The Great Architects of Tiron

By F. Bernier

Introduction

For years historians and Freemasons alike have tried to identify the origin of "the Craft", the speculative art of modern Freemasonry. Most of them agree that it all began in Kilwinning, Scotland, sometime during the 12th century. But that is about all they agree on. Were the first "free masons" Italian or French? Was their tradition the legacy of the Roman collegia, or the French guilds of artisans that emerged in medieval times? Were these "free men" under the spiritual direction of monks? And how and where did they learn the secrets of the trade? Were they transmitted from father to son or from master to novice?

Our research and field work now allow us to advance a new theory, with credible answers to these long-enduring questions. As demonstrated in this article, the masons who built Kilwinning and many other great abbeys and churches in Scotland, Wales, France, Ireland and England were monks of a very special kind: they were reformed Benedictines of the "free church" of Bretagne and they practised the Celtic Rite.

These monks were master craftsmen of all trades: architects, bridge-builders, painters, carpenters, woodcarvers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, stonemasons, etc. However they left no marks that could identify them as such because they worked in absolute humility and solely for the glorification of God. For this reason, their masterpieces were often attributed to other, more 'visible', craftsmen.

F. Bernier
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The first great Bernard

You have probably never heard his name. He was born in 1050, in a small village near Abbeville, in the county of Ponthieu (Somme), France. For this reason he was sometimes called Bernard de Ponthieu, or Bernard d'Abbeville, but he truly became famous as Bernard de Tiron, from the name of the place, in the forest of Tiron, near Chartres, where he established his *Abbatia Sanctae Trinitatis de Tirone* (Holy Trinity of Tiron) in 1109.

Bernard died on 25 April 1118, according to Mabillon, and not without founding a very peculiar congregation in 1105. As a pious, reformist Benedictine monk, Bernard had many things in common with his namesake, Bernard of Clairvaux, who was 44 years younger. Yet the first Bernard was a man of exception with an extraordinary vision, and very different from the famous monk of Clairvaux.

Bernard was about 20 years old when he was admitted into the Order of St. Benedict, at the Abbey of Saint-Cyprien-lès-Poitiers. He left the order once and for all in 1101 when the power-hungry abbot of Cluny, with the support of Pope Pascal II, disapproved his irregular appointment as new abbot of Saint-Cyprien. This was a time of much needed reformation in the Benedictine order. Bernard's contemporary St. Peter Damian, Doctor of the Church and Cardinal-Bishop of Ostia, even declared that the Rule of St. Benedict was written for beginners, while the example of the solitary Desert Fathers was meant for older masters in search of perfection. This may have been Bernard's goal since he spent the following years as a hermit under the pseudonym of Guillaume, in the forest of Craon, Brittany; there he spent three years at La Roë, a small monastery of Canons Regular and hermits founded in 1095 by the Breton Robert (Ropartz) d'Arbrissel and the Norman Vitalis de Mortain, future founder of the short-lived congregation of Savigny (1112). They lived together, in separate cells, detached from the world, in great poverty and strict penance, in the example of the Fathers of the Desert. Not surprisingly, their refuge "was called significantly in contemporary sources *a new Egypt*,"[1] as it attracted a growing number of followers, men as well as women. After three years, Bernard left to live a solitary life for another period of two to three years on the island of Chaussey, just off Saint-Malo, then returned to the forest of Craon. In 1100 he was named the successor of the abbot at Saint-Cyprien, but this was a short-lived experience. Eventually all three hermits separated to found distinct communities.

At first glance, the monks of Tiron, also called Tironensians (sometimes Tyronenses) appear quite similar to their contemporary, the Cistercian monks. Both their founders denounced the growing laxism of the Benedictine

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[1] *A History of the Cistercian Order*, by Louis J. Lekai, S.O. cist., , Ph.D., Chapter 3: The White Monks, page 13, Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Spring Bank, Sparte, Wisconsin, 1953, on http://www.monksonline.org/White-Monks/ch1A.htm

monks of Cluny, and professed a return to the strict asceticism and humility of the early Benedictines. But this is about all the two monastic orders had in common. There were major "cultural", political and spiritual differences which may well explain why one order has become so famous while the other has been left out of most history books.

Rebel with a Cause

From its very beginning, the story of Bernard of Tiron is one of a major clash leading to a separation from the "mystical body of Christ", the social organization of the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, when Bernard left Saint-Cyprien in 1101, he was rebelling against Cluny and the supremacy of the Roman clergy, which explains his monastic order survived until the 16th century in Celtic Scotland. In comparison, the Cistercians, particularly under Bernard de Citeaux, quickly became the most powerful arm of the Roman Catholic Church in France and England.

It has to be said that between the 9th and 11th century, at the time Bernard de Tiron lived, there had been a long struggle to re-establish the ancient Breton dioceses – mainly Dol, Saint-Malo and Rennes - and free the Church of Brittany from the Roman Archdiocese of Tours. It is in this precise context that Bernard's nomination in 1100 as the abbot of Saint-Cyprien took place: at the time the Abbey of Saint-Cyprien was still a "free church", independent from Cluny, and both Renaud, the older abbot of Saint-Cyprien and Bernard, his successor, wanted to keep it this way. But four years later, the Cluniacs succeeded in having Pascal II siding with them. Bernard went to Rome to plead his case, but the Pope refused to change his mind. Invoking God's justice, Bernard cited Pascal II before God - *Papad ad divinum judicium provocavit*. At first infuriated, the Pope finally relented and recognized Saint-Cyprien's rights as a "free church". Unfortunately, this privilege lasted only a few years and the abbey was finally placed under Cluny.[2]

Chances are Bernard was viewed as a heretic because he stood up to the Pope, and never ceased to defend the right to sovereignty of the old Celtic Church of Brittany. And whatever power Cluny, as the right arm of the Roman clergy, had gained in this Gaulish region was absolutely non negotiable. As historian A. J. Wylie (1886) explains,

> "The 12th century, particularly in Scotland and Brittany, was a time when two Christian faiths of different origins were contending for possession of the land, the Roman Church and the old Celtic Rite. The age was a sort of borderland between Culdeeism and Romanism. The two met and mingled often in the same monastery, and the religious

[2] *Histoire littéraire de France, où l'on traite de l'origine et du progrès, de la décadence et du rétablissement des sciences parmi les Gaulois et parmi les François,* Tome X Qui comprend la suite du douzième siècle de l'Église jusqu'à l'an 1124, par des religieux bénédictins de la Congrégation de S. Maur ; nouv. éd. (1995) , conforme à la précédente (1868) et rev. par M. Paulin Paris, Congrégation de Saint-Maur; entry Robert de Tyron, p. 212-214; Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France http://gallica.bnf.fr

belief of the nation was a mumble of superstitious doctrines and a few scriptural truths." [3]

All this clearly indicates that Bernard de Tiron did not recognize the power of Cluny over the "free church" and local affairs of Brittany. More importantly, in pure Celtic and Gallican tradition, he was not afraid to stand up to the Pope to defend his rights to independence, not only at Saint-Cyprien, but also at Tiron which would never surrender to Cluny.

Having resigned his title of abbot at Saint-Cyprien in 1105, Bernard left to found one of the first monastic orders of strict observance - the Order of Tiron - with the intention of restoring monastic life to its original asceticism, following the Rule of St. Benedict in all its rigour. In 1107, Rotrou II le Grand (ca 1078-1144), Count of Perche, who participated in the "Reconquista", the first crusade in Palestine, gave Bernard the land he needed for his first settlement in the forest of Tiron. Forced to move in 1114, Bernard and his monks were granted land by the Bishop Yves de Chartres in the nearby parish of Gardais where the Tironensians' mother Abbey of the Holy Trinity was finally established. (Around 1122, Rotrou granted the land of La Trappe to Vitalis de Mortain and his congregation of Savigny, who soon built a monastery there. Albert Mackey wrongly claimed the Trappist monastery was founded by "*that devotee of secret organizations, Count La Perche, in 1140*."[4] In fact, the monastery was simply raised to an abbey in 1140.)

Just a few years after their establishment at Tiron, the monks of Bernard, were invited by David I to settle in Scotland at Selkirk, in the Ettrick Forest, near the English border, and in 1113 the French Tironensians inaugurated their first abbey in 'Scotia'.

> "While still Earl of Cumbria and Lothian [David] brought Benedictine monks from France to Selkirk, and Augustinian canons to Jedburgh, and procured the restoration of the ancient see of Glasgow, originally founded by St. Kentigern." [5]

By 1115, having gained the respect of the nobility and royalty in France, England and Scotland, the monks of Tiron already owned 12 abbeys and 28 priories in 22 parishes. By the end of the 12th century they controlled a total of 117 priories and abbeys, some of them in Wales and Ireland, including the Monastery of St. Dogmael at Cardigan, South Wales (1115), St. Mary's

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[3] *History of the Scottish Nation*, Vol. III. From the Union of Scots and Picts, A.D. 843, to Death of Alexander III, A.D. 1286, by Rev. J.A. Wylie, LL.D. , London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., Edinburgh 1886

[4] *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences*, By Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 1875; reprint Lighnting Source Inc. 2002

[5] Article on Scotland, By D.O. Hunter-Blair, The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XIII, 1912 by Robert Appleton Company, Nihil Obstat, February 1, 1912. Remy Lafort, D.D., Censor, *Imprimatur.* +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York, Online Edition 2003 by K. Knight

Abbey in Dublin (1134-38), as well as Holycross Abbey (1168) which was built especially for the Tironensians by Donal Mor O'Brien, King of Ireland (Thomor & Munster) for the sole purpose of safekeeping a relic of the Holy Cross. (Holycross Abbey was soon taken over by the Augustinians).

