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BEDE'S *PLURES DE SCOTTORUM REGIONE*: THE IRISH  
IN THE *HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA GENTIS ANGLORUM*

BY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements  | iv  |
| Abbreviations   | v   |
| <u>Introduction</u>   | 1   |
| i. Ethnicity and the Irish  | 7   |
| ii. Methodology   | 11  |
| iii. The Irish in Bede's <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i> and past scholarship | 16  |
| iv. Easter and the Irish  | 17  |
| <br>  |     |
| Chapter One: <u>The Irish of Lindisfarne</u>                                | 20  |
| i. Northumbria's First Irish Bishop (Anonymous 1)                           | 24  |
| ii. Aidan   | 27  |
| iii. Fínán  | 45  |
| iv. Colmán and the Irish Clergy of Lindisfarne                              | 51  |
| v. *Tuda  | 59  |
| Conclusion  | 60  |
| <br>  |     |
| Chapter Two: <u>The Irish in Northumbria</u>                                | 62  |
| i. Rónán  | 62  |
| ii. Aldfrith  | 72  |
| iii. Boisil   | 89  |
| iv. Adomnán (2) of Coldingham and his Priest (Anonymous 4)                  | 103 |
| Conclusion  | 120 |
| <br>  |     |
| Chapter Three: <u>The Irish in Southern Britain</u>                         | 121 |
| i. Diuma and Cellach  | 122 |
| ii. Dícuill (1) and the Monks of Bosham                                     | 132 |
| iii. Maeldub  | 136 |
| Conclusion  | 144 |
| <br>  |     |
| Chapter Four: <u>Fursa and his Companions</u>                               | 145 |
| i. Fursa  | 147 |
| ii. Fóillán   | 163 |
| iii. Ultán  | 165 |
| iv. Fóillán and Ultán: The Dagobert Affair                                  | 170 |
| v. Dícuill (2) and Gobbán   | 174 |
| vi. Beoán and Meldán  | 181 |
| Conclusion  | 184 |
| <br>  |     |
| Chapter Five: <u>The Irish on Iona</u>                                      | 186 |
| i. Columba  | 189 |
| ii. Ségéne  | 197 |

|  |  |     |
|--|--|-----|
| iii.                                       | Adomnán (1)                              | 200 |
| iv.  | Dúnchad                                  | 209 |
| v.   | Elders of Iona                           | 215 |
| vi.  | Community on Iona                        | 217 |
|  | Conclusion                               | 219 |
| Chapter Six: <u>The Irish in letters</u>   |  | 222 |
| i.   | Irish Bishops and Abbots                 | 227 |
| ii.  | Dagán                                    | 227 |
| iii.                                       | Columbanus (1)                           | 229 |
| iv.  | Tómméne                                  | 234 |
| v.   | Columbanus (2)                           | 234 |
| vi.  | Crónán (1)                               | 235 |
| vii.                                       | Díma                                     | 236 |
| viii.                                      | Báithéne                                 | 236 |
| ix.  | Crónán (2)                               | 237 |
| x.   | Ernéne                                   | 238 |
| xi.  | Laisréne                                 | 239 |
| xii.                                       | Sillán                                   | 241 |
| xiii.                                      | Ségéne                                   | 242 |
| xiv.                                       | Sarán                                    | 243 |
| xv.  | The Other Irish Teachers and Abbots      | 244 |
|  | Conclusion                               | 245 |
| Chapter Seven: <u>The Other Irish</u>      |  | 248 |
| i.   | Reuda and the Dalreudini                 | 248 |
| ii.  | Áedán mac Gabráin and his Army           | 251 |
| iii.                                       | Irish scholar (Anonymous 2)              | 256 |
| iv.  | Man who Saw Chad's Soul (Anonymous 3)    | 261 |
| v.   | Ecgeberht's Monk (Anonymous 5)           | 263 |
| vi.  | Nechtán                                  | 266 |
|  | Conclusion                               | 270 |
| Chapter Eight: <u>The Irish as a Group</u> |  | 271 |
| i.   | The Irish                                | 273 |
| ii.  | Teachers and Preachers                   | 279 |
| iii.                                       | Unity of the Church                      | 285 |
| iv.  | The Excuse of Ignorance                  | 288 |
| v.   | Wilfrid                                  | 288 |
| vi.  | Contrast with the <i>Chronica maiora</i> | 290 |
| vii.                                       | Easter and the Irish Revisited           | 294 |
|  | Conclusion                               | 297 |
| <u>Conclusion</u>                          |  | 301 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <u>Appendices:</u>                                   |     |
| Appendix 1: Prosopography of the Irish               | 307 |
| Appendix 2: Distribution of the Irish and/or Ireland | 309 |
| Appendix 3: Comparing Northumbrian Kings             | 310 |
| Appendix 4: Relationships of the Irish               | 311 |
| <br>   |     |
| Bibliography   | 312 |

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AFM* *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616 I*, ed. and trans. John O'Donovan (Dublin, 1848; repr. 1990)
- AI* *Annals of Inisfallen (MS Rawlinson B 503)*, ed. Seán Mac Airt (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951)
- AASS* *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. J. Bolland et al. (Antwerp/Brussels) [cited by month]
- ASC* *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, with Supplementary Extracts from the Others: A Revised Text*, ed. J. Earle, C. Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952)
- AT* *The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. Whitley Stokes I (Felinfach: Llanerch, 1993)
- AVC* Anonymous, *Vita Cuthberti, Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940)
- AU* *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, ed. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983)
- CCSL* *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout, Brepols)
- CGSH* *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1985)
- CS* *Chronicon Scotorum*, ed. and trans. W.M. Hennessy (London, 1866; repr. 1964)
- CSEL* *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna)
- FAI* *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, ed. J.N. Radner (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978)
- FÓ* *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé, the Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*, ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1905; repr. Dublin, 1984)
- HA* Bede, *Historia Abbatum, Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historia I*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 364-387; 'History of the abbots of Wearmouth-Jarrow', *The Age of Bede*, trans. D.H. Farmer (London: Penguin, 1998), 187-210
- HE* *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. M. Lapidge, *Bede: Storia*

*degli Inglesi*, 2 vols (Rome and Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla/Mondadori, 2010); *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B.Colgrave, R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* I, ed. C. Pummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), ; J. McClure and R. Collins, *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, the Greater Chronicle, Bede's Letter to Egbert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

- LE* *Liber Eliensis, Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, ed. and trans. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005)
- MD* Michael O'Clery, *Martyrology of Donegal, The Martyrology of Donegal: A Calendar of the Saints of Ireland*, ed. James Henthorn and Willian Reeve, trans. John O'Donovan (Dublin, 1864)
- MG* *Martyrology of Gorman, Féilire Húi Gormáin, The Martyrology of Gorman*, ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes (London, 1895)
- MGH AA* *Monumenta Germaniae Historia, Auctores Antiquissimi*
- MGH SRM* *Monumenta Germaniae Historia, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*
- MT* *Martyrology of Tallaght, The Martyrology of Tallaght, from the Book of Leinster and MS. 5100-4 in the Royal Library, Brussels*, eds. Richard Irvine Best and Hugh Jackson Lawlor (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1931)
- MVC* Bede, metrical *Vita Cuthberti*, 'Bedas metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti', ed. W. Jaager, *Palaestra* 198 (1935), 57-133
- PL* *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris)
- PRIA* *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*
- PVC* Bede, prose *Vita Cuthberti, Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940)
- TTH* *Translated Texts for Historians* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press)
- VG* Anonymous, *Vita Gregorii, the Earliest life of Gregory the Great*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1968)
- VW* Stephen of Ripon, *Vita Wilfridi, The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927; repr. 1985)

All Scriptural references and quotations are from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

## Introduction

The Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* was completed c. 731 at the Northumbrian monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow.<sup>1</sup> Bede, an Anglo-Saxon monk, bequeathed to the world a masterful text charting the birth, development, and maturation of the Anglo-Saxon Church up to its author's own time.<sup>2</sup> This opus has proven to be a fount of information on a very wide range of topics ever since, subjects as varied as early Insular history, Latinity, Christianity, society, ethnicity, politics, and learning, and it is, today, Bede's best known work. As a Northumbrian, Bede offers a view of the origins and development of the Anglo-Saxon church that is inevitably focussed more on the events and evolution of that institution in Northumbria than elsewhere; but he does cast a wider net, describing the history of other regions and

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent critical edition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is in *Beda: Storia degli Inglesi*, ed. and notes. Michael Lapidge, 2 vols (Rome and Milan, 2010), trans. to Italian by P. Chiesa. The English translation can be found in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), and all English quotations from the text are from this edition. Hereafter, this text is referred to as the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Walter Goffart examines the evidence for when the work was completed in 'The *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Bede's Agenda and Ours', *The Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), pp. 40-3. It is usually thought to have been complete by 731, but there are some indications that some revisions and/or additions were made in the years coming up to his death in 735. See Nicholas Brooks, *Bede and the English*, Jarrow Lecture 1999, pp. 7-8, n. 21.

<sup>2</sup> For general discussions of Bede, his time, and his work, see the historical introduction to Colgrave and Mynors' edition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, pp. xvii-xxxviii; Gerald Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976); James Campbell, 'Bede I', in *Latin Historians*, ed. T.A. Dorey (New York, 1966), pp. 159-90, and 'Bede II', in *Bede: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People and Other Selections*, ed. J. Campbell (New York, 1968), pp. vii-xxxii, both repr. in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 1-27 and 29-48, respectively; L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Beda Venerabilis: Monk, Historian and Northumbrian* (Groningen, 1996); Scott DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010).

narrating the complex interactions of kings, kingdoms, and churchmen. In discussing the Roman mission headed by Augustine and the Irish mission from Iona, the two main sources of conversion for the Anglo-Saxons, according to himself at least, Bede accounts for the coming of Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons and their progression as a people of the Church. The latter mission, centred at the monastery of Lindisfarne in Northumbria, was a vital force in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, particularly those of Bede's own kingdom, and Bede writes that once the Iona mission had properly begun, many came from the regions of the Irish into Britain, preaching the faith.<sup>3</sup>

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is one of the ubiquitous texts for Anglo-Saxon England, without which our understanding of the early medieval period would be far poorer. Scott DeGregorio called it, with only a hint of hyperbole, “a universally acknowledged tour de force of historiographic genius”.<sup>4</sup> It has been read, studied, and mined for information for centuries. The Irish who appear in it range from famed churchmen, like Columba, whose lives and actions are celebrated in other texts, to men of whom we would know next to nothing – perhaps not even of their existence – without Bede's text. He places their stories, as well as Anglo-Saxon history, in the context of God's plan and, as David Allison Orsbon puts it, it “aims for nothing less than to illuminate God's agency in and design for English history, a plan that reveals God's intention to include the English in the final and archetypically cosmic resolution to history itself – the Apocalypse”.<sup>5</sup> Bede saw the history of the Anglo-Saxons as part of a broader narrative arc that embraced all of sacred history.<sup>6</sup> He uses *Annus Domini* dating in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a decision that helped this dating method become common practice.<sup>7</sup> His system of dating events from the birth of Christ made his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, like sacred Scripture, a providential history, one in which the birth of Christ offered context. Bede presents the Anglo-Saxons as part of this providential history, in which God's influence and guidance are the pervasive influences.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> HE III.3: ...plures per dies de Scottorum regione uenire Britanniam...

<sup>4</sup> Scott DeGregorio, ‘Introduction’, *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah* (Liverpool, 2006), p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup> David Allison Orsbon, ‘Bede's Sacred Order: Schemes and Tropes in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Part I’, *American Benedictine Review* 62.1 (2011), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> David Allison Orsbon, ‘Bede's Sacred Order: Schemes and Tropes in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: Part II’, *American Benedictine Review* 62.2 (2011), p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> Bede followed Dionysius Exiguus in this. See Máirín Mac Carron, ‘Christology and the Future in Bede's *Annus Domini*’, in *Bede and the Future*, ed. Peter Darby and Faith Wallis (Farnham, forthcoming). My thanks to Máirín for allowing me to read this article before its publication.

<sup>8</sup> Brooks, *Bede and the English*, pp. 4-5.

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is a very carefully constructed work and Bede is a very deliberate author. Considering the large time-scale covered by his text, he had to be selective about what he included. Bede is our only source for much of the history he records, but there must be vast amounts of information that he omitted and which is lost to us forever. Although we do not know how long it took Bede to write the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, there should be no doubt that it was written most carefully. Bede was not without examples in this effort: like Eusebius, he was writing a Christian history; and like Gregory of Tours, he was writing a history of a people.<sup>9</sup> His combination of the two created something more unusual, linking the story of a people to the story of their conversion. His work, though a history in title and intent, and broadly chronological, contains elements of hagiography. He had other, more local examples in the anonymous Whitby *Vita Gregorii* and Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*, both written in the early eighth century.<sup>10</sup> Bede's preface, and the rest of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, also reveal his reliance on sources, named where possible. His preface emphasises the worthy men on whom he relied for information, and this presentation aims to make his work believable and authoritative to his audience. Throughout the text, Bede frequently explains the source of his record and has garnered the reputation of a reliable historian.<sup>11</sup> In 1970, Richard W. Southern wrote that Bede's "capacious mind was seldom swayed by prejudice, firm in its judgments, well fitted to deal with a large mass of disorderly material and to present it systematically and succinctly", and this was long the attitude of most scholars toward the Venerable Bede.<sup>12</sup> In 1988, Walter Goffart's *Narrators of Barbarian History* reframed Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* as a riposte to Wilfrid and his followers, a theory which, if not today wholly accepted, helped to rethink attitudes toward Bede as a narrator.<sup>13</sup> It is important to understand that a writer like Bede cannot be judged by modern historical practices and standards; Bede was a

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<sup>9</sup> A.H. Merrills remarks that Bede wrote a text that was both local and universal, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 235.

<sup>10</sup> Although Bede is often thought not to have known the Whitby *Vita Gregorii*, this seems very unlikely, considering their close proximity in time and geography. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill thinks it surprising, but believes Bede did not know the work, while Walter Goffart assumes he did: Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English people: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), p. 122; Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 500-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Notre Dame, IN, 1988), pp. 265-66. *Vita Gregorii*, in *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Lawrence, KS, 1968); Stephen of Ripon, *Vita Wilfridi*, in *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927; repr. 1985).

<sup>11</sup> D.P. Kirby, *History and Tradition in Britain in the Early Middle Ages: An Inaugural Lecture* (Aberystwyth, 1996), pp. 12-3.

<sup>12</sup> Richard W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970; repr. 1984), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 235-328.

monk, an exegete, a scholar, a teacher, and a *Christian* historian. He is a man with a message. His agenda precludes him from living up to modern standards of historical objectivity, but he makes little attempt to hide his impartiality, so while we would not, today, altogether accept his claim to be a *uerax historicus*, his work remains an essential, and often reliable, source for early Insular history.<sup>14</sup>

Bede himself wrote, in *De Tabernaculo*, that history is the reporting of something having been done or said in plain discourse according to the letter.<sup>15</sup> In the preface to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he beseeched his readers not to think ill of him if they found anything untrue in the text, as he had “endeavoured to give in writing an honest account of what I have collected from common report in accordance with the true law of history”.<sup>16</sup> Paul Christopher Hilliard, in his PhD thesis, argues forcefully for Bede’s theological concerns ensuring that his history is as accurate as possible. For Bede, the literal interpretation of Scripture is necessary before deeper meaning can be extracted, and to make “wilful mistakes” would take from the authority of his work.<sup>17</sup> While this does not mean that Bede was not guilty of omitting details, or was afraid to use a heavy editing hand, it does suggest that Bede was not in the business of invention; we can believe that the people and events Bede describes existed and occurred, or at least he believed they did. Though certain events can at times seem like tropes, this is more an indication of the way Bede thought, using conventions to describe true history.

There is a didactic purpose to Bede’s writings in general, including the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He said of himself that it had been his delight to learn, to teach, and to write, and this text is an excellent example of each of these pursuits.<sup>18</sup> In describing the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church, Bede hopes to encourage his

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<sup>14</sup> See Jean-Michel Picard, ‘Bede, Adomnán, and the Writing of History’, *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 50-70, especially pp. 56-7; *HE* III.17.

<sup>15</sup> *De Tabernaculo* I.6, ll. 784-5, *CCSL* 119A, ed. D. Hurst (Turnhout, 1969): *Historia namque est cum res aliqua quomodo secundum litteram facta siue dicta sit...*; trans. *Bede: On the Tabernacle*, Arthur G. Holder, *TTH* 18 (Liverpool, 1994), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *HE* Preface: *quod uera lex historiae est, simpliciter ea quae fama uulgante collegimus ad instructionem posteritatis litteris mandere studuimus*. This “true law of history” has been the subject of much argument, beginning in 1947 with Charles W. Jones, *Saints’ Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Ithaca, NY, 1947), pp. 83-5. Roger Ray disagreed with Jones in ‘Bede’s *Vera Lex Historiae*’, *Speculum* 55.1 (1980), pp. 1-21, arguing that Bede always intended to record the historical truth, and that his *uera lex historiae* is only a true law of history, as he had no choice but to rely on unconfirmed common report at times (p. 13). See also Walter Goffart, ‘Bede’s *Uera Lex Historiae* Explained’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 34 (2005), pp. 111-6, who sees Bede’s words as pointing to the ‘simple’ story of history, as opposed to the theological interpretation of it.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Christopher Hilliard, ‘Sacred and Secular History in the Writings of Bede († 735)’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007), p. 202: “If anything his theological outlook forced Bede to be as accurate as possible when explicating the historical details in his narrative”.

<sup>18</sup> *HE* V.24: *semper aut discere, aut docere, aut scribere dulce habui*.

readers to emulate the good and avoid the bad, led by the example of the Golden Age of the seventh century. Bede includes biblical analogies in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, so those of his audience who were educated in Scripture could fully appreciate the interconnectedness of history he was presenting. He was well aware of the conventions that saw the islands at the edge of Europe – Ireland, Britain and their archipelago – as the veritable ends of the earth, and understood the role such islands played in the universal spread of Christianity. Bede saw the conversion of the isles as an essential component in God’s ultimate plan for the world, bringing the message of the gospels to all of the *gentes*.<sup>19</sup> Having already described sacred universal history in his *Chronica maiora*,<sup>20</sup> the *Historia Ecclesiastica* gave Bede the opportunity to apply his theologically-focussed mind to the history of his own people, as he saw them, the *gens Anglorum*.

Bede’s first chapter is a geographical contextualisation of Britain, in which he also describes Britain’s neighbour, the island of Ireland. He claims that Ireland surpasses Britain in extent, in wholesomeness, and in climate. Its many advantages include its mild winters, and the fact that no serpents or reptiles can live there, and Bede writes that objects from Ireland are generally efficacious against poisons. The scrapings of Irish manuscripts, Bede attests, were even used to cure cases of poisoning, by putting the vellum pieces in water and having the victim drink the water. He tells us that it is, literally, a land of milk and honey, and that vines and game are plentiful there, listing fish, birds, deer and goats.<sup>21</sup> His geographical identification of Ireland is linked to his depiction of the Irish in his work. Early medieval thought on ethnicity and race was influenced by texts like the very early *On Airs, Waters and Places*, a text from the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, which saw ethnic characteristics as reflecting their

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<sup>19</sup> Once all the peoples of the world, including the Jews, were converted, the Last Judgement and the end of the world would ensue, thus completing God’s plan for the world. See Diarmuid Scully, ‘Introduction’, in *Bede: On Tobit and on the Canticle of Habakkuk*, ed. and trans. Seán Connolly (Dublin, 1997), p. 36; For a discussion of providential history and Bede, see Jennifer O’Reilly, ‘Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*’, in *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité*, ed. Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin and Olivier Szerwiniack (Lille, 2005), pp. 119-45.

<sup>20</sup> The *Chronica Maiora* forms part of Bede’s work on time, *De Temporum Ratione*, CCSL 123B, ed. Charles W. Jones (Turnhout, 1977); *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis, TTH 29 (Liverpool, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> *HE* I.1: *Diues lactis ac mellis insula, nec uinearum expers, piscium uolucrumque, sed et ceruorum caprearumque uenatu insignis*. The land of milk and honey is an image best known, from Exodus 3.8, as the Promised Land.

environment.<sup>22</sup> Isidore of Seville followed this thinking, writing that people vary depending on the climate.<sup>23</sup>

Bede's rapturous description of Ireland in his first chapter takes on new significance in this context, as it has a more benign climate than Britain, is more fruitful than Britain, and its very air is toxic to snakes. Calvin B. Kendall sees this as fitting, making Ireland free from the creatures that brought about the fall of man, and prefiguring the promise of redemption.<sup>24</sup> We might expect an author who compares their own land to others like this to find the latter wanting, rather than the reverse. Why then does Bede make of Ireland a Promised Land? He was, of course, drawing on the information of his sources, and Roger Ray has argued that Bede's elaborate description of both Ireland and Britain in this first chapter is an exercise in impressing the reader.<sup>25</sup> Be that as it may, it does not preclude the passage from also being a complimentary description of the island to which Bede attributed a strong Christian faith and an active missionary spirit.<sup>26</sup> Kendall interprets Bede's description of both Britain and Ireland in this first chapter as an image of the world before the fall of man, with the latter island as the particular image of the Promised Land, prefiguring the redemption of humanity.<sup>27</sup> The description is an unmistakably idealising one which sets up a positive image of Ireland and implies a harmony with Britain. As A.H. Merrills has suggested, it may be that Bede was determined to incorporate Britain's "vibrant neighbour to the

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<sup>22</sup> This text was popular in the middle ages, and was translated into Latin as *De Aere, Aquis, Locis*, in, probably, the late fifth or early sixth century. See Pearl Kibre, 'Hippocrates Latinus: Repertorium of Hippocratic Writings in the Latin Middle Ages', *Traditio* 31 (1975), pp. 123-6, for a list of its manuscripts.

<sup>23</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.2.1, 105, in *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911). The English translation can be found in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach and Oliver Berghof, with the collaboration of Muriel Hall (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 192, 198.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin B. Kendall sees poison as a symbol for the evils of the fallen world, and therefore the efficacy of things from Ireland against it as apt: 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in *Saints, Scholars and Heroes: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honour of Charles W. Jones, Volume 1: the Anglo-Saxon Heritage*, ed. Margot H. King and Wesley M. Stevens (Collegeville, MI, 1979), pp. 181-2.

<sup>25</sup> Bede is here using Isidore's *Etymologiae* 14.6.6, along with Solinus: see Charles Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica II* (Oxford, 1896), pp. 10-1. Roger Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture*, Jarrow Lecture 1997, pp. 13-4.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting's description of this as parody seems reductive, at best: *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (London, 1991), p. 50. William D. McCready sees no reason why Bede should not be considered serious on this matter: *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto, 1994), pp. 46-47. Diarmuid Scully focuses on the link between natural fruitfulness and spiritual fruitfulness, though he too views the description of both islands as a prefiguring of "restored creation" at the end of times: 'Introduction', p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Kendall, 'Imitation and the Venerable Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', pp. 179, 181-2. McCready is sceptical of this interpretation, however, and sees the description of Britain and Ireland as relatively standard historiographical practice, though he acknowledges the biblical references: *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, pp. 47-8.

west” into his *Historia Ecclesiastica* from the beginning, judging the account of one to require notice of the other.<sup>28</sup>

### *i. Ethnicity and the Irish*

This project intends to examine all of the Irish, or *Scotti*, who appear in the pages of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. To do this, one must first define what is meant by ‘Irish’ or ‘Irishman’ – for each and every Irish person mentioned in the text is a man.<sup>29</sup> Ethnicity is usually thought to be about cultural differences. Defining or choosing an ethnicity for a person, whether for oneself or for another, is a process of identification, and very often a process that identifies another as ‘one of us’ or ‘one of them’.<sup>30</sup> The Latin terms *gens* and *natio* are both used by Bede, and the former is evidently an important one for him, appearing, as it does, in the title of the text under investigation here. These two terms involve the idea of common descent as a unifying factor.<sup>31</sup> Common descent was something of importance in the early Insular world, as in so many contexts. As Bartlett comments, “Kin solidarities were central in shaping patterns of property, power, and violence”.<sup>32</sup> For Christians, all of humanity originated from Adam and Eve, but different peoples eventually descended from them. Bede would have understood, from Isidore, that common descent is a factor in ethnicity, though the Spanish author also saw a *gens* as distinguished from other nations by its own grouping.<sup>33</sup> Ethnicity has been defined by Patrick Amory as “the manifestation of group-consciousness, based on that group’s own perception of a set of distinguishing characteristics, whether real or imagined.”<sup>34</sup> When looking at ‘ethnicity’, one must understand that it is not a monolithic, unchangeable identity. It adapts, and continues despite, or perhaps because of, interaction with other ethnic groups, and membership of

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<sup>28</sup> Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity*, p. 260.

<sup>29</sup> For an excellent discussion of the people of Ireland from the very beginnings of the island itself, see J.P. Mallory, *The Origins of the Irish* (London, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Richard Bartlett, ‘Medieval and Modern concepts of Race and Ethnicity’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 (2001), pp. 39-41

<sup>31</sup> Bartlett, ‘Medieval and Modern Concepts’, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Bartlett, ‘Medieval and Modern Concepts’, pp. 44-5. See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 9.2.1 on the etymologies of these words.

<sup>33</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.2.1: *Gens est multitudo ab uno principio orta, sive ab alia natione secundum propriam collectionem distincta, ut Graeciae, Asiae.*

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Amory, ‘The Meaning and Purpose of Ethnic Terminology in the Burgundian Laws’, *Early Medieval Europe* 2 (1993), p. 3. See also Walter Pohl, ‘Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: A Comparative Perspective’, in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. John Hines (Woodbridge, 1997; repr. 2003), pp. 8-10.

an ethnic group can change over time.<sup>35</sup> The anthropologist Fredrik Barth sees ethnicity as a having a membership, identifying itself, and identified by others, being a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.<sup>36</sup> Ethnicity is, in fact, subjective.

Benedict Anderson coined the term ‘imagined communities’ in the 1980s, and this concept is often used in discussions of peoples and ethnicities.<sup>37</sup> The imaginers, in this context, could be the communities themselves or persons outside of them. Rees Davies wrote in 1994 that ethnic identity is “relational”, and that it is often decided in contrast to ‘others’.<sup>38</sup> Barth discusses the ‘boundaries’ of ethnicity, explaining that in interactions, another person is identified as being of the same ethnic group, or a different one. That different ethnic groups persist in the face of successful interaction suggests that this interaction is structured so that it can occur but certain cultural elements are protected from modification.<sup>39</sup> Political aggregations did not necessarily change ethnicity, as in the case of the Middle Angles, who were ruled by the king of Mercia at an early date; or Lindsey, which was dominated at different times by Mercia and Northumbria.<sup>40</sup> In the early medieval period, the world was made up of *gentes*, and these were discrete and seen as such by both themselves and others. In discussing ‘ethnic identity’, it is in fact ‘social identity’ that is really in question, as it is a social construct.<sup>41</sup>

To see Ireland and the Irish of the early medieval period as a ‘nation’, in the modern sense, is of course nonsensical. However, there is ample evidence that the people who inhabited the island of Ireland saw themselves as a cultural unit, as the sources that survive from the early medieval period reveal. Donnchadh Ó Corráin sees a sense of *natio* in the writings of Muirchú and Adomnán in the seventh century, even if the political hegemony these writers reference, as he puts it, “testify to ambition rather than achievement”, and he has no doubt that Irish identity, recognisable from other

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<sup>35</sup> See Fredrik Barth, ‘Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: Introduction’, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston, 1969; repr. 2000), pp. 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Barth, ‘Ethnic Groups and Boundaries’, pp. 11, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Rees Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400. I. Identities’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4 (1994), pp. 8-9.

