meaning of 'oath', and is the standard word for oath, *mionn*, in modern Irish.[94]

The eighth-century Würzburg glosses confirm the association of the term *reilic* with burials. The passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews concerning the dead bodies of sinners in the desert ('quorum cadauera prostrata sunt in deserto') is glossed 'rupusí arreilic' (it had been their graveyard).[95] Furthermore, the ninth-century glossary *Sanas Cormaic* clearly equates this term with a burial ground and with relics of the saints: 'Relic .i. a reliqui[i]s sanctorum'.[96] The term *reilic* also features

[88] *Cóic Conara Fugill* §50 (37).

[89] This is the late title of the text given in CIH 1060.3.

[90] ALI v 454.

[91] CIH 820.42.

[92] Charles Plummer, 'Notes on some passages in the Brehon Laws III', *Ériu* 9 (1921–1923) 109–17: 114. See now Charlene Eska, 'On the swearing of oaths in cemeteries', *CMCS* 71 (2016) 59-70. She argues that the text should be translated as 'relics' not 'cemeteries' here. This is unlikely, given the distinction made between the uses of the plural and singular of *reilic* outlined here. Also, the preceding sentence in the text reads: go mur na reilge (820-41), which can only mean 'to the wall of the cemetery'. My thanks to Prof. Liam Breatnach for bringing this to my attention.

[93] CIH 821.5.

[94] eDIL *s.v.* 1 *mind*. See also discussion in Wycherley, *Cult of relics*, 207–09.

[95] Hebrews 3:17; Whitley Stokes & John Strachan (eds), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus,* 2 vols (Cambridge 1901-1903) i, 708, l. 15.

[96] Kuno Meyer (ed), 'Sanas Cormaic: An Old-Irish glossary', in Osborn Bergin *et al.* (eds), *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* 4 (Dublin 1912) 98. For dating, see Paul Russell, 'Dúil Dromma Cetta

in place names, such as Reilg Odhrain on Iona and Relickoran on Inishmurray. There seems to have been a logical understanding of the term *reilic* to denote the place where relics were buried, although, as we have seen above, this evolution is at odds with the development in most other European languages. As Christopher Jones articulates, the meaning of *reilic* reflects 'the metonymic principle that imbued sarcophagi and reliquaries with the virtus of their contents'.[97]

The two distinct uses for the one term *reilic* (the plural indicating saints' relics and the singular meaning a burial place or graveyard) may be an early Irish linguistic reflection of the Irish Church's appreciation of the hierarchy of relics, since the earliest use of the term referred to the primary *locus* of a saint, the location of his body. It is also surely a result of the wide semantic range contained within the cult of relics.[98]

The final term for graveyard or cemetery under investigation is *rúam*. From the O.Ir. *Róm* 'Rome' *rúam* is essentially just a metonymical use of Rome, but a discussion here is still useful.[99] The spelling *Ruam* (for Rome) is used in texts such as the *Félire Oengusso* and the *Epistil Ísu* in *Cáin Domnaig*, which use both spellings.[100] The respect for Rome as the possessor of the relics of the martyrs was so great that it was believed that deposition of Roman soil in Irish graveyards would effectively provide a burial ground in Roman earth. The term *rúam*, therefore, evolved to take on the added meaning of a cemetery or burial place, out of pilgrimage activity in which Irish visitors to Rome returned with soil and the relics of the saints.[101] Deposition on a site was believed to produce a certain sanctifying effect. The earliest attestations of *rúam* are in the ninth century, which suggests that *reilic* was the earlier term for graveyard. *Sanas Cormaic* simply translates the term as 'Rome' or 'a burial ground'.[102] *Félire Óengusso* notes that Babylon is the burial place of Sts Simon and Thaddaeus: 'Babilón ar-rúamsom, Tathae ocus Simón'.[103] In the prologue to this text the term *rúam* refers to the great cemeteries of Kildare and Glendalough.[104] Indeed, in the *Life of Kevin*, Glendalough is described as one of the 'four best Romes of burial' in Ireland: 'Glen da lacha in cethramadh Roimh

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and Cormac's Glossary', *Études Celtiques* 32 (1996) 115–42; Paul Russell, 'The sounds of a silence: the growth of Cormac's Glossary', *CMCS* 15 (1988) 1–30.

[97]   Christopher A. Jones, 'Old English words for relics of the saints', *Florilegium* 26 (2009) 85–129: 115.

[98]   See Wycherley, *Cult of relics*, esp. appendix.

[99]   eDIL *s.v.* 1 *rúam*.

[100]   *Félire*, *Róm* 'Rome' January 18th (36), March 4th (80), *Ruam* 'Rome' May 20th (107); J. G. O'Keeffe (ed & trans), 'Cáin Domnaig', *Ériu* 2 (1905) 189-214: 192 §1.

[101]   *Bethu Phátraic*: ll. 2809-2831 (141-42). The phenonmenon is not exclusive to Ireland; see Lucy Donkin, 'Earth from elsewhere: burial in *terra sancta* beyond the Holy Land', in Renana Bartal, Neta Bodner, & Bianca Kühnel (eds), *Natural materials of the Holy Land and the visual translation of place, 500–1500* (Abingdon 2017) 109–26.

[102]   *Sanas Cormai* 97.

[103]   *Félire* 219.

