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THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND TO IRISH PEREGRINATIO

THE Irish *peregrini* of the early Middle Ages have mainly been studied for their impact upon Anglo-Saxon England and Frankish Gaul. My primary purpose is not to discuss the relationship between Irish *peregrini* and the societies to which they came in their exile, but rather the relationship between the *peregrini* and their society of origin, early Christian Ireland. Though *peregrinatio* was not a peculiarly Irish custom, it was taken up with enthusiasm in Ireland. One possible approach to an explanation of this fact is to examine the connections between *peregrinatio* and Irish social organisation. It is this approach which I shall follow.¹

In Jonas's *Vita Columbani* there is a distinction between two grades of *peregrinatio*. As a young man, still living in his native Leinster, he was much troubled by the threats to his chastity posed by the *lascivae puellae* of the district. He sought advice from a nun. She told Columbanus that it was then fifteen years since she had left home and settled in her *peregrinationis locus*, but that if she had not been a woman she would have crossed the sea and would have sought out a *potioris peregrinationis locus*.²

The nun's distinction between the two grades of *peregrinatio* was to dictate the course of Columbanus's life. For many years he was content with the lesser *peregrinatio*: he left Leinster and went first to study under a biblical scholar called Sinilis and subsequently to the monastery of Bangor, then still ruled by its founder Comgall. Many years later he began to desire a new *peregrinatio*. In spite of hesitations Comgall gave his permission and Columbanus left with twelve companions for Brittany

¹ There is a good discussion of *peregrinatio* in C. Angenendt, *Monachi Peregrini: Studien zu Pirmin und den monastischen Vorstellungen des frühen Mittelalters* (Munich, 1972), pp. 125-75. There are also some points of interest in J. Leclercq, *Aux Sources de la Spiritualité occidentale* (Paris, 1964), pp. 35-64. On the Irish side see K. Hughes, 'The changing theory and practice of Irish pilgrimage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* xi 143-51. For helpful discussion I am indebted to Professor D. A. Binchy and to Mr. C. P. Wormald.

² Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, Bk. I, c. 3 (ed. B. Krusch, *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis, MGH., Scriptores in usum Scholarum*, Hanover and Leipzig, 1905, p. 156).

and then Gaul. In Annegray and Luxeuil Columbanus found the *potioris peregrinationis locus* of which the nun had spoken many years before.³

The superior type of *peregrinatio* is well-known. Indeed it is often supposed that it was the only type recognised by insular writers, that *peregrinatio* for the Irish and the English necessarily implied a journey overseas.⁴ This appears to be true for the English, but it is not true for the Irish. Columba is a good example of a monk who sought a *potior peregrinatio*: Adomnán tells us that 'he sailed from Ireland to Britain wishing to be a *peregrinus* for Christ's sake'.⁵ Naturally the superior *peregrinatio* is prominent in the *Vita Columbae*, but there is one good example of the lesser *peregrinatio*. The first of Columba's monks to die in Iona was a Briton. He is described as a *peregrinus*.⁶ The evidence is not confined to early or to Latin sources. A standard Irish equivalent for *peregrinus* was *ailithir*, for *peregrinatio*, *ailithre*. In the ninth-century story *Liadain and Cuirithir*, Cuirithir, a Connacht man, is said to go in *ailithre* to the land of the Déssi. Later he leaves the land of the Déssi and goes overseas, again in *ailithre*.⁷ An Irishman might be an *ailithir* within Ireland as well as overseas.

³ *Vita S. Columbani*, I, 3, 4 (ed. Krusch, pp. 152-60). With the phrase *potioris peregrinationis locus* cf. I, 6, *potioris heremi sectare quietem* (ed. Krusch, p. 163) and a similar phrase in c. 10 (ed. Krusch, p. 169).

Sinilis may well be identical with Sillán (< Sinlán, dimin. to Sinell, hypocoristic Mo-Sinu) for whom see J. F. Kenney, *Sources for the Early History of Ireland*, I, *Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929), p. 218; P. Grosjean, 'Recherches sur les débuts de la controverse pascale chez les Celtes', *Analecta Bollandiana*, lxiiv 200-44. Sillán became abbot of Bangor third in succession to Comgall, Columbanus's abbot. Jonas's account, taken literally, suggests only that Sinilis was the head of a school of biblical learning, a *sui litre*, and that Columbanus left him in order to go to Bangor. Even if Jonas was well informed on such details his account does not exclude the identification since, at the time in question, Sinilis may not yet have become a monk at Bangor, or, alternatively, have been the head of a school in a monastery subject to Bangor.

⁴ This is explicitly stated by Angenendt, *op. cit.*, p. 152: 'Das Kriterium ist einfach: Der Exulant muß—aus der Insellage Englands und Irlands leicht verständlich—übers Meer gefahren sein: Wer die *patria* verlassen will, muß die heimatische Insel verlassen'. This leads him (p. 153) to an over-simplified contrast between the concepts of *peregrinatio* current in insular and in continental ascetic circles. Continental ideas were not so different from Irish as they were from English ideas. To take an early example, the use of *peregrinus* and *peregrinor* made by Sidonius Apollinaris in one of his letters to the British bishop and monk Faustus of Riez for (a) renunciation of the world and sin (b) exile from the Auvergne would have been readily intelligible to one reared in the British or Irish traditions (*Ep.* IX, 3, 3 and 4, ed. A. Loyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire*, vol. iii, pp. 135, 136).

⁵ Adomnán, *Vita S. Columbae*, 2nd preface (ed. Reeves, p. 9, ed. A. O. & M. O. Anderson, p. 186).

⁶ *Vita S. Columbae*, III, 6 (ed. Reeves, pp. 202-03, ed. Andersons, pp. 476-78).

⁷ *Liadain and Cuirithir*, ed. and transl. K. Meyer (London, 1902), pp. 22, 26. The text is dated to the late ninth century by G. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Oxford, 1956), p. 209.

