RESEARCH REPORT: MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE MENDICANT ORDERS IN IRELAND PRE-1829

Dr Edel Bhreathnach (Academic Project Manager)

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mendicant religious orders (Augustinians, Capuchins, Carmelites, Dominicans and Franciscans) have been in Ireland since the thirteenth century and their influence on Irish history and culture has been immense. Evidence of this influence can be detected in their archives and book collections, medieval and early modern texts in Irish, English and Latin, their altar plate and in the impressive medieval friaries located in towns and rural sites throughout the country. On arrival in Ireland in the thirteenth century, the friars, and especially the Dominicans and the Franciscans, set about establishing themselves in the main Anglo-Norman ports and towns (e.g. Cork, Dublin, Drogheda, Kilkenny, Waterford) where they would have had access to royal, civic and merchant patronage. They also founded houses in Armagh and Cashel, the main ecclesiastical capitals of Ireland where they probably obtained alms from other orders and both alms and land from bishops. Within a short time of arrival in Ireland, friars were appointed as bishops to various dioceses, an issue (among many) that was to cause constant tension between them and the secular clergy. The primary mission of the friars was pastoral. The mendicant movement swept through Europe in the Middle Ages with the friars to the forefront of preaching to nobles, clerics and laity alike. Ireland was no different as many friars were noted preachers and the Franciscans in particular communicated their message through plays, poetry and songs.

Important patrons were attracted to the friars in the expectation that endowments to them would ensure prayers for their own souls and for their deceased relatives. The nobility of medieval Ireland, the Fitzergus, O’Briens, O’Conors, de Birminghams, O’Kellys,

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1 The UCD Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation project which was undertaken by University College Dublin from 2005 to 2009. Material selected from UCD’s extensive resources of archival and rare material was digitised and catalogued before being made available from a single virtual location (http://ivrla.ucd.ie). This digitised material covers a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines and is arranged in curated collections which can be browsed, searched, bookmarked, or downloaded. In addition to the digitisation of existing UCD collections, the IVRLA conducted a series of demonstrator projects. The remit of these projects was to develop additional digital research resources and to present these in the form of an exhibition collection. Some of these projects incorporated existing IVRLA material but many generated new content which was inspired by the potential of digital resources. Consequently, the IVRLA and its demonstrator projects show how digital repositories can provide access to diverse archival research materials as well as challenging the ways in which we consider digital content and generate research in a digital environment. The IVRLA is a component of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland and is funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) Cycle 3, administered by the Higher Education Authority.
O’Donnells and many more, endowed mendicant friaries in their lordships, making highly-skilled masons and sculptors available to the friars. The evidence of this patronage is apparent throughout Ireland in finely-constructed buildings such as Rosserilly, Co Galway (Franciscan); Sligo Friary (Dominican); Fethard, Co Tipperary (Augustinian); and Castlelyons, Co Cork (Carmelite). Internal stone furnishings, including very elaborate tombs and altars survive in the ruins of Irish friaries, as in Ennis, Co Clare (Franciscan). That so many friaries were built along major routeways, on river-bends and in ports suggest that as well as playing an important role in the spiritual life of the community, they were also a vital component of the economy: they collected tolls, controlled fisheries and had a close relationship with merchant families.

During the fifteenth century, a movement of stricter observance among the friars led to a renewal of their spiritual mission and this in turn increased their capacity to receive alms and patronage. New friaries were built and old friaries were re-built and with this expansion came a growth in the acquisition of interior furnishings: altar plate, statues, rood screens, tapestries, many of which were imported from abroad. Very few objects survived the medieval period in Ireland, mainly due to the destruction that came with the dissolution of religious orders by the Tudor administration in the mid-sixteenth century.

There has always been a popular belief that the tumult of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had such an impact on the mendicant orders in Ireland that they barely managed to survive. Recent research, building on scholarship undertaken by the orders themselves during the twentieth century, has shown that although circumstances were difficult and they encountered many obstacles, in many areas they flourished. They continued to function in the vicinity of their friaries, they established colleges on the continent and from these colleges (examples include the Franciscan colleges of Louvain, Prague and Rome) a vibrant intellectual and political life extended into the royal courts and universities of Europe and the papal court in Rome. At home, the friars were not without patrons, although a change of patrons is discernible. The great medieval patrons, such as the O’Donnells and Fitzgeralds, were gone and replaced by a new wealthy middle-class of landowners and merchants such as the Coppinger, Colman-Gould, Lynch and Ferris families. Their patronage manifested itself primarily in altar plate: chalices, patens, vestments and other liturgical objects. While seventeenth-century secular Irish silverware and Church of Ireland altar plate was known to exist and had been partially catalogued, this was not the case with Irish Catholic silverware. The main objective of the project on the material culture of the mendicant orders in Ireland was to create a full inventory of portable objects pre-dating 1829 (the year of Catholic
Emancipation in Ireland) in the possession of the mendicant orders in Ireland and by doing so, begin to estimate the amount of material that had been produced and had survived.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Original IRCHSS Project

