

A lacuna in Irish historiography: the Irish *peregrini* from Eoin MacNeill to *The Cambridge history of Ireland* and beyond

ALEXANDER O'HARA*
Trinity College Dublin

ABSTRACT. *This article highlights some of the historiographical trends over the past one hundred years in how the Irish diaspora in early medieval Europe has been studied. The role of the peregrini, the Irish monastic exiles who left Ireland for Britain and continental Europe from the sixth century onwards, has to some extent been marginal and tangential to the historiography of this island. Forms of modern 'Irophobia' in some scholarship have also led to an obfuscation of the early medieval religious and ethnic landscape by seeking to minimise Irish cultural influence. The article argues that by contextualising the phenomenon of Irish clerical exile in Europe within broader theological and comparative frameworks, further research in this field has the potential to clarify the influence of the Irish and to show how the experience of exile contributed to the formation of both Irish and European identities in the middle ages.*

Despite the growth and professionalisation in Irish historical studies since the time of Eoin MacNeill (1867–1945), the role of the *peregrini*, the Irish monastic exiles who left Ireland for Britain and continental Europe from the sixth century onwards, has to some extent been marginal and tangential to the historiography of this island. The Irish diaspora of the early middle ages was exclusively male and clerical and it was propelled by predominantly religious concerns — the *peregrini* embraced a voluntary form of religious exile from Ireland that was rooted in the Irish social context and monastic tradition.¹

There were varying types and degrees of *peregrinatio* within and outside of Ireland. One could be exiled as a legal punishment under secular law as a criminal and one could become a *peregrinus* or ascetic exile as a devotional practice within Ireland by simply leaving the territory of one's birth for another region.² The practice was not defined by gender. The holy woman who advised the young

* Alexander O'Hara, *Loyola Institute, School of Religion, Trinity College Dublin*, alohara@tcd.ie

¹ Elva Johnston, 'Exiles from the edge? The Irish contexts of *peregrinatio*' in Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (eds), *The Irish in early medieval Europe: identity, culture, and religion* (London, 2016), pp 38–52; T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The social background to Irish *peregrinatio*' in *Celtica*, xi (1976), pp 43–59.

² Pamela O'Neill, '*Peregrinatio*: punishment and exile in the early Gaelic church' in *Australian Celtic Journal*, ix (2010), pp 29–41; Stephanie Hayes-Healy, 'Patterns of

Columbanus to leave Ireland on ‘greater ascetic exile’ (*potior peregrinatio*) was herself a *peregrina* within Ireland who bemoaned the fact that her sex prevented her from leaving the island. In Jonas of Bobbio’s account, the anchoress clearly distinguishes between two kinds of *peregrinatio*: ‘It has been fifteen years since I left my home and here sought out a place of pilgrimage. Since then, with Christ’s help, I have set my hand to the plough without looking back, and had the weakness of my gender not hindered me, I would have sought out a place of superior exile across the sea.’³ For the sake of clarity, in this article *peregrinatio* is taken to mean ascetic exile outside of Ireland (*potior peregrinatio*), whether that was undertaken to Britain (in the case of Columba of Iona or Aidan of Lindisfarne) or to continental Europe (in the case of Columbanus of Bobbio). Donnchadh Ó Corráin’s monumental three-volume reference work *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium: Medieval Irish books and texts (c.400–c.1600)* (henceforth *CLH*) in 2017 revealed not only the rich source material from which historians of medieval Ireland can draw, but also the significant contribution that modern scholarship has made in the field of medieval Irish history since the publication of James F. Kenney’s *The sources for the early history of Ireland: ecclesiastical* in 1929.⁴

I

Following the impact of the world’s first identifiable pandemic, the sixth-century Justinianic plague in Europe (c.541–9), the earliest phase of recorded Irish migration was characterised by predominantly ascetic monastic exiles such as Columba of Iona (d.597), Columbanus of Bobbio (d.615), Fursa (d.650), Kilian of Würzburg (d.687), Virgil of Salzburg (d.784) and others who espoused a voluntary form of religious exile in leaving Ireland as *peregrini* to establish monastic foundations in Britain and on the continent.⁵ The second phase of Irish migration to Europe from the mid-eighth century to the end of the tenth century featured a series of Irish theologians and scholars who left Ireland to seek patronage at the Carolingian imperial and episcopal courts. This period coincided with Scandinavian attacks on the British Isles that impacted monastic life and scholarly activity in Ireland. Scholars such as John Scottus Eriugena (c.800–77), Sedulius Scottus (*fl.* 840–60), Dicuil (c.760–c.830), Dungal of Pavia (*fl.* 811–28) and Donatus of Fiesole (*fl.* 829–76) amongst others produced a range of works of

peregrinatio in the early middle ages’ in eadem, *Medieval paradigms: essays in honour of Jeremy Duquesnay Adams* (New York, 2005), pp 3–24.

³ This is the first (but by no means the last) recorded instance of a desire for emigration from Ireland. Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani abbatis et discipulorumque eius* I. 3, ed. Bruno Krusch in *Ionae vitae sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi* (Hannover and Leipzig, 1905), p. 156. Alexander O’Hara and Ian Wood (trans.), *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast* (Liverpool, 2017), p. 100.

⁴ Donnchadh Ó Corráin (ed.), *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium: medieval Irish books and texts (c.400–c.1600)* (3 vols, Turnhout, 2017); James F. Kenney (ed.), *The sources for the early history of Ireland: an introduction and guide. Volume 1: ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929; revised reprint in 1966 with addenda and corrections by Ludwig Bieler).

⁵ Peter Sarris, ‘New approaches to the plague of Justinian’ in *Past & Present*, no. 254 (2021), pp 315–46.

philosophy, theology, geography, astronomy, poetry and biblical exegesis. Like the earlier monastic exiles, these scholars relied on a network of secular and ecclesiastical patrons who provided them with protection and employment for their teaching and scholarship. The final third phase of Irish clerical exile relates to the federation of Irish monasteries (the *Schottenklöster*) established from Regensburg on the Danube by Marianus Scottus (d. c.1088) and his Irish abbatial successors in Southern Germany and Austria. In this article I will focus on the historiography dealing with the first and second phases of the Irish diaspora from the publication of Eoin MacNeill's *Phases of Irish history* (1919) to the publication of *The Cambridge history of Ireland i: 600–1550* (2018). My aim is to show, notwithstanding the articles by Johnston, Charles-Edwards and O'Neill amongst others cited throughout, how the study of the Irish medieval diaspora has on the whole been neglected in Irish historiography and to propose some ways forward for the field. It aims also to draw attention to how forms of modern anti-Irish bias or Hibernophobia in some scholarship have led to an obfuscation of the early medieval religious and ethnic landscape by seeking to minimise Irish cultural contributions.

II

The early medieval Irish émigré monks were the first to express a sense of Irish identity in writing and to articulate in their poetry a particular view of their island homeland that would in time change the way Ireland and the Irish were perceived both at home and abroad. Confronted with a late antique view of Ireland and the Irish as the preeminent barbarian island on the edge of the known world, these exiles played a key role in gradually shaping a new perception of the island that can be traced in their writings and in the hagiographies later written about them. The first people to write about Europe as a collective social and cultural unity were exiles and immigrants from Ireland. Exile has played a key role in the formation of not only individual but also of collective identities.⁶ Coming from the periphery of Europe, these exiles acted as cultural brokers in the networks they forged with elite patrons and grassroots communities in post-Roman Europe. It was during this early medieval period that the future nations and peoples of Europe began to take shape.⁷ The position of the Irish as outsiders enabled them to view the disparate peoples of Europe as a unity even though those peoples did not yet perceive themselves as such. Irish authors also incorporated their home-island within a larger geographical purview and played a key role in the creation of medieval concepts of Europe.⁸

Those who left Ireland as religious exiles were often those who wrote about their Irish ethnic identity and island homeland. Their theological understanding that they

⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples: sacred sources of national identity* (Oxford, 2003).

