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IROMANIE-IROPHOBIE REVISITED:
A SUGGESTED FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR CONSIDERING
CONTINENTAL REACTIONS TO IRISH PEREGRINI
IN THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CENTURIES*

In his stimulating essay on *Iromanie-Irophobie*, Johannes Duft cogently observed that the attitudes expressed by these terms were already current in the Early Middle Ages when some writers demonstrated a marked predilection to identify poorly documented but significant non-Irish figures, works and foundations, as Irish.

Already in the ninth century, the Irish presence had captured the imagination of continentals and the reputation of the *peregrini* was such that many of these uncertain attributions seemed reasonable to both learned and unlearned alike. As is well known, however, that reputation was a mixed one. Some were greatly impressed by the piety, asceticism and missionary efforts of the *peregrini*; others criticized them for an undisciplined wandering life and an unwillingness to abide by the rules, hierarchy and conventions of continental society and its religious traditions. Part of the problem lay in the marked contrast in such matters as tonsure, liturgy, orthography and abbatial-episcopal relations.

Although these are obvious grounds for serious differences of opinion, it seems to the present writer, at least, that they are not really a sufficient explanation for the division of opinion since some thought well of the *peregrini* despite them while others did not.

In the following brief essay, I should like to look more closely at the matter of cultural difference. All specialized questions dealing with Easter dating, the production of manuscripts, the foundation of monasteries and the like are purposely excluded. Rather, I am more interested in sketching the actual mental make-up, the temper and cultural personality, so to speak, of the *peregrini* themselves. There are important nuances here which have not been much recognized in continental

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3 See the works cited in notes 1 and 2 and Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, Ithaca 1966, p. 91-111.
historiography but are nonetheless essential to understanding the entire question of Germano-Celtic cultural interaction. The place to begin is with Irish society itself.

Unlike the continent, where learning in the seventh and eighth centuries was predominantly in the hands of the church, Irish society possessed separate learned groups, some of which had their own organized schools and arduous curricula of training. These were the elite of the *àdæ aná*, the «learned men» or «men of art,» of whom the most important were the poets (*filid*) and jurists (*britheimin*). Each of these honored groups had a long tradition of native pagan learning. Many of their members had a status equal to that of a noble lord and the most learned amongst them had a *wergild* equal to that of a petty king. They belonged to the *nemed* class (cf. Gaulish *nemeton*), the meaning of which is «sacred» or «holy», and their standing was sustained by religious feelings as well as wealth. It seems correct to call them a «mandarin class». Such status was well recognized by the church in its legislation. Indeed, in the seventh and eighth centuries, it was the church which had to strive for equal recognition with the learned orders and not the other way around. Partly as a consequence, perhaps, the Irish church sought to accommodate, and succeeded in accommodating, a great deal of traditional vernacular learning and associated attitudes which, on the continent, would have seemed highly exotic and redolent of paganism.

Of all the learned orders, the Irish monks were most closely drawn to the *filid*, the poet-seers, and it is probably no accident that the great sixth century abbot, Columba of Iona, was closely connected with them in early medieval legend. The association of churchmen and poets went further than is widely recognized. The grades of rank of the poetic hierarchy, for example, were synchronized with those of the church by 700 or so. Moreover, it is certain that many monks wrote poetry in both Latin and the vernacular. Large numbers of poets were actually attached to monasteries. One eighth-century legal text declares that many of the learned

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6 Kelly (as note 4) p. 43f.


