Margaret McNair Stokes (1832–1900): Negotiating Cultural Values Within Nineteenth-Century Irish Antiquarian Discourse

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Abstract

In her own time, Margaret McNair Stokes (1832-1900) was an esteemed antiquarian and artist. Her work on early Christian architecture and monumental sculpture in Ireland was pioneering and foundational and continues to inform contemporary research on these topics. Facilitated by her family and their social networks, Stokes was part of an active antiquarian culture based in Dublin which involved membership of scholarly associations as well as social events both at home and on tour throughout the country. Stokes played an important role within these circles, taking on significant editorial projects as well as advancing her own research interests. However, in order to critically assess Stokes's specific contribution to Irish antiquarianism, this article examines two key aspects of her work – the development of new methodologies for the study of Irish sculptured stone monuments, and her advancement of a specific model of periodisation in relation to Irish medieval art and architecture, one which was highly nationalistic, focused on ideas of cultural purity, and which eschewed the prevailing trends within Irish antiquarianism and historiography away from politicised interpretations of the Irish early Christian and medieval past. In considering these facets of Stokes's contribution to Irish antiquarianism and historiography, this article repositions her as a pivotal figure, forging and heralding significant changes of scholarly direction in relation to the fields of research in which she engaged.

In 1878, Margaret McNair Stokes (1832–1900) dedicated her important antiquarian text _Early Christian Architecture in Ireland_ to Edith Chenevix Trench, daughter of Richard Chenevix Trench (1807–86), Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin.[1] The somewhat cryptic dedication provides

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[1] The first section of Stokes's _Six Month on the Apennines_ takes the form of letters to Edith Trench, reflecting a significant connection between the two women. Both were connected to Alexandra College in Dublin, and it is probable that they shared an interest in the education of girls. Members of the Chenevix Trench family were deeply involved in Irish cultural and political life. Edith's niece, the artist Francesca (Cesca) Trench (1891–1918) was an active member of the Gaelic League and

some insight into how Stokes positioned her own work and career as a woman in the largely male-dominated world of antiquarian scholarship. Her dedication begins with a passage from the fourteenth-century 'Vision of Piers Ploughman', in which a group of pilgrims in search of truth are told to wait by the ploughman until his work was completed and he could guide them. In response, a veiled lady exclaims at the delay, and asks 'What sholde we wommen | Wercke the while?'[2] This question, Stokes argues, 'now stirs in the hearts of many of us women in the present day'. The contemporary response, she imagines, would be similar to that given in the original poem: that the 'lovely ladies with their long fingers' were to work their 'churches to honour', and to do charitable acts through giving food and clothes to the needy. Women's antiquarian work is framed by Stokes as 'a humble yet lofty aim of helpfulness', through which 'we women need not fear stepping outside our sphere'.[3]

Writing during a period when women were largely excluded from universities and scholarly societies, Stokes argues in the dedication to *Early Christian Architecture* that antiquarian work both honours 'Our Church, in its past and Present', but also gives 'food and raiment' to Ireland. Continuing, Stokes contends that 'there are forms of hunger and thirst other than for mere material food', and that 'no country stands more in need of clothing of honour, and of that food by which the soul is fed than does our own beloved Ireland'. She concludes the dedication to Trench with the wish to be a 'helper, not the hinderer, of such men as have striven, and still do strive, to work wisely in her cause'. This complicated positioning of her work is self-consciously gendered, carving out a space for women in antiquarian circles without 'stepping outside our sphere'.[4] However, as we argue in this article, while apparently deferring to gendered restrictions and propriety, Stokes made room for a significant degree of action and agency, framing patriotic and nationalist antiquarian work as fulfilling the requirements of charity, as well as serving the needs of the Church. This careful positioning made space for Stokes's own pioneering investigation of sculpted crosses, and her politicised framing of Irish antiquities within her historiographical narratives.

In her own time, Stokes was an esteemed antiquarian and artist. Her work on early Christian architecture and monumental sculpture in Ireland was pioneering and foundational and continues to inform contemporary research on these topics. Facilitated by her family and their social networks, Stokes was part of an active antiquarian culture based in Dublin which involved membership of scholarly associations as well as social events both at home and on tour throughout the country. She played an important role within these circles, taking on significant editorial

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Cumann na mBan. Patrick Maume, 'Cesca Trench (Trinseach, Sadhbh)', *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*, XI (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 669–71.

[2] Margaret Stokes, *Early Christian Architecture in Ireland* (London, 1878), p. v.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

projects with leading contemporary antiquarians as well as advancing her own research interests. Throughout her career, Stokes advanced the use of photography and drawing as critical tools within antiquarian scholarship. As well as her articles and collaborations, her major book-length works included *Early Christian Architecture in Ireland* (1878), *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (1887), her studies of the Irish saints across Continental Europe, *Six Months on the Apennines* (1892), and *Three Months in the Forests of France* (1895). By the end of her life, she was considered one of the most important antiquarian scholars of her day, and from 1893 she received a civil list pension. A series of memorial lectures in her honour was instigated at Alexandra College for women, then based on Dublin's Earlsfort Terrace.

To critically assess Stokes's specific contribution to Irish antiquarianism, this article examines two key aspects of her work, the development of new methodologies for the study of Irish sculptured stone monuments, and her advancement of a specific model of periodisation in relation to Irish medieval art and architecture. This model was highly nationalistic, focused on ideas of cultural distinctiveness, and complicated the prevailing trends within Irish antiquarianism and historiography away from politicised interpretations of the Irish early Christian and medieval past. In considering these facets of Stokes's contribution to Irish antiquarianism and historiography, we reposition her as a pivotal figure, who forged and heralded significant changes of scholarly direction in relation to the fields of research in which she engaged.

I

Margaret Stokes's lifetime coincided with the establishment and consolidation of many of the key institutions and organisations dedicated to defining and preserving Irish history and culture.[5] This period of investment and interest in history, antiquarianism, and archaeology more generally, reflected broader international trends, often aligned with the definition of a 'national past', and identifiable national characteristics, borders and cultural expressions.[6] Clare O'Halloran, Bernadette Cunningham and Joep Leerssen, among others, have examined the position of historical narratives, sources and monuments as vital sources within Irish cultural and political identities from the seventeenth century onwards.[7] Questions of the past, and narratives

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[5] Elizabeth Crooke, *Politics, Archaeology, and the Creation of a National Museum of Ireland: An Expression of National Life* (Dublin, 2000).

[6] Gabriel Cooney, 'Building the future on the past: archaeology and the construction of national identity in Ireland', in Margarita Diaz-Andreu and Timothy Champion (eds), *Nationalism and Archaeology* (London, 1996), pp. 146–63.

