

Roy Flechner & S. Meeder (eds), *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe. Identity, Culture and Religion*. Palgrave: London, 2016. 288 pp. £49.68 hbk); £26.99 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-137-43060

Sven Meeder and Roy Flechner introduce their collection of essays with a summary of historiography on the impact of the Irish on Continental Europe that is notably clear. They organise their survey by periods, themes, and the nationalist or religious agendas driving scholarship, and highlight key controversies. Christopher Loveluck and Aidan O’Sullivan’s chapter on archaeological evidence for travel, transport, and communication covers a large timespan, c. 400–1100, and is necessarily general. They focus on the early part of the period, synthesising Ewan Campbell’s work and noting critiques of it, and gathering together evidence for contact with Byzantium. The authors are careful to address evidence from western Britain as well as Ireland where relevant. They argue for links between trade routes and religious travel by individuals, for example linking the salt trade to western Francia and the ‘sacred routeway’ from Ireland to Rome, which passed down the Loire valley to Tours and on. The section on the Viking period 850–1100 is brief and focuses on trade to Islamic Iberia.

Elva Johnston surveys the different aspects of the Irish understanding of *peregrinatio*, discussing how it was used in Irish texts and lived by the Irish, and charting its changing meaning and embodiment by individuals. Johnston emphasises the flexibility of the term and how it was accommodated to changing social and political circumstances, pointing up the difference between *peregrini* of the sixth and seventh centuries, and scholarly exiles fleeing the effects of the Vikings in the eighth. During her discussion she addresses associated questions, such as why the Continental Irish *peregrini* do not feature in Irish annals, and she points to potential new areas of research. Yaniv Fox meanwhile offers a critical reassessment of textual evidence for Irish ascetics in Merovingian Gaul, arguing that the Irish ascetic became a stock figure used as a

narrative device by Carolingian hagiographers, and as a legitimising agent by scribes of cartularies seeking to justify institutional landholdings. Fox shows how fictional characters were associated with actual historical figures who indeed had links to foundations with Irish backgrounds. The usefulness of these stock characters derived from the fame of the Irish for sanctity, and Fox's discussion demonstrates the genuine historical impact of Irish clerics in Merovingian Gaul. It nevertheless also serves as a reminder that we cannot assume that all such figures testify to an historical trend.

Albrecht Diem contributes a chapter on 'Columbanian' monastic rules in which he highlights the differences among three rules created after Columbanus's death and associated with monasteries linked to him. Diem shows how they departed from Columbanus's principles and practices, and reveal disagreement about whether Columbanus's rule was ideal. Diem relates these rules to dissent described by Jonas in his *Life of Columbanus*, and sets their ideas in their political and social context: an example is Eustathius and Waldebert's engagement with secular power which was possibly the sort of wrong behaviour that was the target of rules about abbatial behaviour in *Regula cuiusdam patris*. Diem also brings out the novel character of some of their content, as for example the stress on love as a means of total control in the *Regula cuiusdam ad uirgines*. The mass of early medieval monastic rules can appear a thicket, and Diem's chapter both leads the reader through the texts he discusses and advises on how to read rules, suggesting readers look for themes rather than concentrating on individual regulations. Also looking at Columbanian monasticism but this time from a conceptual perspective, Ian Wood offers another useful caution against accepting the picture of Columbanus's impact disseminated in Jonas' *Life*. Wood succinctly reviews the historiography on Columbanus and its biases, and then surveys the evidence concerning Columbanus and its problems, one of which is that it is found in a small interconnected group of sources. He concludes that the

way forward lies in setting Columbanus in the wider context of the sixth- and seventh-century monastic church in Gaul and Francia. This assured essay delivers valuable lessons in a minimal number of words.

Caitlin Corning looks at Columbanus's involvement in the question of dating Easter, and gives a useful summary of the issues involved in the process, the history of different practices, and the social and political context to Columbanus's arguments in favour of the *Latercus* table. The value of this essay lies in the clarity of Corning's explanations of the factors involved in dating Easter and the shifts in Columbanus's argumentation.

Mark Stansbury contributes a chapter on the much-debated topic of Irish exegesis; at the outset he distinguishes between material composed by Irish exegetes and a putative distinctive 'Irish' style of exegesis. Stansbury surveys the scholarship and its controversies, with the bulk of his discussion given to a critical assessment of Bernhard Bischoff's *Wendepunkte* article. He concludes that Bischoff's method was flawed in that he started with symptoms of Irishness and then used them to classify texts as Irish, rather than starting from all exegesis and identifying shared features ('he shot first, and drew the target second'). This methodological error is revealed by texts known to have been produced on the Continent that have features which Bischoff classed as 'Irish'.

Stansbury did not address Michael Gorman's response to Bischoff, which is part of the historiography, but Gorman's critique is largely nullified by Stansbury's inclusion of a range of different types of writing in manuscripts under the heading of exegesis, rightly justified on the basis that explanations can appear in different places and formats on the page, but anything aimed at explaining biblical text is exegesis. Stansbury's chapter is helpfully clear; his critique of Bischoff and suggestion that future research should look at a wider sample of anonymous Latin exegesis have been vindicated by the work of Lukas Dorfbauer on Fortunatianus's commentary on Matthew, which falsifies Jean Rittmueller's assumption in her edition of *Liber quaestionum in euangeliis* (Brepols, CCSL 108F,

Scriptores Celtigenae) that the commentary is distinctively Irish. It should be noted in passing that it is not true to say that ‘Irish scholars are important for the role they played in using and transmitting works by Pelagius’ (p. 118): Pelagius’s works circulated continuously on the Continent from the fifth century onwards, with his letters travelling most freely in Italy (Bonner, *The Myth of Pelagianism*, 2018).