The English, however, do seem to have denied anyone the title of *peregrinus* unless he had gone overseas. This is surprising since the vernacular equivalent, *elpeodig*, could be used for a man from another kingdom as well as a man from abroad. Among the seventh century laws Ine c.23 is particularly instructive:⁸ the *elpeodig* may be a man with readily available son or kinsmen, and so probably from a neighbouring kingdom; he may also be a man under the protection of an abbot or abbess, often, no doubt, a *peregrinus* in the full sense like Maeldub, Aldhelm's master. An important point in Ine c.23 is that the king receives a half or two-thirds of an *elpeodig's* wergeld. The association between king and monastery was generally close in seventh century England; the association between king and *peregrinus* was even closer. The *peregrinus* left his homeland to serve a heavenly lord; he enjoyed also the protection of royal lordship.

Yet it is clear that for Bede a man was not a *peregrinus* until he had left Britain for Ireland or the continent. This is not merely shown by negative evidence, though in Bede's case since he frequently mentions *peregrini* and *peregrinatio* the argument *e silentio* is a strong one. In Bede's *Historia Abbatum* he relates how the pope commanded Benedict Biscop to accompany Theodore back to England. He was not commanding Benedict Biscop to return to his native Northumbria, and indeed at first he became abbot of St. Peter's Canterbury.⁹ He remained, therefore, from the legal point of view an *elpeodig*; but for Bede he had given up his *peregrinatio* and returned to his *patria*. The *patria* which is here contrasted with *peregrinatio* is not the native kingdom but Britain. This is shown by what Bede says of Ecgbert, one of his leading *peregrini*: 'Uouit enim uotum, quia adhuc peregrinus uiuere uellet, ut numquam in insulam, in qua natus erat, id est Britanniam, rediret'.¹⁰ The implications of this vow are shown by what Bede says of Englishmen in Ireland in 664: they were there, *relicta insula patria*, to study the Scriptures or to practise the monastic life.¹¹ Bede does not seem to have been untypical in his usage. Felix can say of Guthlac 'et parentes et patriam comitesque adolescentiae suae contempsit', using *patria*, here for the native kingdom, but he never describes him as a *peregrinus*.¹² The only distinct use of the

⁸ ed. F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, vol. i (Halle, 1903), pp. 98, 99. For the legal status of the *elpeodig* from another kingdom, cf. Hlothhere and Eadric, c. 15 (ed. Liebermann, p. 11).

⁹ Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, c. 3 (ed. C. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica*, i, pp. 366, 367).

¹⁰ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, iii, 27 (ed. C. Plummer, i, p. 193).

¹¹ *Ibid.* (ed. Plummer, i, p. 192).

¹² Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci*, c. xix (ed. B. Colgrave, p. 82).

peregrinatio terminology to appear in English sources of the seventh or eighth centuries is the common metaphor by which life on earth is regarded as a *peregrinatio*.¹³

A further distinction between the Irish and English concepts of *peregrinatio* is that, for the Irish, *peregrinus* may be used for an exile or alien even though the exile is not a fulfilment of an ascetic ideal. In Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* there is a story of how Columba secured the release of an Irish slave-girl in the possession of the Pictish *magus* Broichan. Columba is there made to call her a *peregrina captiva*.¹⁴ There is no such usage in Bede. Here again the Irish usage remains attached to the vernacular terminology for exile, whereas the English does not. OIr. *ailithir* and OE. *elpeodig* may refer to a foreigner or alien who has not become an exile for religious or ascetic reasons;¹⁵ so may *peregrinus* when used by an Irishman, but not when used by an Englishman.

If, then, the Irish usage of *peregrinus* is still firmly attached to corresponding vernacular ideas, it is necessary to scrutinize more closely the OIr. vocabulary for exile and the alien. *Ailithir* is a general term, used predominantly in a religious context. More specific terms are *ambue* 'non-native', and *cú glas* 'grey dog', i.e. 'wolf'.¹⁶ Other terms are *deorad* and *muirchuirthe* (*murchuirthe*, *murchorihae*). *Ambue* and *cú glas* are used together and may, therefore, be considered as a pair.

The distinction between the *cú glas* and the *ambue* is that the *cú glas* is the exile from overseas while the *ambue* is the exile from another kingdom within Ireland. The distinction can be established not only from the

¹³ e.g. in Ceolfrid's letter to the king of the Picts, Bede, *Hist. Eccles.* v, 21 (ed. Plummer i, p. 333).

¹⁴ *Vita S. Columbae*, II, 33 (ed. Reeves, pp. 146–48, ed. Andersons pp. 398–404). The Andersons suggest (p. 588) that the description of the slave-girl as a *peregrina* 'may imply that she had been living as a nun in Britain'. The suggestion should be rejected. There is no evidence in the text, apart from the interpretation of *peregrina*, that she was ever a nun in Ireland or in Britain. Columba requests her release not on grounds of respect for religion or for monasticism but *humanitatis miseratione*. Freeing slaves, irrespective of their previous profession, was part of the tradition in Iona (cf. Aidan's behaviour recorded by Bede, *Hist. Eccles.*, iii, 5, ed. Plummer, i, p. 136), and required careful management in the sixth century Irish church, *First Synod of St. Patrick*, cc. 1, 32, ed. L. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae)*, vol. v, Dublin, 1963), pp. 54, 58.

¹⁵ For *ailithir* see e.g. Wb. 7c12, ed. W. Stokes and J. Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, vol. i (Cambridge, 1901), p. 542. This marginal gloss clearly refers to the end of *Romans* 16.26, 'ad oboeditionem (obæditionem, Wb.) fidei in cunctis gentibus', not to v. 25 'secundum reuelationem misterii', as indicated by Stokes and Strachan.