[7] Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland c. 1750–1800* (Cork, 2004); Bernadette Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000); Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996).

of ideas of heritage and identity, were bound up in complicated ways with issues of religious, national and political affiliation. These complex negotiations were played out through scholarship, through institutions like museums, collections and historical associations, and across different cultural forms, particularly through the works of theatre, visual art and literature associated with the Celtic Revival.[8]

In Ireland, these narratives were fractured and often contentious, with different contemporary political allegiances and perspectives shaping historical interpretations. The development of an institutional infrastructure around the interpretation of the past can be viewed as a response to unruly, conflicted and potentially subversive historiographical traditions. Given the lack of opportunities for women to engage in nineteenth-century public life more generally, it is hardly surprising that these institutions, museums, archives, scholarly associations and universities, rarely facilitated the participation of women.[9]

Women were able to gain a foothold in some aspects of public cultural life in Ireland, most notably through writing fiction and journalism, and through the visual arts.[10] Women similarly participated in the field of botany and botanical illustration, and could be members of certain scholarly institutions, although institutional roles and salaried positions were not open to them.[11] Women, therefore, were largely absent from many of the key institutional activities involved in forging historical narratives, in working on the development of museum collections or catalogues, in managing historic buildings and monuments, or as lecturers within the university system. In this restrictive context, the considerable achievements of Margaret Stokes as an artist, historian, scholar and author are even more notable.[12]

[8] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (London, 1996); Declan Kiberd and P. J. Mathews (eds), *Handbook of the Celtic Revival: An Anthology of Irish Cultural and Political Writings 1891–1922* (Notre Dame, 2016).

[9] A recent book dedicated to the pioneering Irish antiquarians focused on the contributions of men to Irish antiquarian discourse and practice: Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Siobhán Fitzpatrick with Howard Clarke (eds), *Pathfinders to the Past: The Antiquarian Road to Irish Historical Writing, 1640–1960* (Dublin, 2012).

[10] Anna Pilz and Whitney Standlee (eds), *Irish Women's Writing 1878–1922: Advancing the Cause of Liberty* (Manchester, 2016); Éimear O'Connor, *Irish Women Artists 1800–2009: Familiar but Unknown* (Dublin, 2010).

[11] The careers of Ellen Hutchins (1785–1815) and Mary Ward (1827–69) are examples of female participation in the area of botany and botanical illustration. *The Dictionary of Irish Biography* provides biographical entries for both. Hutchins was a friend of Whitley Stokes (1763–1845), Margaret Stokes's grandfather.

[12] While Stokes was exceptional in her antiquarian achievements, she was certainly not unique. Several other women also had an impact upon Irish antiquarian and historical discourse throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from across commercial and aristocratic spheres. Examples include Charlotte Brooke (*c*.1750–93), Louisa Catherine Beaufort (discussed below), and Elizabeth Rawdon, Countess of Moira (1731–1808).

Margaret Stokes was born in Dublin in 1832.[13] She was one of ten children and was educated at home by a governess, during which time she developed her skills as an artist. Her father, Dr William Stokes, was a doctor and keen antiquarian, and her brother, Whitley Stokes, became a leading scholar of Celtic languages.[14] The Stokes home was 5 Merrion Square, and neighbours included other professional families, mainly physicians, who were also deeply involved in historical and antiquarian research, such as William Wilde and his wife, Jane Francesca Wilde. The Stokes family hosted salons at their home, and guests included leading cultural figures of the period, including Sir Samuel Ferguson, William Reeves, J. H. Todd, Sir Frederic William Burton, George Petrie and Edwin Richard Windham Wyndham-Quin, the third Earl of Dunraven. These men were significantly involved in shaping Irish historical and antiquarian discourse throughout the nineteenth century, and this network facilitated and enabled Margaret Stokes's early work as an antiquarian and artist.

As a daughter of what might be termed Dublin's intellectual aristocracy, Stokes benefited from the collective learning on antiquities of her family networks and enjoyed the privilege of access to treasured objects that they brought her.[15] Among the Stokes family's friends was J. H. Todd, who served as assistant librarian at Trinity College Dublin, where several early medieval manuscripts, including the ninth-century Book of Kells, were held.[16] Stokes produced a beautifully coloured copy of the 'Chi Rho' page of the Book of Kells for the Society of Antiquaries' *Vetusta Monumenta* series, providing evidence of her access to such manuscripts.[17] In a period when learned society and public collections of medieval objects were still being assembled, it was the prerogative of keepers, members and scholars to directly examine metalwork or manuscripts. Without family connections, Margaret Stokes may very well have been denied entry to this privileged world.

Many of Stokes's early projects were collaborations with these key figures in her family network. She provided margin ornament based on the decorated initials of the Book of Kells for Ferguson's poem *The Cromlech on Howth* in 1861, and illustrations of the painted miniatures in the ninth-century Garland of Howth for J. H. Todd's 1869 publication

[13] The entry for Stokes in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* includes a select bibliography on her work and life. Andrew O'Brien and Linde Lunney, 'Margaret McNair Stokes', *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*, IX (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 102–3. A detailed account is also provided in Janette Stokes, 'Margaret Stokes (1832–1900) and her intellectual circle: an approach to early Christian art' (unpublished thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2004).

[14] Eoin O'Brien, Anne Crookshank and Gordon Wolstenholme, *A Portrait of Irish Medicine* (Dublin, 1984), pp. 115–22.

[15] Noel Annan, 'The intellectual aristocracy' (1955), in *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics, and Geniuses* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 304–41; Michael Purser, *Jellett, O'Brien, Purser and Stokes: Seven Generations, Four Families* (Dublin, 2004).

[16] M. L. Colker, *Trinity College Dublin: Descriptive Catalogue of the Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Manuscripts* (Aldershot, 1991); P. B. Phair, 'Betham and the Older Irish manuscripts', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 92/1 (1962), pp. 75–8; Andrew O'Brien and Linde Lunney, 'James Henthorn Todd', *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*, IX (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 391–3.