<sup>39</sup> Barth, ‘Ethnic Groups and Boundaries’, pp. 15-6.

<sup>40</sup> See *HE* II.16, III.11, 21, 23.

<sup>41</sup> See John Moreland for discussion of constructed identity, ‘Ethnicity, Power and the English’, in *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrell (London and New York, 2000), pp. 23-51, especially p. 40.

peoples, was in place by that time.<sup>42</sup> Origin stories that included all of Ireland were being created and recorded by the seventh century, which Ó Corráin attributes to the learned classes of early Ireland, who were able to see beyond internal political divisions.<sup>43</sup> The *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, whose origins go back as far as the eighth, and possibly the seventh, century, offers a view of the past that sees the Irish as descended from a common ancestor and having a common identity.<sup>44</sup> Both Bede and the Irish themselves agreed in viewing the Irish as a *gens* or *natio*, separate and distinct from other peoples.

In describing Britain, Bede differentiates between five peoples – Anglo-Saxons, British, Irish, Pictish and Latin – and asserts that they had five languages. This emphasis on language as a vital cultural signifier is common in the early medieval period, though it is not necessarily a definer of separate or common ethnicities.<sup>45</sup> The importance of language can be seen in an Irish context in the Old Irish text *Auraicept na n-Éces*, which claims that the Irish language resulted from the fall of the Tower of Babel. In the division of languages that then occurred, those that spoke Irish came together to form the Irish people, rather than those of the same origin.<sup>46</sup> Bede had read Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, in which the Spanish author explains that peoples come from languages, and not the other way around, and it is clear that he associates language and *gens*.<sup>47</sup> Language alone does not denote membership of an ethnic group, as the example of Irish-speaking Northumbrian kings shows, but it is a powerful signifier.<sup>48</sup> Bede adds that the Latin language, through the study of Scripture, became common to all peoples, which can be interpreted as saying that Christianity became a group identity also common to all.<sup>49</sup> In discussing the story of the Tower of Babel in

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<sup>42</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland', in *Historical Studies XI: Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence, Papers read before the Conference held at Trinity College, Dublin, 26-31 May 1975*, ed. T.W. Moody (Belfast, 1978), p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland', pp. 7, 35.

<sup>44</sup> *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, ed. and trans. R.A.S. Macalister, 5 vols (Dublin, 1938-56); Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in pre-Norman Ireland', p. 6. Mallory would even argue that a sense of 'Irishness' existed in the fifth century and earlier: *The Origins of the Irish*, p. 296.

<sup>45</sup> Bartlett offers several examples, from the early tenth-century Regino of Prüm to the fourteenth-century historian, John of Fordun: 'Medieval and Modern Concepts', pp. 45-9; Patrick Amory, 'Meaning and Purpose of Ethnic Terminology', pp. 3-4; Cf. Genesis 11.6.

<sup>46</sup> Genesis 11.1-9. *Auraicept na n-Éces* ll. 1035-8, in *Auraicept na n-Éces, the Scholars' Primer*, ed. and trans. George Calder (Edinburgh, 1917). See also James Acken, *Structure and Interpretation in the Auraicept na nÉces* (Saarbrücken, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.1.1. Isidore is not always consistent in the respect, but he does stress the importance of language.

<sup>48</sup> Oswald and Oswiu: *HE* III.1, 3, 25.

<sup>49</sup> *HE* I.1.

Genesis, Bede uses the symbol of unified language to signify universal love and faith, and his vision of Latin as a unifying language reflects Christianity's unifying power as a group label.<sup>50</sup> The unity of Christian faith in Britain was, then, reflected in the common use of Latin.

Another significant cultural arbiter in early medieval identities was that of law. In Ireland, although the island was a patchwork of kingdoms and political divisions, an independent legal class participated in creating a system of law that applied to all. Even with political disunity, laws and customs served to create a sense of what it was to be Irish.<sup>51</sup> The very existence of law-collections, Rees argues, can be seen as an act of community-creation, and was even more important in the absence of a unified political field.<sup>52</sup> It is particularly interesting that the Irish (and the Anglo-Saxons) wrote their laws in their vernacular, rather than in Latin. These were texts aimed at the people who spoke those languages, as Stacey has pointed out, and not just for an elite.<sup>53</sup> Perceived common descent, law and language were, as Susan Reynolds argues, the criteria on which a community might be based by the sixth century.<sup>54</sup> However, although the inhabitants of the island of Ireland may have recognised a common culture among them, they were not a unified nation in any sense. Just as Walter Pohl remarks of the Anglo-Saxons, individuals from Ireland would not have acted in the name of a *gens Scottorum*, though they might have recognised their common culture.<sup>55</sup>

The Irish were, on the most general level, a people who inhabited the island of Ireland. For Bede, while this geographical identity was accurate, it did not limit them to that island, and he speaks also of the *Scotti* of northern Britain. Despite their geographical remove from Ireland – though Bede acknowledges the close proximity of the two islands – they remain Irish. It is interesting that Ireland is seen as culturally homogeneous, by both the Irish and those outside, but it is characterised by great political fragmentation. Even Bede's Britain, with its many kingdoms, could not compare to the partitions that existed in Ireland. F.J. Byrne posits that there were about

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<sup>50</sup> *In Genesim* III.11, pp.157-58, 162, in *CCSL* 118A, ed. Charles W. Jones (Turnhout, 1967); *On Genesis*, ed. and trans. Calvin Kendall (Liverpool, 2008), pp. 233, 238.

<sup>51</sup> Rees Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400. III. Laws and customs', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996), p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400. III. Laws and customs', p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Robin Chapman Stacey, 'Law and Order in the Very Old West: England and Ireland in the Early Middle Ages', in *Crossed Paths: Methodological Approaches to the Celtic Aspect of the European Middle Ages*, ed. Benjamin T. Hudson and Vickie Ziegler (Lanham, MD, 1991), p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Reynolds, 'Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm', *History* 68 (1983), p. 389.

<sup>55</sup> Pohl, 'Ethnic Names and Identities', p. 12.

150 kings at any one time in Ireland between the fifth and twelfth centuries.<sup>56</sup> Just as Bede could view the Anglo-Saxons as the *gens Anglorum* and yet the Northumbrians as the *gens* that live north of the river Humber, so he understood that the Irish constituted the people of the whole island of Ireland, and yet that the Dál Riata to the north of Britain were Irish also.<sup>57</sup> Bede seems, at times, to be guilty of over-simplifying the ethnic make-up of the island of Britain, but this was with a purpose: that of seeing the Anglo-Saxons as one people, participating in history as directed by the Christian God.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, referring to the *Scotti* was a far simpler construct than articulating complicated – and foreign – territorial or political affiliations.

One might argue that to set aside a certain group from the many hundreds of individuals who are mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is too artificial a distinction to lead to any meaningful conclusions, but this is not the case. Bede was himself very interested in, and very aware of, questions of ethnicity. If he were not, we would not have so much to work with in this context. Ethnicity, whether defined or delineated by believed biological links, language, law, or other social aspects, was important to Bede, and evidence of this can be found throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Therefore, examining closely the men he called *Scotti* (and some whom he did not) is a worthwhile and productive exercise.

## *ii. Methodology*

This aim of this thesis is to create a prosopography of the Irish persons mentioned in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and to draw conclusions about them more generally. Prosopography is an approach to history, rather than a methodology in itself, entailing the detailed investigation of the lives of individuals within a clearly defined group, and it must be adapted to the project in question. It is a way of looking at a defined group of people that acknowledges them as individuals while also treating them as a group, and involves the collection of structured data on each person in a group;

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<sup>56</sup> F.J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 2001; repr. 2004), pp. 7-8.

<sup>57</sup> *HE* I.15.

<sup>58</sup> This is particularly noticeable in his neglect of the Britons who still inhabited Anglo-Saxon territory. Although Bede offers no possibility of these Britons 'becoming' Anglo-Saxon, he also avoids mentioning their presence. See Pohl, 'Ethnic Names and Identities', p. 25.

only then is the information analysed.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the information is analysed on an individual and on a group basis.

This project began with the identification on the group to be studied. The Irish, or the *Scotti*, who appear in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* were decided upon as the population for analysis.<sup>60</sup> Data-gathering began with a survey of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, picking out each of the Irish persons and groups to be included. The Irish individuals were identified through the following categories: those defined by Bede as *Scotti* or of the *gens Scottorum*; those whose geographic origin is Ireland; those who have at least one Irish (as in, of Irish geographic origin) parent; those who have an Irish name. Included in those with Irish geographic origins are the Irish of northern Britain, the Dál Riata, as Bede clearly identifies them as *Scotti* and gives them an Irish geographic origin.<sup>61</sup> Forty-two individuals and nine discrete groups were identified.

Having isolated all those Irish in the text, the information offered by Bede was gathered, and then other primary texts were examined for further details. A variety of primary sources were used in this way, including various contemporary hagiographies, martyrologies, the Irish annals, and Bede's other works, which range from exegesis to his scientific tracts.<sup>62</sup> These have been necessary to compare, contrast, and supplement the information garnered from Bede's text. At times Bede and these sources present a very large and comprehensive set of data on a person, and at other times only scant details survive. Despite such dearth, it is often possible to mine these texts for information and hints at omitted or unknown details. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* remains at the centre of the research however, and it is specifically the presentation of the Irish in this text that is the purpose of the project. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* has been read and studied since its writing in the eighth century, and this has inevitably resulted in a vast quantity of secondary literature. While the primary source of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* itself remained the focus of this project, it has been necessary to draw on the work of other scholars on Bede and his text, to offer context, to increase

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<sup>59</sup> See K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, 'Introduction: Chameleon or Chimera? Understanding Prosopography', in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*, Prosopographica et Genealogica 13 (Oxford, 2007), pp. 1-32, especially pp. 3-5, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Keats-Rohan explains that a population comprises members with a connection between them, though it can be a grouping created by the researcher and is not necessarily as self-defined one: 'Introduction: Chameleon or Chimera?', pp. 28-9.

<sup>61</sup> *HE* I.1.

<sup>62</sup> These texts are listed as Primary Sources in the bibliography.

my understanding of the period and, vitally, to ensure this work does not merely repeat the findings of those who have come before.<sup>63</sup>

Prosopography requires that the individuals in its population be examined under the same set of criteria. In compiling my set of categories, I followed the example of the excellent *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE)* database, a project based at the University of Cambridge and King's College, London, which has created an online profile of every recorded inhabitant of England from the late sixth to the late eleventh centuries.<sup>64</sup> This project used a set of categories very close to those of *PASE*, as building on the work already done was the best approach. However, considering its massive scope, the *PASE* database necessarily has a very structured approach, focusing on the bare recorded details about individuals such as events, possessions, and associates. Due to the more limited population group of this project, the data collection was, conversely, more extensive. Data was collected in a spreadsheet, for ease of collection and access.<sup>65</sup>

Yet the compilation of data is only the first step in prosopography. Next, one must analyse the information assembled, looking at individuals in the context of the group. For example, while in the assembly of data all assertions in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are accepted, in the analysis they may be questioned and challenged.<sup>66</sup> Usually, in prosopography, individuals are listed alphabetically by name, as has been applied in Appendix 1. As this project focuses on individuals who were often closely connected, and about whom it was impossible to discuss in isolation, it was decided to divide the analysis into eight chapters, of which the first seven are broadly geographical. The final chapter looks at the Irish of the text as a group themselves. While statistical analysis is a common approach to modern mass prosopography, it is not properly applicable to this project as the numbers involved are too small, although

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<sup>63</sup> Secondary literature is explicitly flagged as necessary to the production of a prosopography, as declared by Koenraad Verboven, Myriam Carlier and Jan Dumolyn, 'A Short Manual to the Art of Prosopography', in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>64</sup> This database is available at <<http://www.pase.ac.uk>>, and the website includes comprehensive information on the project and its methodology.

<sup>65</sup> The prosopography can be found below at Appendix 1. The categories used were: Name, Source, Status, Location, Office, Relationships, Possessions, Education, Events, Easter, Bede's attitude, Iona connection. The last three are unique to my project.

<sup>66</sup> See Dion C. Smythe, 'A Whiter Shade of Pale': Issues and Possibilities in Prosopography', in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications*, pp. 129-30. Smythe calls these assertions 'factoids' (p. 130), a practice also followed by the PASE project: 'Digital Strategy', *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* <<http://www.pase.ac.uk>> [accessed 7 April 2013].

some meaningful data can be obtained.<sup>67</sup> Rather, this is a more traditional prosopography of an elite, in which a series of case studies are brought together. Among these are several unnamed individuals, whose Irishness will be argued from context, and some groups, the members of which are often anonymous.<sup>68</sup> This investigation presents a picture of the Irish Bede mentions as persons in their own right, as players in Bede's narrative, and as a discrete group within the story Bede is telling. The historical reality of these persons is far more complex than Bede presents, and intensive exploration can yield greater understanding of this history. Moreover, the complex network of personal affiliations and relationships that existed in seventh-century Northumbria and the rest of Britain can be at least partially revealed through close examination, and aid our understanding of the period.<sup>69</sup>

Bede's own work as an exegete has a bearing on the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as he expected at least some of his audience to recognise the biblical allusions and deeper meaning of his text. It is necessary to synthesise this approach with the historical investigation of the Irish to arrive at a true understanding of Bede's intentions. The end of the twentieth century saw a renewed interest in Bede's exegetical writings, which had long been neglected in favour of his historical and scientific works.<sup>70</sup> This has led to much scholarly discussion of these works, and a new understanding of the themes that interested Bede throughout his life – mission, reform, and orthodoxy.<sup>71</sup> It is possible to see harmony in Bede's works, exegetical and otherwise, though that is not to say that there is no difference between his early and later works.

While Bede calls this text a history, it is a not history in the modern sense, and his heavy authorial hand can be seen throughout the work. Bede the Christian, the biblical scholar, and the historian is ever-present in the text, and the qualities and events he describes must be accepted within the context of the narrative he has created. While the reality of his chronology of events of the work may be debated, it is vital that we

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>68</sup> See David A.E. Pelteret, 'Should One Include Unnamed Persons in a Prosopographical Study?', in *Prosopography Approached and Applications*, pp. 184-96.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 4, a network chart comprising all the Irish individuals of this project in relation to those directly connected to them, demonstrating this complex web of affiliation and interconnection.

<sup>70</sup> The Liverpool University Press's *Translated Texts for Historians (TTH)* series was an essential part of this sea-change, and there have been more accessible editions of Bede's exegesis available for study as a result. Scott DeGregorio discusses this development in Bedan studies in 'Introduction: The New Bede', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, WV, 2006), pp. 2-5.

<sup>71</sup> For example, O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth', pp. 119-45; DeGregorio, 'Footsteps of His Own: Bede's Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, pp. 143-68.

approach the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as a coherent work, which is written deliberately and with purpose.<sup>72</sup> The Irish, then, are to be examined both as historical figures, whose existence beyond the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is accepted (whether we can find proof of this or not), and also as figures who play parts in Bede's elaborate text.

Chapter One examines the bishops sent by Iona to evangelise the kingdom of Northumbria. Though titled 'The Irish of Lindisfarne', the first man discussed is not connected to that foundation, being Aidan's predecessor as bishop whose mission was a failure. Aidan, Fínán and Colmán are discussed in detail, individually and in relation to one another and the text. Chapter Two looks at the other Irishmen in the kingdom of Northumbria, including two whose 'Irishness' is less obvious than others', Boisil and Aldfrith. Although the bishops of Lindisfarne are the best-known Irishmen in the kingdom, they were not the only one to leave their mark. Chapter Three investigates the Irish in kingdoms south of Northumbria: Mercia, Sussex and Wessex, demonstrating that Irish were living and working throughout the island. Some of these men are attached to the Columban mission to Northumbria, and others seem not to be associated with it, revealing the variety of backgrounds from which the Irish came. Chapter Four explores the place of Fursa, the famed visionary, and his Irish companions in East Anglia in the text. Though celebrated on the Continent in a *vita* of his own, Fursa is made to fit in with Bede's narrative and his presentation of the *Scotti* more generally. Chapter Five considers the Irishmen of Iona, dispatchers of bishops to Northumbria and Columban leaders. Though less directly present in Bede's text than other Irishmen mentioned here, their influence is still vitally important. Chapter Six looks at the Irishmen mentioned in letters included by Bede. Chapter Seven surveys the Irishmen who do not fit into the loose geographical categories of previous chapters, and include several men in Ireland and two kings. Chapter Eight takes a broader view of the Irish in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, evaluating them as group, the *Scotti*, as well as their presentation in the text more generally.

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is a work of great skill and breadth, and it has a purpose – to describe the development of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons while supplying its audience with a gallery of good (and bad) examples.<sup>73</sup> The persons who appear in it often have a function beyond the historical fact of their existence. Bede is considered quite modern in his approach to history, stressing eye-witness accounts and

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<sup>72</sup> For a discussion of this, see Goffart, 'Bede's Agenda and Ours', pp. 29-45.

<sup>73</sup> James Campbell coined this very apt phrase, 'Bede I', p. 25.

documentary evidence. Despite such indications of trustworthiness and objectivity, the didactic purpose of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* means that Bede's editorialising hand can often be seen, particularly when we have access to his sources or similar contemporary sources. My approach looks beyond the historical to include the role of these persons within Bede's greater narrative. The Irish are very important in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* - as missionaries, as teachers, as *peregrini*, and as Christian models.<sup>74</sup> Just as Bede's exegesis understood the many layers of understanding in the Bible and in Patristic texts, Bede's own work must be read similarly. A constant issue in the researching and writing of this project was that it is a thesis on the Irish in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It was essential to maintain focus on the Irish within the context of this work. Simply writing an exhaustive biography of the individuals in question, particularly in the cases of those figures with careers beyond this text, such as Columba and Fursa, would not have achieved the aim of illuminating the role of the Irish in this text.

### *iii. The Irish in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica and past scholarship*

This project is not the first attempt to tackle the Irish in Bede's momentous work, though it is the first full-length study. As early as 1958, Margaret Pepperdene raised the question of Bede's depiction of the Irish in the text, and concluded that Bede emphasised the Roman mission at the expense of the Irish one.<sup>75</sup> In 1983, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín reiterated some of Pepperdene's criticism, and drew attention to the generally unacknowledged debt Bede owed to the Irish in matters of scientific and computational scholarship. Ó Cróinín, in a revised reprint of this article, commented that he had ascribed no malice to Bede in his omission, but wished to draw attention to this absence.<sup>76</sup> Alan Thacker responded to Ó Cróinín with 'Bede and the Irish', in which he argued that Bede celebrated the Irish in his writing, and saw them as part of the wider church.<sup>77</sup> This attitude has been echoed since by writers like Clare Stancliffe and

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<sup>74</sup> For a broad discussion of *peregrinatio*, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976), pp. 43-59.

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Pepperdene, 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: A New Perspective', *Celtica* 4 (1958), pp. 253-62.

<sup>76</sup> Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', *Peritia* 2 (1983), pp. 229-47, repr. in *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin, 2001), p. 190, n.88. See Charles W. Jones, *Bedae Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge, MA, 1943), pp. 111-3; Wallis, 'Introduction', *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, pp. lxxii-lxxix.

<sup>77</sup> Alan Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian*, pp. 31-59.

Walter Goffart, who similarly view Bede's attitude toward the Irish as essentially positive.<sup>78</sup> Since Thacker's article, in which he asserted that, at the time of writing, Bede had been regarded, concerning the Irish contribution, as "at best [...] ambiguous" and "at worst [...] deliberately undervaluing", opinion on Bede's attitude has, for the most part, changed, not least thanks to the article in question.<sup>79</sup> However, a monograph published in 2009 by Vicky Gunn raised the subject again, and concluded that Bede was, in fact, very critical of the Irish.<sup>80</sup> This project seeks to thoroughly examine the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, individually and as a group, and explore their presence in the text, their purpose, and Bede's perceptions of them.

#### *iv. Easter and the Irish*

Easter is a subject central to discussions of Bede's depiction of the Irish, and as 'Roman' and 'orthodox' Easter will later be contrasted with the 'Insular' and 'unorthodox' Easter, it is best to deal with these issues here. Bede took great interest in Easter and the calculation of its date, and to say, as Plummer does, that it seems to have "a place in Bede's mind out of all proportion to its real importance", is to dismiss its significance for Bede.<sup>81</sup> Not only is Easter the most important Christian festival, celebrating Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, but it became a significant symbol of unity for a church that aspired to being Universal. Easter is based on Jewish Passover, but, unlike that feast, was always celebrated on a Sunday. It is a moveable feast, calculated by cross-referencing lunar and solar calendars, and the complexities therein resulted, early on, in some uncertainty as to the exact date. The (much-simplified) rule is that Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox.<sup>82</sup> Much ink has been expended, since the early centuries of the

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<sup>78</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*; Clare Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, Jarrow Lecture 2003; Stancliffe, 'British and Irish Contexts', pp. 69-83, especially pp.78-82. Stancliffe focuses solely on the Columban Irish in the latter article, however.

<sup>79</sup> Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', p. 31. Stancliffe's article, 'British and Irish Contexts', pp. 69-83, is an excellent example of this.

<sup>80</sup> Vicky Gunn, *Bede's Historiae: Genre, Rhetoric and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon History* (Woodbridge, 2009), especially pp.37-40, 68-76. Gunn does remark, however, that Bede's treatment of the Irish was not all the same, p. 76.

<sup>81</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* I, p. xl. In his 'Excursus on the Paschal Controversy and Tonsure', Plummer went so far as to refer to the "tediousness of the paschal controversy": *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 348.

<sup>82</sup> Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era* (Oxford, 2008), p. 40. For an extensive investigation of the various Easter tables, see pp. 59-316.

Christian religion to the present, in attempting to explain the significance and the complications of the system to be used.

Easter and the ‘Easter controversy’ are relevant to discussion of the Irish because Easter is a topic Bede brings up in an Irish context. The Columban Irish who evangelised the Northumbrians celebrated Easter according to an 84-year cycle.<sup>83</sup> This is not the place to go into the intricacies of the various methods of calculating Easter, but, to briefly summarise the main issues: the 84-year Easter tables limited Easter to between the fourteenth and twentieth days of the Jewish month of Nisan, and deemed March 25 to be the vernal equinox; the Victorian 532-year Easter tables calculated Easter between the sixteenth and twenty-second days (but sometimes also gave an alternative date, using fifteenth to twenty-first day lunar limits), and used March 21 as the equinox; and the Dionysiac 19-year Easter tables specified the fifteenth and the twenty-first days of Nisan as the Easter limits, and also used March 21 as the vernal equinox.<sup>84</sup> These different criteria inevitably led to different dates in some years. Both the Victorian and the Dionysiac tables had been favoured by Rome, but by mid-seventh century, the latter had become the preferred method.

Until the 630s, the 84-year Easter reckoning was generally followed in Ireland.<sup>85</sup> The Columbans maintained their practices after that in honour of their predecessors and in response to the problems inherent in the Victorian tables, despite the attempts of others to persuade them to change.<sup>86</sup> It is very interesting that Bede does not explain the difference between the Victorian and the Dionysiac Easter tables in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Instead of depicting a Christian world in which several tables were used in different places at different times, even Rome, and one in which the Easter advanced by Rome was not always the same Easter they promoted in the 660s, he presents a situation in which the two opposing systems were the unorthodox 84-year

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<sup>83</sup> For detailed examinations of the 84-year cycle, see: Daniel McCarthy, ‘The Origin of the Latercus Paschal Cycle of the Insular Celtic Churches’, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 28 (1994), pp. 25-49; Immo Warntjes, ‘The Munich Computus and the 84 (14)-year Easter Reckoning’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 107C (2007), pp. 31-85.

<sup>84</sup> For discussion of this complicated subject, see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ‘“New Heresy for Old”: Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640’, *Speculum* 60.3 (1985), pp. 505-16, repr. in *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 87-98; Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year: An Exploration of Calendar Customs and Time-Reckoning* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 791-7, 803-15; Immo Warntjes, *The Munich Computus: Text and Translation. Irish Computistics between Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede and its Reception in Carolingian Times* (Stuttgart, 2010), pp. xxx-xli, 346-7.

<sup>85</sup> See Maura Walsh and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, ‘Introduction’, *Cummian’s Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 15-22.

<sup>86</sup> The Victorian tables remained popular in Gaul into the eighth century: Wallis, ‘Introduction’, p. lxxix.

cycle and the orthodox Roman cycle.<sup>87</sup> By simplifying the situation, Bede was able to show Rome as the authority, unchanged, and those who followed the 84-year cycle as in error, and in need of correction. As the importance of orthodoxy increased over time, particularly in the issue of the calculation of Easter, the Roman traditions won out, and this movement towards orthodoxy is an important theme in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. However, this text is not defined, as Smyth believed, by the “triumph of Anglo-Saxon Roman Christianity over its Celtic neighbours”, Bede’s narrative being far more nuanced and complex than such a simplistic description implies.<sup>88</sup>

In Northumbria by 664, the royal household represented the problem of Easter on a domestic level. Queen Eanflæd, raised in Kent, followed the orthodox Easter, and had a Kentish priest as her personal cleric. King Oswiu, her husband, on the other hand, adhered to the 84-year Easter his Columban clergy celebrated, having been exiled in his youth and baptised by the Irish. Bede asserts that, tired of this discord, which might see one member of the royal couple celebrating Easter Sunday while the other was still fasting for Lent, the king decided to have the situation resolved and called together a synod at the monastery of Whitby. Bede’s account is usually preferred to that of Stephen of Ripon in his *Vita Wilfridi* due to the latter’s more obvious biases.<sup>89</sup> Colmán, Irish bishop of Lindisfarne, defended his community’s Easter practices with an appeal to the authority of Columba, and to Anatolius and the Apostle John. Wilfrid, spokesperson for the adherents of the Roman Easter, countered these arguments, and asserted that the practices of the universal church must be preferred to those of a small number at the edge of the world. Finally, the issue was decided by Oswiu’s query over whose authority was greatest, that of Peter or that of Columba. With the unanimous answer of Peter, the Roman Easter tables carried the day, and Colmán, along with his Irish clergy and some thirty of the Anglo-Saxons at Lindisfarne, left for Iona. This departure brought to an end the line of Irish bishops at Lindisfarne, but it did not end Irish influence in Northumbria.

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<sup>87</sup> Masako Ohashi, ‘Theory and History: An Interpretation of the Paschal Controversy in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*’, in *Bède le Vénérable entre Tradition et Postérité*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>88</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland, AD 80-1000* (London, 1984), p. 76.