professions could be practiced in both lay and monastic society without change of status⁹. Another makes clear that some churchmen were expected as a matter of course to be versed in both poetry and history¹⁰. According to one Middle Irish legal tract, each monastery was to have its own poet and jurist¹¹. Evidence like this has caused more than one scholar to recently conclude that »the syllabus of the ideal or exemplary Irish monastic school comprised three interacting subjects-léigenn »ecclesiastical learning«, filidecht »poetry or native lore« and féinechas »native law«. It is no surprise to find that the great and thoroughly pagan saga, Táin Bó Cuailnge, »The Cattle-Raid of Cooley,« one or another version of which existed around 700, was either produced or written down in a monastery¹³. The twelfth-century scribe who recorded the Book of Leinster recension of the text wrote that he gave no credence to the fables of the Táin or to the demonic incidents described in it. At the same time, however, he also proclaimed »a blessing on everyone who shall faithfully memorize the Táin as it is written here and shall not add any other form to it«¹⁴. The story still possessed something of a »magical potency.« Such an attitude is perfectly consistent and understandable in the Irish tradition but who can imagine a Christian continental monk bestowing a blessing on someone who would memorize the Voluspá or the Merseburger Zauberspruch? The concept of what is praiseworthy is simply not the same.

To understand the way in which secular learning and tradition influenced Irish monks, one must know something more about the filid. Early sources reveal the poet's order to have been organized in various grades depending upon skill¹⁵. They were greatly revered for they had the power to bless and to praise but were also feared since their contrasting ability to curse and satirize was universally acknowledged¹⁶. In fact, medieval Irish literature from the seventh century onwards is replete with examples of magical contests and flytings between poet/druid (the two are not easily distinguishable)¹⁷ and saint, in which the saint only wins by trickery or great effort and does not always emerge unscathed. Like the saints, the poet/druids could successfully bless and curse, raise contrary winds, darken the sky and afflict with disease¹⁸. The cooperation between the two nemed groups, on the other hand, is again emphasized in the late seventh century Vita Patricii where it is the king's poet

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¹¹ Ibid. p. 23.
¹³ The two main recensions have been edited and translated by Cecile O'Rahilly, Táin Bó Cuailnge. Recension I, Dublin 1976; Táin Bó Cuailnge from the Book of Leinster, Dublin 1967.
¹⁵ These sources have edited and translated by Liam Breathnach, Uraicecht Na Riar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law, Dublin 1967.
who rises as a mark of respect to the saint and becomes a witness to the new faith in Tara. Most interesting in the present context, perhaps, is the peripatetic or itinerant nature of the poets for they are depicted in the sources as constantly underway, moving from one lordly hall to another all over the island. Their status entitled them to expect and receive hospitality and reverence. Such travel was otherwise rare in Ireland for beyond one’s own kingdom one became an endangered foreigner or exile, a deoraid of low status who was fair game without kin or protectors. In fact, the only two groups who normally traveled in this way were poets and peregrini, a point which again draws attention to their association and interaction. One must, of course, immediately add that not all peregrini were monks and that the concept of peregrinatio is as old as Christianity itself. Nonetheless, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that close association with the poetic order helps to explain the prevalence of the Irish practice or, indeed, some of the complaints about the wanderings of peregrini on the continent. In short, the traditional explanation of peregrinatio is certainly correct but it does seem to require recognition of an additional cultural nuance separate from religious belief.

Some aspects of the learning of the Irish monks also seem to have derived from traditions of the poetic order. It is otherwise difficult to account for the pronounced love of exotic vocabulary, allusion and word play which is so impressively evident in Irish culture. It helps to explain why the Etymologies of Isidore received so welcome a reception in Ireland even before 650 and why it achieved such great prestige thereafter. It also helps to understand the development of the remarkable Sondersprache of the Hisperica Famina and other related literature. The fili’s love of subtle speech, hieratic language and public scholarly disputation to achieve rank is surely reflected there. A similar mélange of pride and delight in language is displayed in

power of the poets was so feared that it might be incorporated among the formal sanctions of a treaty: Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae I, Oxford 1968, p. cii with notes.


