An Armagh Penal Cross of 1730

BY

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Introduction

Penal crosses were and are treasured possessions in Ireland and the beautiful example of a penal cross that the present writer saw in Armagh in the Summer of 2008, then in the procession of Raymond Murray, now in the Ó Fiaich Library/Archive, certainly falls into this category. These small wooden crosses range in date from the early 18th to about the mid-19th century, and are probably so-called because they stem from a time when the penal laws against Catholics were in force in Ireland. The earliest surviving cross noted by A.T. Lucas is dated 1702.¹ The Armagh penal cross which is the subject of this article dates from 1730.

As Lucas has pointed out, early crosses are generally carved from heavy, close grained timber, often yew, the later ones often from softwood, and while they vary considerably in size, the average crucifix might be between 200 and 300 mm in length.² On the front they have the carved figure of Christ in high relief, surrounded by various symbols of the passion incised on the cross itself, while on the back they usually have the letters IHS incised across the crossbeam or transom, with a cross projecting upwards from the H and three nails underneath pointing towards the date which is usually inscribed lengthways along the shaft. They may also have scourges. According to Lucas, ‘the shortness of the arms has been shown to be a direct result of carving out of the solid’.³

There is ample evidence for the link between the penal crosses and the Lough Derg pilgrimage, as Lucas has shown.⁴ The use of the penal cross in the ‘devotional rounds’ is mentioned in two accounts of pilgrimages to Lough Derg in 1727,⁵ while 19th century accounts of the pilgrimage make reference to

¹ In the museum of the Franciscan Friary, Rosnowlagh, Co. Donegal: cf. A.T. Lucas, Penal Crucifixes (Dublin 1958) p. 3.
² Ibid., pp 2-3.
³ Ibid., p. 23.
⁴ Ibid., pp 31-2.
⁵ Ibid., pp 32-3, with further evidence from the 18th and 19th centuries for this association: cf. Michael Hewson, A Description of St. Patrick’s Purgatory in Lough Derg (Dublin 1727), 132; John Richardson, The Great Folly, Superstition, and Idolatry of Pilgrimages in Ireland, especially of that to St. Patrick’s Purgatory (Dublin 1727), pp 49, 62; John D. Seymour, in St. Patrick’s Purgatory (Dundalk 1918), p. 58, refers to a 15th century account of a pilgrimage to the purgatory of Lough Derg (1441) by a Florentine merchant Antonio Mannini in which mention is made of him being brought into a chapel and a cross being put into his right hand.
Armagh Penal Cross of 1730
crucifixes being used or sold to pilgrims. Lucas suggested that the penal crosses with their uniformity of style and technique were probably made by local carvers who inscribed the date on the back and sold them to people on the way to Lough Derg where they were used during the devotional exercises. The date may have marked the year when the owner made the pilgrimage. The cross was treasured ever afterwards.

The popularity of the Lough Derg pilgrimage in the country would help to account for the distribution of surviving examples. Quite a number of these crucifixes have survived, preserved as family heirlooms, and produced in times of sickness and tribulation. The production of such crucifixes may not have been confined to the area around Lough Derg. But while some may have been produced locally around the country, copied perhaps by an enterprising craftsman and sold on the occasion of local patterns, they are principally associated with the Lough Derg pilgrimage.

Description of Armagh Penal Crucifix

The Armagh penal cross of 1730 is 370 mm long and 90 mm wide. The main shaft is 245 mm long below the transom and 70 mm above. The thickness of the wood is not uniform. It is 10 mm at its widest and tapers in both directions, though more so towards the top. A marginal groove runs around the perimeter of the cross on both sides. The figure of Christ is 145 mm long and in high relief; it is 12 mm at the knees. The head is inclined to the right, as is usual in penal crosses. The mouth is marked with a tiny little line, the hair with angled lines and there is a halo around the head. Nail marks are visible in each hand, much more so on the left hand. The rib cage is portrayed with angled incisions. The loincloth has curved lines with a ribbon-like extension on both sides of the figure. The feet overlap, right over left; and have a nail mark; the toes are showing. The cords on the forearms which often figure on penal crosses are not present here. Above the head in the shaft is the titulus INRI and above that again appear to be three five-sided 'stars' or sunbursts. Below the titulus are what appear to be three dice. There is a jug or ewer below the right arm of the crucified figure and a hammer above and a pinchers below the left arm. On the