⁷ Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (eds), *Post-Roman transitions: Christian and Barbarian identities in the early medieval West* (Turnhout, 2013); Patrick J. Geary, *The myth of nations: the medieval origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2003).

⁸ Klaus Oschema, 'An Irish making of Europe (early and high middle ages)' in Wolfram R. Keller and Dagmar Schlüter (eds), *"A fantastic and abstruse Latinity?" Hiberno-continental cultural and literary interactions in the middle ages* (Münster, 2017), pp 12–30.

were merely pilgrims en route to their true *patria* in Heaven did not preclude a robust sense of Irish identity. The experience of exile and interacting with different ethnic groups served to sharpen and give expression to a burgeoning sense of what it meant to be Irish.⁹ Their history and experience are therefore central to any historical work on Ireland, especially dealing with the medieval period. The ritual of ascetic exile or *peregrinatio* entailed by its very nature a process of disengaging from Ireland. With some exceptions, the *peregrini* were generally forgotten in their homeland while their memory was celebrated and memorialised abroad in Britain and in continental Europe where they had settled. Despite the significance of the *peregrini*, this has also largely been the case in Irish historiography over the past century to which I now turn. In the following I seek to trace these historiographical trends chronologically from 1918 to 2018.

III

In his influential *Phases of Irish history* (1919) Eoin MacNeill did not deal with the *peregrini* at all. He only mentioned them in passing, referring the reader instead to the work of Margaret Stokes.¹⁰ Stokes had published two works on early medieval Irish saints in Europe in the 1890s which were essentially Victorian travel accounts, but were richly illustrated and had served to draw some attention to the traces of the Irish saints in Europe and of European influence in Ireland.¹¹ Now considered the founder of the discipline of early Irish history, MacNeill's scholarly and linguistic talents were understandably focused on his principal area of expertise: early Ireland. *Phases of Irish history* grew out of a series of twelve public lectures he gave in Dublin between 10 January and 18 March 1918 and was written in response to the views in Goddard Henry Orpen's work on Anglo-Norman Ireland concerning the pre-conquest Irish and early Irish history.¹² The Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland was decidedly a good thing for Orpen as 'Until the coming of the Normans — and then only partially — the Irish never felt the direct influence of a race more advanced than herself'.¹³ A graduate of Trinity College Dublin (T.C.D.), Orpen's Anglocentric view of medieval Irish history, and preference for the later medieval period, would have a long legacy in Irish medieval studies, especially at T.C.D., which did not have a position in early medieval Ireland until 2016 when the Ussher Assistant Professorship in Early Medieval Ireland was established.¹⁴ Although Orpen was not affiliated

⁹ See the contributions in Alexander O'Hara (ed.), *Columbanus and the peoples of post-Roman Europe* (Oxford, 2018).

¹⁰ Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish history* (Dublin, 1919), pp 239–40.

¹¹ Margaret Stokes, *Six months in the Apennines; or, a pilgrimage in search of vestiges of the Irish saints in Italy* (London, 1892); eadem., *Three months in the forests of France: a pilgrimage in search of vestiges of the Irish saints in France* (London, 1895).

¹² For the scholarly and political background, see Elva Johnston, 'Eoin MacNeill's early medieval Ireland: a scholarship for politics or a politics of scholarship?' in Chris Jones, Conor Kostick and Klaus Oschema (eds), *Making the medieval relevant: how medieval studies contribute to improving our understanding of the present* (Berlin, 2020), pp 212–24.

¹³ Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333* (4 vols, Oxford, 1911–20), i, p. 105.

¹⁴ Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, on which see Seán Duffy, 'Historical revisit: Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169–1333* (1911–20)' in *I.H.S.*, xxxii, no. 126 (2000), pp 246–59. See also Stephen H. Harrison, 'Re-fighting the battle of

with T.C.D. (he was a gentleman scholar), his scholarship and magnum opus would influence the work of Edmund Curtis, A. Jocelyn Otway-Ruthven, and their successors in what constituted the field of study of medieval Ireland as a subject at T.C.D. Curtis's *A history of medieval Ireland*, published in 1923, resolutely ignored the early medieval period as did his successor, Otway-Ruthven, whose cursory introductory chapter on Gaelic Ireland in her own *History of medieval Ireland* of 1968 (dedicated to Curtis) was written by Kathleen Hughes, allowing Otway-Ruthven to move on to her main area of expertise, Ireland after the Norman invasion.¹⁵

The Catholic Church in Ireland was just as uninterested in promoting scholarship of this so-called 'golden age' in the Irish church. Thomas O'Loughlin's assessment of Catholic scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century is worth quoting:

there was reluctance on the part of the Catholic Church to support the study of the early medieval period. At no point, despite a policy of sending young clerical scholars abroad for study, was anyone sent to learn the new disciplines that were then changing the face of patrology ... This was a great loss, and there were no studies of Irish materials comparable to the large historical projects sponsored by the Church on the Continent in the first half of the century ... The full effect of this neglect we shall never be able to estimate, we know of some materials that were lost in the two World Wars, but how much more? Given its unique resources in the Irish context, its access to the competent training and to materials abroad, this neglect is a scandal in the history of Irish studies.¹⁶

Some early twentieth-century continental European Catholic scholars were more appreciative of and interested in the *peregrini*, as seen, for example, in the work of the Breton Benedictine scholar Louis Gougaud, whose earlier work in French was published in English translation in 1923.¹⁷ His article of 1924 on 'The Isle of Saints' traced the use of the term *insula sanctorum* to refer to Ireland from Marianus Scottus of Regensburg in the eleventh century to the modern period.¹⁸

Otherwise, interest in the Irish *peregrini* in the 1920s and 30s was muted. Helen Waddell's bestselling *The wandering scholars of the middle ages* (1927) deals with the Irish *peregrini* in passing, and she translated some of their Latin poetry in her popular *Mediaeval Latin lyrics*.¹⁹ The Jesuit scholar John Ryan published his *Irish*

Down: Orpen, MacNeill and the Irish nation-state' in Michael Brown and Stephen H. Harrison (eds), *The medieval world and the modern mind* (Dublin, 2000), pp 171–82.

¹⁵ Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland: from 1086 to 1513* (Dublin, 1923), on which see James Lydon, 'Historical revisit: Edmund Curtis, *A history of medieval Ireland* (1923, 1938)' in *I.H.S.*, xxxi, no. 124 (1999), pp 535–48. A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland, with an introduction by Kathleen Hughes* (London, 1968).

¹⁶ Thomas O'Loughlin, 'The Latin sources of medieval Irish culture: a partial *status quaestionis*' in Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (eds), *Progress in medieval Irish studies* (Maynooth, 1996), pp 92–3.

¹⁷ Louis Gougaud, *Gaelic pioneers of Christianity: the work and influence of Irish monks and saints in continental Europe (6th to 12th cent.)* (Dublin, 1923).