22 Michael W. Herren, (ed. and trans.), The Hisperica Famina I. The A-Text, Toronto 1974, p. 42: «The whole of the Famina are filled with allusions to the superiority of one person’s knowledge or rhetorical ability over those of another. Competition is everywhere in evidence: the scholars are competing for trophaea. All in all, there is so little evidence of a Christian tradition and so many vestiges of a pagan one, that we must surely conclude that the authors of these works were attempting to preserve some remnants of the pagan culture of Ancient Ireland.» See also Michael W. Herren, The Hisperica
Auraicept na nÉces, or the »Poet's Primer«, a text much read in the eighth century and later. This has been described as »the first medieval grammar of a European vernacular«. What is most surprising about it, however, is the mentality of the scribe. He regards Irish as superior to all other forms of speech, including the three sacred ones of Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Anders Ahlqvist views this opinion as likely to have been a native idea for no other early medieval tradition dared to challenge the supremacy of the biblical and patristic languages. Although the author was surely a monk, the manuscript tradition of the Auraicept demonstrates that it was the product of a school specializing in poetico-legal material. Again, even allowing for the triumphalist tone of the prologue to Lex Salica, it is difficult to imagine a Frankish monk maintaining that his language is superior to that of the bible.

Aside from their attitudes to pagan texts, poetry, learning and the use of the vernacular, the Irish also developed a singular approach to church government. It is currently a matter of much debate; so too is the relationship between oral and written materials and the degree of continuity of paganism. It is certainly correct to say, however, that Irish Christianity borrowed continuously from the native secular law of the learned jurists. Take, for example, the Irish concept of abbacy. The word


25 AHLQVIST (as note 23) p. 12f., 19f.

26 Ibid. p. 13.


used to designate an abbot was *princeps* which, in the continental context, usually signified rulers of various kinds but was not normally applied to heads of monastic houses. As Hughes and Davies have shown, its usage in Ireland constituted an exceptional particularization. *Principatus* was similar. It was frequently applied to the authority of abbot and bishop as well as king and so were terms like *regnnum* and *monarchia*. In other words, the terminology of authority suggests that writers of the seventh and eighth centuries regarded abbots in the same light as they regarded secular rulers. Even the qualities which might seem to be naturally secular and royal elsewhere were explicitly linked with abbots in Ireland. This will become more understandable when it is realized that the greater monasteries of Ireland were actually monastic settlements or «towns» in which monks, priests, nuns, poets, judges and bishops with their male and female dependents, lived. As Richard Sharpe observes: »An eighth century *monasterium* might have far more non-monks than monks.« The abbot exercised monarchical power over all of them. He possessed rights of taxation and superior jurisdiction and seems to have often assumed that submission to Christianity implied submission to its officers.

A similar non-continental mentality permeated the Irish concept of *peregrinatio*. That concept has recently been clarified in several important contributions so I will not go into detail here. It is worth stressing, however, as T. M. Charles-Edwards showed, that »by the mid-seventh century the *peregrinus* held a position of considerable prestige and power in Irish society.« If he had vowed to undertake the *potior peregrinatio*, life-long exile overseas, then he also became a *deorad Dé*, »exile of God«, with a status equal to that of the normal king. Although contemporary and later hagiographers frequently mention his difficulties in leaving home and family, it also seems likely that his family gained in prestige and that his kin-group could take justifiable pride in his decision. Self-sacrifice and increased honor went hand-in-hand. By virtue of his vow, the »exile of God« became a living and walking martyr, a saint in all certainty and a representative of God on earth. It seems right to say that

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32 Davies (as note 31) p. 83 f.


34 Sharpe (as note 28) p. 261.

35 Davies (as note 31) p. 89 f.


37 Charles-Edwards (as note 20) p. 53.
»the peregrinus might have renounced the world, but the power which he held prevented the world from renouncing him.« \textsuperscript{38}

The portrait which now begins to emerge is considerably more varicolored and diverse than that often depicted in contemporary historical commentary. Some aspects of the modern, or even medieval continental, ideas about humility, self-sacrifice and monastic piety simply do not accord with the attitudes expressed in the sources discussed here. Irish monastic culture, it may be suggested, was strongly influenced by the still living pagan traditions of the haughty poets and the flourishing schools of jurisprudence. How else does one account for the Irish conception of the Old Testament as a law-book\textsuperscript{39} or for the views expressed in the Collectio Canonum Hibernensis and elsewhere that the learned clergy are judges in the same way as the priests and levites of ancient Israel?\textsuperscript{40} Ó Corráin, Bretnach and Breen draw on vernacular texts to show that in ecclesiastical cases three individuals are chosen to judge, the bishop, the scribe and the man who holds worldly affairs in contempt\textsuperscript{41}. The procedure is that prescribed in the Pentateuch.

