Exiles from the Edge? The Irish Contexts of *Peregrinatio*

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Approaches to *peregrinatio*

In a letter to Pope Boniface IV († 615), probably written around AD 613, *peregrinus* and church founder, Columbanus († 615), declared that the Irish who inhabited the world's edge were ideal Christians, free of heresy's taint.[1] Rather transparently, Columbanus strongly implies that he, like his fellow countrymen, is a Christian of apostolic mould, preserving the purity of early Church belief and practice. For him, those who lived at the edge of the earth were innocent of the errors that flourished closer to its centre, in Burgundy, in Italy and in the very heart of Rome. In this letter, and elsewhere, Columbanus, a man intensely self-conscious of his status as an exile, a *peregrinus*, brews a heady mix of identity, geography and religious orthodoxy. He is a deeply idiosyncratic writer; he also articulates those various factors which led him, and others, to leave Ireland. To find God, he tells us, one must renounce one's native place.[2] Nearly a century later, Adomnán († 704), abbot of Iona, wrote a great hagiographical celebration of his founder-saint, Columba († 597). *Vita Columbae* is steeped in the language of exile. Tellingly, not all of it is tied to Iona's first abbot. For instance, Adomnán details the travails of Cormac ua Liatháin, a man who was a contemporary of Columbanus. Cormac is described as unsuccessfully seeking a desert in the ocean, no less than three times, before finally settling for a more mundane religious life.[3] The words which Adomnán uses are loaded: Cormac's desert is the *eremus* or *desertum* of the hermit. It purposefully echoes the ascetic heroism of the Desert Fathers, particularly Anthony of Egypt († 356), the contours of whose life had become an inspiration for many western Christians. Both Columbanus and Cormac have come to be seen as iconic *peregrini*, despite the apparently contrasting nature of their experiences. Columbanus succeeded in leaving Ireland permanently, carving out an influential, if controversial, Continental career. Cormac, on the contrary, failed to find his transmarine desert and returned to Ireland where, eventually, he came to be revered as a saint. Columbanus speaks to us directly as a self-identified *peregrinus*, although it is left to his biographer Jonas to tease out the implications more fully.[4] Cormac, whose voyages are only known

second-hand through Adomnán, is not explicitly called a *peregrinus* at all. Why, then, are both placed on a spectrum of *peregrinatio*?

The major reason is that religious exile, linked with the type of ascetic desert sought in vain by Cormac, feature across a variety of texts, either of Irish origin, or emerging from an Irish-influenced milieu. On the basis of these, it has become commonplace for scholars to situate the experiences of Cormac and of Columbanus within a practice known as *peregrinatio pro Christo* or exile for Christ. It is usual to define *peregrinatio* as a form of religious renunciation, inspired by the words of Jesus in the Gospels challenging believers to put aside home and family to follow God.[5] Thus, *peregrinus*, a word originally meaning stranger, came to be interpreted as referring to a pilgrim or an exile. Among the Irish, *peregrinatio*, the journey of the *peregrinus*, described a life-long exile for the sake of God. By the end of the sixth century, according to this definition, the Irish regarded a permanent overseas *peregrinatio* as the highest form of ascetic renunciation and it inspired many of the Irishmen who left for Britain and the Continent. However, things are not quite so simple. While exile and asceticism are strongly associated in many sources, this association is often indirect and *peregrinatio* may not even be explicitly mentioned, as in the case of Cormac ua Liatháin. Another good example of this type of indirect articulation is the Cambrai Homily, a short text written in a combination of Old Irish and Latin, usually dated to sometime around 700, roughly contemporary with the writings of Adomnán.[6] For the author of the homily, renouncing the world of material attachments, in favour of asceticism, is a form of martyrdom to be equated with the 'red martyrdom' suffered by early Christians. The homily explains that in order to win metaphorical martyrdom the ascetic must separate from the familiar. Scholars have frequently interpreted this as a nod towards *peregrinatio*.[7] Furthermore, the importance of rejecting personal attachments is emphasized in Jonas' Life of Columbanus, written a generation after its subject's death. It is Jonas who tells us that while exile within Ireland was good, it was surpassed by the superior *peregrinatio* of leaving the island entirely, a formulation which has proved remarkably influential.[8] Nuances aside, it does seem clear that in the course of the sixth and seventh centuries religious ideals, centred on exile and ascetic martyrdom, coalesced among Irish ecclesiastics.

