The bog body from Cashel Bog, Co. Laois

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Introduction

On the afternoon of Wednesday 10th August 2011, Bord na Móna worker Jason Phelan discovered a bog body while operating a milling machine in Cashel Bog, Co. Laois. The discovery was investigated over a four day period by a team of archaeologists and conservators from the National Museum of Ireland, assisted by Bord na Móna staff.

Nature and location of Cashel Bog, Co. Laois

Located five and a half kilometers south of Portlaoise on the Abbeyleix road (fig. 1), Cashel Bog is a source of peat moss used as a soil conditioner for horticulture, farm-animal bedding, poultry litter and mushroom culture. South-east of the bog, the long, arched ridge of Cullenagh Mountain dominates the landscape. Streams that form the river Cush rise on the slopes of Cullenagh Mountain and in Cashel Bog. The Cush flows northwards, becoming the river Triogue, which continues northwards to join the river Barrow at Clonterry, between Mountmellick and Garryhinch.

Beyond the northern end of Cullenagh Mountain is the Rock of Cashel (td. Cashel) and Crosy Duff Hill (td. Lamberton Demesne). The Rock of Cashel is a limestone outcrop that is highly fossiliferous with crinoids and brachiopods. Unlike its famous namesake in Co. Tipperary, it has regrettably been quarried extensively and there is no surviving evidence to suggest that a cashel or stone fort may once have crowned its summit. As will be discussed later, Crosy Duff Hill is an ancient assembly site and place of inauguration.

Cashel Bog is located in parts of the townlands of Cashel, Ballyruin, Colt, Clonaddoran, Pass, and Ballycarnan. The bog is divided along its northeast to southwest axis by the boundary between the baronies of Maryborough West and Cullenagh. Lying to the west in Maryborough West are the townlands of Colt and Clonaddoran (civil parish Clonenagh and Clonagheen). Lying in the eastern half of Cashel Bog in the barony of Cullenagh are the townlands of Cashel, Ballyruin and Pass all in the civil parish of Ballyroan. Part of the northern end of the bog is located in the townland of Ballycarnan (civil parish Kilcolmmanbane), in the barony of Maryborough East.

As shown on a Tudor map dated circa 1563 (reproduced in O’Leary and Lalor, 1914, front piece. See also Andrews and Loeber, 1998, 243–286) in the 16th century Cashel Bog formed the boundary between Touayoui (Tuath Fhiodhbhuidhe or Tuath Aodha Bhuidhe, Tuath of the McEvoys (O’Leary and Lalor, II, 444))
Figure 1: Location map showing Cashel Bog and the find place of the bog body.
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Figure 2: Copper axe head found beside Cashel Bog, Colt, Co. Laois.

in which Colt townland was located; and Touachlou (Tuath of the MacLowes) in which was located the townlands of Cashel, Ballyruin and Pass (O’Leary and Lalor, 1914, 444–6). Clonaddoran was in Feranodoulin (Fearann Ua nDunlainge (O’Dowling’s land) ) as was that part of Ballycarnan that lay west of the Cush river. The part of Ballycarnan that lay east of the river was in Feranolauler (Fearann Ua Leathlobhair, (O’Lalor’s land) ).

Archaeological finds from the area

Cashel Bog and the surrounding area are not only of considerable historical interest but have proven to be a rich resource of archaeological finds. An archaeological survey of Cashel Bog undertaken in 2005 found two post rows, one of which yielded radiocarbon dates in the ranges 640–780AD and 660–890AD; a Neolithic platform dated to 3780–3640 BC and three sightings of archaeological wood (Whitaker, 2006, 44).