¹⁸ Louis Gougaud, 'The Isle of Saints' in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xiii, no. 51 (1924), pp 363–80.

¹⁹ Helen Waddell, *The wandering scholars of the middle ages* (London, 1927). The book was a bestseller, going through three editions in the first year. See 'Introduction' by John

monasticism: origins and early development in 1931, and this remains the only survey work on early Irish monasticism in which the *peregrini* are treated as an integral part.²⁰ Apart from the contribution of Mario Esposito in the field of Hiberno-Latin, scholarship on the Irish medieval diaspora in Europe was minimal during the war period.²¹

It was during the 1950s and 1960s that scholarly output on early medieval Ireland and the Irish in Europe began to increase in quality and quantity. The Austrian classicist, Ludwig Bieler, who left Vienna after the Anschluss and found asylum in Ireland in 1940, brought an exceptional talent to bear on Patrician scholarship, and built greater awareness of the heritage of the Irish *peregrini* in Europe. Compiled over many years, his collection of microfilms of manuscripts containing Irish material in continental libraries is now housed in the National Library of Ireland and is, in addition to his editorial work on Hiberno-Latin texts, an extraordinary legacy in this field.²² The historic Luxeuil conference of 1950 to commemorate the fourteenth centenary of the birth of Columbanus and orchestrated by the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman to bring together diplomats, statesmen, and academics at the start of the project of European integration, gave new impetus in the postwar period to the study of Columbanus.²³ This was followed in 1957 by the publication of the St Andrews Ph.D. thesis of G. S. M. Walker who edited and translated the writings attributed to Columbanus in the second volume of the *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* series published by the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.²⁴ This series has published a number of important sources for the *peregrini* from this period, notably Dicuili's *Liber de mensura orbis terra* in 1967 and the works of John Scottus Eriugena.²⁵ 1959 saw the publication in Zurich of a little-known work by the Swiss scholar Margrit Koch on *Sankt Fridolin und sein Biograph Balther* that deals with the hagiographical legend of a pseudo-Irish saint and on the perception of Ireland and the Irish in continental saints' Lives.²⁶

The work of the Cambridge historian Kathleen Hughes on the early Irish church in the 1960s included a balanced consideration of the *peregrini* outside

Scattergood in the reprinted issue of Helen Waddell, *Mediaeval Latin lyrics* (Dublin, 2008), pp v–xxxviii.

²⁰ John Ryan, *Irish monasticism: origins and early development* (New York, 1931).

²¹ Mario Esposito, *Irish books and learning in mediaeval Europe*, ed. Michael Lapidge, Variorum Collected Studies Series 313 (Aldershot, 1990); idem, *Studies in Hiberno-Latin literature*, ed. Michael M. Gorman, Variorum Collected Studies Series 810 (Aldershot, 2006).

²² Hermann Rasche, 'Ludwig Bieler' in Gisela M. B. Holfter (ed.), *German-speaking exiles in Ireland, 1933–1945* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 172.

²³ On the conference, see Alexander O'Hara, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *Columbanus and the peoples*, pp 3–5; *Mélanges Colombaniens: Actes du Congrès International de Luxeuil, 20–23 juillet 1950* (Paris, 1951).

²⁴ *Sancti columbani opera*, ed. G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* II (Dublin, 1957).

²⁵ *Dicuili Liber de mensura orbis terrae*, ed. J. J. Tierney, with contributions by Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1967); *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon (De diuisione naturae), Liber primus*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, with the collaboration of Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1968).

²⁶ Margrit Koch, *Sankt Fridolin und sein biograph Balther: irische heilige in der literarischen darstellung des mittelalters* (Zurich, 1959).

of Ireland.²⁷ In 1963 John Ryan published a short collection of essays entitled *Irish monks in the Golden Age* based on the Thomas Davis Lectures broadcast by Radió Éireann, that included contributions by the Oxford medieval historian J. M. Wallace-Hadrill on Aidan of Lindisfarne; the Jesuit Bollandist scholar Paul Grosjean on Virgil of Salzburg; and the Sorbonne scholar Marguerite-Marie Dubois on Columbanus.²⁸ This had followed a volume entitled *The miracle of Ireland* edited by the French Academician Henri Daniel-Rops.²⁹ 1963 also saw the publication of Ludwig Bieler's richly produced and illustrated *Ireland: harbinger of the middle ages* published by Oxford University Press which dealt substantially and sensitively with the *peregrini*.³⁰ Bieler concluded that 'between 600 and 750 the Irish ... constitute the decisive cultural factor throughout the territory of the future Carolingian Empire'.³¹ A weightier piece of classical German scholarship appeared two years later with the Munich historian Friedrich Prinz's *Frühes Mönchtum im Frankenreich*, which dealt in part with monasteries established by Irish founders and which coined the term 'Hiberno-Frankish monasticism' to describe the monastic foundations established by *peregrini* such as Columbanus, Fursa and their Frankish successors.³² It attempted to map methodically and categorise those monastic foundations that had links to Irish *peregrini*. Prinz would produce a number of articles in this field in the subsequent years and while he is often now criticised for his lack of nuance in treating the diversity of so-called Hiberno-Frankish monasticism, his work moved the field forward significantly.³³ The 2007 Manchester Ph.D. thesis of Sarah Tatum and the 2012 PhD thesis of Yaniv Fox, the latter of which was published as *Power and religion in Merovingian Gaul: Columbanian monasticism and the Frankish elites* by Cambridge University Press in 2014, substantially built upon and modified the work of Prinz by investigating aristocratic networks and ties in greater detail and showing (in the case of Tatum) how hagiographers in the Columbanian monastic network attempted to maintain distance from their aristocratic patrons.³⁴

IV

It is not surprising after a spate of laudatory studies on the *peregrini* and their influence that the iconoclasm of the late 1960s would seek to dismantle some of

²⁷ Kathleen Hughes, *The church in early Irish society* (London, 1966), chapter 9; eadem, 'The changing theory and practice of Irish pilgrimage' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xi (1960), pp 143–51.

²⁸ John Ryan (ed.), *Irish monks in the golden age* (Dublin, 1963).

²⁹ Henri Daniel-Rops (ed.), *The miracle of Ireland* (Dublin, 1959).

³⁰ Ludwig Bieler, *Ireland: harbinger of the middle ages* (Oxford, 1963).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³² Friedrich Prinz, *Frühes mönchtum im Frankenreich: kultur und gesellschaft in Gallien, den Rheinlanden und Bayern am beispiel der monastischen entwicklung (4. bis 8. Jahrhundert)* (Munich and Vienna, 1965).

³³ Friedrich Prinz, 'Heiligenkult und adelsherrschaft im spiegel merowingischer hagiographie' in *Historische Zeitschrift*, cciv (1967), pp 529–44; idem, 'Columbanus, the Frankish nobility and the territories east of the Rhine' in H. B. Clarke and Mary Brennan (eds), *Columbanus and Merovingian monasticism* (Oxford, 1981), pp 73–87.