¹⁶ For *cú glas* 'wolf' as a kenning for the stranger see R. Thurneysen, 'Nachträge zu "Irisches Recht"', ZCP xix 348. The similar Germanic usage is attested as early as the fifth century in Sidonius Apollinaris, Ep. VI, 4, 1 (ed. Loyen, iii, p. 15), and cf. *Lex Salica*, 55, § 4 (ed. K. A. Eckhardt, MGH, Leges I, vol. 4.1, pp. 206–07).

often unreliable legal glosses but also from the lawtracts themselves. Both types of exile might marry a native woman. If they did so then their status would depend upon that of their wives, whereas the normal rule was for a wife to have an honour-price half that of her husband. Similarly their children would, in the absence of normal agnatic kin within their kingdom of residence, turn to their mother's kindred for support. Hence one tract gives the rule that the mother's kindred has only a very limited interest in her children except when they are the children of a *cú glas* or an *ambue*.¹⁷ Another tract says there are three categories of men whose honour-prices are fixed according to the honour-prices of their wives: a man without land who has married an heiress, 'a man who follows his wife's buttocks across a boundary' (of a kingdom), namely an *ambue*, and finally a *cú glas*.¹⁸ Yet another tract describes the position of the *glasfine* 'grey kinsman': 'The grey kinsman is a son of a woman of thy kindred whom she bears to a Briton: he gets only the inheritance of a sister's son or free gifts for one separated from a kindred'.¹⁹ The 'grey kinsman', is the son of a 'grey dog', a 'wolf'. In the typical case the wolf is an *Albanach*, a Briton. From this situation in which the Briton is the typical alien from overseas living in Ireland derive the medieval Latin terms *albanus* and *albanicus* for an alien, an *advena*. These terms must have their roots in Hiberno-Latin.²⁰

To the position of the *cú glas* corresponds the *potior peregrinatio* of Jonas, to the position of the *ambue* the lesser *peregrinatio* within Ireland. In the case of the *cú glas* the parallel can be followed even in detail. One way in which a man might become a *cú glas* was to have been a *muirchirthe*, a man stranded from the sea. *Muirchuirthe* is used as a gloss on *cú glas*.²¹ In one tract *deorad* and *muirchuirthe* appear to be used as if they corres-

¹⁷ Tract on *Dire*, § 33 (ed. R. Thurneysen, *Irisches Recht, aus den Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1931, phil.-hist. Klasse, No. 2, Berlin, 1931, p. 31).

¹⁸ Tract on the *fuidir*, § 4 (ed. R. Thurneysen, *Irisches Recht*, p. 64).

¹⁹ *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vol. iv, ed. A. G. Richey and T. O'Mahoney (Dublin and London, 1879), p. 284. For the phrase *dedlaíd fri fine*, see R. Thurneysen, *Irisches Recht*, p. 74.

²⁰ I here adopt an explanation close to that given by Du Cange, *sv.*, (except that *Albanach* has its earlier meaning 'Briton', not its later one 'Scotsman') in preference to the derivation from Germanic **aliban* given in J. F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, i, (Leiden, 1954), p. 32. The Germanic form is purely conjectural whereas the Irish form is not.

²¹ e.g. Tract on *Dire*, § 33.

ponded respectively to *ambue* and *cú glas*.²² If the exile might be linked to his new society through marriage, he might also be linked through submission to a lord. An old rule quoted by a commentator states that a *muirchuirthe* has a third of the honour price of his lord unless the latter be a king or someone equal in rank to a king (a chief poet or bishop), in which case his honour price is one seventh.²³ This makes the *muirchuirthe* a particular sub-class of the *fuidir*, the man who cannot rely upon his kindred for status and support but instead must rely upon his lord.²⁴ He is little better off than the *dóerfuidir*, 'inferior *fuidir*', whose honour-price is one quarter of his lord's.²⁵ In the tract on the *fuidir* we find, apart from the *ambue* and the *cú glas* (the latter mentioned by name), a particular type of *muirchuirthe*, the *fuidir cinad o muir*, the *fuidir* cast up by the sea who has committed an offence.²⁶ This is the man who for his offence—a glossator mentions kin-slaying—has been put in a boat, pushed out to sea and left to the mercy of wind and wave. It was, in the Christian period, a type of Judgment of God related to other forms of the ordeal found in other countries at the same period.²⁷

This procedure is echoed by one form of the *potior peregrinatio*. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 891 there is the following entry:

And three Irishmen came to king Alfred in a boat without any oars from Ireland which they had left secretly because they wished for love of God to be in exile (*elþiodignes*), they cared not where. The boat in which they travelled was made of two and a half hides and

²² *Berrad Airechta*, § 22 (K. Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften', ZCP xiii 21, tr. and emended R. Thurneysen, *Die Bürgschaft im irischen Recht (aus den Abhandlungen der preussischen Akad. d. Wiss.*, 1928, phil.-hist. Klasse, No. 2, Berlin, 1928), p. 9). But even this case is not clear. In the heptads there is an example of *muirchuirthe* being used alongside *ambue*: *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vol. v, ed. R. Atkinson (Dublin, 1901), p. 182. This does not, however, exclude the possibility, which in my opinion is a strong one, that *deorad* could be used for the exile in general, whether from Ireland or overseas. It is the glosses which make *deorad* and *muirchuirthe* into straight equivalents of *ambue* and *cú glas*.

²³ *Irishes Recht*, p. 7, and, less completely, p. 39.

²⁴ This is denied by Thurneysen, *Irishes Recht*, p. 72, on the grounds that § 7 of the *fuidir* tract mentions only a specific type of *muirchuirthe* and that the honour-price of a *muirchuirthe* is higher than that of a *dóerfuidir*. The second of these arguments is a clear *non sequitur*, the first depends on the assumption that the list in § 7 is exhaustive, which he does not support. The list appears too heterogeneous to support any such assumption.

