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The Eschatological Body: Fleeing the Centre in Pre-Modern Insular Christianity and Post-Modern Secularity

Sara Terreault

Concordia University, Montreal QC, sara.terreault@concordia.ca

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The Eschatological Body: Fleeing the Centre in Pre-modern Insular Christianity and Post-modern Secularity

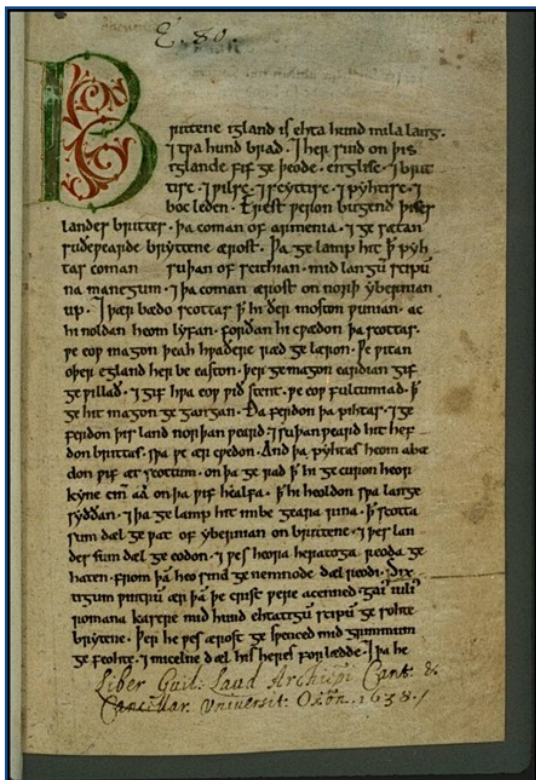
Sara Terreault

Concordia University, Montreal QC
sara.terreault@concordia.ca

'The Eschatological Body' examines the practice *peregrinatio pro Christo* among the Insular Christians living at the north-west edge of Europe in the early Middle Ages. The paper distinguishes this *peregrinatio ex patria* from the more conventional understanding of pilgrimage as *peregrinatio ad loca*, or destinational pilgrimage. It explores the theological and existential meanings of exile, foreignness, and home inherent in the practices, and suggests that for these Insular *peregrini*, the body becomes the dynamic 'centre' in decentred, itinerant lives awaiting the eschaton. The paper concludes by considering the possible links between this ancient practice and the postmodern notion of 'existential migration' as theorised by psychologist Greg Madoson.

Key Words: pilgrimage, pre-modern Christianity, Christian pilgrimage, peregrinatio, peregrinatio pro Christo, peregrinatio ex patria, peregrinatio ad loca, peregrini, destinational pilgrimage, Insular Christianity, Patrick, Columba, Columbanus, seafarer, Anglo-Saxon, existential migration, serial pilgrims, post-modern pilgrimage, secularism

Figure 1 : Initial page of the Peterborough Chronicle, also known as the Laud manuscript and the E-manuscript. A version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, dating from the 12th century.



Source : Bodleian Library, Oxford:
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9d/Peterborough.Chronicle.firstpage.jpg>

Introduction

Between lines recording the efforts of Arnulf, King of East Francia, at the Battle of Leuven, and the death of an esteemed Irish teacher named Suibhne, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 891 notes the sea journey of three men from Ireland who ran aground at Cornwall. They landed high-and-dry not due to miscalculation or equipment failure but by the destiny to which they expressly gave themselves, setting off as they did in a skin coracle, sans rudder and sans oars.^[1] The chronicler deemed it remarkable enough to record, though he did so quite plainly and without apparent amazement or alarm:

And three Irishmen came to king Alfred in a boat without any oars, from Ireland, whence they had stolen away because they wished for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, they cared not where. The boat in which they set out was made of two and a half hides, and they had taken with them, provisions for a week and after a week they came to land in Cornwall, and soon went to King Alfred. Thus were they named: Dubhslaine and Macbeathadh and Maelinmhain.^[2]

1. The Anglo-Saxon text of the Parker Chronicle (A version) reads, 'bate butan ælcum gerebrum': A. H. Smith, ed., *The Parker Chronicle, 832-900* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1980), 40.

Figure 2 : *To the Skellig*, Éamonn O'Doherty , bronze, 1995, Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry, Ireland.



Kelly's sculpture depicts monks making pilgrimage from the Kerry coast to the island of Skellig Michael. The monastic settlement on Skellig Michael dates back at least to the 7th century, and probably earlier.

Source: Daragh O'Driscoll, 2012, with permission.

In the context in which the text was written, the word translated above as 'pilgrimage' (*elþiodignesse* in the Anglo-Saxon) also denoted foreign travel, sojourn, or exile. Early Jesus movements adopted the notion of exile as existentially representative of the human condition, as numerous passages in the New Testament demonstrate.^[3] By the early Middle Ages a fully developed theology of estrangement from the heavenly *patria* had developed, linking biblical metaphor with the culture of movement of late antiquity, with its complex notions of civil and legal status, belonging

2. G. N. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1972), 82; this text is a translation of the Parker Chronicle, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 173. The Anglo-Saxon text as follows: 'þrie Scottas comon to Ełfrede cyninge, on anum bate butan ełcum gereþrum of Hibernia, þonon hi hi bestęlon forþon þe hi woldon for Godes lufan on elþiodignesse beon, hi ne rohton hwær. Se bat wæs geworht of þridan healfre hyde þe hi on foron, 7 hi namon mid him þæt hi hæfdun to seofon nihtum mete; 7 þa comon hie ymb .vii. niht to londe on Cornwalum. 7 foron þa sona to Ełfrede cyninge; Þus hie wæron genemnde, Dubslane 7 Maccbethu. 7 Maelinmun,' Smith, *Parker Chronicle*, 40.

3. See Ephesians 2:19, Hebrews 11:13, for instance.

and foreignness. From the late third century when Antony the Great moved out into the Egyptian Desert in response to the Gospel call of Jesus to follow him: 'go, sell what you possess and give to the poor . . .',^[4] significant numbers of Christians - more- or less-formally monastic^[5] - imitated the spiritual homelessness of their itinerant saviour and his disciples through bodily leave-taking and self-exile. This *peregrinatio ex patria*, or *xeniteia* in the Greek-speaking context, marked early monastic culture with a spirit of mobility and contingency, what Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony has called 'an exodus toward self-transformation.'^[6]

In the Insular world at the north-west edge of Europe in the early Middle Ages, '*peregrinatio*' carried the double-sense of an *intentional journey*, this is, a literal leaving of one's native country, and of an *existential condition*, that is, a state of spiritual alienation from the heavenly fatherland, which was the ultimate destiny of the human soul. Some Insular *peregrini ex patria* were monastic migrants who left home and settled humbly in foreign lands, leaving little or no historical trace; nothing further is known of the three who landed at Cornwall in 891, for instance. Others became beloved spiritual heroes lionised for ascetical virtuosity, intellectual prowess, and/or religious and cultural mission, such as the founders of the powerful monasteries of Iona and Lindisfarne, and the cleric-scholars at the Frankish courts. But all of these *peregrini* left their earthly homeland and social centre for the sake of a deeper existential home, centred effectively - albeit provisionally - in the itinerant body oriented transcendently toward the eschaton.

