The Irish Peregrinatio and St. Cataldus

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Si non video Romam, certe cito moriar: although these words are placed by Molua's biographer in the mouth of the saint, we may take them as reflecting his own belief and that of his medieval contemporaries in the value of pilgrimage to the Eternal City. Italy, thus, constituted one of the most sought-after destinations of Irish people in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, we also know of Irish pilgrims travelling further afield, in particular to the Holy Land, amongst them, possibly, San Cataldo whose feast we are celebrating in these days.

However, before we can speculate on this, let us first look at Irish pilgrimage as such.

The notion of *peregrinatio*, a life of wandering spent in exile from one's native land, was cultivated by the Irish religious from the late sixth until the early sixteenth century. Modelling themselves on Christ, whose life on earth was frequently described as a pilgrimage, as a period of exile from the heavenly fatherland, the Irish paid more heed to God's words to Abraham: e*xii de terra tua et de cognatione tua et de domo patris tui et vade in terram quam tibi monstravero* (Genesis 12: 1), as given as the motto for the pilgrimage of St. Columcille opening line of the saint's vernacular Life, reflects this aspect.[i] Columcille settled on Iona, an island north of Ireland, an island so remote but yet to become a centre of learning and writing. It was here, too, that a ship-wrecked Gaulish pilgrim named Arculf provided Adamnán, abbot of the monastery in the eighth century with an account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Arculf's account was written down, including of diagrams, in Adamnán's work De locis sanctis, a work widely transmitted in manuscripts on the Continent.

For Columcille and his successors, to remove oneself from the structures of society and one's family was considered as the pinnacle of self-denial. This was best achieved by a withdrawal to a secluded place, a *desertum*, an island as Skellig Michael or Innisfallen or to a lonely inland location, as those seen here. Even those monks, living in large monastic centres, proto towns of medieval Ireland as Clonmacnois or Glendalough, often left their monasteries in order to withdraw to a secluded place.

More poignantly, however, by leaving mainland Ireland altogether, the pilgrim experienced a complete release from the structures that bound, but also protected him.[ii] Initially, as we have seen, the islands to the North of Ireland were the natural choice for this anchorite movement and it is from here we have the first written evidence.

However, this concept was shared likewise by ascetics for whom this was the pinnacle of piety and also by delinquents and criminals punished for some of the most heinous crimes.[iii] The latter, as punishment for grievous offences, had often been relegated to the Judgement of God, which meant in some cases the pushing out to sea of a boat. This, of course, conjures up the well-known anecdote in the Anglo Saxon Chronicle for the year 891 of the three Irishmen who had landed in Cornwall in a boat without oars 'because they wished for love of God to be in exile, they cared not where'.[iv] Similarly, illustrating that *peregrinatio* was not just a single concept Columbanus of Bobbio's biographer, Jonas, recounts that as a young man the saint had sought the advice of a nun after having been tormented by the *lascivae puellae*. The nun informed him that she had left home to move to a *peregrinationis locis*, but, had she not been a woman, "she would have crossed the sea and would have sought out a *potioris peregrinationis locus*".[v] Indeed, Columbanus himself practised both forms, first leaving his home to pursue his studies at the monastery of Bangor[vi], later to set sail from Ireland towards an unknown future on the Continent.

When Columbanus fell foul of his employers at the court of Burgundy, he defied every effort to have him returned to Ireland, not because he had come to love Ireland less, but because his renunciation of home was the very epitomy of his pilgrimage. Lacking all experience of blood or red martyrdom, so smooth was the transition from paganism to Christianity, the early Irish Church espoused a new kind of martyrdom, more appropriate to its own experience, calling it *bánmartre*, 'white martyrdom', which entailed 'separation for the sake of God from everything one loved'. Not surprisingly, this characteristically Irish form of Christian idealism captured the imagination of other people.

