

A photograph of Boyle Abbey ruins in County Roscommon, Ireland. The image shows a long, narrow cloister with a series of stone arches supported by columns. The sky is blue with some clouds. The text is overlaid on the image.

# Boyle Abbey — order and space

BEFORE THE TWELFTH century Irish ecclesiastical foundations were a patchwork of simple churches and associated buildings. It took over one thousand years for the architecture of the Roman world to reach Ireland, initially in the form of rounded or Romanesque arches. This changed with the arrival in Ireland of the Cistercians, who brought with them a highly disciplined and centralised form of monastery, reflected in the Roman-inspired architecture and building layout.

Church, cloister, chapter-house, sacristy, library, bell-tower, dormitory and kitchens were all contained within one massive structure, making them the largest buildings in existence in Ireland at that time. It has been argued that the Cistercians sought architectural simplicity, a symbol of their simple and uniform monastic rule. However, the barrage of graceful arches and angles seen here at Boyle Abbey in County Roscommon conveys a complex geometry and order of space not previously witnessed in Irish ecclesiastical architecture. Such bold and complex architecture and design combined to impress upon the local populations the revived organisation, discipline and authority not only of the medieval monasteries themselves but also their secular patrons. ■

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