³⁴ Sarah Tatum, 'Hagiography, family and Columbanian monasticism in seventh-century Francia' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 2007); Yaniv Fox, *Power and religion in Merovingian Gaul: columbanian monasticism and the Frankish elites* (Cambridge, 2014).

these grand narratives. A contrary view was advanced by Edmondo Coccia's 200-page article of 1967 'La cultura irlandese precarolingia: miracolo o mito?' ('Pre-Carolingian Irish culture: miracle or myth?') in the Italian journal *Studi Medievali*, in which he concluded that Irish literary production during the pre-Carolingian period was 'mediocre and of very little value'.³⁵ The note of scepticism sounded in Coccia's article had been anticipated by Johannes Duft in 1956, and even then was nothing new, but it would be taken up by more scholars in the years ahead.³⁶ Duft had drawn attention to what he termed 'Iromania' and 'Irophobia', two contrasting currents of opinion on how Ireland and the Irish were perceived in medieval Europe (and specifically on the nature of their influence and contribution — or lack thereof — to Western medieval culture) as it was reflected in the medieval historical sources and in later historiography.³⁷

This trend in historical studies from the late 1960s onwards coincided with the outbreak of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and with Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) bombings in Britain during the course of the 1970s and '80s.³⁸ These strained political circumstances brought a more sceptical attitude to the influence of the Irish medieval diaspora in Europe. This approach, which tends to suggest Irish influence was minimal and short-lived, is seen for example in the publications of Ian Wood in the early 1980s, and in his recent O'Donnell Lectures published in 2015 and 2016 as 'The Irish in England and on the continent in the seventh century', in which he seeks to downplay Irish influence in Europe.³⁹ In contrast, Clare Stancliffe has made significant contributions to the historiography of early medieval Ireland and the *peregrini* by highlighting how the Irish understood *peregrinatio* as a form of martyrdom,⁴⁰ while Thomas Charles-Edward's 1976 article on 'The social background to Irish *peregrinatio*' showed how native Irish law influenced and informed the monastic practice of *peregrinatio*.

German scholarly interest in the *peregrini* continued into the 1970s and 80s with publications by Walter Berschin on St Gallen and the figure of Columbanus's rebellious disciple, Gallus, in addition to Arnold Angenendt's 1972 *Monachi peregrini* on the founder of the monastery of Reichenau, Pirmin, and his other articles on Irish

³⁵ Edmondo Coccia, 'La cultura irlandese precarolingia: miracolo o mito?' in *Studi Medievali*, viii (1967), p. 420. Coccia was reacting to the title of the 1959 work *The miracle of Ireland*.

³⁶ Johannes Duft, 'Iromanie-Irophobie: fragen um die frühmittelalterliche Irenmission, exemplifiziert an St Gallen und Alemannien' in *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Kirchengeschichte*, I (1956), pp 241–62.

³⁷ See also Michael J. Enright, 'Iromanie-Irophobie revisited: a suggested frame of reference for considering continental reactions to Irish *peregrini* in the seventh and eighth centuries' in Jörg Jarnut, Ulrich Nonn and Michael Richter (eds), *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit* (Sigmaringen, 1994), pp 367–79.

³⁸ It is noteworthy that Liz Curtis's *Nothing but the same old story: the roots of anti-Irish racism* (London, 1984) was published in London in the 1980s.

³⁹ Ian Wood, 'A prelude to Columbanus: the monastic achievement in the Burgundian territories' in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, pp 3–19; idem, 'The *Vita Columbani* and Merovingian hagiography' in *Peritia*, i (1982), pp 63–80; idem, 'The Irish in England and on the continent in the seventh century: Part I' in *Peritia*, xxvi (2015), pp 171–98; idem, 'The Irish in England and on the continent in the seventh century: Part II' in *Peritia*, xxvii (2016), pp 189–214.

⁴⁰ Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, white and blue martyrdom' in Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick and David Dumville (eds), *Ireland in early mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 21–46.

peregrinatio.⁴¹ The early 1980s saw the founding of *Peritia* by the University College Cork (U.C.C.) academic Donnchadh Ó Corráin, a journal which has done much to advance our knowledge in this field, and the publication of the series of volumes on *Irland im Europa* based on the 1981 colloquium 'Ireland and Europe in the early middle ages' organised by the Europa Zentrum Tübingen and the Board of Medieval Studies Dublin. The Tübingen volumes were major publications that are still indispensable for the scholarship of the *peregrini*.⁴²

The 1970s witnessed renewed investigation of the historical ties between the islands and links to Europe, with Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community (E.E.C.) in 1973 together with the United Kingdom. Prior to his elevation to the archbishopric of Armagh in 1977 and then to the cardinalate, Tomás Ó Fiaich, as professor of modern Irish history at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, had been an enthusiastic advocate for scholarship in this field and published a number of popular works on the subject.⁴³

The historiography of the 1980s saw widening horizons with edited volumes on *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism* by Mary Brennan and Howard Clarke, as well as contributions on Killian of Würzburg and Virgil of Salzburg for centenary anniversaries by continental scholars that followed conferences and exhibitions.⁴⁴ The *Bibliography of Celtic-Latin literature 400–1200*, compiled by Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe and published by the Royal Irish Academy in 1985, provided a valuable resource for scholars in this field and an up-to-date bibliography and list of manuscripts.⁴⁵ Graduates of University College Dublin (U.C.D.) were making their mark on the study of early medieval Ireland, notably Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, Jean-Michel Picard and U.C.D. staff member Michael Richter whose *Medieval Ireland — the enduring tradition* was published in German in 1983 before appearing in its first English edition in 1988.⁴⁶ Richter maintained a

⁴¹ Walter Berschin, 'Gallus abbas vindicatus' in *Historisches Jahrbuch*, xciv (1975), pp 257–77; idem., *Eremus und Insula: St. Gallen und die Reichenau im mittelalter, modell einer lateinischen literaturlandschaft* (Wiesbaden, 1987); Arnold Angenendt, *Monachi peregrini: studien zu Pirmin und den monastischen vorstellungen des frühen mittelalters* (Munich, 1972); idem., 'Die irische *peregrinatio* und ihre auswirkungen auf dem Kontinent vor dem Jahre 800' in Heinz Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren mittelalter* (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1982), i, pp 52–79.

⁴² *Die Iren und Europa im früheren mittelalter*. The first of a number of volumes in the series that are still standard works.

⁴³ Tomás Ó Fiaich, *Gaelscrinte san Eoraip* (Dublin, 1986); idem., *Irish cultural influence in Europe, VIth to XIIIth century: key to map* (Dublin, 1967); idem., *Columbanus in his own words* (Dublin, 1974).

⁴⁴ *Columbanus and Merovingian monasticism; Kilian. Mōch aus Irland – aller Franken patron 689–1989*. Katalog der Sonder-Ausstellung zur 1300-Jahr-Feier des Kiliansmartyriums 1. Juli 1989 –1. Oktober 1989 Festung Marienberg Würzburg (Würzburg, 1989); Heinrich Dopsch and Roswitha Juffinger (eds), *Virgil von Salzburg, Missionar und Gelehrter*. Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums vom 21–24. September 1984 in der Salzburger Residenz (Salzburg, 1985).

⁴⁵ Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe (eds), *A bibliography of Celtic-Latin literature 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985).