<sup>89</sup> *HE* III.25; *VW* 10; although some scholars prefer Stephen’s *Vita Wilfridi* in some instances, believing it to be more accurate. See, for example, Clare Stancliffe, ‘British and Irish Contexts’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, p. 75.

## Chapter One: The Irish of Lindisfarne

Lindisfarne grabs the attention of any reader of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* interested in the Irish. The foundation was the base from which many of the leading Irishmen of the text worked – Aidan being the best known and the most important. He was not, however, the only influential Irish bishop at Lindisfarne. His successors, Fínán and Colmán, each made their mark on the religious and political landscape of early Anglo-Saxon England, and Aidan's short-term predecessor is also worth investigating. Lindisfarne is at the centre of Bede's discussion of the Irish in the third book of his work, and rightfully should take centre-stage in explorations of the Irish more generally in Bede's thought.

The bishops of Lindisfarne are an interesting group, as is the question of their position at the monastery. Leaving aside the first bishop sent, Aidan's unnamed predecessor, Bede presents them in an utterly monastic setting. These bishops had responsibility for the Northumbrian people as a whole, but are definitively located at the monastery of Lindisfarne. Although they appear to be leaders of this monastery, they are not abbots: Bede always calls them bishops.<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that the monk-bishops of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, such as Aidan and Cuthbert, admirably fulfilled the dual roles of pastor and contemplative which constituted two, at times conflicting, ideals of the Church.<sup>2</sup> Bede carefully explains in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that the monastery of Iona is unusual in its organisation, in that the monastery is ruled by an

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<sup>1</sup> He uses *episcopus* and *antistes* when discussing them.

<sup>2</sup> Simon J. Coates, 'The Bishop as Pastor and Solitary: Bede and the Spiritual Authority of the Monk-Bishop', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47.4 (1996), pp. 612-7.

abbot who is a priest and monk, and even the bishops of the territory are subject to him. One might be forgiven for presuming that Lindisfarne would follow a similar system to its mother-house, but the episcopal nature of Aidan's position challenges this.

Whether Iona was truly governed as Bede explains is open to debate. Cormac Bourke has shown that Cillíne Droichtech mac Dícolla, fourteenth abbot of Iona, was most likely a bishop as well as abbot, and he was abbot of Iona when Bede was writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>3</sup> Bourke similarly demonstrated that Fergna, the fourth abbot of Iona, was a bishop, drawing on the evidence of the *Martyrology of Gorman*, which is repeated in the *Martyrology of Donegal* and the *Annals of the Four Masters*.<sup>4</sup> While Reeves, in the notes to his nineteenth-century edition of the *Vita Columbae*, disputed whether such a title should be believed in light of the precedent of Columba as an abbot and priest, Bourke is sceptical that this precedent was ever considered obligatory, and is of the opinion that Fergna's abbacy and episcopacy did not coincide in territory.<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Márkus remarks on one bishop Conamail, signatory of Adomnán's *Lex innocentium*, who is probably the same Conamail who became abbot of Iona after Adomnán's death.<sup>6</sup> If this identification (and title) can be relied upon, Iona itself had another abbot who had reached the grade of bishop, whether or not he fulfilled that function at the monastery. As Márkus states, there is no recorded bishop of Iona before Cóeti, who died in 712. Márkus explains this by suggesting that Iona was not very involved in pastoral activity, and so did not generally need a bishop.<sup>7</sup> While this may hold true for Iona, Lindisfarne was a centre of pastoral activity and its bishops were of prime importance. Alan Thacker has discussed the fact that Bede's information on Iona is not necessarily always reliable, and, following from a comment by Richard Sharpe,

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<sup>3</sup> Cormac Bourke, 'Cillíne Pontifex', *The Innes Review* 49.1 (1998), pp. 77-80.

<sup>4</sup> Cormac Bourke, 'Fergna Epscop', *The Innes Review* 51.1 (2000), pp. 68-71. *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1616*, Vol.1, ed. and trans. John O'Donovan (Dublin, 1848; repr. 1990). The *Martyrology of Gorman*, dating to the twelfth century, was compiled by the abbot of Knock in Co. Louth, while the *Martyrology of Donegal* is a far later creation, written by Mícháel Ó Cléirigh in the seventeenth century, based on much earlier materials.

<sup>5</sup> Bourke, 'Fergna Epscop', pp. 69, 71; W. Reeves, *The Life of St. Columba, Founder of Hy* (Dublin, 1857), pp. 372-3.

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Márkus, 'Iona: Monks, Pastors and Missionaries', in *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots: Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland*, ed. Dauvit Broun and Thomas Owen Clancy (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 128. Márkus does comment that his title in the guarantor list of Adomnán's *Lex innocentium* may not be accurate, as Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha argues in 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', *Peritia* 1 (1982), p. 196, but he references one bishop Convall in the Dunkeld Liturgy to support it, pp. 128-9, n. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Márkus, 'Iona: Monks, Pastors and Missionaries', pp. 123-4. This Bishop Cóeti was a signatory of Adomnán's *Lex innocentium*, and a contemporary of that abbot.

draws attention to a suggestion in the *Vita Columbae* that bishops were highly esteemed at that monastery.<sup>8</sup> Nor was Iona without access to bishops, as ordaining Aidan's predecessor, and the three bishops who came after him, required three bishops on each occasion. As Márkus states, any failure to follow canon law in this would surely have drawn criticism from those who opposed the Columbans in Northumbria.<sup>9</sup>

We have clear evidence that Aidan, his predecessor, and his successors Fínán and Colmán were in episcopal orders, as both Bede and the Irish annals refer to them as *episcopi*. At no point does Bede call any of them abbots, nor does he mention abbots of Lindisfarne during their tenure, but, if one were to infer from the information Bede supplies about actual persons, it would seem that these bishops fulfilled a leadership role at the monastery of Lindisfarne. A.A. Duncan sees the situation as one where the abbot was a bishop, or was subordinate to the bishop – very different indeed to Iona.<sup>10</sup> It is not until after Colmán's departure from Lindisfarne that we hear of a separate abbot and bishop, with Eata becoming abbot of the monastery and Tuda bishop of the Northumbrians.<sup>11</sup> Eata later became bishop of Lindisfarne, within Theodore's new diocesan plan for the kingdom, but prior to that Eata was bishop of Bernicia from Wilfrid's ousting in 678. In the latter role, Bede tells us, Eata had his episcopal see either at Hexham or Lindisfarne, and he was promoted to the rank of bishop from the community of monks.<sup>12</sup> While Eata was abbot of Lindisfarne, Wilfrid was bishop of the kingdom, and moved his episcopal seat to York. During Eata's career, the episcopacy of Northumbria and the abbacy of Lindisfarne were clearly two separate entities, but this is less obvious before Colmán's departure.

The ninth-century Durham *Liber Vitae* named Aidan, Fínán and Colmán as abbots who were also priests, while Symeon of Durham's history of Durham lists them among the bishops.<sup>13</sup> The Durham *Liber Vitae* probably based this categorisation on the

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<sup>8</sup> Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', p. 55; VC I.35.

<sup>9</sup> Márkus, 'Iona: Monks, Pastors and Missionaries', pp. 130-1.

<sup>10</sup> A.A. Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R.H.C. David and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford, 1981), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> HE III.26. Considering Bede's failure to mention a change, and the state of disrepair the church of York was said to be in when Wilfrid became bishop, it seems most likely that Tuda maintained his episcopal seat at Lindisfarne, VW 16.

<sup>12</sup> HE IV.12: *...et Eata, qui Berniciorum prouinciam gubernaret...ille in Hagustaldensi siue Lindisfarnensi ecclesia cathedram habens episcopalem, ambo de monachorum collegio in episcopatus gradum assciti.*

<sup>13</sup> In the Durham *Liber Vitae* they are listed among the *nomina abbatum gradus praesbyteratus*; Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio atque Procursu Istius, Hoc est Dunhelmensis, Ecclesie*, Preface, ed. and trans. D. Rollason (Oxford, 2000), pp. 2-4.

leadership role fulfilled by these men at Lindisfarne, as its Northumbrian origins suggest its compilers would have known of these men's episcopal status. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* eventually offers an explanation of the situation, stating, in discussion of Cuthbert's assignment as prior of Lindisfarne under abbot Eata, that *a temporibus ibidem antiquis*, the bishop had lived with his clergy and the abbot with his monks. Bede asserts that these monks were also considered part of the bishop's household.<sup>14</sup> This chapter is clear on the distinction between bishop and abbot of Lindisfarne by Cuthbert's time, and applies it to Lindisfarne's history, explicitly referring to Aidan, its first bishop, who was also a monk. Even more explicit is Bede's explanation, in his prose *Vita Cuthberti*, which states that the bishops chose the abbot of Lindisfarne with the help of the community, and that this abbot rules the monastery. All of the ecclesiastical grades, from the readers to the bishop himself, lived a monastic life as part of the community.<sup>15</sup> There is still room for scepticism in this matter, as this is asserted only when discussing Cuthbert, and there is no indication of it in descriptions of any of the Irish bishops and their interactions with Lindisfarne.<sup>16</sup> If one relied only on the third book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the impression of Lindisfarne would be of a community led by a bishop. Nonetheless, Bede ascribes this system to ancient times, and its reflection of more recent procedure at Lindisfarne is probably applicable to the community's full history also.

Although Bede famously explained previously that Iona, after the example of Columba himself, had a priestly abbot to whose authority the kingdom, and even bishops, were subject, Lindisfarne did not follow this pattern.<sup>17</sup> The monastery of Mayo, founded by Colmán in the west of Ireland, seems only to have had a bishop, with no mention made in the annals of an abbot, though it is quite possible that Mayo followed the same system as Lindisfarne.<sup>18</sup> Although Bede stresses that Bishop Aidan was a monk from the monastery of Iona in *HE* III.3, and in the very next chapter explains that Iona had the unusual arrangement whereby the abbot had authority over even bishops, Bede never states that this situation applied to any of the many monasteries which were established from Iona and over which Iona held sway. The

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<sup>14</sup> *HE* IV.27.

<sup>15</sup> *PVC* 16. Bede repeats much of this at *HE* IV.27.

<sup>16</sup> As Lapidge has pointed out, this passage is taken almost directly from Bede's prose *Vita Cuthberti*, which may explain why it does not appear until the fourth book: *Storia degli Inglesi* II, p. 646.

<sup>17</sup> *HE* III.4.

<sup>18</sup> *AT* 732: *Pontifex Muighe h-Éo Saxonum, Gerailt obít*; *AU* 773: *Aedan episcopus Maighe h-Eu....mortui sunt*.

monastic life led by all at Lindisfarne, including its bishop, seems to have struck a chord with Bede. Immersed in the monastic life himself, Bede emphasises this aspect of Lindisfarne's organisation. He also highlights it in the cases of Augustine at Canterbury and Pope Gregory I in Rome, placing Lindisfarne in good company.<sup>19</sup> Alan Thacker believes Bede's portrayal of Lindisfarne is very Gregorian in nature, and sees evidence of this right up until the Synod of Whitby in 664. As Thacker remarks, Aidan and other Irish figures are presented as excellent monastic examples in a manner that does not set out to emphasise their Irishness, or their difference, but rather to situate them in the same tradition extolled by Gregory the Great.<sup>20</sup>

*i. Northumbria's first Irish bishop (Anonymous 1)*

As Bede explains in *HE* III.5, Aidan was not the first bishop sent to the Northumbrians at Oswald's request. One *austerioris animi uir* [man of an austere spirit] was first sent over in response to Oswald's plea, but found the Anglo-Saxons unresponsive to his methods. He made little headway and the people were unwilling to listen to his message, so he returned to Iona.<sup>21</sup> There, he reported to an assembly of seniors that he was unable to teach those to whom he had been sent, as they were untameable men with hard and uncivilised minds.<sup>22</sup> Bede here echoes the words of Ezekiel 2.4, which says that Ezekiel is to be sent to the people of Israel, who are children of hard faces and uncivilised hearts.<sup>23</sup> This bishop was calling the Northumbrians a rebellious people who had been offered the message of salvation and rejected it. These words also reflect the letter of Gregory I to Mellitus, travelling to join Augustine in Britain as part of the Roman mission to the Anglo-Saxons. There, Gregory wrote that it would not be possible to force the Anglo-Saxons, with their *durae mentes*, to forget their previous customs completely, but they should be encouraged to adopt

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<sup>19</sup> *HE* I.27; II.1.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Papers Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, with Donald Bullough and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 144, 146; Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', pp. 43-6.

<sup>21</sup> *HE* III.5: *genti Anglorum praedicans nihil proficeret, nec libenter a populo audiretur*. This unsuccessful missionary might be compared to Wihthberht, a companion of Ecgberht, who spent two years attempting to convert the Frisians to no avail (*HE* V.9). Dáibhí Ó Cróinín pointed out to me that Palladius is similarly described in Muirchú's *Vita Sancti Patricii* I.8, in Muirchú Moccu Macthéni's 'Life of Saint Patrick', ed. and trans. David Howlett (Dublin, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> *HE* III.5: *quia nil prodesse docendo genti, ad quam missus erat, potuisset, eo quod essent homines indomabiles, et durae ac barbarae mentis*.

<sup>23</sup> Ezekiel 2.4: "And they to whom I send thee are children of a hard face, and of an obstinate heart." This passage is part of the vision of Ezekiel, in which he is told to go to the people of Israel, who have sinned against God, and who even up to that day were stubborn and intractable.

Christianity step by step, rather than expecting them to embrace it in one leap.<sup>24</sup> The assembled elders of Iona discussed the problem, wishing to fulfil Oswald's solicitation, and regretting the failure of their emissary. Aidan then voiced the opinion that their first choice had been overly harsh in his attitude, and had not offered them easier doctrines before moving on to more complex theology. This passage is vitally important to Bede's depiction of Aidan, and will be discussed below, but, in examining this first Irish bishop to the Northumbrians, it is evident that he offers a strong contrast to Aidan's suitability to the position.

Bede gives us almost no information about this bishop's time in Northumbria. Oswald's accession to the throne is usually dated to 634, and Bede tells us that *mox ubi* [as soon as] he became king, he sent to Iona for a bishop for his people. Bede writes that Iona was not slow in sending Aidan, a statement that is qualified two chapters later when he tells us that Aidan was not in fact the first choice for the task. Bede states that this man attempted to preach to the Northumbrians *aliquandiu*, for some time. This temporal adverb is very vague, and is used by Bede to denote periods of time from some hours to far longer periods.<sup>25</sup> Of course, it would have taken time for this first missionary to be sent for, chosen, dispatched, disillusioned and returned, however Bede's decision to attest to Aidan's quick dispatch to Northumbria implies that the first candidate did not remain long at his attempted mission. It seems likely that he spent less than a year among the Northumbrians, allowing Bede to gloss over his time and suggest that Aidan was quickly sent. Identifying this man is nigh on impossible. Bede has not troubled to supply his name, if it were even available to him, probably as his function in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is to stress Aidan's superior qualities. This adds to the supposition that his tenure in Northumbria was very short, as no details of his presence there survive in any other sources. As is so often the case, without Bede's testimony, this Irishman's very existence would be unknown. Despite his convenient purpose as a foil to Aidan's virtues, his historicity has not been questioned. Aidan is usually depicted as the first Irishman to come to convert the Anglo-Saxons, and Bede's reference to this predecessor is situated so as to maintain this impression of the former, placing it two chapters after Aidan's introduction. His inclusion of the unnamed

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<sup>24</sup> HE I.30: *summum locum ascendere nititur, gradibus uel passibus, non autem saltibus eleuatur.*

<sup>25</sup> HE III.25: *aliquandiu* refers to the length of time spent by Agilbert with Wilfrid and Alhfrith. HE IV.8: *aliquandiu* refers to a length of time during one night when a strange light occupied the sky.

previous occupant of the see is a slightly inconvenient fact that he must insert in Aidan's history, and he does so with consummate skill.

In the early sixteenth-century, Hector Boece offered the name Cormac for this bishop, a claim that has been repeated more recently with nothing to support it.<sup>26</sup> Boece's *Scotorum Historiae a Prima Gentis Origine* included various details on this Cormac, such as that he was very learned, and spent a year in Northumbria before his return to Iona. While it is possible that Boece had access to an early source that has not survived, very soon after the publication of his work questions were asked as to his sources and methods, and he cannot be relied upon to fill the gaps left by Bede.<sup>27</sup> Márkus speculates on the later fate of this man, whom he calls *Austerior* after Bede's description, wondering whether he returned to life as a monk, or remained a bishop elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> A bishop would not have come alone to Northumbria at its king's invitation; after all, a sole bishop does not a mission make. Aidan's predecessor must have been accompanied by men and objects which could aid him in his mission. No mention is made by Bede as to the presumed companions of this bishop, or whether they returned to Iona with him or awaited his replacement's arrival in Britain. Where this bishop based himself is another unanswered question, as Bede explicitly links Lindisfarne with Aidan, stating that the latter chose the site himself. Aidan's predecessor is likely to have based himself initially at the royal court, in light of Oswald's role in his coming to Northumbria. There may not have been time to establish a monastery elsewhere before the bishop took the decision to return to Iona. The fact that Aidan is generally the first name on lists of the bishops of Lindisfarne certainly supports this.<sup>29</sup>

Although Bede does not state it in discussing this bishop (or Aidan for that matter), Paulinus's time in Northumbria doubtless resulted in converts in some numbers, so this man's arrival was not to a kingdom that was utterly pagan.<sup>30</sup> As a royally initiated mission, this man may have found at least some support in Northumbria. However, Aidan's good working relationship with Oswald is emphasised

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<sup>26</sup> Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae a Prima Gentis Origine Libri xiii* (Paris, 1527), IX; Peter Berresford Ellis, *Celt and Saxon: The Struggle for Britain AD 410-937* (London, 1993), p. 144.

<sup>27</sup> See Nicola Royan, 'Boece, Hector (c.1465–1536)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2760>> [accessed 25 October 2012].

<sup>28</sup> Márkus, 'Iona: Monks, Pastors and Missionaries', pp. 129-30.

<sup>29</sup> In the early twelfth century, Symeon of Durham began his list with Aidan: *Libellus de Exordio*, Preface, p.4.

<sup>30</sup> Although Paulinus's work probably focussed on Deira more than Bernicia.

by Bede in discussing the success of that Irishman's mission, and may perhaps be considered in searching for a reason for the first mission's failure. If this man failed to inspire Oswald's full cooperation, his task in Northumbria would have been all the more difficult. Although his unsuccessful attempt to convert the Northumbrians is a regrettable passage in the history of Iona-Northumbria relations, Bede's presentation of this man as a powerful contrast to Aidan serves to eulogise the latter all the more rather than focussing on this early Irish failure. This unnamed figure's role is to stress his successor's abilities, and to demonstrate just how special Aidan was.

## ii. Aidan

Aidan is named among luminaries like Columba, Columbanus, Gall and Fursa by Louis Gougaud in his discussion of the influence of Irish monks, and he easily deserves such illustrious company.<sup>31</sup> Aidan is the Irishman *par excellence* in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his importance for the monastery of Lindisfarne cannot be overestimated. Aidan was sent from Iona as bishop to the Northumbrians c. 634/5, and his mission was quite successful from the beginning.<sup>32</sup> Although, as discussed, Aidan was a bishop rather than an abbot, Bede emphasises his monastic state, and presents him as both bishop and monastic leader.<sup>33</sup> Although not actually the first Irish missionary to the Anglo-Saxons, such is his importance that he is frequently characterised so.<sup>34</sup>

Bede first introduces Aidan in *HE* III.3, as the man sent in answer to Oswald's request for a bishop for his people. He immediately praises him as a man of "outstanding gentleness, devotion, and moderation".<sup>35</sup> Bede's depiction of Aidan includes a great deal of laudatory material: he tells us that Aidan set an example of abstinence and self-control, and always practised what he preached.<sup>36</sup> He says that Aidan was uninterested in material things, and used to give away gifts, including, on

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<sup>31</sup> Louis Gougaud, 'The Achievement and the Influence of Irish Monks', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 20 (1931), p. 197.

<sup>32</sup> It must have been after August 31 in 634, as Bede tells us that he died on that date in 651, and that it was during the seventeenth year of his episcopacy: *HE* III.17.

<sup>33</sup> *HE* III.3: *Monachus ipse episcopus Aidan.*

<sup>34</sup> See Ian Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan: Bureaucrat and Charismatic?', in *L'Église et la Mission au VIe Siècle: La Mission d'Augustin de Cantorbéry et les Églises de Gaule Sous l'Impulsion de Grégoire le Grand*, Actes du Colloque d'Arles de 1998, ed. Christophe de Dreuille (Paris, 2000), pp. 152-4.

<sup>35</sup> *HE* III.3: *...accepit namque Aidanum summae mansuetudinis et pietatis ac moderamine uirum...*

<sup>36</sup> *HE* III.5: *Unde inter alia uiuendi documenta saluberrimum abstinentiae uel continentiae clericis exemplum reliquit; cuius doctrinam id maxime commendabat omnibus, quod non aliter quam uiuebat cum suis ipse docebat.*

one memorable occasion, a horse he had just been given by King Oswine.<sup>37</sup> Later, in the fourth book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Aidan is tacitly invoked in Bede's description of Chad, who preferred to walk rather than to travel on horseback, just as Aidan had, drawing attention to Chad's Irish connections.<sup>38</sup>

It is not until *HE* III.5 that we learn that Aidan was not the first bishop sent from Iona to the Northumbrians. Bede introduces this episode with *Ferunt autem* [Furthermore it is reported], implying that he obtained this information from community knowledge rather than from any written source. It is made clear that Aidan was on Iona and attended the assembly of elders that met to discuss the failed mission of the first bishop to the Northumbrians. We may place him, then, among these *seniores* to whom that bishop reported. His selection as a replacement bishop, while explained by Bede as motivated by his own reaction to the first emissary's experience in Northumbria, would have been the result of extensive discussion on Iona. Having had their first choice rejected by the people, Aidan, one presumes, had qualities more likely to encourage the Northumbrians to accept him.

The circumstances of Aidan's selection as replacement for the first bishop sent from Iona to Northumbria are very significant for his portrayal by Bede. As described above, his predecessor arrived back on Iona and explained his return to an assembly of elders. Aidan, on hearing of this man's failure to move the Northumbrians, suggested that he might have been at fault, rather than they. Aidan's attitude is one of practicality and orthodoxy: while the first bishop sent to Northumbria attempted to convert the people with deep theology, Aidan points out the necessity of beginning with the simple things, and only when they are ready moving on to the more complex concepts of Christianity. Drawing on the Pauline image of taking milky foods before progressing to meat, Aidan demonstrated his understanding of the problem, saying:<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *HE* III.5, 14.

<sup>38</sup> *HE* IV.3. N.J. Higham also sees Chad's place of seclusion as an echo of Aidan's on Farne Island: (*Re-Reading Bede: the Ecclesiastical History in Context* (Abingdon, 2006), p. 140. Thacker asserts that this tendency can be further traced to a monk named Equitius in Gregory's *Dialogi* I.4, 'Bede and the Irish', p. 44; Gregory I, *Dialogi*, *PL* 77.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 3.1-2: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. As unto little ones in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able; for you are yet carnal"; Hebrews 5.12-4: "...and you are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that is a partaker of milk, is unskilful in the word of justice: for he is a little child. But strong meat is for the perfect; for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil."

Uidetur mihi, frater, quia durior iusto indoctis auditoribus fuisti, et non eis iuxta apostolicam disciplinam primo lac doctrinae mollioris porrexisti, donec paulatim enutriti uerbo Dei, ad capienda perfectiora, et ad facienda sublimiora Dei praecepta sufficerent.<sup>40</sup>

Central to this passage, and to Aidan’s suitability to the role of missionary bishop, is his *discretio*, which Bede explicitly attributes to him.<sup>41</sup> In his *De Tabernaculo*, Bede writes that the discerning minister knows when to speak, and takes into account the ability and condition of his audience.<sup>42</sup> Bede calls this the mother of virtues, twice assigning it to this bishop, and he ends his encomium of Aidan with the statement that he proved himself remarkable, not only in his moderation and *discretio*, but later for many other virtues.<sup>43</sup> This quality of discretion, or discernment, as it is generally translated, is peculiar to Aidan in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. *Discretio*, from the Latin, *discernere*, to see or distinguish, translates the Greek *diakrisis*;<sup>44</sup> in an ascetical Christian context, *discretio* had a dual significance: discernment – meaning the ability to distinguish, judge or separate, and measure – meaning moderation, the avoidance of extremes.<sup>45</sup> While Bede was aware of this dual meaning, he comments on Aidan’s moderation (*moderamen*) on several occasions, which suggests that his use of *discretio* rather signifies good judgement.<sup>46</sup>

What sources might have influenced Bede in attributing *discretio* to Aidan? Pope Gregory I’s recommendations fit well with Bede’s use of *discretio* as he too advocates the need to take the circumstance or character of the faithful into account, and Aidan possesses many of the qualities Gregory recommends.<sup>47</sup> Gregory’s *Regula*

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<sup>40</sup> HE III.5: “It seems to me, brother, that you have been unreasonably harsh upon your ignorant hearers: you did not first offer them the milk of simpler teaching, as the apostle recommends, until, little by little, as they grew strong on the food of God’s word, they were capable of receiving more elaborate instruction and of carrying out the more transcendent commandments of God.”

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed discussion of Aidan’s *discretio*, see my article, ‘Aidan’s *discretio*: A Discerning Irishman in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*’, *Fons Luminis* 2 (2012), pp. 71-93.

<sup>42</sup> *De Tabernaculo* I.7, ll. 847-9, p. 26: *quando discretus uerbi minister non solum tempus oportunum in dicendo obseruat uerum etiam qualitatem sensumque auditorum diligenter exquirat, et iuxta huius distantiam modum sui sermonis temperat*; *On the Tabernacle*, p.27.

<sup>43</sup> HE III.5: *...gratia discretionis, quae uirtutem mater est...*; HE III.5: *Qui ubi tempus accepit sicut prius moderamine discretionis, ita postmodum et ceteris uirtutibus ornatus apparuit*.

<sup>44</sup> Edith Scholl, ‘The Mother of Virtues: Discretion,’ *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 36.3 (2001), p. 389.

<sup>45</sup> André Cabassut, ‘Discrétion,’ in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité: Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire* III, ed. Marcel Viller (Paris, 1957), pp. 1311-3.

<sup>46</sup> Spencer Cosmos, ‘Oral Tradition and Literary Convention in Bede’s Life of St Aidan’, *Classical Folia* 31 (1977), pp. 61-2, argues that Bede simply means moderation by *discretio*; but, as remarked above, Bede’s application of *moderamen* and *continentia* to Aidan renders this unlikely.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory, *Regula Pastoralis* I.2, l.10, PL 77; Bede, HE III.5, 17. *Regula Pastoralis* 1.10 discusses the character needed in a ruler of the church, including setting a good example, rejecting fleshly and material

*Pastoralis* I.11, on the sort of person who should not be a leader, lists a lack of discernment as one of the failings of such a person.<sup>48</sup> Bede's admiration for this pontiff and familiarity with his work need no exposition here, and Aidan has been deemed a very Gregorian figure by scholars of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>49</sup> Despite the similarity between Gregory's ideal pastor and Bede's Aidan, however, the pope makes no reference to discretion being the mother of virtues.