However, it is important to point out that this coalescence was more complex than the standard definition of *peregrinatio* implies. It is noteworthy, too, that *peregrinatio* and *peregrinus* did not always mean exile in the sense which has been

discussed, even in Irish texts. Similarly, not all forms of ascetic martyrdom were imagined to involve an exile from home, or, indeed, one which was necessarily permanent. Terminology is sometimes imprecise and scholars should beware of artificially and rigidly defining a concept of *peregrinatio*. In particular, Jonas' hierarchy of *peregrinatio*, culminating in the permanent overseas variety, should not be a straitjacket to the detriment of other possibilities. For instance, an insistence on the life-long nature of *peregrinatio* has led to a fruitless debate about whether Columba can be considered to be a true *peregrinus*. The reason is that he travelled back to Ireland when occasion demanded. Yet, Adomnán is explicit: Columba is a *peregrinus*.[9] Therefore, our understanding of *peregrinatio* needs to be flexible enough to acknowledge the importance of religious exile to Irish ecclesiastics, in a variety of circumstances.

This complexity should not surprise as *peregrinatio* had demonstrably diverse origins and expressions. Furthermore, it did not remain static over time. The *peregrini* of the sixth, seventh and early eighth centuries can broadly be distinguished from those who came after.[10] The latter were arguably as much encouraged by the possibilities of Carolingian patronage as they were inspired by asceticism. Moreover, as Kathleen Hughes influentially suggested, changes to the religious landscape at home were of equal weight. This included the emergence of the Céli Dé, a group of loosely aligned ecclesiastics, who rose to prominence at the end of the eighth century.[11] They praised virtues of *stabilitas*, exhorting monks to remain within their monasteries. The desert could as easily be found at home as in the ocean. However, the Céli Dé did not have any noticeable impact on the numbers of Irish clerics travelling abroad. They are most usefully viewed as one end of a spectrum of opinion among Irish ecclesiastics, reflecting changing emphases in ecclesiastical thought.[12] Neither was *peregrinatio* peculiarly Irish, even if Irish practice was influential on how it came to be perceived by their neighbours. The famous English writer, Bede, for instance, presents a very clear vision of *peregrinatio*, one which echoes Irish ideals of exile but is much more interested in the importance of overseas missionary activity, something which is only patchily attested among the Irish.[13] *Peregrinatio* was also geographically diverse. Irish *peregrini* were to be found in Ireland, Britain, on the Continent and among the north Atlantic islands. This chapter will not examine the careers of individual *peregrini* but will instead explore the factors, specific to their experience in Ireland, which inspired them to leave home. The main focus will be on the earliest phases of *peregrinatio* during the sixth and seventh centuries. If life on the edge was so close to Christian

perfection, why journey at all? What commonalities catalysed the different trajectories of a Cormac and a Columbanus? What unites the searcher for a lonely desert in the ocean with the founder of monasteries, centrally located in the heart of Europe?

The social and cultural origins of *peregrinatio* in Ireland

The starting point is to identify those influences which shaped the emergence of *peregrinatio*, broadly defined, within Ireland. This area of enquiry has been greatly illuminated by the work of Thomas Charles-Edwards.[14] He has illustrated the extent to which *peregrinatio* echoed native social assumptions. This is underlined by the fact that the vernacular *ailithir* and *ailithre* function as direct semantic equivalents of *peregrinus* and *peregrinatio* although, like them, they predominantly occur within religious literature. However, Charles-Edwards further argues that the Irish words can be usefully considered as part of a wider, and notably rich, semantic field which incorporates legal terms for exile.[15] For Charles-Edwards this suggests that the origins of *peregrinatio* are not only to be located in responses to Christian modes of asceticism. They are also tied to originally native ideas of exile. These, in turn, are encoded in the early Irish law tracts where exile is, primarily, a form of punishment. The Irish penitentials, using the term *peregrinatio*, take a similar position, indicating that the practice was widespread in secular and ecclesiastical society by at least the seventh century. In order to unpick the meanings attached to exile as punishment it is necessary to outline a number of basic features of early Irish society, features which arguably shaped the careers of *peregrini*.