⁴⁶ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Rath Melsigi, Willibrord, and the earliest Echternach manuscripts' in *Peritia*, iii (1984), pp 17–49; Jean-Michel Picard, 'The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*' in *Peritia*, 1 (1982), pp 160–77; Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland — the enduring tradition* (Dublin, 1988); idem., *Ireland and her neighbours in the seventh century* (Dublin, 1999).

lively interest in medieval Ireland, but always with an eye to the wider European context. Another U.C.D. graduate, John O'Meara, published a monograph on *Eriugena* with Oxford University Press in 1988 and founded the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies in 1970, in addition to his English translations of Latin texts important for Irish historical studies, notably Gerald of Wales's *Topography of Ireland* and *The voyage of Saint Brendan*.⁴⁷

Dáibhí Ó Cróinín's 1995 textbook, *Early medieval Ireland 400–1200*, which was revised and updated for the second edition published in 2017, clearly filled a much-needed gap in the literature and incorporates the history of the *peregrini* in this general survey work of early medieval Ireland, as Michael Richter had done before him.⁴⁸ Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel's work on the *Schottenklöster*, the Irish monastic foundations from the High medieval period in Germany and Austria, has also contributed greatly to the later Irish monastic foundations on the continent as she has shown the Munster links with these foundations.⁴⁹ Damian Bracken and Diarmuid Scully have brought thoughtful and novel approaches to the study of the *peregrini* and the perception of Ireland in late antiquity and the medieval period by situating the *peregrini* in their studies as influenced by and interacting with their wider late antique contexts.⁵⁰ Thomas Charles-Edwards's comprehensive *Early Christian Ireland* of 2000 has a lengthy and insightful chapter on Columbanus, while the 2001 volume *Studies in Irish hagiography: saints and scholars*, edited by John Carey, Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain, contains a number of important contributions, notably Clare Stancliffe's on Jonas of Bobbio's *Life of Columbanus* and David Dumville's on St Cathróe of Metz and the 'hagiography of exoticism' about pseudo-Irish saints on the continent.⁵¹

⁴⁷ John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford, 1988); John J. O'Meara (trans.), *Gerald of Wales. The history and topography of Ireland* (Hardmondsworth, 1982); idem, *The voyage of Saint Brendan: journey to the promised land* (Dublin, 1978).

⁴⁸ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early medieval Ireland 400–1200* (London, 1995; 2nd ed. London, 2017).

⁴⁹ Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel, 'Aspects of the promotion of Irish saints' cults in medieval Germany' in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, xxxix (1982), pp 220–24; eadem, 'Irish Benedictine monasteries on the Continent' in Martin Browne and Colmán Ó Clabaigh (eds), *The Irish Benedictines: a history* (Blackrock, 2005), pp 25–63; Damian Bracken and Dagmar Ó Riain-Raedel (eds), *Ireland and Europe in the twelfth century: reform and renewal* (Dublin, 2006).

⁵⁰ Damian Bracken, 'Authority and duty: Columbanus and the primacy of Rome' in *Peritia*, xvi (2002), pp 168–213; idem, 'Columbanus and the language of concord' in *Columbanus and the peoples of post-Roman Europe*, pp 19–50; Diarmuid Scully, 'Pagans, Christians and Barbarians: the Irish in Giraldus Cambrensis and the Graeco-Roman sources' in Florence Bourgne, Leo Carruthers and Arlette Sancery (eds), *Un espace colonial et ses avatars. Naissance d'identités nationales: Angleterre, France, Irlande* (Paris, 2008), pp 45–59; Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (eds), *Listen, O Isles, unto me: studies in medieval word and image in honour of Jennifer O'Reilly* (Cork, 2011).

⁵¹ Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000); Clare Stancliffe, 'Jonas's *Life of Columbanus and his disciples*' in John Carey, Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain (eds), *Studies in Irish hagiography: saints and scholars* (Dublin, 2001), pp 189–220; David Dumville, 'St Cathróe of Metz and the hagiography of exoticism' in Carey *et al.* (eds), *Studies in Irish hagiography*, pp 172–88.

Interest in the Irish medieval diaspora has not translated into significant attention in larger studies of the medieval period in Ireland. The 2005 *A new history of Ireland volume 1* edited by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and published by Oxford University Press, contains approximately four pages on the *peregrini* in a work of 1,408 pages.⁵² This is comparable to the four pages given to the subject in John Carey's chapter on 'Learning, imagination and belief' in *The Cambridge history of Ireland: Volume 1, 600–1550* published in 2018, although the space dedicated to the early medieval period as a whole is much greater in the *New history*.⁵³

Furthermore, despite the surge in publications and scholarship that has developed around the figure of Columbanus and his hagiographer, Jonas of Bobbio, in recent years (given greater impetus by the fourteenth centenary commemorations in 2015), a definitive biographical study on Columbanus comparable to other major Irish historical figures remains to be written.⁵⁴ The recent work produced by an array of Irish, European and international scholars has filled an important gap in our knowledge on this subject, but there are clearly lacunae with regards to the historiography of the *peregrini* as a whole that remain to be addressed.⁵⁵ For example, Pádraig Ó Riain's *A dictionary of Irish saints*, published in 2011, only deals with Irish saints venerated in Ireland.⁵⁶ Columbanus, Fursa, Kilian and many other *peregrini* do not feature in it. This is understandable, as a work of this size had to be circumscribed and it is a remarkable resource for the cult of saints in Ireland. But comparable work needs to be carried out for the Irish saints on the continent. In my review of *The Irish in early medieval Europe: identity, culture, and religion* edited by Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (2016) I highlighted examples of the editors' flippancy in their remarks and asides: 'hard to swallow for some proud Irishmen'; 'we meet another proud Irishman'. There was also a

⁵² Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, i: prehistoric and early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005).

⁵³ John Carey, 'Learning, imagination and belief' in Brendan Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland, i: 600–1550* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 47–75.

⁵⁴ Alexander O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the legacy of Columbanus: sanctity and community in the seventh century* (Oxford, 2018); idem (ed.), *Columbanus and the peoples*; idem (ed. & trans) with Ian Wood, *Jonas of Bobbio: Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé*; Eleonora Destefanis (ed.), *L'eredità di San Colombano. Memoria e culto attraverso il medioevo* (Rennes, 2017); Alain Dubreque and Sébastien Bully (eds), *Colomban et son influence: moines et monastères de haut moyen Âge* (Rennes, 2018); Conor Newman and Mark Stansbury (eds), *Identity in early medieval Europe* (Rennes, 2022). On Jonas of Bobbio see also the seminal works of the French Benedictine scholar Adalbert de Vogüé, 'En lisant Jonas de Bobbio: notes sur la *Vie de Saint Colomban*' in *Studia Monastica: Commentarium ad Rem Monasticam Investigandam*, xxx (1988), pp 63–103; his French translation of the *Vita Columbani* with extensive notes, *Jonas de Bobbio. Vie de Saint Colomban et de ses disciples* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, 1988); and his more general survey work *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'antiquité* (12 vols, Paris, 2007), xi; and those of the German historian Albrecht Diem, chief among which is his 'Monks, kings, and the transformation of sanctity: Jonas of Bobbio and the end of the holy man' in *Speculum*, lxxxii (2007), pp 521–59.

⁵⁵ For example, the recent work of the Finnish scholar Katja Ritari, *Pilgrimage to heaven: eschatology and monastic spirituality in early medieval Ireland* (Turnhout, 2016) mainly focuses on the expectation of judgement and the afterlife in early medieval Irish monastic spirituality.