7 Penal Crucifixes, p. 33; see also P. Ó Gallachair, 'Pilgrim Crucifixes of Lough Derg', Clogher Record 5 (1963-65) pp 296-306.
8 An 18th century source, the Retrospections of Dorothea Herbert, 1770-1789 (London 1929), p. 17, mentions a cross in connection with the pattern of St. John's Well near Kilkenny City (24 June). Recording a pilgrimage made by her eighty year old nurse Mary Neal in 1772 Dorothea wrote: 'Old Mary Neal fancied herself Obligated to go on a Pilgrimage for the Good of her Soul—To Saint Johns Well then she went walking bare foot to Kilkenny over a sharp pavement, and doing many Other Acts of Popish Penance—She returned after a long absence with a Bottle of Sanctified Water, two pair of New Padreens (or Beads) a holy Cross—A Dispensation—and the priests Blessing'.
9 See a similar example on the penal cross of 1725 from Dundalk in Lucas, Penal Crucifixes, fig. 2.
figure's left side is a ladder and on its right, a short spear. Below the feet are the skull and crossbones and below that again the cock and the pot.

On the reverse side across the transom the monogram IHS is incised in large letters. Projecting from the bar of the 'H' into the upper shaft is a cross, while below the shaft are three nails in a fan shape arrangement. All three are carved with triple lines and have an ornamental pattern. The nails point towards the date, 1730, which is carved in large figures with double lines and which runs down the shaft. Between the date and the bottom of the shaft are three scourges, each with three thongs.

The Symbols of the Passion

Although symbols of the passion go back to the early centuries of Christianity, they are only found together as a group in Europe in the later Middle Ages. From the fifteenth century onwards in Ireland symbols of the passion are found on tombstones particularly in the area of counties Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford, Meath, Dublin and Kildare, while some are also found on chalices from the late 16th century onwards. Most of the symbols depicted on the penal crosses are mentioned in the canonical accounts of the passion but some come from later apocryphal works.

Sun, Moon and Stars

On the Murray penal cross, there are what appear to be three five-pointed stars in the upper half of the shaft above the titulus. Two are readily recognisable

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11 See Margaret M. Phelan, ‘The O’Kerin School of Monumental Sculpture in Ossory and its Environis in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, _Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries_ vol. 126, 1996, pp 167-81; Fergus O’Farrell, ‘Passion Symbols in Irish Church Carvings’, _Old Kilkenny Review_ vol. 2, no. 5, 1983, pp 535-41; Roe, ‘Instruments of the Passion’ pp 531-2; John Hunt, _Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture, 1200-1600: a study of Irish tombs with notes on costume and armour_ (Dublin 1974); the symbols include the titulus, sun, moon, stars, three dice, seamless garment, sponge, spear, ladder, hammer, pincheres, three nails, scourges, birch thongs, cords binding Jesus to the pillar of flagellation and cords binding his arms to the cross, IHS, cock and pot, cock on pillar, jug and basin, scourges, skull and crossbones, sword of Peter, ear of Malchus, purse and thirty pieces of silver, lantern, five wounds, chalice, cup on pole, hand that struck Jesus, crown of thorns, sceptre, Veronica’s veil; about half of these appear on the penal crosses.


13 See J.J., Buckley, _Some Irish Altar Plate_ (Dublin 1943), pp 31, 36, 40, 42-3, 47, etc.
but one can make out a third. Three five- or six-pointed stars are to be found on penal crucifixes. Three stars are found on crucifixion scenes on 17th century chalices and on 18th century tombstones in the South-East of Ireland.