A number of archaeological bog finds are recorded from the townlands centered on Cashel Bog. Many are from Cashel Bog itself but in some instances the finds are from Coolnacarton Bog to the west, separated from Cashel Bog by a strip of dry land (Whitaker, 2006, fig. 2, 5). Clonaddoran has produced two leather shoes (reg.
Figure 3: One of a pair of unfinished copper axe heads found close to Cashel Bog at Crubeen, Co. Laois.

nos. NMI1943:115, NMI1960:576), a stone axe head (NMI1960:655), a bag and sandal of leather, flint arrowhead and two wooden stakes (NMI file IA/148/1960), a second leather bag (NMI1973:94) and a stone spearhead (NMI1966:98). An animal hide (NMI1986:38) was found in either Oldtown or Clonaddrigan. Two finds of bog butter were found in Cashel (NMI1971:1007 and NMI file IA/244/1986) with two more coming from Colt townland (NMI1986:58; NMI2011:258). Also in Colt townland a copper axe head (NMI1939:125) (fig. 2) is reported to have been found near a low mound while two copper axe heads (NMI1999:8–9) (figs. 3, 4) turned up in Crubeen, a townland that runs down from the western slopes of Cullenagh Mountain to near the south-eastern end of Cashel Bog. A wooden beetle was discovered in Cashel Bog at Ballyruin (NMI1984:139) while three iron horseshoes were discovered at Pass of which one was acquired by the National Museum (NMI1930:231). A calibrated radiocarbon date of 30–240AD was obtained for one of the pieces of bog butter from Colt (NMI1986:58) which was found at the eastern edge of a Coolnacartan Bog immediately to the west of Cashel Bog (Downey et al., 2006, 32–34).
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Figure 4: One of a pair of unfinished copper axe heads found close to Cashel Bog at Crubeen, Co. Laois.

Historical background

At the northeast edge of Cashel Bog, the townlands of Pass and Ballyheyland are where the Battle of the Pass of the Plumes took place involving local Irish forces and Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, Commander of Queen Elizabeth’s forces, who landed in Ireland in April 1599. While on an expedition southwards through Leinster to subdue the Munster Geraldines, Essex relieved the garrison in Maryborough (now Portlaoise) and on the 17th May he attempted to march through the Pass of Cashel, en-route to Kilkenny. ‘The Earl continued his march until he came to Crussydoff (Crosy Duff, Cros Dubh), formerly known by the name of Tulach maic Cumgail; on this hill he encamped, and on the next day as he proceeded, his forces were attacked again by prince Anthony [Uaithne mac Rudhraighe Í Mhórdha, also anglicized as Owny Mac Rory O‘More] as they entered the Pass of Cashel’ (O‘Byrne, 1856, 110–111). The attack was directed at Essex’s train and rearguard and the engagement lasted two hours. The result was the death of a large number of Essex’s men while more fled. John Harrington, Essex’s chronicler, claimed that Essex lost only two officers and a few privates. On the other hand, Irish accounts by Philip O’Sullivan-Beare and the Four Masters, indicate that Essex lost 500 soldiers. The Pass of Cashel, where the battle took
place, became known as *Bearná na gCleití* or the Pass of the Plumes because of the plumage of the English helmets left on the battlefield (O’Hanlon, 1879, 279–288; FitzGerald, 1904, 199–210).

An important English account of the battle is provided by John Dymmok in his journal of events in Ireland between 10th May and 9th September 1599. Dymmok reports that having relieved Maryborough, Essex ‘lodged that night at the foot of a very highe hill colled Crosy Duff, the generall Ratehill of the province of Leinster, where the rebell Ony mac Rury O’More shewed himselfe with 500 foote and about 40 horse two myles from our campe, renewing that night and contynewinge the next morninge a challeng which he had made a few daies before, to fight 50 of his with 50 of ours with sworde and target, which was consented vnto by the lorde lieutenant, but the rebell never came to performe yt. The lord lieutenant havinge from the topp of Croshi duff viewed the cuntry rownde about, and particulerly the way of that dayes march, led his army towards a passage called Cashells, halfe a myle from that nights quarter’ (Butler, 1843, 32).