⁵⁶ Pádraig Ó Riain (ed.), *A dictionary of Irish saints* (Dublin, 2011).

tendency to minimise Irish influence on the continent in statements like: ‘Whether originality, when it is present, can be directly linked to a scholar’s Irish heritage is a matter of contention.’⁵⁷ I drew attention to how the authors employed value-based judgements in conjunction with ethnic indicators in relation to Irish people only, while not doing so when writing about other ethnic groups. Thus, we find no ‘obstinate’ or ‘proud’ Anglo-Saxons or Franks in the book, yet the editors chose to use these terms when writing about Irish subjects, superimposing their own value-judgements onto what should have been an objective historical argument.

Perhaps due to closer geographical, historical and cultural connections to Ireland, the Irish and British scholarly output and interest in the cult of Columba/Columcille (521–97), who left Ireland and founded the monastery of Iona in the Hebrides in 563, has been significantly greater than that afforded any other Irish *peregrinus*.⁵⁸ A notable contrast to the missionary to the Picts is the case of Fursa, the first Irish missionary figure in Anglo-Saxon England, who established a monastery in East Anglia in 633 together with his brothers Faolán and Ultán. He continued his *peregrinatio* to Gaul in 644 where he established another monastery at Lagny-sur-Marne with the support of the leading Frankish noble and mayor of the palace, Erchinoald, who fostered his cult at Péronne following his death. As Fursa was reported to have had a near death experience and visions of heaven and hell which feature in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (III.19) and in the *Vita Prima Fursei*, his interest for historians has primarily been in relation to the development of the doctrine of Purgatory in the early medieval West.⁵⁹ Notable exceptions are the 1918 article by the English liturgical scholar F. E. Warren who wrote the standard work on the liturgy of the early Irish church and the 1952 article by the German scholar John Hennig.⁶⁰ The Occasional Papers published by the Fursey Pilgrims in Norwich since 2001 have brought new

⁵⁷ Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (eds), *The Irish in early medieval Europe: identity, culture, and religion* (London, 2016), pp 205, 240. See the review of the work by Alexander O’Hara in *The Medieval Review*: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/23484> (8 March 2017). For Flechner’s and Meeder’s Reply in *The Medieval Review*: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/23536> (20 April 2017) and O’Hara’s Response: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/article/view/23763> (21 June 2017).

⁵⁸ The secondary literature is too extensive to cite comprehensively. See *CLH* 230 for a full list of secondary works which runs to seven pages (pp 282–90). Key works are A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (eds), *Adomnán’s Life of Columba* (London, 1961; 2nd ed. Oxford, 1991); Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: the history and hagiography of the monastic familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988); Richard Sharpe trans., *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth, 1995); Cormac Bourke (ed.), *Studies in the cult of Saint Columba* (Dublin, 1997); Dauvit Broun and Thomas Owen Clancy (eds), *Spes Sctorum: hope of Scots. Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1999).

⁵⁹ Claude Carozzi, ‘La géographie de l’Au-delà et sa signification pendant le haut moyen âge’ in *Popoli e paesi nella cultura altomedievale*, Settimana di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, xxix (1983), pp 523–75; Maria Pia Ciccarese, ‘Le visioni di Fursa’ in *Romanobarbarica*, viii (1984/5), pp 231–303; Marilyn Dunn, ‘Gregory the Great, the vision of Fursey and the origins of purgatory’ in *Peritia*, xiv (2000), pp 238–54; Marina Smyth, ‘The body, death and resurrection: perspectives of an early Irish theologian’ in *Speculum*, lxxxiii (2008), pp 531–71.

⁶⁰ F. E. Warren, ‘St Fursey’ in *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, xvi (1918), pp 252–77; John Hennig, ‘The Irish background of St Fursey’ in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, lxxvii (1952), pp 18–28.

scholarship to bear on this figure as well as producing a translation of the *Vita Prima* or *Transitus Fursei* which has made the earliest account of Fursa's Life accessible to a wider audience.⁶¹

V

While undoubtedly great strides have been made in the study of the Irish monastic diaspora in medieval Europe over the past hundred years, the potential in this field has still to be fully explored and incorporated into Irish and European historical studies more generally. With the publication of the *CLH* in 2017 the timing is now optimal for a comprehensive and innovative study considering recent historiographical debates. The excellent reference works provided by Kenney (1929), Lapidge and Sharpe (1985), and now Ó Corráin, are there for a survey work that would treat of this phenomenon as a whole over the *longue durée* of the middle ages. One of the undoubted challenges of this subject is that scholars have to master a forbidding array of primary sources and ancillary disciplines, dealing with different historical contexts and geographical regions over a substantial chronological timeframe while also gaining command of the secondary literatures in the relevant European languages. The range of data and specialist requirements to carry out such a project is daunting as the 1,728 pages of source material in the *CLH* shows. For the first time, however, we have a comprehensive overview of the primary and secondary sources and a ground-breaking project is possible. But it requires a collaborative, team approach and the application of the right combination of varied team expertise and methodologies that draws upon diverse disciplines in medieval history, theology, manuscript studies and cultural studies. One recent criticism of the *CLH* was that the project was too much for a single scholar and that a digital collaborative project would have been more appropriate.⁶² This would have enabled the material to be published in an open-access format allowing for continual updating as new manuscripts come to light.

The theological aspect of the works of the *peregrini* and scholarly émigrés are understudied by historians while many Hiberno-Latin biblical commentaries remain in part unedited, leaving a significant lacuna in our understanding of the manner in which exiles were received and their theological works appropriated by the communities in which they operated. The topic of the distinctiveness in the Hiberno-Latin exegetical tradition, first brought to the fore in Bernhard Bischoff's article of 1954, has been afforded uneven treatment.⁶³ While specialists in Hiberno-Latin exegesis have made great strides in noting the influence of Irish theologians abroad, the import of their work remains vastly underappreciated in

⁶¹ Michelle Brown, *The Life of St. Fursey: what we know; why it matters* (Norwich, 2001); Oliver Rackham, *Transitus beati Fursei: a translation of the 8th Century manuscript* (Norwich, 2007). See also on the *vitae* of Fursa, Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Les vies de saint Fursey: les sources irlandaises' in *Revue du Nord*, lxxviii (1986), pp 405–13; Stephanie Hamann, 'Religious thought in the early seventh century as reflected in the *Visio Fursei*' in *Peritia*, xxx (2019), pp 123–44.

⁶² Caoimhín Breatnach and Colmán Etchingham, 'Review of Ó Corráin, D. ed. *Clavis litterarum Hibernensium: Medieval Irish Books and Texts (c.400–c.1600)*, 3 vols. (Turnhout, 2017)' in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, lxxvii (2020), pp 248–81.

⁶³ Bernhard Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der geschichte der lateinischen exegese im frühmittelalter' in *Sacris Erudiri*, vi (1954), pp 189–279.

broader studies of the middle ages. At times, the matter has been the subject of spirited scholarly exchange by specialists in medieval Irish studies while Hiberno-Latin biblical exegesis is largely ignored in works that treat biblical studies more broadly such as *The new Cambridge history of the bible from 600 to 1450* and Beryl Smalley's *The study of the bible in the middle ages*.⁶⁴ As native Irish speakers, some *peregrini* continued to write in Insular script and make notes on the margins of their manuscripts in Irish. All of these exiles and scholars had to master secondary European languages as well as Latin, engaging in a polyglot intellectual culture. Eriugena in particular was an important translator and mediator of Greek patristic theology to the Continent, and his knowledge of Greek was exceptional for this period. He is widely considered to be the most important Western theologian between Augustine in the fifth century and Anselm in the eleventh. Eriugena's work as a theologian on the gospel of Saint John is less studied than his philosophical works.⁶⁵ There are also few studies that situate Eriugena and the other Irish scholars within their Carolingian context and within the theological debates of their time while their actual academic and cultural background in Ireland is rarely taken seriously in scholarship to date.⁶⁶ These scholars are often studied as individual case studies rather than holistically.