The three ‘stars’ are usually taken to represent the sun, moon and stars and are found together in some biblical texts. The sun, moon and stars are associated with the day of the Lord in Joel 2:10 and 3:15 (cf. Isaiah 13:10; 4 Esdras 7:39), and with the coming of the Son of Man in the gospels of Mark (13:24-25), Matthew (24:29) and Luke (21:25). The gospels, however, do not link them to Jesus’ death on the cross. Luke’s gospel associates an eclipse of the sun with the death of Jesus, but the stars are not mentioned in the text. The sun, moon and stars are mentioned together in a first century life of Adam and Eve in relation to the death of Adam. The story (46.1) tells how the ‘sun, moon and stars’ were ‘darkened’ for ‘seven days’ after the death of Adam. But the sun, moon and stars are associated with the death of Christ in the first of the ‘passions’ in the Leabhar Breac, the ‘Passion of the Image of Christ’. Here the storyteller, recalls how at the first passion ‘gloom and darkness came over the sun and the moon and all the stars of heaven’.

The Dice

According to all four gospels Jesus’ clothes were divided among the soldiers who were present at the crucifixion. The Romans usually crucified criminals naked but according to some traditions they make concessions to the Jewish horror of nudity and allowed a loincloth to be used. According to an apocryphal work The Acts of Pilate (10:1), Jesus was left with a loincloth after

14 See, for example, Buckley, Altar Plate, pp 69 (Plate XXIV fig. 2), 73 (Plate XXVI fig. 1).
16 Mark 13:24-25: ‘But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.’ (cf. Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:25); see also Psalm 148:3 (‘Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!’).
17 Luke 23:44-5: ‘It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two’; cf. Lucas, Passion Crucifixes, p. 4.
18 According to the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, Pilate is said to have called upon ‘sun and moon to witness that I do not find any reason for death, nor, indeed, any crime or sin against the holy man yonder’ (III:1); cf. Irish Biblical Apocrypha. Selected Texts in Translation, ed. Marie Herbert, Martin McNamara, Edinburgh; T & T. Clark, 1898, pp 64, 71. The sun and moon are depicted on the Monasterboice High Cross (cf. Peter Harbison. The Crucifixion in Irish Art [Dublin 2000], pp 4-5).
20 ‘tanic temel & dorchatu dar grein & dar esci & dar rennaib nime ar-chena’: text and translation from Robert Atkinson, The Passions and Homilies from Leabhar Breac: text, translation and glossary (Dublin 1887), pp 42, 279. Lucas took the sun, moon and stars to represent the ‘whole firmament’ (Penal Crucifixes, p. 4.).
21 See Jubilees 3:30-31; 7:20.
the division of his clothes. He is portrayed as such in the crucifixion scene on the panel of an early 5th century Roman ivory casket in the British Museum and on the Santa Sabina wooden door in Rome, and he is portrayed as such on Irish High Crosses, tombstones, chalices and penal crosses.

The gospels of Matthew (27:35), Mark (15:24) and Luke (23:34) recount that the soldiers who crucified Jesus divided his clothes among them by casting lots (kléron). According to John’s gospel it was for his tunic, a long garment worn next to the skin, that the soldiers cast lots. Casting lots was an age-old practice both within and without Israel. Saul for example was chosen by lot as Israel’s first king. In the Acts of the Apostles Matthias was chosen by lot (edókan klérous) to replace Judas as one of the twelve. The lot itself could be a flat stone or piece of wood or a potsherd which could be thrown or could be put into a container to be drawn out in order to determine a choice or assign a portion. Each man would mark his own lot and the first out would be the winner.

Dice games, however, were popular among Roman soldiers, and this popularity probably led to the widespread belief that dice were used by the Roman soldiers on Golgotha. Whether the soldiers would have brought their ‘dice box’ (pyrgos) with them to the place of crucifixion is another matter. Not everyone subscribes to this theory. It has been suggested that the division of the clothes was decided by a game called mora – guessing the number of outstretched fingers in one’s opponents’ hidden hands. If, however, the soldiers were going to be there for a considerable time, they may have brought dice with them. Whatever was used on Golgotha, it was dice which the artists depicted down the ages, and it is dice that one finds, for example, on Irish tombstones from the 15th century onwards. Lucas lists four penal crosses dating from 1713 to 1718 on which the dice appear. In the Murray penal cross three dice appear in a diagonal row in the upper half of the shaft below the sunbursts and slightly to the right of the central one.

22 Although the singular is used in the Greek it is usually translated ‘lots’. Underlying this reference is Psalm 21:19 LXX: ‘They divided up my clothes (himatia) among themselves and for my clothing (himatismon) they cast a lot (ebalon kléron)’.