[17] *Vetusta Monumenta*, VI (London, 1968).

on early Irish manuscripts. Todd held Stokes's opinion in high enough regard that he quoted her analysis of the technical skill required to make the manuscript paintings.[18] Her technical ability as an artist was central to her identity as an antiquarian and scholar, reflecting the importance of sketching and drawing in creating accurate records and illustrations of antiquities, particularly prior to the development of photography. Stokes was reportedly a self-taught artist; however, her skill for documenting antiquities undoubtedly benefited from visits to archaeological sites that she made with her father, George Petrie and the third Earl of Dunraven, who also used photography to record monuments.[19] Indeed, Stokes's career-long engagement with detailed painted copies, drawings, woodcut illustration and photography reflects her active participation in innovations in antiquarian scholarship around the importance of visual evidence for communication.[20]

Stokes's mother died in 1869, and her father passed away in 1878. From the late 1870s, her own scholarly career began to flourish, perhaps reflecting an earlier caring role in the home. Building on her experience of documenting the intricate paintings in early Irish Gospel books, her focus turned to the architecture and sculpture of medieval Ireland. Her early works in this area were collaborative. Stokes was responsible for organising the papers of George Petrie, following his death in 1866, and with publishing a scholarly edition of his *Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language*.[21] Similarly, she had been part of antiquarian and archaeological field trips with the third Earl of Dunraven and others, and following his death, his son commissioned Stokes to edit and write the introduction for his father's major work on Irish architectural history. This resulted in the *Notes on Irish Architecture*, published in two volumes in 1875 and 1877. She was a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (RSAI), among other scholarly associations, and as women were not elected to membership until the twentieth century, was made an honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) in 1876. Her essays were published in journals such as the *Journal* of the RSAI (*JRSAI*) and *Archaeologia*, the journal of the Society of Antiquaries in London.[22] In doing so, Stokes took part in the broad network of antiquarian

[18] J. H. Todd, *Descriptive Remarks on Illuminations in Certain Ancient Irish Manuscripts* (London, 1869).

[19] Stokes, 'Margaret Stokes (1832–1900) and her intellectual circle'.

[20] Changing technologies around antiquarian representation are considered in Dana Arnold and Stephen Bending (eds), *Tracing Architecture: The Aesthetics of Antiquarianism* (London, 2002).

[21] Walter Fitzgerald, 'In memoriam: miss Margaret Stokes', *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society*, 3/4 (1901), pp. 201–5. Philip McEvansoneya, 'More light on Margaret Stokes and the publication of George Petrie's '"Christian inscriptions in the Irish language"', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 141 (2011), pp. 149–66; Philip McEvansoneya, 'The published work of Margaret Stokes: part I, introduction and a new bibliography', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 148 (2018), pp. 54–69.

[22] Margaret Stokes, 'Observations on two ancient Irish works of art known as the Breac Moedoff, or shrine of St. Moedoc of Ferns, and the Soiscel Molaise, or gospel of St. Molaise of Devenish', *Archaeologia*, 43/1 (1871), pp. 131–50.

societies throughout the British Isles, reflecting the contemporary culture of scholarly collaboration and cooperation.

Stokes moved from these collaborative endeavours to produce independent works of scholarship. *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (1887) was produced as a handbook for the South Kensington Museum Art Handbook series (now hosted by the Victoria and Albert Museum). This publication reflected her status as the leading authority on Irish antiquities, and was referenced by a subsequent generation of scholars on the subject, including T. J. Westropp, Henry S. Crawford, and Arthur Kingsley Porter.[23] *Early Christian Art in Ireland* was largely illustrated with her own drawings and woodcuts, as well as those of leading antiquarian artists like William Wakeman who worked on the Irish Ordnance Survey and Joseph Anderson of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries, again reflecting her position within antiquarian networks. Later works on Irish art included her privately published book on the Cross of Cong (1895).

This overview of Stokes's life reflects her position in Irish intellectual life, and the social, familial and professional networks in which she was embedded. She was actively involved in the networks of scholarly societies that explicitly aimed to create a non-partisan and objective space for the consideration of the past, and yet also negotiated the increasingly complex relationships between the material remains of the past and national, religious and political identities. Like many of the Celtic Revivalists, she needed to create and articulate her own place between cultural and political nationalism. Furthermore, like many other members of the Church of Ireland, her work represents the desire for a strong sense of connection to the heritage of the early Christian and medieval church, particularly in the light of increasing alignment between Roman Catholicism, the medieval past and Irish national identity.[24] Moving beyond biography, however, the remainder of this article focuses on a close

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[23] Thomas Johnson Westropp was selected to complete Stokes's last work on the high crosses and published a further article on the buildings and monuments at Clonmacnoise: Margaret Stokes and T. J. Westropp, 'Notes on the high crosses of Moone, Drumcliff, Termonfechin, and Killamery', *The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 31 (1896/1901), pp. 541–78; T. J. Westropp, 'A description of the ancient buildings and crosses at Clonmacnoise, King's County', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 37/3 (1907), pp. 277–306. Henry S. Crawford continued Stokes's project of systematically recording monumental stone crosses and moved beyond the figure panels to consider ornament: Henry S. Crawford, 'A descriptive list of the early Irish crosses', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 37/2 (1907), pp. 187–239; Henry S. Crawford, *Irish Carved Ornament from Monuments of the Early Christian Period* (Dublin, 1926). The Harvard art historian Arthur Kingsley Porter knew Stokes's work but diverged in his interpretation of the iconography: Arthur Kingsley Porter, *The Crosses and Culture of Ireland* (New Haven, CT, 1931).

[24] The connections between the late nineteenth-century Church of Ireland community and medieval Irish heritage are discussed in Mark Empey, Alan Ford, and Miriam Moffitt (eds), *The Church of Ireland and its Past: History, Interpretation and Identity* (Dublin, 2017). The use of the medieval past as a legitimising heritage by the Roman Catholic church is considered in Niamh NicGhabhann, 'Sermons and the performance of historiographical authority in the construction of the Roman Catholic built landscape, 1880–1890', in Raphaël Ingelbien and Susan Galavan (eds), *Figures of Authority in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 2020), pp. 118–38.

analysis of the specific contributions that she made to antiquarian method and scholarship.

II

The monumental form of the high cross occupied the intellectual work of Margaret Stokes for the last decades of her life. Her intention had been to produce a book cataloguing the Irish high crosses and updating the visual documentation of the carvings. Regrettably, she passed away before the project was completed. Only a book on the Castledermot and Durrow crosses in 1898 and a second paper on the crosses at Moone, Drumcliff, Termonfechin and Killamary, published posthumously in 1901 and completed by her colleague T. J. Westropp, were produced.[25] It is through these publications that we can see the full flowering of Stokes's methodology.

Stokes asserted in the dedication to *Early Christian Architecture* (1878) that Irish antiquities had been neglected. Having been identified by many colonial Protestants as unwelcome landscape features that perpetuated superstitious Roman Catholic rituals, Irish monuments had suffered collapse, disdain and even intentional destruction in the previous centuries.[26] Beginning in the late eighteenth century, antiquarians including Jonas Blaymire, Mervyn Archdall, Francis Grose and Edward Ledwich made surveys of premodern buildings and other antiquities in Ireland.[27] As part of these projects they documented high crosses, albeit unevenly. And here their analysis of the carving was hampered by the inability of the artists making drawings of the crosses to identify the figural subjects. This was a problem Roger Stalley attributes to a bias towards classical sculptural forms and the Protestantism of Ireland's earliest antiquarian scholars who lacked familiarity with medieval iconography that they probably regarded as 'papist'.[28] There remained few accurate visual records of early medieval sculpture until after the establishment of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (1824–39).[29] The Stokes family friend George Petrie, regarded as the father of Irish

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[25] Margaret Stokes, *The High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow* (Dublin, 1898); Margaret Stokes and T. J. Westropp, 'Notes on the high crosses', *The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 31 (1896/1901), pp. 541–78.