Crosy Duff, the hill on which Essex camped, is in the townland of Lamberton Demesne (Fitzpatrick, 2004, 215), which is but two miles from the edge of Cashel Bog. Fitzpatrick records Crosy Duff Hill as a place of assembly and observes that although the hill is somewhat inconspicuous, like other assembly places it offers a spectacular view. A large part of Leinster is viewable from the summit, including the Curragh of Kildare, the Wicklow mountains to the north and the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the south. ‘Apart from two ringforts there are no other extant earthworks on the hill. Dymmok however imparts something of the importance of this mustering site, suggesting that Crosdubh was at one time a place at which royal tribute was collected’ (Fitzpatrick, 2004, 215). Fitzpatrick also notes the proposal by Lord Walter FitzGerald that Crosy Duff ‘could also have been the place where Ó Mórdha was inaugurated’ (Fitzpatrick, 2004, 215). The likely significance of the hill to Ó Mórdha suggests that the decision of Lord Essex to camp there was a calculated insult directed at his Irish foe. It is also likely that the significance of the hill extended far back in time to a period long before the later middle ages, and that the presence of a human sacrifice in Cashel is in some way related.

It is reported that around 1840, while digging the foundations of a house known as Ned Duff’s, near the battle site, many human remains were exhumed (O’Hanlon, 1879, 286). The placename *Móinín na Fola*, meaning ‘the little bog of the blood’, is traditionally associated with the Irish defeat of Essex’s army. Fogarty states that the name refers to ‘the borders of the road near Ballyroan’ (which flanks the eastern edge of Cashel Bog) (Fogarty, 1918, xiv) while O’Hanlon locates it in the townland of Ballyheyland, near the foot of Crosy Duff, where the battle of the Pass of the Plumes began (O’Hanlon, 1879, 287).
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Lord Mountjoy, succeeded Essex as Lord Lieutenant and quickly took the field against the Irish rebels. In August 1600 he devastated the country of Donnell Spaniagh Kavanagh in Co. Carlow and on the 24th of the same month it was at the Pass of Cashel that Donnell Spaniagh Kavanagh submitted to Mountjoy. Kavanagh withdrew his contingent to high ground to watch the ensuing fight with the remaining Irish force, which was defeated and driven across Cashel Bog into the woods beyond (FitzGerald, 1904, 208).

To the north-east of Cashel Bog in the townland of Ballycaran is Lalor’s Mills where an agreement was made in 1607 between the Irish and Patrick Crosbie representing the crown, as a result of which the leading men of the Seven Septs of Laois were transplanted to Co. Kerry. The Seven Septs of Laois were: O’Devoy (O’Deevy), O’Doran, O’Dowling, McEvoy, O’Kelly, O’Moore and O’Lalor. Lalor’s Mills is referred to in the agreement by the anglicized Irish form Mollin O Lalour (FitzGerald, 1923, 139). Analysis of the Tudor map of 1563 indicates that Lalor’s Mills and part of the townland of Ballycaran (or Ballycarney), east of the Cush river, was in Feranolauler (Fearann Ua Leathlobhair) i.e. ‘O’Lalor’s land’. So also was the townland Carigminban (? Cremorgan); Ballynockan and Dysart castles and the churches at Kilcolmanbane and Dysart-Enos. Cros Dubh (or Crosy Duff) must also have been within the O’Lalor territory and O’Leary and Lalor propose that its location is indicated on the map by the name ‘Croche Donga’ which name is written at the south east corner of Feranolauler. (The placename is referred to by O’Leary and Lalor (p. 445) as ‘Crochedongan’). This may be a corrupt anglicised version of Crosdubh or it may indicate an alternative name for the hill. The first element ‘Croche’ is Cruach, ‘a hill’. The second element ‘donga’ or ‘dongan’ may be from daingean, signifying ‘a stronghold, a fortress, a garrison’ (Dinneen, 1927, 302). According to Dinneen (ibid.) the word also relates to ‘a solemn vow or promise; a contract of any kind’. The term would seem an appropriate one for a major place of assembly and inauguration.

In 1999, a monument was erected at Cashel Cross to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the battle of the Pass of the Plumes. With so much military action in the immediate vicinity, when the discovery of a bog body was reported from Cashel Bog, the possibility that it was the body of a soldier of the Tudor period was immediately considered.

Location and description of the body

The find place was in the middle of the bog in Cashel townland, close to the boundary with Clonaddoran townland (fig. 1). At the time of discovery, at least two meters of peat has been removed from the location, however according to Bord na Móna staff, the find place lay some distance above the underlying fen peat. All
Figure 5: Cashel Man under excavation.