23 Matthew 27:35: ‘And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots’ (cf. Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34); John 19:23-4: ‘When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.’ This was to fulfil the scripture, ‘They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots’. The tunic is usually understood as a symbol of unity.


26 Penal Crucifixes, p. 9: Carrigallen, Co. Leitrim (1713); Togher, Co. Louth (1714); St. Mel’s College, Longford (1717); St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth (1718).
Titulus

Usually the titulus is placed at the top of the shaft but not in this case, perhaps because of the damaged end of the shaft. All four canonical gospels reported that Pilate had a titulus or title fixed about the head of the crucified Jesus. In the case of crucifixion, which could be described as a Roman terror tactic inherited from the Medes and the Persians, a placard with the criminal's name and crime was sometimes carried before the condemned man to the place of execution or hung around his neck. In this case it was placed over Jesus' head at the crucifixion scene. Jesus probably carried the crossbeam to Golgotha where it was fixed on to a standing beam.

The wording that fits INRI, the Latin 'Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum', comes from John 19:19 which in the Vulgate reads: 'scripsit autem et titulum Pilatus et posuit super crucem erat autem scriptum Iesus Nazarenus rex Iudaeorum'. The words of the inscription (written differently in the four gospels) are the only words that are claimed to have been written about Jesus during his lifetime. According to John's account it was Pilate who wrote the title, thus making a public profession of the truth he had earlier evaded. The chief priests had forced him to condemn Jesus whom he knew was innocent, now he turns the tables on them by affixing the title to the cross.27

Jug

There are two possible interpretations of the symbol below the figure's right arm - a chalice or a jug or ewer - but the vessel on the Murray penal cross has a handle and possibly a spout which point towards a jug for pouring water. The jug handle is to be seen on a penal cross from 1725.28 The jug is to be found on tombstones from the 17th century onwards.29 This recalls the incident recorded in the gospel of Matthew of Pilate washing his hands. During the trial of Jesus, Pilate, as Matthew 24:27 recounts it, when he saw that he was not going to be able to release Jesus and that there was a danger of a riot starting, 'took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves'. He then gave Jesus over to the crowds. Pilate washing his hands was a common theme in early Christian art,30 and is found on the Irish High Crosses.31

Pinchers and Hammer

Neither the pinchers nor the hammer is mentioned in the canonical gospels but they are very commonly depicted as part of the instruments of the passion.32

27 The Revised Standard Version renders the Greek: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'. According to the Gospel the titulus was written in three languages - Aramaic, Greek and Latin.
28 See Lucas, Penal Crucifixes, Fig. 2.
29 See, for example, Phelan, 'Monumental Sculpture in Ossory', pp 170, 173, 174, 175, 177; O'Keeffe, 'Instruments of the Passion', p. 162.
31 At Durrow and Monasterboice; see Harbison, High Crosses, vol. I, pp 268-9.
32 See, for example, the illustrations in Phelan, 'Monumental Sculpture in Ossory', pp 170-8; de hOir, 'Kilkenny headstones', pp 153-4, 156; O'Keeffe, 'Instruments of the Passion', pp 162-5.
Armagh Penal Cross of 1730
An Armagh Penal Cross of 1730

The canonical gospels and the Gospel of Peter tell the story that Joseph of Arimathea taking the body of Jesus from the cross and burying it. The deposition was a very popular theme in art and sculpture. The pinchers is associated with the withdrawing of the nails for the deposition of the body of Jesus and is a common motif on tombstones. The pinchers is usually found with the hammer on crucifixion scenes, the hammer being used for nailing Jesus to the cross. Here it is clawed, as is usual on penal crosses. The hammer is found above the left arm, the pinchers below it.

Ladder and Spear

The ladder is associated with the crucifixion and the deposition but is not mentioned in the gospel accounts. It is found very frequently on penal crosses and also on the base of 17th century-chalices and on tombstones from the 15th century onwards. On the penal crucifixes it is almost always found on the lower shaft on the figure’s left side, opposite the spear.