After Selkirk, the monks of Tiron built some of the wealthiest and greatest abbeys of Scotland: Notre-Dame of Roxburgh, at Kelso (1128 to 1143), Arbroath (1178 to 1197), Lindores (1190), and Kilwinning (from 1140 to 1162), the said birthplace of Freemasonry. A 1516 document at the Abbey of Tiron also mentions the "Abbaye de Sélecherche" (date unknown) in County Cumberland, but all traces of it are now lost.[6] Smaller properties included the Priory of Fyvie, under Arbroath, the Priory of St. Dogmaël in Pembrock, the Priory of Fogo in Berwickshire, and the Priory of Lesmahagow (for St. Machutus, also St. Malo) in South Lanarkshire, the latter two under Kelso Abbey.

Known for their building skills and Celtic spirit, the Tironensian monks had quickly become the preferred monastic order of David I, most likely because they offered a suitable alternative to the old Culdee Church of Scotland, allowing for the bridging of the Romanish and Celtic rites. Besides, there were undeniable similarities - legal, ritual, artistic, and political – between the Irish, Scots, Welsh, and Bretons.

It was David's mother, Queen Margaret, later sanctified by Rome, who instituted the pro-Romish movement which was meant to oust all traces of the "Culdee heresy" from Scotland. The plan was to metamorphose the Celtic Church on the Roman diocesean model, and to bring the Culdees (from *Céli Dé*, "companions" or "servants of God") under canonical rule. But it did not happen quite as planned.

The Scots believed the Culdees had preserved primitive Christianity free from all Roman corruptions. Not wanting to use force against the Culdee elders of Scotia or to destroy what was considered true Scottish heritage, David I opted instead for diplomacy. He appealed to new, reformed Christian religious orders that could ease the transition to a more modern Scottish Church. One of them, apparently the first one ever considered, was the Order of Tiron. As Breton Celts and therefore cousins of the Gaels and Scots, the Tironensian monks certainly could blend in easily while appreciating the local customs and history of the old Culdee system. By the same token, those Culdees who had to integrate Tironensian communities may have lost their rights and sovereignty, but they were able to preserve their distinct heritage. It is this combination of two Christian traditions that would set the Tironensian monks apart, at least in Scotland.

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[6] *Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de la Sainte-Trinité de Tiron 1114-1140*, published and annotated by Lucien Merlet, Société archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir, Tome I, Chartres, 1883, page 119 (CXIX)

While the old Church of Brittany was loosing ground and power to the advantage of Roman supremacy, the Tironensian abbeys of Scotland, independent and distant enough from the Holy See, quickly rose in prestige, power and fortune while becoming a most welcome refuge for the local "Celtic heretics".

As mentioned by John Yarker (1909), "It is worthy of note that the Culdee system existed in Scotland for some centuries after the Norman Conquest, nor does it then seem to have been extinct in Ireland." Quoting Sir James Dalrymple, Yarker adds that the "Culdees kept themselves together in Scotland until the beginning of the 14th century." [7] Yet many of their customs were kept alive until the Reformation (1560) within the walls of several powerful abbeys, and Kilwinning was most likely one of them.

> "Kilwinning: Located in Ayrshire, Scotland, in the town of the same name, where a church was said to have been founded early in the eighth century by St. Winning . . . identified by some scholars with St. Finnan of Moville, an Irish saint of much earlier date; other authorities say he was a Welshman, called Vynnyn, while the Aberdeen Breviary (published 1507) gives Scotland as his birthplace. What is certain is that there was a Christian church at Kilwinning, and also a monastery of Culdees, several centuries before the foundation of the Benedictine house by Hugh de Morville, Constable of Scotland, and a great territorial magnate of the district, somewhere between 1140 and 1162."[8]

Upon their arrival at Kilwinning, possibly as early as 1128, the French monks met a small group of Columbanist monks still occupying the area. But based on all existing records, these Culdees soon disappeared. In reality it was the Tironensians' mission to peacefully accept the Culdees within their cloister, to allow for their gradual secularization, and not to eradicate them. But it was the Tironensians of Arbroath Abbey, founded in 1178, who were eventually entrusted with the greatest share of the Culdee heritage and rights:

> "The Abernethys descend from the hereditary abbots of the Culdee monastery at Abernethy. . . The House of Abernethy possessed the right to inaugurate the King of Scots as ecclesiastical representatives of the House of Fife branch of the Kindred of St. Columba. Between 1189 and 1196 King William the Lion granted the church of Abernethy to the Abbey of Arbroath, which had been founded . . . by King William

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[7] *The Arcane Schools: A review of their origin and antiquity; with a general history of Freemasonry, and its relation to the theosophic, scientific and philosophic mysteries,* J. Yarker, Belfast 1909. Chapter VIII: Masonry in Saxon England

[8] Article on Kilwinning Abbey, By D.O. Hunter-Blair, in The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VIII, Robert Appleton Company 1910. Online Edition 2003 by K. Knight

> the Lion (of the line of David I and the Kindred of St. Columba) as the seat of a new order in conjunction with the gradual secularization of the old Celtic abbeys, a task completed by about 1300 under King Robert Bruce. About the same time Lawrence, son of Orm de Abirnythy (sic), conveyed to the church and monks of Arbroath his whole right 'In the advowson of the church of Abernethy'."[9]

Completed in 1233, the Abbey of Arbroath (from *Abirbrothock*) became one of the wealthiest monasteries of Scotland. It received great endowments, not only from William the Lion, but also from many other princes and barons. The Tironensian monks were also given special privileges:

> "They were exempted from assisting at the yearly synods; they had the custody of the Brecbennach, or consecrated banner of Columba; they acquired from Pope Benedict, by Bull dated at Avignon, the right to wear a mitre; and they, in some instances, were the foremost churchmen of the kingdom." [10]

The fact that the Tironensian monks of Arbroath were entrusted with the *Brecbennach* (also *Brachbennach*, and *Breac-bannoch* in Gaelic), meaning "the speckled peaked one", is quite significant as this precious object was the most visible and potent symbol of the post-Columban Church. Brought from Iona to Pictland, this was an 8th century ark-shaped reliquary of Pictish style containing a relic of Columba, the Irish warrior saint. About the size of a prune, this portable shrine was worn around the neck, usually by a guardian monk, and even paraded before the Scots before they took part in battles against English troops, including the one at Bannockburn in 1314. It was William the Lion who, in 1211, gave custody of this highly symbolic icon to the monks of Arbroath, granting along with it the lands of Forglen, "in return for service to the Royal army."[11]

Being socially, politically and culturally compatible, the Breton monks of Tiron and the Culdees of Scotland got along just well, the former group never trying to suppress the latter. Instead the French monks worked at defining a new Church for the Scots, one where a 'romish' episcopal system would not interfere with Celtic spirituality. This easily explains why the Tironensians

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[9] *Clans and Families of Ireland and Scotland, An Ethnography of the Gael A.D. 500 – 1750*, By C. Thomas Cairney, Ph.D, Part IX: The Gaels, Willow Bend Books, 1989

[10] *Arbroath, a historical perspective drawn from the Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland: A Survey of Scottish Topography, Statistical, Biographical and Historical*, edited by Francis H. Groome and originally published in parts by Thomas C. Jack, Grange Publishing Works, Edinburgh between 1882 and 1885; on the site of The Gazetteer for Scotland, http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk:81/scotgaz/towns/townhistory385.html.

[11] *Clans and Families of Ireland and Scotland, An Ethnography of the Gael A.D. 500 – 1750*, Part IX: The Gaels, by C. Thomas Cairney, Willow Bend Books, 1989

were so highly esteemed - and granted precious gifts - by the followers of the old Culdee church:

> "The Monastery of Brechin existed in the time of David I., the promoter of Royal Burghs, 1123-53, and that after the erection of the Episcopal See, the old Culdee Convent became the electoral chapter of the new Bishopric; the Abbot of Brechin, then secularised, transmitted to his children the lands which his predecessors had held for the church; and one of these, in the time of William the Lion (1165-1214), made a grant of lands to the monks at Arbroath."[12]

Abernethy, Aberbrothoc, Montrose, Dull, Arbirlot, Brechin, St. Andrews, Dornoch, Dunkeld, Applecross, Dunfermline, Mortlach, Blairgowrie, Ratho, Tirriff, Kinghorn and Lesmahagow were the main branches of the Culdee family in Scotland. The Tironensian monks not only inherited the rights, treasures and properties of three of the most influential centers of the Culdee Church –Brechin, Abernethy and Lesmahagow - they also welcomed the Columbanist monks within their cloisters.

The Tironensian monks most likely owed their success among the Culdee elders of Scotland to their own Celtic heritage from Brittany. However too many clues suggest they were not the reformed Benedictines of strict observance the Catholic Church would like us to believe. A few insightful historians, such as John Yarker, have speculated that the monks of Tiron had abandoned the Roman Liturgy to follow the Celtic Rite, perhaps secretly to avoid persecution. But no historian has ever found any solid evidence that could confirm their hypothesis. Not that it didn't exist, it was just hard to find.

In February 2005 we came across the evidence we had lost all hopes of ever finding. It is a contemporary portrait of Bernard de Tiron - painted in 1135 - by one of his disciples, depicting "Bernardus Abbas" with the Celtic tonsure. The painting is displayed in full view inside the chapel of the priory of Notre-Dame d'Yron, a former pilgrimage stop-over to Compostella, founded in 1115 by Agnès de Montigny at Cloyes-sur-le-Loir, less than 25 miles from Chartres.[13]

The particular hairstyle of Bernard de Tiron may seem like a detail, but it is today one of major historical significance: It proves that Bernard had indeed returned to the Celtic roots of the Christian Church of Gaul, independently of and in opposition to the Roman Catholic Rite, with the protection of the Duchy of Bretagne and the old Church of Brittany.