[26] John Richardson, *The Great Folly, Superstition and Idolatry of Pilgrims in Ireland: Especially of that to St. Patrick's Purgatory* (Dublin, 1927).

[27] Walter Harris, (ed.), *The Whole Works of Sir James Ware Concerning Ireland*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1739); Mervyn Archdall, *Monasticon Hibernicum, or an History of the Abbies, Priories, and Other Religious Houses in Ireland*, 3 vols (London, 1786); Francis Grose and Edward Ledwich, *The Antiquities of Ireland* (London, 1791).

[28] For example, see Thomas Wright's classicising interpretation of the figure panels in his drawing of Muirdach's Cross, Monasterboice. Thomas Wright, *Louthiana* (London, 1748); Roger Stalley, *Early Irish Sculpture and the Art of the High Crosses* (New Haven, CT, 2020), fig. 150, pp 162–5; Jane Hawkes, 'Margaret Stokes and the visual translation of early medieval monuments', *Peritia*, 30 (2020), pp. 145–75, at p. 149.

[29] John Andrews, *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1975).

archaeology, became, in 1835, the head of the topographical survey. Through Petrie's influence, particularly over two of his drawing students and draughtsmen on the survey, William F. Wakeman and George Victor Du Noyer, the team were able to develop a standardised method of representing monuments in a landscape for perspective and among people for scale. Their work advanced visual documentation of the crosses although details of the figural and ornamental panels were still limited.[30]

By the middle of the nineteenth century there was a growing body of visual records for individual Irish high crosses but the field lacked a comprehensive catalogue of the monuments, a void in the scholarship which Henry O'Neill (1798–1880) attempted to rectify with his 1857 publication, *The Sculptured Crosses of Ancient Ireland*. The volume depicted nine Irish crosses and details of the carved panels in lithographs made from paintings by the author. The images were at once the most accurate representations of the monuments published to that date and also constructions of an Irish past immersed in the vocabulary of the picturesque, a device which served O'Neill's political agenda.[31] As Williams observes, his scholarship 'emphasizes the sculptures' native origins', to promote the study and preservation of Irish medieval objects, 'particularly in the service of a developing national identity'.[32] Petrie's strategy of visualising the medieval past in a landscape setting that included peasants and ruins reiterated the construct that Mitchell defined as an imperial landscape formula popular in nineteenth-century colonial views.[33] O'Neill turned this genre to an Irish nationalist advantage by illustrating the crosses set among bucolic scenery and pretty peasants, coding the images with nostalgia for a medieval past where the monumental crosses were evidence of a sophisticated Irish civilisation prior to Ireland's twelfth-century colonisation by the Anglo-Normans.

To the fractious historiographic scholarship on Irish crosses, Stokes brought order and synthesis. She shared O'Neill's regard for the accomplishments of early medieval Irish sculptors and claimed the form of the ringed Irish high cross was itself an Irish invention.[34] In *Early*

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[30] William Wakeman, *Archaeological Hibernica: A Handbook of Irish Antiquities, Pagan and Christian* (Dublin, 1848), pp. 89–95; Peter Harbison, 'Wakeman's "Archaeological Hibernica"', *Irish Arts Review*, 30/2 (2013), pp. 118–21; Petra Coffey', George Victor Du Noyer 1817–1869 artist, geologist and antiquary', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 123 (1993), pp. 102–19.

[31] Peter Harbison, *Henry O'Neill of the Celtic Cross* (Dublin, 2015), pp. 33–8; Colleen M. Thomas, 'Invoking the authority of the middle ages in 19th-century Ireland: the "Irish Crosses" of Earley & Powells', in Ingelbien and Galavan (eds), *Figures of Authority in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, pp. 185–206. Following the example of Petrie, Stokes did not mix picturesque and antiquarian illustration, keeping a firm boundary between the two forms, insisting on the role of illustration as a kind of objective visual evidence.

[32] Maggie M. Williams, *Icons of Irishness from the Middle Ages to the Modern World* (New York, 2012), pp. 37–43, at pp. 39, 42.

[33] W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape', in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, 2002), pp. 5–34.

[34] Stokes, *Early Christian Art*, II, p. 17; Helen M. Roe, 'The Irish high cross: morphology and iconography', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 95/2 (1965), pp. 213–26; Stokes, *The High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow* (Dublin, 1898), p. I; On the form of the high

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Christian Art in Ireland (1887) Stokes bristled at the misapplication of the term Celtic to early Christian material made in Ireland, a term that amalgamated several early medieval cultures, and instead preferred to identify the style as singularly Irish. While O'Neill argued that the crosses had value based on their cultural significance in Ireland, Stokes positioned the Irish monuments as culturally relevant in relation to the European canon. She used *Early Christian Art in Ireland* to lay out the case for the primacy of Irish art within the development of Christian visual culture. Through a lens of linear development where innovation emanated from a cultural centre to the periphery, Stokes suggested that Ireland, as Europe's westernmost isle, was the last to receive Christian art forms originating on the continent. Following on from this insight, Stokes argued that Irish art's significance lay in how it offered 'the only tangible and trustworthy authority for information concerning primitive culture periods elsewhere'.[35] Ireland, by virtue of its provincial location, had preserved examples of early medieval art that had disappeared from regions which were Christianised earlier than Ireland.

Nowhere was this more evident to Stokes than in the monumental stone crosses. At the time *Early Christian Art in Ireland* appeared, forty-five sculptured crosses were documented in Ireland, a significant addition to O'Neill's earlier nine and a reflection of the growing rediscovery and reconstruction of the monuments.[36] In her analysis for carved stones, Stokes built on a chronological framework proposed in the Petrie's *Inscriptions*' 'Concluding Notes', a section in fact attributed to Stokes herself.[37] Its relative chronology for assigning dates to Irish crosses was linked to the development of lettering inscribed on medieval stones across Europe. Comparison between crosses carved on Irish slabs and those rendered in late antique and early medieval Italy led Stokes to conclude that Greek- and Latin-style cross forms had been imported into Ireland at an early date.[38] By the tenth century, these forms had developed into what was termed the Irish cross with its familiar ringed head (See Figures 1 and 2 for examples). The chronology proposed by Stokes placed the most sophisticated sculpted crosses in the ninth and tenth centuries and supported the view that before the twelfth century, Irish culture had reached a pinnacle, synthesising comparative archaeological analysis with nationalist interpretations of the monuments.

