



# THE CULT OF RELICS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

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**This book explores how the Christian phenomenon of relic veneration became manifest in early Ireland and evaluates the continuity between Irish practice and that on the continent.**

As the cult of saints became increasingly important to the Christian religion during the latter centuries of the Roman Empire, so too the veneration of relics became a central element of Christian piety. The relics of holy men and women — the very tangibility of which ensured their lasting appeal — could be used to heal the sick, improve the weather, ensure victory in battle, and represent power and authority. Even today, in an era of declining church attendance, famous relics such as the head of St Catherine of Siena or the tongue of St Anthony of Padua continue to draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims; the need to preserve and venerate objects associated with the important and the famous is a well-established human trait.

This book is the first to explore the historical roots of the cult of relics in early medieval Ireland, deepening our understanding of how the pagan Irish adapted to the new religion. Examining the cult of relics from the earliest Irish sources up to the ninth century, it provides insights into the role of relics and the culture and people to whom they were so significant. The volume investigates how the Christian phenomenon of relic veneration developed in early Ireland and it evaluates the continuity between Irish practice and that on the continent. By offering a new model of how the cult of relics evolved and by exploring the extent to which it helped forge early Irish Christianity, the arguments presented here have the potential to reshape views of the entire period.



"[This] is a well-argued, insightful book about religious things and their uses in early medieval Ireland. Experts on the topic will profit from Wycherley's philological investigations. Non-specialists will appreciate the book as an accessible introduction to yet another of the countless Christianities of early medieval Europe." - Lisa Bitel, University of Southern California, *The Medieval Review* 17.05.13.

Product details. Hardcover : 254 pages. Examining the cult of relics from the earliest Irish sources up to the ninth century, it provides insights into the role of relics and the culture and people to whom they were so significant. The volume investigates how the Christian phenomenon of relic veneration developed in early Ireland and it evaluates the continuity between Irish practice and that on the continent. By offering a new model of how the cult of relics evolved and by exploring the extent to which it helped forge early Irish Christianity, the arguments presented here have the potential to reshape views of the entire period. ¶ Examining the cult of relics from the earliest Irish sources up to the ninth century, it provides insights into the role of relics and the culture and people to whom they were so significant. The volume investigates how the Christian phenomenon of relic veneration developed in early Ireland and it evaluates the continuity between Irish practice and that on the continent. By offering a new model of how the cult of relics evolved and by exploring the extent to which it helped forge early Irish Christianity, the arguments presented here have the potential to reshape views of the entire period. ...more. Get A Copy. Amazon. *Early Medieval Ireland: Archaeological Excavations. 1930-2004.* Aidan O'Sullivan, Finbar McCormick, Thomas Kerr & Lorcan Harney.Â 157 burying the dead in early medieval Ireland â€“ how was the corpse treated in rites and practices?. 158 iron age/early medieval burials in penannular burial enclosures and in annular enclosures/ring-ditches (5TH-7TH century a.D.) . 160. In early Irish law, swearing on saints' relics was common practice to secure agreements or to seal contracts. The language used suggests that this continued a custom of swearing in cemeteries, with the dead ancestor or saint essentially acting as a witness to the deal. I have outlined elsewhere how the practice of swearing oaths on relics became so prevalent that one of the Old Irish terms for a relic, *minn* (or *mind*), became the modern Irish term for oath, *mionn*.Â There seems to have been less squeamishness concerning corpses in medieval Ireland. Some saint's tombs had openings in the form of holes or windows so that the bones were visible, or even within armâ€™s reach. This provided direct access for the faithful to the relics and intensified the intimate relationship between saint and pilgrim.