Robert d'Arbrissel too wore the Celtic tonsure, as clearly mentioned in a 12th century document where he is described as wearing "a rough hair-shirt on his

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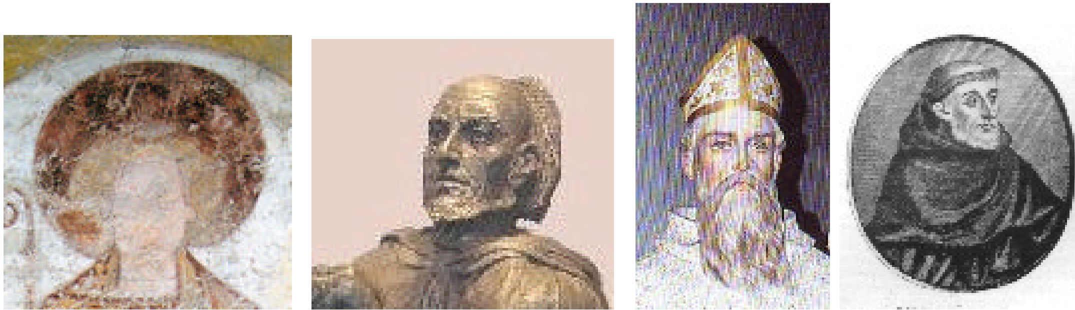
[12] C. Thomas Cairney, quoting Abbott's *Eccl. Surname* (1871), 1989
[13] For information and pictures of chapel in Cloyes: http://www.cloyes-sur-le-loir.com

skin, an old robe full of with holes, with his legs half-exposed, the beard uncut, *his hair shaved on the forehead,* walking barefoot among the crowds."[14] However the founder of the controversial Abbey of Fontevraud, like his colleague Bernard de Tiron, was never portrayed in such "heretical" fashion in official Roman Catholic iconography. The suppression of such an eloquent 'detail' was most certainly a deliberate decision from the Roman clergy since it proves that the hermits of the forest of Craon were not obeying the Roman Catholic canons.



From left to right: Portrait of Bernard de Tiron, 1135, with the Celtic tonsure (photo: F. Bernier); 6th Irish monks with the same tonsure; statue of Bernard at Tiron, left (photo: F. Bernier), and Arbrissel (photo: anonymous), both incorrectly shown with the Roman tonsure

A symbol of the free man

The Celtic Rite had many cultural and liturgical differences with the Roman Church. In fact, "the emphasis on monasticism, the organizational structure of abbots and monasteries versus bishops and parish churches, and the themes of ascetic holiness and pilgrimage, all point to influences from Eastern Christianity." [15]

During the 7th and 8th century, the style of tonsure was one of several major points of controversy, with the calculation of the date of Easter, baptism, the ordination of bishops and the consecration of churches. In the "Latin" Rite of the Catholic Church, tonsure referred to the inducting of a person into the clergy. The Oriental or Eastern tonsure, which claimed the authority of St. Paul, consisted in shaving the whole head. This was observed by churches owing allegiance to Eastern Orthodoxy. The Roman tonsure, called St. Peter's, involved shaving the top of the head with a crown of hair left to grow around it to represent the crown of thorns placed on Christ's head. In comparison, the Celtic tonsure (or traverse tonsure) was made with shaving only the front part of the head following a line drawn from ear to ear.

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[14] Original text in French: "*Un cilice sur la peau, vêtu d'une robe usée et trouée, nu à mi-jambe, la barbe inculte, cheveux rasés sur le front, marchant pieds nus parmi la foule*..."

[15] *The Celts and Christianity*, by Morgan O'Maolain, The Clannada na Gadelica, a Gaelic culture education facility, 1998, on http://www.clannada.org/docs/cltcchrs.html

The early history of the Celtic tonsure practice is lost in obscurity; it has been suggested that "perhaps it was indeed of druidic origin"[16] since it is known the Druids of Ireland and Brittany shaved the top front of their head while keeping the rest of their hair long. However, in the 12th century the Celtic tonsure was a clear mark of opposition to the Roman clergy. Since the 7th century this type of hairstyle was called *tonsura magorum* (with *magu*, meaning magician, then accepted as equivalent to *druid)*, and later coined *tonsura Simonis Magi* by the Roman party who attributed the origin of this peculiar tonsure to Simon Magus, the "first heretic" and opponent of St. Peter. Not so, claimed many Celtic monks who traced back several of their practices, including their tonsure, to the authority of Saint John. (Note that that even today, the *Magoi* of Matthew 2 are *druidhean* in the Scottish Gaelic Bible.) It is likely the term *tonsura Simonis Magi* was made up only to suggest heresy. What we do know however is the fact that Saint Columbanus (543-615), the Irish Abbot of Luxeuil and Bibbio, maintained this peculiar type of hairstyle when he arrived in France. So did Saint Samson, founder of the abbey-bishopric of Dol, who also brought over from Britain the Celtic penitentials and the method for the dating of Easter.

It is worth noting that the Roman Catholic Church also named the sin of *simony* - the act of exchanging temporal goods in return of supernatural gifts or favours – after Simon Magus who had not converted out of true faith in Christ, but in the hope of gaining greater magical power and influence. He had offered money to Peter and John, asking them to grant him through baptism the magical power of the Holy Ghost (Acts, 8:9-29) so that he could perform miracles. Not surprisingly, back in 9th century Brittany, false accusations of simony were made against the monks of the diocese of Dol: Nomenoë, wishing to be anointed King of Brittany but finding opposition among the prelates of Dol, tried to get rid of them by charging them with simony, a sin denounced as "the most abominable of crimes" by many medieval ecclesiastical writers.

As we can see, any association, even in name, with Simon Magus clearly suggested heresy, and in this sense, the *tonsura Simonis Magi* of the Celtic monks identified them as heretics in the eyes of the Church of Peter. But as long as the abbots of the Church of Gaul remained independent from the authority of Rome, as was the case in Brittany, the Celtic monks were free to do as they wished, even more so if they lived out in the woods, away from the Roman clergy.

The Celtic tonsure, as practiced until the 7th century, served as a powerful symbol of the "free Church of the Celts" as it signaled non-Roman Christian identity. It literally marked Irish ethnic boundaries as well as religious and political independence from the Roman clergy. The clash about the date of Easter and the Celtic tonsure at the Synod of Whitby, Northumbria, in 664

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[16] *Les chrétientés celtiques*, by Christian Guyonvarc'h, on http://www.clio.fr/article.asp?article=733...33&Auteur=3230;

marked the beginning of the demise of the Celtic Church and the imposition of the Roman rite and Roman ecclesiastical authority. It also "propelled the confrontation of written tradition with oral tradition, distinct systems of symbolism and distinct ethnic groups".[17]

There had been strong disagreement about the question of Irish monastic leaders having more control over local worship than the rather distant Roman church authorities, and about the secular power of kings over local spiritual matters. In other words, the Christian Celts claimed complete sovereignty over the spiritual destiny of their territories, in Brittany, Ireland, Wales and Scotland – and the Celtic tonsure was a symbol of their freedom.

Based on Charles Plummer's essay, *Excursus on the Pascal Controversy and Tonsure* (published in his Bede's *Opera Historica*, Oxford, 1898),[18] the tonsure practice was connected with the Roman idea that long hair was the mark of the *freeman*, while the crown of hair identified the master and the shaven head identified the *slave*. Not surprisingly, the Romans often punished Christians by shaving their heads to humiliate them, making them look like slaves. Eventually some monks of the Roman clergy began to shave their heads completely to identify themselves as "slaves of Christ". In comparison, the Celts who called themselves "servants of Christ" still placed great value on the virtue of humility, and felt the traditional image through their symbolic haircut should be maintained. But then, the Celts also viewed themselves as "freemen" of the "free Celtic Church", and while the shaving of the top front part of their heads was a symbol of humility and obedience, the fact that they left their hair grow on the back may well have become a symbol of freedom and independence from the "masters" of the Roman clergy. Indeed, at the time of the Synod of Whitby, the Roman clergy had already begun to wear a crown of hair, supposedly as a symbol of the crown of thorns of Christ. But this crown had first been the hairstyle of the members of the ruling class, the patrician slave owners and the masters of Roman Antiquity, such as Caesar. Therefore the Roman crown of hair identified the monks not as servants but masters, and this was the new, "modern" hairstyle imposed by Rome in the 7th centuiry. Thus, at Whitby in 664, a lot was at stake, at least symbolically speaking.

Although Pope Paul VI abolished all formal tonsure practices in 1972, it is still maintained by a few monastic orders, such as the Carthusians and the "Trappists" (whose mother abbey at La Trappe was founded in 1122 by Vitalis de Mortain, a close friend of Bernard de Tiron), as well as by the Eastern Catholic Orthodox Church, which broke away from the Roman Church in 1054. In this sense, any monks who still wore the ancient tonsure of the East during the 12th century were openly marking their cultural identity and

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[17] *Celtic Tradition in Liturgical Practice: The Irish Synthesis*, By Dr. Gail Justin, Instructional Technology, Manhattanville College, Purchase NY, on http://faculty.mville.edu/justing/synthesis.htm

[18] *Excursus on the Pascal Controversy and Tonsure,* by Charles Plummer, in his Bede's *Opera Historica*, Oxford, 1896; and *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England*, Charles Plummer, Georges Bell & Sons, London 1907

certainly expressing their opposition to the supremacy of the Roman Church. The peculiar hairstyle of "the humble servants of God" was a strong political statement: It was the symbol of a "free church", the very mark of the freeman, one obeying only to his own conscience and taking orders directly and solely from God, independently from the Holy See and the Bishops of Rome.

The true "Tirones"

Before we go any further, it is important to understand the meaning of the name *Tiron* as it was used in the early 12th century context. Historian Denis Guillemin (1999) believes the name, also spelled Thiron, comes from Latin *thironium*, a "high hill". In our opinion this is incorrect: there are no "high hills" in Thiron-Gardais, where the old mother abbey is still standing. Although surrounded by small hills at some distance, the area where the old abbey is still standing is perfectly flat.