A seventh century text in Old Irish and Latin known as the Cambrai Homily identifies this exilic pilgrimage as 'white martyrdom,' to wit: 'when they part for the sake

4. See the passage from Matt 19:21 cited as catalyst for Antony's leaving home in Athanasius, 'The Life of Antony,' *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (Robert C. Gregg, trans; New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 31.

5. That monasticism in early Christianity was a fluid and, in some expressions even anarchic, phenomenon is sometimes obscured by the subsequent prevalence of the Benedictine Rule, which normalised stability of place within Western monasticism, and explicitly condemned monastic wandering. See Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300-800* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 5-6.

6. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2005), 147.

of God from everything that they love.^[7] This is pilgrimage not as *journey* to a sacred earthly centre, but rather pilgrimage as existential *condition* of transience. As witness to the innate ambiguity of human being, which ineluctably oscillates between stasis and movement, between now and to-come, between here and somewhere else, *peregrinatio* was purposefully directed into geographic, social, and psychic margins. The pilgrim's aspiration for arrival and centring is postponed in favour of departure and displacement. The only proximate destination is a spiritual horizon open to the transcendent and the eschatological: the *peregrinus* or *peregrina* seeks his or her 'place of resurrection,'^[8] i.e., his or her place of death, the 'where' that the unlocalisable God releases her or him into eternity.

I'd like to consider the de-centring practice of *peregrinatio pro Christo* as distinctive of the Christianity of Ireland and the British Isles in the early Middle Ages. I will retain the Latin terms '*peregrinatio*' and '*peregrini*' to distinguish Insular exilic migration and migrants from the more conventional sense of pilgrims as travellers to sacred centres. I have chosen the term 'Insular Christianity' to include what are often referred to separately as 'Celtic,' 'British,' and 'Anglo-Saxon' Christianity, or together as the more unwieldy (and still inadequate) 'Hiberno-Saxon' Christianity.^[9] If insularity in the geographical sense tempts assumption of cultural insularity, it is important to remember that travel by water within and beyond the Atlantic Archipelago was often easier, and almost certainly faster than trekking over land; indeed, evidence of water-borne mobility among and beyond these Isles dates back to the earliest periods of human habitation.^[10] Contact among the Isles of the early medieval period (and with the wider world) is richly evidenced in the archaeology of trading centres in Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.^[11]

Shared spiritual culture was inevitable given the intense interchange - economic, political, and cultural - between Christian Ireland and Britain. While Christianity initially travelled from Roman Britain to Ireland,^[12] the direction of influence shifted after the withdrawal of Rome in the early fifth century. By the sixth century, Irish 'saints and scholars' were famously (and eventually infamously)^[13] bringing their thought and practices to Britain and the Continent, and British and Anglo-Saxon monastics were travelling to study in Ireland. While the persistent notion of a unified or uniform Celtic or Insular Church pitted over and against a Roman Church has been solidly refuted,^[14] there were nonetheless distinctive cultural continuities among the Christian inhabitants of Britain and Ireland. A strong penchant for peregrination was one of these.

Through primary texts in English translation, I will retrieve the discourse of foreignness and exile, and the eschatological desire for a transcendent home expressed by the Insular *peregrini* and by those who memorialised and theologised their acts of holy mobility. Attending carefully to the texts of *peregrinatio* is an ethical matter: we are in a sense *hospites*, both guests and strangers, in their worlds of religious meaning and it is incumbent on us to listen to them generously, even while reflecting critically. Without presuming to psychoanalyse across centuries, something of the theoretical *and* existential dimension of the Insular wanderers can be recovered in reading these texts.

Having listened to the voices of the past, I will then briefly conclude by considering a perhaps surprising resonance between the intensely religious practice of *peregrinatio* and a restlessness that psychologist Greg Madison has identified in secular postmodernity and has termed 'existential migration.' Based on his intensive research with a group of contemporary

7. Oliver Davies, ed., *Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 369-370.

8. The phrase 'place of resurrection' can be found in medieval Irish hagiography; see Esther de Waal, *Every Earthly Blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic Tradition* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 27, 40, 42.

9. For a short but helpful discussion of current research on the commonalities among Irish and British of the early Middle Ages, see Caitlin Corning, *The Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 178-181.

10. Evidence of travel over water dating back to at least the Mesolithic period along the Atlantic Seaboard is discussed in Barry Cunliffe, *Britain Begins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 72-75.

11. Paul Fouracre, 'Britain, Ireland, and Europe, c.500-c.750,' *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c.500-c.1100* (Pauline Stafford, ed.; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 128.

12. And this certainly before the arrival of Palladius in Ireland who was sent in the year 431 by Pope Celestine, according to the Chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine, 'To the Irish believing in Christ' (*ad Scottos in Christum credentes*); quoted in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200* (London & New York: Longman, 1997), 14.

13. See below regarding grumblings amongst some of the Insular *peregrini*'s continental contemporaries.

14. Huw Pryce, 'Conversions to Christianity,' *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c.500-c.1100* (Pauline Stafford, ed.; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 143.

voluntary migrants, Madison proposes that *practices* of mobility and self-chosen exile are properly expressive of a radical existential *condition* that haunts some people some of the time, and others much of their lives. Of people who recognise in themselves such a condition, including himself, he writes: ‘We are living paradoxes. We need to feel at home but have never done so, we need to belong but renounce opportunities for belonging, we venture into the unknown in order to experience the homecoming that will finally settle us, but doesn’t.’^[15] Existential migration is ‘instigated by a powerful need to pursue one’s personal potential by maximising freedom, independence, and choice.’^[16] Existential migrants ‘choose to make themselves foreigners,’^[17] and, in choosing *not* to be at home, enact the desire for some deeper and elusive home to which to belong.^[18] For existential migrants, and I will suggest, also for the Insular *peregrini*, the locus of life’s meaning-making is shifted from a sacred earthly centre of belonging to a sacred decentred *not*-belonging. Their very bodily selves become their temporal centres; and arrival at ‘home’ is perpetually postponed through ongoing desire for a ‘true’ home always beyond the imagined - and perhaps imaginable - horizon.