²⁵ Tract on the *fuidir*, § 3 (*Irishes Recht*, p. 64)..

²⁶ *Ibid.* § 7 (*Irishes Recht*, p. 65).

²⁷ cf. Thurneysen's commentary, *Irishes Recht*, p. 74 and M. E. Byrne, 'On the punishment of sending adrift', *Ériu* xi 97–102. An important example is *Cáin Adamnáin*, § 45 (ed. and transl. K. Meyer, Oxford, 1905, p. 30). There it is explicitly described as a *Iudicium Dei*. On this cf. J. Ryan, 'The Cain Adamnáin', in R. Thurneysen et al., *Studies in Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1936), pp. 270–71.

they took with them sufficient food for seven days. And after seven days they came to land among the Cornishmen and they went immediately to king Alfred.'²⁸

The entry has great value as contemporary evidence for this form of *peregrinatio*: the annal for 891 is the last written by the first hand of the Parker MS. Two centuries earlier, in a very different type of document, the same form of *peregrinatio* appears, only this time its function is explicitly that of a Judgment of God. The seventh century notes on the life of St. Patrick by Muirchú tell the story of St. Patrick's triumph over a bandit called Maccuil.²⁹ Maccuil was planning to kill Patrick, but instead one of his own followers met his death. The astounded bandit professed faith in God and repentance for his sins. Patrick replied, 'I cannot judge but God will judge', and commanded him to go unarmed to the sea, bind his feet together with an iron fetter, throw the key into the sea, and put himself into a boat made of one hide, without rudder or oar and go wherever the wind might take him. Maccuil did as he was commanded, and was blown to the Isle of Man where he was rescued by two missionary bishops whom he eventually succeeded.

The natural assumption is that the *cú glas* had a lower status than the *ambue*, the *muirchuirthe* than the *deorad* from within Ireland. This is taken for granted by the commentators, and though their evidence is in general highly unreliable I think that they may be correct in this instance. The *fuidir cinad o muir*, the *fuidir* cast up by the sea after he has been put to sea for an offence, is a sub-class of *muirchuirthe*. Evidence for the type of offence for which he is exiled may reveal something of the attitude to this form of exile. In one MS. of the tract which contains the expression *fuidir cinad o muir* there is a gloss which gives an offence for which such a procedure would be appropriate: *fingal* 'kin-slaying'.³⁰ A law tract on theft begins: 'there are three sins which God punishes most severely: betrayal and theft and slaying of kin'.³¹ The compiler was no

²⁸ *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer and J. Earle, vol. i (Oxford, 1892), p. 82; *The Parker Chronicle* (832–900), ed. A. H. Smith (3rd ed. London, 1951), p. 40. My translation is based upon that of D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents, I, c. 500–1042* (London, 1955), p. 184. It should be noted that in going immediately to the king, the *peregrini* are behaving as one would expect from Ine c.23. Ine's laws survive because Alfred appended them, or a selection of them, to his own lawbook, and they were thus current law in Alfred's Wessex.

²⁹ *The Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, ed. W. Stokes (London, Rolls Series, 1887), vol. ii, pp. 286–89.

³⁰ *Irishes Recht*, p. 65.

³¹ *Senchas Már: Facsimile of the Oldest Fragments*, ed. R. I. Best and R. Thurneysen (Dublin, 1931), p. 28 (*Bretha im Gatta*), printed by R. M. Smith in *Irish Texts* iv ed. J. Fraser, P. Grosjean and J. G. O'Keeffe (London, 1934) pp. 18–20.

doubt exaggerating by putting the subject of his tract in such company, but for the other two, betrayal and kin-slaying, he reflected normal opinion. Kin-slaying, in particular, was an offence for which a society which relied upon the solidarity of the kindred might have difficulty in finding an appropriate penalty. In part, then, the adoption of this procedure for those who have slain a kinsman might be a consequence of a lack of effective institutions by which laws could be enforced and offences punished, other than kinship (repudiated by kin-slaying) and lordship (repudiated by betrayal). If the bases of society were repudiated, recourse was had to a judgment of God. There are good reasons for this view but I think that it is only part of the story.

The procedure does not only abandon the offender to the will of God. It expels him from Ireland. There is no suggestion that, if he is blown back to Ireland, he will be held to have been vindicated by the judgment of God. Quite the contrary: he is classified as a *fuidir*, one without effective ties of kin. In effect, he is treated as a *cú glas*, a wolf, a complete outsider.

Analysed in this way, the procedure has clear analogues elsewhere, in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and in the penitential literature. Adomnán tells the story of an encounter between Columba and a man who had committed incest with his mother and had slain a kinsman (the *fingal* of the legal glossator).³² The story begins with Columba ordering his monks one night to pray to God because that very hour the incest had been committed. The next day he prophesied that the *infelix homuncio* would arrive after a few months. The story, then, is one more illustration of Columba's visionary and prophetic powers, but it has a number of interesting twists. The wicked man duly arrived in the company of one of Columba's monks Lugaid, who was ignorant of what had happened. Columba tried to have him put out at Mull to prevent him landing upon Iona. Such sins had made the man an outcast, a man who should not only be expelled but even kept from landing.