The earliest mentions of the place name is *Tyroon*. Several subsequent variations include *Tiro Tironio, Tyron, Tyrun, Tironium,* but the accepted term designating the order was usually *Tirone*, as mentioned in the abbey's 1114 cartulary. But was the forest already named "Tyroon" when the monks settled there? Is this the origin of the order's name? This is what suggested the Tironensian monk Geoffroy le Gros in his biography of Bernard, written between 1130 and 1150. Besides, the nearby river, in the parish of Gardais, has been called the *Thyronne* – *Tiro*, in Latin – for as long as can be remembered. However we could not find any records identifying the origin of the river's name either. Thus it is quite possible, even probable, that the people living in the area named the forest after the monks. In old Latin cartularies, they were referred to as *Tironense* or *Tirones*. In French they were called *Tironiens*, and in English, *Tinonensians, or Tironenses,* sometimes with a "h" and/or a "y". But then, if the area was as flat as it is today, thus not a *thironium*, where did the name *Tiron* or Tyroon come from, and what does it mean?

Everything leads us to believe the correct name originally used by the monks was *Tirones*, the plural form of the Latin word *tiro*. In ancient Roman times, a *tiro* was a young soldier, an army recruit, or a novice in some activity. In Medieval times, the same term, *tiro*, was often used to refer to a squire or a newly-trained knight. All dictionaries and reference books (Thesaurus, All-Words English Dictionary, Britannia, Ultralingua, etc.) describe a *tiro* as one who is "beginning to learn a trade", who "is in the rudiments of any branch of study", or a "person imperfectly acquainted with a subject". The synonyms given are: initiate, entrant, novice, prentice and apprentice, beginner, learner, neophyte, greenhorn, rookie, tenderfoot and trainee. The Webster Dictionary (1913) defines the word *tyrionism* (also *tironism*) as "the state of being a tyro, a beginner, a novice." This interpretation is the same used at the time of Cassoriorus (490-585) when the *tirones* were described as

"novices new at the study of the Bible".[19] In comparison, Jerome (340-420), in his *Vita S. Hilarionis*, used the expression *Christi tirones* in the sense of followers or disciples of Christ.

Several sources give *tiro* as the origin of the Tironensians' name. The Britannia Internet Magazine (1996) writes, "this group was another reform of Benedictinism, named for their use of *tirones* - apprentices, similar to the Cistercian *conversi*," [20] lay brothers who turned to the service of God. Similarly, Mark D. F. Shirley writes, in an article entitled "Regular Orders", that the word Tironensians "derived from the *tirones* – apprentices - who were united by the founder of the order to pursue their skills in the service of God."[21]

It is possible the term "tiro" came to designate the novice scribes and copyists in medieval monasteries, in the example of Marcus Tullius Tiro, a scribe and a freedman of Cicero (1st century AD). Tiro invented a system of shorthand called the Tironian notes (*notae Tironianae*), originally consisting of some 4,000 signs and abbreviations, many formed with dots and bars. In the Medieval period, the Tironian notes had grown to some 13,000 signs and was taught in Western monasteries, particularly the Benedictines.

On the other hand, Columbanist monks of the 6th to 9th century, such as those at the Abbey of Luxeuil (6th century) in Franche-Comté, called themselves *Regis tiron*es, the "servants (or apprentices) of the King" (Christ), a Latin rendition of *Céli Dé* (Culdees), "the servants (or companions) of God".

Were the monks of Tiron known as scribes? Did they use Tiro's system? Yes and no. As "servants of Christ", they wrote in stone, using codes and symbols to convey the Word of God. This is not exceptional: from the time of Charlemagne, in the 8th century, to the middle of the 12th , all knowledge and practice of architecture, painting, and sculpture were exclusively confined to the monks, with bishops personally superintending the erection of the churches and cathedrals in their dioceses.

Quoting Ludwig Steiglitz, Albert Mackey wrote in his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* that the secrets of the art of building were "scrupulously maintained within the walls of cloisters" and many of the founders of monastic Orders, especially Benedictine, "made it a peculiar duty for the brethren to devote themselves to architecture and church building". This, in

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[19] Proceedings from The City and the Book I – International Congresses in Florence, Certosa, 30, 31 May, 1 June 2001, Section II: The Christian Bible, Dr. SSA. Luciana Cuppo Csaki, Societas Internationalis Pro Vivario, on http://www.florin.ms/aleph2.html

[20] Source: http://www.britannia.com/church/tironen.html
[21] Source: http://www.durenmar.de/articles/regularorders.html

our opinion, is correct, particularly regarding the monks of Tiron, but it was also a Roman tradition that the clergy "borrowed" long ago from other- and older - Christian sources.

Indirectly related to our topic is the fact that *tyrone* (also *tirone*) is also the anglicized name of the old Irish county of *Tir Eoghain*, later *Tir Owen*, meaning the "kingdom of Eoghain", an Irish king in the 5th century. Tyrone county (now Offaly) is precisely where the very first *mac an t'saoir* came from. This title, meaning *son of the builder,* designated the Irish scribe as a translator of the New Testament. The first known scribe and *mac an t'saoir* in Tyrone was Saint Cirian, the founder of the monastery of Clon mac'noise (ca 545). Since Cirian's father was a maker of chariots, *mac an t'saoir* was translated in Latin *as filii artifices*, "son of the artificer". In Latin, the word *artifex* designated a worker, craftsman, expert – a term reminiscent of the Roman colleges of artificers (craftsmen of all trades). Was this the legacy of the Romans? How could this possible, knowing that the Romans never set foot in Ireland, and that the Order of St. Benedict of Nursia was created at Subiaco, Italy, at about the same time? This suggests at least this may have been the legacy of St. Patrick or other Romanized Christians who came to Ireland prior to 540. In any case, the first Benedictine monks in Ireland arrived in 1134.... and they were from Tiron. They are the ones who founded St. Mary's Abbey in Dublin.

After Cirian, as the abbey grew to become a famous school and scriptorium from the 8th-10th centuries (producing the Books of Kells and Durrow), most abbots successively took the title of *mac an t'saoir*, supposedly in reference to Jesus, the "son of the carpenter". But the fact that the metal workers of the school of Clon macnoise also produced some of the world's finest Celtic craftwork in gold, silver and bronze suggest the original meaning of *mac an t'soir* was "son of the artificer", which is synonymous with craftsman, mason and architect.

At this point we can conclude that *Tirones* designated the initiates of a school of trades - students as well as teachers, prentices and masters - and that the monks of Tiron were recruits and followers of Christ who learned to master various trades. While the students were those craftsmen recruited and ordained, the first masters were Bernard de Tiron and his senior disciples, all of whom, like Robert d'Arbrissel and Vitalis de Mortain, called themselves *magistri et principes eremitarum* – "masters and teaching authorities" - an expression typically Celtic and associated with the role of the wise "Elder", the ancient Druid, later replaced by the Culdee scholar and the abbot of the Irish school tradition. As such, it is clear that the Order of Tiron was an initiatic school of Celtic tradition.

The Labour of Love

Numerous historians and masonic researchers, and even archaeologists, have often referred to some anonymous "grey monks" (not "grey friars") as

being Benedictines, or have confused them with the Cistercian "white monks", also of strict observance. In reality, the Tironensians, like the monks of Savigny, traditionally wore a grey tunic; afterwards they adopted the black habit. How significant was the color? In the Rule of St. Benedict, no colour is specified, but according to the Catholic Encyclopedia (1911), "it is conjectured that the earliest Benedictines wore white or grey, as being the natural colour of undyed wool." Here, the "earliest" monks were those living in the 6th-7th century in strict conformity with the Rule. However black became "the prevailing colour, hence the term "black monk" designating all Benedictines "not belonging to one of those separate congregations which has adopted a distinctive colour." Bernard of Tiron chose the grey habit to distinguish his monks of strict observance from the "black monks" of Cluny who no longer respected the Rule. However, it is reported that in the 14th century the Tironensian monks of Kelso, Scotland, chose the white habit of the Cistercians. Meanwhile, after being forced to join the Order of Citeaux in 1147, the Savignacs adopted the white garbs of the Cistercians. Also, many archaeologists and art historians who have never heard of a congregation by the name of *Tiron* still claim that all medieval churches of early Gothic style were most certainly Cistercian in design and built by "Templar" masons. Such confusion is understandable for several reasons.

Like the Cistercians, the Order of Tiron was a reformed Benedictine branch of strict observance, but contrary to Bernard of Citeaux, the abbot of Tiron applied the Rule of St. Benedict (dated ca 528) to the letter, believing in the spiritual benefits of manual labour and artistic creativity. For this reason, the Tironensian monks never hired *conversi* or lay brothers to work for them; they were the sole artisans, and as such did all the work themselves as part of their daily routine.