Peregrinatio was concerned with rejecting normal social connections. In striking contrast, the early Irish imagined their world as a network of social communities, structured through an all-encompassing legal hierarchy, one which was explicated in minute detail. These communities were composed of groups of people living in a district, bound together in a socio-political framework centred around the local ruler. This basic district was known as a *tuath* or petty kingdom.[16] These petty kingdoms were not politically significant but were the lynchpins of Irish society on a local level. Their inhabitants were organized through hierarchy, geography and genealogy, all of which intersected in important ways. The individual was tightly bound into these communal groups. Thus, his or her legal standing, expressed through honour-price, was not merely a function of personal status. It was also based on how he or she was related to the wider kin group and community.[17] Therefore, each person was effectively locked into a

system rooted in deeply embedded genealogical, communal and political ties. *Peregrinatio* was a radical challenge to this interconnectedness.

However, as Charles-Edwards has shown, being disconnected from the wider community was a major disability in early Irish law, one which severely affected an individual's social standing.[18] So, for example, a foreigner, whether from overseas or another Irish kingdom, had limited legal rights. This could be ameliorated through marriage to a native or by submission to the local ruler, but only partially. Moreover, it has been shown that exile, with its attendant legal disabilities, functioned as a form of serious punishment. If an individual committed a particularly reprehensible crime, such as kinslaying or incest, he or she was outcast from the community. This famously could take the form of being set adrift in a boat without a means of steering. The criminal was then left to the seas and God's mercy.[19] While the trope of setting adrift appears in several texts, its earliest extant reflection is in Muirchú's *Vita S. Patricii*, a biography of St Patrick written towards the end of the seventh century. In this Life a criminal bandit, Macc Cuill, attempts to trick Patrick.[20] Macc Cuill eventually submits to the saint and, as a form of voluntary punishment, casts himself adrift in a boat without oars, having shackled his feet and thrown away the key. The destination is left to God. He is providentially washed up on the Isle of Man where Macc Cuill eventually rises to the episcopacy. Muirchú's tale combines a number of suggestive features. Remarkably, Macc Cuill, a foreigner on the Isle of Man, does not lose status but gains it through a fascinating reversal of normal expectations. He transforms from a bandit to a bishop, from a social outcast to society's leader. Indeed, the bishop had the highest honour price of any ecclesiastic according to early Irish law. Yet, although Macc Cuill has been viewed as a proto-*peregrinus*, the language of *peregrinatio* is never employed here or, indeed, elsewhere by Muirchú. On the other hand, the hagiographer is acutely interested in the status of foreigners, given that Patrick himself was one. Nonetheless, a connection can be made between the Macc Cuill episode and *peregrinatio*. Famously in 891, two centuries after Muirchú composed his *vita*, three Irish clerics were washed up on the English coast after crossing the Irish Sea in a rudderless boat. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us that they did this for the love of God.[21] This is an arresting parallel, although we should be cautious of reading Muirchú in the light of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, separated as these texts are by language, date and culture. It seems telling, however, that journeying on the ocean for the sake of God is presented as *peregrinatio* in *Nauigatio S. Brendani*, the Voyage of St Brendan, a Hiberno-Latin text which may

date to the eighth century.[22] These, and other examples, make a compelling *a priori* case for connecting punishment, exile and voyaging with *peregrinatio*.