Pilgrimage as Centring and De-centring

Both popular and scholarly construals of pilgrimage usually involve the notion of centripetal bodily movement toward a consecrated destination. In Christian tradition, the archetype is found in the medieval pilgrim journey that culminated in bodily arrival at a sacred centre, an *axis mundi*^[19] activated by the bodily traces of a holy hero. Arrival at the destination may involve ritual engagement with place and persons associated with it. Jenn Cianca’s preceding article uncovers the earliest roots of practices that ground this conventional understanding of pilgrimage in the Christian tradition, and the next piece by George Greenia presents the apotheosis of Western destinational pilgrimage in his examination of

medieval Christian religious journey. The Kumbh Mela in South Asian tradition and the Hajj in Islam also fit the pattern of pilgrimage as travel vectored toward a sacred centre, as do apparently secular journeys to such places as legendary battlefields and graves of beloved artists and entertainers. Even the micro-pilgrimage offered by the increasingly popular practice of labyrinth walking is movement *toward* a specific somewhere, typically located in the centre of the winding path.^[20]

Destinational pilgrimages are not *simply* destination-centred, however: they are *doubly* centred. Barring unexpected circumstances or events on the way,^[21] a return journey from a *sacred centre* is part of the conventionally-understood pilgrimage pattern, and the return is typically a return to a *quotidian centre*, that is, a return *home*. Victor and Edith Turner assumed this when they appropriated Arnold Van Gennep’s tripartite rites-of-passage structure of separation - limen - reaggregation to chart the conventional pilgrimage process.^[22] The phases of separation and liminality indicate a withdrawal from the quotidian centre to travel to a transcendent ‘centre out there,’^[23] thence a return home bearing spiritual (and perhaps also material) gifts acquired on the journey. The object of contemporary pilgrimage studies is typically some form of centring, or destinational pilgrimage, often though not always understood in some relationship - positive, negative, or nuanced - to Turnerian theory. Ultimate or, in Christian theological language, *eschatological* concern may (traditionally) or may not^[24] be part of destinational pilgrimage; when it is,

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15. Greg A. Madison, *The End of Belonging: Untold Stories of Leaving Home and the Psychology of Global Relocation* (London: Greg A. Madison, 2010), 7.
 16. Greg A. Madison, ‘Home’ is an Interaction, Not a Place,’ *Existential Analysis* 27/1 (January 2016): 28.
 17. Madison, *End of Belonging*, 13.
 18. Madison, *End of Belonging*, 13.
 19. I borrow the term from Mircea Eliade on the ‘symbolism of the ‘centre’’ in religious worldviews; see his *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 27-56. He relates this centre directly to the pilgrim experience at page 43.

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20. Lauren Artress’s introduction of the labyrinth at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, in 1991 marks a watershed moment in the popular reclaiming of labyrinth walking as spiritual journey. She stresses a three-fold pattern of the ‘Three Rs’ - Releasing, Receiving and Returning’ that maps neatly onto Victor Turner’s and Edith Turner’s separation-limen-reaggregation schema (see footnote 22 below). Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool* (New York: Penguin, 2006), xii.
 21. Medieval pilgrims typically put their worldly and spiritual affairs in order before leaving on pilgrimage because death *en route* was a real possibility. For a detailed description of how pilgrims typically prepared for the journey, see Jonathan Sumption, *The Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 168-175.
 22. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 231, 249.
 23. Victor Turner, ‘The Centre Out There: Pilgrim’s Goal,’ *History of Religions* 12/3 (Feb 1973): 191-230.

ultimate concern is eventually rewoven into the resumed, if transformed, pragmatics of returning to and living at home.

While *peregrinatio* and the English word ‘pilgrimage’ share a common etymology, the early Christian *peregrinatio ex patria* should not be mistaken for *peregrinatio ad loca sancta*, that is, destinational or centring pilgrimage. In the Latin world, the term *peregrinatio* definitively indicated the living out of some form of foreignness, whether sentenced as punishment for criminal behaviour, or chosen as ascetical-penitential spiritual practice.^[25] Evoking both his erstwhile Neo-Platonism and his subsequent biblically-grounded grasp of the alienating effects of the Fall, Augustine of Hippo identified the Christian as inherently pilgrim, as ‘someone who feels foreign and wants to go home’ to the true fatherland.^[26] For Augustine, this was not a call to bodily journey but an affirmation of the human condition. Indeed, many early Christian writers, Augustine included, explicitly discouraged physical travel, both *ad loca sancta* as well as *ex patria*, for a variety of reasons ranging from concerns for personal safety, to the moral dangers *en route*, to the risk of idolatry of place associated with non-Christian traditions.^[27] In other instances, however, and especially in the Insular world of northwestern Europe, the psychic and physical asceticism of bodily departure became an expression of Christian earthly life as exile. Leaving home for these *peregrini* meant leaving not only kith and kin, but also leaving their social centre and their locus of familiarity and of political and bodily safety. In the ultimate act of faith in God’s providence, they assumed the legal status of foreigners, concretely performing through bodily displacement their spirituality of alienation and its implicit desire for their true home.

24. It can be argued that secularisation results not in a liquidation but rather an immanentisation of eschatology. For a short survey of secularised eschatology from Enlightenment onward, see Frederic J. Baumgartner’s ‘The Millennium of Pure Reason,’ (Chapter IX), in his *Longing for The End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 133-150.
25. Manuela Brito-Martins, ‘The Concept of *peregrinatio* in Saint Augustine and its Influences,’ *Exile in the Middle Ages: Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8-11 July 2002* (Laura Napran and Elisabeth Van Houts, eds.; Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 83.
26. Gillian Clark, ‘Pilgrims and Foreigners: Augustine on Traveling Home,’ *Travel, Communication, and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Linda Ellis and Frank Kidner, eds.; Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 149.
27. Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 36-42.

Figure 3: Coracle and paddle, typical River Teifi design, displayed in Manordeifi Old Church Manordeifi, Pembrokeshire, Wales.



Coracles of similar design have been used since, and continue to be used to today in Ireland and the British Isles, as well as in South and Southeast Asia.

Thus, Insular *peregrinatio pro Christo* was constituted not by travel *to* a holy centre, but rather by extended - sometimes permanent - movement *away from* the quotidian centre of an often-beloved earthly homeland. Whether travelling on foot to make hermitage in a neighbouring but still relatively ‘foreign’ locality, or setting out by river and sea to remote islands, or to the Continent (and, according to some albeit improbable claims, as far away as North America),^[28] to preach or teach, to sojourn or to wander onwards, the ultimate goal of the *peregrini* was the heavenly home. Christianity emerged in the context of a Jewish culture shot through with eschatological hope; the heart of Jesus’s preaching centres on the nearness of the Kingdom, or reign, of God (Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ,

28. See the propositions of Geoffrey Ashe in his *Land to the West: St. Brendan's Voyage to America* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), and Tim Severin in his *The Brendan Voyage* (London: Hutchinson and Toronto: Nelson, Foster & Scott, 1978).

basileia tou theou). Throughout the gospels and the other New Testament writings, the nearness of the Kingdom seems alternately spatial and temporal, alternately at hand and yet still to come. This urgency - and ambiguity - is reflected in the eschatology of the scripture-soaked Insular Christians. Living latitudinally at the edge of the known world, they also saw themselves as living historically on the 'edge of the eschaton,'^[29] and so as heirs to the eschatology and missiology of Jesus and the apostles. *Peregrinatio pro Christo* afforded them variously and sometimes simultaneously the identity of 'strangers and foreigners on the earth' (Heb 11:13), the opportunity for figurative if not bodily martyrdom via exile (Cambrai Homily), and the context for preaching and teaching 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1.8).