Figure 6: Hazel stakes in proximity to the body of Cashel Man.
that was visible to start with was a pair of legs below the knees, and a torso. The body appeared to be naked. Later it was possible to work out that the torso had been damaged by the milling machine which also removed the head, neck and left arm. Excavation revealed that the right arm was concealed below the legs and torso. Damaged body parts including a mandible and teeth, ribs, clavicle, vertebra, skin and other fragments of tissue were recovered from disturbed peat. Following excavation it was determined that the body was crouched, orientated N-S with the head (now missing) to the south (fig. 5). The body was lying on the right side with the legs flexed tightly. It had been placed on the bog surface, possibly in a pool, and two hazel stakes marked the place of deposition (fig. 6). These were inserted into the bog at angles of 30 degrees and 62 degrees. It appears that the stakes would have crossed above the victim’s head. It is possible that they were used to tie the body down but they may simply have marked its location in the bog. Wounds noted on the body suggest that one was dealing with a victim of human sacrifice. The body, which proved to be that of a young adult male, was removed to the National Museum Conservation Laboratory where a programme of further investigation and analysis was undertaken and is on-going currently.

Subsequently, the remains were subjected to CT scanning which revealed that Cashel Man’s surviving arm had been broken in antiquity by a sharp blow, and the spine was broken in two places. There are also cuts to the back, seemingly inflicted by an axe. Further analysis is taking place, including palaeobotanical analysis of a column of peat which was removed from the site. This will provide information on the local environment at the time the body was deposited and may determine whether the body was placed in a bog pool.

The age of the bog body
One of the hazel stakes yielded a 14C date of 3605Â±30 BP 95.4: (2 sigma) cal BC 2033- 1888 while the body itself was 3678Â±31 BP 95.4: (2 sigma) cal BC 2141-1960. This showed that Cashel Man lived and died in the Early Bronze Age around 2000BC. This surprising result was confirmed by radiocarbon dating of the top and bottom of the peat column removed for Palaeobotanical analysis. The bottom of the monolith was found to date around 3500BC while the top is around 2000BC when Cashel Man was deposited in the bog. In addition to confirming the age of the bog body, the peat monolith will provide a unique opportunity to look at the local landscape and human dynamics of the area immediately before and during the time of Cashel Man.

Discussion
Although skeletonised human remains of greater antiquity have been found in bogs such as a 5000 year old skeleton from Stonyisland Bog, Co Galway (Ó Floinn,
Figure 7: Derrycashel Man, Co. Roscommon, a Middle Bronze Age crouched bog body.

1995, 221–234), the body of Cashel Man appears to be the oldest fleshed bog body to have been found in Europe. Hitherto the earliest dated Irish find of a fleshed bog body was Derrycashel Man, Co. Roscommon which dated to around 1431–1291 BC, during the Middle Bronze Age. In the case of Derrycashel Man, due to the condition of the body and its incompleteness, it is not possible to state whether or not the remains are those of a victim of human sacrifice. It is interesting to note however that like Cashel Man, Derrycashel Man was deposited in a crouched position (fig. 7). This was the normal position for inhumation burials of the Early Bronze, examples of which have been discovered in a number of locations in Co. Laois including Cuffsborough, Luggacurreen and near Dunamase (Waddell, 1990, 104–5). The majority of Bronze Age burials appear to have been cremated but whether any particular significance can be attached to the different burial rites, i.e. inhumation and cremation, cannot be determined.

The three copper axes found in the vicinity of Cashel Bog (figs. 3–4) suggest clearly that ritual deposits were being made in the area during the Early Bronze Age. The two axes from Crubeen are probably votive deposits and whereas the single find from Colt could have been lost, most likely it too was a votive deposit. The Colt axe shows damage to the blade and was used extensively before its
deposition or loss. It is of Harbison's Lough Ravel type (Harbison, 1969, 11, no. 50, fig. 3, 2). The pair of axes from Crubeen represents unfinished examples of the same Lough Ravel type for which a date range of 2,500 – 2,000 BC can be proposed. The wounds present on Cashel Man would have been inflicted using a flat axe of the same general type as the Early Bronze Age axes found in the vicinity of Cashel Bog.

