

The Isle of Man: A Land- and Sea-scape of Burial Mounds and Stone Crosses

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The coastal landscape of the Isle of Man is populated by significant numbers of medieval chapels, cemeteries and carved stone cross slabs, and also by furnished Viking Age burial monuments located in prominent positions. The degree to which many of these sites and monuments share the same landscape niches and are visually and physically accessible from the shore, is compelling.

The overall chronological narrative on the Isle of Man through the medieval period saw early Christian burial grounds weather an influx of 10th century settlers, who introduced new burial practices and monuments, before their assimilation and conversion led to the creation and erection of the well-known carved stone crosses. The later 11th and 12th centuries brought further great change, as cross-carving came to an end, and most of the early chapels and burial grounds were abandoned in favour of just 17 parishes.

The application of GIS, map-regression and landscape survey offers new ways of exploring the factors governing the siting of these monuments. Whilst offering a new and alternative perspective on the distribution and location of the medieval chapels, which have long been related to patterns of landholding, this approach is also demonstrating a closer relationship between these Christian sites and the Viking Age burial monuments than perhaps hitherto appreciated.

This connection can also be traced through the subsequent raising of carved stone monuments, and into the development of sites that project the sense of place and status required for candidacy as the centres of the newly created parishes in the 12th century.

Many of these sites are in sight of, or close to the sea, and the same studies are more clearly demonstrating their seaward dimension, offering ways of linking them across the Irish Sea to the neighbouring coastlines.