Although not the originators of pilgrimage as voluntary exile, Insular Christians gained a reputation at home and abroad for holy restlessness.^[30] By the ninth century, Heiric, the irritable if witty Benedictine monk of Auxerre, famously wondered if indeed, given the numbers of Irish *peregrini* on the continent, there were any Irish left in Ireland.^[31] For a time, arguably from the fifth century if we count the Briton St. Patrick a *peregrinus* in Ireland (as I will below) into the ninth century if we likewise count the Irish and Anglo-Saxon scholars at the Carolingian court (which they themselves did),^[32] *peregrinatio* shaped Insular Christianity and influenced Christianity on the Continent. It did so internally as a characteristic expression of the Insular faith, and externally as *peregrini* exerted powerful spiritual and intellectual influence through their journeys beyond the Isles. The

practice of *peregrinatio* proved to be flexible, adapting to socio-political conditions in the Isles and abroad. From original ideals of asceticism and penance combined with local traditions of penal exile in secular law,^[33] *peregrinatio* was accommodated to the exigencies of both mission and scholarship. Seminal historian of early Irish Christianity, Kathleen Hughes, suggested that *peregrinatio* shifted from bodily journey practice to literary trope as both Insular and Continental attitudes toward monastic mobility waned and preference for stability increasingly gained official favour.^[34] The Viking raids in the Isles began in the late eighth century and spread to the Continent, doubtless adding a dampening effect on the travels of *peregrini*, though perhaps adding to the romance of the emerging journey tales.^[35] Even after the waning of the practice, the literary celebration of the eschatological wanderers preserved the spiritual ideals and adventures of the *peregrini*; the Voyage of Saint Brendan (*Nauigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis*, composed c.780-800),^[36] became a medieval blockbuster. Yet we know from the case of Dubhslaine and Macbeathadh and Maelinmhain that *peregrini* were still setting themselves adrift as late as 891.

Textual sources of *peregrinatio*

1) Patrick as *peregrinus*

Saint Patrick is not usually counted among the Insular *peregrini*.^[37] However, in both extant texts from his own hand, he characterises his life in Ireland as one of a stranger in an alien land, travelling for the sake of Christ.^[38] The *Epistola* is a withering warning to a warband that had captured and enslaved a number of

29. Thomas O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2005), 74.

30. For example, in his ninth century *Life of St Gall*, Walafrid Strabo identified the practice of exilic pilgrimage with the very nature of being Irish: 'Quibus consuetudo peregrinandi iam paene in naturam conversa est,' quoted in Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c.700-c.1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 7.

31. Sven Meeder references the *Miracula Sancti Germani Heiric of Auxerre*, (c.870) to this effect in 'Irish Scholars and Carolingian Learning,' *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture, and Religion* (eds. Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder; London: Palgrave, 2016), 185.

32. Linda Dohmen demonstrates how most of the Irish and Anglo-Saxons who lived at court or in monasteries on the Continent considered their stay abroad 'as a *peregrinatio*, a pilgrimage in the service of God'; see her 'Wanderers between Two World: Irish and Anglo-Saxon Scholars at the Court of Charlemagne' in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, eds. Meredith Cohen and Justine Firnhaber-Baker (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 96.

33. The influence of legal tradition in the Irish context in particular is explored in detail in T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *peregrinatio*,' *Celtica* 11 (1976): 43-59.

34. See Kathleen Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11/2 (October 1960): 148ff. From the eighth century onward, the spread of local movements like the Céli Dé from Ireland to Scotland and England, and the normalisation of Benedictine monasticism on the Continent meant increasing emphasis on stability of place in the religious life.

35. Hughes, 'Irish Pilgrimage,' 146-147.

36. Jonathan M. Wooding, 'Monastic Voyaging and the *Nauigatio*,' *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism* (Jonathan M. Wooding, ed.; Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 229.

37. Patrick, probably a Brythonic Celt, was born to a middle-class Christian family somewhere in western Britain, possibly Cumbria. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 16.

38. *Confessio* 26, 34 in Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 74, 75; in this volume, Davies retitles the *Confessio* of Patrick as 'Patrick's Declaration of the Great Works of God.' I retain *Confessio*.

his Irish converts,^[39] and the *Confessio*, a defense against his critics by way of a declaration of his faith and his experience of the actions of God in his life. In the *Confessio*, Patrick explains how he himself was taken forcibly to Ireland as a slave, escaped, then years later returned voluntarily as a divinely contracted missionary. He fashions an eschatological portrait of himself as an itinerant evangelist, working at ‘the very ends of the earth’ (*Confessio* 1)^[40] and in ‘the last days . . . before the end of the world’ (*Confessio* 34),^[41] as per the great commission of the risen Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).

Patrick’s journeys do not fit the classic motif of *peregrinatio* according to which ascetic or penitential motive is primary and preaching or teaching secondary; indeed, Patrick’s record of his experiences exactly invert this order. But such a definition of *peregrinatio* is practically too restricted, saying more about ideal than reality, more about historiography than history.^[42] In his own words, he refers to his travels as *peregrinationis meae*,^[43] ‘my pilgrimage’ or ‘my exile’ (*Confessio* 37), to the Irish amongst whom he worked as *alienigenas*, ‘aliens’ (*Confessio* 1), and to himself as *peregrino propter nomen suum*: a ‘stranger for [the Lord’s] name’ or pilgrim (*Confessio* 26).^[44] In the *Epistola* Patrick calls himself *proselitus et profuga, ob amorem Dei*, ‘a stranger and exile for the love of God’ (*Epistola* 1), deliberately characterising himself as a sojourner in an alien land. Further, in both texts he underlines the hardships that are necessarily part of his mission, and clearly understands these in ascetical terms. He details his bodily suffering in ‘snow and ice and rain’ which compounded intentional spiritual practices of fasting and prayer (*Confessio* 16, 17),^[45] he

describes how the ‘zeal of God’ and the ‘truth of Christ’ have driven his ultimate renunciation of his homeland for the love of ‘neighbours and children’ (*Epistola* 1).^[46] In his depiction of the trials inherent in his work, he places himself in the tradition of suffering in the spiritual wilderness, from the Jews in the book of Exodus through the temptation of Christ in the Gospels to the eremitic lives of Desert Fathers so beloved in the Insular world. In fact, he explicitly describes a twenty-eight day bodily passage through a (presumably actual) desert (*desertum*) after fleeing Ireland, complete with a battle with Satan (*Confessio* 19 ff).

There is evident in Patrick’s *Confessio* a significant and undoubtedly wrenching experience of the tension between home and not-home, between belonging and being an exile. He recounts how he was welcomed home by his parents after escaping slavery in Ireland, perhaps via Gaul,^[47] and how, despite their pleas that he remain with them in Britain (*Confessio* 23), he chose to leave the hard-won familiarity and affection of home to return to Ireland after experiencing a ‘night vision’ in which ‘the voice of the Irish’ called to him. Patrick tells us in his own words that he was compelled in the very core of himself, ‘broken-hearted’ (*Confessio* 23),^[48] to leave home for a life as a missionary, but also as foreigner, an ascetic, and a penitent. According to Thomas O’Loughlin, ‘In Patrick’s case we can be certain of this much: he saw himself as a stranger in Ireland working on the fringes of human space and time.’^[49] In his own writing and according to the grand tradition that arose in his name, it is clear that as existential anticipating the eschaton, Patrick must be counted among the Insular *peregrini*, indeed perhaps as the first of their number.

2) Columba the Princely peregrinus

Within a century of Patrick’s activity in Ireland,^[50] Saint Columba sailed from Ireland to the Isle of Iona in the Inner Hebrides. There he established a monastery that would become one of the most powerful and

39. Raiding parties back and forth across the Irish Sea were not uncommon in the years following the withdrawal of Rome from Britain in the early fifth century; Patrick’s first journey to Ireland was as a slave kidnapped by one such Irish foray into northwest Britain.

40. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 67.

41. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 75-76.

42. See James Bruce’s argument for the missionary component of *peregrinatio* in Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae* (late seventh century), in *Prophecy, Miracles, Angels, and Heavenly Light? The Eschatology, Pneumatology, and Missiology of Adomnán’s Life of St Columba* (Carlisle and Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2004), 209-211.

43. All references in this article to the Latin texts of Patrick’s *Confessio* and *Epistola* are from ‘*Ego Patricius*,’ Royal Irish Academy, accessed March 26, 2017. <http://www.confessio.ie/#>.

44. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 74, 482n; the reference to delivery for the sake of the Lord’s name is from Psalm 106:8.

45. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 71.

46. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 84. Davies retitles the *Epistola* of Patrick as ‘The Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus’; I retain *Epistola*.

47. Muirchú’s *Life* of Patrick, written in the seventh century, places Patrick in Gaul studying under Germanus at Auxerre ‘for a long time’ before returning to Britain; see the *Vita Patricii* 1:6, available in English translation in O’Loughlin’s *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 192-229.

48. Davies, *Celtic Spirituality*, 23.

49. O’Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 78.

50. Patrick’s dates are the subject of much debate; O’Loughlin’s argument for dating Patrick’s death in 493 remains convincing, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 44-47.

influential of all Insular monastic foundations. On his father's side, Columba was born into the powerful lineage of the Northern Uí Néill dynasty of Ulster; he became a monk as a young adult and had a productive religious career in Ireland where he founded several monasteries. His departure for Britain is recounted by Adomnán, ninth abbot of Iona in the *Vita Columbae* (*VC* hereafter), the most important source of information about Columba. Adomnán tells his readers how two years after the Battle of Cúl Dreimhne (561), 'the holy man first set sail from Ireland to be a pilgrim' [*vir beatus de Scotia peregrinaturus primitus enavigavit*].^[51] Adomnán twice dates Columba's departure by way of the battle,^[52] but does not claim a causal link. By the eleventh century, however, there had arisen various associations to the effect that Columba's journey was either imposed as punishment, or undertaken voluntarily as penance for his involvement in the battle,^[53] the cause of which was (sometimes) reported to be the unauthorised copying by Columba of a manuscript that belonged to St Finnian.^[54] Whether departing purely as *peregrinus pro Christo*, or for some legal or penitential reason connected or not to battles or manuscripts, Columba would not have been travelling into the unknown. As an Irish nobleman he would likely have known and even possibly had some pull within the Dál Riata kingdom that spanned the Irish northeast (part of Co. Antrim) and western Scotland (roughly Argyll). Columba's social and religious capital is recognised on his arrival in Britain: Adomnán recounts how, soon after landing, he visited and delivered a clairvoyant message to King Conall mac Comgaill of Dál Riata (*VC* 1.7). It is King Conall who is reputed to have bestowed on Columba the Isle of Iona for his monastic settlement.^[55] According to the *Vita*, Columba continued to be enmeshed in political issues in his homeland and made numerous journeys back to Ireland during his period of pilgrimage in Britain. He also received many visitors to Iona, seven of whom are identified by Adomnán's story as *peregrini*. Nonetheless, he acquired the traditional nickname of

Cúl ri Érenn, meaning 'Back Toward Ireland,'^[56] underlining his spiritual, if not always bodily or political separation from home.

Given the actual and likely socio-political components of Columba's journey, it does not present with the same risky abandon as that of the Irishmen who landed in Cornwall in 891 (Introduction above). He is clearly identified by Adomnán as a *peregrinus pro Christo*,^[57] recognising the *condition* of Columba's earthly life at Iona as 'living in pilgrimage [*peregrinantem*] in Britain.'^[58] Further, at his death: 'he was crossing over from this weary pilgrimage [*peregrinatione*] to the heavenly home.'^[59] Iona was Columba's place of pilgrimage, not his second home: he was a *peregrinus* because he turned his back toward his earthly home in order to orient himself toward the eschaton.

3) Columbanus: *peregrinus to the Continent*

Perhaps the most celebrated of the Insular *peregrini* is St Columbanus, another Irishman who lived a generation after his namesake (and perhaps role model), St Columba. Columbanus's story can be worked out by way of his own writing, which includes a rule for monks, a collection of homilies, and songs and poetry, in addition to a *Vita* written by one Jonas, a monk at Bobbio, only about twenty-five years after his subject's death. Jonas's sources included monks at Bobbio who had known Columbanus; he also used earlier texts,^[60] and in the *Vita* seems keen to substantiate the data he provides.^[61]

According to Jonas, the young Columbanus had an encounter with a female anchorite who was living in her 'place of pilgrimage' (*peregrinationis locum*), away, but still in Ireland.^[62] Had she not been prevented by the 'frailty' of womanhood (*fragilis sexus*), she explains, she would have crossed the sea

51. *Vita Columbae* 1.7: '*vir beatus de Scotia peregrinaturus primitus enavigavit*' in *Life of St. Columba, founder of Hy* (William Reeves, ed.; Dublin: University Press for the Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1857), 31. English translations in this article are from Adomnán of Iona, *Life of Columba*, (Richard Sharpe, trans.; Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1995), this quote at 118.
52. *Vita Columbae*, second preface and 1.7.
53. Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, 13.
54. Phyllis G. Jestice, *Encyclopedia of Irish Spirituality* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 141.
55. Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, 16.

56. Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, 15.

57. *Vita Columbae*, Second Preface: '*de Scotia ad Britanniam pro Christo peregrinari volens*.'

58. *Vita Columbae* 1.13; Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, 122.

59. *Vita Columbae* 3.23; Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, 229.

60. Aidan Breen, 'Columbanus' Monastic Life and Education in Ireland,' *Seanchas Ard Mhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 23/2 (2011): 7.

61. Jonas's representation of political and religious contexts in which Columbanus moved is problematic and in places erroneous. Jonas of Bobbio, *Life of Columbanus, Life of John of Réomé, and Life of Vedast* (Alexander O'Hara and Ian Wood, trans.; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 23.

62. Jonas of Bobbio, *Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis* (Bruno Krusch, trans.; Hanover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1905), 156.

