



Holed stone at Castledermot, Co. Kildare

HOLED STONES are one of the great enigmas in the Irish archaeological record; their origin, date and function are not readily explained. In Ireland many are found at early church sites, where they are nearly always decorated with an Early Christian cross. However, it is generally believed that these stones were originally pagan monuments. According to local traditions they were sometimes used during engagement or wedding ceremonies, the lucky couples joining hands or fingers through the hole, depending on its size.

If these were pagan stones, were they used in ceremonies celebrating tribal alliance? In pagan Ireland, alliances between

tribes were often symbolised by marriage. This was also true for Early Christian society in Ireland, and the ceremony may have been adopted by the Irish church, who blessed these stones with a new symbolism.

That the hole did represent a Christian symbol is highlighted at Castledermot in County Kildare. Here the cross is ringed, and the four segments created by this ring and the cross appear to emphasise the central hole. Could it be that the hole may have symbolised Christ's crucifixion itself, by portraying the perforation of His hands and feet, nailed to the cross?

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