> "The Rule of Benedict was not written for artists. It dates from a time in which there was no sharp distinction between artist and artisan. It uses the word "art" (ars) seven times. Once in reference to the instruments of the spiritual craft, the instruments of good works (4.75), three times in reference to tasks assigned during the work periods of the day (46.1; 48.24; 66.6), and three times in a chapter devoted specifically to the artisans (*artifices*) of the monastery (57.1-3). [22]

Over the centuries the trades and traditions of Roman art – from writing and painting to architecture, bridge-building and metal working - were preserved and practised largely in Benedictine houses. But the Benedictine tradition was also deeply marked by the Culdee system from which the Benedictine monk Winfrid, better known as St. Bonifacius, largely borrowed in the 8th century to create a special class of monks composed of *Operarii* (craftsmen) and *Magistri operum* (Masters of the Works). As explained by historian J.A. Wylie:

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[22] *Art and Monasticism*, By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB, STD, April 1997, The Benedictine Monastery of the Ascension, Jerome ID, USA, on http://www.idahomonks.org/aam.htm

> "Winfrid, an Anglo-Saxon by birth, and a Benedictine monk, in 719 seeks out Willibrod, then at the head of the Culdee evangelization, and under a great show of guilelessness and much pious zeal, insinuates himself into his favour. He desires to study the methods of evangelising under the Culdee leader. 'He crept in beside Willibrod,' says Dr. Ebrard, 'as the wolf steals in beside the shepherd,' and lived for three years with him, a professed coadjutor, but in reality a spy. At the end of three years he returned to Rome, whence he had come, and where he had been instructed. Pope Gregory II consecrated him as bishop, and changed his name to Bonifacius, the "good-doer," as if in anticipation of the services expected from him. He returned to Germany, no longer wearing the Culdee mask, but as the legate extraordinary of the Pope. . . Supported by the authority of Carloman [Charlemagne] and Pépin of France, he proceeded to suppress the Culdee establishments by changing them into bishoprics subject to the authority of Rome. He founded in Germany the Sees of Wartzburg, Burabourg, Erfurt, and Aichstadt, and in 744 the monastery of Fulda. This was the method Boniface adopted to evangelise the Germans, even metamorphosing Culdee missionaries into Benedictine monks, and Culdee colleges into Romish Sees, by fair means if possible, by force where artifice failed."[23]

Four hundred years later, the "grey monks" were probably the only ones who actually did all the work themselves. In fact, Bernard de Tiron felt it was the monk's duty, while restricted to absolute silence, to communicate the essence of the Holy Scriptures through artwork and architecture in the example of the early Benedictines.[24]

> "The famous St. Bernard thought he had discovered a cure for this inevitable tendency to putrefy. Brought up in the strictest school of asceticism, and having a salutary dread of whatever tended to effeminacy, he thought it not good that the whole time of a monk should be given to meditation; and as the best preservative from the temptations which are incident to idleness he sought to devise occupation for both head and hands of the recluses."[25]

The monks of Tiron were known not only for their artistic talent and architectural skills which they brought to local communities, but also for their mastering of all trades. "Among the Tyronenses there were found skilfull farmers, expert carpenters and smiths, while others of the order excelled in

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[23] History of the Scottish Nation, Rev. Wylie, London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., Edinburgh, 1886, Vol. 2, Ch. 8

[24] *Le travail dans les monastères au Moyen-Âge*, Émile Levasseur (19th century), article on Encyclopédie de l'Agora, Ayers Cliff, Québec, Canada, http://agora.qc.ca/reftext.nsf/Documents/Moyen_Age--Le_travail_dans_les_monasteres_au_Moyen_Age_par_Emile_Levasseur

[25] Wylie, Vol. III, Ch. 24

the arts of architecture and drawing."[26] In fact, Bernard made it mandatory for each monk to work and master at least one art or trade, and this certainly set them apart from all other monastic congregations. Guillaume de Neubrige (Reg. Angl. 1.I, e. 15, 12th century) did mention that Bernard had written a set of "particular rules" or statutes for his monks.[27] (Unfortunately, the original text of these rules has been lost.)

> "His monks, besides doing agricultural labor, practiced all the arts and crafts without the employment of lay brothers. The fervor of discipline and simplicity animated Bernard in the foundation of Tiron in 1109. The return of this group to manual labor and to the original simplicity of liturgical services in accordance with the prescriptions of the Rule of St. Benedict safely supports the assumption that Bernard was quite familiar with the reform of Citeaux."[28]

In comparison, the "white monks" (Cistercians) rejected manual labour and prohibited all artistic work. They employed *conversi* and lay brothers for whom Stephen Harding, the founder of the Cistercian Order, drew up a comprehensive legislation (*Usus Conversorum*, translated as *Usages*) in the 1120s for their organization in their monastic community. At about the same time, Bernard de Clairvaux, in his *Apologia ad Gulielmum* (1123), set the stage for new, very strict architectural standards for all Cistercian monasteries and churches, claiming that monks should spend their precious time on earth doing penance and meditating on God's Law, not on architecture and religious art. Accordingly, in 1134, new rules were enforced, restricting the work of masons and artists so greatly that all Cistercian properties everywhere ended up exhibiting the same pattern of extreme ascetic simplicity. And as the Dominican Pierre Mandonnet explains, the list of prohibitions was quite specific:

> ". . . the legislation of 1134, after reaffirming the requirements of the *Exordium Parvum* concerning simplicity of liturgical vestments and equipment, prohibited illuminated initials and the use of colors in copying manuscripts, banned the fine bindings of codices decorated with gold or silver, forbade stained glass windows, figurative carvings and murals, both in church and monastery. Sculptured portals were not allowed and the Chapter of 1157 prohibited even the coloring of the simple portals or church doors. The same Chapter condemned the towers built of stone; only a modest wooden bell tower was allowed and this could accommodate no more than two bells of small size. In

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[26] Ibid

[27] *Histoire littéraire de France, où l'on traite de l'origine et du progrès, de la décadence et du rétablissement des sciences parmi les Gaulois et parmi les François,* by the Saint-Maur Congregation, Tome X, p. 215; nouv. éd. (1995), conforme à la précédente (1868) et rev. par M. Paulin Paris, 1995; published on Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/

[28] *A History of the Cistercian Order*, by Louis J. Lekai, S.O. cist., , Ph.D., Chapter 3: The White Monks, p. 13, Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Spring Bank, Sparte, Wisconsin, 1953, on http://www.monksonline.org/White-Monks/ch1A.htm

> 1218, decorative pavements were forbidden and the Chapter of 1240 ordered the removal of all pictures attached to the altars."[29]

Style was literally deemed frivolous and even distracting to the contemplative Cistercian monks, so the rule was to keep everything extremely simple and this, in the end, became the Cistercian style. For this reason, the monks of Citeaux never developed a particular style in art and architecture, and never learned to master any trade. Instead, they hired craftsmen to work in very stark, humble style while they, as "servants of God", prayed, did penance and meditated on the Holy Scriptures. However we disagree with Mandonnet's claim that "other religious orders never achieved the formation of a school of art equal to it in conspicuous and uniform features." The monks of Tiron most certainly did.

Many Benedictines did not agree with Bernard de Clairvaux's views. One of them was a "Theophilus Presbyter" (ca 1070-1125), the pseudonym of a Benedictine monk who described himself as a "humble priest, servant of the servants of God". Sometime between 1110 and 1125 (exact date unknown), Theophilus certainly expressed the views of the Tironensians when he published his essay *On various Arts* (De Diversis Artibus), a practical guide in three volumes defending the "important place of art in God's universe" and diametrically opposed to Bernard de Clairvaux's *Apologia*. The main techniques discussed in this document are painting and drawing (especially for illuminated codices), stained glass and glass painting, and goldsmithing. In true reformist Benedictine style, Theophilus claimed that skills and knowledge which he described as "the inheritance that God bestowed on Man," should be sought, shared freely and used in all humility for the glorification of God. In his preface, he wrote,

> "Through the spirit of wisdom, you know that all created things proceed from God, and without Him nothing is. Through the spirit of understanding, you have received the capacity for skill - the order, variety and measure with which to pursue your varied work. Through the spirit of counsel, you do not bury your talent given you by God, but, by openly working and teaching in all humility, you display it faithfully to those wishing to understand. Through the spirit of fortitude, you drive away all the torpor of sloth, and whatever you assay with energy you bring it with full vigour to completion. Through the spirit of knowledge accorded you, you are, in the abundance of heart."[30]

Many historians believe the author was Rogerus of Helmarshausen, a German Benedictine metallurgist and armourer, originally from the Stavelot-Malmedy monastery in the Belgian Ardennes, near the German border. However

[29] *St. Dominic and His Work*, par Pierre Mandonnet, O.P., translated by Sister Mary Benedicta Larkin, O.P., B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis/London, 1948. Chapter 17: Efforts of the Church to Revive Preaching
[30] *De Diversis Artibus*, by Theophilus (Presbyter), ed. and trans. by C. R. Dodwell, Edinburgh and London, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. and New York, Oxford University Press, 1961

"Theophilus" was not the only Benedictine monk who held these views and who called himself the "servant of servants of God". Bernard de Tiron and his mason-monks too were dedicated to the service of the "servants of God"- the Culdees. In this sense, it is not impossible that Bernard, who died in 1118, or one of his disciples, wrote the essay *On Various Arts*, anonymity being the mark of absolute humility.

<u>The School of Tiron</u>

Tradition – or simply legend - has it that the Mother Lodge of Scotland, Kilwinning No. 0, was first organized by "Italian artisans" who in 1140, built the Abbey of Kilwinning on the bank of the Garnock River. From there, it is said, two more lodges were founded at Scoon and Bertha (now Scone and Perth) around 1193-95.

> "In the middle of the 12th century, wars all over Europe made masons and architects look for a quiet place and Scotland became their shelter. Amongst them, came a group from Lombardy (Northern Italy), holding a charter stating that its rules had been set according to those that Hiram, King of Tyre, had established when he sent workers to King Solomon for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In Scotland these masons built the Abbey and Tower of Kilwinning in 1140, where a lodge already existed since 1128 and where Scottish masons held their general assemblies. In 1150, this lodge was constituted as the 'Mother-Lodge of Kilwinning' and still exists today."[31]

Built between 1140 and 1162, the Abbey of Kilwinning was erected under David I by Jocelyn, Bishop of Glasgow, and Hugues de Morville, High Constable of Scotland.[32] It is quite possible, as was the case in elsewhere in Scotland, that the Tironensian monks, who arrived in Selkirk, Scotland, in 1113, then moved to Kelso in 1128, were already occupying the Culdee site of Kilwinning several years before construction of their new monastery began. While a number of French monks were firmly established at Kelso on the English-Scottish border, other mason-monks were sent directly from France by the mother house in Tiron to build the new abbey at Kilwinning. These expert craftsmen had been recruited, ordained and trained by the Tironensians, in compliance with the strict rules established by their founder.