The “Material Culture of the Mendicant Orders in Ireland” project started in 2004 under the aegis of the UCD Micheal O'Clirigh Institute and was funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) from 2005 to 2008. Two full-time researchers were employed to work on the project, Dr Malgorzata Krasnosebska-D’Aughton, who undertook the fieldwork, bibliographical research and compiled the inventory and Dr Colmán Ó Clabaigh OSB who undertook a detailed study of the mendicant orders in Ireland, 1224-1534. Prior to embarking on the fieldwork, Dr D’Aughton trawled through existing published and unpublished inventories (e.g. J.J. Buckley’s *Some Irish altar plate* (1943)) with a view to identifying objects and their possible locations.

Following three years of intense fieldwork by Dr D’Aughton, a total of 422 objects were recorded. Fifteen Franciscan houses were visited and 176 objects pre-dating 1829 were fully recorded. Twenty-six other mendicant order houses were visited and a total of 246 objects were recorded in houses of the Augustinians (32), Capuchins (11), Carmelites (33), Dominicans (76), Dominican Nuns (87) and the Discalced Carmelites (7). The research uncovered a large quantity of previously unrecorded or poorly recorded objects of various types, mainly altar plate and liturgical vestments. The range of objects consists of silver chalices, silver patens, liturgical vestments, monstrances, candlesticks, wooden statues, rosaries, crucifixes, pendant crosses, reliquaries, pewter chalices, ciboria, thuribles, sanctuary lamps, processionals crosses, pyxes, bells, one pax, one seal and one chair. Objects were fully described, photographed, measured and researched from art historical, historical and liturgical perspectives. A text-and-image database was specifically designed for the project.

IVRLA Project

Although the IRCHSS project had designed the database, not all of the information gathered had been entered. The purpose of receiving funding from IVRLA funds was to complete the final stage of the project, namely, to fine-tune the database and to enter all the

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2 This date span was chosen because 1224 marks the arrival of the first mendicants in Ireland, while 1534 signals the start of the Henrician reformation legislation in Ireland.
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data collected by Dr D’Aughton into the database. The IVRLA phase of the project ran from July to December 2009 and was carried out by Elizabeth Dawson (bibliographical researcher) Brian Keenan (database and IT researcher). This stage of the project also considered security and database storage issues as well as identifying appropriate material that could be made available through the IVRLA website.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

Material Identified and Analysed

There was a significant range of liturgical objects identified during the IRCHSS phase of the project. Of the 422 objects, there were forty-one object types made from a variety of materials including precious, semi-precious, and even non-precious metals; wood; stone; and textiles. The forty-one object types have been listed in Appendix 1. The most numerous objects were chalices.

The project involved a detailed analysis of all objects. Each item is described under specific headings (which have been listed in Appendix 2) and is linked to a series of detailed photographs taken of each object. A data dictionary and data manual was compiled by Dr D’Aughton in accordance with international standards and with advice from Dr Hourihane and Mr Ó Floinn. The database is a relational database that uses FileMaker Pro 8.5. It is flexible and cost effective and allows for information to be entered, sorted and searched with ease. The database provides for the consistent organisation of interrelated information: objects are related to each other, objects to images, and works and images to authorities. It adheres to the established international standards both in its structure and terminology.

The first phase of the IVRLA project concentrated on obtaining data from Dr D’Aughton in a retrievable format. Following a review of the data carried out in consultation with Dr D’Aughton, a strategy was put in place to ensure that the data was categorised, catalogued and entered quickly and efficiently. Incomplete or misplaced data was corrected and full records were obtained where absent and the overall structure and function of the proposed database was assessed.

For logistical reasons relating to the constraint of completing this project within a six-month timeframe, the data was divided into two separate, but complementary databases. Both have been completed using Filemaker Pro 8.5 and the structure, titles, names and assigned IDs all correspond to each other. This will facilitate the easy transfer of data into one large database at a later date. The first database contains all material relating to the Franciscan order.
and holds 1.8 GB of data. The second database contains the material relating to all the other mendicant orders covered by the research and holds 3.4 GB of data. The database contains 422 objects and 3800 associated images, all of which have been converted into jpeg format from the original TIFF format. Conversion to jpeg images was necessary since such a large number of images in the original TIFF format (for which file sizes are considerably larger) would have caused serious difficulties with the functioning of the database. With regard to the transfer of the data to the IVRLA, it was necessary for the project researchers to liaise with the IVRLA team to ensure that the fields in the database could be mapped onto equivalent fields in the IVRLA database and to make additional cataloguing information available for the IVRLA website.