[104]   *Félire* 25.

adhlaicthe as ferr i nErinn'.[105] The term took on the same meaning in Welsh. *Rufain*, 'Rome', clearly refers to a graveyard, and not to the Italian city, in some sources.[106] Furthermore, the twelfth century *Liber Landauensis* described the island of Enlli, today Bardsey Island, off the coast of Wales, as 'the Rome of Britain' on account of its cemetery containing twenty thousand holy confessors and martyrs.[107]

The motif of Irish saints and pilgrims bringing back soil from Rome is fairly common in later Irish hagiography. The *Betha Colmáin maic Lúacháin* recounts how Colmán Elo obtained soil from the tombs of martyrs in Rome.[108] The story relates how 'the soil of Rome was thereupon scattered in every direction in the cemetery of Lynally, so that it is a burial in the soil of Rome for each one who has been buried there from that onward': 'roscaelied iar sin úir Roma 7 úir na dá apstal déc in cech air di relige Lainniu, conid adnacal a n-úir Róma da cach aen adnaicther inti ósin hille'.[109] Material corroboration of this practice may be provided by Richard Warner's analysis of the importation of exotic material into Ireland. He argues that fragments of Mediterranean *terra sigillata* ('Samian' table ware) found on early Irish sites such as Lough Faughan, Lagore, and Ballinderry were imported on account of their value as relics.[110] He also points out that Lynally is in the general area of the sites that yielded these *terra sigillata*.[111]

Conclusion

To return to the issues outlined at the outset — why in modern Irish does the word for a communal burial ground not fit in with the general semantic development of other Indo-European languages? This examination of specific terms suggests a number of possible interrelated reasons. The literary culture in early medieval Ireland developed simultaneously in two languages: one imported language with an already highly advanced literary style and form; the other a native vernacular, written down for first time but well preserved by a sophisticated oral tradition. Other vernacular cultures in medieval Europe did not produce the same volume of texts. For example, the early Irish law texts, which make many prescriptions relating

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[105] *Betha Caoimhgin* I, in Charles Plummer (ed & trans), *Bethada Náem nÉrenn,* 2 vols (Oxford 1922) i, 125–30: 128, §xi.

[106] See Joseph Vendryes, '"Rome" au sens de "Cimetière"', *Revue Celtique* 51 (1934) 301–02; Joseph Vendryes, 'Ruam', *Revue Celtique* 43 (1926) 185.

[107] Vendryes, 'Ruam', 185.

[108] Kuno Meyer (ed & trans), *Betha Colmáin Maic Lúacháin* (Dublin 1911) 77 (80-81). Meyer argues (vii) that the language of the Life possibly dates to the twelfth century and that the text may have been commissioned in response to the discovery of the relics of Colmán in 1122, as recorded by AU.

[109] Meyer, *Betha Colmáin*, 82 (84–85).

[110] Richard B. Warner, 'Some observations on the context and importation of exotic material in Ireland, from the first century BC to the second century AD', *PRIA* 76 C (1976) 267–92: 285–86.

[111] Warner, 'Some observations', 288. See his map, 287.

to burial and cemeteries, are the largest vernacular compendium of legal texts in early medieval Europe. It is worth quoting the well known apology at the end of the *Additamenta* in the Patrician texts in the Book of Armagh:

> *Finiunt haec pauca per Scotticam inperfecte scripta, non quod ego non potuissem Romana condere lingua, sed quod uix in sua Scotica hae fabulae agnosci possunt; sin autem alias per Latinam degestae fuissent, non tam incertus fuisset aliquis in eis quam imperitus, quid legisset aut quam linguam sonasset pro habundantia Scotaicorum nominum non habentium qualitatem.*

> Here end these few pieces, written imperfectly in Irish. Not that I could not have penned them in the Roman language, but these stories are hardly intelligible even in Irish; had they, on the contrary, been told in Latin, one would not so much have been uncertain about them as left in the dark as to what one had read and what language had been used because of the great number of Irish names which have no established forms.[112]

While the writer is plainly denigrating the Irish written language in comparison with Latin, it is also clear that use of Irish was sometimes unavoidable on account of untranslatable names and phrases, and that he was skilled in both codes.[113] This bilingualism led to a profusion of terms relating to burial and accounts for Tírechán's explanation of the terms *fert* and *reilic*. The term *reilic*, while not Latin, is a direct borrowing, reflecting the influence of the new language. This term overtook the native vernacular *fert*, which perhaps is not surprising considering burial ultimately came under the control of the Church.

The bilingualism of the literate 'elite' could explain why a form of the Latin *coemeterium* did not gain traction in the Irish sources. However, it is, of course, incorrect to state that a direct counterpart to English *graveyard* or Norwegian *gravplass* does not exist, as *reilic* is clearly such a term. The analysis above indicates that the term *reilic* literally meant 'a burial ground' or 'place of graves' in the earliest Irish sources. The unique element in the semantic development of the Irish term is that it was borne out of the cult of relics. I would argue that this reflects the range and complexity of the terms relating to the cult of relics touched on above — a discussion that is beyond the scope of the current article. It is also a reflection of the growing role of the cult of relics in the interactions between the Irish Church and society. The discussion provided here illustrates that, while both Latin and vernacular terms for cemeteries repay scrutiny, the Old Irish terms reveal more than their Latin counterparts about prevailing religious customs.[114]

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[112] *Additamenta*, in Bieler, *Patrician texts*, 178–79: §17.1.

[113] Adomnán expresses the same sentiment in his *Vita Columbae* 2–3.

[114] This phrasing is borrowed from Jones, 'Old English words': 86, which partly inspired by own investigations into the terminology of relics in Medieval Ireland.