Now, some historians have suggested the masons' marks found on the broken walls and mouldering arches of the old chapterhouse - a room measuring 38 by19 feet – on the eastside of the Kilwinning abbey is evidence that a first "luge" was holding meetings there. In our opinion, this was most likely the "classroom" where the mason-monks – not lay brothers - learned

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[31] *An abbreviated history of Freemasonry*, by Phil Grau, P.M., 2005, published on the website of Havasu Masonic Lodge N°64 F. & A.M., Arizona, http://www.havasumasons.org/index.htm

[32] Yarker, Ch. 8: Masonry in Saxon England

and practiced. Indeed, we learn in the Scottish *Annals of Lesmahagow* (a Tironensian sanctuary founded in 1144 on a Culdee site) that there was a school or college of mason-monks in every single abbey the Tironensians ever occupied in Scotland:

> "The Tyronensian order of monks had six monasteries in Scotland, and each of the brethren of the establishment where he resided followed whatever trade or mechanical art he knew; so that a College of industrious artisans of the Order consisted of sculptors, carvers, carpenters, smiths, masons, horticulturists, etc. under the direction of an Elder, and the profits of their work were brought into a common fund for general maintenance."[33]

This, we presume, was modeled after the mother Abbey back in France. Several French historians specialized in medieval art and architecture believe the monks of Tiron were not only expert craftsmen, but the founders of the greatest school of arts and trades of their time. This school, founded around 1117 in Chartres, was already well known when Hugues de Toucy was consecrated Archbishop of Sens (1142-1168). These historians also believe the monks of Tiron were the skilled artisans who introduced the Gothic style in France, starting with the construction (in 1134) of the second Cathedral Notre-Dame in Chartres of which, after a fire in 1194, remain only the triple, Royal Portal, built between 1145 and 1170, and the twin bell towers (1134-1165). The inception of the Gothic style, with its distinctive pointed arch and ribbed vault that allowed for extraordinary height, first occurred in the region of Paris and Île-de-France between 1120 and 1150. (Coincidentally the monks of Tiron had a priory at Rueil-Malmaison and another one, with a large fief, on rue Tiron, in the 4th "arrondissement".)

> "The principal structural characteristics of Gothic architecture arose out of medieval masons' efforts to solve the problems associated with supporting heavy masonry ceiling vaults over wide spans. . . Medieval masons solved this difficult problem about 1120 with a number of brilliant innovations. First and foremost they developed a ribbed vault, in which arching and intersecting stone ribs support a vaulted ceiling surface that is composed of mere thin stone panels. This greatly reduced the weight (and thus the outward thrust) of the ceiling vault,

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[33] *The Annals of Lesmahagow, A narrative of events year by year of written records and pictures dating from 1179AD to 1864AD*, curtesy of James Lee, Chapter 2: History, chiefly Ecclesiastical, published on http://www.lesmahagow.com/history/annals/CH05/05(s05)001.htm
Note: In 1144, David I granted the monks of Kelso the barony and church of Lesmahagow, in Clydesdale, where they built the priory of St. Machutes (Lesmahagow, or St. Malo and St. Maclou, a disciple of Brendan, 6th c.). In 1228 and again in 1240, Richard de Bard (from Gaelic "minstrel", poet) granted more lands to the Abbey of Kelso and the Priory of St. Machutus, including Little Kyp, in Lanarkshire. The grant and privileges were confirmed successively by King Malcolm and William the Lion, and by Bishops John, Joceline, William, and Walter, all of Glasgow, as well as by Pope Innocent IV (ca 1250). From its foundation, the Priory of Lesmahagow was declared a sanctuary, free from all episcopal dues and subjection. The monks' liberties were expanded by David II (1330-1332) who granted them a charter freeing them from all imposts. Source: The Annals of Lesmahagow, Chapter 2: History, chiefly ecclesiastical, on http://www.lesmahagow.com

and since the vault's weight was now carried at discrete points (the ribs) rather than along a continuous wall edge, separate widely spaced vertical piers to support the ribs could replace the continuous thick walls."[34]

At the time of the Cathedral's reconstruction, the Order of Tiron was already well known for its exquisite craftsmanship. French architect Louis-Albert Mayeux (1872-1931) was convinced the Tironensian mason-monks designed and worked on the construction of the 2nd Cathedral of Chartres and other great churches in France.[35] In 1906, Mayeux published a rather controversial article in the Revue Mabillon, entitled ***Les grands portails du XIIe siècle et les Bénédictins de Tiron***. He had studied the phenomenon of early Gothic architecture, including the churches of Saint-Ayoul (Provins), Étampes and Saint-Loup du Naud in the Diocese of Sens, and came to the conclusion that there had been an extraordinary school of arts and trades in Chartres – one founded and directed by the mason-monks of Tiron, between 1130 and 1160:

> "As he closely studied the great portals of the 12th century within the limits of the dioceses of Sens, Paris and Chartres, Mayeux reports in their statues identical and very well defined features; thus he concludes there has been in this province, between 1130 and 1160 a true school worthy of being called the school of the 12th century, and that these portals were created by craftsmen (sculptors) who most likely came out of the same formation, or perhaps by the same artist. . . The creator of this school would be Saint Bernard, abbot of Tiron, of the Diocese of Chartres. He founded his monastery with the protection of the great Yves of Chartres, bishop of this city, and attracted 'workmen specialized in wood and iron, sculptors and goldsmiths, painters, masons and others fine craftsmen."[36]

Mayeux and other historians were convinced this great school at Chartres was founded by Bernard of Tiron himself shortly before his death. It is apparently Thibault IV le Grand (d. 1152), Count of Blois, Troyes, Champagne and Chartres, who asked the monks of Tiron to invest their talent in the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Chartres. (Thibault's uncle was Hugues de Champagne, who in 1126, had joined the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem; his son Hugues became

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[34] *A history of the Gothic period of Art and Architecture*, by Andrew Henry Robert Martindale, professor of visual arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England, 1974–95, author of *Gothic Art* and others; published on History World International, 1985 – 2004, http://history-world.org

[35] *Les grands portails du XIIe siècle et les Bénédictins de Tiron,* by Albert Mayeux, in-8e, 26 p., Archives monastiques, Revue Mabillon, August 1906; commentary in Bulletin Monumental, directed by Eugène Lefevre-Pontalis, Société française d'archéologie, 70e Volume, Paris-Caen 1906, p. 605; also quoted in *Les protagonistes de la popularité de Saint Loup vers 1554 : Hugues de Toucy, Archevêque de Sens*, Les rencontres de Provins, on http://perso.magic.fr/relet/StLoup/Les_Protagonistes/HUGUES_DE_TOUCY.htm

[36] Mayeux (1906), as quoted in in *Les protagonistes de la popularité de Saint Loup vers 1554 : Hugues de Toucy, Archevêque de Sens*, Les rencontres de Provins

Abbot of Citeaux in 1155, and his daughter Marguerite joined the Abbey of Fontevraud.) This is also what clearly stated author and reputed art historian Charles Marie George Huysman (aka Joris-Karl Huysman), a friend of Aleister Crowley and the first president of the Goncourt Académie in his highly detailed and referenced novel *La Cathédrale* (1898):

> "We can admit that during the 12th and 13th century it was the Benedictine monks of the Abbey of Tiron who directed the construction works of our church; this monastery had established a house in Chartres in 1117; we also know that this cloister housed more than 500 religious specialised in all crafts and that the sculptors, painters, stone carriers and masters were in great number. It would be quite natural to believe that these monks . . . are the ones who drew the plans of Chartres and employed these groups of artists whose image we can see in one of the old stained glass window of the apse. Men with fluffy bonnets in the shape of filter bags, cutting and planning the statues of kings."

We do not know for sure that the monks of Tiron were the master architects who introduced the Gothic style in France, but we do know they used a very unusual masonry technique. In Cardigan, South Wales, we find the remains of a Tironensian abbey, built in 1115, that archeologists consider absolutely unique: St. Dogmaël, founded by Sir Fitz Martin in 1115. They are intrigued by the peculiar work of freestone masonry in the abbey's architecture, which is also found all over the old village of Cardigan. The specialists have suggested that the monks may have learned this peculiar style from Robert Fitz Martin since his manor at Cemais (near Cardigan) is built in the same fashion:

> "With the exception of Portland Stone, Bath Stone and Larvikite, building stones derived from sources beyond Offa's Dyke are conspicuously absent in Cardigan. Here, and in the neighbouring village of St Dogmaels, extensive use has been made of slate and sandstone derived from local quarries. What is particularly intriguing is the way in which these materials have been utilised by local masons in buildings pre-dating the early twentieth century. Courses of dressed slate slabs often alternate with either single or double courses of dressed sandstone blocks. Such banding is prominent in St Dogmaels, not only in houses and cottages, but also in the abbey walls, the only Tironian abbey established in Wales and England. Robert Fitz Martin, the Anglo-Norman lord of Cemais and the abbey's founder, brought a band of monks from the mother abbey of Tiron (Thiron) in the diocese of Chartres. He may also have introduced a building tradition (and possibly some building stones), which are peculiar to that part of Cemais between Cardigan and his castle at Newport."[37]

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[37] From a paper presented at the Conference Stone in Wales, held at the National Museum & Gallery Cardiff, April, 2002. *The building stones of Cardigan and St Dogmaels, a French connection?* By Dafydd

In Thiron-Gardais, where the Abbey of Tiron is still standing, archeological studies have revealed the same peculiar use of stones in the masonry of 12th century walls. Not surprisingly, the mother abbey was built beginning in 1114, the same period as St. Dogmaël. This suggests that the monks of Tiron invented this peculiar technique, and used it not only in the construction of St. Dogmaël in Cardigan, but also at Cemais.