The lack of scope given to early medieval Ireland in the first volume of *The Cambridge history of Ireland* is surprising given the significant work that has been carried out by historians and archaeologists of early medieval Ireland over the past thirty years.⁶⁷ Sadly, within medieval studies in general, medieval Ireland and especially early medieval Ireland, when it is addressed at all in general survey works, is treated as the black sheep of medieval history. It is often simply ignored, dismissed as uninteresting or too obtuse, and put into a corner as being somehow quite special — not in a good way.⁶⁸ This is seen, for example, in Nicholas Vincent's remark in his chapter on 'Angevin Ireland' that 'the conquerors who arrived at Bannow Bay in 1169 ... found themselves time-travellers to an Iron Age, closer to the world of Bede than to that of Chrétien de Troyes'.⁶⁹ This is symptomatic of how, regrettably, many otherwise knowledgeable medieval historians still perceive medieval Ireland. In fairness, Irish early medievalists have not helped themselves that much given that the field (at least in the past) has been riven by petty

⁶⁴ Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (eds), *The new Cambridge history of the bible from 600 to 1450* (Cambridge, 2012); Beryl Smalley, *The study of the bible in the middle ages* (South Bend, 1964); Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Bischoff's Wendepunkte fifty years on' in *Revue Bénédictine*, cx (2000), pp 204–37; Michael Gorman, 'The myth of Hiberno-Latin exegesis' in *Revue Bénédictine*, cx (2000), pp 42–85; Charles D. Wright, 'Bischoff's theory of Irish exegesis and the Genesis commentary in Munich, Clm 6302' in *Journal of Medieval Latin*, x (2000), pp 115–75. I am grateful to Meredith Cutrer for these observations.

⁶⁵ Deirdre Carabine, *John Scotus Eriugena* (Oxford, 2000) does not deal specifically with Eriugena's more theological works as she states explicitly in her preface.

⁶⁶ Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Surveying medieval Irish theology: the significance of the *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium* for the study of the history of theology' in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, lxxxv (2020), pp 80–88.

⁶⁷ See the review by Seán Duffy in *History Ireland*, xxviii, 5 (Sept./Oct. 2018): www.historyireland.com/book-reviews/cambridge-history-of-ireland-vol-1-600-1550 (6 June 2020).

⁶⁸ See, for example, Chris Wickham, *Framing the early middle ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), p. 51.

⁶⁹ Nicholas Vincent, 'Angevin Ireland' in Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland*, i: 600–1550, p. 205.

factionalism, infighting and individual rivalries to a greater extent perhaps than other areas of historical enquiry. Faced with ever greater challenges to the historical profession and to the study of early medieval Ireland in particular, a new collegiality and cooperative spirit will have to animate future working relationships. Irish medievalists will also need to be more confident, outspoken and articulate about the value of their field and why it matters at both university level and in the public sphere, especially in working with the public to highlight the importance of medieval Irish studies.

Beyond being further relegated even more to complete irrelevance in Irish higher education, the principal challenges ahead in this field are likely to be in relation to a new wave of historical revisionism and relativism, particularly with regards to the Irish in medieval Europe. With the notable exception of former Lampeter-based scholars Thomas O'Loughlin, Jonathan Wooding and their network,⁷⁰ the role of religion has not been afforded the prominence it merits in medieval historical studies dealing with such key topics as Christianisation, missionaries and monastic founders which can only as a consequence provide methodologically incomplete studies on these subjects.⁷¹ While socioeconomic and political angles on these subjects clearly do have their value and place, historians need to deal with religion in a more constructive way. Many of the current trends epitomise one of the criticisms of Peter Brown's influential 1967 biographical study of Saint Augustine which was said to be a biography without the theology.⁷² Robin Lane Fox's new biography of Augustine shows how both can be interwoven while doing full justice to the sources.⁷³

For the Irish *peregrini*, many avenues of inquiry still remain to be explored. What role did their writings play in fashioning a new image of Ireland and the Irish on the

⁷⁰ Both have published extensively in this field. For representative studies, see Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic theology: humanity, world and God in early Irish writings* (London and New York, 2000); idem, 'Living in the ocean' in Bourke (ed.), *Studies in the cult of Saint Columba*, pp 11–23; Jonathan M. Wooding (ed.), *The Otherworld voyage in early Irish literature: an anthology of criticism* (Dublin, 2000); idem, 'Peregrini in the ocean: spirituality and reality' in Emer Purcell, Paul MacCotter, Julianne Nyhan and John Sheehan (eds), *Clerics, kings and vikings: essays on medieval Ireland in honour of Donnchadh Ó Corráin* (Dublin, 2015), pp 411–17. See also Rodney Aist, 'Pilgrimage in the Celtic Christian tradition' in *Perichoresis*, xv (2017), pp 3–19; Katja Ritari, 'Liturgy and asceticism: recent works on early Irish theology' in *Peritia*, xxii–xxiii (2011), pp 346–55; Meredith D. Cutrer, 'Early Irish *peregrinatio* as salvation history' in Jonathan M. Wooding and Lynette Olson (eds), *Prophecy, fate and memory in the early medieval Celtic world* (Sydney, 2020), pp 76–91.

⁷¹ A recent example that is not untypical of recent trends is Roy Flechner's new biographical study, *Saint Patrick retold: The legend and history of Ireland's patron saint* (Princeton, 2019). See the highly critical review of the work by the Oxford Church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch, 'Who kicked them out?' in *London Review of Books*, xli, no. 15 (Aug. 2019). See also Katja Ritari's review of Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (eds), *The introduction of Christianity into the early medieval Insular world: converting the Isles I* (Turnhout, 2016) in *Peritia*, xxviii (2017), pp 249–52 which, despite the title, says very little on the process of Christianisation. This equally applies to the second volume in the series, Nancy Edwards, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Roy Flechner (eds), *Transforming landscapes of belief in the early medieval Insular world and beyond: converting the Isles II* (Turnhout, 2017).

⁷² Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a biography* (London, 1967). See the review by John O'Meara in *University Review*, v (1968), pp 159–62.