The *Regula Benedicti*, by the sixth-century monk Benedict of Nursia, contains the phrase *discretionis matris virtutum sumens*, a very close parallel for Bede's phrasing.<sup>50</sup> This position as the mother of virtues makes discretion particularly special and important.<sup>51</sup> Benedict, in all likelihood, derived the importance of *discretio* from Cassian, being very influenced by Cassian through his own familiarity with his works, and through another of his sources, the anonymous Rule of the Master.<sup>52</sup> The chapter of the Rule entitled *De Ordinando Abbate* sees the most thorough explanation of *discretio*'s use and need, stating that an abbot must be discerning and moderate.<sup>53</sup> The requirements of this chapter might be aptly applied to Aidan: he became bishop (rather than abbot) of Lindisfarne because he explicitly showed himself to merit the appointment: he is learned in scripture; he has charity; he has discretion and moderation. Aidan fulfils the Rule's requirement that a monastic leader teach through words and example; he is unafraid to rebuke those in need of correction; he understands that different persons must be dealt with differently; and he does not care for worldly

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things, being unafraid of adversity, generosity, and studying so as to be able to instruct others – qualities admirably demonstrated by Aidan in Bede's account. Trans. Henry Davis, *Gregory the Great: Pastoral Care*, (Mahwah, NJ, 1950).

<sup>48</sup> Gregory, *Regula Pastoralis* I.11.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting considers Aidan a thoroughly Gregorian construct, but while he remarks on Aidan's discretion, he sees it as simply good judgement, rather than anything more complex: Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 6. Alan Thacker calls Aidan "a truly Gregorian *doctor* and *praedicator*", 'Bede and the Irish', pp. 43-5.

<sup>50</sup> Benedict, *Regula Benedicti* 64.19, *The Rule of Benedict: A Guide to Christian Living. The Full Text of the Rule in Latin and English*, ed. and trans. G. Holzherr (Dublin, 1994). Bede was very interested in the Benedictine Rule, though that is not to say that he followed it: see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'A Tale of Two Rules: Benedict and Columbanus,' in *The Irish Benedictines: A History*, ed. Martin Browne and Colmán Ó Clabaigh (Dublin, 2005), pp. 17-8

<sup>51</sup> Augusta M. Raabe remarks that *discretio* is a pervasive motif in the Benedictine Rule, despite the word itself only appearing a few times: 'Discernment of Spirits in the Prologue to the Rule of Benedict,' *American Benedictine Review* 23.4 (1972), p. 401.

<sup>52</sup> Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York, 1998), p. 25: The Rule of the Master was heavily influenced by Cassian's writings; Stephen Lake, 'The Influence of John Cassian on Early Continental and Insular Monasticism to c. A.D. 817' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1996), p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> *Regula Benedicti* 64.

things.<sup>54</sup> Conversant as he was with Cassian's writings, Benedict was surely thoroughly familiar with Cassian's discussion of *discretio*, and his stress on that virtue suggests he was in agreement with the fifth-century writer as to its value.<sup>55</sup>

Evidence of Bede's direct knowledge of Cassian has become far clearer in the years since M.L.W. Laistner deemed it "difficult to determine" and admitted but one clear reference.<sup>56</sup> Stephen Lake, who has examined both Continental and Insular material for signs of Cassian's influence, argues convincingly for Bede having read him closely – particularly his *Conlationes*.<sup>57</sup> Cassian devoted an entire Conference to the virtue of *discretio*, which he considered the basis for the good monastic life, and he was the first to explicitly make it the foundation for other virtues. The Pauline image of milky food in the Letter to the Corinthians, taken up by Aidan in Bede's account, is used by Cassian several times in his *Conlationes*.<sup>58</sup> For Cassian, discretion is "the begetter, guardian, and moderator of all virtues" (*virtutum generatrix ...discretio est*), and "among all the virtues [it] holds the supreme and first place."<sup>59</sup> Although the word *generatrix* differs from Bede, the concept is identical. Without discretion, other virtues can never be perfected as they are open to corruption. It enables the Christian to distinguish good from evil in all situations, from supernatural visions to one's own motivations, and it strengthens a monk in keeping from all extremes, which are spiritually dangerous. Cassian considers following in the way of one's fathers and predecessors to be a part of discretion, as the wisdom handed down was the best teacher of all.<sup>60</sup> Cassian is referenced in the *Amrae Coluimb Chille*, indicating that this writer was read at Iona, which may point to Aidan's *discretio* being a quality he was traditionally described as having by the community of Lindisfarne. However, Bede's own learning would not have permitted him to simply repeat what was said of this bishop, knowing, as he must have known, the implications of such a virtue.

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<sup>54</sup> *Regula Benedicti* 2; *HE* III.5, 14.

<sup>55</sup> The Benedictine Rule recommends reading Cassian's *Conlationes* and *Instituta*, and helped to ensure that Cassian became a monastic authority in the West: *Regula Benedicti* 42.3, 73.5.

<sup>56</sup> M.L.W. Laistner, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede,' in *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings: Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of his Death*, ed. A.H. Thompson (Oxford, 1935), p. 251: he confirms Bede's knowledge of Cassian's *Conlationes* 17. Laistner did admit the likelihood of Benedict Biscop having brought some of Cassian's writings home with him from the south of France.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Lake, 'Knowledge of the Writings of John Cassian in Early Anglo-Saxon England,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003), pp. 39, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes*, 10.8; 4.19; 17.20; 23.5. The Latin text of Cassian's *Conlationes* can be found in *Cassianus Conlationes*, ed. Michael Petschenig, *CSEL* 13 (Vienna, 1886; repr. 2004); trans. Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Conferences* (New York, 1997).

<sup>59</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* 2.4; 1.23: *omnium namque virtutum generatrix, custos moderatrixque discretio est*.

<sup>60</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* 1.20.

Aidan is the only individual in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* directly ascribed the virtue of discretion. It does arise elsewhere, but only in Aidan's case is it descriptive.<sup>61</sup> The implications of this are significant. Bede's linking of it to Aidan's moderation and his "many other virtues" is a connection that may draw upon Benedict's Rule, but it comes originally from Cassian. Bede's description of it as the mother of all virtues looks to Benedict also, but again the concept comes from Cassian and Bede would have been aware of this. On a primary level, this quality of *discretio* enables Aidan to see why the very first missionary from Iona was unsuccessful in Northumbria, and, using the images of the Apostle Paul, to plan a way to effectively convert the Anglo-Saxons. However, Aidan's *discretio* might be seen to influence his presentation beyond his missionary suitability.

Aidan has always posed a problem for scholars of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: though one of the most highly extolled figures in the work, Bede disapproves vehemently of his method of dating Easter by the Insular 84-year cycle, handed down from his religious fathers. This is the conundrum of Aidan of Lindisfarne: this excellent man, whose influence on the Northumbrian church is affectionately celebrated by Bede, followed the 'wrong' (that is, an unorthodox and eventually abandoned) Easter cycle. Bede does not avoid this awkward issue, and states from the outset that Aidan was wrong in this; but he explains it by stating that Aidan, like many of his countrymen, believed himself to be following Anatolius.<sup>62</sup> He adds, in discussing the foundation on Iona, that they were so far away no one could bring them the synodal decrees about the observance of Easter, though they were diligent in their devotion to the teachings of the apostles, prophets and evangelists.<sup>63</sup> Even as he acknowledges the problem, Bede excuses the use of "tables of doubtful accuracy" by Aidan and Columba's other successors as understandable, though unfortunate, ignorance.

In his depiction of the Synod of Whitby, Bede puts a variety of arguments for the orthodox Easter in Wilfrid's mouth, but the day is eventually carried by a simple

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<sup>61</sup> In *HE* I.27, Bede includes a series of questions sent by Augustine to Pope Gregory I, and the latter's replies. These questions are sometimes referred to as the *Libellus Responsionum*, and there have been doubts raised as to their authenticity. Regardless, Bede believed them to be authentic. See Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede's Text of the *Libellus Responsionum* of Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 15-33, repr. in *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others*, Paul Meyvaert (London, 1977), X. Gregory's responses to Augustine's questions mention *discretio* three times: *HE* I.27 (questions 8 and 9); and Bede's description of Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis* mentions the *discretio* recommended for rulers of the Church: *HE* II.1. In each of these cases, *discretio* is mentioned prescriptively.

<sup>62</sup> *HE* III.3.

<sup>63</sup> Bede, *HE* III.3, 4.

appeal to St Peter's primacy. Bede also has him state that, as long as the Irish monks knew no better, there was little harm in their traditions concerning Easter, and that surely, if the predecessors of the current head of the Irish mission, Colmán, had been taught a more perfect way, they would have accepted it.<sup>64</sup> Bede, quoting Paul on the Jews, remarks that Aidan had zeal for God, but *non plene secundum scientiam*; in Aidan's case, it seems, zeal was enough, and though he followed the wrong Easter, Bede has Wilfrid tell us it did no harm.<sup>65</sup> These same words on zeal are later used to describe the monks of Iona before Ecgberht's success in persuading them to adopt the Roman Easter tables.<sup>66</sup> One might object to such condescension, as Bede himself drew heavily on Irish materials in his own work on computus, but he is here referring only to the intractable Columbans of the north, having already acknowledged that those of the south were orthodox.<sup>67</sup> O'Reilly draws attention to Wilfrid referring to the early Church's toleration of Judaic customs for a time, but maintaining that this was no longer lawful, likening the latter to the earlier generation of Irish missionaries' traditions.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, in Bede's account of the Synod of Whitby, what had once been acceptable was no longer lawful, and what was allowed for Aidan could not continue for his successors.

Bede insists that he disapproves of how Aidan celebrated Easter, whether he did not know better, or, if he did, he "was compelled by the force of public opinion not to follow it".<sup>69</sup> This certainly suggests that Bede did not think Aidan oblivious to Roman traditions on dating Easter, yet he offers excuses for him. In fact, he absolutely excuses Aidan for his Easter adherences, even explicitly stating that Aidan was perfect in doctrine, regardless of his actual Easter practices.<sup>70</sup> Bede's repeated praise of

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<sup>64</sup> Bede, *HE* III.25: *Neque illis multum obesse reor talem paschae obseruantium, quamdiu nullus aduenerat, qui eis instituti perfectioris decreta, quae sequerentur, ostenderet; quos utique credo, siqui tunc ad eos catholicus calculator adueniret, sic eius monita fuisse secuturos, quomodo ea quae nouerant ac didicerant Dei mandata probantur fuisse secuti.*

<sup>65</sup> Bede *HE* III.3: "not entirely according to knowledge"; Romans 10.2.

<sup>66</sup> Bede, *HE* V.22.

<sup>67</sup> See Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', pp. 229-47; *HE* III.3: *Porro gentes Scottorum, quae in australibus Hiberniae insulae partibus morabantur, iam dudum ad ammonitionem apostolicae sedis antistitis pascha canonico ritu obseruare didicerunt.*

<sup>68</sup> Bede, *HE* III.25: Jennifer O'Reilly, 'Introduction,' in *Bede: On the Temple*, ed. and trans. Seán Connolly (Liverpool, 1995), p. xxxvii. Plummer sees the gradual elimination of Judaic customs from the early Church as a recurring theme in Bede's work: *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 190. See also Michael Herren, 'The 'Judaizing Tendencies' of the Early Irish Church', *Filologia mediolatina* 3 (1996), pp. 73-80, for a discussion of the early Irish church's interest in the Old Testament and its active acceptance of Christianity's foundations in Judaism.

<sup>69</sup> Bede, *HE* III.17: *...uel suae gentis auctoritate ne agnitum sequeretur deuictus.*

<sup>70</sup> Bede, *HE* III.17: *In quo tamen hoc approbo, quia in celebratione sui paschae non aliud corde tenebat, uenerabatur et praedicabat quam quod nos...*

Aidan's character and actions serves to soften his unorthodox stance. Colmán's predecessors had, in fact, been shown the 'more perfect way' of which Bede speaks. Bede gives no indication that he knew Cumman's Paschal letter, a seventh-century epistle written by a southern Irishman to Ségéne of Iona arguing for the Roman Easter reckoning, but he was aware that the southern Irish had accepted the orthodox Easter in the 630s.<sup>71</sup> Cumman's letter to Ségéne probably arrived at Iona before Aidan had even left for Northumbria, or at least soon afterwards, and Ségéne's staunch loyalty to the Easter practices of his predecessors would have influenced the thoughts and actions of the man he sent as bishop to the Northumbrians.<sup>72</sup> Even if Aidan had already departed when the letter arrived, one imagines such a document and such an issue would have been shared. Cumman's letter suggests it is in reply to arguments from Iona, and it must have instigated a great debate on the island, to which Aidan was witness, even if from a distance.

Bede remarks that Aidan's Easter tables were patiently tolerated by all, including the Continental orthodox bishops Honorius of Kent and Felix of East Anglia, as all loved him and understood he could not reject the customs of those who sent him.<sup>73</sup> Colmán, on the other hand, though he protested that he too had received his tables from his spiritual fathers, was not granted such indulgence. O'Reilly remarks that catholic unity was essential for Bede, and the unorthodox Easter detracted from this, hence the necessity for recording its defeat. Aidan, however, was beloved by all, whether Romanist bishops or the community of Whitby, and so was no threat to unity.<sup>74</sup> In Cassian's writings, discretion allows one to rightly judge if one is following the traditions of one's elders – and if these elders and traditions are truly godly.<sup>75</sup> Aidan was careful to maintain the traditions of his elders, and those around him did not try to dissuade him. Like Cassian himself, Aidan was perpetuating the traditions, and Bede

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<sup>71</sup> See Walsh and Ó Cróinín's edition, *Cumman's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi*.

<sup>72</sup> Cumman, *De Controversia Paschali, Cumman's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi*, pp. 6-7; Bede, *HE* III.5.

<sup>73</sup> *HE* III.25. Holford-Strevens remarks astutely that only adherents to the Roman Easter would have had to make allowances for Aidan, all others would have made allowances for the Romanists: Leo Franc Holford-Strevens, 'Marital Discord in Northumbria: Lent and Easter, His and Hers,' in *Computus and its Cultural Context in the Latin West, AD 300-1200: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Science of Computus in Ireland and Europe, Galway 14-16 July, 2006*, ed. Immo Warntjes and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Turnhout, 2010), p. 153.

<sup>74</sup> O'Reilly, 'Introduction,' p. xlii.

<sup>75</sup> Augustine Casiday, 'Tradition as a Governing Theme in the Writings of John Cassian,' *Early Medieval Europe* 16.2 (2008), p. 200.

seems loath to disapprove of this in his case.<sup>76</sup> That Aidan's successors were not allowed this defence is most probably a reflection, not only on Aidan's special place in the conversion of Northumbria, but also on his discernment, and so Bede allows him his Insular Easter. If Aidan possessed the *discretio* to know whether the traditions he was being handed down were for the good, at least as far as he was concerned, Bede must tolerate his 84-year cycle.<sup>77</sup>

The Irish argument that they are following the teachings of their fathers is a powerful one, and one which Bede would have understood and appreciated. Part of Cassian's concept of *discretio* is the ability to tell if an elder is teaching in error, and, by adhering to the traditions, one might recognise departures from it in others. It follows that Aidan's discretion should have enabled him to see if those he followed and emulated had strayed. Cassian's *Conlationes* particularly stress continuity with the teachings of the elders, and following these traditions, without recourse to one's own desires, is one part of discernment.<sup>78</sup> Understanding what traditions are worthy of following is also part of it, according to Abba Moses in Cassian's writings.<sup>79</sup> Even if a teacher is venerable and beloved, errors cannot be tolerated.<sup>80</sup> As Aidan *did* possess this virtue, he was eminently capable of telling whether the traditions he followed and perpetuated were worthy of such devotion, and by pointedly ascribing him this quality, Bede implicitly says that Aidan's choices were acceptable. Cassian writes in *Conlationes* I.20 that, if one lacks discernment as to one's teachers, one might be dragged into "heretical errors and bloated presumptions".<sup>81</sup> But Bede makes clear that Aidan was most certainly neither a heretic, nor a deviator from true doctrine.

Aidan, through Bede's careful wording, is not only praised and set up as an example to the Anglo-Saxon Church, but is excused the error of incorrectly dating the feast of Easter. Despite Bede's vigilant insistence on his own disapproval, the Irish monk is attributed correct judgement for his time and place, and emerges as one of the most memorable figures in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede says that he describes Aidan as he did, not because he agreed with his unorthodox Easter, but because, as a

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<sup>76</sup> Casiday, 'Tradition as a Governing Theme,' p. 192.

<sup>77</sup> Bede was certain of the unorthodoxy of the one used in the Columban tradition: see Daniel McCarthy and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The 'Lost' Irish 84-year Easter Table Rediscovered,' *Peritia* 6-7 (1987-88), pp. 227-42.

<sup>78</sup> Casiday, 'Tradition as a Governing Theme,' p. 199.

<sup>79</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* II.15.

<sup>80</sup> Casiday, 'Tradition as a Governing Theme,' p. 200.

<sup>81</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* I.20: *ad haereticos errores ac praesumptiones tumidas*.

*uerax historicus*, he must record in a straightforward manner those things which were done by him or through him.<sup>82</sup> Though such wording suggests that Bede was distancing himself from Aidan and his uncomfortable (for Bede) methods of calculating the date of Easter, the Northumbrian monk actually offers the reader an affectionate portrait of an excellent monk, bishop, and missionary, and such distance permitted Bede to excuse Aidan, while maintaining his own orthodoxy. Roger Ray points out that, though Bede explains Aidan's error, he does not use this to teach a lesson on the consequences of such an error, and Aidan remains a positive example.<sup>83</sup> Through his application of the virtue of *discretio*, augmented by the way in which he describes Aidan, Bede presents the Lindisfarne bishop as an ideal monk in the spirit of Cassian, the monastic authority. Recently, Vicky Gunn argued the converse of this perspective, believing that Bede's portrait of Aidan is "fairly innocuous", and reading his criticism over Easter as the defining feature of his depiction of Aidan. Gunn thinks Bede could hardly omit Aidan, due to his importance to Lindisfarne, and suggests that Bede's positivity is purely in the interests of providing a good example to his readers rather than any particular esteem for the bishop.<sup>84</sup> This stance fails to take into account the strength of Bede's admiration for Aidan, whose portrayal is above and beyond what would be necessary for history's sake alone.

Part of Bede's exoneration of Aidan is his explicit denial of one of the accusations levelled at the bishop: that he was a Quartodeciman. Bede states that Aidan did not, as some persons falsely suppose, celebrate Easter on the fourteenth of the month if that day were not a Sunday. Bede's use of the present tense for the verb *opinantur* implies that this imputation was current during the writing of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, some eighty years after Aidan's death. Stephen's *Vita Wilfridi* may contain the slur against which Bede argues, as Stephen has Wilfrid call the Britons and the Irish Quartodecimans *c. 713*.<sup>85</sup> Bede is direct on this issue: Aidan only celebrated Easter on a Sunday, for the appropriate reasons, and was absolutely not a Quartodeciman heretic. This partial vindication of Aidan's Easter practice, troubling though it was, is particularly important when seen in light of Bede's argument about Judaising practices in his chapter on the Synod of Whitby. Although the Columbans'

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<sup>82</sup> Bede, *HE* III.17: *...sed quasi uerax historicus simpliciter ea, quae de illo siue per illum sunt gesta, describens et quae laude sunt digna in eius actibus laudans...*

<sup>83</sup> Roger Ray, 'Bede's *Vera Lex Historiae*', *Speculum* 55.1 (1980), p. 20.

<sup>84</sup> Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>85</sup> *VW* 12.

paschal traditions harked back to older customs, and should not be accepted by the 660s, they were not Judaisers in the true sense.

Bede praises Aidan for many other reasons besides his *discretio*. Living according to what one preaches to others is, for Bede, an important requirement for being a good Christian teacher, and this quality is stressed in Aidan. Many of the men put forward as models of holiness possess this attribute, and Bede later highlights it in Ecgberht, the soon-to-be archbishop of York: *operatione et doctrina confirmare*.<sup>86</sup> Aidan lives with the monks of Lindisfarne, and insists that those around him engage in prayer and study daily. His wonderful attributes are listed at length in *HE* III.17, in which Bede relates that Aidan was characterised by love and charity, continence and humility. He lacked anger and greed, and reviled pride and vainglory. He excelled in carrying out the commandments, in study, and in keeping vigil. He rebuked the proud and the powerful, and comforted the weak and the poor.<sup>87</sup> Bede stresses the truthfulness of his depiction by stating that he records these details, not to commend Aidan's error over Easter, but as a *uerax historicus*. Coates's discussion of the combination of pastoral and contemplative qualities in monk-bishops, of which Aidan is an excellent example, invokes Cassian as an important influence for the bringing together of those roles in a monastic setting. Aidan's pastoral activities are beyond reproach, while his pursuit of the contemplative life, shown through both his withdrawal to Farne Island and his emphasis on the importance of scriptural study, is made clear.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Coates sees strong similarities between Bede's depiction of Aidan's laudable behaviour and the presentation of Caesarius of Arles in his *vita*; this is how a holy man is described.<sup>89</sup>

Bede tells us that Aidan was given the island of Lindisfarne as his episcopal see at his request. The Irish annals call Lindisfarne the island of Medcoit, an Irish version of the Old Welsh name Medcaut that, as Charles-Edwards remarks, suggests the men from Iona had contact with the British, possibly even cooperating with British

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<sup>86</sup> Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum Episcopum*, ed. Charles Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* I, pp. 405-6; Cosmos, 'Oral Tradition and Literary Convention in Bede's Life of Aidan,' p. 55, remarks that Bede uses this idea seventeen other times to denote sanctity.

<sup>87</sup> *HE* III.17: *...studium uidelicet pacis et caritas, continentiae et humilitatis; animum irae et auaritiae uictorem, superbiae simul et uanae gloriae contemtorem; industriam faciendi simul et docendi mandata caelestia; sollertiam lectionis et uigilarum; auctoritatem sacerdote dignam redarguendi superbos ac potentes; pariter et infirmos consolandi ac pauperes recreandi uel defendendi clementiam*. Aidan shares several of the virtues Bede attributes to Ecgberht, agent of change at Iona in 716. Both men are said to have qualities of *mansuetudo*, *humilitas* and *continentia*: *HE* III.3, 17, 27.

<sup>88</sup> Coates, 'The Bishop as Pastor and Solitary', pp. 608-10; Cassian, *Conlationes* I.8.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 617.

religious.<sup>90</sup> Bede explains that Oswald used to act as interpreter for the bishop, who was not yet fluent in the Anglo-Saxon vernacular. Bede then leads into his famous comment that thereafter, many came from the country of the Irish to Britain to preach.<sup>91</sup> Aidan is the harbinger of a wave of Irish missionaries, who instructed the Anglo-Saxons, young and old, in the new faith.<sup>92</sup> His connection to Kings Oswald and Oswine reveals that his mission continued to be associated with royal figures, and Bede mentions that he died at a royal property on which he had a church and a cell.<sup>93</sup> Despite this, Aidan carved out an independent niche for the Christian mission in Northumbria. Bede writes that he travelled about mainly on foot, preaching to rich and poor alike, and seldom dined with King Oswald.<sup>94</sup> Bede portrays him as a man unimpressed by power or wealth, an attitude that would hardly have suited the royal court. His association with both Oswald and Oswine also crosses the boundary within Northumbria between the kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, underlining the all-embracing nature of the new faith.<sup>95</sup>

This embrace also includes diversity within the Church. While Aidan is an adherent of the Columban church's chosen Easter tables, his is not a jealous faith. Bede's account of one of Aidan's miracles, wherein the bishop predicts a storm and offers the priest Utta holy oil with which to quell the waves on his sea-journey, is in fact a reference to the arrival of Eanflæd to be Oswiu's wife.<sup>96</sup> Aidan approved of Utta's mission to bring the princess to Northumbria, and his miraculous prophecy and gift enabled the priest to do so safely. In doing so, Aidan was enabling, even encouraging, the arrival of a new queen who followed the orthodox Easter and her priest.<sup>97</sup> Aidan surely knew of Eanflæd's connection to the beginnings of Christianity in Northumbria, specifically to Paulinus's time in the kingdom.<sup>98</sup> Aidan had no issue with accommodating other paschal practices, and did not see it as a threat, but rather an expression of diversity within unity. It should also be noted that Bede names James the

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 314. See Kenneth Jackson, 'On the Northern British Section in Nennius,' in *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, ed. N.K. Chadwick (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 31-2; and Andrew Breeze, 'Medcaut, the Brittonic Name of Lindisfarne', *Northern History* 42.1 (2005), pp. 187-8.

<sup>91</sup> *HE* III.3: *Exin coepere plures per dies de Scottorum regione uenire Britanniam...*

<sup>92</sup> *HE* III.3: *...imbuebantur praeceptoribus Scottis paruuli Anglorum una cum maioribus studiis et obseruatione disciplinae regularis.*

<sup>93</sup> *HE* III.14, 17: *erat in uilla regia... In hac enim habens ecclesiam et cubiculum...*

<sup>94</sup> *HE* III.5.

<sup>95</sup> Charles-Edwards also remarks on this: *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 315.

<sup>96</sup> *HE* III.15.

<sup>97</sup> See Máirín Mac Carron, *Brides of Christ, Royal Marriage and the Conversion of the English in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College Cork, 2007), p. 125.

<sup>98</sup> *HE* II.9.

deacon as a link between the Roman mission to Northumbria and the later mission, and mentions no conflict between the deacon and the new missionaries.<sup>99</sup> Aidan's connection to abbess Hild is another important point made by Bede, though it appears in the fourth book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>100</sup> Hild, while in East Anglia and planning on entering the religious life on the Continent, was called back to Northumbria by Aidan. After a year, she took over the monastery of Hartlepool, where she enforced a monastic rule influenced by Aidan and other (unnamed) religious men. Some years later, she became head of the monastery at Whitby, in which she again instituted a monastic rule, and Bede praises the justice, piety, chastity, peace and charity she encouraged there.<sup>101</sup> Hild was unquestionably under the influence of Aidan, and is numbered among the supporters of the Columban Easter at the Synod of Whitby.<sup>102</sup> Notwithstanding this, Bede writes that Hild, who had been baptised by Paulinus in the Roman tradition, maintained the faith she was taught purely until her death: her adherence to the Insular 84-year Easter cycle did not undermine this orthodoxy. Decidedly, Hild's association with Aidan and the Columbans posed no problem for Bede, and his description of her, which at times echoes those of the Irish bishops, is most complimentary.<sup>103</sup>

Aidan, "the brilliant sun of Inis Medcoit" is celebrated on August 31 in *Félire Óengusso*, Aidan *episcopus* of Inis Medcoit in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, the earliest of the Irish martyrologies available to us, and "wise" Aidan is commemorated in the *Martyrology of Gorman*.<sup>104</sup> The notes to the *Félire* add, confusingly, that this Aidan was from Cell Mór in Mennat Tíre in Airgialla, or in the north-east of England in Inis Medcoit, that is Inis Cathaig, or the north-west of little England in Inis Medcoit, and the notes to the *Martyrology of Gorman* state simply that he was a bishop from Inis Cathaig. Mícheál Ó Cléirigh was happy to link Aidan with both Inis Cathaigh and Inis

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<sup>99</sup> *HE* II.20. James lived long enough to attend the Synod of Whitby (*HE* III.25), presumably finding a way to work alongside each of the Irish bishops sent by Iona.