In Ireland, the ritual killing of young men is known to have occurred during the Early Iron Age (Kelly, 2012, 232–240) and the discovery of an Early Bronze Age victim apparently killed in accordance with the same ritual brings the practice back in date by at least a millennium and a half. The place of deposition of the body of Cashel Man is in a bog on the border of a territory (Fearann Ua Leathlobhair) that is overlooked by and contains Crosy Duff Hill (Cros Dubh) the probable place of inauguration of the regional kings of Laois (Laoighis). This mirrors closely the location at which Oldcroghan Man was discovered in a bog on the boundary of the territory of Tuath Cruachan, overlooked by and containing Croghan Hill, inauguration place of the kings of Offaly (Uí Failge). Other Iron Age bog bodies also seemed to have been placed in proximity to important boundaries (Kelly, 2006, 1).

It has also been noted that votive finds of objects such as feasting equipment, weapons, regalia and attire, and objects relating to equestrian procession also had a strong tendency to be found in boundary locations (Kelly, 2012, 232–240). This gave rise to the theory that these votive deposits and Iron Age bog bodies were related to kingship and sovereignty rituals. However it was considered likely that these were practices that extended back far into the Bronze Age and while the discovery of an Early Bronze Age victim of ritual killing in Cashel Bog may be considered remarkable; precisely such an outcome can be seen to have been anticipated.

The ritual of kingship that is implied by the Iron Age finds is not exclusive to that time and survived in many of its essential aspects down to the destruction of the Gaelic way of life at the end of the Middle Ages. However preliminary research into Bronze Age finds in Ireland appears to demonstrate that the origin of the practice extends far back into the Bronze Age. Hoards and single finds of Bronze Age weapons, shields, horns, cauldrons and gold personal objects can all be shown to occur on boundaries and even some Early Bronze Age lunulae appear to follow the pattern. This suggests a continuous kingship tradition of extraordinary conservatism and remarkable antiquity. (Kelly, 2006, 5)

In the English subdivision of Connacht in 1565, O’Conor Don’s territory became the barony of Ballinlober while the territory O’Conor Roe became the barony of
Roscommon. At Coggalbeg the boundary between these two baronies runs through Coggalbeg Bog where the barony boundary is coextensive with the ancient territorial boundary between Mag Aí and the Trícha Cét known as Na Trí Tuatha which contained the territories of Corcu Aclann, Cenél Dobtha and Tir Briúin na Sinna (MacCotter, 209–10, map, Appendix 2). The only known hoard association of a gold lunula with gold discs, (the probable regalia of an Early Bronze Age king), was found in Coggalbeg Bog which is situated on this boundary, suggesting perhaps that it is a boundary of great antiquity.

The need for boundaries and territories appears to have developed as a consequence of the introduction of agriculture during the Neolithic period in order to protect farm animals, crops and the agricultural land that supported them. Protection from natural calamities such as adverse weather, infertility of the soil, drought, flooding and disease, as well as from human attack and theft, also became paramount concerns. The unpredictable nature of natural threats and the apparent randomness of events that could impact disastrously upon communities were rationalized as the actions of supernatural forces that needed to be propitiated to ensure their benevolence. The fertile source that produced new life annually was the land, which was perceived of as female in gender. Indeed, this ancient concept of ‘Mother Earth’ remains with us to this day. In time the land came to be regarded not just as female in gender but as a divine in nature, that is, a goddess.

In many parts of the ancient world the office of king came to be regarded as divine or semi-divine and we may infer that by the Bronze Age in Ireland, the office of king was separated from the community by sacred rites of initiation and various taboos. As the semi-divine representative of the people it may have appeared logical that the king should become wedded to the goddess in order to bring influence to bear on the supernatural realm. This marriage was affected through the inauguration ceremony of the king and it is striking that this essentially pagan ritual should have persisted in Ireland, albeit with a Christian gloss, until the destruction of the Gaelic order at the end of the 16th century.