Statements like these accurately portray a mentality. Whether they reflect actual practice is a question in urgent need of extended study\textsuperscript{42}. But we are not far from the claim, at least, that learned men are the right and proper judges of kings. Irish hagiography provides plenty of examples and the peregrini on the continent certainly kept the concept in mind. Consider, for instance, the case of Columbanus who, as Wallace-Hadrill stated, »broke every Gallic conciliar decree on the right relationship of monks with diocesans; and these decrees had unimpeachable canonical tradition behind them.« \textsuperscript{43} As his own writings show, Columbanus was a man who deeply believed in humility, who disdained arrogance and who practiced a severe form of asceticism\textsuperscript{44}. Yet, he is also the man who sternly lectured popes, spurned bishops and chastised kings\textsuperscript{45}. Kilian exhibits a similar chutzpah before duke Gozbert\textsuperscript{46}. So does Corbinian in Arbeo's \textit{vita} dedicated to Virgil of Salzburg (who was himself willing

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Raymund Kottje, Studien zum Einfluß des alten Testaments auf Recht und Liturgie des frühen Mittelalters, Bonn 1964, p. 11–43. See also the works cited in note 30.
\textsuperscript{40} Hermann Wasserschleben (ed.), Die irische Kanonensammlung, Aalen 1966\textsuperscript{2}, p. 62f.
\textsuperscript{41} Ó Corrání (as note 30) p. 397f.
\textsuperscript{42} For the kinds of problems involved, see Peter Classen (ed.), Recht und Schrift im Mittelalter, Sigmaringen 1977.
\textsuperscript{43} J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, The Frankish Church, Oxford 1983, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{44} His sermons on faith, love, poverty and remorse exhibit a wonderful generosity of mind and a passionate belief in the embracing love of the Creator. See G. S. M. Walker (ed. and trans.), \textit{Sancti Columbani Opera}, Dublin 1970, p. 60–121.
\textsuperscript{46} A number of studies in Ericshen (as note 2) are relevant. See especially Wilhelm Störmer, Die Herzöge in Franken und die Mission, p. 257–268; Hans-Werner Götz, Die Viten des hl. Kilian, p. 287–298.
to repeatedly confront the famous Boniface, a papal legate). As Franz Brunholzl remarks, the events of the *vita* together with Corbinian’s *Unbeugsamkeit* and *aufbrausendem Wesen* clearly recall the character and personality of Columbanus. The similarity goes further than that. When Corbinian persisted in accusing the duke’s wife of an illegal marriage, Pilitrud replied in such a way as to suggest that he was Irish (*Brittanorum origine ortum*) or, perhaps, that he was acting like an Irishman. However one interprets the remark, it seems clear that the Irish reputation for admonishing rulers and disregarding their prerogatives was well known.

In Ireland, at least, the willingness of saints to stand steadfast against authority of all kinds would reach heights undreamed of on the continent. Students of medieval hagiography routinely state that the greatest of all miracles is that of raising the dead. But that is not so certain. The coercion of the Divine Being, if it can rightly be called a »miracle«, might well be thought to outshine it.