<sup>100</sup> *HE* IV.23.

<sup>101</sup> *HE* IV.23: There seems to be some confusion as to whether she founded this monastery or took it over: Bede writes *construendum siue ordinandum; ...multam ibi quoque iustitiae, pietatis, et castimoniae... sed maxime pacis et caritatis custodiam docuit*.

<sup>102</sup> *HE* III.25. Hild did adopt Roman Easter practices after the Synod.

<sup>103</sup> Hild is said to have *prudens*, like Colmán (*HE* III.26), to have taught peace and charity, like Aidan (*HE* III.17), and to have insisted on the study of the Scriptures, again like Aidan (*HE* III.5, 17).

<sup>104</sup> *FÓ* August 31: *Aedán in grían geldae, Inse Medcoit molmae...*; *MT* August 31; *MG* August 31: *Aedan ergna*. The *Martyrology of Tallaght* is dated by Pádraig Ó Riain to the very early ninth century, and the *Félire* is a verse-martyrology that owes much to the earlier text, and is not much later than it. See Ó Riain's *Anglo-Saxon Ireland: The Evidence of the Martyrology of Tallaght*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 3 (1993).

Medcoit in his *Martyrology of Donegal*, and went so far as to name him Aidan, son of Lughar, of the line of Eochaidh Finn Fuath-nairt, and so related to Saint Brigit.<sup>105</sup> Without knowing exactly where Ó Cléirigh sourced this genealogical information, and considering the convenience of such an illustrious relation, it would be wise to disregard such attestations.<sup>106</sup> Aidan's supposed connection to Inis Cathaigh, now Scattery Island in the Shannon estuary, can be explained by the record of the death of an abbot Aidan of Inis Cathaigh in 863.<sup>107</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* record the burning of Cell Mór of Aidan son of Aengus in 749, which could account for that offering. Several other churches in Ireland claim a connection with Aidan of Lindisfarne, but there is little evidence to support them.<sup>108</sup> Aidan's connection to Lindisfarne/Inis Medcoit was the defining one of his life. There are two men by the name of Aidan mentioned in Adomnán's *Vita Columba*, but each of these date from Columba's time, which makes them almost certainly too early to be possibly identified with Aidan of Lindisfarne.<sup>109</sup>

Aidan's death is recorded in the Irish Annals in the year 651, and Bede tells us that he died in the seventeenth year of his episcopacy, on the last day of August.<sup>110</sup> Aidan's death occurred only twelve days after that of Oswine, king of Deira, a fact Bede does not fail to point out. Although such correlation might be taken to imply some foul play in Aidan's death (as there certainly was in Oswine's), Bede later explains that Aidan died of an illness.<sup>111</sup> Despite Bede's praise of Aidan, his miracles, and the presence and translation of his relics at Lindisfarne, it does not appear that a continuing

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<sup>105</sup> See *CGSH* 2, 427, pp. 3, 64; Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502, in *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* I, ed. M.A. O'Brien (Dublin, 1976), 125 a 52-53, etc., p. 79. The Fothairt were a subject people of Leinster, as Byrne discusses, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp.130-1.

<sup>106</sup> Although it is interesting to note one Aodh geal, whom the Book of Leinster calls the son of Luchdach (the Books of Lecan and of Ballymote call him the son of Lugaid), and who is linked to a southern Uí Néill branch, the Síl nÁedo Sláine, kings of Brega: *CGSH* 662.64, p. 87. Lugaid, in the variant readings, is called *Lugaid moir min*, and one Luigbe moccu Min is named as a messenger from Áed Sláine to Columba in *VC* I.15, and is present on Iona in *VC* I.24. Richard Sharpe, in notes 133 and 249 to *Life of St Columba* (London, 1995), pp. 289, 327, discusses another young man in the *Vita Columbae*, one Luigne moccu Min, but resolves that Adomnán is sure they are different men of the same tribal group, and points out that Mosinu moccu Min, abbot of Bangor, might have been similarly related. It is tempting to see potential familial connections for Aidan of Lindisfarne here, either to Mosinu moccu Min and those related to him on Iona, or to the Síl nÁedo Sláine in Brega, but neither of these suits the *Martyrology of Donegal's* genealogy, and so cannot refer to the same Lughar, Lugaid, or Luigne. In addition, there is reason to believe that Fínán of Lindisfarne was the son of Colmán Rímid (see below), who apparently shared the kingship of Tara with Áed Sláine; *AT* 596; *AU* 598. It is difficult to imagine that this 'sharing' was equanimous, making it less likely that a man from one side would follow the other as bishop of a flag-ship monastery in Northumbria.

<sup>107</sup> *AI* 863; Pádraig Ó Riain suggests this association is due to confusion with the Irish name for Lindisfarne, Inis Medcoit: *A Dictionary of Irish Saints* (Dublin 2011), p. 75.

<sup>108</sup> See Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 75.

<sup>109</sup> *VC* I.26 (Aidan mac Fergnai) and III.7 (Aidan mac Libir).

<sup>110</sup> *HE* III.17.

<sup>111</sup> *HE* III.14, 17.

cult grew up around him at that foundation.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps, as Caitlin Corning has suggested, it was easier to present Cuthbert as an orthodox saint worthy of reverence in the long-run, and the latter eclipsed the earlier man.<sup>113</sup> It should be remembered, however, that Cuthbert quite literally joined, or perhaps one could even say replaced, Aidan at Lindisfarne: Cuthbert's body was translated to the right side of the altar at Lindisfarne, the same spot in which Aidan's had been buried.<sup>114</sup> Aidan's death is included in the timeline of *HE* V.24, a rare honour as only this bishop's death and Colmán's departure with the Irish monks explicitly represent the Irish strand in Anglo-Saxon history in this summary. Bede saw these as pivotal events; the Synod of Whitby (though this is not specified, merely Colmán's leaving) being an obvious candidate for inclusion, and Aidan's death marking the *dies natalis* of a vital and foundational figure for the Northumbrian church.

The manner in which Bede describes Aidan, including several miracle stories and many incidents of virtue, might be taken to suggest that some sort of written *vita* or account existed on which our author could draw. Spencer Cosmos believes there was a *vita* written before Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>115</sup> Yet Bede makes no reference to such a resource though he is happy to mention the *libellus* of Fursa's life when discussing that Irish saint.<sup>116</sup> Several miracle stories concerning Aidan are included in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and Bede openly states that such signs and miracles were divine validation of Aidan's holiness.<sup>117</sup> In addition to giving Uta holy oil with which to calm the storms, Aidan prayed that the fire kindled by the Mercian Penda and his army, who were attacking the Northumbrians, might not destroy the royal site of Bamburgh, and his request was granted.<sup>118</sup> Finally, Bede relates that the support or buttress upon which Aidan leaned as he died miraculously escaped burning twice, though the building around it was destroyed. He adds that splinters of that buttress are

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<sup>112</sup> Traditions about Aidan were remembered at Lindisfarne, however, and Charles-Edwards posits that both Aidan and Cuthbert had cults at the monastery, not as rivals but as complementary figures: *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 342-3.

<sup>113</sup> Caitlin Corning, *The Celtic and Roman Traditions: Conflict and Consensus in the Early Medieval Church* (New York, 2006), p. 140. James Campbell remarks that the success of Cuthbert's cult, rather than Aidan's, may have been down to the latter being "a foreigner, and difficult", 'Elements in the Background of the Life of St Cuthbert and his Early Cult', in *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to A.D. 1200*, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge, 1989; repr. 2002), p. 11.

<sup>114</sup> *HE* III.17; *PVC* 40.

<sup>115</sup> Cosmos, 'Oral Tradition and Literary Convention in Bede's Life of Aidan', p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> *HE* III.19.

<sup>117</sup> *HE* III.15: *Qui cuius meriti fuerit, etiam miraculorum signis internus arbiter edocuit...*

<sup>118</sup> *HE* III.15, 16.

known to have healing powers.<sup>119</sup> Regardless of whether an actual *vita* was written, the stories of Aidan's virtues and miracles were evidently well-preserved at Lindisfarne, and possibly, given Aidan's importance for the conversion of the kingdom, elsewhere. When leaving Lindisfarne for Iona after the Synod of Whitby, Colmán took some of Aidan's bones with him.<sup>120</sup> This action demonstrated the love and esteem of those who departed the monastery for Iona, but the fact that only some of the bones (*partem ossuum*) were removed is evidence that Aidan's memory continued to be revered there.<sup>121</sup> Bede reveals that later Aidan's remains were translated to a location to the right of the altar.<sup>122</sup> Translations were occurring in Ireland by the seventh century, but this one occurred only after Theodore's rededication of the Lindisfarne church, when the Irish bishops had long departed.<sup>123</sup> Ó Carragáin remarks on Fursa's translation to within the church of Péronne as a sort of canonisation, placing the remains of a holy man by the altar, as one would the remains of the martyrs.<sup>124</sup> Such treatment of Aidan fits with his commemoration as a holy man worthy of reverence and treated him as one suitable for translation to a church dedicated to Rome's rock of authority, Peter. This action, as Bede comments, befitted so great a bishop – high praise indeed.<sup>125</sup> One miracle not included in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but described elsewhere by Bede, is that of Aidan's soul being carried to heaven, as witnessed by Cuthbert.<sup>126</sup> Bede used this story to excellent effect in his prose *vita* of Cuthbert, setting it up as the saint's inspiration to join the monastic life. It is interesting to note that this miracle appears in

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<sup>119</sup> *HE* III.17.

<sup>120</sup> *HE* III.26. This is particularly interesting as Columba's remains do not seem to have been treated thus on Iona. Colmán may have been influenced by the Anglo-Saxons in this, or perhaps this act was a reaction to the rejection of Columban traditions at Lindisfarne – it may have been a defensive response, emphasising Aidan's holiness.

<sup>121</sup> This breaking up of holy remains was not common in Anglo-Saxon England until much later than the seventh century, and Nancy Edwards remarks on the atypical nature of Colmán's actions at Lindisfarne, though she does contextualise it within Irish influence: 'Celtic Saints and Early Medieval Archaeology', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford, 2002), pp. 251-2.

<sup>122</sup> This was after Theodore's arrival in 669, but presumably before Eadberht's alteration of the church.

<sup>123</sup> Tomás Ó Carragáin, however, does not believe translation was usual before the eighth century: *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual and Memory* (New Haven and London, 2010), p. 67. Ó Carragáin refers to the fact that even Columba's body was interred in the cemetery on Iona until the mid-eighth century.

<sup>124</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 71; see also A. Angenendt, 'In Porticu Ecclesiae Sepultus: Ein Beispiel von Himmlisch-erdischer Spiegelung', in *Iconologia Sacra: Mythos, Bildkunst und Dichtung der Religions – und Sozialgeschichte Alteuropas: Festschrift fuer Karl Hauck zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Keller and N. Staubach (Berlin, 1994), pp. 68-80. Charles-Edwards states that in the late seventh century such translations were becoming usual among the Anglo-Saxons, and mentions those of both Chad and Æthelthryth: *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 342, nn. 307-8.

<sup>125</sup> *HE* III.17: ...illo osso eius translata atque ad dexteram altaris iuxta uenerationem tanto pontifice dignam condita sunt.

<sup>126</sup> *PVC* 4.

the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* also, but the anonymous author does not explicitly link it to Cuthbert's decision to enter religious life, as Bede does.<sup>127</sup> Cuthbert joined the community at Melrose, rather than that of Lindisfarne, an action Bede explains by the draw of the holy prior Boisil, though he carefully attests to the holy men at Lindisfarne.<sup>128</sup>

All this praise is contextualised, but not tempered, by Bede's careful addendum that Aidan was wholly wrong in his manner of calculating Easter. Despite his belief in the importance of Easter and its calculation, this caveat about Aidan does not truly undermine Bede's carefully crafted positive image of the bishop.<sup>129</sup> This is vitally important to Bede in the context of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* more generally. The Irish mission to Northumbria was hugely influential, and Bede sets it up as an impressively successful mission, through which his own kingdom was evangelised and embraced the Christian faith. Men associated with this same mission spread out, and converted peoples beyond the borders of Northumbria too, a process which Bede saw as part of the great destiny of the Anglo-Saxons. For Bede, it is essential that the Irish mission in Northumbria be viewed positively, and Aidan's careful presentation in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is central to this: by ensuring that the de facto founding father of this successful venture was acceptable to all, Bede could proudly describe the coming and spread of Christianity to his people, and beyond. If Aidan were to be criticised as his successors were, the Northumbrian Church could be similarly tainted. It is interesting, in light of this, that Bede persevered in granting such time and effort to the depiction of the Irish mission, rather than focussing on Paulinus's efforts in Northumbria. In this, he acknowledges the powerful work of Aidan and his successors, even if the latter suffer a little for their continued preservation of the 84-year Easter cycle.

Aidan's salvation is the salvation of the foundations of the Northumbrian church. Ian Wood, in discussing the contrast in Bede's portrayals of Aidan and Augustine of Canterbury, argues that Lindisfarne's presentation of Aidan as a charismatic suited Bede's purposes.<sup>130</sup> Aidan is one of the few people about whom Bede expressed personal affection, saying he admired and loved Aidan's adherence to

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<sup>127</sup> See Karl Lutterkort, 'Beda Hagiographicus: Meaning and Function of Miracle Stories in the *Vita Cuthberti* and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian*, pp. 84-85; *PVC* 4; *AVC* I.5.

<sup>128</sup> *PVC* 6. For further discussion of Melrose, see Chapter Two.

<sup>129</sup> Aidan even appears in Bede's metrical *Vita Cuthberti* 5, where Bede relates a miracle he performed.

<sup>130</sup> Ian Wood, 'Augustine and Aidan', p. 176.

the commands of the evangelists, the apostles and the prophets. Although he also says he heartily hates his methods of calculating Easter, Bede focuses on Aidan's utterly orthodox doctrine, and explicitly states that he believed in the redemption of the human race by the passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven of the one mediator between God and men, even the man Christ Jesus.<sup>131</sup> Bede is here quoting from Paul's letter to Timothy, in which Paul declares himself apostle to the gentiles.<sup>132</sup> By drawing on Pauline explanation of doctrine, and asserting that Aidan followed this to the letter, Bede establishes that he was not a heretic but a man of righteous orthodoxy in the most important matters.

When referring to Colmán's transport of part of Aidan's relics away from Lindisfarne, Bede speaks of the bones of the most reverend father Aidan.<sup>133</sup> This event took place after the Synod of Whitby, but Bede's words indicate that Aidan remained a holy figure – for Bede as well as for the community at Lindisfarne – even after the events at that council. As a missionary, Aidan's influence and example brought many into the fold of Christianity, and encouraged the Anglo-Saxons themselves to embrace the evangelical life. Aidan's name is invoked in *HE* V.22, when Bede declares that the eventual conversion of Iona to Roman Easter traditions in 716 came about some eighty years after Aidan arrived in Northumbria. Bede presents this as a loop that was finally closed: the Irish, having converted the Anglo-Saxons, were in turn brought to a deeper conversion and into unity with the rest of the universal church. Aidan's mission and legacy ensured that the Irish were deserving of this service. As the founder of Lindisfarne, his importance for that community is without question, and this has wider repercussions. Many other monasteries and missions to other kingdoms had their origins in the Lindisfarne foundation and tradition, and by establishing Aidan as a peerless holy missionary bishop, Bede enabled these monasteries and missions to retain their integrity, regardless of Lindisfarne's issues with Easter.<sup>134</sup> Reconciling Aidan's reputation with doctrinal purity and exemplary behaviour enabled the Anglo-Saxon church to acknowledge his influence and move forward. His reputation led to his wonderful portrait in Bede's work, for Bede himself never met the man. He is worthy of record both because of the example he set, for his community, for the converted, and

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<sup>131</sup> *HE* III.17: *redemptionem generis humani per passionem resurrectionem ascensionem in caelos mediatoris Dei et hominum hominis Iesu Christi.*

<sup>132</sup> I Timothy 2.5.

<sup>133</sup> *HE* III.26: *reuerentissimi patris Aidani.*

<sup>134</sup> Gunn would disagree with this point, as she states that Bede undermines Iona and Lindisfarne, and by extension those monasteries linked to the latter: *Bede's Historiae*, pp. 75-6.

for the audience of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and for his position as source and founder of the Irish mission in Northumbria.

### iii. *Fínán*

Fínán succeeded Aidan after that bishop's death in 651, and, like him, was sent to Northumbria from Iona. Although Fínán is not described in the same glowing terms given to Aidan, he took up the reins in Northumbria capably. For ten years, Fínán was bishop of Lindisfarne, working alongside King Oswiu. These ten years were eventful for the Northumbrians, seeing protracted conflict with the Mercians to the south, and it seems Fínán involved himself at a political level. Although Fínán is not described nearly as enthusiastically as Aidan, he does perform a function that Aidan is not shown carrying out: converting other kings.

Bede mentions Fínán in several chapters as the bishop baptising the king of another kingdom, and in this he is shown working with Oswiu. Fínán baptised Peada, son of the pagan Mercian king, Penda, who had made his son sub-king of the Middle Angles. The baptism took place at a location called *Ad Murum*, and included Peada's accompanying *gesiths* and *thegns*, along with their servants.<sup>135</sup> Peada's conversion enabled missionaries to be sent to the Middle Angles from the Northumbrians: four priests, named Cedd, Adda, Betti, and Diuma. The last of these was Irish, while the other three were Anglo-Saxons, a fact that illustrates the success of Aidan's mission to Northumbria and its continuation by Fínán. Fínán made Diuma a bishop after Penda's death, actively pushing forward the mission in the neighbouring kingdom.<sup>136</sup> Fínán also baptised king Sigeberht of the East Saxons, at Oswiu's instigation, and the king called Cedd back from his task among the Middle Angles to go and evangelise the East Saxons.<sup>137</sup> After some time, Cedd returned to Northumbria and came to consult with the Lindisfarne bishop. On hearing of his successes as a missionary among the East Saxons, Fínán decided to ordain him bishop, and called upon two other bishops to assist him. Who these two bishops might have been, we have no clue. Presumably these, or other, bishops were similarly involved in Diuma's consecration as bishop. Colgrave and Mynors believe they were Columban bishops, leaving Cedd in an equivalent position to

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<sup>135</sup> *HE* III.21. *Ad Murum*, a village belonging to the king, has been variously identified as Heddon-on-the-wall, Walbottle, and Walton. No definitive decision has been reached.

<sup>136</sup> *HE* III.21. See Chapter Three.

<sup>137</sup> *HE* III.22.

that of his brother, Chad, who was ordained by Bishop Wine of the West Saxons and two British bishops who followed an unorthodox Easter.<sup>138</sup> The possibility that the bishop of Lindisfarne was in contact with British clergy offers another option in Cedd's case, though it leaves him in the same situation.<sup>139</sup> Fínán is shown to continue the good work begun by Aidan, even ordaining men whose training had been under that bishop.<sup>140</sup> On a more secular note, he is also shown participating in what Kirby calls "a new political initiative on the part of Oswiu".<sup>141</sup> Fínán was, in fact, embracing the potential of a bishop, integrating the spiritual and the political to drive forward the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons.

Bede relates that Fínán built a church on the island of Lindisfarne, suitable to a *sedes episcopalis*, and specifies that it was built *more Scottorum, non de lapido, sed de robore*, and roofed with reeds.<sup>142</sup> This raises the question of what existed before Fínán's building enterprise: Lindisfarne may not have had a large church at all in Aidan's time. Archbishop Theodore later dedicated it to Saint Peter, which must have been a rededication. Who, then, was the original dedicatee, if indeed Lindisfarne's church was dedicated to anyone? The Irish generally did not dedicate their churches to one saint in particular, and churches were more likely to be named after founders than saintly figures of particular devotion. The *Annals of the Four Masters* record a church of Columba at Kells which was destroyed in 802, but this is probably simply a reference to the *familia*'s founder. It would be intriguing indeed if the church at Lindisfarne had actually been dedicated to Columba, but no evidence remains to tell us.

It is no surprise that the Irish bishop, Fínán, built a church of timber. Wood was, undeniably, the material of choice for the construction of churches in Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries. Tírechán's seventh-century life of Patrick attests to contemporary preference for timber, relating that Patrick built a church of turf only because there was no wood;<sup>143</sup> the *Vita Columbae* speaks of leaving to get wood for

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<sup>138</sup> HE IV.2; Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 282, n. 3.

<sup>139</sup> Cedd was never challenged on the validity of his ordination, but as he died before the arrival of Archbishop Theodore, this is not unusual.

<sup>140</sup> Diuma was a priest by 653 and a bishop by 656, at the latest, and so was most likely a member of the Lindisfarne community well beforehand. Cedd, Bede tells us, was trained at Lindisfarne, apparently during Aidan's episcopacy: HE III.23.

<sup>141</sup> D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), p. 94.

<sup>142</sup> HE III.25: "in the manner of the Irish, not of stone, but of timber".

<sup>143</sup> Tírechán, *Collectanea 44: fecit ibi aeclessiam terrenam de humo quadratam, quia non prope erat silua: The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, ed. and trans. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1979), p. 158.

construction on the tree-poor Iona.<sup>144</sup> The first stone church mentioned in the Irish annals is in *AU* 789 at Armagh, and this method of building continued alongside wooden constructions far beyond the eighth century.<sup>145</sup> Fínán's wooden church, though remarked upon by Bede, was not out of the ordinary in Northumbria either. We have another example in Aidan's church on the royal site near Bamburgh, at which the wooden buttress survived two fires, and yet another in King Edwin's original timber church at York, later replaced by a stone building.<sup>146</sup> Despite Wilfrid's renovation of the stone church at York and his association with Continental trends, his monastery at Oundle is described in a manner that suggests it was mainly made of wood.<sup>147</sup> The stone buildings of Jarrow are commented upon because they are more unusual and they said something about those building them. In the 650s, wooden buildings were quite usual in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, and the change to stone only began in the later seventh century under Continental influences.<sup>148</sup> Fínán's wooden church, then, was not unusual in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, and its material did not make it peculiarly Irish.

That Bede remarks so pointedly on Fínán's church could be taken to have a thematic as well as a literal implication. Bede tells us that Eadberht, bishop of Lindisfarne (c. 688-98) after the death of Cuthbert, later removed the reed thatch and covered the church in lead.<sup>149</sup> Although Theodore was satisfied with a rededicated wooden church, stone churches were associated with orthodoxy in the eighth century. Raleigh Radford infers a "rather condescending tone" on the part of those habituated to stone churches when speaking of wooden buildings, including Bede's account of Fínán's church among them.<sup>150</sup> Bede does seem to think stone churches superior to wooden ones, and his account of Edwin's first church, made of timber, being replaced

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<sup>144</sup> *VC* II.45.

<sup>145</sup> Wooden churches were still used in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Ann Hamlin, 'The Archaeology of the Irish Church in the Eighth Century', *Peritia* 4 (1985), p. 283. For a discussion of the construction methods used, see Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, pp. 19-26.

<sup>146</sup> *HE* II.14, III.17. The buttress is almost certainly made of wood at Aidan's church, as Bede mentions the holes (*foramina*) with which it was fixed to the building. It is interesting that Bede mentions a support or buttress, as buttresses were not common on continental churches, but Ó Carragáin suggests they may be represented in the image of the Temple in the Book of Kells: *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*: pp. 25-6.

<sup>147</sup> *VW* 67. Stephen talks of men trying to burn it completely, and mentions straw thatch (*stipuloso*).

<sup>148</sup> Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (London, 1971), pp. 74-5. These influences were both Roman and Gallic.

<sup>149</sup> *HE* III.25: ...*Eadberct ablata harundine, plumbi lamminis eam totam, hoc est et tectum, et ipsos quoque parietes eius, cooperire curavit.*

<sup>150</sup> C.A. Raleigh Radford, 'The Earliest Irish Churches (the Oliver Davies Lecture for 1977)', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, Third Series, 40 (1977), p. 5.

by an *augustiore* stone building supports this.<sup>151</sup> Bede announces, in his *Historia Abbatum*, that Benedict Biscop built a stone church *iuxta Romanorum...morem*; an emphatic declaration that Bede links to his devotion to Peter, Rome and orthodoxy.<sup>152</sup> Whether Eadberht's alteration of Fínán's church should be seen as an enshrinement of a holy church or a modification of an awkwardly-Irish building is an interesting puzzle.

One is reminded that Aldfrith had become king of Northumbria in 685, and, as discussed in Chapter Two, this king's reign involved a certain amount of suppression of his Irish connections. Although he remained on good terms with the Irish, as his relationship with Adomnán demonstrates, it was necessary for him to accentuate his Anglo-Saxon side over and above his Irish background. With Lindisfarne in sight of Bamburgh on a clear day, it is plausible that overhauling the monastery's church in a decidedly unIrish manner was at least supported by the king. Fínán's wooden church, though acceptable to the bishops between Fínán and Eadberht, and even to Archbishop Theodore, may have become symbolic in its transformation, particularly if it took place early in Eadberht's episcopacy, though we have no information to pinpoint the date. Eadberht's probable successor as bishop of Lindisfarne, Eadfrith, continued this attitude, and during his episcopacy the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, with its tenaciously orthodox depiction of the saint, was written.<sup>153</sup> However, Tomás Ó Carragáin sees Eadberht's actions as an attempt to preserve the church, treating it as one would a relic.<sup>154</sup> Based on Bede's depiction of Bishop Fínán in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, one would not expect his church to be viewed as a relic as he is not presented in a particularly saintly manner, but this does not preclude the possibility. After all, our perceptions of the Irish bishops of Lindisfarne are completely coloured by Bede's portrayal. It is worth noting that Wilfrid, on finding the church at York in a state of disrepair, had the roof ridges covered in lead as part of his restoration.<sup>155</sup> While it is difficult to discern the motivation behind Eadberht's actions, the manner in which Bede presents the change to the church in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* does not suggest reverence.

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<sup>151</sup> HE II.14. This is not mentioned in the VG.

<sup>152</sup> HA 5: *Benedictus oceano transmisso Gallias petens, cementarios qui lapideam sibi aecclesiam iuxta Romanorum quem semper amabat morem facerent...*

<sup>153</sup> Bede's metrical and prose *vitae* of Cuthbert were also written during Eadfrith's episcopacy, though the latter, in particular, was more accepting of Cuthbert's Irish influences.

<sup>154</sup> Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland*, p. 150.