The *infelix homuncio*, however, outmanoeuvred Columba. He declared that he would not eat until he had seen and talked with the holy man. He was proceeding exactly according to the rules of Irish law. Columba was guilty of *esáin*, literally 'driving-away', that is, refusal of hospitality. Columba was also a *nemed*, a sacred or privileged person. To secure one's right from a *nemed* the appropriate procedure was to fast against him (*troscad*). The consequence of such a fast was to place the *nemed* in a quandary: he could give way, or, at least, give a pledge that he would

satisfy the just claims of the faster; but until he did this he was not allowed to eat himself. If he ate without giving a pledge he was liable to pay twice the value of whatever was claimed by means of the fast.³³ Columba gave in, very unwillingly. He went down to the shore with his principal councillor and eventual successor, Baithéne. Baithéne argued from Scripture that the man's penitence should be accepted. Columba replied, 'Baithéne, this man has perpetrated fratricide in the manner of Cain, and has slept with his mother'. The *infelix homuncio* then knelt in the sand (he must by this time have been allowed ashore) and promised to fulfil the *leges penitentiae* according to the judgment of the holy man. The judgment was then given: 'si xii. annis inter Brittones cum fletu et lacrimis penitentiam egeris, nec ad Scotiam usque ad mortem reversus fueris, forsan deus peccato ignoscat tuo'. The verdict was a lifelong *potior peregrinatio*. In Irish terms he was to be a wolf, an outsider, for life.

Adomnán, in telling this story, refers to the 'laws of penance'. The penitentials suggest that Columba's judgment was on the normal lines. The Penitential of Cummean prescribes three years of penance and *peregrinatio perennis* for a man who has committed incest with his mother.³⁴ Columba increased the period of penance because of the man's fratricide. *Peregrinatio* is found in the penitentials prescribed for other sins though it is not usually a lifelong sentence.

Adomnán's story, apart from its general interest as an illustration of Irish legal procedure, displays two features of importance in understanding the Irish background to *peregrinatio*: it shows the insistence on making a man who has committed certain very grave offences into a complete outsider, and it shows the holy man delivering a judgment prescribing lifelong *peregrinatio* so that, perhaps, the penitent will escape condemnation at the judgment seat of God. The offender must not even be allowed to pollute the soil of the island by landing. This desire to prevent pollution may help to explain the rationale behind the use of expulsion from Ireland as a punishment of the very gravest offences: it is not merely an expulsion from a society, it is an expulsion from a land. Columba's initial reaction, then, may perhaps reveal the attitude given legal effect first in the native laws and then in ecclesiastical legislation.

There is evidence, therefore, to show the reality of the attitudes implicit in the term *cú glas*, 'grey dog', 'wolf'. There is also good evidence to show that the *ambue*, the exile from another kingdom within Ireland, was regarded with some contempt. I have already quoted the expression

³² *Vita S. Columbae*, I, 22 (ed. Reeves, pp. 51-2, ed. Andersons, pp. 252-56).

³³ R. Thurneysen, 'Das Fasten beim Pfändungsverfahren', *ZCP* xv 260-75.

³⁴ *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. L. Bieler, p. 114 (c. 9), cf. p. 68 (c. 6).

used in one law tract for an *ambue* who marries a native woman: 'a man who follows the buttocks of his wife across the boundary'.³⁵ That this is a deliberately harsh reference to his desire for sexual intercourse is shown by a passage in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.³⁶ Cú Chulainn has secured an agreement with Ailill and Medb by which he fights their warriors one by one and their army cannot move while he remains victorious. He is in the middle of a series of such single combats when he is approached by a lovely girl who declares that she has fallen in love with him and has brought treasure and cattle (as her contribution to the marriage settlement). They then have the following conversation (Cú Chulainn speaking first):

'You have come at a bad time. We are in bad shape; we are famished. I cannot lie with a woman while I am in this struggle.'

'I should be a help to you in your struggle.'

'It is not in exchange for a woman's buttocks that I have undertaken it.'

The girl turns out to be the war-goddess and promises to attack Cú Chulainn in revenge for his repudiation of her.

The same expression is used on another occasion later in a contemptuous reference to the adultery of Fergus (an Ulster exile in Connaught) with Medb.³⁷ Situation and phraseology in saga and law tract correspond exactly. The expression is used as a reproach, not because the union was adulterous, but because lust has led to misfortune, just as the law tract uses the expression because the *ambue* is held to have lost status through an exile dictated by lust.

Although non-legal sources confirm the legal evidence for the low status of *cú glas* and *ambue* there is a distinct difference in the attitudes they display to the two categories of exile. The *cú glas* is the complete outsider, the class to which one assigns the man whose very presence is a pollution on the land, who has committed offences which place him outside society. The *ambue* may be a despised class of low status, but that is as far as it goes. The *ambue* is only a relative outsider. This, then, is the explanation of the two grades of *peregrinatio* in Jonas's *Vita Columbani*: any ascetic *peregrinatio* is a renunciation of kindred and wealth,

³⁵ *Irisches Recht*, p. 64.

³⁶ *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ed. J. Strachan and J. G. O'Keefe (Dublin, 1912), ll. 1609-1629, pp. 59-60. *Lebor na Huidre*, ed. R. I. Best and O. Bergin (Dublin, 1929), ll. 6081-6100, pp. 188-89.

³⁷ *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, ed. Strachan & O'Keefe, ll. 3599-3600, p. 120; cf. Fergus's own verdict, ll. 3646-3648, pp. 121-22, where the reference is to Medb's leading the Connaught army into foreign lands.

but in the world into which Columbanus was born *potior peregrinatio* was the natural path to complete renunciation. For the *cú glas*, the 'wolf', the world was indeed an *alienus mundus*.³⁸

Yet though renunciation of the world was the central aim of any ascetic *peregrinatio*, it is nevertheless true that by the mid-seventh century the *peregrinus* held a position of considerable prestige and power in Irish society. The Irish law tracts have a special term for him: he is the *deorad Dé*, 'exile of God'. Like the bishop or the chief poet, the *deorad Dé* has a legal status equal to that of the normal Irish king.³⁹ Any ordinary contract requires a surety before it is valid; but among the privileged contracts valid without a surety is 'a thing for which the men of heaven and the gospel of Christ are invoked [as sureties], for every exile of God is obliged to enforce their suretyship as though he himself had been invoked for it or as though his celebration [of religious rites] had guaranteed it'.⁴⁰ In other words, the exile of God is the representative on earth of God and the saints. The *peregrinus* might have renounced the world, but the power which he held prevented the world from renouncing him.