⁷³ Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: conversions to confessions* (New York, 2015).

continent? What was the nature of the contact with their homeland and was there an ongoing dialogue between the exiles and communities in Ireland? To what extent did they shape hybrid cultures in the royal courts, monasteries, and schools on the continent where they encountered and mixed with people from different ethnic backgrounds? As immigrants, what kind of agency did they have and how did they negotiate conflict? Why were some obscure saints with Germanic names given a spurious Irish ethnicity? The ritual of *peregrinatio* as an expression of the monk's abandonment of the *saeculum* marked a further step in the individual's inner transformation modelled on Christian ideals. Such transformations can reveal the primary intuitions, drives and conflicts active within a culture. The idea of the 'self' can be studied as a cultural formation like any other and particularly the manner in which 'the kind of transformation(s) a culture puts forward as a goal or possibility for human life always expresses the primary axioms, conflicts, and intuitions that make up its particular world'.⁷⁴

VI

Some concluding words should go to the *peregrini* themselves. The two short poems by Donatus, an Irish bishop of Fiesole in Tuscany, writing in the late ninth century, and Dubdúin, an Irish monk of the monastery of St Gallen in the tenth century, are the most manifest expressions of the way these religious exiles constructed a new image of Ireland as a sacred homeland. Ireland, *Scottia*, for Donatus is the *optima tellus*, 'the most noble land', situated on the western edge of the world, and known from ancient books. Rich in minerals, blessed with a favourable and fertile climate, for Donatus 'the beautiful fields of *Scottia* flow with milk and honey' (*melle fluit pulchris et lacte Scottia campis*), an explicit association with the biblical Promised Land. He also remarkably asserts that the 'savage seed of lions' (*saeva leonum semina*), an oblique reference to the Romans, never conquered Ireland, the *Scottica terra*. Donatus's poem concludes:

In this island the people of the *Scotti* deserve to live,
 (*In qua Scottorum gentes habitare merentur*)
 A people renowned in war, in peace, and in faith.
 (*Inclita gens hominum milite pace fide*).⁷⁵

Dubdúin, writing north of the Alps in St Gallen later in the tenth century, displays similar sentiments in his poem about the holy men who left Ireland for the continent. There were clearly some ethnic tensions in the monastery of St Gallen between the Irish brothers and the native monks. Dubdúin writes how the monks of St Gallen despised their Irish brethren as 'wretched imbeciles' (*imbiciles miserios*) and these ethnic faultlines may have led to a stronger articulation of Irish identity amongst the Irish abroad. In contrast, the poet writes about the *insignes sancti*, 'the eminent saints', who were buried at St Gallen, his compatriots, 'illustrious native men whom noble Ireland, our island, nourished'. This territorial attachment is

⁷⁴ David Shulman and Guy S. Stroumsa (eds), *Self and self-transformations in the history of religions* (Oxford, 2002), p. 4.

⁷⁵ Donatus of Fiesole, 'Finibus occiduis describitur optima tellus' in Ludwig Traube (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini aevi Carolini* 3 (Berlin, 1896), pp 238–40.

further underlined in an ethnic sense as Dubdúin remarkably notes that he and these saints are *una de stirbe creati* (they 'come from the same stock').⁷⁶ As well as mentioning Gallus, Columbanus's disciple who settled in the area as a hermit in 612, he notes two others, Dubsláine and Fáelán, who are also later buried there.⁷⁷ These names appear in the St Gallen Necrology, while a contemporary Dubsláine is mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* for the year 891 as having met King Alfred of Wessex with two other Irish *peregrini* after having landed in Cornwall. These men had left Ireland in a thin, hide-covered boat without any oars and with only a week's supply of provisions. They allowed the boat to drift on the sea as their only concern was to be exiles; they did not care where.⁷⁸ From Dubdúin, it would appear that this same Dubsláine in time made his way to the monastery of St Gallen like other Irish exiles that came to venerate the relics of Columbanus's famous companion. Like many others, he would die in exile, far from Ireland. Yet he was commemorated by his compatriot as part of a venerable tradition stretching back to the pioneering *peregrini* who left their island homeland some 400 years before.

The history of the Irish in early medieval Europe has been predominantly written by historians outside of Ireland. This relative lack of engagement in this field by Irish historians cannot simply be excused as down to a lack of sufficient funding. The root may lie in part in 'colonial legacies',⁷⁹ or may go back to the foundations of professional Irish historiography in the 1930s when a new generation of Irish historians were trained in England in other disciplinary specialisms.⁸⁰ Understandably, the focus of Irish medievalists was on early Ireland and early medieval Ireland: the legacy of a traditional focus in Irish university history departments on medieval Irish history post-1169 (and latterly emphasis on modern Irish history) also had a role. Brendan Bradshaw's comment on revisionism in modern Irish historiography that 'The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the increasing dominance of a more overtly iconoclastic approach by a new generation, initially reflecting disillusionment with the nationalist dream ... and later reacting against the contribution, as they believed, of the nationalist mythology to the recrudescence of radical militant nationalism'⁸¹ appears to be equally applicable to the study of early medieval Ireland and the Irish in Europe which, for some historians, were associated with Irish Catholic nationalism.

Recent historiography on the Irish in Europe has sought to minimise Irish cultural influence and the agency of the *peregrini* as immigrants, reigniting older

⁷⁶ Dubdúin of St Gallen, 'Hic sunt insignes sancti, quos insola nostra', is a 16 hexameter poem written on a blank page of a bible: St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, MS. 10, fol. 3. The poem is translated in J. M. Clark, *The Abbey of St Gall as a centre of literature and art* (Cambridge, 2013 [in 1926]), pp 29–30, n. 186.

⁷⁷ Karl Schmuki, 'Guests and teachers from Ireland at the Abbey of St Gall' in Cornel Dora and Franziska Schnoor (eds), *The cradle of European culture: early medieval Irish book art* (St Gallen, 2018), p. 107.

⁷⁸ The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, s.a. 891 in C. Plummer and J. Earle (eds), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (2 vols, Oxford, 1892), i, 82.

⁷⁹ Stephen Howe, *Ireland and empire: colonial legacies in Irish history and culture* (Oxford, 2000); Clare Carroll and Patricia King (eds), *Ireland and postcolonial theory* (South Bend, 2003).

⁸⁰ Brendan Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship in modern Ireland' in Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish history: the debate on historical revisionism, 1938–1994* (Blackrock, 1994), p. 197.

⁸¹ Bradshaw, 'Nationalism and historical scholarship', p. 206.

debates.⁸² The maximalist ('Irophile') and minimalist ('Irophobe') approaches ultimately have their origins in the middle ages when Irish influence was already debated in Europe.⁸³ These binary either/or historiographical stances have prevented a more both/and approach that is now possible through the application of new historical methodologies using the *CLH* as the *grundlage*. It is to be hoped that the field can muster the required collaborative approach, personnel with the required expertise, and methodologies that can draw upon diverse disciplines in medieval history, theology, manuscript, Celtic and cultural studies. Application of advances in digital humanities and data analytics have the potential to provide the most definitive picture to date of the scope and reach of Irish clerical exiles and scholarly networks in Britain and Europe. The role and dialectics of exile in the shaping of identity during this period remains understudied. The many surviving letters, poems, and theological treatises of Irish clerical exiles and scholars in Europe provide us with opportunities to consider how these exiles wrote about their own sense of identity as Irish Christian exiles conscious of their role in the broader cultural arena of a Europe gradually taking shape. By contextualising the phenomenon of Irish clerical exile in Europe within broader theological and comparative frameworks, further research in this field has the potential to show how the experience of exile contributed to the formation of both Irish and European identities in the middle ages.⁸⁴

⁸² Sven Meeder, *The Irish scholarly presence at St Gall: networks of knowledge in the early middle ages* (London, 2018). See the critical reviews of this work by Cornel Dora in *Peritia*, xxix (2018), pp 278–81; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín in *Journal of British Studies*, lvii (2018), pp 863–4; J. J. Contreni in *American Historical Review*, cxxiv (2019), pp 1938–9.

⁸³ Enright, 'Iromanie-Irophobie revisited'.

⁸⁴ The author is grateful to Meredith Cutrer, J.-Michel Reaux Colvin, Jeffrey von Arx S.J., Liam Chambers, Clodagh Tait, Guy Beiner, Robert Savage, James Kelly and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, criticism and feedback.