<sup>155</sup> VW 16: *Primum culmina corrupta tecti renovans, artificiose plumbo puro detegens...*

Despite his long episcopacy, Fínán remains, for the most part, unknown to the reader of Bede's work. The only time we are shown a glimpse of his personality, as opposed to accounts of his actions, is during his well-known exchange with Rónán, an Irishman who came to Northumbria to try and persuade the bishop and others of the accuracy of the Roman Easter tables over their own ones. Bede uses this interaction as part of his introduction to his account of the Synod of Whitby, and Bede depicts Bishop Fínán refusing to accept Rónán's arguments for the Roman orthodox tables. Bede states that one of these two men is *homo ferocis animi*, but it is grammatically unclear to which he is referring. From the context, in which Bede states that Fínán became embittered with correction and an opponent of the truth, it seems most likely that Fínán is the man of fierce spirit. *Ferox* implies qualities such as headstrong and spirited, as well as fierce, and so is a suitable adjective for Fínán, who becomes bitterly opposed when attempts are made to persuade him to change his practices.<sup>156</sup> Having come from Iona after Aidan's death in 651, Fínán was probably present at Iona for discussions over the dating of Easter. He may have witnessed, or even been part of, the Iona reaction at receipt of Cumman's Paschal letter, which would have influenced his later recalcitrance at all attempts to convince him of the superiority of the Roman Easter tables. Fínán continued Aidan's policy of conforming to the practices of Iona in dating Easter. Like his predecessor, he could not countenance straying from the path of his Columban forefathers. However, unlike Aidan, Fínán is not excused his Easter traditions, and Bede recounts the story of Rónán and the Lindisfarne bishop to show that, like his successor Colmán, Fínán was intractable on this issue. While Aidan had *discretio*, his successors are not similarly endowed, and, lacking this important quality, when it came to their time they were found wanting.

The *Annals of Tigernach* record the death of Fínán son of Rímid for the year 660, a listing that must refer to Fínán of Lindisfarne.<sup>157</sup> This patronymic is also in the *Annals of Ulster*, and it seems to indicate a filial connection with Colmán Rímid, king of the Cenél nEógain.<sup>158</sup> This offers a tantalising link to Aldfrith, son of Oswiu, discussed in Chapter Two; Fínán may have been brother to Aldfrith's Irish mother, and so uncle to a king of Northumbria. The similar elements in the names of Fínán and Fín, alleged mother of Aldfrith, support this connection, although such a naming pattern is

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<sup>156</sup> HE III.25: *...acerbiorem castigando et apertum ueritatis aduersarium reddidit*; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879; revised, 1962), <www.brepolis.net> [accessed 19 November 2012].

<sup>157</sup> AT 660: *Obitus Finaín maic Rimedha, espuic*; It is also repeated in CS 660.

<sup>158</sup> AU 660: *Obitus Finnani episcopi filii Rimedo*.

not common among Irish siblings. Fínán's political, familial, and ecclesiastical standing cannot have harmed Aldfrith's later claim to the Northumbrian kingship, despite Fínán's death some twenty-four years before his nephew's accession. Conversely, Any connections between Oswiu and Fínán's family would likely have been taken into consideration when he was chosen as the new bishop to the Northumbrians, and one imagines it would have had considerable impact on the decision. The secular and political implications of this situation certainly contribute toward the image of Fínán as a savvy agent of Iona. Considering Fínán's episcopacy was completely within Oswiu's reign, it seems impossible that the issue of the latter's son and the former's nephew would not have arisen, yet Bede does not breathe a word about it, almost certainly as a means of minimising mention of Aldfrith's Irish background. That Oswiu and Fínán are shown to cooperate might be interpreted as evidence that this blood connection only improved relations between them. After all, despite the ructions caused by Rónán's arguments, Oswiu made no move toward abandoning the 84-year Easter cycle until Colmán had succeeded Fínán as bishop of Lindisfarne.

Fínán has not been positively identified in any of the martyrologies, yet an intriguing possibility appears in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, where, on January 9, *Finani saxonis* is commemorated.<sup>159</sup> *Finani* is an Irish name, so the *saxonis* epithet is doubtful as an ethnic marker. There is a comparable entry in *Féilire Óengusso* on October 7, where one entrant is recorded as *Cellach Sachs*, but the notes explain that he was not an Anglo-Saxon, but rather had spent time among the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>160</sup> Might this Saxon Fínán similarly be a Fínán who spent time among the Anglo-Saxons?<sup>161</sup> Bede tells us that Fínán was bishop for ten years in Northumbria, and that Aidan died at the end of August. Allowing time for Fínán's selection as bishop, consecration and arrival in Northumbria, a January date for Fínán's death could fit with Bede's dating. If indeed it is Fínán of Lindisfarne in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, this entry attests to Fínán's reputation beyond that monastery, whether due to familial connections, political importance, or religious career.

Bede's depiction of Fínán in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* cannot compare with that of Aidan; he is not a charismatic holy man but rather a shrewd and political bishop whose defensive reaction to Rónán's arguments does not endear him to the reader.

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<sup>159</sup> *MT* January 9. This is repeated in *MD* January 9 with *Fionan, Saxon*.

<sup>160</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>161</sup> Pádraig Ó Riain has noted this, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland*, p. 9.

Rohini Jayalikota suggests that part of Bede's reticence, or even negativity, on Fínán may reflect his own reaction to evidence that the bishop was particularly powerful and influential.<sup>162</sup> Although Bede's depiction of Fínán is not necessarily negative, it is certainly not as effusive as that of Aidan. It is interesting to note that both Aidan and Colmán appear in Ó Riain's *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, but Fínán does not. Those two men are remembered as founders of monasteries, while Fínán was not a founder, nor was he recorded in a manner that emphasised saintliness. It behoves us, in the context, to compare Bede's somewhat ambiguous depiction of Wilfrid, another bishop whose career was characterised by politics and secular connections. Perhaps the few details available to us on Fínán are due to Bede's discomfort with aspects of his career. But while Fínán suffers a little when compared to Aidan, his depiction by Bede *is* still predominantly positive. When Bede goes to great lengths to praise the community at Lindisfarne after Colmán's departure, he specifies that this praise applies to Colmán and his predecessors, and he consistently names him with Aidan and Colmán as a coherent group, apparently seeing these three men as a unified body.<sup>163</sup> He also situates the many Anglo-Saxons who travelled to Ireland for advanced instruction in the times of Fínán and Colmán, suggesting that these two men helped to inspire these journeys.<sup>164</sup> In his prose *Vita Cuthberti*, Bede writes that Cuthbert chose to join the community at Melrose rather than that of Lindisfarne. As mentioned above, Boisil's holiness attracted the budding saint and, Aidan having just died, it seems Fínán (if indeed he had yet arrived in Northumbria) did not present similar appeal; Bede does note, however, the *sancti uiri* of Lindisfarne.<sup>165</sup> While Fínán is not described with the affection and charisma granted to Aidan, his ten-year tenure, in the main meets with Bede's approval.

#### *iv. Colmán and the Irish Clergy of Lindisfarne*

Colmán succeeded Fínán in 661, once again sent over as bishop from Ireland, presumably from Iona. Colmán's episcopacy saw the holding of the Synod of Whitby, at which King Oswiu decided to adopt, on behalf of the kingdom, Roman Easter practices over those of the Columbans. Colmán's term of office in Northumbria was

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<sup>162</sup> R. Jayatilaka, 'Fínán [St Fínán] (d. 661)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9425>> [accessed 21 November 2012]. In fact, Bede's depiction does not seem negative.

<sup>163</sup> *HE* III.26.

<sup>164</sup> *HE* III.27.

<sup>165</sup> *PVC* 4, 6.

short-lived compared to those of his predecessors, as he returned to Iona in 664 after the events at Whitby. Colmán is neither a saintly figure like Aidan, nor a political participant, like Fínán – at least, not as far as can be discerned from Bede’s writing. Colmán’s career is overshadowed by the events at Whitby in 664 and even his first introduction in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is marked by reference to the great controversy that arose concerning the calculation of Easter and the discipline of religious life.<sup>166</sup> It is in *HE* III.25, the chapter in which Bede describes the Synod of Whitby, that we first meet this Columban bishop. He has two functions, both as successor to Fínán as bishop to the Northumbrians, and as spokesperson at the synod for those who adhered to the 84-year Easter cycle used by the Columbans. He was opposed in this by Wilfrid, then a priest, who spoke on behalf of Bishop Agilbert.

Colmán was the obvious choice as spokesperson for the Columban lobby at the Synod of Whitby. As bishop to the Northumbrians, his status was high, and, as an emissary of Iona, his stance on the Easter controversy was clear. Although Agilbert designated Wilfrid as spokesperson for those advocating a change to Roman practices due to the former’s inability to fully express himself in English, Colmán appears to have had no such trouble.<sup>167</sup> Either he had made good use of his time in Northumbria, or he had begun to learn Old English even before he was elected to the position of bishop to the Northumbrians. Colmán’s arguments in favour of the Insular Easter have been explored at length elsewhere, so suffice it to say that he emphasised the long tradition the Columbans followed, and looked to the Apostle John and Anatolius to support his Easter dating.<sup>168</sup> Bede puts able arguments in Wilfrid’s mouth to counter Colmán’s points, and the day is eventually won by an appeal to Peter’s pre-eminence in heaven over that of Columba. Colmán’s efforts are described at length, and Bede grants him able justifications, using the illustrious examples of John, Anatolius and, not least, Columba himself. However, while Aidan had *discretio* and was excused his Easter customs, his successors Fínán and Colmán were not deemed as worthy. As with the Judaic customs that were tolerated for a period, by the time these bishops were installed

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<sup>166</sup> *HE* III.25.

<sup>167</sup> For an exploration of bilingualism and interlingualism in this text, see Alaric Hall, ‘Interlinguistic Communication in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*’, in *Interfaces between Language and Culture in Early Medieval Britain: A Festschrift for Matti Kilpiö*, ed. Alaric Hall, Olga Timofeeva, Ágnes Kiricsi, and Bethany Fox (Leiden, 2010), pp. 37-80, especially pp. 43-9. Hall rather unconvincingly downplays the use of Latin as a medium of communication, however.

<sup>168</sup> For discussion of Colmán’s Easter practices, see Benedicta Ward, *A True Easter: The Synod of Whitby 664AD* (Oxford, 2007).

at Lindisfarne, nothing could excuse, as Bede saw it, their refusal to change their Easter practices to those of Rome.<sup>169</sup> Wilfrid's points stress the centrality of Peter and Rome, and distance the orthodox side from over-reliance on ancient custom, just as Christians are called to leave behind Judaic tradition. Bede does not attempt to minimise the results of the council held at Whitby; as he puts it, Colmán found that his learning was despised and rejected.<sup>170</sup> These are emphatic words, and Bede does not downplay the rejection of the Columbans' traditions, even adding that the form of the tonsure was also argued over at the synod, and again the Columbans were declared wrong.

Colmán was not alone in his reluctance to change his Easter tables, and it seems likely that there was great pressure on the community of Lindisfarne to pledge their allegiance in one direction or another.<sup>171</sup> Stephen's account of the Synod of Whitby has Colmán state his case for the Insular Easter with undaunted courage (*intrepida mente*). Just as Colmán viewed altering his Easter practice as a slight on the memory and legacy of Columba, so his monks must have felt loyalty to their traditions. Those who could not countenance this change were not solely Irish, but made up of both Irish and Anglo-Saxon men, and they left Lindisfarne for friendlier shores. The compilers of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, while failing to mention the Synod of Whitby, deemed Colman and his companions' departure worthy of inclusion.<sup>172</sup> On leaving, Colmán requested that Eata be made abbot of Lindisfarne. Bede states that he asked this of King Oswiu, who granted it, indicating a royal intervention at the monastery that was not apparent beforehand. Oswiu's part in the Synod of Whitby seems to have amplified his influence within the Northumbrian church. Eata had been a disciple of Aidan, and Oswiu, who Bede then states esteemed Colmán greatly for his *prudentia*, was happy to grant the bishop this request.<sup>173</sup> Colmán's authority was evidently not erased by the outcome of the Synod, as he, taking some of Aidan's bones with him on departure, also

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<sup>169</sup> Gunn makes also makes this point, *Bede's Historiae*, p. 75, though it seems to jar with her previous argument that Aidan's depiction by Bede is overshadowed by his erroneous Easter.

<sup>170</sup> *HE* III.26: *Colman uidens spretam suam doctrinam sectamque esse dispectam...*

<sup>171</sup> Ó Cróinín believes Bede never actually saw an 84-year Easter table, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', p. 185. Though surprising, considering the continued interaction between Iona and Northumbria in the person of Adomnán, the adoption of Roman Easter tables in Northumbria was a divisive decision, and it is probable that Colmán, bishop of Lindisfarne in 664, brought their Easter materials home to Ireland with him.

<sup>172</sup> *ASC* 664.

<sup>173</sup> *HE* III.26: *...episcopum Colmanum rex pro insita illi prudentia diligebat*. Colgrave and Mynors translated *diligebat* as "greatly loved", but this seems excessive.

instructed the community that Aidan's remaining relics be buried in the sanctuary, and was presumably obeyed.<sup>174</sup>

Leaving Northumbria, Colmán took with him all of the Irish who had been part of the Lindisfarne community, and approximately thirty Anglo-Saxons, and travelled back to Iona. Some monks remained at Lindisfarne, all of whom were Anglo-Saxons, Bede suggests. One imagines that on Iona Colmán was debriefed on the events of the Synod of Whitby. Bede tells us that he went on to found a monastery on the island of Inishbofin, and the *Annals of Tigernach* date this to 668, four years after his departure from Northumbria.<sup>175</sup> The Fragmentary Annals state that Colmán went to Inishbofin with the relics of many saints, suggesting that Colmán maintained an interest in relics. One might wonder whether he brought any relics of Aidan with him, a likely scenario considering his Lindisfarne monks would have had a particular reverence for their founder. Bede writes that Colmán built (*construxit*) a church on the island for his Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks.

Unfortunately, conflict erupted between the Irish and the Anglo-Saxon monks who had travelled there with him. Bede states that the English clergy grew tired of the Irish monks leaving the monastery during the summer, and returning for the winter, expecting to live off the harvests reaped by the Anglo-Saxons. This habit could be the traditional practice of booleying, or transhumance, and so it has sometimes been seen.<sup>176</sup> However, transhumance was not exclusive to Ireland, and cannot have been an alien practice to the Anglo-Saxons. Nor were the Irish unused to growing and harvesting crops, and Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* attests to barley-growing on Iona.<sup>177</sup> Instead, the Irish may have been taking advantage of their proximity to their home territories, having travelled to Northumbria and perhaps never expecting to see their homes again. Vera Orschel looks to the Irish reputation for wandering to explain this

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<sup>174</sup> See note 1 in Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 132 on Bede's use of *secretarium*, meaning sanctuary, where the altar was placed.

<sup>175</sup> *HE* IV.4; *AT* 668.

<sup>176</sup> Nora Chadwick, 'Bede, St Colmán and the Irish Abbey of Mayo', in *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border*, pp. 189-90.

<sup>177</sup> *VC* II.3. It is interesting that Bede notes in *HE* I.1 that the hay is not cut in Ireland during the summer for winter use, though whether this was part of the harvest on which the two sides of the community disagreed cannot be confirmed.

incident, and suspects that the Irish monks were fulfilling the call set down in early Irish canons, to teach one's own country first.<sup>178</sup>

This situation must have continued for at least one year, if not more, before the Anglo-Saxons grew frustrated enough to demand a solution of Colmán. Colmán founded the monastery of Mag Eó (Mayo) on the mainland for these monks, an act that cannot have happened before 669 if the chronology of the annals can be relied upon.<sup>179</sup> Remains of the monastery of Mayo, or *Mag n-Eó na Sacsan*, as Bede calls it, can still be seen near to Claremorris in Co. Mayo, including an enclosure of more than 400 metres in diameter.<sup>180</sup> The name of this foundation attests to its reputation as a habitation of Anglo-Saxon monks, and Anglo-Saxon names are associated with it well into the ninth century. Bede's inclusion of the correct Irish form of the name, and of the name of Inishbofin, attests to an Irish-speaking (and Irish-writing) source for this information. The monks who first settled there with the help of Colmán had had ample opportunity to learn Old Irish, exposed as they had been to native speakers at Lindisfarne, on Iona and finally on Inishbofin.

Orschel suggests that Inishbofin may have had an existing, but abandoned, monastery, and that Colmán's journey there was to an established foundation, although Bede's use of the verb *construo* for Colmán's monastery calls this into question.<sup>181</sup> Nora Chadwick also believes that the choice of so remote an island is hard to fathom unless the area had at least been Christianised. She suggests that modern-day Westport may have been an access-point to western Ireland from the sea, and wonders if Iona had a connection to the region.<sup>182</sup> Chadwick is struck by Bede's precise details about Mayo, and by the space he sets aside for it, concluding that he thought it an important foundation.<sup>183</sup> At the time Bede was writing about it in the 730s, Mayo was still occupied by Anglo-Saxons, and the community had adopted better customs (that is, orthodox practices), and had a canonically elected abbot. Bede remarks on their

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<sup>178</sup> Vera Orschel, 'Mag nEó na Sacsan: An English Colony in Ireland in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries', *Peritia* 15(2001), pp. 87-8. See also Orschel, 'Maigh Eo na Sacsan: Anglo-Saxons in Early Christian Mayo', *History Ireland* 9.2 (Summer, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>179</sup> Nollaig Ó Muraíle draws attention to the fact that the origins of the name of Iona (Í) most likely lie in \**iuo*, and the Old Irish *éio*, meaning trunk, yew tree, also found in the name of Mayo: 'The Columban Onomastic Legacy', in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, ed. Cormac Bourke (Dublin, 1997), p. 198. It is not hard to imagine this connection being intentional, and it suggests a continued reverence for Iona and the Columban *familia* at Mayo's founding.

<sup>180</sup> Orschel, 'Maigh Eo na Sacsan', p. 16.

<sup>181</sup> Orschel, 'Mag nEó na Sacsan: An English Colony in Ireland', pp. 86-7.

<sup>182</sup> Chadwick, 'Bede, St Colmán and the Irish Abbey of Mayo', pp. 192-3.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

*continentia*, a quality they brought with them from Lindisfarne it seems, and praises them for their devotion. When exactly the monastery of Mayo had adopted orthodox traditions is not known, though it has instigated some discussion among scholars. It seems likely that Mayo followed the example of Iona, and so would have accepted the Roman traditions after 716. Certainly, their Anglo-Saxon heritage would have been no hindrance to continuing as part of the Columban *familia*, though Bede does not comment on it. Nollaig Ó Muraíle has remarked on the “intriguing” instances of place-names associated with Columba in the south-west of Co. Mayo, but of course the presence of the Mayo community can explain this.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, the place-names he refers to are mostly within thirty miles of the remains of the Anglo-Saxons’ monastery.<sup>185</sup> The monks who remained on Inishbofin can also be assumed to have influenced the region, though we learn no more of them from Bede. Colmán’s position as founder of both of these monasteries is recalled in the martyrologies, and formed an essential part of his later life. In this, Colmán is unique among the Irish bishops to Northumbria in having an attested, and important, career after Lindisfarne. It is curious that Bede chose to place the chapter on Colmán’s foundations at Mayo and Inishbofin in the fourth book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Colmán does not appear elsewhere in the chapter, and this information could easily have been added to *HE* III.26. The third book dealt with Lindisfarne’s mission, and it seems that Colmán’s fortunes after his departure from there had no place in it. Mayo’s evidence of Anglo-Saxon monks living admirably monastic lives in Ireland can be seen to tie in with Book IV’s description of the maturation of the Anglo-Saxon church, and perhaps Bede wished to show that, while the Irish had ostensibly left Northumbria, their influence would continue, and was still to be respected and remembered.<sup>186</sup>

Despite Colmán’s role as the last Irish bishop of the Northumbrians, and his departure from the kingdom, he is kindly remembered in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as one of the bishops of Northumbria whose contribution to the Anglo-Saxon Church is not forgotten.<sup>187</sup> *HE* III.26, coming directly after the chapter on the Synod of Whitby, is

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<sup>184</sup> Ó Muraíle, ‘The Columban Onomastic Legacy’, pp. 200-1, 204, 214.

<sup>185</sup> There are also onomastic references to Columba on some islands off Mayo, which may be the result of Inishbofin’s influence, as it was closer to them than the Mayo monastery, e.g. Inishkea North and Inishturk.

<sup>186</sup> Higham believes *HE* IV.4 is in the fourth book to draw attention to the importance of the Irish mission: (*Re-*) *Reading Bede*, p. 140.

<sup>187</sup> Kenneth Veitch believes Bede “attempts to sully” Colmán’s reputation, and blames his “intransigence and insensitivity” for the events at the Synod of Whitby, but this is a very simplistic reading of Bede’s

a positive, even nostalgic look at the Irish of Lindisfarne. Bede tells us that Colmán, like his predecessors, was moderate and frugal, as demonstrated by the sparse buildings at Lindisfarne. Bede writes that they hardly had enough to house themselves, and had no money, only cattle, as they gave away any money they received, having no need of it. Bede even specifies that they did not need to provide for the visits of wealthy men, as such men seldom came, and when they did they came to pray and hear the word of God. Even the king came with a small retinue, and if he did dine at Lindisfarne, it was on the same simple fare enjoyed by the community. This attitude, which reflects the character of Aidan described earlier by Bede, sets the Irish bishops of Lindisfarne apart from secular Anglo-Saxon society; they interacted with it, but they were not of it. As he so eloquently puts it, the aim of these teachers was to serve their God, not the world, and to care for their souls, not their bellies. This praise is applied to all of the Irish bishops of Lindisfarne, but Colmán is named at its beginning, making him an example of this simple piety. It is vital to bear in mind that Bede does not define these qualities as particularly Irish; rather, it is that these Irish and their community at Lindisfarne, made up of both Irish and Anglo-Saxons, are particularly good examples of monastic Christians.<sup>188</sup>

Even though Colmán only spent a few years in Northumbria, it is possible his influence might be discerned beyond that kingdom. After all, Bede's silence on any political involvement on Colmán's part is not truly evidence that he did not cooperate with King Oswiu in some matters. Patrick Sims-Williams examines the evidence for a lost charter of Wulfhere of Mercia in his excellent book, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*. This charter was described in the seventeenth century by Patrick Young and William Dugdale, and records the grant by Wulfhere of fifty hides of land at Hanbury to one Abbot Colmán.<sup>189</sup> Sims-Williams admits the impulse to presume this Irishman came from Northumbria, but beyond adding that Irish influences appear elsewhere in England too, comes to no conclusion on the matter. Bishop Colmán's episcopacy fits into Wulfhere's reign as king of Mercia (658-675), so it is chronologically possible that he is the Colmán in question, but this identification remains unlikely. Although Wulfhere's bishop from c. 658 was Trumhere, a man

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text, and ignores Bede's praise in *HE* III.26: 'The Columban Church in Northern Britain, 664-717: A Reassessment', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland* 127 (1997), p. 629.

<sup>188</sup> Thacker is emphatic on this point: 'Bede and the Irish', p. 43.

<sup>189</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 106-8. S 1822; London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius C. IX, fol. 131r.

educated and ordained *a Scottis*, and probably related to King Oswine of Deira, this bishop's leanings were almost certainly Roman orthodox in nature.<sup>190</sup> Wulfhere's ascension to the kingship of Mercia saw a throwing-off of Northumbrian overlordship, and it would be unreasonable to suppose he would give land to the bishop of Lindisfarne in his own territories. However, it should be remembered that Wulfhere was happy to accept the Irish-trained Northumbrian Chad as bishop of his people *c.* 670.<sup>191</sup> Finally, that the charter called Colmán an abbot is perhaps the main reason the bishop of Lindisfarne should be ruled out as a possible identification, because, as explored above, the bishops of Lindisfarne were not also abbots.

Colmán died in 676, according to the Irish annals.<sup>192</sup> He is remembered on August 8 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* as a bishop of Inishbofin; evidently his prime connection was this foundation rather than that of Mayo, and the *Féilire Óengusso* names him as *Colmán epscop aille, Ó Inis Bó Finde*.<sup>193</sup> The latter martyrology's annotations associate him with both Inishbofin and with Iona, and assert that he died in his eightieth year, which would place his birth around 596. The name Colmán was by no means rare in the early medieval period, and many men by that name are preserved in the historical record. Kuno Meyer remarks on the 113 Colmán's to be found in the *Martyrology of Donegal* in discussing the poem written by one Colmán to another on the latter's return to Ireland; neither Colmán is the bishop of Bede's text.<sup>194</sup> There are even several stone inscriptions of the name Colmán, such as that on the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise, but none that can be linked to the sometime-bishop of Lindisfarne.

Colmán differs from Fínán and Aidan in that he had a career after Lindisfarne. He is commemorated separately for his position as founder of Inishbofin, and, to a lesser extent, of Mayo. That part of his life held an interest for Bede, who acquaints his readers with these two monasteries in the west of Ireland. Despite its distance from Northumbria, and indeed from Britain, Mayo was relevant to Bede's purposes as an Anglo-Saxon (or predominantly Anglo-Saxon) foundation in Ireland which had

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<sup>190</sup> *HE* III.21. See Chapter Three for a discussion of Trumhere.

<sup>191</sup> *HE* IV.3.

<sup>192</sup> *AT* 676; *AU* 676.

<sup>193</sup> *MT* August 8: *Colmani episcopi Insi Bó Finni*; *FÓ* August 8: "Colmán, a praiseful bishop from Inishbofin." Colmán is also commemorated in *MG* August 8. One Colmán of Mayo is, however, remembered at *MG* November 13, and almost certainly refers to Colmán of Inishbofin. *MD* includes this commemoration, but it is a later hand.

<sup>194</sup> Kuno Meyer, 'Colman's Farewell to Colman', *Ériu* 3 (1907), p. 186.

flourished and come round to orthodox practices. The links Bede creates between Lindisfarne and Mayo through the *continentia* ascribed to both communities, and his stress on Colmán's role in both, are intentional, and Colmán's reputation certainly benefits.

v. \*Tuda

Tuda is included here only because he has been erroneously categorised as Irish by some scholars. Tuda became bishop of the Northumbrians on Colmán's departure, and Bede states that he was educated and ordained among the southern Irish.<sup>195</sup> Bede adds that Tuda had arrived in Northumbria from Ireland while Colmán was bishop, and had, as a holy man should, taught the faith by both word and deed. Colgrave and Mynors have noted, in their edition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, that it was "obviously tactful" to appoint an Irishman who followed the orthodox traditions as bishop.<sup>196</sup> In saying this, they are correct that Tuda was suitably orthodox in both his Easter practices and his crowned tonsure, but they are incorrect in categorising him as Irish. Bede merely says that he was educated and consecrated as a bishop there, not that he was Irish himself. Considering Bede had just remarked some lines previously on the Irish holding the Northumbrian episcopate for thirty years, ending with Colmán, it is impossible to interpret his words as meaning that Tuda was an Irishman.