Though the glossators tend to equate the *deorad* with the *ambue* it is highly unlikely that the term *deorad Dé* was only applied to a *peregrinus*

³⁸ Cf. the well-known sentence in Columbanus, *Instructio* IV: *alienus tibi totus mundus est, qui nudus natus nudus sepeliris* (ed. G. M. Walker, *S. Columbani Opera*, Dublin, 1957, p. 78), where as in most of Columbanus's sermons the argument is that human life as such is a *peregrinatio*. In effect, Columbanus combines this notion of *peregrinatio* with the one which sees it as an ascetic exile. On the one hand 'ibi enim patria ubi Pater noster est. Patriam ergo non habemus in terra, quia Pater noster in caelis est' (*Instr.* viii, ed. Walker, p. 94), and, 'Occupemus itaque nos divinis, ne forte humanis, et quasi peregrini semper patriam suspiremus, semper patriam desideremus' (*ibid.*, p. 96). On the other hand, *peregrinatio* as exile is found in the letters: 'in has terras peregrinus processerim' (*Ep.* II, 6, ed. Walker, p. 16); and also in the sermons (*Instr.* IV, 2, ed. Walker, p. 80, l. 29). There may be a play on both notions in *Ep.* III, 2, where Columbanus and his fellow *peregrini* are at once in *peregrinatione* and in *patria* for they observe the *nostrorum regulae seniorum* not the *regulae Gallorum*. By the former are probably meant not just the Irish rules of Easter observance etc., but also the evangelical *canones* described in *Ep.* II, 5 (ed. Walker, p. 14), the rules of Christ and, therefore, of the heavenly *patria*. The two notions may also be combined in *Instr.* X, 3 (ed. Walker, p. 102, l. 33) where in *alienis habitamus* certainly refers to the earthly *peregrinatio* as opposed to the heavenly *patria*, but probably also to the foreign lands in which Columbanus and his fellow *peregrini* are living. For Columbanus the physical *peregrinatio* renders obvious and tangible the transient and alien nature of human life on earth. In this way he had no difficulty in adapting the insular notion of ascetic exile to continental conditions where a Burgundian, a Frank or a Roman took his law and legal standing with him wherever he went (the *Personalitätsprinzip*).

³⁹ *Bretha Crólige*, § 4 (ed. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu* xii 6); *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, p. 78. Cf. *Bretha Crólige*, § 12 (ed. Binchy, pp. 11-12, the note on pp. 58-8), the *deorad creitme* (= *deorad Dé*) in the text ed. Binchy *Ériu* xii 81 § 6, and the discussion on pp. 121-26.

⁴⁰ *Coibnes Uisci Thairidne*, § 7 (ed. D. A. Binchy, *Ériu* xvii 67 and note, pp. 80-81).

from another kingdom within Ireland. We know from Bede that English *peregrini* were welcomed in Ireland, and Ecgberct, at least, was a man of considerable influence.⁴¹ Given the value placed upon the *potior peregrinatio* it is probable that a man like Ecgberct held the position of power which the laws assign to the *deorad Dé*. *Deorad*, then, may be translated 'exile'; and the more restricted meaning given to the term by the glossators may be rejected.

The lawyers had not always given high status to the *peregrinus*. Indeed, it is probable that it was only in the second half of the sixth century that the church acquired the extensive privileges which appear in the seventh century law tracts. It is possible to trace in outline the path by which the *peregrinus* rose to the position of privilege which he held in the seventh century. The history of this rise helps to explain the attractions of *peregrinatio* for the Irish.

The first evidence for *peregrinatio* in Ireland is provided by the writings of St. Patrick. His *peregrinatio* among the Irish is one of the principal themes of the *Confessio* and the *Epistola*. One passage from each will show what exile entailed. In chapter 37 of the *Confessio* he explains how God triumphed in him against the arguments of his *seniores* with the following consequence:

ut ego ueneram ad Hibernas gentes euangelium praedicare et ab incredulis contumelias perferre, ut audirem obprobrium peregrinationis meae, et persecutiones multas usque ad uincula et ut darem ingenuitatem meam pro utilitate aliorum.⁴²

And in the *Epistola* he says:

Ingenuus fui secundum carnem; decorione patre nascor. Vendidi enim nobilitatem meam—non erubesco neque me paenitet—pro utilitate aliorum; denique seruus sum in Christo genti exterae.⁴³

The phrases are often biblical, but the loss of status to which he refers is not mere metaphor. On his hereditary status he is precise: his father was a *decurio*, and by birth, therefore, Patrick had *nobilitas*, *ingenuitas*. He was a member of the *curiales*. All this he lost through returning to Ireland as a missionary. Though a bishop, he did not have the status of a freeman. The difference between this situation and that of the church in the seventh century is complete: in the seventh century a bishop, by

⁴¹ Bede, *Hist. Eccles.*, iii, 27 (ed. Plummer, i, p. 192). Schieffer's verdict on Ecgberct is accurate: 'Er wurde der große Vermittler und Initiator' (Th. Schieffer, *Winfrid-Bonifatius und die christliche Grundlegung Europas*, 2nd ed., Darmstadt, 1972, p. 97).

⁴² *Libri Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi*, ed. L. Bieler (Dublin, 1952), p. 77.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 96.

virtue of his office, has the status of a king; in the fifth century a missionary bishop, by virtue of his exile, does not even have the status of a freeman. Patrick was a Briton, an *Albanach*, and therefore a *cú glas*, a complete outsider.