At this point it is worth returning to the legal context. The role played by exile within vernacular law has already been outlined. However, this outline needs to incorporate a further important strand, the freedom of movement between kingdoms allowed to those of high status. The general position was that an individual was bound to their kindred and community through blood and through space. It was expected that most Irish people would remain living in the same district for the majority of their lives. Extended travel was normally restricted to trade, military matters and marriage alliances between kingdoms. These expectations were so fundamental that the majority were legally classed as *áes trebtha* 'farming people'. They were contrasted with high-ranking professionals such as poets and judges, as well as with kings and clerics, all of whom enjoyed much greater rights of mobility.[23] This freedom to travel was a practical feature in an otherwise decentralized society. But, how did this impact upon *peregrinatio*? Essentially, a high-ranking churchman would expect the right to travel widely. Paradoxically, then, in view of its conceptualisation in terms of legal punishment and communal disenfranchisement, *peregrinatio* echoes elite travel privileges. Moreover, the Irish law tracts explicitly give the *peregrinus*, called a *deorad dé*, an outsider or exile for God, the honour price equivalent to a bishop or a local king.

This dual way of legally positioning *peregrinatio*, as shameful punishment or exalted privilege, underlines just how nuanced our readings of it need to be in order to fully appreciate the great debt that it owes to the actualities of Irish society. It was these actualities which inspired Irish ecclesiastics to interpret the ideals of Christian asceticism within a meaningful and familiar frame of reference, one where the breaking of social bonds is envisaged in a culturally specific way. Of course, the shattering of social connections for the sake of God is not uniquely Irish; it was a feature of Christian asceticism everywhere. What was distinctive was the contexts in which this was placed by Irish writers. These were ambivalent and contradictory, making *peregrinatio* both punishment and privilege. Arguably, it is this powerful ambiguity which fostered the creative convergence of originally separate ideals of martyrdom, punishment, submission to God and the providential journey. While this convergence nourished *peregrinatio*, the multitude of influences did ensure that its actual practice varied, producing figures as different as Cormac is from Columbanus. This variety is frequently

obscured because Continental *peregrini*, such as Columbanus, are viewed as normative rather than being examples of a much wider socio-religious phenomenon.

Geography, exile and identity

This confluence of ideals was further shaped by another significant factor, one which greatly influenced Irish writers from at least the sixth and seventh centuries. It arguably provided an extra impetus towards a specifically overseas *peregrinatio*. This was the question of where to locate Ireland and the Irish within Christian history and Christian understandings of the world. These understandings provided a well-crafted shared framework which encompassed geography, history and ethnicity. They were based on the Classical geographical tradition, one which was inherited, and developed, by Christian writers. These writers combined the Bible with the Classical legacy, re-categorising the knowledge of antiquity in the process. They put Jerusalem at the centre of the world; they mapped Biblical history and Old Testament ethnic divisions onto the Classical geographical model. This was imagined as a globe containing the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, enclosed by the great outer ocean, *oceanus*.[24] The Romans believed that the most civilized peoples lived on the shores of the middle sea, the Mediterranean. As one left the middle, people became less civilized and the climate worsened. This ideological geography gave Romans a way to interpret the world and assert their cultural superiority. Roman assumptions were the foundation of how most educated early medieval Christians thought about the geographical landscape. They were popularized by writers such as Augustine in the fifth century, Cassiodorus in the sixth and Isidore of Seville in the seventh.[25] This landscape, as both Irish and English writers noted, placed their islands at the edge, the point where human habitation gave way to the mysteries of the impassable world-encompassing ocean. Indeed, Adomnán's description of Cormac's voyages brilliantly evokes the dangers of this infinite ocean, extending endlessly to the northern horizons. He seems to believe that it marked the boundaries of human possibilities of exploration.[26] But these boundaries were not fixed, no more than the ocean, making it the perfect realm in which to observe the workings of the divine will. This understanding transmuted the providential voyage into an act of trust in God, moving it far beyond concepts of legal punishment. In this sense, the actual journey, the *peregrinatio*, was as meaningful as the destination.