This short-lived bishop (he died of the plague within the year) was completely excluded from the record in Stephen's *Vita Wilfridi*, a decision that suited Wilfrid's hagiographer, and might be seen to conform to the author's anti-Irish bias if one were inclined to see Tuda as an Irishman.<sup>197</sup> In fact, Colgrave and Mynors are not the only scholars to assume Tuda was Irish: Eric John calls Tuda a southern Irishman, and D.P. Kirby also refers to him as Irish.<sup>198</sup> While one might attempt to argue that Tuda is a poorly reproduced Irish name, such as Tuathal, Bede's ability to correctly represent Irish names elsewhere undermines such a possibility, and Tuda is a well-recorded

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<sup>195</sup> HE III.26: ...*Tuda, qui erat apud Sottos austrinos eruditus atque ordinatus epsicopus...*

<sup>196</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 308, n. 3.

<sup>197</sup> HE III.27; VW 11.

<sup>198</sup> Eric John, 'The Social and Political Problems of the Early English Church', in *Land, Church and People: Essays Presented to Professor H.P.R. Finberg*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Reading, 1970), p. 43. Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 102.

Anglo-Saxon name.<sup>199</sup> It may be that Tuda's education and consecration among the southern Irish made him a conciliatory figure at Lindisfarne, just as Eata, chosen as abbot of the community there, was selected by Colmán before his departure, but he was certainly not an Irishman.

### *Conclusion*

Bede brings all three Irish bishops of Lindisfarne together in *HE* III.25 – unnecessarily, one might think. It was important to him to hark back to these three crucial figures in his exposition on one of the central events of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and he invokes all three again in the following chapter when he writes that the Irish had been bishops there for thirty years, and calculates the length of Aidan's, Fínán's, and Colmán's respective episcopacies. *HE* III.26 is essential to Bede's understanding of the three named Irish bishops of Lindisfarne: despite the events at Whitby, their legacy is one of good examples and simple piety. Aidan's predecessor, intriguing as his existence is, is used mainly as a foil for Aidan's virtues, and is not included with the three Irish bishops who followed him. The career and example of Aidan have long been held up as the shining light of the Irish mission to the Anglo-Saxons, and by Bede's reckoning this is accurate. Aidan's life sets the tone for Bede's presentation of the Irish mission in Northumbria, stressing holiness, humility, monasticism, and mission. For those who see Bede's attitude toward the Irish as a very positive one, Aidan is the example always raised as evidence, and his description has taken over the story of Lindisfarne in its first thirty years, at times to the disadvantage of his successors.

Fínán and Colmán too have much to offer the narrative of the Irish in Northumbria. Fínán's reputation is not characterised by the simple sanctity we see celebrated in Aidan but rather he is shown to participate in a wider mission, joining the king in dominating ever-growing tracts of the island of Britain. Religion acts as a tool of dominion in Oswiu's hands, and Fínán looks to have been a willing participant. Fínán's political influence is likely to have grown significantly over his ten years as bishop, but Bede had little interest in discussing that aspect of his episcopacy. Colmán's time as bishop in Northumbria is inevitably dominated by the Synod of Whitby. We

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<sup>199</sup> It is thought to be an Anglo-Saxon appropriation of a British name: John Insley, 'Pre-Conquest Personal Names', in *Reallexicon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 23, ed. Heinrich Beck et al. (Berlin and New York, 2003), pp. 373-4.

hear no more of his tenure there beyond the chapter with which Bede follows the Synod, extolling the virtues of the Irish bishops and their community at Lindisfarne. This chapter does not concern Colmán alone, but he is named, revealing that the chapter's praise includes him specifically and contextualises the events at Whitby. These three men, Aidan, Fínán, and Colmán, are presented together by Bede, who, despite depicting them differently, sees them as a coherent group. Their importance as the early bishops of Bede's own kingdom is unquestionable, and Lindisfarne's Irishmen lead the way as representatives of the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Judged solely on these men, the Irish would have a claim to greatness in Bede's narrative of the development of the Anglo-Saxon church, but of course they are not alone, and many more Irishmen play a role in elucidating our author's attitudes. With this in mind, we expand outward from Lindisfarne to the kingdom of Northumbria as a whole.

## Chapter Two: The Irish in Northumbria

Although Lindisfarne dominates perceptions of the Irish in Northumbria, it was not the only site inhabited by men from the neighbouring island. In this chapter, several individuals with Irish backgrounds who led lives outside the tidal island monastery of Lindisfarne are discussed. Some of these are, as is generally the case in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, confirmed Irishmen, declared as such by its author; others are less definite, and their ethnic background must be teased out. As the kingdom in which the Irish mission from Iona first arrives, Northumbria saw the strongest influence of the Irish, and this influence and impact are seen far beyond the shores of Lindisfarne, including other monasteries and even the royal court.

### *i. Rónán*

Rónán is a significant figure in understanding Bede's attitude toward the Irish, though to judge by his exploration by some scholars, this does not always seem the case.<sup>1</sup> Bede writes in *HE* III.25 that the controversy over Easter arose in Northumbria because those who came from Kent or Gaul said the Irish customs were different from those of the universal church. Bede counts among these a vigorous supporter of the true Easter, one Rónán, an Irishman, who was thoroughly educated in regions of Gaul and Italy. Rónán's interactions with Fínán date his stay in Northumbria to that bishop's time in office, between 651 and 661. It is likely that it was in fact nearer to the end than the beginning of this period, as Aidan's episcopacy (c. 634-651) saw no opposition to

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<sup>1</sup>Among the works not to even mention him in the index, though the Synod of Whitby receives ample attention, are George Hardin Brown's *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, 2009) and Higham's (*Re-*) *Reading Bede*. Stancliffe mentions him only once in *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, p. 8.

his customs, while only three years after Fínán's death the Synod of Whitby marked the end of Columban primacy in Northumbria.

From the beginning, Bede acknowledges the significance of an Irishman being among the first to point out the isolated nature of the Columban traditions followed by the Iona mission in Northumbria. Rónán arrived in Northumbria and attempted to put the Irish and the Northumbrians straight on the calculation of Easter. Arguing with Fínán, bishop of Lindisfarne, Bede says he managed to set many right, and encouraged others to properly investigate the matter. However, he was unable to correct Fínán, and Bede explains that because he was a man of arrogant spirit, he was opposed to the better way proposed. As discussed in Chapter One, readers of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* have long puzzled over Bede's ascription of *homo ferocis animi*, as, grammatically, it could apply to either Rónán or Fínán, and could be equally used to describe either one in the context of the story. Although it would fit well with Rónán's previous description as *acerrimus*, it could equally apply to Fínán.<sup>2</sup> As Bede is interested in showing Rónán to be in the right here, it is unlikely he would describe him thus.

*HE* III.25 is the focal point of Bede's entire work, coming mid-way through the narrative and containing a formative event in the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church: the Synod of Whitby. At this council the Northumbrian Church, under the stewardship of King Oswiu, chose to adopt the orthodox practices of Rome in the calculation of Easter over the Columban practices passed on from the Iona mission to the kingdom. This involved the repudiation of thirty years of this Irish mission in the kingdom, and the personal rejection of the traditions in which he had been baptised and long adhered to on the part of Oswiu himself. Bede says of this king that he thought nothing better than the teachings of the Irish, but even he was persuaded at the Synod to renounce the Columban paschal conventions.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Bede begins this chapter, preoccupied as it is with the importance of orthodoxy and the triumph of Roman traditions over Columban practices, with Rónán is no accident. As Goffart has remarked, Bede places Rónán first among the detractors of the Columban Easter: first in the chapter *and* first chronologically. If nothing else, it is an answer to Stephen of Ripon's well-known claim for Wilfrid that the bishop was the first to question the Irish

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<sup>2</sup> Wallace-Hadrill sees no reason to ascribe fierce temper to Rónán over Fínán: J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> *HE* III.25: *Quia nimirum Osuii a Scottis edoctus ac baptizatus, illorum etiam lingua optime imbutus, nil melius quam quod illi docuissent, autumabat.*

customs.<sup>4</sup> While Bede acknowledges Wilfrid's contribution to the Synod, and places in his mouth many effective arguments for Roman orthodoxy and against Columban divergence, Wilfrid is not given first place in the fight over Easter; Rónán is.

Rónán was not present at the Synod of Whitby, though if he had been, he would certainly have sided with Wilfrid and Agilbert.<sup>5</sup> Joining these men were Romanus and James the deacon, and the latter is presented as part of the bastion of orthodoxy emanating from Kent which had continued in Northumbria, though meagrely, since the time of Paulinus.<sup>6</sup> Rónán is evidence that the issues over Easter were not divided on purely ethnic lines, and that some Irish not only knew and embraced the Roman customs, but attempted to persuade others of them, including the bishop of Lindisfarne. Bede's account of Rónán must rely on preserved tradition; after all, the synod was little more than sixty-five years before Bede was writing his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>7</sup> That such a detail was remembered is further evidence of the significance of Rónán's role.

Despite Rónán's attempts to correct Fínán, the bishop continued to follow the methods of the Columban church and there was hostility between them. Fínán's death in 661 provides the *terminus ante quem* for their debates, demonstrating that the issue of Easter was under discussion and a controversial subject several years before the Synod of Whitby took place. Despite this, even Fínán's death did not bring about an immediate council on the matter, a fact that supports Richard Abels's thesis that political developments played as much a role as religious concerns in its assembly.<sup>8</sup> Alhfrith, son of Oswiu, was an instigator of the synod and a proponent of the orthodox Easter, under Wilfrid's influence. The *Vita Wilfridi* states that it was Wilfrid's return to

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<sup>4</sup> VW 47: *Necnon et ego primus post obitum primorum procerum, a sancto Gregorio directorum, Scotticae virulenta plantationis germina eradicarem...* ("Was I not the first, after the death of the first elders who were sent by St Gregory, to root out the poisonous weeds planted by the Scots?"); Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 312.

<sup>5</sup> Thacker mistakes Romanus, the Kentish priest, for Rónán, 'Bede and the Irish', pp. 40-1. Thacker sees this inclusion as evidence of Bede's attempts to show that the Irish were not all of the same opinion on Easter, but Rónán's appearance in the chapter makes this point well, regardless of his absence from the synod.

<sup>6</sup> This reminder of the continuity of Roman influence in Northumbria is another way in which Bede undermines Wilfrid's biographer's attempts to make his hero a lone campaigner for orthodoxy.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Goffart, 'Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?', in *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Andrew Gillett (Turnhout, 2002), p. 22, writes that memory survives only about three generations, or roughly fifty years in the medieval period, unless preserved by writing or memory. An event such as the Synod of Whitby is likely to have been preserved in memory through written records, due to its importance in the ecclesiastical history of Northumbria.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Abels, 'The Council of Whitby: A Study in Early Anglo-Saxon politics', *The Journal of British Studies* 23.1 (1983), pp. 1-25.

Northumbria that inspired Alhfrith and others to discard the traditions of the Columbans in favour of those of Rome.<sup>9</sup> While it took Alhfrith some time to realise the political benefits of such a move, Rónán's arguments may also have played their part.<sup>10</sup> Oswiu too may have had political motives in calling the synod, and perhaps personal ones also.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the reasons for the eventual gathering of the council, the fact remains that Rónán was, as Bede states, among the first to raise these issues, and was the only one of these he named.

Bede's account of the Synod of Whitby reveals the influence of Eusebius's description of the Paschal controversy, with similar arguments used in the discussion of divergence over Easter.<sup>12</sup> There is no figure like Rónán in Eusebius's account, no individual who raises the issue and attempts to persuade those on the side of ancient, if unorthodox, customs to conform to those of Rome. While Rónán's actual historicity and contribution would have been reason enough for Bede to include him, it cannot have rendered it essential unless Rónán's existence and influence was an undeniable element in the question of Easter in Northumbria. Seeing as he is omitted from Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*, we can only assume this was not the case.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it appears that Bede went out of his way to place Rónán at the beginning of both this chapter and this issue, leading both the account and the vanguard of orthodoxy.

Rónán serves to introduce the Synod of Whitby in a neat narrative that demonstrates that its issues were debated from an early period, and that the Columbans of Lindisfarne were intransigent in their attitude throughout. Though the actual issues are not specified until the Synod proper (and even then are loosely defined as the correct calculation of Easter and the orthodox tonsure), Bede states that the matters at issue were the true rules of the church. Bede's construction of the chapter implies that Rónán inspired the discomfort and agitation that led to the Synod being called. There is no need for Rónán's story in the chapter on the synod – Bede's points on orthodoxy and the new chapter in the story of the church of Northumbria could have been as clearly told without it. Nor was Rónán's story unique enough to warrant inclusion, for Irish

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<sup>9</sup> VW 7.

<sup>10</sup> Abels, 'The Council of Whitby', pp. 5-10.

<sup>11</sup> See Holford-Strevens, 'Marital Discord in Northumbria', pp. 143-58.

<sup>12</sup> Damian Bracken, 'Rome and the Isles: Ireland, England and the Rhetoric of Orthodoxy', in *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations Before the Vikings*, ed. James Graham-Campbell and Michael Ryan, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 157 (Oxford, 2009), p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> Although the VW's hostility toward, and generalisation about, the Irish may provide the motivation for Rónán's absence.

religious in Ireland had been orthodox since the 630s, and the Columbans had heard such arguments since, through the southern Irish and the Anglo-Saxons who visited Ireland or travelled to Northumbria. Instead, Rónán's story is front-loaded in this chapter to make some very clear points: Rónán is evidence that the issues over Easter were not divided on purely ethnic lines; he is evidence that some Irish not only knew and embraced the Roman customs, but attempted to persuade others of them; and he is evidence that Wilfrid was not the only, or even the first, individual to bring these issues to the attention of Northumbria's Christians.

Bede remarks that Rónán persuaded many to adopt orthodox practices with his arguments. One may wonder how such a thing came about: did he preach in public places? Meet with other churchmen privately? Bring up these issues at court? He would surely have had the support of Oswiu's orthodox queen, Eanflæd, whose own clergy maintained Roman practices. He is shown to have debated with Fínán, possibly publicly, and while Bede makes no direct connection between him and the royal family, his arguments are likely to have come to their attention. Those whom Rónán corrected and inspired to seek the truth go unmentioned later in the chapter.

Wilfrid's return to Northumbria is usually dated to between 658 and 660, and so could not have been too long before Rónán was arguing for the Roman Easter, if he were even before the Irishman. Bede does not set out the chronology of this passage explicitly, but Rónán's mention and the discussion of his influence before Wilfrid appears in the chapter are, it seems, purposeful. While Bede does not date Rónán's arrival in Northumbria beyond Fínán's episcopacy, it is inserted after Fínán's construction of a church, which appears to have been early in his tenure as bishop. Bede is careful to make Rónán a campaigner in his own right - he is never connected to Wilfrid at all, with Bede saying he learned these ways in Gaul or Italy. If he had come back with Wilfrid, one might expect some indication of it, either from Bede or from Stephen of Ripon - though that might not fit with the latter's implications that the Irish were always, blanketly, wrong (though this is not the full story of Wilfrid's attitudes). Not only is Bede pointing to Rónán, an Irishman, promulgating Roman customs, but also to others coming from Kent and Gaul who did the same. This leaves Wilfrid as very much after the party - he may have been involved in the Synod, and with persuading Alhfrith to get involved as Bede stresses, but he was certainly not the first to contest the view of the Columban Irish, as Stephen has him declare in VW 47.

Bede numbers Rónán among those who came to Northumbria having trained in Kent or Gaul, both areas in which the orthodox Easter was followed. More specifically, Rónán's education took place in Gaul or Italy (*in Galliae uel Italiae partibus*), locations that place him far closer to the authority of Rome, though Bede does not indicate exactly where. Stancliffe draws attention to the possibility that Bede used *uel* in his description of Rónán's educational background to mean 'and' rather than 'or', as it is frequently translated, pointing to Thompson's remarks on the use of that word.<sup>14</sup> While Bede's use of *uel* could indicate uncertainty over Rónán's place of education, it is as likely to signify that he studied in both locations. In this case, like Wilfrid, whose education in Lyons and Rome led him to return home eager to share his new rectitude on orthodoxy and Easter, Rónán's education in Gaul *and* Italy would enable him to travel to Northumbria with the certainty of authoritative and apostolic tradition to bolster him. It seems highly likely that Rónán had spent time among the Columban religious of Northumbria before his time on the Continent, as one would expect him to wish to share his new perspectives with his old *fratres*. It is unlikely he stayed, however, as he is unmentioned at the Synod of Whitby and may have been quite unwelcome in Northumbria, having publicly quarrelled with the bishop. Despite Rónán's attempts to correct Fínán, the bishop was not for turning.<sup>15</sup>

Plummer remarks that nothing is known of this Rónán beyond what Bede tells us, though many Rónáns appear in Irish sources, and this is the attitude that has persisted, for the most part, in the years since his commentary.<sup>16</sup> Of the many Rónáns who appear in Irish sources, none can be convincingly demonstrated to be the Rónán *acerrimus* of Bede's account. One Rónán of Aghalurcher, Co. Fermanagh, dates from the seventh century, but is in no way identifiable with Bede's Rónán.<sup>17</sup> Rónán Find, son

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<sup>14</sup> Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, p. 38, n. 41; E.A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1984), p. 73. Bede does in fact use *uel* to mean 'and' quite often in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, such as III.5, in reference to Aidan's example of abstinence *and* self-control (*abstinentiae uel continentiae*), and III.17, where Aidan restores *and* takes care of the poor (*paupers recreandi uel defendendi*). The translations of Colgrave and Mynors, and Lapidge both translate the instance of Rónán's place of education as 'or'.

<sup>15</sup> Bede uses the verb *emendare*, meaning to correct or free from faults. It also has the harsher meaning of to chastise, or correct with punishment. He uses this same verb to describe Adomnán of Coldingham's self-correction through strict austerity, so it may be that the harsher nuance of this verb is also meant in the case of Rónán and Fínán, whose exchanges certainly appear to have been hostile. Bede does not use this verb very often, preferring *corrigere* generally.

<sup>16</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 188; some seventeen Rónáns can be found in the seventh century alone.

<sup>17</sup> This Rónán appears to date from early in the seventh century, and was both a king and a bishop, recorded as *epscop Rónán rígdæ* in *FÓ* February 9. See Seosamh Ó Dufaigh, 'Rónán of Aghalurcher', *Clogher Record* 19.2-3 (2007-2008), pp. 185-200.

of Sarán, appears in the twelfth-century text, *Buile Suibhne* as a cursing saint, an assertive attitude that chimes with the Rónán of Bede's story, but he is too early in the seventh century to tie in with the latter.<sup>18</sup> Rónán of Dromiskin, son of Berach, was a disciple of saint Fechín of Fore and died in 665, but the Rónán we see in Northumbria was a man whose life had been spent on the continent before his appearance in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and so he should probably not be looked for among the luminaries in Ireland in the early or mid seventh century.<sup>19</sup>

The death of Rónán, abbot of Kingarth, is recorded in the Irish annals in 737.<sup>20</sup> A predecessor's death is noted in 688, which may mark the beginning of this Rónán's abbacy, or there may be an intervening abbot or abbots missing. This identification would necessitate both great longevity on Rónán's part and a young age on his appearance in Northumbria, and it might be supposed that Kingarth, a monastery on the Dál Riata island of Bute associated with the Cenél Comgaill, would be an unlikely location for an orthodox figure like Rónán. However, Fraser has posited that Kingarth may have adopted orthodox practices by the 690s, and, if this is the case, Bede's Rónán might have found a suitable position there.<sup>21</sup> Rónán evidently had an interest in persuading his fellow Insular Christians to follow the orthodox practices he had learned on the Continent, and if Kingarth was as unattached to Iona as Fraser thinks, it might have offered new pastures for this deeper conversion. Of course, this does not account for his whereabouts between the early 660s and 688 (or later), but this potential identification of Rónán, abbot of Kingarth, with the Rónán of Northumbrian infamy is perhaps the most plausible of those offered here. Whether Rónán returned to the Continent, or travelled elsewhere in Britain or back to Ireland cannot be discovered.

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<sup>18</sup> He is connected with the battle of Mog Rath (c. 637): Donald M. Schlegel, 'Eastern Ulster Origins in the Fermanagh Genealogies: O'Monaghan, the Manaig, and St Ronan; Magarraghan, Lisgoole, and St Aed', *Clogher Record* 20.2 (2010), p. 203.

<sup>19</sup> *AT* 665; Ó Dúfaigh, 'Rónán of Aghalurcher', pp. 193-4. A Latin life of Rónán son of Berach exists in the twelfth-century Austrian Great Legendary, ed. A. Poncelet, *Analecta Bollandiana* 17 (1898), pp. 161-6.

<sup>20</sup> *AU* 737 and *AT* 737; Lloyd Laing, Jennifer Laing, David Longley, with a contribution by A.D.S. Macdonald, 'The Early Christian and Later Medieval Ecclesiastical Site at St Blane's, Kingarth, Bute', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 128 (1998), p. 554.

<sup>21</sup> Fraser believes Kingarth was quite separate from Iona, and attracted the loyalties of the Cenél Comgaill and, perhaps, the British kingdom of Alt Clut. He therefore suggests that the *nonnulla etiam de Brettonibus in Britannia* [some of the Britons in Britain] and *pene omnes qui ab Hiensium dominio erant liberi* [nearly all who were not under the dominion of Iona], mentioned by Bede in *HE* V.15 being converted to orthodox beliefs by Adomnán, might have included Kingarth during the episcopacy of Iolán, whose death is recorded in *AU* 689: James E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland, Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh, 2009), p. 220; James E. Fraser, 'Strangers on the Clyde: Cenél Comgaill, Clyde Rock and the Bishops of Kingarth,' *The Innes Review* 56.2 (2005), pp. 118-9.

Another Rónán, connected to Kilmaronan, Lennox (in the kingdom of Alt Clut), is said to have ‘cleeked’ the devil on the head, an event still annually commemorated in June in the town of Innerleithen, Scotland.<sup>22</sup> Beyond the close proximity of this Rónán to that of Kingarth, there is no particular reason to associate him with Bede’s fiery churchman, though Farmer remarks that he has been “implausibly identified” with the same. Lastly, there is an Irish hermit named Rónán who spent time on the remote island of North Rona in the seventh century.<sup>23</sup> Tradition identifies Rónán of Kingarth with the Rónán of Kilmaronan and that of North Rona, seeing him as an important figure whose influence can be seen in the locations associated with him, and such activity would not be incompatible with the assertive churchman described by Bede. However, such identification is, at best, speculative.

Moving focus from Britain to the Continent, both Kenney and Mabillon believe the Rónán of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* may be the same man mentioned in the will of Bishop Ansoald of Poitiers, though Plummer views this theory as “highly uncertain”.<sup>24</sup> Ansoald’s will states that he restored the abandoned monastery of Mazerolles on the river Vienne, and gave it to one Bishop Romanus, an Irish pilgrim, and his companions.<sup>25</sup> His will is dated to 696, which allows Rónán more than thirty years to make his way from Northumbria to Francia, which would not be unexpected, considering the location of his training in Gaul and/or Italy. The area in which Poitiers and Mazerolles are found is easily accessed by the Loire, considered by James to be one of the main routes from Ireland to Francia.<sup>26</sup> One of Ansoald’s charters, dated to 677, includes a signatory called *episcopus Romanus*, and this is likely to refer to the same Irish bishop.<sup>27</sup> Of course, such an identification would necessitate the

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<sup>22</sup> David Hugh Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th edn (Oxford, 2003), p. 348.

<sup>23</sup> Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, p. 348.

<sup>24</sup> James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (Dublin, 1968), p. 499; Jean Mabillon, *Annales Ordinis Sancti Benedicti Occidentalium Monachorum Patriarchae* I.15 (Paris, 1703), p. 474; Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 188.

<sup>25</sup> *Fragmentum Testamenti Ansoaldi, Episcopi Pictavensis*, in ‘Les Chartes Mérovingiennes de Noirmoutier’, J. Tardif, *Nouvelle Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger* 22 (1898), p. 789: *peregrinum ex genere Scotorum, nomen Romanum, episcopum cum suis peregrinis*.

<sup>26</sup> James is, however, highly sceptical about this identification: Edward James, ‘Ireland and Western Gaul in the Merovingian period,’ in *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick and David Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), p. 379. Jonas’s Life of Columbanus mentions Irish ships at Nantes and Noirmoutier in the seventh century, I.23: *The Life of Columban by the Monk Jonas*, ed. Dana Carleton Munro, new edn (Felinfach, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> A charter of 678 refers to Thomeneus, *episcoporum minimus*, who Louis Gougaud suggests is the same person as the Irish bishop of Angouleme and signatory of a Council of Bordeaux in 667-75, Tomianus: Gougaud, ‘The Achievement and the Influence of Irish Monks’, pp. 200-1. If this is the case, several Irish religious seem to have been part of Ansoald’s circle.

interchangeability of the names Rónán, or Ronanus, and Romanus, which is in no way a given. Bede himself carefully distinguished between these two, mentioning the Irish campaigner, Rónán, and the Kentish priest Romanus in the same chapter. If this is indeed the same Rónán who appears in Northumbria, he seems to have been elevated to the episcopacy at some time between his sojourn with the Lindisfarne community and his witnessing of Ansoald's charter. One would expect, had he been a bishop during the episode Bede records, the historian would have mentioned this salutary fact. Perhaps, like Wilfrid, he travelled to Gaul to receive a proper consecration, though he might instead have returned home to Ireland, in the south of which he could easily find orthodox bishops to consecrate him.

Ansoald succeeded Dido as bishop of Poitiers, and Kenney claims the two bishops of Poitiers were, in fact, relatives.<sup>28</sup> Dido had been very involved in the events that saw the child Dagobert II, heir to the Austrasian throne, abducted and sent to Ireland under the instructions of the mayor of the palace, Grimoald.<sup>29</sup> Years later, Wilfrid was instrumental in Dagobert's return to his kingdom.<sup>30</sup> There appears to be a Nivelles link in the story, as Gerberding has remarked, as Grimoald and Dido met together at that monastery before the affair unfolded.<sup>31</sup> Hammer sees Ansoald as a figure with similar loyalties as Dido, and one must wonder at his Irish connections.<sup>32</sup> It may be that the Romanus mentioned in Ansoald's will was part of an Irish network that played a part in the return (if not the exile) of Dagobert. If he corresponds to Rónán of Northumbria, this might connect Rónán to Wilfrid in ways beyond their common enthusiasm for orthodox Roman traditions. While Bede makes no such association, they might have moved in similar circles in Francia. Both, if one follows this premise to its conclusion, were elevated to the episcopacy after the Synod of Whitby, both had connections to the Frankish hierarchy, and both may have played a part in the Dagobert matter. In light of the Nivelles link, one might suggest that Rónán was part of Fursa's

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<sup>28</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, p. 497. This is supported by C.I. Hammer, 'Arbeo of Freising's 'Life and Passion' of St Emmeram: The Martyr and His Critics', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 101.1 (2006), p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> James makes this point in 'Ireland and Western Gaul in the Merovingian Period', p. 379. See Chapter Four.

<sup>30</sup> VW 28.

<sup>31</sup> Richard A. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 60-1.

<sup>32</sup> Hammer, 'Life and Passion' of St Emmeram', pp. 19, 26-7: Hammer suggests that Dido may have been attempting to save the life of the young prince, pointing out that exile in Ireland was not the worst fate that might have befallen him (p. 19).

circle on the Continent, rather than assuming him to have been from a Columbanian context.