(*mare transacto*) for a ‘superior’ pilgrimage place (*potiorus peregrinationus locum*).^[63] While the Irish recognised displacement both within and beyond Ireland as *ailithre* (Irish cognate of the Latin *peregrinatio*),^[64] clearly, the farther from home the religious exile the better it was. In the text, the holy woman chides Columbanus for staying in his native land (*natalem solem incoles*),^[65] and encourages him to ‘depart, young man, from ruin’ (*o iuvenis, pergeo, evade ruinam*),^[66] in effect, to flee corruption by the body through journey in the body. Columbanus soon after leaves his family home - a touching emotional detail by Jonas has his mother protesting stretching herself, weeping, across the floor to block his way. But Columbanus did leave, never to see his home and family again, wherever ‘salvation via the open road’ would lead (*quocumque salutis via a iter pandat*).^[67]

Leaving his native soil (*relicto ergo natali solo*), Columbanus went to study Scripture with Abbot Sinell of Cluaninis (Co. Fermanagh), thence to the monastery at Bangor where he entered under the abbacy of Comgall, its founder. There Columbanus led an austere life of fasting and prayer, living and teaching the faith by example, by mortification - putting to figurative death - of the body.^[68] Into his middle age, this life apparently sufficed to fulfil Columbanus’s spiritual desires. However, eventually, perhaps remembering the holy *peregrina* of his youthful encounter, Columbanus began to long for the *potior peregrinatio*, that is, travel overseas and in perpetuity. Jonas links the desire to memory of the call of Abraham to leave his homeland and community, to become a ‘stranger and alien’^[69] while journeying toward a land of God’s choosing (Genesis 12.1).^[70] Abbot Comgall at first refuses permission to Columbanus, despite the latter’s declaration that it was his heart’s ardent desire (*cordis ardorem et ignitum*)^[71] to leave. Eventually though, Jonas tells us, Comgall gave in and Columbanus set off, with a group of companions, on the pilgrim adventures on the continent for which he is famous,

and which have gained him latter-day recognition as the patron of a united Europe.^[72]

The theme of estrangement as basic to human being emerges explicitly in Columbanus’s own writing. The clearest instances can be found in his eighth sermon, where he writes: ‘human life is like a road’ (*viam esse humanam vitam*) and ‘we have no homeland on earth, since our Father is in heaven’ (*patriam ergo non habemus in terra, quia Pater noster in caelis est*).^[73] Further on in the same text, he describes the appropriate human state in this world as itinerant (*semper viatoribus*), and desirous, ‘ever sighing for the true homeland,’^[74] therefore living as ‘pilgrims and guests of the world,’ oriented toward ultimate transcendence.^[75] For Columbanus, the Promised Land of Abraham has been spiritualised, perhaps via the Otherworld paradises of pre-Christian tales, into the Promised Land of the Saints,^[76] the former not a destination Abraham would reach in earthly life, and the latter likewise deferred for the Insular *peregrini* in expectation of a second ‘fullness of time’ (Galatians 4:4).

4) The Anglo-Saxon peregrini

Within the Anglo-Saxon world, identification as *peregrinus* was reserved for those whose journeys took them across the sea,^[77] and like the Irish before them, they took to the sea in considerable numbers, in order to ‘undergo a life without a feeling of belonging anywhere and to anyone, except to God.’^[78] In his

63. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 156.

64. Charles-Edwards, ‘The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*,’ 44.

65. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 156.

66. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 157.

67. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 157.

68. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 158-159: *ipse quod doctrina didicerat in suo corpore mortificationem ferendo uberius exemplo monstraret.*

69. Genesis 23:4: Hebrew:) עַמְּקָם וְהוֹשָׁב אֲנִי עַמְּקָם: stranger and wə-tō-wō-šāb: sojourner).

70. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 159: *peractis itaque annorum multorum in monasterio circulis, coepit peregrinationem desiderare memor illius Domini imperii ad Abraham.*

71. Krusch, *Vitae Sanctorum*, 159.

72. Robert Schuman, one of the founders of the European Union, referred to Columbanus as ‘The patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe.’ Quoted in Brendan Lehane, *Early Celtic Christianity* (London: Constable, 1994), 147.

73. Columbanus Hibernus, ‘Sermons of Columbanus’ *Instructio* VIII.1, CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts, Documents of Ireland, accessed 26 March 2017, <http://celt.ucc.ie/published/L201053/index.html>.

74. *Instructio* VIII.2: *quasi peregrini semper patriam suspiremus, semper patriam desideremus.*

75. *Instructio* VIII.2: *vivamus in via ut viatores, ut peregrini, ut hospites mundi.*

76. Consider, for example, Otherworlds as depicted in the Irish *imramma* and *echtrae*, genres of voyage and adventure tales first written down by the end of the seventh century, but with roots in indigenous myths that are certainly older in origin. That sea voyages and Otherworlds should be part of Insular cultures is hardly surprising; that Christians of the Isles should continue this partition, likewise.

77. Charles-Edwards, ‘The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*,’ 45.

78. Linda Dohmen, ‘Wanderers between Two Worlds: Irish and Anglo-Saxon Scholars at the Court of Charlemagne,’ *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France* (Meredith Cohen and Justine Firnhaber-Baker, eds.; Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 92.

Figure 4 A remarkable and unique contemporary image of a boat on the Kilnaruane Pillar Stone, in southwestern Ireland.



Notes: The remaining shaft of a high cross, this stone presents a carving of Ss Anthony of Egypt and Paul of Thebes. It was certainly erected in a monastic context and the boat and rowers may indeed portray peregrini. (Images: far left, the remaining pillar stone, middle an enlargement showing a faint outline of the boat, right a restored version of the same panel, below a graphic schematic of carved boat, rowers and crosses.)

Sources: 4a : (cropped) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kilnaruane_Shaft_SE_Face_2009_09_11.jpg
Category:Kilnaruane_Shaft#/media/

4b : (cropped) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kilnaruane_Shaft_SE_Face_2009_09_11.jpg
Category:Kilnaruane_Shaft#/media/

4c : author's

4d : https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kilnaruane_Pillar_Stone_SE3_Drawing.svg
Category:Kilnaruane_Shaft#/media/

Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731), Bede cites with admiration numerous examples among both Irish and Anglo-Saxons. These numbers include Willibrord of Utrecht, celebrated Northumbrian 'Apostle to the Frisians,' who for a time lived the life of pilgrim exile in Ireland 'for the sake of the eternal homeland' (*peregrinam pro aeterna patria*, *Historia* 3.13) before departing on mission to the Continent.^[79] Bede expresses exceptional, repeated praise for Bishop Egbert, the 'Englishman' (3.4) and 'beloved of God' (5.22), not least because under his influence monasteries in Ireland and Britain, including Iona, conformed to the 'catholic' dating of Easter; this had been a serious bone of contention dividing Insular Christians, culminating in the great Synod at Whitby in

664. Bede extols Egbert's galvanising effect on Anglo-Saxon missionary journeys to the Continent (including those of Willibrord, Wigbert, and Swidbert in Frisia, plus the two Ewalds who were martyred for their labours in Saxony). But Bede also specifically and repeatedly calls readers' attention to Egbert's choice to separate himself from his homeland: he spent much of his adult life in Ireland, thus honouring a vow made on recovery from a severe illness as a young man. Bede tells us that indeed, Egbert lived as '*peregrinus* for the Lord until the end of his life' (*Historia*, 4.3); 'living as a stranger in Ireland for the sake of a heavenly homeland hereafter,' this 'venerable servant of Christ' was 'worthy to be named with all honour.'^[80]

79. Bede the Venerable, *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum: Historiam Abbatum, Epistolam ad Ecgberctum* (Charles Plummer, ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1896), 152.