The importance of the encircling ocean was supported by Christian interpretations of the relationship between time and space. They believed that these were intertwined because of their simultaneous creation. These ideas fed into the common belief in an earthly paradise, one which was had complex associations with both time and space.[27] It existed beyond time but was also an actual physical place which could be located on a map. Usually, it was situated in the east, being frequently identified with the Garden of Eden. Some, however, believed that it was separated from the normal world by the ocean.[28] This strand of interpretation reinforced the sense, already seen in Adomnán, that the ocean flowed at the limits, or even between, existences. The clearest distillation of these ideas can be found in *Nauigatio S. Brendani*, a text which provides by far the most extensive early medieval reflection on the nature of the providential voyage undertaken for the sake of God.[29] The author of the narrative portrays *peregrinatio* as both the physical journey to find paradise and the pilgrimage of the Christian through life, the two being symbolically identical. Its central conceit is that the north Atlantic is teeming with monks and hermits who, unlike Cormac ua Liatháin, have successfully found their way to wave-wrapped deserts.[30] The text offers a concentrated idealisation of the overseas and life-long exile. Nevertheless, its primary *peregrinus*, the sixth-century Irish abbot Brendan of Clonfert, is only a temporary exile. He returns to Ireland bringing with him the precious insights of his journey, physically manifested as the gemstones of paradise.[31] Thus, the *Nauigatio* presents the complexities of *peregrinatio* in a deceptively simple narrative form. Its *peregrinatio* can be life-long or temporary; it can be eremitical or communal; it can result in salvation or damnation, such are the dangers of leaving the community and venturing beyond Ireland. Above all, the *Nauigatio* dramatizes the initially ascetic underpinnings of Irish overseas *peregrinatio*, especially that centred on the north Atlantic. Arguably, its portrayal of the the ocean as God's laboratory is something which directly emerged from the reception of Christian geography among the Irish.

The north Atlantic locale for overseas *peregrinatio* is sometimes treated as being of less importance that the far better attested world of those Irish clerics who journeyed to Europe. This is not surprising as we cannot trace networks of Irish exiles winding through north Atlantic islands or even begin to establish their influences. However, their experiences of *peregrinatio* help illuminate the broader phenomenon. This is because the push factors to leave Ireland are especially prominent in their cases and the pull factors correspondingly weak. These *peregrini* were not relocating to foreign human

societies. Before the settlement of the north Atlantic islands by the Vikings, such social communities, apart from those created temporarily by *peregrini* themselves, simply did not exist. In contrast, the pull exerted by societies in Britain and on the Continent provided, to varying degrees, powerful stimuli to potential Irish exiles, not all of which related to asceticism. For instance, the exile circle at Liège, centred around the prolific ninth-century Irish cleric and writer Sedulius Scottus, can hardly be described as being an ascetic colony.[32] Fortunately, however, there is a precious direct witness to these earlier austere *peregrini*. This is the early ninth-century Irish geographer, Dicuil, who gives an important insight into Irish clerical voyagers in his *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*. Dicuil writes of them at their vanishing point; he provides a backwards look into the eighth century, albeit one where he can draw on personal experiences and eyewitness accounts. Dicuil describes Irish clerics as living as hermits on islands, probably to be identified as the Faroes.[33] But, according to Dicuil, the arrival of the Vikings brought an end to their settlements. Additionally, in a famous passage, he depicts an expedition of Irish monks to the then unsettled Iceland, dated to around 795 AD. The monks closely observed what they regarded as unusual physical and astronomical data, including the phenomenon of the midnight sun during the Icelandic summer.[34] Indeed, the Icelanders came to believe that Irish monks had settled on the island before them. While the existence of these so-called *papar* may be highly questionable, they do function as a memory of the by then vanished north Atlantic clerical world of the Irish. Their era was likely one of relatively brief duration, when compared to those of other Irish exiles. Cormac's voyage, as recorded by Adomnán, probably lies near its beginning. Dicuil memorializes its end. In the two centuries between some Irish *peregrini* found their ocean deserts.