Stokes recognised that to facilitate comparison between figure sculpture on the Irish cross panels and continental prototypes, as much

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cross see H. Richardson, 'The concept of the high cross', in P. N. Chathain and M. Richter (eds), *Ireland and Europe: The Early Church* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 127–34; Martin Werner, 'On the origin of the form of the Irish high cross', *Gesta*, 29/1 (1990), pp. 98–110; Stalley, *Early Irish Sculpture*, pp. 9–21.

[35] Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (2 vols; London, 1887), I, p. 3.

[36] Ibid., II, p. 8.

[37] Stokes, 'Concluding Notices', in George Petrie, 'Christian Inscriptions', pp. 133–41; Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, II, pp. 1–6.

[38] Ibid., II, p. 5.

Figure 1 Drumcliff Cross, platinotype photograph retouched with overpainting by Stokes. By permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

for the benefit of 'foreign antiquaries' as for Irish scholars, it was necessary to circulate 'faithful illustrations' of the panels.[39] Underlying her motivation to share images of Irish sculpture was Stokes's conviction that iconographic analysis or the theory of 'image writing' advanced by French archaeologist Adolfe-Napoléon Didron was the best interpretive device available for Christian imagery.[40] Here we can assume that she was influenced by having served as editor of the English translation of Didron's book on Christian iconography that had given her intimate

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[39] Stokes, *The High Crosses of Castledermot and Durrow*, p. ii.
[40] Adolfe-Napoléon Didron completed by Margaret Stokes, *Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. J. Millington (2 vols; London, 1886).

Figure 2 Moone Cross, original platinotype photograph by Stokes, unretouched. By permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

access to his ideas. Successful identification of the same subjects in Irish and continental art confirmed her theory that Irish sculpture preserved an important corpus of Christian iconography produced before the twelfth century. Motivated by a desire to make the most accurate images possible, Stokes established a 'systematic method of interpretation', using drawings substantiated by rubbings and reproduced as engravings as in *Early Christian Art in Ireland*.[41] Through these visual records, Stokes expected that her interpretation of the value of Irish monuments would be recognised, that they would be 'allowed to tell their own tale and add their quota to the history of the Past'.[42] Accurate visual records were thus the critical tools that fed Stokes's discourse.

[41] Ibid, I, p. iii.
[42] RIA, Stokes 12L26, (12), cited in Jane Hawkes, 'Margaret Stokes and the visual translation of early medieval monuments', *Peritia*, 30 (2020), pp. 145–75, at p. 166.

Recent scholarship by Jane Hawkes situates Stokes's drawings of monumental stones in the historical context for the visual paradigms of antiquarianism, comparing her work to that of other antiquarians and recognising her techniques as advances on established standards.[43] It was through her engagement with photography, enhanced by her own overpainting, beginning in the 1890s, that Stokes began to achieve the faithful images she required. The technique was fundamental to her project to record all of Ireland's high crosses, which resulted in the 1898 and 1901 publications on Irish monuments. Her practice can equally be seen to be embedded in the photographic survey movement that arose in Britain from the late 1880s.[44] Driven by an impetus to document the past before evidence of it disappeared, volunteers formed photography societies with the aim of documenting antiquities.[45] The RSAI commissioned its own project in the 1890s.[46] The perceived advantage of photography was its objectivity. As the curator of the RSAI survey noted, photography 'holds the mirror up to nature, and is therefore most useful in giving an accurate and enduring record'.[47] Stokes, a member of the RSAI, could not have more clearly articulated her own goals for the visual documentation of Irish antiquities.

For Stokes photography also became an important interpretative tool; she took control of the medium and manipulated it so that the images would support her analysis.[48] She told the RIA Publications Committee how her paintings were 'worked on a certain foundation – that foundation being a platinotype print from a certain negative. The faintest indications of design discoverable in this negative are brought out by [her] brush'.[49] A relatively inexpensive process favoured by photographic societies, platinotypes produced matte, tonal prints that reduced the ill effects of poor lighting on bas-relief sculpture and brought clarity to carved lines.

[43] Hawkes, 'Margaret Stokes and the visual translation of early medieval monuments'.

[44] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photography and the material performance of the past', in Jennifer Tucker (ed.), *Photography and Historical Interpretation*, special issue of *History and Theory*, 48/4 (2009), pp. 130–50.

[45] Venda Louise Pollock, 'Dislocated narratives and sites of memory: amateur photographic surveys in Britain 1889–1897', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 10/1 (2009), pp. 1–26.

[46] John L. Robinson, 'Notes on the photographic survey', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 3/3 (1893), pp. 295–97; Peter James, 'Evolution of the photographic record and survey movement, c. 1890–1910', *History of Photography*, 12/3 (1988), pp. 205–18; Elizabeth Edwards, Peter James and Martin Barnes, *A Record of England: Sir Benjamin Stone and The National Photographic Record Association 1897–1910* (London, 2006).

[47] Robinson, 'Notes on the photographic survey', p. 297.

[48] Marie Bourke, 'Margaret Stokes (1832–1900): antiquarian, artist, writer – pioneer', '*Prodigies of learning': Academy Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Royal Irish Academy (2018), <https://soundcloud.com/the-royal-irish-academy/margaret-stokes?in=the-royal-irish-academy/sets/prodigies-of-learning-academy> [accessed 22 May 2020]. Margaret Denny, 'Catharine Weed Barnes Ward: advocate for Victorian women photographers', *History of Photography*, 36/2 (2012), pp. 156–71; Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham, NC, 1999); Carol Armstrong, 'From Clementina to Käsebier: the photographic attainment of the "Lady Amateur"', *October*, 91 (2000), pp. 101–39.

[49] Dublin: Royal Irish Academy/MS 12 L 36.

After printing, Stokes used the rubbings she took of the sculptures on site as the basis for painted highlights which she added to the photographs.[50]

It was through this careful process that she was able to offer a confident reinterpretation of the third panel from the top of the stem on the cross at Drumcliff, Co. Sligo, as the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, as opposed to O'Neill's earlier description of the scene as the seizing of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Figure 1). Stokes's textual description reflected the importance of her close visual analysis: 'careful rubbings and study of the subject show the outline of a child's form in the arms of the aged and bearded man who forms the central figure of the group, and the action of the hand outstretched by the figure to his left, is rather that of caressing and supporting than seizing'.[51] Through this new identification, the interpretation of the emotional character of the panel was entirely changed with implications for the rest of the iconographic programme.