The links between the fifth-century situation and that in the seventh century can, to a limited extent, be reconstructed. First, there is a link between Patrick's writings and Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* in a point of vocabulary. It has been shown that Patrick's use of *proselitus* as an equivalent to *peregrinus* derives from the *Vetus Latina* bible.⁴⁴ By the standards of normal Christian usage on the continent it was, by the fifth century, archaic. But *proselitus* is used by Adomnán in exactly the same sense. In two out of five examples it is used for someone also termed a *peregrinus*. In one case it is used for a British disciple of St. Patrick.⁴⁵

For the sixth century church before the definitive conversion of Ireland there is the evidence of the so-called *First Synod of St. Patrick*.⁴⁶ The principal aims of the canons in this document are to strengthen the cohesion of the Christian community within a pagan kingdom, and, in part as a means to this end, to strengthen the authority of the bishop over the church. The terminology used by the text is revealing. The bishop enjoys *principatus* over a *plebs*, a *parruchia*. *Plebs*, however, is the Latin equivalent of OIr. *túath* which, in the seventh century, was the population of a kingdom and, therefore, of a bishopric since the latter coincided with the kingdom. In ecclesiastical contexts, *túath* was used for the lay population of a kingdom or diocese as opposed to the clergy, hence Adomnán's *plebeus homo* for OIr. *fer túaithe*, 'layman'.⁴⁷ It is probable that already by the time of this text one bishop to each *túath* was the norm. Yet, if this is the case, there is no doubt that some of these canons imply a policy which would have produced, in effect, a *túath* within a *túath*, a Christian *plebs* within a pagan kingdom. Recourse

⁴⁴ C. Mohrmann, *The Latin of St. Patrick* (Dublin, 1961), pp. 39–40.

⁴⁵ *Vita S. Columbae*, 2nd preface (ed. Reeves, p. 6; ed. Andersons, p. 182) for the British disciple of St. Patrick; I 32, 44 (ed. Reeves, pp. 61, 85, 86; ed. Andersons, pp. 270–72, 304) for the *proselitus/peregrini*; I 26, 30 (ed. Reeves, pp. 55, 59; ed. Andersons, pp. 260, 265, mistranslated 'new-comers' p. 266) for *proselitus*.

⁴⁶ On the date and character of this document see the discussion between D. A. Binchy, 'Patrick and his biographers', *Studia Hibernica* ii 45–49, L. Bieler, 'Patrick's Synod: a revision', *Mélanges offerts à Mlle. Christine Mohrmann* (Utrecht, 1963), pp. 96–102, K. Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), pp. 44–53, D. A. Binchy, 'St. Patrick's "First Synod"', *Studia Hibernica* viii 49–59, and K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: Introduction to the Sources* (London, 1972), pp. 67–71. I share the view of Dr. Hughes that the canons probably belong to the mid-sixth century.

⁴⁷ See the references in the index to the Andersons' ed.

to a judge is prohibited: the Christian must take his case to the Church.⁴⁸ Gifts from pagan kindreds are not to be received into the Christian community.⁴⁹ Since the exchange of gifts was an essential social bond in early Irish society, this canon implies a separation of each *túath* into two societies, one Christian, the other pagan.

The principal sanction mentioned in these canons is excommunication, namely, expulsion from *ecclesia*, *plebs* or *parruchia*. It is used not only for such serious offences as following Irish custom in the matter of divorce and second marriages,⁵⁰ but also for apparently less weighty offences: a cleric, for example, who takes his cut from gifts intended for the bishop is excommunicated.⁵¹ Excommunication is a serious matter: just as gifts are not to be accepted from pagan kindreds they are not to be accepted from an excommunicate.⁵²

If the Christian *plebs* is a conscious counterpart to the still pagan *túath*, then excommunication is the counterpart of punishment through exile in the secular law. Furthermore, once the final conversion has come about (probably in the second half of the sixth century), and Christian *plebs* and secular *túath* are to all intents and purposes identical, then excommunication will naturally imply exile from the *túath*. Final conversion, then, stimulated the growth of the system of penitential exile which is found in the seventh century.

Once the secular legal background is recognised it is possible to understand how the considerable British missionary effort in Ireland during the fifth and early sixth centuries and the fierce discipline exerted by the bishops of the sixth century Irish church contributed to the growth of the Irish tradition of *peregrinatio*. This tradition was always explicitly founded on certain key scriptural passages, but derived much of its power from the organization of Irish society. Because of the ideas which expressed that organization, *peregrinatio* was the most intelligible form of ascetic renunciation available to Irishmen. The ascetic ideal cohered with the society.

⁴⁸ *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. Bieler, p. 56, c. 20.

⁴⁹ *The Irish Penitentials*, loc. cit., c. 13. I prefer to translate *Elemosinam a gentibus offerendam in ecclesiam recipi non licet* by 'Alms offered by pagan kindreds ('pagans' Bieler) are not to be received into ('accepted for' Bieler) the church'. Pagans are *gentiles*, not *gentes*, in this text, cc. 8, 14, 20. Bieler translates *a gentibus sperat permissionem* in c. 24 by 'looks to laymen for permission'. Though in St. Patrick's genuine writings *gens* appears to be the equivalent of OIr. *túath*, there is good evidence in such later texts as Adomnan's *Vita Columbae* for the meaning 'kindred'; and this transl. fits the context in the *Synod* well. I should, therefore, transl. *gentes* in both cc. 13 & 24 by '(pagan) kindreds'.

⁵⁰ *The Irish Penitentials*, p. 56, c. 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58, c. 26.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 56, c. 12.

An important implication of this argument is that missionary work was an inherited element in the Irish tradition of *peregrinatio*. There has been considerable confusion on this question because of an excessive reaction against earlier panegyrics of the missionary achievements of Irish *peregrini*.⁵³ It has been rightly pointed out that a man may be a *peregrinus* without having any intention of being a missionary. This point is confirmed by the conclusion that an Irishman might be a *peregrinus* (of the lesser grade) even if he never left Ireland. What is now at issue is not, however, whether *peregrinatio* necessarily implied missionary intentions, but rather whether the way in which the Irish tradition of *peregrinatio* developed led to some *peregrini* becoming missionaries. The answer to this second question is clear: the part played by Patrick and other missionaries in the early growth of the tradition inevitably linked together the *potior peregrinatio* and missionary work. For men reared in that tradition it was natural, but not necessary, to be a missionary if one became a *peregrinus* of the higher grade.