The spear is a biblical motif, recalling as it does the piercing of Jesus’ side recounted in the Gospel of John. When the soldiers broke the legs of the two men who were crucified with Jesus to ensure their quick deaths, they found that Jesus was already dead (19:33). One of the soldiers, however, ‘pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water’ (19:34). The Greek verb *nysssein* could mean to pierce or to stab, the purpose being to ensure that Jesus was dead, or it could mean ‘to pierce’ or ‘to plunge deeply’, the purpose being to deliver the *coup-de-grace*. The former seems more likely in John’s gospel, that is, that his (right) side was pierced to ensure that he was dead.

The soldier who pierced Christ’s side is not identified in John’s gospel but is named in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* (XVI) and elsewhere as the Roman soldier Longinus. The name was probably given to him in tradition because of the ‘spear’ which is known in Greek as the *logche*, in Latin as ‘lancea’, which means a long, slender spear. Longinus is said to have been cured of blindness by the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ. In the ‘Passion of Longinus’ in the *Leabhar Breac* Longinus is quoted as saying to the prefect Octavius that it was he who ‘wounded Christ with a soldier’s spear

33 Mark 15:45-46; ‘And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. And he bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock: and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb’: cf. Matthew 27:57-59. Buckley, *Altar Plate*, p. 103, notes their presence on a chalice of 1664.
34 See Buckley, *Altar Plate*, pp 27, 31, 36, 40, 42-3, 47, etc.
35 The 15th century Florentine artist Fra Angelico has two ladders in his painting of the nailing of Christ to the cross that may be seen in the convent of S. Marco in Florence. On the Slieverue penal cross the ladder is on the left side of the shaft, the spear on the right side; see illustration in Fearghus Ó Fearthail, Jim Walsh, ‘A ‘Penal Crucifix’ of 1721’, *Sliaabh Rua, A History of Its People and Places*, ed. Jim Walsh (Slieverue 2001), pp 167-77, 174.
36 A blow at the heart intended as a coup de grace would have been aimed from the left side, splitting his heart in two; see Robert Atkinson, *The Passions and Homilies from Leabhar Breac: text, translation, and glossary* (Dublin 1887), p. 300; Harbison, *Crucifixion*, p. 3.
37 The other figure that is on the High Crosses but not on the penal crosses is Stephanaton who holds up the vinegar to the dying Jesus to drink; see Harbison, *Crucifixion*, 2-7, 36-7.
in His right side, so that His heart burst'. He is portrayed on the figure's left side in the panel in the British Museum mentioned above.

The spear is found on the 9th century depiction of the crucifixion (the earliest representation in Irish art) in a manuscript of the Abbey of St. Gall in Switzerland. It is on the left side of the figure of Jesus. But it is found on both sides of the figure in depictions of the crucifixion — on the figure's right side on the High Crosses of Clonmacnoise, Kells, Monasterboice, Moone and Castledermot South, for example, and on the left on that of Castledermot north. The spear pierces Jesus' left side on a bronze plaque of about 1100 found in Clonmacnoise, while it pierces the right side on the McMahon tomb panel in Ennis Friary (c. 1470). The spear is also found on sculpted tombs and on silver chalices from the late 16th century onwards. It is on the figure's right hand side in the Armagh penal cross of 1730 as on other penal crosses; the ladder is on the left.

Skull and Crossbones

The motif of the skull and crossbones seems an odd Christian motif but it is found on 16th century chalices and also on tombstones in Ireland and abroad. It is found at the foot of the cross in Luca Signorelli's crucifixion (1495-1500) in the Uffizi gallery in Florence and in Andrea de Castagno's crucifixion (1431) in the church of Sant' Apollinare in Florence.

The fact that Jesus was crucified on the hill of Golgotha, which in Hebrew means the place of the skull (from the shape of the hill, perhaps), may have been significant in the development of the motif, but more significant is the fact that the skull and crossbones at the foot of the cross are those of Adam. According to a Christian tradition reported by Origen in his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, and by others, the body or head of Adam was buried on Golgotha in the place where Christ was later crucified. The eighth-century poet Blathmac describes how 'the flowing blood from the body of the dear Lord baptised the head of Adam'.