The Christian geographical scheme may have had another, less direct, impact, one upon the expression of *peregrinus* group cohesion among the Irish. This is the role that it played in inspiring the Irish to assert their ethnic self-identity. It has already been noted that geography and ethnography were closely linked in Classical and Christian thought. The location of Ireland, at the edge, could be interpreted negatively. It suggested that the Irish were less favoured and less civilized than their Continental neighbours. In response, the Irish affirmed their scholarship and Christian orthodoxy, a point which Columbanus makes, not always subtly, in his writings. For him, Irish learning was a font of excellence, not a source of deficiency; it gave him the confidence to speak on matters of doctrine and practice.[35] Rhetorically, Columbanus reverses the

usual assumption that lands distant from the Mediterranean cradle of Christianity were uncivilized, bleak and doctrinally suspect. Moreover, he offers an unusually personal insight into the dynamic of being an outsider in a foreign society. This dynamic also meant that Irish exiles tended to cluster together in identifiable religious and scholarly networks. For *peregrini* who chose to remain within Ireland, such issues of identity and solidarity were far less important, if at all. These *peregrini*, the *deoraid dé* of the law tracts**,** even more so than their north Atlantic brethren, are the least prominent group of exiles in academic scholarship. Intriguingly their number may have included women, *peregrinae*, who are otherwise almost entirely absent from the record. It is worth noting Jonas' memorable account of how one such woman inspired Columbanus to seek, firstly, *peregrinatio* within Ireland and, finally, exile overseas.[36] She even remarks that if she had been a man she would have taken the overseas option.

Remembering *peregrini*: absence and social memory

This articulation of Irish identity among overseas *peregrini* apparently contrasts with how they were viewed from home. For, here, there is a surprising *lacuna*, one long recognized by scholars, the seeming absence of overseas *peregrini* from Irish sources, especially as individuals.[37] The *peregrini* may have emphasized their Irishness but, it seems, their fellow countrymen, who remained in Ireland, were not so impressed. It has already been shown that the concepts of ascetic martyrdom and exile feature prominently in many Irish texts. This is also the case if only sources demonstrably written on the island, such as the vernacular law tracts, are considered. *Peregrinatio* is one of the best attested phenomena that can be traced through early medieval Irish writings. Moreover, overseas *peregrini* made crucial contributions to Irish intellectual culture. *Peregrinus* networks helped the movement of manuscripts to and from Ireland. They physically joined the Irish with their European neighbours, facilitating their contribution to the intellectual life of early medieval Christianity. This is practically demonstrated through the survival of Irish manuscripts in Continental libraries; it is also reflected in the long-lasting Irish presence in several European monasteries, such as Bobbio and St Gallen.[38] The close institutional ties between the Irish monastery of Slane and Péronne in northern France is another revealing example of the value attached to these networks by the Irish on both sides of the sea.[39] It seems logical to suppose that Irish exiles gravitated to these centres on account of their known links with home. Yet,

as scholars have noted, the medieval Irish chronicles barely commemorate any of the overseas *peregrini*. As these texts provide the preponderance of surviving historical information about specific individuals and churches, this is particularly frustrating.[40] It is worth stressing that this absence does not apply to *peregrini* within Ireland, many of whom may well be among the clerical multitudes whose deaths are recorded. Even among overseas *peregrini* there are some exceptions. Fursa († 649), who had significant connections in northern France and was considered the patron of Péronne, is mentioned in the Annals of Ulster. His fame as a visionary, combined with the institutional relationship between Slane and Péronne, are probably the decisive factors.[41] Much later, Dubthach mac Maíle Tuile († 869), author of the Bamberg cryptogram, is commemorated in the same text.[42] Nonetheless, the vast majority of overseas *peregrini*, including men as famous as Columbanus, are simply not mentioned.