**Selection of Material for the IVRLA Collection**

The objects made available on the IVRLA website consist of forty objects from the Irish Franciscan collection currently on display in the National Museum of Ireland in Collins Barracks. The complete database is being kept securely by the IVRLA while issues of accessibility and security are negotiated with the orders.

Various criteria had to be considered in making this database accessible to the public. Two important criteria are the fact that this work has been completed in partnership with the mendicant orders in Ireland and the potentially conflicting need for public accessibility. Both of these are discussed below.

(i) **Partnership with the mendicant orders in Ireland**

The objects included in the inventory are in the private possession of the various mendicant orders, mainly kept in their regional houses. A small number of objects are held elsewhere especially in parish churches throughout Ireland. A key element of the project has been the partnership developed between the UCD Micheal Ó Cléirigh Institute and the

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3 The original TIFF files have been securely stored separately to the databases as these are the preservation standard for image files.

4 Due to the extensive information in the mendicant orders database, not all of the fields could be mapped directly onto IMAD (IVRLA Metadata and Administrative Database) which manages all of the IVRLA files. Information which could not be directly mapped was instead included in the EAD (Encoded Archival Description), which manages the way in which collection information is structured and displayed. Therefore the full extent of information provided in the database is now available to users.

5 The IVRLA assigns subject headings e.g. to each object in its database to allow users to easily search for material. This work involved the project researchers to review each object and identify the relevant Library of Congress subject headings (from the list provided by the IVRLA staff) for each one. These headings can be seen on the collection description page or in the detail for each individual objects. Clicking on the heading gives the user a list of all other objects that have the same subject heading.
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mendicant orders, in particular the Franciscans, the study of whose collection has become the template for work with the other orders. This partnership acknowledges the religious orders as the custodians of this material and respects the need for sensitive cooperation in connection with objects that in many cases continue to be used as objects for the religious and liturgical purpose for which they were commissioned.

In practical terms permission to study and record the material has been granted at national level by the major superiors of each order and negotiated at local level through contact with the superiors of individual houses and in consultation with members of the orders responsible for their archives and libraries. As the work with the Franciscans has developed, the other orders have become more engaged with the project, facilitating the expansion of the project into all their houses. While relations with orders other than the Franciscans have yet to be formalised, good relations have been established with them. The Conference of Religious of Ireland, the representative body of all the religious orders in Ireland, has been briefed in detail on the project. The Franciscans have embarked on developing a long-term heritage management strategy to care for the material in their custody and this will be made available as a template to other orders.

As the database has been progressed, issues concerning sensitive information such as the current location of objects and recording the movement of objects have arisen and are matters for discussion with the orders. The extent to which such sensitive information can be generally available when the database is open to researchers is currently being investigated and account is being taken of international practices in this area (see section 4 below).

(ii) Public accessibility

Although, as already outlined, there are necessarily sensitivities around access to these objects, they are nonetheless of considerable public and research interest and it is important to facilitate appropriate access. One of the exciting outcomes of the project to date has involved the public display of the material for the first time. Arising directly out of the work of the project, an exhibition entitled *Franciscan Faith: Sacred Art in Ireland 1600-1750* opened in November 2007 at the National Museum of Ireland in Collins Barracks, Dublin. This exhibition showcases a selection of the Franciscan chalices and other objects and engages with themes such as the development of style, regional differences, distinctive iconography and patronage. A catalogue of the National Museum of Ireland exhibition will be published in 2011 edited by Raghnall Ó Floinn with major contributions by Dr Malgorzata Krasnodebska D’Aughton and other scholars in the field. The project was also involved in another exhibition in the Hunt Museum in Limerick in 2007. This exhibition concentrated on the regional silver
of Limerick and the south-west of Ireland and included Franciscan artefacts as centrepiece exhibits. A catalogue of the Hunt Museum exhibition, edited by John Bowen and Conor O’Brien, was published in 2007.

Objects from the Franciscan friary in Ennis, Co Clare are currently on display in Clare Museum, Ennis. These exhibitions have two objectives: to make the public aware of these newly-discovered objects and to begin the process of alerting scholars to their significance. The availability of the National Museum of Ireland exhibition’s objects on the IVRLA website is a considerable step towards fulfilling these objectives.