Accurate identification of the subjects on Irish sculpture also served to further Stokes's positioning of the monuments as proxies for lost continental art. As she discussed for the panel representing David in the Lion's Den on the Moone cross, Co. Kildare:

> Though a very common symbol of triumph over suffering in the early ages of the Church in Italy, is said to be very rarely seen in art, between the eighth and the sixteenth century. Therefore, the constant occurrence of this subject in Irish sculpture of the intermediate centuries – say from 800 to 1200 – is all the more important as forming a link in the history of iconography [Figure 2].[52]

Analysis of the sculptures as art rather than as archaeological specimens proved to be an effective tool for Stokes. Her object after all was 'not to present a guide to the antiquities of Ireland, but rather to indicate how these antiquities should be approached'.[53] The methodology Stokes developed was a lengthy and measured process in which carefully curated photos of high cross sculpture were not only documentary records, they were a means of interpretation, and they acted as a visual discourse to complement her textual analysis.

III

In her assessment of the polarised interpretations of the Irish past during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Clare O'Halloran has written that historical 'works which signalled the claim of a great

[50] Jenifer Ní Ghrádaigh, 'Authorship denied: Margaret Stokes, Rev. James Graves and the publication of Petrie's *Christian Inscriptions*', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 138 (2008), pp. 134–44, at p. 136.
[51] Margaret Stokes and T. J. Westropp, 'Notes on the high crosses', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 31 (1896/1901), pp. 541–78, at p. 557.
[52] Ibid., p. 547.
[53] Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, p. 6.

pre-colonial golden era were understood as signalling a pro-Catholic stance, whereas sceptics of the claim were taken as opponents of the relaxation of the penal laws'.[54] This statement reflects the extent to which the interpretation of Irish history was closely linked to contemporary Irish politics, and the legitimacy of English conquests, plantations and legislative power in Ireland. Typified by the works of Petrie and others, scholars from the mid-nineteenth century onwards aimed to distance themselves from these conflicted and often sectarian historiographical traditions.

However, despite an increasing attention to ideas of objectivity and archaeological science, antiquarian practices remained embedded within ideas of national identity. These pervasive concepts of ethnic, 'racial' and national difference deeply informed the organisation and framing of culture and heritage.[55] In this context, cultural distinctiveness and unique achievements were viewed as indicating specific social characteristics and national attributes. Reflecting her position within Irish antiquarian circles and networks, Stokes was asked by the fourth Earl of Dunraven to work with his late father's materials on early Irish architecture, marshalling his significant collection of photographs, plans and commentary notes into two volumes published in 1885 and 1887 respectively. Stokes describes her contribution to the main body of the text as adding descriptions to some of the ruins in accordance with the wishes of Dunraven himself, but emphasised her role as editor rather than author. Despite this, however, her introductory essay to the first volume of *Notes on Irish Architecture* proposed a very distinct, politicised narrative around the origins, development and decline of Irish early Christian and medieval art and architecture. As in many contemporary antiquarian and art historical accounts, the boundary points between art historical or aesthetic periods employed by Stokes in her introductory essay were linked to broader historical and often political narratives, with specific incidents being framed as providing a turning point from one artistic epoch to the next. Throughout Stokes's survey texts, architectural and artistic periodisation was mapped on to political periodisation.

Irish antiquarians and historians were especially interested in contemporary developments in periodisation. The Wildes visited Copenhagen in 1859 to examine the use of Thomsen and Worsaae's 'Three Ages' system of archaeology, which proposed the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages.[56] As Katherine Wheeler has written, themes of periodisation, historical authority, language and ethnography pervade Victorian architectural historiography in particular. She cites James Fergusson's assertion that 'architecture is in all instances as correct a test of race as

[54] Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750–1800* (Cork, 2004), p. 5.
[55] Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2011).
[56] Michael Ryan, 'Sir William Wilde and Irish antiquities', in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (ed.), *The Wilde Legacy* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 69–84, at p. 76.

language'.[57] In an Irish context, the question of stages of development and periodisation in relation to early Christian and medieval architecture had been highly distorted, for example in claims made for round towers, as evidence of a highly sophisticated pre-Christian culture, or alternately, as evidence of connections with ancient Phoenician or Hindu culture.[58] While O'Halloran and others have focused on the politicisation of earlier historiographical practices, an analysis of Stokes's contribution to the field reflects the continuation of these frameworks of ethnic distinctiveness, relative systems of value and politicised periodisation.

The developmental narrative highlighted by Stokes in *Notes on Irish Architecture* focused on Irish buildings before and after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. It is, of course, not unusual that such a seismic event would precipitate cultural change, and it had been used as an historiographical device in defining specific periods by other scholars, including Louisa Beaufort and Petrie in their earlier histories of Irish architecture.[59] However, by the late nineteenth century this break was described in an explicitly political framework, with the Anglo-Norman invasion deemed catastrophic, and far more damaging, to what was viewed as a 'native' or 'pure' Irish culture than the influence of the Vikings, church reforms or the presence of European monastic orders.

The preface to *Notes* provided by Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin, the fourth Earl of Dunraven located the book firmly within a conflicted historiographical context. While the fourth Earl was not involved in antiquarian work himself, he provided some valuable insight into his father's motivations and antiquarian approach in his preface. In describing the motivations for compiling the materials for the volume, the fourth Earl explained that his father wanted to 'vindicate the character of the ancient and medieval Irish' and to substantiate 'their claim of having attained unassisted to a degree of culture that would favourably compare with the contemporaneous condition of other European nations', but that he 'did not admire that school of patriots who teach a people to sustain their self-respect by dreaming of ancestral glories'.[60] Echoing Stokes's narrative of Ireland as a repository of lost continental art between 800

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[57] Katherine Wheeler, *Victorian Perceptions of Renaissance Architecture* (Abingdon, 2016), p. 9.

[58] The work of Henry O'Brien on the history of the round tower in particular was dismissed by many antiquarians due to his adherence to earlier modes of discourse, and his exaggerated claims for Irish cultural influence. Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), pp. 108–56 and in Roger Stalley, 'Sex, symbol and myth: some observations on the Irish round towers', in Colum Hourihane (ed.), *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and its European Context* (Princeton, 2001), pp. 27–48; Bernd Roling, 'Phoenician Ireland: Charles Vallencey (1725–1812) and the Oriental roots of Celtic culture', in Karl A. E. Enenkel and Konrad Adriaan Ottenheym (eds), *The Quest for an Appropriate Past in Literature, Art, and Architecture* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 750–70.

[59] Louisa Catherine Beaufort, 'An essay upon the state of architecture and antiquities previous to the landing of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* (1828); George Petrie, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland, Anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion* (Dublin, 1845), pp. 102–242.