Adam is also linked to Calvary or Golgotha and the cross of Christ by a

39 Stephanaton, the sponge bearer, and Longinus with his lance are present on the High Crosses on the right (Moone, Castledermot South, Ullard) and on the left (Castledermot north)
40 Cf. Harbison, *Crucifixion*, p. 3. In Fra Angelico's painting in S. Marco in Florence it is Jesus' right side that is pierced.
42 See, for example, Buckley, *Altar Plate*, pp 68 (1637b), 81-2 (1640g).
43 Cf. Buckley, *Altar Plate*, pp 23, 26, 26-8; 30-1, 38, 48, 63, 92-3; Longfield, 'Irish Tombstones. VII', 174; Phelan, 'Monumental Sculpture in Ossory', pp 171; 173; it is found on the tombs of the Irish earls in S. Pietro in Montorio in Rome and frequently on funerary monuments in Roman churches.
44 Origen, *In Matt* 27:33; 126; *PG* 13.1777; *GCS* 38.265 and 41.226.
45 Origen refers to the body of Adam, Pseudo-Basil, to the skull, a tradition known to Jerome; see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. II, p. 937 n. 9.
46 *The Poems of Blathmac Son Cu Brettan Together with the Gospel of Thomas and a Poem on the Virgin Mary*, edited and translated by James Carney, Irish Texts Society 47 (Dublin 1964), p. 20. The association of Adam and Christ is of course already present in the letters of St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 15; Rom 5:14-19).
legend, which was popular in medieval times. According to this story, Adam, when he was dying, sent his son Seth into Paradise to obtain the oil of mercy. The archangel Michael, whom he met, refused his request. Instead he was given a twig or seed from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (or from the tree of Life or from a Cedar of Lebanon, depending on the version of the story). Seth returned and placed the seed in the mouth of Adam (or the twig on the corpse). From this seed or twig grew a tree from which eventually came the wood for the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.

In 'The Adam and Eve Story' from the 10th century Saltair na Rann (lines 2229-2240) the poet tells how when Adam died he was anointed with oil and buried in Hebron until 'the flood of the deluge' took his head from his buried corpse and carried it to Jerusalem after which it remained 'before the gate of Jerusalem'; it ends up on Golgotha, however, and 'the cross of Christ was afterwards planted therein'. The legend linking Adam to the cross and the traditions which located the burial place of his body or skull on Golgotha, and the crucifixion of Jesus in this place appear to lie behind the use of the imagery of the skull and crossbones in Christian art.

The Cock and Pot

There are two motifs involving a cock that are association with the death of Jesus. One of these is found in the gospels and refers to the three denials of Peter (Mark 14:66-72; Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 23:54b-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27); the other is found in apocryphal literature and involves the figure of Judas who betrayed Jesus. Both motifs are found on tombs in Ireland. The apocryphal story of the cock and the pot developed from the reference in the Gospel of Matthew (27:3-5) that when Judas saw what was happening to Jesus he repented, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, admitted his wrongdoing, and threw down the pieces of silver in the temple when they gave his protest short shrift; he then went and hanged himself.

The story occurs in Ireland in various forms. It is found in the Leabhar Breac (222 b25) where the cock that rises from the pot is identified as the cock that crowed at Peter's denial. It is also found in the ancient poem 'Crist Rocrochad' or 'Christ was Crucified'. In the fifteenth century manuscript of the Acts of Pilate, part of the Gospel of Nicodemus, the cock that returns to life crows three times, again echoing the cock of Peter's denial.


48 It was cut down but not used for Solomon's temple and eventually having figured in a dream of the Queen of Sheba and having been discarded, it was used for the cross.


52 The story runs as follows: 'And departing to his house to make a halter of a rope to hang
Irish folk versions of the story usually represent a development of Matthew 27:62-66 which tells how after Jesus' burial by Joseph of Arimathea the high priests and the Pharisees get permission from Pilate to have the tomb made secure until after the third day because of Jesus' prediction while he was alive that he would rise on the third day. Matthew's gospel recounts how 'they went and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard' (27:66). The Irish scene then changes to a feast at which the Jews who had sealed the tomb are gathered together in the high Priest's house for a feast with a cock boiling in the pot. They were afraid that the Lord would rise from the dead. One said he would, another, that he would not, no more than the bird at the bottom of the pot. At that the cock hopped up on the edge of the pot, clapped his wings and announced the resurrection with the words: 'Tá Mac na h-Oighe Slán' ('the Son of the Virgin is safe'). 53 In Peig's autobiography a version of the story is told in response to the question: 'What does the cock say when he crows?' ('Cad deir an coileach nuair a ghlaodhann sé?'); 54 the answer, 'Mac na hOighe slán! Mac na hOighe slán!' 55 Lucas has given a list of over thirty instances of the appearance of the motif of the cock and pot on tombstones from the 15th (Kildare), 16th (Tipperary, Kilkenny, Cork, Clare, Galway and Roscommon) and 18th centuries (Roscommon, Wicklow, Wexford, Offaly, Kildare, Carlow and Cavan). 56