**Significance of the Research Material**

The material discovered and recorded as part of this project is very significant for a variety of reasons. Most of the objects date to the late medieval and early modern periods. It is, therefore, at the cusp of two epochs. Its style reflect a continuation of late medieval forms well into the seventeenth century in Ireland while also absorbing the arrival of Counter-Reformation iconography and elements of the Baroque style. For the first time it has been possible to identify Catholic altar plate of Irish origin and to differentiate between regional styles. This material provides for new perspectives in Irish art historical studies, ecclesiastical history and patterns of patronage.

The detailed analysis of the material has focused so far on Franciscan chalices, but even this analysis has identified important areas of research. New insights have been gained into artistic styles prevailing in Ireland (late medieval, Renaissance and Baroque). Local styles continued to be used while new artistic and theological ideas were being introduced from the continent. High quality craftsmanship is evident including the existence of sophisticated Irish silver-smithing. Since objects produced outside Dublin were not generally hallmarked, the inscriptions and provenance information relating to these Franciscan chalices will help to identify for the first time several seventeenth-century Irish regional silver-smithing workshops. This work was sponsored by wealthy Catholics of both Irish and Old English stock primarily in towns such as Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick. These chalices share many characteristics with contemporary European chalices and also reflect the donors’ devotional practices and piety. In iconography they echo popular late medieval and early modern devotions, in the dissemination of which the mendicant orders played a pivotal role.
4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A key component of the future development of this database relates to access to the material and copyright for use of any information and images of the objects. The corpus of material is new to scholars in the fields of art history, history and theology in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ireland and the inventory will be a key resource in the future study of these research fields. It is also a new venture for the mendicant orders in Ireland whose material heritage has not been subject to public access to date. To ensure the beneficial use of the material and that this use is acceptable to the orders, there is an urgent need to engage with the orders on various issues including (i) the sharing of expertise relating to this material (ii) the question of intellectual property (iii) scholarly and public access to the material and (iv) the development of heritage management plans by the mendicant orders in Ireland.

To accomplish the objectives outlined above, a number of steps are required. The implications of the object database need to be discussed with the provincials of each order. Discussions also need to take place with national partners, especially the National Museum of Ireland concerning streamlining the database with projects being carried out under its aegis, and with the national advisory body, the Heritage Council of Ireland, regarding the projects’ implications at a national level. Best international practice needs to be established through liaison with existing international partners (the Index of Christian Art, University of Princeton and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London) and advice from a body such as the Kress Foundation. Arising from this, advice on heritage management strategies needs to be provided to each order; key to these strategies will be issues such as access to the database, management of the metadata and security of the objects.

It is also anticipated that the research emanating from the project will be disseminated through seminars and further publications of the research. The research team hopes that, in the coming years, this research project will provide the basis for many detailed investigations and will encourage the expansion of this and similar projects.

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The Kress Foundation, which is based in the US, specifically deals with questions of accessibility and dissemination in the art world.
APPENDIX 1: Types of Liturgical Objects Identified

This list is given in alphabetical order. The most numerous objects identified were chalices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Altar</td>
<td>Jug</td>
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<td>Altar Linen</td>
<td>Liturgical Attire</td>
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<td>Antependium</td>
<td>Maniple</td>
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<td>Bell</td>
<td>Monstrance</td>
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<td>Bowl</td>
<td>Pall</td>
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<td>Box</td>
<td>Paten</td>
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<td>Candlestick</td>
<td>Prayer Sheet</td>
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<td>Candlestick Fitting</td>
<td>Processional Cross</td>
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<td>Chair</td>
<td>Pyx</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chalice</td>
<td>Reliquary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chalice Veil</td>
<td>Rosary</td>
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<td>Chasuble</td>
<td>Sanctuary Lamp</td>
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<td>Christomatory</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
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<td>Ciborium</td>
<td>Seal</td>
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<td>Crown</td>
<td>Spoon</td>
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<td>Crucifix</td>
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<td>Criet</td>
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<td>Cruets Holder</td>
<td>Stoup</td>
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<td>Diptych</td>
<td>Thurible</td>
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<td>Host Box</td>
<td>Triptych</td>
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<td>Incense Boat</td>
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APPENDIX 2: Headings Used to Describe Each Object

The following headings were used to describe each item in the database.

- Object number
- Object name
- Object type (as per Appendix 1 above)
- Date (of creation of the object)
- Material
- Dimensions
- Hallmarks
- Location
- County
- Country of location
- Country of origin
- Description (a detailed description of the shape of the object, iconography and so on)
- Inscription
- History
- Provenance
- Notes on the condition of the object
- Bibliography
- Images

Readers who are unfamiliar with these objects or their purposes may wish to consult the online source *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (New Advent, 2009). 16 Aug. 2010 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>.
WORKS CITED


Buckley, J. J. *Some Irish Altar Plate*. Dublin: Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1943.