Reference is made in an eleventh-century charter to the Irish "who, for the mortification of their bodies, and salvation of their souls, live in exile from their country, and go about visiting holy places."[vii] Relinquishing one's homeland without any specific goal in mind seems to have consisted of the gathering together of a group of like-minded companions and simply taking a boat towards Britain or the Continent. Still we must not assume that all expeditions were like the above-mentioned entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 891-2.[viii]

Instead, as the charter suggests, many emigrants left with a fixed purpose in mind, whether it be to visit holy places or to take up employment at scholarly centres of the Carolingian empire. Such journeys became all the more popular after the threat of Viking attacks had receded, making travelling safer again. An entry in the annals of the monastery of St. Bertin under the year 848 refers to a mission sent by a *rex scotorum* to Charles the Bald, announcing a victory over the Northmen, and requesting free passage for a

pilgrimage to Rome. With the resumption of pilgrimage the establishment of a network of *monasteria scotorum,* some of them built on earlier foundations, others newly created, began to provide the more permanent pilgrims with homes for life, and their transient companions with convenient stopping points. A further upsurge in Irish pilgrimage, probably in the wake of a treaty securing safe conduct between King Canute of England, Conrad, the German Emperor and the king of Burgundy in 1027, is confirmed by a long list in the Irish annals of journeys to Rome by Irish kings and clerics.[ix]

Since Rome, home of the relics of saints Peter and Paul, was the most favoured destination for pilgrims, the majority of these stopping-places lay along the pilgrim routes to the eternal city. Moreover, although no itineraries of Irish pilgrims survive as such, these can be reconstructed from a variety of sources.

More difficulties arise when we attempt to re-create the pilgrims' routes to the Holy Land, possibly travelling on from Rome via Taranto. Little is known about Irish participation in such travels, only the itinerary of two Franciscans who left Ireland for Jerusalem in 1322, but did not travel to Southern Italy, survives. Otherwise, only some isolated entries in the Annals of Innisfallen under the years 1060 and 1080 refer to pilgrimages to Jerusalem[x] and in 1215 provisions are made for the departure of Donatus, archbishop of Cashel.[xi] Yet, much of the imagery retained in Irish sculpture, especially in the concept of the High Crosses, seems to relate to impressions gained not only at Rome, but also, in the Holy Land.[xii] Here, the testimony of the Schottenklöster, Benedictine monasteries established by Irish pilgrims in Germany in the end of the 11th century, comes to help. A number of these houses were dedicated to St. James of Santiago de Compostela, patron of pilgrims, but the consecration of the monastery of Holy Cross at Eichstätt with its replica of the Holy Sepulchre refers directly to Jerusalem. Both the mother-house at Regensburg, as St. Mary's in Vienna, lay, of course, on the routes to the Holy Land and were places of departure for both pilgrimages and crusades. Furthermore, though concrete evidence is missing, we know from the literature of the Schottenklöster, that the monks there were well aware of the importance of Jerusalem as pilgrimage destination. Thus they relate that Virgilius, the 8th - century Irish bishop of Salzburg in Austria supposedly travelled to Jerusalem with seven other bishops 'qui proposuerant Domini vestigia ad Sanctam Terram corporeis oculis videre solito more reverendorum patrum Scotorum'..[xiii] If we can believe the author of the Libellus, Irish pilgrimage to Jerusalem was still alive in the twelfth century when *quidam comites potentes de terra Hybernie cruce signati erant et parati versus Romam et Ierosolimam ad peregrinandum* are

directed by the Irish king to guard the Schottenkloster delegation which had come on a fund-raising mission, back to Regensburg.[xiv] On the Continent, the presence of Irish pilgrims is attested in historiographical documents, such as chronicles, annals and acts of councils and in hagiographical works. Furthermore, a trace of a passing pilgrim can often be detected in the text of a liturgical document, in an entry into a necrology, calendar or confraternity book. We can also pinpoint pilgrim stations by taking into account the witness of manuscripts in continental libraries. Whether imported from Ireland or copied on the Continent from Irish exemplars, manuscripts can provide us with clues as to the centres the Irish frequented. Indeed, the same can be said of reliquaries, which appear also to have been often transported in pilgrims' satchels. Together with reliquaries some cults of their native saints travelled with the Irish for these can be found in continental liturgical documents and church dedications alike. This is particularly the case with the cult of St Brigid, who was apparently the saint most revered by Irish pilgrims.

