

# A CASTLEDERMOT hogback

IN THE PREVIOUS issue of *Archaeology Ireland* (13, 3) Peter Harbison discussed a sarcophagus at Clones, which he termed 'a unique Romanesque-style monument'. In that paper Harbison suggested that this stone example is unique for the twelfth century. However, it may not be the only example of a sarcophagus in stone from Ireland.

The hogback grave at Castledermot, also unique in Ireland, may prove to be another example of a sarcophagus, though from an earlier period. The Castledermot hogback is of a type which originated in north Yorkshire, about the middle of the tenth century, and its form is based on Viking longhouses. This compares loosely with the Clones sarcophagus, which is based on the shape of a house or church (could the Castledermot hogback also be based on the architecture of an early church?).

One end of the Clones sarcophagus is seemingly undecorated, leading Harbison to support an earlier suggestion that it was intended to place this end of the sarcophagus up against something, such as the base of a cross. Curiously, the east face of the south high cross at Castledermot is undecorated, whereas the other three faces (and all four faces of the north cross) are highly decorated. Is it possible that the hogback was intended to be placed against the base of the south cross at Castledermot? If so, this suggests that the high cross was deliberately carved with this arrangement in mind. ■

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South cross at Castledermot, showing south and east faces



Close-up of the Castledermot hogback stone