The king was the most important personage in society and the purpose of the sacred prohibitions that attended his office was to show him as mediator between supernatural powers and his community. Fír flatha meaning ‘truth of a sovereign’ was the ancient Irish conceptualisation of the good fortune connected to the beneficent rule of a sovereign which by placing nature in equilibrium, kept plagues and misfortunes away from the people, maintained peace and caused an abundance of fruit, milk, corn, fish and children. However, being the power-point upon which social equilibrium depended was not without inherent dangers. Should a king’s reign not bring about the expected prosperity it could result in his ritual death at the hands of his people.
Prehistoric Ireland contained at least one hundred and fifty small kingdoms each with its own territorial goddess. The greatest of these was the goddess Ériu who presided over the whole island of Ireland and from whom the modern name of the island derives. The earth goddess was perceived of as having a number of attributes. As it was she who nourished the crops and herds she was fertility goddess and as she was the actual land on which the people dwelled she was the goddess of sovereignty as well. She exercised control over the annual cycle of birth, death and renewal which made her goddess of death. Warfare was a common cause of death and as the territory that embodied the goddess needed to be protected by warlike means, the goddess also assumed the attribute of war goddess. In early Irish tales the goddess may appear in any or all of these guises, in which she may be depicted as young and beautiful or old and haggard. It was believed that as a king grew older so also did the goddess with a resultant loss of beauty and fertility. However through her re-marriage to a young and vigorous new king the goddess would be restored to her youthful beauty and fecundity.

The mating of the god Daghda with the goddess Bóinne, who resided at Brugh na Bóinne (Newgrange passage tomb), may encapsulate a very early tradition based on the penetration of the passage and chamber by a beam of sunlight cast by the rising mid-winter sun. The symbolism here is that of the penetration of the earth goddess by the sun god. The offspring of the adulterous union of Daghda and Bóinne is Aonghus, who is fostered by the god Midir. Aonghus is represented as the eternally youthful god of youth, love and poetry. When he comes of age, Aonghus learns the identity of his father Daghda whom he visits seeking his inheritance. By a ruse Aonghus acquires Brú na Bóinne as his patrimony. The theme here is the replacement of an old king by a younger one. In one version of the tale it is Daghda who is replaced by his son (Gwynn, 1914, 211–212) whereas another version has the cuckolded husband of Bóinne (Elcmar, i.e. Nuada, i.e. Nechtan) being dispossessed by Aonghus. However, Elcmar is rewarded with land at Cleitech, to the south of the river, where he builds a new stronghold (Bergin and Best, 1938, 147). Perhaps significantly, it is at Cleitech that Muircheartach Mac Erca, king of Tara, suffered a ritual triple death and where king Cormac mac Airt died with a salmon bone stuck in his throat (Ní Bhrolcháin, 2011, 44–65). It may be that the stated cause of death of Cormac mac Airt is but a euphemism for the king having been strangled or had his throat cut, for it seems clear that Cleitech is associated with the replacement of kings and their ritual killing. Stout places Cleitech at Rossnaree (Stout, 2002, 64, 67–8, fig. 11, 70) and it is clear from other sources that it was located on the south bank of the Boyne to the west of Brúgh na Bóinne (Stokes, 1892, 512; Hogan, 1910, 248). Cleitech would have been located on the boundary between Brega and the kingdom of Fir Arda Ciannachta (for the
boundaries of these kingdoms see MacCotter, 204–5, 236–7; map, Appendix 2). It would also have been located on the boundary of the core Tara landscape as identified by Newman (2005, fig. A, 397). From this we may conclude that the boundary locations at which the bodies of Cashel Man and Oldcroghan Man were deposited, compare closely with the location at which kings of Tara also suffered ritual death.

