

An entry under the year 1119 in the Irish manuscript known as *Chronicum Scotorum* reads: "Croc Crist i gConnachta in hoc anno", that is, "the Cross of Christ in Connacht in this year". Another entry, this time in the *Annals of Tigernach*, says: "Croch Crist a nErinn isin bliadain sin, co tucadh morchuairt di la rí g nErenn .i. la Tairrdelbach Húa Concobair, 7 cor chuindigh ni di d'astadh a nErinn, 7 ro leced do, 7 do cumdaighedh laís hí a Ros Coman", that is, "the Cross of Christ in Ireland in that year, and it was brought on circuit by the King of Ireland, Turlough O'Connor, and he asked for some of it to keep in Ireland and it was granted him and it was enshrined at Roscommon".

By correlation with the Annals of the Four Masters, of Ulster and of Lough Key, it seems that the events narrated in the *Annals of Tigernach* may be dated to between A.D. 1119 and 1123 and it is thus clear that in the first quarter of the twelfth century a portion of the True Cross was enshrined at Roscommon at the behest of Turlough O'Connor, King of Ireland.

The reliquary known as the Cross of Cong may, on stylistic grounds, be dated to the first quarter of the twelfth century; portion of the inscription on it states that it was made to the order of Turlough O'Connor and in another place it says that it enshrines the Cross on which suffered the Founder of the world, that is, the True Cross. It is a shrine that was kept always in the west of Ireland. It seems, therefore, that there can be little doubt, if indeed any, that the precious object which we call the Cross of Cong is that referred to in the *Annals of Tigernach*.

The inscription on the shrine reads as follows (beginning at the base of the shaft, dexter side, and running round to end low on the sinister side):—

✠ HÁC CRUCE CRUX TEGITUR QUÁ PASUS CONDITOR ORBIS
OR DO MUREDACH U DUBTHAIG DO SENÓIR ÉREND
OR DO THERRDĒL U CHONC HŌDO RÍG EREND LAS SAN
DERRNAD IN GRESSA
OR DO DOMNALL MC FLANNACAN U DUB DENSKUP
CONNACHT DO
CHOMARBA CHOMMAN ACUS CHIARÁN ICAN ERNAD
IN GRĒSSA
OR DO MAELISU MC BRATDAN U ECHAN DO RIGNI IN
GRESSA
✠ HÁC CRUCE CRUX TEGITUR QUÁ PASUS CONDITOR
ORBIS

That is,

In this cross is preserved the cross on which suffered the Founder of the world.

Pray for Muredach O'Duffy, the senior of Ireland.

Pray for Turlough O'Connor, King of Ireland, at whose behest this shrine was made.

Pray for Donal Mac Flanagan O'Duffy, bishop of Connacht, successor of Comman and Ciaran, under whose auspices this shrine was made.

Pray for Maelisu son of Bratán O'Echan, who made this shrine.

Of the people mentioned in the inscription Turlough O'Connor ruled as King of Ireland until his death in 1156; Muredach O'Duffy, who was, apparently, the chief ecclesiastic of Connacht, died at Cong in 1150. Donal O'Duffy, who died at Clonfert in 1136, is described in the inscription as "bishop of Connacht" and also as "successor of Comman and Chiaran"; Comman was the founder-saint of Roscommon (where the shrine was made) and Chiaran established Clonmacnoise. It is, thus, reasonable to assume that Bishop O'Duffy was Abbot of the monastery at Roscommon. Of the artificer of the shrine we know nothing more than his name.

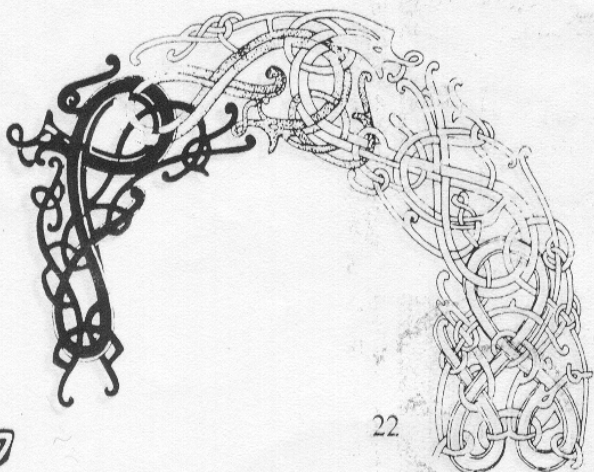
Nothing is known of the history of the reliquary for centuries after its fabrication. The inscription on it to Muiredach O'Duffy is mentioned in 1709 but the then location of the shrine is not given; by implication, it was in Connacht. In 1822, Dr. George Petrie saw it in a house at

Abbotstown near Cong. Here it was in the possession of a Father Prendergast, variously described as parish priest and as the last abbot of the Augustinian Abbey of Cong, who was living in retirement outside the village. He had discovered the cross in an oaken chest in Cong, but there is no information as to how the reliquary reached the village. In 1839, on Petrie's recommendation, Professor MacCullagh of Trinity College, Dublin, purchased the cross from Father Prendergast's heir and presented it to the Royal Irish Academy, in whose collections in the National Museum of Ireland it now is.

The Cross of Cong is 76.2 cm. (30 ins.) in overall height and 47.9 cm. (18½ ins.) wide across the arms. At its base the shaft measures 9.6 cm. (3¾ ins.) wide and narrows to 4.5 cm. (1¾ ins.) just below its junction with the arms. The arms, too, narrow from 8.9 cm. (3½ ins.) at their extremities to about 4.5 cm. (1¾ ins.) near the central boss.