As the choice of route travelled by pilgrims depended largely on the places where they could expect hospitality, it is only logical that Irish pilgrims would have taken into account earlier foundations rightly or wrongly attributed to their fellow countrymen. For this reason, later pilgrims tended to visit the places that had Irish connections and it would be tempting to speculate whether there are any signs of later Irish contacts in Taranto.

Hospitality was, of course, one of the main requirements of the overland pilgrim, and Benedictine monasteries were obliged to provide it under chapter 53 of their rule.[xv] Often, however, the continuous flood of pilgrims proved to be a drain on monastic and diocesan finances, and, as far as Irish pilgrims are concerned, there was more than one complaint. Indeed, it was in response to such complaints that hospices specifically catering to Irish pilgrims were set up. Yet, the Irish could always remain confident of gaining acceptance at other ecclesiastical centres, given that their learning and competence in manuscript writing was accepted generally. We may refer to the well-known episode concerning the stop-over of bishop Marcus and his nephew Moengal at the monastery of St Gall on their way back from Rome ca 850. In the words of the chronicler Ekkehart IV "They were superbly educated in divine and secular knowledge, and they kept their books, treasures and garments for themselves and St Gall". In fact, Moengal stayed on in St Gall as the teacher of the monastic school. That Irish pilgrims should have stopped over at St Gall was, of course, mainly due to the fact that the founder of the monastery was thought to have been Irish. And, regardless whether this was true or not, the supposed birth in Ireland of the saint named Gallus was maintained in a cycle of Latin Lives, written at St. Gall from the 8th century onwards.

Once on the Continent, having crossed to France either directly or via Britain, the pilgrims would have followed trade and travel routes in use since at least Roman times. On the way to Rome two mountain ranges had to be negotiated, the Alps via one or the other of the passes then open and the Apennines in Italy. No doubt, different routes were followed at different times, yet we can discern some distinct itineraries, all of them beginning in Northern France. One possible route traversed France towards Lake Geneva, crossed the Alps via the Gran San Bernardino pass, followed the Aosta valley towards Vercelli, Pavia and Fidenza, before intersecting the Apennines to arrive at Lucca hence to Rome, more or less the same itinerary as was followed by archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury in 990. This route converged at Vercelli with a more western one that ran via the Mont Cenis Pass and Susa. Another possible, more easterly route led through Lotharingia towards Trier, then followed the river Rhine upwards towards the Swiss border, crossed the Alps by the Lukmanier or Septimer passes, before arriving at Milan and thereafter joining the previously described route from Northern Italy to Rome.

We know that St Columbanus, having travelled to Milano from Bregenz in Austria, soon tired of fashionable life at the court of the king of Lombardy and requested to retire to a secluded place, a desertum. Although his stay in Bobbio was only short - he died two years later in 615, the monastery he had founded continued to attract Irish pilgrims for many years to come. This is testified by Irish manuscripts, best known the glossed Gospels now in Turin Library, by the remnants of reliquaries and also by the epitaph to a bishop Cummian whose inscription can still be seen in the church. But traces of Irish presence can be found along the *via Francigena,* the traditional pilgrims' path right from the point where the Alps were crossed. Dedications to St Brigida of Kildare, seemingly patron saint to all Irish travellers. One can follow her trail, so to speak, right through the Aosta valley where she joins the devotion of the supposedly Irish saint Ursus whose feast-day was also celebrated on 1 February. Dedications to Brigida can be found in Ivrea, the *hospitale Scotorum* in Vercelli and Pavia and at Piacenza, the latter endowed by the Irish bishop Donatus of Fiesole near Firenze. Donatus had stated specifically that the church should be open for Irish pilgrims "si de gente mea aliquis peregrinus advenerit" and had presented it to the monastery San Columbano in Bobbio. Bishop of Fiesole from 829-876, Donatus may also have been involved in the palace school established at Firenze by emperor Lothar in 825, just as his compatriot Dungal who had presided over the famous school at Pavia before retiring to Bobbio. Dungal may also have been the 'master' to whom Donatus dedicated his metrical Life of St Brigida, whose composition is a further proof of Donatus' veneration for the saint *Scottorum gloria, nomen, honor.*[xvi]