80. Bede 4.9: *uenerabilis et cum omni honorificentia nominandus famulus Christi et sacerdos Ecgberct, quem in Hibernia insula peregrinam ducere uitam pro adipiscenda in caelis patria retulimus,*

By the late eighth century, Insular scholars were arriving in increasing numbers at the court of Charlemagne, where they were valued (and generously supported) for their intellectual sophistication and concrete contributions as teachers. The reputation for intense religiosity and missionary zeal of earlier waves of Irish and Anglo-Saxon *peregrini* preceded them, making the Insular cleric-scholar a fixture of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance. In his ninth century biography of Charlemagne, Einhard (d. 840) notes how the king 'liked foreigners' (*amabat peregrinos*), and looked after them well (*in eis suscipiendis magnam habebat curam*). Einhard himself however, expressed some ambivalence, toward the 'foreigners,' suggesting that they were a burden on the court's resources (*ingentia incommode*).^[81] An anonymous hagiographer of Alcuin of York, one of the most illustrious of the Insular scholars to ply their trade in Francia, includes a telling story from the monastery of Saint Martin at Tours where Alcuin had been made abbot by Charlemagne in 796. It recounts how one Aigulf, another Anglo-Saxon, overheard the local monks grumbling among themselves, to wit: 'Oh God, free this monastery from these Britons!'^[82]

The identity of the Insular *peregrini*-scholars was a complicated one. Clearly, for them, there has been a shift in the *expression* of *peregrinatio* away from the open-ended journey without oars literal or figurative, but the desire remains to live out - via bodily dislocation and dispossession from the earthly homeland - the conviction that the true home is outside of earthly time and space. On the one hand, they were made welcome and were generally well supported body and soul, by their patrons; on the other hand they were treated to the scorn (and perhaps jealousy) of others. In a practical sense, they had new homes - some stayed for many years, some permanently - but they did not consider them 'home,' nor did they refer to them as such.^[83] The earthly *patria* was in the Isles, and was still an object of longing: in a sense that longing was essential to *peregrinatio*. As the material of sacramental bread and wine both represents and presents (makes present) spiritual hunger, living *in peregrinatione* away from the earthly homeland both represented and presented the desire for the true homeland. Alcuin, for one, explicitly identified himself repeatedly in his writing as *peregrinus*. His self-authored epitaph carries through the recognition of the

paradoxical condition of human being as *homo viator*. In the form of a poignant *memento mori*, he invites the future visitor to his grave to 'pause, traveller' (*subsiste, viator*),^[84] to think about life and death, while even in death Alcuin waits for the sound of the angelic trumpet to call him forth for a final journey at the end of time.^[85]

5) *The Seafarer as peregrinus*

A particularly evocative expression of *peregrinatio* as basic to the human condition can be found in the Anglo-Saxon poem the *The Seafarer*. Likely originating in the mid-ninth century in the West Midland region of Britain,^[86] the poem consists of 124 lines, often divided by scholars into two or three sections. It is generally classified as an elegy, but it also shows apparent homiletic intention. An ongoing debate continues as to whether the poem ought to be read literally - that is, as being about the journey of an actual *peregrinus pro Christo* - or allegorically, as a theological-metaphorical exposition of the Christian anthropology of alienation from the *aeterna patria*. In fact, the poem works on both levels such that the literal meaning carries - or better, *embodies* - the figurative meaning, and thus gives it concrete expression, much as the practice of *peregrinatio* embodies - actually and symbolically - the desire for 'white martyrdom.' *The Seafarer* moves through intense descriptions of life on the water 'in the paths of exile' (*wræccan lastum*, line 15b), including the physical hardships of passage through the seasons at sea: 'My feet were afflicted by cold, fettered in frost' (*Calde geprungen / wæron mine fet, forste gebunden* (lines 8b-9a)^[87] and the agonising - and paradoxical - emotions of separation from home and kin (*nænig hleomæga, / feasceaftig ferð frefran meahte*, lines 25b-26b) and of the wild zeal for journey

81. Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni* (Georg Heinrich Pertz, Georg Waitz, and Oswald Holder-Egger, eds.; Hanover and Leipzig: Hahn, 1905), 22-23.

82. Quoted in Dohmen, *Wanderers*, 90.

83. Dohmen, *Wanderers*, 94.

84. The full text of Alcuin's epitaph is available in Luitpold Wallach, 'The Epitaph of Alcuin: A Model of Carolingian Epigraphy,' *Speculum* 30/3 (July 1955): 367-368. The author also provides an English translation, 373.

85. Wallach, 'The Epitaph of Alcuin,' 368: '*personet angelica donec ab arce tuba.*'

86. Ida Gordon provides careful evidence for provenance and date of the poem in *The Seafarer* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 27-32. The only extant copy of the poem is in the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, fol. 81b-83a), dating c. 975. Gordon provides an annotated version of the Anglo-Saxon text, 33-48.

87. The Anglo-Saxon lines are from Gordon, the English translation from Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 53-56.

when spring arrives (predating by at least 500 years the depiction of another pilgrim desire in Prologue Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*):^[88]

*The groves burst forth and blossom, towns
become fair,
meadows grow green, the world revives;
all these things urge the heart of the eager man
to set out on a journey, he who means to travel
far over the ocean paths
. . . the paths of exile to the end of the world.*^[89]

The poem ranges back and forth between weariness and enthusiasm; it links journey tale with homily,^[90] and turns its readers toward the eschaton. The frailty and transience of the human worlds of matter and of meaning are attested to with images of personal demise by 'illness or old age or the sword's edge' (*adl opbe yldo opbe ecghete*, line 70)^[91] and cultural decline whereby 'Days of great glory in the kingdom of earth are gone forever' (*Dagas sind gewitene, / ealle onmedlan eorþan rices*, lines 80b-81b).^[92] The poem includes a summons to ascetic dispossession for the purposes of managing desire, maintaining balance in all things, and thus achieving purity of wisdom.^[93] An elegiac solemnity pervades *The Seafarer*, reminiscent of the melancholy Tolkien famously noted in *Beowulf*.^[94] Perhaps, as Tolkien suggests regarding the tone in *Beowulf*, it is related to admiration for aspects of the old pagan world even as Christians opt for a new one: certainly in *The Seafarer*, traces of old-world splendour

are invoked in reference to fate and worldly glory, and gold-giving nobility. But the splendour is undoubtedly fading, and the seafarer knows where his eternal destiny lies: not among kin, nor in the blossoming groves or fair towns of his native land, nor even in a gold-strewn grave (*græf ... golde stregan*, line 97). Rather his 'heart's longings always urge [him] / to undertake a journey, to the country / of a foreign people far across the sea.'^[95] Departing for a foreign country (*elpeodigra eard*) suggests the *potior peregrinatio* commended to young Columbanus by the holy woman in Jonas's *Vita*. Ida Gordon reminds us of the possible double meaning of the phrase that brings together the literal and allegorical levels of *The Seafarer* whereby '*elpeodigra eard*' may also be an allusion to the alien condition of human beings who are ultimately only guests in this world. Miranda Wilcox makes the case for the double meaning by reference to an Anglo-Saxon homily from the Blickling collection,^[96] written before the tenth century:

it is needful for us to perceive the blindness of our pilgrimage; we are in the foreign land of this world - we are exiles in this world . . . and now we must seek hereafter another kingdom^[97]

In the same spirit, the poem's seafarer figuratively and perhaps literally takes to the sea, longing and suffering for what is beyond the worldly horizon, on the way to his 'place of resurrection.'