The core of the reliquary is of oak but it is uncertain how large the piece of wood is: hollow spaces may be observed in places where the covering sheets of metal have sprung from their binding strips. The wood is covered on the back, front and sides with sheets of bronze which are fastened together at their edges by binding-strips of silver-plated bronze of U-shaped cross-section. The plates are further secured to the wooden backing by nails placed in inconspicuous places in the superficial ornamental plates.

At the angles of the shaft and arms of the shrine and at regular intervals along its edge in front circular, domed, glass studs project. These are set in gilt bronze, beaded frames with scalloped edges. Of the former eighteen studs five are now missing and it is clear that the original design required alternating red and green studs. The frame in which each stud is contained is continued as a cylindrical projection to the back of the cross where, in positions corresponding to those of the glass studs on front, discs with patterns of red enamel set in yellow have been inserted into bronze frames, originally gilt. Of the original eighteen enamelled studs two are now missing.



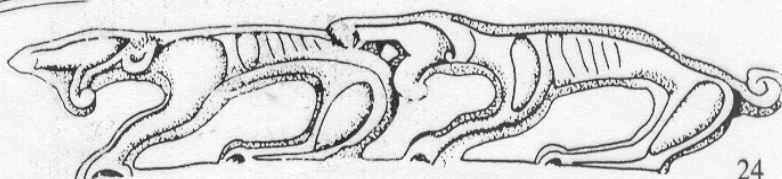
22



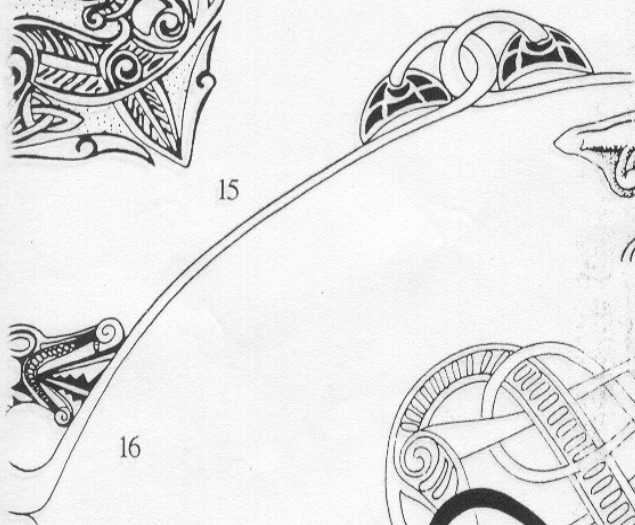
23



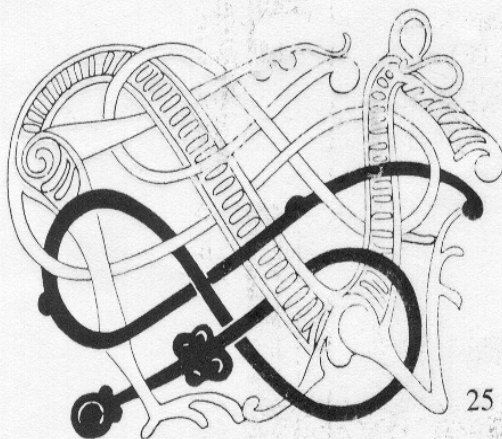
15



24



16

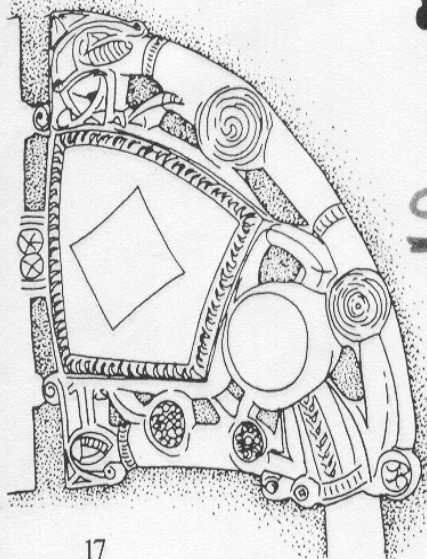


25

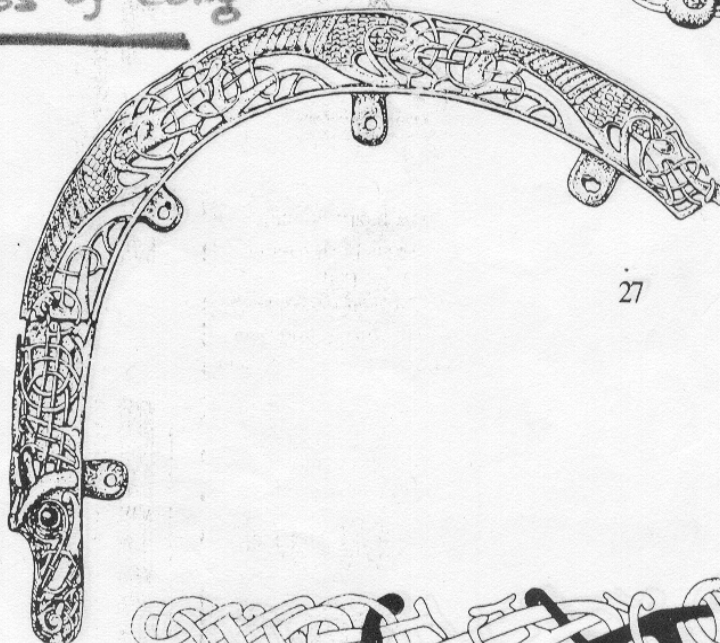
Cross of Cong



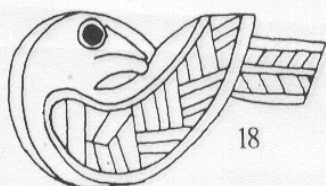
26



17



27



18