Both Pavia and Fiesole lay, of course, near the southern route to Rome, as did Lucca whose patron saint, Fridianus, is also given an Irish pedigree. That there existed a saint called Fridianus cannot be doubted. He is vouchsafed for by a passage in the Dialogues of St Gregory the Great shortly before the year 600 who speaks of a miracle recently performed by the bishop Frigdianus of Lucca, crediting him with changing the course of the river, a scene repeatedly depicted in frescoes and paintings in Lucca. In circumstances very similar to those at Taranto, his Life was not composed until some 4 or 500 years after his lifetime, the first recension to refer to his Irish background being not earlier than the latter part of the 12th century. Fridianus is supposed to have been the son of the king of Ulster in the North of the island, who, after a life devoted to religion in Ireland, decided to leave his home-land in order to commence his peregrinatio. At first, he led the life of a solitarius at Monte Pisano near Lucca, but when rumours of his deeds and miracles spread, he was invited to become bishop of Lucca, where he administered his diocese for some 28 years. While remaining in the church later dedicated to him, he is also credited with having founded the cathedral church of San Martino. The exact position of the saint's tomb was forgotten until it was miraculously re-discovered, this was followed by a number of translations, one in the latter part of the 11th century and a further one in the year 1152. Due to its possession of its founder's relics, S. Frediano developed into the most important church in Lucca, jealously watched by the cathedral church of San Martino which was only able to establish a leading position with the onset of the devotion to the Volto Santo in the late 11th century.

The Vita, which includes extracts from the Life of the St Finnian of Moville in the northern part of Ireland, strongly suggest that later pilgrims supplied the information concerning Fridianus' supposed Irish background. According to a passage in one of the manuscripts of the Life of Fridianus we learn that particulars about the saint's life and genealogy had been supplied by a group of Irish pilgrims *ad limina apostolorum* that means on their way to Rome, most probably in the latter part of the 12th century. One of the named was Malachy prior of Sancte Trinitatis, a monastery established for the Irish in Rome in the eleventh century. It is quite possible that the canons of San Frediano who administered a number of the larger churches in Rome may have had contact with the Irish colony there. Indeed, the Canons Regular established at the church and monastery of St Frediano were invited by Pope Paschal II to reform the clergy of the Lateran and were known as the Lateran Canons of St Fredianus from then on.[xvii]

A further Lucca saint, the saintly bishop Silaus or Silao closely connected to the monastery of S. Giustina there, is also given an Irish pedigree in his Life. A number of details, which can only have

been supplied by Irishmen, have been added to the document. As in the other instances, it was the discovery of his tomb, complete with an inscription, which identified him as divus Sylaus, episcopus Hiberniae, which prompted his translatio in the year 1180. No doubt, it was on this occasion that his Vita was commissioned.

A number of parallels between the situations in Lucca and Taranto become apparent:

1.   There seems to have been a certain confusion or uncertainty as regards the name of the saint, the Lucchese one variably referred to as Fridianus, Fredianus, even Frigianus. In all cases, however, the name was unusual for the locality and therefore prompted speculation as regards to the saint's provenance at a time when the cult was verbalised. While a previous cult of the saint may have existed already without any indication as to the saint's provenance, this was changed in the course of the twelfth century. The vague similarity of their names to those of some Irish saints (Cathal or Carthach in the case of Cataldus, Finnian or Finbarr in that of Fridianus) prompted them to suggest an Irish pedigree for the saint while, at the same time, endeavouring to find out details about the Irish saint in question.

2.   According to their vitae, memory of the saints had been lost and it was not until the miraculous discovery of their tombs that their cult was re-invented, their identification often aided by an inscription on the sarcophagus or a cross which was buried with it. An elevatio or translatio took place, prompting the creation of a Vita which provided aspects of the saint's life. Often, circumstances required a new translatio or the composition of a further life of the saint.