[60] Edwin, third Earl of Dunraven and Margaret Stokes, *Notes on Irish Architecture*, I (London, 1875), p. xiii.

and 1200, he wrote that 'while the rest of Europe slumbered heavily, steeped in the uneasy sleep of ignorance … as early as the sixth century the Irish nation showed symptoms of a vigorous individual life'. This enabled Ireland 'to originate and foster to a considerable degree of perfection a distinctively national form of architecture'.[61] It is telling that the fourth Earl felt it necessary to dedicate so much of the preface to a positioning of his father's place within historiographical politics, distancing him from the work of discredited antiquarian figures and countering the claims of Irish barbarism. It also provides a valuable insight into the perspectives and attitudes of this antiquarian circle, and would have framed the tours and expeditions in which Stokes took part.

In her introductory essay to the first volume of *Notes*, Stokes built on and extended Dunraven's interpretation of Irish architectural history, foregrounding a more explicitly political framework. She described the 'special interest' attached to the study of Irish ecclesiastical architecture 'before it ceased to be essentially Irish' as being linked to the fact that 'owing to various circumstances, the remains of a great number of monuments belonging to the period between the sixth and twelfth centuries of the Christian era have survived, untouched by the hand either of the restorer or of the destroyer'.[62] For Stokes, this allowed the scholar to 'trace the gradual development from an early and rude beginning to a very beautiful result; the dove-tailing, as it were, of one style into another, till an Irish form of Romanesque grew into perfection'.[63]

Stokes posited a view of Irish architectural history throughout both volumes of *Notes* which was based on an identifiable 'native' culture that was irrevocably damaged by the Anglo-Norman influence in Ireland. This narrative did not preclude her tracing the impact of prior external influences. For example, she compared the Irish round towers with belfries and campaniles in Ravenna, Pisa, Switzerland and France, and also positioned the Irish Romanesque within the context of the same style across Europe more generally.[64] Stokes viewed these external influences as positive, and as reflective of the kind of 'native hybridity' that she identified and valued in the sculpted crosses.

This narrative continued in her concluding essay on the Irish Romanesque in the second volume of *Notes on Irish Architecture*. Here Stokes described these external cultural influences as widening the 'local and native customs and manners', and that such gradual changes did not 'kill or crush out the native life'.[65] According to Stokes, these changes instead sought to 'harmonize and blend' rather than to disrupt: 'preserving to Irish art the dignity of individuality, with that delicacy of conception and treatment which belongs to her national genius,

[61] Ibid., p. xiii–xiv.
[62] Ibid., p. xvii.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Margaret Stokes, *Notes on Irish Architecture*, II (London, 1877), pp. 157–8, 189.
[65] Ibid., p. 202.

but enlarging its forms and multiplying its beauties of detail by the introduction of external and foreign elements'.[66] The political upheavals precipitated by the Anglo-Norman arrival, by contrast, Stokes saw as heralding the 'death of native art', and since that time 'no work of purely Celtic art, whether in illumination of the sacred writings, or in gold, or bronze, or stone, was wrought by Irish hands after that century'.[67] From this point, she argued, Ireland's artistic 'language, once so subtle and refined, seems to lose its grammatical conscience, and her true national life to sink into the sleep of death'.[68]

These framing essays set out Stokes's view on true or native 'Irish' architecture and its inextricable links to a state of political independence. She repeatedly referred to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century as the breaking-point for this vision of national culture and the arrest of a vibrant national tradition, by contrast asserting that the time just prior 'the period at which this art touched its highest point'.[69] Although she did frame the idea of an Irish Romanesque style within a broader European framework, this was qualified with the comment that 'when the Romanesque wave reached our shore, there was already a style of architecture here which had attained to very noble results', and therefore should be considered a particularly 'Irish Romanesque'.[70]

IV

Stokes included her essay from *Notes on Irish Architecture* as an introduction to her volume on early Christian architecture in 1878, and its impact can be traced in several directions. A long review of her book on early Christian architecture published in 1884 in *The Irish Monthly*, an Irish Jesuit journal, foregrounded the link between a unique national culture and the political life of the nation, reinforcing Stokes's identification of the 'fatal arrest' of a national architectural style.[71] Stokes's publications were cited in the bibliography of Sophie Bryant's (1850–1922) popular history book *Celtic Ireland*, published in 1889, and the influence of her narrative is evident. So, for example in her section on Celtic art, she asserted 'up to the middle of the twelfth century there is development, resulting in work of rare beauty. Soon afterwards, production almost ceases; the land is no longer a place for beautiful things to be made in it'.[72]

Celtic Ireland was favourably reviewed by Henry Stuart Fagan in *Academy* magazine in 1889. Fagan, who was sympathetic to Irish home

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., p. 203.
[68] Ibid. Stokes's use of a linguistic metaphor here may reflect her familiarity with her brother Whitley's work on comparative philology and Celtic languages.
[69] *Notes*, I, p. xxvi.
[70] Ibid., p. xxvi.
[71] 'Miss Stokes on early Irish ecclesiastical architecture', *Irish Monthly*, 12/138 (1884), pp. 624–36, at p. 624.
[72] Sophie Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (London, 1889), p. 178.

rule and Irish cultural nationalism, pitched Bryant's book as a response to the representation of Irish history within the works of figures like James Anthony Froude. According to Fagan, Froude's position can be summarised as viewing the Irish as 'semi-savages … with no culture, save a little music', against which Bryant draws a broad picture of a people which had 'preserved the consciousness of a home-grown culture, from which they were wrenched, and to which, under happier conditions, they may hope to revert'.[73] Fagan's review reflects the extent to which the antiquarian narratives were continually mapped on to contemporary political discourse. Indeed, contemporary political issues were to the fore in this review, with Fagan noting in response to Bryant's chapter on the Brehon Laws that 'the fitness of the Irish of today for Home Rule may, to some extent, be judged from the social and political system that they had developed'.[74]

Stokes directly referenced these ongoing debates, and specifically Froude's representation of Irish culture in her introductory essay to *Notes*. She vehemently disagreed with his comments that Irish craftsmen and architects had 'little architecture of their own, and the forms introduced from England had been robbed of their grace'.[75] The context of Froude's views on Irish culture also informed the reception of *Notes*, with a review published in the *London Quarterly Review* in October 1878 stating that the 'numerous autotypes of Irish buildings from the earliest times to the eve of Strongbow's invasion' conclusively proved the existence of a highly civilised early Irish civilisation, and a comprehensive contradiction of Froude's opinions. The reviewer also referenced contemporary tensions, arguing that 'to put these records of the past before the intelligent English public is the surest way of meeting the ungenerous cry of inferiority of race'.[76]