One way of approaching this seeming evidential gap is through social memory. This can be defined as encompassing the chosen shared histories which join groups of people together. Such histories underpin the formation of communal identity and feed into the elaboration of social practice. Social memory is highly artificial and selective: certain events are memorialized, others are not. In recent years, scholars have become increasingly aware of the crucial role performed by the creation and maintenance of social memory in medieval societies.[43] In early medieval Ireland, ecclesiastics were among the most important custodians of social memory, although this was a function they shared with other groups such as professional poets.[44] The medieval Irish chronicles are an outstanding example of how social memory functions in practice. The ecclesiastical chroniclers chose who to commemorate and what institutions, secular and religious, to emphasize. Moreover, these choices can be closely mapped onto the interconnected communities, already discussed, which defined Irish life. The overseas *peregrini* did not fit into these structures. This is because the chroniclers' interests are largely confined to people and events within Ireland and, up to a point, the Irish kingdom of Dál Riata in northern Britain. Non-Irish happenings are recorded, but not consistently. A useful example is to contrast the apparent lack of interest in the Irish presence in Anglo-Saxon England in the chronicles with the detailed record provided by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[45] As the earliest stratum of the Irish chronicles ultimately originated from an Iona source, one might expect them to contain many echoes of English developments. Missionaries sent from Iona, after all, made the key contribution to the conversion of Northumbria. Moreover, these missionaries were

influential on the subsequent consolidation of Northumbrian ecclesiastical institutions. However, references are extremely limited and without the evidence provided by Bede it is doubtful that historians would now appreciate the foundational contribution of the Irish to this phase of English history. Of course, the chronicles and Bede's *Historia* are different genres of writing. Nonetheless, they are comparable in the sense that the *Historia* is also an articulation of social memory. Bede chooses to remember the Irish in England, while the Irish chroniclers do not.

Does this mean that Irish social memory purposefully excluded the *peregrini*? Answering this sheds a further light onto the Irish contexts of *peregrinatio*, especially in structural terms. It is an answer made up of partial observations. As already outlined, the Irish-specific concerns of the medieval chronicles almost certainly account for the lack of *peregrini* in their records. In addition, some exiles may have simply disappeared from knowledge entirely: this is surely the case with many of those *peregrini* who sought ascetic retreats in the north Atlantic. It could even be argued that their lack of commemoration is a marker of their success; they wished to leave Ireland behind them, disappearing beyond the bounds of normal society in the process. We know about Cormac ua Liatháin because he failed. But, perhaps, enquiry can be broadened. Irish social memory, particularly before around AD 800, is deeply concerned with *peregrinatio*. It is why it features, in various guises, in so many texts. These texts ask important questions. What is an exile? What status is proper to a *deorad dé*? How can one become a martyr? Are there deserts in the ocean? These questions go to the heart of *peregrinatio*. They also show a fascination with structure and process, a fascination that shaped the articulation of *peregrinatio* in Irish terms. It is these interests which ensured that *peregrinatio* became part of Irish social memory while individual *peregrini* faded.

Conclusions and contexts

At this point it is worth reconsidering the different elements which have been identified as contributing to the emergence of a distinctively Irish form of *peregrinatio* during the sixth and seventh centuries. How do these fit together into a shared and flexible framework? The first thing to note is that travel is a key unifying element. As already outlined, the Irish conceptualized the act of making a journey in a particular way which aligned it simultaneously with status and with punishment. At the same time, ideas of ascetic martyrdom had gained traction. Together, these provided a rationale for

peregrinatio within the island. An individual could sever thickly woven communal ties by crossing one of the multitude of boundaries that divided the many Irish local kingdoms. However, the inspiration to venture further was given an extra push by the Irish reception of the Christian geographical tradition. This helped transform the ocean into a space of ascetic and theological significance. Finally, for those who crossed the seas to Britain and the Continent, a further and highly practical dynamic developed. The likes of Columbanus and, a generation later, Fursa and his family circle, established networks which encouraged even more Irish clerics to travel abroad. By the eighth century this had attained a resilient self-sustaining momentum, a momentum which meant that the original ascetic impulses of the earliest *peregrini* came to be less obviously important. If anything, this demonstrates the extent to which Irish *peregrinus* networks flourished through flexibility; they mutated as circumstance dictated, retaining their relevance even as societies and fashions of religious expression changed. And it is this flexibility which defines *peregrinatio*, whether it is the long journey of Columbanus towards fame and Bobbio or Cormac's futile quest across wide Atlantic wastes.