3.   The saints are portrayed as bishops; indeed, the Life of Cataldo also includes details as regards the diocesan organisation, claiming that he established 12 suffragan bishoprics, thus elevating him to a status of archbishop. The emphasis on diocesan matters reflects the concerns of the 12th century church reform, which endeavoured to bring Ireland into the universal church. With the arrival of a diocesan structure and the dismissal of the old-style monastic order, both sides saw it necessary to create written texts, which justified their stance. This became even more acute when the conventions of Irish society was threatened by the arrival of the Anglo Norman invasion in the year 1169. It was, therefore, never more opportune to stress the sanctity of Ireland, both at home and abroad and Irish pilgrims were only too prepared to help and propagate as many Irish saints abroad as possible.

A further example from the Schottenklöster scriptorium proves that it became a dissemination centre for writings, which addressed themselves to both the people at home and the local society. In particular, they were anxious to manipulate events within their

surroundings to their own use. The Irish monastery of San Jacobo at Regensburg, mother-house to the other Schottenklöster, was extremely anxious to maintain its position within an often jealous environment. Thus, when during re-building activities after a disastrous fire in 1152, a second sarcophagus was discovered in the neighbouring convent of Niedermünster next to that of the patron saint Erhard, it was the Irish monks who were able to grasp the opportunity.

They wrote a Life of a hitherto unknown 7th century saint Albartus, archbishop of Cashel, who, after listening to the homily of a famous bishop at Lismore, decided to go on peregrinatio with his friend Erhard, bishop of Armagh, eventually ending up in Regensburg. Erhard stayed in Regensburg while Albart travelled to Jerusalem. Returning through Regensburg, Albart found his friend had died and he stayed until he himself passed away and was buried next to him. Here, too, we recognise the stress on diocesan structures, with particular reference to Lismore, well known to us from the Life of Cataldo, and Cashel, the metropolis of the South of Ireland.

Other than at Taranto and at Lucca, there was an Irish presence at Regensburg which would explain why their anxiousness to provide an Irish connection for a saint bearing a completely German name. Yet, we can see that the practise of using Irish background information for continental saints, which may or may not have lived, is not confined to Italy. Moreover, we are in the fortunate position to be able to pinpoint the probable time-span in which this acculturation took place, the extant Lives pointing to the middle and second half of the 12th century. It may have been a chance meeting between the bishop of Taranto and St Malachy at Clairvaux or the visit of Irish pilgrims at Lucca, which provided material for the local churches, which were in the process of re-establishing the cults of their saints. As has been seen, it was the spirit of the 12th century which prompted the travels of Irish church men on the Continent and although we will never be able to ascertain with certainty whether Cataldo or Frediano have been Irish, we have learned much about the process of the establishment of their cults, cults which were so powerful that they are still alive and well today! Although Taranto is a very long way from Ireland, it might be of interest to look out whether any traces of passing pilgrims to the tomb of San Cataldo may have brought back things. I have given the example of St Gall in Switzerland above. It was here that the companion of St Columbanus, the 7th century St Gallus, was thought to have died. The monastery, founded near his hermitage became a celebrated stop-over for Irish pilgrims, a place of pilgrimage for all later compatriots of the saint. It is of no consequence that scholarship in recent years has tried to prove that Gallus had not come from Ireland, or, that he had not existed at all. The important point was, that all during the Middle Ages he was

considered Irish and stayed such both to his Swiss surroundings and the Irish pilgrims. Moreover, although never an Irish monastery, its connections with St Gall and Columbanus ensured that all further Irish pilgrims could be expected to receive hospitality there. They repaid the hospitality manifold as all the many Irish manuscripts still in the St Gallen library can prove. Those pilgrims which did not end their lives in exile on the Continent but returned home brought with them manuscripts or artefacts, often relics for deposition in their own churches and graveyards, appropriately termed 'relig' from reliquia or even 'róim' from Rome. Furthermore, the inspiration for innovations in Irish decorative art, whether this took the form of illustrations in gospel manuscripts or themes depicted on High Crosses, was brought back by pilgrims and it comes as no surprise that one of the most prominent of Irish architectural forms, the Romanesque, was introduced in the course of the twelfth century, era par excellence of pilgrimage. The archiepiscopal see of Cashel, not far from Lismore, may provide some of the answers. The 12th century High Cross at Cashel shows not only traces of the labyrinth which is still visible today at the entrance to the cathedral of San Martino in Lucca, but also shows a figure which, according to art historians, is directly influenced by the crucifix of the Volto Santo. A returning pilgrim may, thus, have immortalised the images he saw at Lucca. I would suggest, therefore, that if San Cataldo has been known in the early Middle Ages as Irish, he would certainly have attracted the attention of other Irish pilgrims. In this case we would expect to find later Irish references at Taranto. Even more so, if later Irishmen went as pilgrims to the grave of San Cataldo and then returned home, could there possibly be traces of memories from Taranto and could these still be apparent somewhere amongst the national monuments of Ireland to this day?