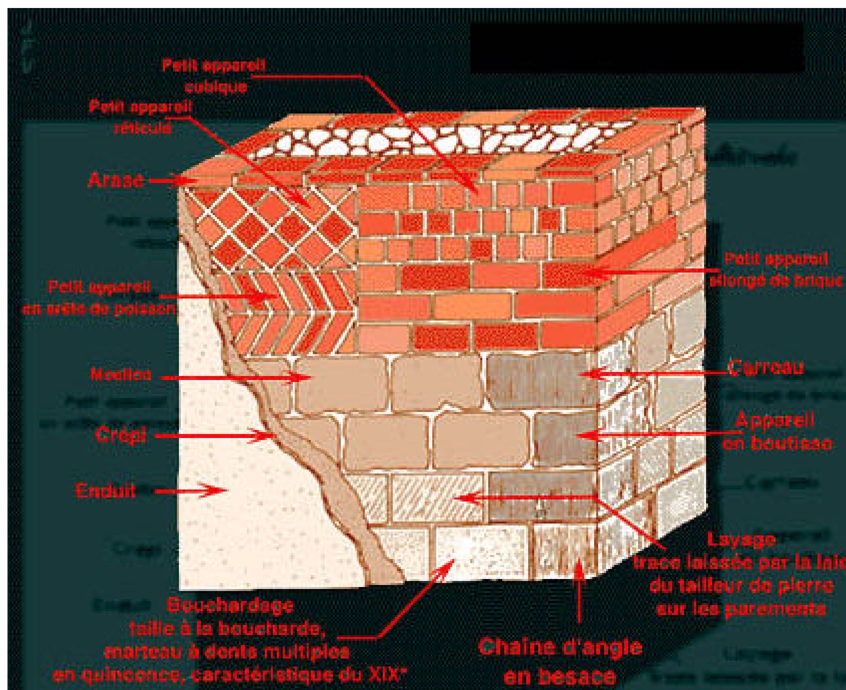

Figure 4 –Stone masonry at the Abbey of Tiron, France (Photo: Tiron-Gardais' website)

As mentioned, the monks of Tiron seemed to have mastered all arts and trades. Even more exceptional is the fact that the Tironensians monks, at least those of Lesmahagow, were identified as *pontifices* (bridge builders), a Roman specialty that very few monks mastered in medieval times:

> "They were sometimes employed over a wide district of country, and in the "Statistical Account of Scotland" (article kn Hamilton Parish, 1799) it is mentioned that the old bridge across the Avon, near Barncluith was built by the brethren of Lesmahagow."[38]

The *pontifex* is a priest or religious man who, at least symbolically, 'builds a bridge' between God and humanity. Like the *artifex (artificer,* artisan), the religious bridge-builder played a key sacerdotal role in the ancient Roman

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Elis Grufydd , Trinity College, Carmarthen, UK, on the site National Museums & Galleries of Wales, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/cisp/database/stone/trllw_1.html and http://www.nmgw.ac.uk/www.php/188#10

[38] *The Annals of Lesmahagow, A narrative of events year by year of written records and pictures dating from 1179AD to 1864AD*, curtesy of James Lee, Chapter 2: History, chiefly Ecclesiastical, published on http://www.lesmahagow.com/history/annals/CH05/05(s05)001.htm

religion. The Roman Emperor bore the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, and as such was the "highest priest" and the official head of the College of *Pontifices*, the most important priestly college; he conducted religious ceremonies, consecrated temples, and controlled the calendar. After Christianity was firmly established as the main religion in the old Roman empire, the title was assumed by the Pope ("Pontiff"). And if the Pope inherited the spiritual and sacerdotal mission of the pontifex, the operative artisans who mastered the secret art of building Roman bridges were also, by definition, pontifices.

> "It is important to mention that the technologies of bridge building at that time were based on individual intuition of outstanding 'masters' and on the experience passed down through the generations rather than on rules of mechanics and mathematics. The significance of preserving the knowledge of bridge building and of extending it was closely connected with military purposes and the interests of trade in ancient times. The Romans even established a separate caste - the 'pontifices' (bridge makers)."[39]

We could even say that a new 'bridge' was built between the operative artisans and the religious pontifices in the 12th century, with the creation of a new confraternity called the *Fratres Pontifices*, or Bridge Builders. They first appeared in the South of France when Saint Benezet, also known as "Little Benedict" and "Benedict the Bridge Builder", and his companions united to build the Bridge of Avignon (1178-1184). The fraternity, which was granted a charter in 1191 by Clement III, was organized in the same way as a "third order": they wore a habit with a distinctive badge, but were not bound by perpetual vows. Each local fraternity, which admitted women as "sisters", was divided in three branches, or degrees: knights, who contributed the funds and were called *donati* (donators); clergymen, usually monks, who acted as spiritual guides; and workers. Interestingly, their duties also included the lodging and entertainment of travelers, whether pilgrims or artisans.

At this point, it does not really matter what country - Italy (Lombardy), England, Germany, or France - the sacred arts of bridge-building and architecture came from, it was most certainly the legacy of the Romans and their famous colleges of *artifices* and *pontifices*, and there is little doubt that the Benedictine and Irish monks were the heirs of this precious knowledge and that they used it each in their own Christian way, in accordance with their respective Rule of life, for the "glorification of God".

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[39] Steel construction: Introduction to design; Lecture 1B.4.4: Historical Development of Iron and Steel in Bridges, Departement of civile engineering, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, April 2003, on http://www.kuleuven.ac.be/bwk/materials/Teaching/master/wg01b/l0440.htm

The Rule of Silence

Although we do find several testimonials about the monks of Tiron being master craftsmen, it is quite difficult to ascertain who exactly built what and when. For instance, not only was most of the 2nd Cathedral of Chartres destroyed by a fire in 1194, but the monks of Tiron lived and worked in absolute humility, never leaving behind any traces, signatures, or records indicating they were the ones who had designed and built some of the greatest masterpieces of medieval architecture.

Their daily routine, as well as that of most Benedictine monks of strict observance, was largely dedicated to manual labour: they had to work at least 6 to 7 hours each day and the kind of work, divided in two types (fields and workshops) that each one did was decided by the abbot. From Easter until the calends of October, the *artifice*s worked from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m; from October until the first Sunday in Lent, they worked without interruption from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

The Benedictine *artifices* were to work in complete silence (occasional hand signs and whispers were permitted), and strictly for the glorification of God. Manual labour was not only essential to community life, it was regarded as sanctifying work as long as the monk never took pride in his talent or accomplishments. Accordingly, the Rule (Chapter XLVIII, *de Opere manuuni quolidian*) clearly states that the proud craftsman was forbidden to do his work for a certain period of penance. Does this mean the Tironensian artisans never signed their pieces? Not necessarily. They had to keep silent and humble, but they could very well have used the tironian notes – dots, bars and simple symbols - to leave their names or personal marks.

While such intense physical activity and focus on arts was completely un-Cistercian by Bernard de Clairvaux's standards, it made perfect sense for monks living in the example of both the Benedictine and the Irish monks of the 6th century. At Tiron, being a monk was not all about penance, mortification and meditation; it was first and foremost about serving God and working solely for His glorification, in symbiosis with Nature. As craftsmen, they could spread the Word of God to the outside world through architectural and other artistic masterpieces that were symbolic of His perfection. It was also, in true Celtic spirit, a question of being in direct contact with the elements and bringing rough matter, such as stone, wood and metal, to life through artistic and manual labour. Such dedicated work could only help establishing direct communication between Man and God's personal Nature. In other words, working with the elements was an act of divine communion.

Such a vision amongst Benedictine congregations was unique to the Order of Tiron, and it was a conscious choice made early on by Bernard de Tiron. Quite simply, this was the living legacy of the old Culdee system and the *mac an t'saoir*, the noble "freeman" of Celtic society; a tradition much closer to

the Brehon laws and the “free Church” of the Bretons, Scots and Irish than to the Roman Catholic feudal system.

But how did the monks of Tiron become master craftsmen in the first place? Who taught them? Actually, everything suggests that Bernard recruited his first artisan-monks amongst Breton workers, most of them pagan workers he converted. Indeed, Geoffreoy le Gros (12th century), in his biography of Bernard, relates that in 1109 many pagans living in the nearby area converted and took the monastic habit at Tiron. In Vitalis de Mortain’s own words (Book VIII, chap. 27), Bernard who had always been particularly close to craftsmen from the very beginning, made several attempts at an apostolate amongst them: “*Whence the workers freely gathered round him, carpenters as well as black smiths, sculptors and goldsmiths, painters and stonecutters, vinedressers and farmers*.” If Vitalis was a direct witness, then this means that Bernard was already in contact with a good number of converted craftsmen when he and Vitalis separated and left the forest of Craon – in 1105 - to establish their respective hermitages, Vitalis at Savigny, in the forest of Fougères, Normandy, and Bernard, at Tiron, near Chartres.

Mother Abbey at Tiron, early 12th c. (Photo: © F. Bernier)

There is one solid clue indicating that Bernard did *recruit* his future monks among Breton craftsmen. This is precisely what the name *tirones* given to his monks suggests: they were indeed *recruits*. One may feel this particular term is synonymous with *soldiers of Christ* fighting against paganism and heresies – as in the Holy Land. In this case, Bernard would have accepted in his congregation any good Christian wishing to dedicate his life to the service of God. But it appears instead that Bernard converted craftsmen of all trades, picking and choosing among them the best potential students and “messengers” to become monks and to communicate the Word of God to the

illiterate people through symbolic artwork and architecture. Thus every *tiro* was first a *craftsman*, or became one. They were selected and recruited as actual or potential craftsmen, then entered into the Order as novice monks to be initiated into the Mysteries of God by the *magistri et principes eremitarum*.

Such emphasis on manual labour was not uncommon for Benedictine monks (even today) as the Rule of St. Benedict prescribes equal time to work, prayer, study and recreation in roughly equal proportions. Nor was such time allocation unusual for the Irish monks who followed the Rule of St. Columba - attributed to either the Abbot of Iona (6th century), or to his contemporary, Columbanus, the abbot of Bobbio who founded the Abbey of Luxeuil. In fact, the Benedictine monks of Luxeuil and Solignac (founded in 632) followed both the Rule of St. Benedict and the Rule of Columba, and this went on for a very long time.