In Muirchú’s seventh century *Vita Patricii*, we are told that Patrick had petitioned God with four requests. An angel had thereafter appeared to proclaim that they had been granted. Among these requests was the famous one that Patrick be allowed to become the judge of the Irish on the day of doom. Although the exact way in which Patrick had advanced his petition is not described in Muirchú, it may well be that depicted in the vernacular *Tripartite Life* from the end of the ninth century which incorporates much from earlier sources. According to this *vita*, Patrick had

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49 Franz BRUNHÖLZL (ed. and trans.), Bischof Arbeo von Freising. Das Leben des heiligen Korbinian, in: Hubert GLASER, Franz BRUNHÖLZL, Sigmund BENKER (Hgg.), *Vita Corbiniani*, München 1983, p. 134: Propeterea coitie invide fomitem ministrabat; aiebat hoc ob principis dispectum aegisse episcopum, Brittanorum origine ortum, aliud nil quam mortis reum proclamitans. Although recent scholars have not followed them, both Bruno KRUSCH, *Arbeonis Episcopi Frisingensis Vitae Sanctorum Haimbrammi et Corbiniani*, Hannover 1920, p. 135–144, and Georg BAESHECKE, Vor – und Frühgeschichte des deutschen Schrifttums II, Halle 1953, p. 116f., have argued strongly for the Irish or Celtic origins of Corbinian. For a discussion of the historiography, see Hubert Glaser, Bischof Arbeo von Freising als Gegenstand der neueren Forschung, p. 11–76, in the work cited above. With regard to royal chastising, it should be pointed out that the lowest grade of Irish king was considerably less powerful and more approachable than his titular continental counterpart. See RICHTER (as note 5) p. 17f. Although this may have played some role in conditioning the attitudes of monks, it is unlikely to have been decisive. The power of the Irish kings was not negligible and grew during the Christian period. See Marilyn GERRIETS, Kingship and Exchange in Pre-Viking Ireland, in: Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 13 (Summer 1987) p. 39–72 and, by the same author, The King as Judge in Early Ireland, in: Celtica 20 (1988) p. 29–52. Although late, one remark in a vita seems to exemplify much of the Irish monastic attitude when it states that kings were enemies of the saint but that God forced them to obey him: Reges enim erant semper inimites ei, sed divina virtute ei obedient cobeabantur. Vita S. Aidi Episcopi Killariensis in W. W. HEIST (ed.), *Vita Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Bruxelles 1965, p. 178.

50 BIELER (as note 19) p. 116.

presented his petition on a mountain top. The angel who often accompanied him gave God's answer: »God gives thee not what thou demandest, because it seems to him excessive and obstinate, and great are the requests.« 32 Patrick replied that he would not leave the mountain »till I am dead or till all the requests are granted to me.« So Patrick abided there »in much displeasure, without drink, without food ... after the manner of Moses.« 33 After forty days, the angel reappeared with impressive spiritual grants of power for the saint and demanded again that Patrick leave. But the saint continued to remain obstinate and adamant through a long series of dramatic angelic promises: »Except (only) if the high King of seven heavens should come, I will not get me gone since I have been tormented, till I am blessed.« Eventually, the exasperated Deity gave up: »The Lord said, 'There hath not come, and there will not come, after the apostles, a man more admirable, were it not for thy hardness. What thou hast prayed for thou shalt have'.« Patrick then proclaimed a blessing on God and departed the mountain.

It is hard to imagine a more impressive performance than this! However, the act of pressuring God is not at all uncommon in high and late medieval Irish vitae 34. In reading them some eighty years ago, Charles Plummer remarked that the notion that saints might actually confront God or upbraid Him because he does not conform to their wishes is something which sounds blasphemous to modern ears 35. It was less so in popular culture of the Middle Ages for there are some points in common here with the idea of the humiliation of saints discussed by Patrick Geary 36. Nonetheless, this Irish method of negotiating with the supernatural is memorably eccentric and can only be explained by positing a thorough assimilation of secular legal learning.