himself, he found his wife sitting and roasting a cock on a fire of coals or in a pan before eating it: and saith to her: Rise up, wife, and provide me a rope, for I would hang myself as I deserve. But his wife said to him: Why sayest thou such things? And Judas saith to her: Know of a truth that I have wickedly betrayed my master Jesus to the evil-doers for Pilate to put him to death: but he will rise again on the third day, and woe unto us! And his wife said to him: Say not nor think not so: for as well as this cock that is roasting on the fire can crow, just so well shall Jesus rise again, as thou sayest. And immediately at her word that cock spread his wings and crowed thrice. Then was Judas yet more convinced and straightway made the halter of rope and hanged himself" (M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford 1924], p. 116); see Seymour, 'The Cock and Pot', pp 147-9; Douglas Hyde, *Legends of Saints and Sinners* (Dublin 1915), pp 76-9.

53 See A. O'Connor, 'Mac na hOighe Slán!' A Short Study of the 'Cock and Pot' in Irish Folk Tradition', *Sinsear*, vol. 2, 1980, pp 34-42; in Irish folklore the story may be connected to Judas, to a group of Jews or Roman soldiers, or to individuals such as Herod or Peter or Mary Magdalene (p. 37).

54 The story in Peig runs as follows: Nuair a bhí fós a curtha 'san uaigh dubhait na Gáidheil le chéile go ndubhairt Mac an tSiúiníre, nuair a bhí Sé 'na bheataigh, go n-éireachadh Sé an trecas lá. 'B'fhéidir,' ar siad le chéile, 'go goidfheadh a mhuintir leo É, is go ndéarfaidís gur aiseirigh Sé, 'Imthighidh,' arsun t'Uachtaráin, 'agus daingnighidh an leac le béal na huagha'. Nuair a bhí an leac feistithe go maith aca d'thilleadh an t-airís. Bhí an fheidh agus féasta aca ansan. Bhí pota ag fluíchaíadh ar an dtéine a bhí lán do choiligh ógá. Do labhhair ar t'Uachtaráin. 'An bhfuil bhur gnó déanta cruinne agaibh?' ar seisean. Labhhair duine aca agus d'fhreagair 'ní éireachadh Sé anois nó go n-éireachadh an t-eán atá ag fluíchaíadh i n-ghocht an choire'. Ní tíosu sin ná éirigh an coileach ar bhruach an choire, do gheadh a dhá sciaithán agus do ghlaodoir an Mhac Mhuire. 'Mac na hOighe slán! Mac na hOighe slán!' ar seisean (Peig, [Dublin 1936], p. 76; see another from Corca Dhuibhne in O'Connor, 'Mac na hOighe', p. 36.

55 An onomatopoeic rendering of the crowing of the cock (Lucas, *Penal Crucifixes*, p. 28).

56 Penal Crucifixes, pp 29-30. To his list may be added 15th century examples from Kilcooley Abbey in Tipperary (cf. O'Keeffe, 'Instruments of the Passion', p. 161) and a 17th century
IHS, the Nails and Scourges

On the back of the cross, across the transom are the letters IHS, the first three letters of the name Jesus in Greek. The Christogram was understood as a profession of faith in Jesus (Iēsous) as Son (Huios) and Saviour (Sōtēr). The fish would later represent such a profession of faith, the Greek ichthus standing for Jesus, Christos, Theos, Huios, Sōtēr. As is common with this symbol a cross projects upwards from the bar of the H.