Irish antiquarian discourse was also part of broader imperial narratives of comparative cultural progress and development. A review of the first volume of *Notes* was published in 1876 in the leading literary magazine the *Athenaeum*. The reviewer noted that he hesitated to apply the term 'architecture' to the subject of the book at all, with the full text of the review revealing a critical framework clearly informed by imperial and colonial rhetoric that both exoticised early Irish culture and distanced it from English pre-Christian and medieval culture. The reviewer commented that 'there is immeasurably more art in the carved decorations of a South Sea or South African spear-handle, or a Sandwich Island paddle, than in anything this volume shows', and concluded that 'it is simply nonsense to talk about art when speaking of structures which are of less architectural value than so many New Zealand pahs'.[77]

[73] Henry Stuart Fagan, 'Celtic Ireland', *The Academy*, 31 Aug. 1889, pp. 128–9.
[74] Ibid., p. 129.
[75] *Notes*, I, p. xxvi.
[76] 'Dunraven's Irish architectural antiquities', *London Quarterly Review*, 51/101 (1878), pp. 246–50.
[77] 'Notes on Irish architecture', *Athenaeum*, 15 April 1876, p. 539.

Such comments reflected the long-established critical instability around where to frame Irish culture: its capacity to be positioned as 'Oriental', Phoenician or Hindu, as uniquely Irish, or as second-rate imitations of established or dominant forms. In writing about the Christian architecture illustrated at the end of the first volume, the reviewer noted that these forms would be considered 'Romanesque of the roughest kind, and comparatively speaking, on the smallest scale, and of the most poverty-stricken character as regards skilled labour, beauty, invention, or cost'. Despite these comments, the reviewer did grudgingly give some credit to Stokes herself, noting that 'we sincerely rejoice that a competent Irish scholar has the matter in hand'.[78]

V

While the details of Stokes's biography and her family networks give us an insight into Victorian antiquarian culture in Dublin, this article seeks to go further, to map her significant contributions to the field and to identify her as a pivotal and influential figure in her own right. The methodological approaches refined by Stokes represent the vanguard of nineteenth-century antiquarian techniques. Not only was she well-informed on the advances made by Irish antiquarians, but she was also conversant with studies made by antiquarians abroad. Her texts referenced the German scholars Von Quast and Otte and the French archaeologist Le Blant.[79] She corresponded with her contemporary in Scotland, Joseph Anderson, and was recruited to edit the English translation of Didron's *Christian Iconography* thanks to her reputation 'as an accomplished student and writer in this branch of art'.[80]

Her work built on established techniques of periodisation, linking buildings and monuments to documentary evidence to establish context and dates. Careful documentation in drawings and photographs confirmed her analysis and offered a visual discourse to support her arguments. Stokes identified a developmental trajectory for both sculpted crosses and ecclesiastical architecture that positioned the works in relation to the European canon and situated the most accomplished Irish examples in the two centuries before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. Her readings could be justified by an objectively scientific methodology, but nonetheless were embedded in the nationalist politics prevalent in antiquarian studies in Europe and Victorian Britain.

Stokes's work was central to the conception of a 'golden age' in Irish art that would dominate early twentieth-century scholarship and beyond. Her identification of a vibrant period of cultural production between the

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ferdinand von Quast and Heinrich Otte, *Zeitschrift für christliche Archäologie und Kunst* (Leipzig, 1856); Edmond-Frédéric Le Blant, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes des Gaules antérieures au VIIIe siècle* (2 vols; Paris, 1856–65).
[80] Joseph Anderson, *Scotland in Early Christian Times* (Edinburgh, 1881); Didron and Stokes, *Christian Iconography*, I, pp. ii, iii.

years 600 and 1200 that reached its highest points with Tara Brooch in the seventh or eighth century, the Book of Kells in the ninth century, the Monasterboice cross sculptures in the tenth century and the Irish Romanesque chancel arches at Clonmacnoise before the twelfth century focused the narrative of subsequent researchers on Ireland as a light in an otherwise dark age Europe.[81] Her assessments of early medieval Irish design as an innovative hybrid of external forms and native visual culture, as in the high crosses and the Irish Romanesque, fed an increasingly nationalist political rhetoric in Ireland. In 1912, a project to revise and reissue Stokes's *Early Christian Art in Ireland* was undertaken involving Eoin MacNeill, who would serve as Minister for Education under the Irish Free State and Count George Plunkett, father to Joseph Plunkett, an architect of the Easter Rising of 1916.[82] Cultural nationalists perceived the historiography Stokes developed as a critical tool for their revolution and it was one that proved to have both academic and popular resonance.

Her identification and establishment of the concept of the 'golden age' between the years 600 and 1200 was shaped by counter-narratives of Irish barbarism and cultural backwardness established by Froude and others. Her emphasis on a kind of 'native hybridity' that allowed for external influences within Irish cultural distinctiveness also reflected broader cultural dynamics in relation to the uses of the Irish past during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Irish cultural nationalism became increasingly linked to political nationalism during this period and was also often aligned with a specifically Catholic resurgent and triumphant identity.[83] In the wake of the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1871, the Irish Protestant community increasingly emphasised their association with the early Irish church, which provided a rich material legacy of cultural independence.[84] These political and religious contexts informed Stokes's approach and motivation, as evidenced in her dedication to Edith Chenevix Trench. Stokes was a pivotal figure in Irish medieval studies, and her identification of the high cross form as an Irish innovation was supported by scholarship for nearly a century. Her consideration of Irish sculpture and architectural decoration with an artistic rather than an archaeological framework positions her at the

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[81] This narrative persisted as late as the 1990s with the publication of Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Europe* (New York, 1995); Daibhi O Croinin, *Early Medieval Ireland* (London, 2017), p. 212.

[82] William J. McCormack, *Dublin Easter 1916 The French Connection: The French Connection* (New York, 2012); 'Letter from William H. Grattan Flood to "Mr Buckley" requesting he pass revised editions of "Early Christian art in Ireland" to George Noble Plunkett, Count Plunkett', Count Plunkett Papers, 1648–1940, Dublin/NLI/MS11, 379/14/1.

[83] Niamh NicGhabhann, 'Sermons and the performance of historiographical authority in the construction of the Roman Catholic built landscape, 1880–1890', in Ingelbien and Galavan (eds), *Figures of Authority*, pp. 118–36.

[84] Church of Ireland cultures of historiography in the context of Disestablishment are considered in Mark Empey, Alan Ford, and Miriam Moffitt (eds), *The Church of Ireland and its Past: History, Interpretation and Identity* (Dublin, 2017).

beginning of a triumvirate of pioneering female scholars in this field, followed by Helen M. Roe and Françoise Henry in the twentieth century.

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PEER REVIEW

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