It was the boundary that gave physical form to a kingdom and therefore to the territorial goddess whom it embodied. At such places offerings were made of butter, quern stones, plough parts and sickles. These related to milk production and the cultivation and processing of grain, thus reflecting the desired outcome of good yields and successful harvests that the king wished to achieve through his marriage to the earth goddess. The nature and range of other objects found deposited in proximity to boundaries – and rarely in other contexts such as on settlements or in burials – suggest the deposition of items associated with the inauguration of sacral kings in the course of sovereignty rituals. As adverted to earlier, the categories into which these Bronze Age and Iron Age votive objects appear to fall are regalia, weapons, feasting utensils and objects associated with equestrian procession. These are categories of objects known to have played important roles in the inauguration ceremony of medieval Irish kings in which the king’s dress and weapons were of key importance, as was his inauguration procession (either on horseback or on a horse-drawn vehicle) and his inauguration feast. Prehistoric head-dresses, gold collars, pins, armlets and items of clothing such as capes and hats may represent regalia; and weapons are present in the form of swords, spearheads, spear shafts, spear butts, axes and shields. Platters and vessels made of wood as well as cauldrons and drinking vessels made of wood and metal represent feasting utensils while objects associated with equestrian procession include bridle bits, y-shaped leading pieces and parts of wheeled vehicles. It appears that these objects were deposited in boundary locations as a statement and definition of the king’s sovereignty.

The term liminality is derived from Latin limen, meaning a ‘threshold’ and in ancient Ireland the office of kingship was itself considered to be a liminal state circumscribed by kingly prerogatives and taboos. Based often on natural boundaries in the landscape such as mountains, rivers and bogland, territorial boundaries are obvious liminal places whose geographical aspects can accentuate their liminal characteristics. Forming a threshold between land and water, bogs are classic liminal places that, by extension, may also have been taken to represent a threshold between the material world and the otherworld. In the tree-coved landscape of ancient Ireland bogs would have presented a huge vista of sky, providing a window on the heavens. A ritual involving magic or supplication to a deity performed at a liminal place has an optimum prospect of proving successful
and even greater success could be assured by performing the ritual at a liminal time such as Imbolc, Bealtaine, Lughnasa or Samhain, the feasts that divided the Celtic year, or solar events such as the midsummer and midwinter solstices.

Belief in the magical properties of boundaries has persisted into modern folk beliefs some of which appear related to ancient votive practices of depositing butter and quern stones on tribal boundaries. In parts of Ireland a spancel or hobble was made from rushes to cure a cow that for some reason was unable to yield milk (Ó Catháin, 1999, 239). It was required that the rushes be cut on a riverbank that formed the boundary between two townlands and the charm was worked by placing the spancel on the cow’s leg and offering prayers to St. Brigit, who was the Christian personification of the pagan goddess of the same name. Water from a boundary ditch was used to treat cattle in the absence of issue, and in particular, water from a mearing ditch between two parishes was considered the most effective. In Co. Cavan it was believed that a cure for rheumatism could be obtained by using, in a particular way, water and stones taken from a well or stream dividing two counties (O’Farrell, 1978, 61).

In ancient Ireland standing stones were erected to denote boundaries and these too were imbued with magical properties. In modern folk tradition many standing stones were believed to have originated as large lumps of butter thrown from various mountain tops by the hero Fionn Mac Cumhail, who is associated with both Croghan Hill and Crosy Duff Hill. When fallen to earth the butter turned to stone but often retained the marks of the hero’s fingers (Feehan and Dunne, 2003, 3–4). A standing stone known as Lia Ailbe once marked the boundary between the kingdoms of Northern and Southern Brega, where a battle was fought in 737. The stone is referred to in the Annals of Ulster as the chief monument of the plain of Brega. When it toppled in 999, Mael Sechnaill, the high-king, had in made into four millstones, presumably with the intention of transferring the magical properties of the standing stone to the millstones and the flour that was ground upon them (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, 1983, 429).

**Conclusion**

Prior to damage inflicted by a peat harvesting machine, Cashel Man appears to have been a fully intact body albeit wounded in antiquity. Found close to an important boundary in proximity to an inauguration hill and surrounded by bogland rich in votive deposits, Cashel Man appears to fit the pattern observed earlier for prehistoric bog bodies in Ireland. This suggests that the killing of Cashel Man was connected with kingship and sovereignty rituals. All the indications are that the human remains from Cashel Bog tell of the fate of a young king who, through...
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folly or misadventure, was deemed to have failed to appease the goddess on whose benevolence his people depended, and who paid the ultimate price.

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