The relevant concepts are peculiar ones of grace, clientage and fasting. As Pádraig Ó Ríain points out, the Latin word gratia, even as it occurs in the common continental phrase gratia dei, did not enter Irish until the High Middle Ages 37. In earlier times, the word used instead was rath, nominally the verbal noun of ernaid, »bestows.« Rath had a strong legal/contractual sense and was commonly used of »goods, chattels, especially as bestowed in bounty.« 38 It was part of the lord/client relationship whereby the lord provided stock, usually cattle, to a client. The client must then make a yearly payment in return, sometimes a number of offspring of the cattle, and was obliged to enter the lord's retinue as well as to perform military and other kinds of labor services 39. The lord, in turn, was obliged to protect the client's...
interests. Essentially the same contractual idea was applied by the church to its parishioners. The very pervasiveness of the concept is demonstrated by the phrase *céile dé*, »God’s client« used to describe members of the clergy and those in religious orders. As the term *mug*, »slave, bondsman«, also appears as an element in the names of some honored free men of earlier times, it seems probable that the idea of religious clientship played a significant role in pagan culture. The law of fasting is equally archaic and, like the concept of »God’s bondsman«, has an Indo-European background. In a court case in Irish law, the position of the plaintiff was often difficult if the defendant was of *nemed* rank. Hence, the plaintiff might proceed to bring pressure through a ritualized fast before the *nemed*’s dwelling. In such a case, the *nemed* was bound to concede justice to the plaintiff and could not himself eat except under penalty of paying twice the amount originally owed. If the defendant was a churchman, he might not recite his *pater* or *credo* or take the sacraments until the case was settled. Until then, the clapper of his bell was tied to symbolically mark his incompetence.

These are the concepts and the process by which Irish holy men might pressure God, even chide him for perceived faults. Although Patrick is compared to Moses, and although other parallels can be found in the Old Testament, his actions are entirely in accord with indigenous native law. According to this law, he is entitled to fast in order to advance his case and, as the »client« of his »lord«, God owes him a sympathetic hearing and some amount of reciprocity. But his demands are great ones and God can rightly describe him as a »hard« man. Here we see another intriguing aspect of the manner in which common theological concepts could intermingle in Ireland with native traditions to produce something strikingly different from continental norms. Alone among early medieval Europeans (with the possible exception of some Jewish communities), the Irish had creatively included God in their legal system in such a way that he could be sued by his follower and forced to concede what he had originally refused. Why should monks who conceived of God as their patron in this way pay much attention to lesser authorities, secular or spiritual? That attitude explains why Piligrud could think of Corbinian as being »Irish«. The *peregrini* were known for disregarding social status. Of course, one did not have to be Irish to take this view; other holy men could and would do the same. The fact is, however, that it can not have been very common behavior on the continent since it appears to have been especially associated with Irish monks.

The implications of the present interpretation go beyond the matter at hand. Consider that very little is actually understood about the rationale for the intensity of Irish asceticism. Although continental monks would share in the common theological groundings for such behavior, the extremes of ascetic life were unconventional and were not always highly regarded so that Christian teachings alone can not explain the pervasive Irish passion, the extra measure of self-sacrifice for which they were famous. In the end, all efforts to do so must return to Irish culture itself.

60 O’Riain (as note 12) p. 363: »Almost certainly underlying the choice of the legal term *rath* for *gratia* is the assumption that the Christian goad stood to the Irish in the relationship of overlord to clients«.
61 Ibid.
62 Binchy (as note 54) p. 168f.
63 Kelly (as note 4) p. 182f.; Thurneysen (as note 54) p. 260–275.
A working hypothesis is this: If Irish monks were »clients« of God who had provided stock to them, i.e., who had suffered and died for their sins, who had granted them baptism and provided them heaven, then rent was owed to Him in the form of the offspring of that stock and in other services. Since the stock which he had provided was the greatest that could be imagined, then the rent to be paid was equally high - strict devotion together with the scouring of the body that interfered with complete allegiance to God's precepts.