The Columbanist Rule was much stricter than the Rule of St. Benedict. It divided each day and all work into three parts:

> "Three labours in the day, viz., prayers, work, and reading. The work to be divided into three parts, viz., thine own work, and the work of thy place, as regards its real wants; secondly, thy share of the brethen's [work]; lastly, to help the neighbours, viz., by instruction or writing, or sewing garments, or whatever labour they may be in want of, *ut Dominus ait, Non apparebis ante Me vacuus* [as the Lord says, "You shall not appear before me empty."].[40]

More importantly, St. Columba's monks were also divided into three groups, all under the direction of abbots, or *magistri*: the "*seniores*, who were responsible for the services in church; working brothers who did most of the manual labour in the workshops and fields; and *juniores*, who were novices, or prentices, under instruction.[41] It would not be such an extraordinary thing to say that the monks of Tiron blended together the Benedictine and the Columbanist rules since all Columbanist monasteries gradually drifted into the Benedictine Order. In fact, the Rule of Benedict was, in essence, columbanist: it gradually absorbed and supplanted the much stricter Irish Rule of Columbanus during the 7th to 8th century to become, "out of Ireland and other purely Celtic lands, the only rule and form of monastic life throughout western Europe."[42]

The fact that the monks of Tiron were not just *artifices* but also master craftsmen and architects, with schools in Chartres and everywhere else they went, leaves very little doubt about the identity those peculiar French

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[40] *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland II*, By A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873, pp. 119-121
[41] *Columba, Pilgrim and penitent,* By Ian Bradley, Wild Goose Publications, 1996, p.70-73
[42] The 1911 Edition of The Encyclopedia Love to Know, "Benedictine." *LoveToKnow 1911 Online Encyclopedia.* © 2003, 2004 LoveToKnow. http://48.1911encyclopedia.org/B/BE/BENEDICTINES.htm

workers who were brought to Scotland from France to build Kilwinning Abbey between 1140 and 1162. As Benedictines, they had returned to the old Gaulish tradition of the Abbey of Luxeuil, blending together the Rule of St. Benedict and that of St. Columba, with a great emphasis on work and arts, in the same spirit as the one expressed by Theophilus. They had learned and mastered all arts and trades, and their realizations and methods were just as unique, puzzling and anonymous as their "Tironensian" name.

The Free Masons of Tiron

Another indicator of the Tironensians' mastery of the art of building was their perfect knowledge of freestone, which they used to build most of their abbeys in Scotland. *Free stone* was the term given to fine or even-grained stone, usually limestone or sandstone, that was uniform enough to be carved and worked easily in any direction.

> "The Freestone was a term applied to stone suitable in texture for the jambs, piers, arches, traceries, and other constructional parts of a building, the planning of which required a thorough knowledge of Geometry, and the details of the work had to be set out by a master on a tracing board before the templates and molds could be made for the use of the Craftsmen. While the term has been dropped by the working masons, the inscription "stone and marble mason" may still be seen."[43]

All Tironensian monasteries, including Kilwinning Abbey, were made of freestone, and with reason: good freestone, mostly sandstone, abounds in Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Peeblesshire and Selkirkshire. Freestone of various colours - red, yellow and white, some even chocolate-coloured. There was also limestone. And whinstone, which splits with a clean fracture, and was used as stone-wall fences by the stonemasons of the district who were "famous for their skill in its manipulation, producing as they do with only a hammer and trowel beautifully-faced walls".[44]

Timothy Pont who had seen the cartulary of the abbey of Kilwinning (said to be now lost) wrote in 1608: "*The structure of this monastery was solid and grate, all of freestone cutte, the church fair and staitly after ye modell of yat of Glasgow, with a fair steiple of 7 score foote of height, yet standing quhen I myselve did see it*."

Now, many modern Freemasons believe the term "free mason" derived from the medieval expression "freestone mason". While the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon claims that *free stone* was first mentioned in 1212, in

[43] *Stone masons Terminology*, Holden Research Circle, United Grand Lodge of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, on http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Rhodes/3436/terminology.html

[44] *Peebles and Selkirk Minerals,* by G. C. Pringle, Rector, Burgh and County High School, Peebles, 1914

Normandy, the Catholic Encyclopedia states that *free stone mason* and its shortened version *free mason* first appeared in 1375 (no location specified).[45] However, based on an article published in 1908 in *The Mason's Chronicle* (Vol. I), the term *free mason* was used in 1155, and perhaps years before. We do not know who is right since none of these sources provides references, but Normandy and the approximate date of 1155 make sense to us: the word *mason* is indeed of French origin, and the mason-monks of Tiron considered themselves the "free men" of a "free church", working as *artifices* in the service of God. (Perhaps it is not a coincidence either that the term *obedience,* designating a religious house placed under a mother house, reportedly appeared in 1155.)

As the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon points out, "It is hypothesized that a 'Free Mason' was free of his Guild; he had the freedom of its privileges and was entrusted with certain rights."[46] Now, if we all agree that the word "mason" is of French origin, then it is logical to think that "free" comes from "franc", as is the case for "France" and the old golden coin named "frank". France owes its name to the Salien Franks, the Merovingians' ancestors. Clovis converted to Roman Catholicism 20 years after the fall of the Roman Empire (476). However the concept of "freemen" traces back to the Celts of Gaul, or Galli, particularly the "Brittones" of Irish descent in Armorica (Brittany).

In old Celtic clannish society, the *freeman*, or *saoir*, was the title of high ranking men, usually skilled tradesmen, in compliance with the old Brehon Laws of druidist Ireland which were not incompatible with Christianity. In fact, there is sufficient evidence indicating that several Christians had settled in Ireland before the coming of St. Patrick in the 5th century. But when Patrick - born a pagan under the name of "Maewyn Succat" - converted the Irish Druids, he carefully transcribed and preserved their old Brehon laws as well as most of their ancient customs. Over time, the Druids were replaced by abbots and became Filid, or "Brehons" (law specialists). This allowed for Irish society to remain essentially unchanged for centuries. In *The definitional Problem with the Brehon Law*, Vincent Salafia points out,

> "Saint Patrick's success in Christianizing Ireland may be directly linked to his adaptation of Irish laws by retaining most of the Celtic traditions and laws, thus serving as a monumental affirmation of their legitimacy."[47]

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[45] Article 'Freemasonry', by Hermann Gruber, transcribed by Bobie Jo M. Bilz, The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume IX, Appleton Company, 1910, online edition 2003 by K. Knight

[46] Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon, http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/texts/afandam.html

[47] *The definitional Problem with the Brehon Law*, by Vincent Salafia on http://ua_tuathal.tripod.com/law.html

One such tradition preserved in Irish Christianity involves the notion of *freeman – saoir* and *saer*, in Celtic, Gaelic and Breton, a title that could be passed on from father to son, as master and prentice, because "freedom" was conditional to the transmission of precious knowledge and obligations. Indeed, the same concept was introduced in perfect syncretism at the famous college and monastery of Clonmac'noise, founded in 545 by St. Cirian, a student of St. Finian after whom the Abbey of Kilwinning was named. For generations every abbot and secular *magister* formed at Clonmac'noise were called *mac an t'saoir,* meaning both *freeman* and *son of the builder*, possibly in reference to Jesus, "the son of the carpenter" who had learned his father's trade.

In pre- and early Christian Irish society, the title of freeman (*saoir*), synonymous with free or wise builder, was usually given to master craftsmen of various trades, along with special privileges (such as the right to own and work land), while the head of clan and master artificer was usually the smith, called the *Goban Saoir* (also *Gobborn Seer* and *Cowan Saoir)*, from the name of the pagan god of the smiths. In Gaelic, the *saer men* was the free stone mason, while the *saer coed* was the free artisan or free carpenter. Since *Goban* traditionally designated the head and master of all trades (and even of all elements), it was used, mainly in Ireland, as a title by several Christian abbots, such as Goban, the Abbot of Old Leighlin Monastery at Tascaffin, up until the 11th century. In this sense, the leading role of the pagan smith in old Celtic society was taken over by the abbots and scholars of the Irish Church, and replaced in most instances by the more humble and rather Christian title of *Mac an t'Saoir, "son* of the free builder". The simple term *saoir* –"freeman"- came to designate all master artisans who had been "accepted", initiated and successfully trained under the spiritual direction of a *Mac an t'Saoir* at a school such as Clonmacnoise Abbey. This may could explain why the title *Goban/Cowan,* which could hardly be associated in a Christian manner with "the son of the carpenter" (Jesus), came to designate the low-class, *unfree* operative craftsman. Indeed, the *cowan* - a term of the operative Craft still used today in modern speculative Freemasonry - was the mason, perhaps pagan, who did not serve a regular apprenticeship, did not know how to use mortar, and consequently could not be "accepted" as master of the trade.

As shown in the 1135 portrait found at Cloyes-sur-le-Loir, Bernard de Tiron definitely adopted the "heretical" Celtic tonsure of Simon Magus and the Irish priests. So did his colleagues Vitalis de Mortain and Robert d'Arbrissel. This marked him, as a Benedictine monk of strict observance, as a defender of the old "free" church". By choosing to wear the Celtic tonsure, Bernard was not only claiming his independence from the supremacy of the Roman clergy, which he was not afraid to challenge, he was also presenting himself as a "servant of God" of the Irish tradition - a true *mac an t'saoir* who, in the example of the "son of the carpenter", took orders solely from his Father, the Great Architect of the Universe. Bernard and his brethren never ceased to work anonymously, as free men and humble servants of God, erecting

monuments of unparalleled beauty for the glorification of the Almighty, and for the future generations to see.

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