Conclusion: *Peregrinatio pro Christo* as Existential Migration

The Insular *peregrini* belong to another time and place, and their practices of intentional self-alienation and perpetual pilgrimage might seem very strange, if not pathological, to us today. We know that even in the ancient world, *peregrinatio* (or *xeniteia*) went in and out of spiritual fashion, mostly prompting dissuasion if not condemnation, as centeredness and stability were normalized early in the history of Christian practice. Even while the ascetical ideal of detachment and the anthropology of alienation took hold, these were

88. 'Whan that aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of march hath perced to the roote ... Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages / And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes' in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer* (John H Fisher and Mark Allen, eds.; Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), 11.

89. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, 54. In Gordon, *The Seafarer*, 39-40, 41: 'Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað, / wongas wlitigað, woruld onetted: / ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne / sefan to sipe þam þe swa þenceð / on flodwegas feor gewitan ... þa wræclastas ...' (Lines 48a-52b, 57a).

90. Some scholars have posited two *different* speakers, others two different writers, suggesting alternatively a dialogue, two speeches, and/or two texts joined together. For a view of the poem as a literary unity, see Gordon, *The Seafarer*, 2.

91. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, 55.

92. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, 55.

93. Gordon, *The Seafarer*, 46: 'Stieran mon sceal strongum mode, ond þæt on stapelum healdan, / ond gewis werum, wisum clæne' (lines 109-110).

94. J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,' *Beowulf: A Verse Translation* (Seamus Heaney, trans.; Daniel Donoghue, ed.; New York and London: Norton, 2002), 105, 120.

95. Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*, 55. See Gordon, *The Seafarer*, 38: 'monað modes lust mæla gehwylce / ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan / elpeodigra eard gesece,' (lines 36-38).

96. The collection was written before the tenth century and is preserved in the Scheide Library MS 71, Princeton.

97. From the homily for Quinquagesima Sunday, translated by Richard Morris, and quoted in Miranda Wilcox, 'Exilic Imagining in *The Seafarer* and *The Lord of the Rings*,' *Tolkien the Medievalist* (London: Routledge, 2003), 145.

Figure 5 : Many people today who otherwise live comfortable lives, embark on pilgrimages that require them to embrace voluntary and at times extreme (if temporary) discomfort and dispossession.



Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain.



Blisters become part of, perhaps a badge of, the standard 'no-pain: no-gain' ethos of many contemporary pilgrimages; what is being 'gained' is up for existential grabs.

Source: author's photos, Camino 2011

largely realised and performed virtually, as *peregrinatio in stabilitate*, that is, interior spiritual journey lived out within monastery walls.^[98] And arguably still in our secular contemporary culture, the ideal of stability, of settling down, is indicative of personal maturity and secure self-identity, what psychologist Greg Madison calls our 'conventional settled-centric bias.'^[99] In his theorising of the contemporary condition and performance of 'existential migration,' Madison pushes back against the common professional interpretation of the restlessness of voluntary mobility as psychological pathology, and he is not alone.^[100] As early as the mid-seventies, psychological anthropologist Theodore Schwartz had been challenging the conventional linking of identity-formation with stability of socio-cultural place in his notion of American youth as 'migrants of identity' on continual quest for authenticity.^[101] Schwartz insisted that identity might be shaped temporally as well as spatially. Social

anthropologists Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson credited Schwartz's notion in the title of their edited volume on identity-formation at the close of the twentieth century; their own chapter in that volume challenges 'the implication usually drawn' about the necessary 'relationship between identity and fixity' and the default connecting of self-knowing and 'being at home,' that is, 'being, if not stationary, then at least centred,' especially in globalized postmodernity.^[102]

These theories proposing mobility as normative are acutely resonant with aspects of ancient texts by and about both the premodern Celtic *peregrini* and postmodern, post-Christian, post-secular pilgrims.^[103] Madison observes that there is (for some people at least) a powerful, even irresistible, need to leave where they are, not *for* some concrete goal (although travel

98. Jean Leclercq, 'Monachisme et pérégrination,' *Aux Sources de la Spiritualité Occidentale* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1964), 35-90.

99. Madison, *End of Belonging*, 21-26.

100. Madison, *End of Belonging*, 21-26.

101. Theodore Schwartz, 'Cultural Totemism: Ethnic Identity Primitive and Modern,' *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change* (George A. De Vos and Lola Ross-Romanucci, eds.; Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1975), 130.

102. Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, 'Home and Movement: A Polemic,' *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, eds.; Oxford & New York: Berg, 1998), 21.

103. The flood of first-person accounts of contemporary walking pilgrimage, especially but not exclusively along the Camino de Santiago de Compostella, now constitutes a distinct literary niche. For a now-classic study of Camino pilgrims see Nancy Louise Frey, *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For different permutations of postmodern pilgrimage practices, see the second part of this special journal issue.

for work and education, or even journey to a sacred centre, may provide the justification for the mobility). The existential migrant moves not so much *to* a new centre, as *away* from the comfort and familiarity of centeredness, trusting in the possibility of meaning in and through openness to the unknown, the yet-to-come. For the existential migrant, the body becomes the dynamic centre, the itinerant temporal home. Madison, Schwartz, Rapport, and Dawson have identified something not only socio-psychologically relevant but, to use Madison's term, *existentially* crucial in the dynamic and ambiguous condition of being human, something the Insular *peregrini* intuited religiously, theologised, and radically performed in the early Middle Ages at the western edge of Europe. This far, Madison has not dealt specifically with the sharp rise in interest in walking pilgrimage in the last generation or two,^[104] but his work poses new questions for pilgrimage studies as to what compels contemporary 'serial pilgrims,'^[105] many of whom otherwise live comfortable lives, to embrace voluntary and at times extreme (if temporary) discomfort and dispossession. Perhaps the disruptive experience of sheer otherness encountered in the inherent asceticism of leaving

home, and of sustained mobility, offers release from the hyper-stimulation and stultifying ease of a secularised cultural landscape that has been flattened by disenchantment, and drained of contexts for transcendent experience. Considering *existentially* the practices of the *peregrini* of the early medieval Insular world might provide an interpretive key to thinking about postmodern mobility that is engaged voluntarily, indeed apparently with some strong sense of inevitability. The existential migrant, the contemporary serial pilgrim, and the early medieval *peregrinus* seem to share a fundamental capacity for at least desiring a temporally-deferred 'something-more' that is hard to contextualise in our contemporary post-Christian context. They each enact in their own way a pull towards attentive 'living with awareness of human insecurity'^[106] and the paradoxical, even excruciating, longing for something beyond that. Perhaps the eschatological dreams of Dubhslaine and Macbeathadh and Maelinmhain and their spiritual compatriots bring something important, if unexpected and certainly challenging, to the conversation.

104. See Janice Poltrick-Donato's article in this issue for statistics on walking pilgrimage and other practices of mobility in which distinction between spirituality and recreation blur.

105. I borrow the term 'serial pilgrims' from Michael Agnew, "'Spiritually, I'm Always in Lourdes': Perceptions of Home and Away among Serial Pilgrims," *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 44/4 (2015): 516-535.

106. Greg A. Madison, 'Existential Migration', *Existential Analysis*, 17/2 (2006): 20.

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