The nails on the cross are three in number as is usual with penal crosses - one for each hand and one for the feet. The three nails are incised in typical fan shaped fashion and in the usual position, immediately below the junction of the shaft with the transom, one upright and the other two sloping away, with the lines trebled.

In the act of crucifixion the person was tied or nailed to the crossbeam which was then lifted into place. The implication in the resurrection stories of the gospels is that the nails were driven through the hands (cf. Jn 20:25, 27: ‘Behold my hands and my feet’; Luke 24:39). The Gospel of Peter (6:21) speaks of the drawing of the nails from the hands of the Lord.

The oldest portrayals of the crucifixion of Jesus (Church of Santa Sabina, Rome; British Museum) do not seem to have nails in the feet but the discovery in June 1968 in a suburb of Jerusalem of a first century tomb that contained the remains of a man in his late twenties crucified not long after the crucifixion of Jesus suggest that his feet were nailed to either side of the upright post through the heel bone.57 Four nails appear to have been more common in earlier portrayals of the crucifixion, later three. Helena, the mother of Constantine, is said to have found only three nails and this became the standard.58 Three nails in a fan arrangement and gripped by the pinchers are found on 16th century Butler and Purcell tombs in St. Canice’s Cathedral, and the Archer tomb in St. Patrick’s, Kilkenny, on the St. Leger tomb in Grove, Danesfort, the Archdekin tomb in Dungarvan, Gowran, and on early 17th century tombs at Kilree, Callan, Knocktopher and St. Mary’s in Kilkenny, and Ballyneale and Carrick-on-Suir, in Tipperary.59 The Comerford tomb in Callan has three on their own in a fan shaped arrangement, while three nails in a fan shaped arrangement are shown piercing the heart of Christ on a number of 17th century chalices of 1637.60 Three scourges parallel to one another, each with three wavy thongs are incised on the bottom of the shaft of the cross. The scourges are a fixed element


58 In 1968 a tomb was discovered near Jerusalem containing the bones of twenty people including those of a man in his late 20s who had been crucified. The arms were tied to the crossbeam while the legs were nailed to either side of the upright post through the heel bone; cf. Brown, Death of the Messiah, vol. II, p. 950.

59 See the illustrations in Hunt, Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture I, nos. 165, 185: Phelan, ‘Monumental Sculpture in Ossory’, pp 171-4; O’Keeffe, Instruments of the Passion’, p. 163.

60 See Phelan, ‘Monumental Sculpture in Ossory’, p. 171; Buckley, Altar Plate, pp 63, 65, 69.
on penal crosses and are usually three in number and of a similar type. The scourges are found on many tombstones in Ireland. Most of the tombs mentioned already which have instruments of the passion have only two scourges but the 16th century St. Leger tomb at Grove in Danesfort has three.62

Jesus’ scourging is mentioned in the passion narratives of Matthew (27:26), Mark (15:15), Luke (23:24-25) and John (19:16a; 19:1).63 Mark and Matthew mention that Jesus was flogged at the end of his trial. Although the flogging is not described, some things are known. The person to be flogged was tied to a post or pillar or thrown to the ground or he could be flogged as he carried the cross beam to the place of execution. Rods, it seems, were used on freemen; sticks on military personnel and scourges on others.64 It is scourges that are incised on the penal crosses. These were usually leather thongs with pieces of bone or lead or even spikes attached. In John’s account the scourging or flogging is intended to make Jesus look more wretched so that the Jews might accede to Pilate’s wish to release Jesus.

Conclusion

For the person making the pilgrimage to Lough Derg the penal cross provided a graphic reminder of the sufferings of Christ. The symbols of the passion may not all have been readily intelligible to the pilgrim, especially the link to Adam, but most were and would have provided much food for meditation as he or she made the penitential rounds and reflected on the passion and death of Christ who had given his life on the wood of the cross. And when the pilgrims returned to their homes these small, unique wooden crosses with their evocative symbols represented a memento of a every special event in their spiritual lives, a pilgrimage to the ‘purgatory of St. Patrick’. But the ‘penal cross’ was much more than that, for it played an important part in the devotional life of the pilgrim’s family and became a precious possession that was treasured down the generations.

61 Cf. Lucas, Penal Crucifixes, pp 6, 18.