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[1] Columbanus, *Epistula* V, §§1–2.
[2] Columbanus, *Epistula* II, §6.
[3] Adomnán, *VC*, 1.6; 2.42; 3.17.
[4] Jonas, *Vita Columbani* 1.3.
[5] T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976), 43–59; Michael Richter, *Ireland and her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 41–7.
[6] Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, eds, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose and Verse*, Volume 2 (Cambridge, 1903), pp. 244–7.
[7] Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in Dorothy Whitelock *et* al, eds, *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21–46.
[8] Jonas, *Vita Columbani* 1.3. For its influence, see, Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background'; Richter. *Ireland and her Neighbours*.
[9] Adomnán, *VC*, preface. Richter, *Ireland and her Neighbours*, pp. 49–53.
[10] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 49–50.
[11] Kathleen Hughes, 'The Changing Theories and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11 (1960), 143–51.
[12] Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006).
[13] Bede, *HE* III.4, III.13, IV.3; Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', 45–6.
[14] Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background'.
[15] These include *ambue* 'non-native', *cú glas* 'grey dog' *deorad* 'outsider' and *murchoirthe* 'foreigner', literally one thrown up by the sea.
[16] Francis John Byrne, 'Tribes and Tribalism in Early Ireland', *Ériu* 22 (1971), 128–66.
[17] Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 1–16.
[18] Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', 46–53.
[19] Mary E. Byrne, 'On the Punishment of Setting Adrift', *Ériu* 11 (1932), 97–102; Kelly, *Guide*, pp. 219–21.

[20] Muirchú, *Vita S. Patricii*, I.23.
[21] Discussed by Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', 48–9.
[22] There is a large literature on dating this text. David N. Dumville, 'Two Approaches to the Dating of "Navigatio Sancti Brendani"', *Studi Medievali* 29 (1988), 95–9, influentially suggests the eighth century.
[23] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, p. 72.
[24] Natalia Lozovsky, *'The Earth is our Book': Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400–1000* (Ann Arbor, 2000), pp. 6–8.
[25] Lozovsky, *'The Earth is our Book'*, pp. 10–20, 53–5.
[26] Adomnán, *VC*, 2.42.
[27] Jean Delumeau, *History of Paradise: The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition* (New York, 1995), pp. 42–56; Markus Bockmuehl, 'Locating Paradise', in Markus Bockmuehl and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds, *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 192–209.
[28] Delumeau, *History of Paradise*, pp. 42–56.
[29] Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Distant Islands: The Topography of Holiness in the *Nauigatio Sancti Brendani*', in Marion Glasscoe, ed, *The Medieval Mystical Tradition England, Ireland and Wales* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 1–20.
[30] Examples are *Nauigatio*, §§12, 17, 26.
[31] *Nauigatio*, §§28–9.
[32] Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200* (London, 1995), pp. 224–6.
[33] Dicuil, *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, §15.
[34] Dicuil, *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, §§11–13.
[35] Columbanus, *Epistula* I, §3; *Epistula* II, §§5–6; *Epistula* III, §2.
[36] Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, 1.3
[37] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 42–58.
[38] Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland*, pp. 222–4; *Ireland and her Neighbours*, pp. 177–80.
[39] F. J. Byrne, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick: *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*', *JRSAI* 124 (1994), 11–12; Jean-Michel Picard, ed, *Ireland and Northern France AD 600–850* (Dublin, 1991).
[40] Daniel Mc Carthy, *The Irish Annals. Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin, 2008); Nicholas Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge, 2010).
[41] He is commemorated s.a. AU 649. See also, Stefanie Hamann, 'St Fursa, The Genealogy of an Irish Saint—The Historical Person and his Cult', *PRIA* (C) 112 (2011), 1–41.
[42] He is commemorated s.a AU 869. His career is discussed by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish as Mediators of Antique Culture on the Continent', in Paul Leo Butzer and Dietrich Lorhrmann, eds, *Science in Western and Eastern Civilization* (Basel, 1993), pp. 41–52.
[43] James J. Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford, 1992).
[44] Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 162–9.
[45] Alan T. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', in Luuk A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, *Beda Venerabalis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian* (Groningen, 1996), pp. 31–60.