Rob Meens summarises the Irish contribution to the penitential tradition in an outstanding essay surveying key discoveries, such as Ludger Körntgen’s of the sixth-century Insular *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum* on which Cummean’s penitential was based, and Meens’s own find of the late ninth-century *Paenitentiale Vindobonense C*. Meens overturns earlier assumptions, such as Ludwig Bieler’s, that penitentials were an Irish invention, explaining also why early examples should be termed ‘Insular’. He elucidates the purposes penitentials served, noting for example that early Insular penitentials allot compensation for sins, suggesting that they were used in dispute resolution between lay people, and were not used solely by monks and clerics. Discussing how penance worked in practice, Meens argues that a public/private contrast is too simplistic, and he shows that it was only from the second half of the eighth century that confession and penance were ritualised in liturgical form and became part of normal Christian life.

Turning to the liturgy of the Irish on the Continent, in his essay Yitzhak Hen describes the revision in scholarly thought that has occurred since the days when the idea of a ‘Celtic rite’ held sway; he assesses the sparse evidence available for early Irish liturgy, and concludes that liturgy in Ireland was similar to its counterpart in Gaul. Hen’s discussion is a summary overview, but like the other chapters it revises the scholarly narrative to take account of wider Continental evidence, displaying a trend toward reduced perception of Irish particularism.

Immo Warntjes contributes a chapter comparing the study of computus in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. If read in combination with

Corning's chapter, the subject of *computus* should no longer be impenetrable to any student. Warntjes divides his discussion into four sections: tables, texts, scholars, and manuscripts, and gives a lucid account of the history and nature of the different tables in circulation and the scholarship on *computus*. He argues for a maximalist interpretation of Irish impact in this field, particularly for the period c. 725–60, but he also details other traditions of expertise, for example, subsequent Anglo-Saxon and Frankish study of *computus*. Warntjes is also clear about his methodology for classification of computistical texts as Irish, and identifies scholarship as Insular where no diagnostically Irish symptoms are present (such as the Old Irish language). He sets out a careful process to avoid Bischoff's error, including studying *computistica* produced across Europe to enable diagnostic features other than language to emerge; examples of such features are diagnostically Irish concepts, algorithms, and definitions. Warntjes points to a bright future for research on *computistica*, and to its potential contribution to network analysis between monastic centres.

Sven Meeder gives an overview of current knowledge about individual Irishmen on the Continent during the Carolingian age. He argues that Charlemagne's stress on grammatical expertise initiated his internationalist approach, and he surveys the types of evidence testifying to Irish scholars' activities, citing as examples, poetry, colophons, and connections between manuscripts. Meeder takes aim at the assumption that there were 'Irish centres on the Continent', meaning by this centres dominated by Irish monks or defined by their Irish heritage. Together with his co-editor, Meeder also contributes a chapter on controversies and ethnic tensions. They examine four cases: Columbanus, the Irish bishop Clemens, ethnic rhetoric deployed at the monastery of St Gall, and John Scottus Eriugena's involvement in the Carolingian controversy over predestination. Their overall conclusion is that Irish identity was multivalent and could be used as a simple identifier, an exotic attribute,

or a term of abuse. The essay usefully gathers together some interesting evidence, and may prompt further research. A small point is that Prudentius of Troyes was perhaps being ironic in his comment that Eriugena was the only person able to understand what no one else in Gaul could, particularly given the reference to Gaul being ‘drunk on Celtic eloquence’. It is also not safe to assume that the ‘horrible ideas about predestination’ of which the Irish bishop Clemens was accused related to Pelagius, since as Meeder and Flechner observe, the Carolingian church contained bishops (such as Prudentius) who advocated dual predestination.

Elizabeth Duncan’s chapter describes the diagnostic features of Insular and Late Celtic script, summarising the work of T.J. Brown and David Dumville. She does not address the question of features that might locate script more precisely to Ireland within the Insular milieu. Duncan notes the importance of Irish *peregrini* in bringing about the presence on the Continent of manuscripts with Insular features: she points out that the survival of these manuscripts has contributed to our knowledge of developments in Insular script, and briefly discusses some examples.

In their concluding remarks Meeder and Flechner place questions about methodology in identifying Irish influence centre-stage. They introduce students to a more critical approach based on awareness of the nature of the evidence and the need to relate possible symptoms of Irish influence to the wider context. Most of the chapters in the volume present revisions triggered by setting the evidence for Irish influence in its wider Continental context and successfully undermine old paradigms. The overall effect is to bring a valuable critical perspective to the subject of Irish influence on Continental culture. The editors flag up in their introduction that they did not seek to assemble specialist studies, but to create a book that makes a broad point about scholarly methodology. In this they have succeeded. The volume both reflects the direction of current scholarship and points to future avenues of research; the further reading

section will help students pursue their own studies. *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe* is an accessible introduction that will deservedly feature on student reading lists and be a help to interested academics.

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