



Early Christian Ireland

Term	Definition
Abbess	The head nun in a convent.
Abbot	The head monk in a monastery.
Annals	A yearly record of events, written in manuscript in Early Christian Ireland
Ardagh Chalice	The most famous metal artefact from Early Christian Ireland.
Chalice	A large cup or goblet used in Christian ceremonies.
Beehive huts	Stone buildings with a curved shape often used by monks in Early Christian Ireland
Book of Kells	The most famous manuscript from Early Christian Ireland; it is an illustrated copy of the four gospels.
Cell	A one-person building or hut in which a monk would sleep.
Convent	A complex of buildings where nuns live, work and devote their lives to God.
Diocese	The area controlled by a Christian bishop.
Druid	A pagan or Celtic priest. Druids believed in many gods and had great influence over Gaelic Chieftains.
Filigree	Fine gold or silver wire formed into patterns on chalices and other objects
High Cross	A stone structure shaped like a cross, usually marking the centre of a monastery or an important grave. Decorated with images from the bible.
Irish diaspora	All the Irish people and descendants of Irish people who live outside Ireland.
Longphort	A Viking camp by the water, used as a base for raids.
Longship	A Viking ship designed to navigate rough seas and inland rivers.
Manuscript	A book written by hand.
Missionary	Someone sent to spread Christianity in a foreign place.
Monastery	A complex of buildings where monks live, work and devote their lives to God.
Nun	A woman dedicated to a religious order and to life in a convent.
Monk	A man dedicated to a religious order and to life in a monastery.
Oratory	A small church.
Pagan	Early Christians used this term to refer to non-Christians who worshipped many Gods.
Round Tower	A stone tower used by monks as a belfry or place to hide during attacks.
Scribe	A monk who works in a scriptorium.
Tonsure	Circular haircut on monk's head
Scriptorium	A room where manuscripts were copied by hand and illustrated by scribes.

2.6 CONSIDER the historical significance of Christianity on the island of Ireland, including its contribution to culture and society in the Early Christian period.

Summary		
The period of Early Christianity in Ireland earned the island the title " <i>the land of Saints and Scholars</i> ". Christianity first came to Ireland during the later stages of the Iron Age, where Celts were pagans . The earliest source of Christianity in Ireland is AD 431 with the arrival of Bishop Palladius . Later, St Patrick would arrive and successfully convert the Pagan Celts to Christianity. Monasteries were built, creating many religious communities of monks and nuns (men and women who dedicated their lives to God as well as a life of prayer and work) which often became centres of learning . The earliest known Irish monastery is accredited to Inis Mór which was founded by St. Enda on the Aran Islands around AD 500 . The monks on the island slept in small stone huts shaped like beehives (" <i>beehive huts</i> "). Other monasteries include Clonmacnoise , Skellig Michael and Glendalough .		
Life in an Irish Monastery	The Art of Early Christian Ireland	The Impact of Irish Monks Abroad
An oratory : a building made of wood/stone where monks attended mass or prayed. A scriptorium : where manuscripts were copied by hand and illustrated. A refectory : where monks ate their meals. A round tower : a bell tower and safe place for people and treasures if there as an attack. A guest house : accommodation for travellers or visiting tradesmen. There was a cemetery for monks' simple graves and an external circular wall for protection. The Abbot was the head monk. Monks wore habits (rough robe) and tonsures (shaving the top of one's head) as well as living a strict life of prayer and devotion to God.	Early Irish monasteries created works of art to honour God and show off the monastery's importance. Manuscripts (e.g. Book of Kells) were books written on parchment or vellum using quills. They contained the gospels, psalms and stories of the lives of saints (any myths) written in Latin . They were often decorated in Celtic patterns and bright colours, reflecting the " Golden Age ". Metalwork included crosses, bells, broaches, belts, cups and chalices such as the Ardagh Chalice and the Cross of Cong . High Crosses (e.g. The Cross of the Scriptures , Clonmacnoise) were free-standing stone crosses covered in detailed carvings from the Bible as people of this time could not read or write and so relied on the carvings to learn the bible.	AD 500-1000 was a period of war and instability throughout Europe known as the " Dark Ages ," in which most records are missing, while Ireland was in its " Golden Age ". Irish monks travelled abroad where they founded a total of 37 monasteries were founded in countries such as Germany , Italy , Spain , England , Scotland , Wales , France , Austria and Switzerland . St. Colmcille founded monasteries in Ireland (Durrow and Derry) before later traveling to an island off the coast of Scotland where he founded the monastery on Iona (where the Book of Kells was written).
The Arrival of the Vikings		The Significance of Christianity on the island of Ireland
The Vikings were Scandinavian farmers and fishermen who had superb shipbuilding and navigation skills. They built longships which would withstand the cold northern storms of Norway , Sweden and Denmark but also small enough to sail up rivers. AD 795 saw the arrival of the Vikings in Ireland as they carried out raids on the monasteries at Lambay Island (Dublin) and Rathlin Island (Armagh) . These Viking raiders burned settlements, stole food and treasures while also taking captives as their slaves . They established longphorts (camps established as bases for raids) as time continued which would eventually grow into towns such as Wexford , Waterford , Limerick and Dublin . Wood Quay is our best source of Viking evidence.	Early Christian Ireland was a formative period that had a profound impact on the island's history. The introduction of Christianity by figures like St. Patrick transformed Ireland from a polytheistic society to a Christian one, with far-reaching implications on culture and spirituality. Irish monasteries like Clonmacnoise and Glendalough became bastions of learning and religious life, playing an essential role in the preservation of classical and Christian texts. This era also saw remarkable achievements in the arts, epitomised by illuminated manuscripts such as the Book of Kells and intricately designed High Crosses . Irish missionaries like St. Columbanus travelled far beyond the island, disseminating Irish Christian learning across mainland Europe . Finally, the period was significantly shaped by external influences, most notably the Viking invasions from the late 8th century, which led to the establishment of key Irish towns like Dublin , Cork , and Limerick . The Norman invasion in the late 12th century marked the end of this era but underscored the enduring significance of the Christian Church in Irish life.	