Of course, the idea of penance for sin is ubiquitous among Christians. The present hypothesis proposes the existence of an additional culturally determined dimension of that concept and is not meant to replace it. One must remember, however, that Irish conceptions of penance drew heavily on native law and so, because it looked to the same source, could the ascetic practice of fasting become associated with the traditional one. D. A. Binchy writes: »a separate word was used in early Christian Irish to denote fasting as an ascetic practice – ain(e), borrowed from Latin ieiunnium – which was thus sharply differentiated from the inherited word troscaid, the form invariably used in the secular literature for the traditional »coercive« fasting. Significantly enough, the Latin loan-word eventually dropped out of religious literature also and the native troscaid became the normal term for Christian fasting ...«. The parallels with rath and cèile de are obvious. What has not hitherto been sufficiently realized, however, is the driving force which these native concepts possessed and the influence which they would exert on the pattern of Irish religiosity. On the basis of this approach, a more diversified and nuanced perspective seems possible.

The early Irish consciousness of the obligations of clientship must have been absolute. At the heart of religious clientship lay ideas about affiliation, loyalty and, most probably, a fearsomely rigorous concept of a permanent indebtedness to be permanently repaid. This is why Patrick could say that »I have been tormented, till I am blessed«. Blessedness follows torment. This is implied in early sources like the Liber Angeli which emphasize Patrick's toil and suffering immediately before reference to his supernatural grant of power, and it is also present more explicitly in later works where an angel might regard seven years of fasting as entitling a saint to

64 Binchy (as note 54) p. 169.
65 R. C. Stacey (as note 59) p. 49 writes: »For what lies at the heart of clientship, and maintenance arrangements, and neighborhood relationships, if not an extended state of indebtedness on the part of one or both of the parties involved? Certainly the jurists conceived of the relationship between a church and its parishioners in exactly these terms. Corpus Bescnai's use of contractual language in its enumeration of the dues owed by the church to the laity (for instance, baptism, communion, masses for departed souls) and by the laity to the church (for instance, tithes, first-fruits, and legacies of the appropriate size) would strike a modern-day churchgoer as nothing short of bizarre; only in a culture in which debt was an expression of ongoing affiliation does such language make sense. To this persuasive interpretation, I would only add that the Irish also seem to have been thinking of the concept of »covenant« from the Old Testament. The poet Blathmac might thus compare God to a lord whose clients are the Jews. Other peoples, e.g., the Franks, might speak of themselves as a new »chosen people« but the Irish approached it from a legalistic viewpoint, added the concept of clientship, and applied it most sternly to churchmen.
66 Bieler (as note 19) p. 184.
make a request of God. Such perception of religious reciprocity and duty endowed Irish peregrini with supreme self-confidence but it also required constant extraordinary effort to maintain the contractual balance. If Irish monks demanded much of others, they demanded incomparably more of themselves; it was the rent due for salvation.

The Irish strain of sanctity held great appeal for many Europeans. Monks in particular were impressed but so were kings who treasured the presence of holy men even when they were exasperated by their inability to command them. Impressed too were the people of the countryside who, I suggest, would have been much inspired by supremely self-confident ascetics with sympathies for poetry and the vernacular and an unmatched enthusiasm for mixing the themes of saga with Christian hagiography. Folk legends might quickly grow from these historical roots to create the early medieval reputation discussed by Johannes Duft.

Irish ascetics were more like those of the East than of the West and their behavior often parallels that of the holy men of late antiquity so brilliantly discussed by Peter Brown. They placed their faith in the model of the living saint and no decree of book, synod or king counted for more. But the charismatic outlook was sure to clash with the institutional. Kings ultimately wanted organizational obedience and docility and bishops needed the bones of dead saints more than the muscles of live ones with extra-organizational authority and popular followings. The presence of dispersed ascetics was only desirable if they could be harnessed and made faithful spokesmen for organizational goals. As the coordinated episcopate moved against them, the peregrini were destined to lose. It is this perspective on their cultural personality,