The privileges accorded to the *deorad Dé* demonstrate the change which final conversion brought about in the position of the *peregrinus* within Ireland. To some extent the lesser *peregrinatio* was emptied of significance. The *peregrinus* might leave his native kingdom and his kinsmen, but his status was enhanced rather than diminished by his calling. The ascetic, then, was likely to turn to the superior grade of *peregrinatio*, or, if he did not wish to leave Ireland for Britain or the continent, he could retire to an island off the Irish coast. Both of these possibilities can be illustrated from the seventh century *Vita Fursei*. The young Fursa's religious vocation leads naturally to *peregrinatio*, at first of the lesser grade. He is described, at this stage, as *patriam parentesque*

⁵³ Scholars now generally deny or minimize the connections between *peregrinatio* and missionary work. For example, Schieffer, *Winfried-Bonifatius*, p. 86, writes of Columbanus, 'Wir wissen zwar, daß Columban und seine Jünger nicht zum Zwecke der Heidenmission ins Frankreich kamen'; and yet Columbanus himself thought otherwise, 'Mei voti fuit gentes visitare, et evangelium eis a nobis praedicari' (*Ep.* IV, 5, ed. Walker, p. 30, and cf. Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, I, 4, ed. Krusch, p. 160). The clarity of the debate suffers from a too rigid dichotomy between preaching to the wholly pagan and preaching to the half-Christian. The two were plainly closely connected in the minds of Columbanus and Jonas. Similarly Schieffer writes (p. 97) of Ecgerbert: 'Auch ihn ergriffen die Ideale des irischen Mönchtums, aber es blieb nicht bei einer Fortsetzung der traditionellen *peregrinatio*. Nicht ohne einen deutlichen römischen Einschlag rationaler Planmäßigkeit stellte der Angelsachse die asketische Heimatlosigkeit bewußt in den Dienst eines weitschauenden Missionswerkes'. Apart from the missions of Palladius and Augustine of Canterbury 'römische Planmäßigkeit' had been conspicuous by its absence: E. A. Thompson, 'Christianity and the Northern Barbarians', in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano (Oxford, 1963), pp. 56-78, who neglects, however, on p. 63 the evidence of Prosper, *Contra Collatorem*, which is effectively used by T. F. O'Rahilly, *The Two Patricks* (Dublin, 1942), pp. 20, 21.

relinquens, but not explicitly as a *peregrinus*.⁵⁴ After his monastic training and biblical education he builds a monastery from which he can visit his *patria*, and preach to his *parentes*. It appears that he was a *deorad Dé*, but retained close links with his native kingdom. It was at this point that he experienced his visions. Subsequently there is a change of direction: he preaches now *per universam Hyberniam*, proclaiming what he has learnt through his visions *omnibus populis Scottorum*.⁵⁵ But the position of a *deorad Dé* becomes insupportable: he cannot endure the *irruentium populorum multitudines*, and some are moved by envy to oppose him. First he retires *ad insulam quandam parvulam in mari*, and not long after he retires *de Hybernia insula, peregrina litora petens*. The offshore island is still conceived of as part of *Hibernia*. Only when he travels further, *per Britanniam in Saxoniam*, does the biographer speak of *peregrina litora*.⁵⁶

In the *Vita Fursei*, then, the distinction between the two types of *peregrinatio* is no longer so clear. True, the distinction undoubtedly survived as is shown by the ninth-century story *Liadain & Cuirithir*, but the position of power and status accorded to the *deorad Dé* has undermined the lesser *peregrinatio*: the *irruentium populorum multitudines* are too much. The emphasis is now on the superior *peregrinatio*, exile outside Ireland. Since at least Patrick's day the *potior peregrinatio* had often been associated with missionary work. In East Anglia Fursa is received hospitably by the king and the first activity which the biographer mentions is that of a missionary: *a Sigeberto rege honorifice susceptus, verbo Domini barbarorum mitigabat corda*. The sequence is the same for Columbanus: he proposed to remain in Gaul if his mission was welcomed, but if not, to travel further to neighbouring peoples.⁵⁷ Welcome implied, first of all, the hospitality of the king. As with Fursa, the mission was not that of the preacher in the market-place. The *peregrinus* used the same weapon which had led to the acquisition of power by the *deorad Dé* at home: the ascetic routine in the wilderness. The separation of the holy man from society was the fragile basis of his power as the bearer of divine authority.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Vita Fursei*, c. 2 (ed. Krusch, *MGH SS. rer. Mer.*, IV, p. 435; ed. W. W. Heist, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, Subsidia Hagiographica* No. 28, Brussels, 1965, p. 38).

⁵⁵ ed. Krusch, c. 4 p. 436; ed. Heist, c. 24, p. 48 (Krusch omits the visions, hence the difference between his chap. nos. and those of Heist.).

⁵⁶ ed. Krusch, c. 6, p. 437; ed. Heist, c. 26, pp. 48-9.

⁵⁷ Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, c. 4 (ed. Krusch, p. 160).

⁵⁸ On most points the analysis of P. R. L. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, lxi 80-101, is true of the Irish *peregrini*.

To the final conversion of the Irish in the second half of the sixth century may be attributed the legal establishment of the church hierarchy, and with it the *deorad Dé*, as a privileged profession parallel to that of the *filid*, the seers. This establishment turned the faces of Irish ascetics outwards, not only to islands in the sea but also to missionary fields in Britain and in eastern Gaul. Power at home led to *peregrinatio* abroad.

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