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[i] The theme of pilgrimage in this twelfth-century version is pushed in deference to the original notion of exile as penance: M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: the History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988) 202, 218.

[ii] V. and E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 8-9.

[iii] Charles-Edwards mentions the crime of kin-slaying as a consequence of which traditional ties of kin had to be abandoned, making him a complete outsider; ibid., 49-50.

[iv] A. H. Smith (ed) *The Parker Chronicle* (832-900) (3rd ed. London 1951) 40; Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', 48-9; Hughes, K., ' The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *JournEcclHist* 11 (1960) 143-51: 143. According to Charles-Edwards the pilgrims went straight to the king as they were following current law in Alfred's Wessex. The question will be addressed below.

[v] Krusch, B. (ed), *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, MGH SRG us (Hannover and Leipzig 1905) 156; see: Charles-Edwards, T. M., 'The Social Background to the Irish *Peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976) 43-59.

[vi] D. Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', in M. Lapidge (ed), *Columbanus. Studies on the Latin Writings* (Woodbridge 1997) 1-28: 4.

[vii] Clarke, The Abbey of St. Gall ( ) 27

[viii] Kenney, 488.

[ix] Ó Floinn, R., 'Innovation and conservatism in Irish Metalwork', in C.E.Karkov, M.Ryan and R.T.Farrell (ed.), *The Insular Tradition* (New York, 1997), pp.259-81 (263-4).

[x] S. Mac Airt, *The Annals of Innisfallen* (Dublin 1944, repr. 1988): 1060 records the death of Domnall Déisech who had 'travelled all the journeys which Christ travelled', while 1080 mentions the pilgrimage of Ua Cinn Fhaelad, king of the Déisi.

[xi] , s.a. Sweetman, **Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland** I ( ) 99. A number of thirteenth-century Irish poets include descriptions of the Mediterranean and Levant in their writings, **A. O'Rahilly** (ed), *Measga Dánta* (Cork 1927) 225. Some further, albeit slight, evidence for Irish participation in pilgrimages to Jerusalem has been adduced by C. Kostick, 'Ireland and the First Crusade', *History Ireland* vol. 11 No. 1 (2003) 12-3.

[xii] H. Richardson, 'The Cross triumphant: high crosses in Ireland', in: M. Richter and J-M Picard (eds), *Ogma Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin 2002) 112-7.

[xiii] Breatnach, P, *Die Regensburger Schottenlegende - Libellus de fundacione ecclesie Consecrati Petri. Untersuchung und Textausgabe* (Munich 1977) 185-6. The Irish pilgrim Colman, murdered at Stockerau near Vienna, is supposed to have been on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, see: D. Ó Riain-Raedel, 'Ireland and Austria in the Middle Ages', 11-40. **Cataldus**

[xiv] Breatnach, *Die Regensburger Schottenlegende*, 240.

[xv] St Benedict, *Regula cum Commentariis*, PL 66, cols. 749-52.

[xvi] D. N. Kissane, *Uita metrica sanctae Brigidae: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Commentary and Indexes*, PRIA 77, C, 3 (Dublin 1977) 83.

[xvii] W. Gehrt, *Die Verbände der Regularkanonikerstifte S. Frediano in Lucca, S. Maria in Reno bei Bologna, S. Maria in Porto bei Ravenna und die cura animarum im 12. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt / Bern / New York / Nancy **?**)