71 There are, of course, many other cultural differences which might have given rise to dispute. One thinks of diverse notions and institutions centering on hospitality, for example. If Wendy Davies is right, however, contrasting ideas about healing may have been especially important since they had the potential for seriously affecting continental episcopal revenues. In her stimulating paper on The Place of Healing in Early Irish Society, in: Ó Corrann (as note 8) p. 43–55, Davies notes that there are relatively few healing miracles in Irish vitae of the seventh and eighth centuries, a very odd phenomenon in comparison with continental norms. Nor are there any large Irish collections of charms and herbal remedies such as those of late Anglo-Saxon England. In Muirchu’s Life of Patrick, there is only one healing miracle out of twenty-five; in Tírechán only one in nine and here the saint actually avoided healing; in Adomnán’s Life of Columba, a maximum of eleven out of 121 miraculous incidents and in Cogitosus three out of thirty-three. By contrast, miracles of healing tend to
however – that of the charismatic holy man whose approach to religion was channeled by the assumptions of the learned orders of his homeland – that may help to clarify the Irish reputation and lead to a better understanding of the variety of continental reactions in the seventh and eighth centuries.

predominate in Merovingian and Carolingian lives. In Ireland, the practice of healing lay with doctors (members of the Æs Ænno possessing a legal function) who nurse and cared for the sick but did not usually administer medicines and with women associated with magical healing through spells and incantations. »... Irish clerical writers did not initially see healing as an appropriate manifestation of saintly power nor local magic as translatable into Christian modes of explanation«. The powers of Irish saints seem to have been more closely connected with protection, property, visions, warfare, cursing and so on. Although Davies does not deal with the peregrini or their conflicts with continental authority, her paper has important implications for this milieu. Continental bishops often grew powerful through their control of saints’ graves and shrines which they jealously guarded and which were exploited by them as places of frequent healing miracles. The views of the peregrini in the seventh and eighth centuries (although not so much perhaps in the ninth) may have been far different and if so they are likely to have been perceived as a danger or at least a challenge to episcopal wealth and influence. Although the overall importance of such attitudes is difficult to assess, it is improbable that they were taken casually.
The Irish *peregrini* of the seventh and eighth centuries impressed continental observers not only because of their level of training and education but also because of their differing cultural personality. Unlike the continent, Irish society possessed a learned secular elite, the *aés dano*, which was especially active in the preservation of pre-Christian law and literature and forced the church to a compromise in a number of areas. As a consequence, Irish monks came to have much in common with traditional poets and jurists and absorbed a measure of their world view. The legal conceptions of the latter group concerning the institution of clientage also influenced the monks' interpretation of their relationship to God. In part, at least, they may have viewed themselves as the contractual clients of a divine lord who demanded of them great sacrifice and devotion but who also owed them a certain amount of regard and reciprocity. Such interpretation affected their attitudes towards asceticism and towards continental secular and episcopal authorities. It emphasized the stature of charismatic holy men in indirect opposition to the institutional church which seems to have resented their extra-organizational popularity.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**


**RéSUMÉ**

Les *peregrini* irlandais des VIIe et VIIIe siècles impressionnèrent les observateurs continentaux non seulement par leur niveau de formation et d'éducation, mais aussi par leur personnalité culturelle différente. Contrairement à la situation sur le Continent, la société irlandaise possédait une élite séculière instruite (l' *aés dano*), qui était particulièrement active dans le maintien des lois pré-chrétiennes et qui, en maints domaines, avait contraint l'Eglise au compromis. Par conséquent, les moines irlandais avaient de nombreux points communs avec les poètes et les juristes traditionnels et avaient intégré une partie de leur vision du monde. Les conceptions juridiques de ce groupe sur la clientèle comme institution influencèrent aussi l'interprétation par les moines de leurs relations avec Dieu. Partiellement au moins, ils ont pu se considérer comme des clients contractuels d'un seigneur divin qui leur demandait de grands sacrifices et une grande dévotion, mais qui leur accordait aussi respect et réciprocité. Une telle interprétation marque l'attitude de ces moines envers l'ascétisme et envers les autorités séculières et épiscopales du Continent; elle valorise les saints charismatiques, contrairement à l'Eglise institutionnelle qui semble avoir été hostile à leur popularité en dehors de toute organisation.