Yet a Columbanian context is another way to explain Rónán. Despite Columbanus's own strong feelings on the accuracy of Irish Easter tables, as expressed in his letter to Pope Gregory I, Columbanian monasteries seem to have adopted orthodox practices relatively quickly after his death in 615.<sup>33</sup> At the Synod at Mâcon in 626 or 627, Agrestius, a former monk of Luxeuil, spoke out against what he saw as the heresy of the Columbanians. Soon after this, Luxeuil seems to have changed its method of calculating Easter, as well as adopting elements of the Benedictine Rule in conjunction with its own Columbanian one. Further pressure led Columbanus's monastery at Bobbio to appeal to Pope Honorius around 628, which Stancliffe believes to have led to that Pope realising the situation in Ireland, and writing to its church leaders. Stancliffe claims it is most likely that the charge of Quartodecimanism originated in Gaul rather than Rome, as it ties in with Agrestius's charges of heresy.<sup>34</sup> The Synod at Mâcon was presided over by the bishop of Lyons, and it is not difficult to see Wilfrid, at Lyons in the 650s, being influenced by such attitudes. Aunemundus is linked with Luxeuil through its abbot, Waldebert, who oversaw changes at the monastery over his forty-year abbacy, including the adoption of the *Regula Benedicti*.<sup>35</sup> If Rónán had moved in such circles prior to his trip to Northumbria, his strongly-held orthodox views would make perfect sense. Wallace-Hadrill is firmly convinced of his Columbanian background in Gaul, admittedly a strong possibility for an Irish monk on the Continent whose education is linked with Gaul and Italy.<sup>36</sup> Agilbert, the Frankish bishop of, successively, Wessex and Paris, had connections with Columbanian circles in Gaul, and had spent time in education in Ireland. This may reflect a similar background to that of Rónán.<sup>37</sup> Of course in Gaul and in Italy, whether in Columbanian circles or not, Rónán would have met plenty of persons to argue against the Insular

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<sup>33</sup> Columbanus, *Epistola* 1, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. and trans. G.S.M. Walker (Dublin, 1957), pp. 2-12; Corning, *Celtic and Roman Traditions*, pp. 51-3: Corning argues that the Columbanian foundations on the continent most probably adopted orthodox Easter practices in the 620s, as a result of councils such as the Synod of Mâcon in 627/8.

<sup>34</sup> Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Acta Aunemundi* 9, in *AASS* September VII, p. 745; Ian Wood makes this point in 'Ripon, Francia and the Franks Casket in the Early Middle Ages,' *Northern History* 26 (1990), p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> James Campbell, 'The First Century of Christianity in England,' *Ampleforth Journal* 76 (1971), repr. in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, p. 58. For an excellent investigation of Agilbert's varied career, see Carl I. Hammer, 'Holy entrepreneur': Agilbert, a Merovingian Bishop between Ireland, England and Francia', *Peritia* 22-23 (2011-12), pp. 53-82.

Easter. After all, Wilfrid was similarly persuaded while on the Continent, although Rónán appears to have beaten him to it in Northumbria.

The Rónán Bede depicts may not be any of the other Rónáns discussed here, and may simply be lost to the historical record; unfortunately, it is as yet impossible to prove any of these possible identifications. Nevertheless, his role in the lead-up to the Synod of Whitby, and his place as a counter-point to Wilfrid in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, make him an essential element in discussions of the Irish in Bede's work. He is an example of the variety that exists within the Irish 'group' in Bede's text, demonstrating that ethnicity was not necessarily a defining feature, and that Bede himself could see the diversity within ethnic groupings.

## ii. Aldfrith

Aldfrith reigned as king of Northumbria for almost twenty years before his death in 705.<sup>38</sup> Bede was in an excellent position to chronicle his incumbency, as it coincided with his own life from his teens to his early thirties. Aldfrith succeeded his half-brother, Ecgrith, and was eventually succeeded by his own son, Osred.<sup>39</sup> Aldfrith became king of Northumbria following the disastrous defeat of Ecgrith at the hands of the Picts in 685, a blow that saw Northumbria's expansionist aspirations diminish, and led to a loss of conquered territory among the Picts, the British, and Dál Riata.<sup>40</sup> Bede, quoting from Virgil's *Aeneid*, remarks that from Ecgrith's death the hopes and strength of kingdom began to "ebb and fall away".<sup>41</sup> This describes the decrease in the power and status of Northumbria, yet it also resulted in relative peace between Northumbria and her neighbouring kingdoms during Aldfrith's reign. The author of the earlier *Vita Cuthberti* refers to him as "Aldfrith, who now reigns peacefully", and this stability must have been a welcome relief to Northumbria after the conflict of Ecgrith's reign.<sup>42</sup> Bede

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the problems surrounding dating Aldfrith's death, see Barbara Yorke, *Rex Doctissimus: Bede and King Aldfrith of Northumbria*, Jarrow Lecture 2009, pp. 20-3.

<sup>39</sup> Osred succeeded his father when he was eight, according to Bede (*HE* V.18). He was killed in 716. Æthelwulf's ninth-century poem, *De Abbatibus*, states that he was "vigorous in his deeds, in his words, and in every activity, but...he was an indocile youth" [*Gestis et uerbis et omni strenuus actu | exstitit, ...indocilis iuuenis*]: Æthelwulf, *De Abbatibus* II, ed. A. Campbell (Oxford, 1967), p. 4. The *VW* attests to a different successor to Aldfrith, one Eadwulf who reigned for a short time before being followed by Aldfrith's son, Osred: *VW* 59.

<sup>40</sup> *HE* IV.26.

<sup>41</sup> *HE* IV.26: *Ex quo tempore spes coepit et uirtus regni Anglorum fluere ac retro sublapsa referri; Virgil, Aeneid* II.169.

<sup>42</sup> *AVC* III.6: *Aldfrido qui nunc regnat pacifice*. Aldfrith's reign was not without conflict, as *HE* V.24's mention of the death of Beorhtred at the hands of the Picts in 698 reveals, but the impression given in the sources is one of relative peace.

emphasises Aldfrith's learnedness as an individual, and he seems to have taken an active interest in church matters. He has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation, particularly in the past few decades by Colin Ireland and Barbara Yorke, and it is necessary to explore much of what has been discussed and uncovered about this king before looking at his role in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as an Irishman.<sup>43</sup>

Aldfrith is different from many of the Irishmen discussed in this thesis: not only is he half-Irish, but he is a king rather than a religious figure. He is mentioned in various other works, both Anglo-Saxon and Irish, and this presence reflects his origins and influence.<sup>44</sup> Despite the frequency with which he appears in a wide variety of source material, it might be argued that, despite his excellent qualities of learnedness and apparent interest in the church, Bede's depiction of Aldfrith of Northumbria betrays an element of marginalisation.<sup>45</sup> He is not merely a passing reference or once-mentioned individual in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*; rather, he appears many times.<sup>46</sup> However, he is never the main focus of the ten chapters in which he is mentioned and, of those ten chapters, in three he is named solely to date the events of the chapter by his reign.<sup>47</sup>

If one were to rely solely on Bede's account of Aldfrith, one would have no inkling as to his Irish background. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and in his other works, Bede depicts him as an Anglo-Saxon royal. Of course, Bede raises vague questions over his birth, characterising him as a *nothus*, and he does mention him spending time in the regions of the Irish, but there is certainly no hint that this long-reigning king was, in fact, half Irish.<sup>48</sup> Bede has been accused of doubting Aldfrith's familial links to Oswiu, as he presents him as "considered to be the son of his [Ecgrith's] father", but

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<sup>43</sup> Barbara Yorke, 'Aldhelm's Irish and British Connections', in *Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Founding of the Bishopric*, ed. Katherine Barker with Nicholas Brooks (Oxford, 2010), pp. 164-80, especially pp. 170-3; Barbara Yorke, 'Adomnán at the Court of King Aldfrith', in *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker*, ed. Jonathan M. Wooding with Rodney Aist, Thomas Owen Clancy, Thomas O'Loughlin (Dublin, 2010), pp. 36-50; Barbara Yorke, *Rex Doctissimus*; Colin Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Learning of a *Sapiens*', in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in Memory of Brendan O Hehir*, ed. Kathryn A. Klar, Eve E. Sweetser, Claire Thomas (Lawrence, MA, 1996), pp. 63-77; Colin Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', *Celtica* 22 (1991), pp. 64-78.

<sup>44</sup> Aldfrith appears in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in Bede's prose and metrical *Vitae Cuthberti*, in his *Historia Abbatum*, and his *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*. He is also mentioned in the Irish Annals, *Bríathra Flainn Fhína maic Ossu*, the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, the VW, Æthelwulf's *De Abbatibus* II, Alcuin's *Versus de Patribus Regibus et Sanctis Eboricensis Ecclesiae* ll. 843-6, Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Acircium*, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, along with many later texts.

<sup>45</sup> Yorke writes that Bede "was only prepared to present Aldfrith himself as a minor player within the bigger picture of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*," *Rex Doctissimus*, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> HE IV.26, V.1, 2, 7, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21, 24.

<sup>47</sup> HE V.1, 2, 7.

<sup>48</sup> MVC 21; PVC 24.

he soon afterwards calls him Ecgfrith's *frater nothus* (bastard brother).<sup>49</sup> The word *nothus* indicates illegitimacy, but also a known and noble father, according to Isidore, and Bede never implies Aldfrith was not entitled to be king.<sup>50</sup> Other sources, such as the Irish Annals, call him Oswiu's son, and, in the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, Cuthbert insists he is as much a brother to Ælfflæd as Ecgfrith, and Bede follows this.<sup>51</sup> Bede's acknowledgement of Aldfrith's illegitimacy is not accidental, but it seems tied up more with Aldfrith's apparently obscure background rather than with authorial hostility. It goes unmentioned in the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, but as that work was written while Aldfrith was still alive, this is unsurprising.

It is generally accepted that Aldfrith was the child of a union between Oswiu, the Anglo-Saxon king of Northumbria, and an Irish woman. It is likely he spent his life before his succession among the Irish, and he also has an Irish name: Flann Fína. The explicit case for Aldfrith's Irish ancestry is primarily made in the Irish Annals and genealogies. The *Annals of Ulster* record the death in 704 of *Aldfrith m. Ossu, sapiens, rex Saxonum*.<sup>52</sup> The *Annals of Tigernach* combine his Anglo-Saxon and Irish names to record the death of *Altfrith mac Ossa .i. Fland Fína la Gaedhelu, ecnaidh, rex Saxonum* for the same year, while the *Annals of Inisfallen* mention only his Irish name: *Flann Fíne mc. Gossa, rex Saxorum, quieuit*.<sup>53</sup> The *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* include the death of *Flainn Fiona mc. Ossa, rí Saxan, an t-eagnaid amhra, dalta Adamnáin*.<sup>54</sup> Despite the late dates of extant manuscripts of the Irish Annals, there is every reason to believe that the compilers would have had accurate, contemporary information during the late seventh and early eighth centuries.<sup>55</sup> The various Annals of Ireland clearly call

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<sup>49</sup> PVC 24: *...ferebatur filius fuisse patris illius...* This at least indicates a lack of knowledge about Aldfrith, perhaps as he had not been in Northumbria, and may reflect Bede's discomfort at Oswiu's relationship(s) before his marriage to Eanflæd.

<sup>50</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.5.23; Higham believes calling Aldfrith a *nothus* was acceptable enough to be written during his son's reign, but that the controversial issue to raise was his paternity, and that Bede's hostility can be seen in his remark that Aldfrith *ferebatur* Oswiu's son: Higham, (*Re-*) *Reading Bede*, p. 189. See also Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', *Past and Present* 108 (1985), pp. 17-8.

<sup>51</sup> AVC III.6: *Illum autem non minus tibi esse fratrem usurpaueris quam alterum*; PVC 24: *...habebit enim successorem quem germana ut ipsum Egfridum dilectione complectaris* [...for he will have a successor whom you will embrace with as much sisterly affection as if he were Ecgfrith himself].

<sup>52</sup> AU 704.3.

<sup>53</sup> AT 704.4; AI 705.1.

<sup>54</sup> FAI 165 (704); Colin Ireland observes that these annals append a poem to the entry on Aldfrith that is actually about Ecgfrith, but in doing so support Flann Fína's identification as Aldfrith by confirming his familial connections: 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', p. 70.

<sup>55</sup> See Daniel McCarthy, 'The Irish Annals – Their Origin and Evolution V to XI Sec', *L'Irlanda e gli Irlandesi nell'Alto Medioevo, Settimane di Studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 57 (2010), pp. 612-4.

Aldfrith, son of King Oswiu, by the name Flann Fína. The Irish genealogies, late and at times unreliable as they are, name an Irish princess called Fín (or Fína), daughter of the Cenél nEógain king, Colmán Rímid, as Aldfrith's mother.<sup>56</sup> The Northumbrian princes, Oswiu and his brother Oswald, had spent time among the Irish in exile after their father's death, and during their respective rules, their connection with Iona through the Irish mission can be seen.<sup>57</sup> Marriage into a powerful Irish dynasty would have been a politic action for the exiles, and Oswiu was of appropriate age, in exile from his childhood in 617 until at least 633, if not later.<sup>58</sup> If Aldfrith were born within this time period, he would probably have been the eldest of Oswiu's children.

The obituary of Bishop Fínán of Lindisfarne in the Irish annals names him son of Rímid. Scholars have suggested that this might make him son of Colmán Rímid, and so brother to Fín and maternal uncle to Aldfrith.<sup>59</sup> This theory is very attractive, adding another layer to the relationship between Oswiu and his bishop, and placing a potential ally of Aldfrith in Northumbria many years before his accession to the throne.<sup>60</sup> Oswiu, according to Bede, was married to Eanflæd, daughter of the Deiran king, Edwin.<sup>61</sup> Oswiu's marriage to Eanflæd was representative of the union of Bernicia and Deira in the kingdom of Northumbria, and Bede would not have wanted to take from this important alliance, or to imply that the Christian King Oswiu, convener of the Synod of Whitby, would have been a bigamist. Of course, his Irish wife might have died, but the

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<sup>56</sup> From Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502, in *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* I, 140 a 39-40, p. 135. All the extant Irish genealogies agree on this: Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies,' p. 69, though Ireland admits problems with the genealogies as sources. Ireland comments on the problems with the name Fín, but does not think it takes from the likelihood of Aldfrith's mother having been a high-born Irish woman: pp. 70-4, 77. Hermann Moisl is sceptical on the reliability of the genealogies, pointing to their late dates and tendency toward manipulation: 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century', *Peritia* 2 (1983), p. 122. The Laud genealogies in Laud 610 also support this family tree, recording *Colmán Rímid athair Fína máthair Flainn*: K. Meyer, 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 8 (1912), p. 294. Kirby proposes that Fín might in fact have been Colmán Rímid's granddaughter, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 143, but this creates problems regarding Oswiu's marriage to Eanflæd, among other issues.

<sup>57</sup> *HE* III.3, 25; Polygyny was possible, and perhaps even common in early Irish society: Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988), p. 70. For the Irish and the Anglo-Saxon perspective, see Clunies Ross, 'Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 3-34, especially pp. 13-8.

<sup>58</sup> We do not know if Oswiu returned to Northumbria on Oswald's accession to the kingship, or later. As Michelle Ziegler, 'The Politics of Exile in Early Northumbria', *The Heroic Age* 2 (1999) <<http://www.heroicage.org/issues/2/ha2pen.htm>> [accessed 21 January 2012], suggests, Oswald is also likely to have married, or formed a union of some sort, while in exile.

<sup>59</sup> *AU* 660, *AT* 659; Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the Life of St Cuthbert and his Early Cult', p. 86.

<sup>60</sup> Fínán died in 661, some fourteen years before Aldfrith became king. However, there is evidence in Irish literature that maternal uncles had particularly close relationships with their nephews in early Irish society, and one might wonder how this might have affected Aldfrith and Fínán. See Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, 'The Sister's Son in Early Irish Literature', *Peritia* 5 (1986), pp. 128-60.

<sup>61</sup> *HE* III.15.

absence of Aldfrith from the kingdom implies a certain distancing from this previous union. One can explain the omission of Oswiu's previous marriage to Fín in this way, as one can explain the omission of his other marriage to Rhianmellt, a British princess. This third wife is mentioned in the *Historia Brittonum*, but does not appear in any eighth century works.<sup>62</sup> The *Historia Brittonum* acknowledges two of Oswiu's wives, Eanflæd and Rhianmellt, the confirmable former perhaps supporting the truthfulness of the latter. It is possible that Rhianmellt was a princess from the British kingdom of Rheged, with whom an alliance would have been very useful for neighbouring Northumbria.<sup>63</sup>

Flann Fína is a name associated in Irish tradition not only with Aldfrith, but with a collection of maxims known as *Bríathra* or *Roscada Flainn Fína maic Ossu*.<sup>64</sup> This Old Irish collection is not the certain work of this Anglo-Saxon king, but its very attribution to him attests his reputation for scholarliness and his Irish background. The annals support this reputation, calling him *sapiens* and *ecnae*, bringing together elements of Latin and Old Irish learning that are reflected in Aldfrith's attested interests.<sup>65</sup> A *sapiens*, in Irish society, had attained a certain level of learning, and the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* indicates that it included a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and the ability to act as an ecclesiastical judge. Several bishops and abbots are named as *sapientes* in Irish sources.<sup>66</sup> The annals call Aldfrith *sapiens* and its Old Irish equivalent, *ecnae*, and the ascription of the *Bríathra* to him is clearly linked to this status as a scholar of some standing. Some scholars believe Aldfrith must have been a cleric, or studying to become one.<sup>67</sup> Colin Ireland makes a good case against this interpretation, however, pointing out some other *sapientes* in Irish sources who do not appear to have been clerics.<sup>68</sup> One might also consider the Irish scholar mentioned by Willibrord to Acca: a man "learned in literary studies" but neglectful of his own

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<sup>62</sup> Nennius, *Historia Brittonum* 57, in *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (London and Chichester, 1980) The *Historia Brittonum* dates from the ninth century, as does the Durham *Liber Vitae*, which mentions one Rægnmæld, apparently an Anglo-Saxon rendering of Rhianmellt.

<sup>63</sup> See Martin Grimmer, 'The Exogamous Marriages of Oswiu of Northumbria', *The Heroic Age* 9 (2006) <<http://www.heroicage.org/issues/9/grimmer.html>> [accessed 18 January 2012], for a summary of the evidence.

<sup>64</sup> Colin Ireland, *Old Irish Wisdom Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Bríathra Flainn Fhína Maic Ossu* (Tempe, AZ, 1999).

<sup>65</sup> AU 704 and AT 704, respectively.

<sup>66</sup> T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Contexts and Uses of Literacy in Early Christian Ireland', *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge, 1998), p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Higham, (*Re-*) *Reading Bede*, p. 42; Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty', p. 121.

<sup>68</sup> Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Learning of a *Sapiens*', p. 76. In support of this, Bede's HE III.27 refers to Anglo-Saxons who went to Ireland to learn, not necessarily to enter the religious life.

salvation.<sup>69</sup> It was evidently possible to be learned in areas outside of Christian study, and while Aldfrith's interests seem to have been religious, it is not proof that he had pursued or was pursuing a clerical calling.

Anglo-Saxon sources reinforce Aldfrith's association with learnedness.<sup>70</sup> In his Prose *Vita Cuthberti*, Bede states that Aldfrith was in Ireland before he became king, "pursuing his studies...suffering a self-imposed exile to gratify his love of wisdom".<sup>71</sup> Bede calls him a *uir in scripturis doctissimus* and *uir undecumque doctissimus*.<sup>72</sup> He uses the latter phrase exactly to describe Aldhelm, the famed Anglo-Saxon scholar, within a few chapters of its use for Aldfrith, an apparently deliberate echo that can only reflect positively on the king.<sup>73</sup> Stephen of Ripon calls Aldfrith *rex sapientissimus*, a portrayal that is all the more noteworthy considering that work's accounts of the hostilities between its hero and Aldfrith.<sup>74</sup> Aldfrith's education and abilities were clearly so undeniable that even his detractors were compelled to admit it. Aldfrith is the only Northumbrian king who is recorded exchanging land for a book, and his link with scholarship is further demonstrated by Aldhelm's writing of his *Epistola ad Acircium* and Adomnán's presentation of his *De Locis Sanctis* to the king.<sup>75</sup> The latter work was an important treatise on sacred geography, examining difficulties in the Scriptures through the narrative of a pilgrim's journey through the Holy Land. It is a learned work, one suited to a knowledgeable reader, and its difficult Latin would have necessitated a high level of education; Bede himself felt the work needed an abridgement to render it more accessible.<sup>76</sup> While the dedication or presentation of a

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<sup>69</sup> HE III.13: *doctus quidem uir studio litterarum*.

<sup>70</sup> Ireland draws much of this material together: 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Learning of a *Sapiens*', p. 73.

<sup>71</sup> Bede, PVC 24: *Aldfridus...qui non paucis ante temporibus in regionibus Scottorum lectioni operam dabat, ibi ob amorem sapientiae spontaneum passus exilium*.

<sup>72</sup> HE IV.26 and V.12, respectively.

<sup>73</sup> HE V.18: Aldhelm is also described as *uir undecumque doctissimus*. Bede links this description of Aldhelm with his authorship of several books, and one might wonder if Aldfrith ever wrote anything – though one would expect Bede to mention it if he had. This particular description has, as Lapidge remarks, a long history going back to the second century: *Storia degli Inglesi* II, p. 680.

<sup>74</sup> VW 44.

<sup>75</sup> Bede, HA 15: a wonderfully worked copy of the *Cosmographers*, in this case - *Cosmographiarum codice mirandi operis*; see Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven, CT, 2008), pp. 1-3; Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, ed. Denis Meehan (Dublin, 1958; repr. 1983); Aldhelm, *Epistola ad Acircium*, translated in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 34-47; Rudolf Ehwald (ed.), *Adhelmi Opera*, MGH AA 15 (Berlin, 1919; repr. 1984), pp. 61-204.

<sup>76</sup> HE V.17: Bede's abridgement of the *De Locis Sanctis* has "the sense of his words but put more briefly and concisely" (*...ad sensum quidem uerborum illius, sed breuioribus strictisque comprehensa sermonibus...*); W. Trent Foley describes Adomnán's Latin as "tortuous", and considers Bede's version

scholarly work to a king is not necessarily proof that he could appreciate it, in light of Aldfrith's reputation for Scriptural learning, it seems he could have been in a position to both read and understand the *De Locis Sanctis*.<sup>77</sup>

The link between Aldhelm and Aldfrith created by Bede at *HE* V.18 is made tangible in a treatise sent by the scholar to the king: Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Acircium*. This letter is a long and detailed discussion of Latin metrics and includes a hundred *enigmata*. Its addressee, Acircius, is accepted as a rhetorical reference to Aldfrith, calling him the king from the north-west ruling the northern regions.<sup>78</sup> This letter provides tantalising details that may refer to Aldfrith's life before his succession, and offer insights into his life in Ireland. Aldhelm writes of a pledge made by Acircius and himself twenty years previous, during their young adulthood. The ceremony saw him, Aldhelm, becoming a 'father' and the addressee receiving "the appellations of your adoptive station" and heavenly grace. It is very tempting to wonder at the 'appellations' mentioned by Aldhelm, and note the common element in the names of Aldhelm and Aldfrith. Aldhelm's link with the king is not restricted to their early lives or to his address of the king in this work; Aldfrith married one Cuthburg, sister to king Ine of Wessex.<sup>79</sup> Aldhelm, it has been argued, was of the West Saxon royal family, and there may be a particular connection between Aldfrith and the Wessex kings revealed in his relationship with Aldhelm.<sup>80</sup> Lapidge sees the ceremony as a confirmation, and Yorke concurs, though offers an alternative interpretation as a rebaptism, and both agree in suggesting it took place on Iona.<sup>81</sup> Lynch offers a convincing argument for the ceremony having been a confirmation, reflecting a Roman tradition for episcopal

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of it an act of clarification: 'On the Holy Places: Introduction', in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, ed. W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder, *TTH* 28 (Liverpool, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Ceolwulf, dedicatee of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, may not have been capable of appreciating the work presented to him: Higham, *(Re-) Reading Bede*, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> *Acircius* comes from the Latin words *a* [from] and *circius* [the north-west wind] or *circio* [the region of the north-west], thus meaning the 'man from the north west', and Aldhelm refers to him *Aquilonalis imperii sceptrum gubernanti*, meaning 'ruling the kingdom of the north-east': Neil Wright, 'Aldhelm, Gildas, and Acircius', *History and Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West: Studies in Intertextuality* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 1-28, especially pp. 20-1, 23. Wright, having contextualised the title, translates it as "To the man from Ireland, wielding the sceptre of the Northumbrian kingdom", though he explains this as a reference to Aldfrith's time in Ireland, rather than as a comment on his ethnic or cultural background, pp. 23-4. Interestingly, Aldfrith is called *rex Aquilonensius* in *VW* 51.

<sup>79</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* I.36, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, and completed by R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>80</sup> Michael Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007) pp. 17-22.

<sup>81</sup> Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', pp. 25, 26; Yorke, 'Aldhelm's Irish and British Connections', p. 170, n. 49. It is very unlikely that Aldfrith would have been rebaptised, as this was not considered necessary to adopt Roman practices. Even if it were, he would certainly not have been rebaptised in the Roman tradition on Iona as this would be a repudiation of Columba's traditions.

confirmation which differed from the Gallican liturgy prevalent among the Irish.<sup>82</sup> Whether this confirmation took place on Iona is neither supported nor denied by Aldhelm's letter, but the decision to carry it out must signify Roman orthodox influence – perhaps simply that of Aldhelm – or a deliberate resolution to bring Aldfrith into line with developments in Northumbria.<sup>83</sup>

All of these details and speculations come together to present a picture of a fascinating figure. It is likely he spent his life in Ireland rather than in Northumbria; both Bede and the anonymous author of the *Vita Cuthberti* offer some support for his presence in Ireland before his succession, relating that he was “in exile among the islands of the Irish” and “on the island which is called Iona”.<sup>84</sup> Such a location seems unlikely to be fiction on the part of the anonymous author. There is no evidence of him in Britain before Ecgrith's death in 685, though of course this is not certain proof of his absence either. Bede testifies to his having been among the Irish for “no short time”, and does call it exile, though he insists this was for the sake of learning rather than for political reasons.<sup>85</sup> William of Malmesbury tells us that Aldfrith retired to Ireland “under compulsion or in indignation” due to his being passed over in favour of Ecgrith on the death of Oswiu, but this cannot be relied upon.<sup>86</sup> The very fact that Bede could imply any doubt at all over his parentage does not point to Aldfrith's being a long-term part of Northumbrian society before his accession to the kingship. His Irish name, and his distinction as a man of learning in Ireland (and, perhaps, of Irish learning), and the fact that Aldfrith's half-sister, Ælfflæd, must be reminded of his existence when discussing possible heirs for Ecgrith, implies a more total absence.<sup>87</sup> Taking into account the scene presented in all three *Vitae Cuthberti* which sees the saint tell the

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<sup>82</sup> Joseph H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), pp. 101-2, 112-5.

<sup>83</sup> If Aldhelm's letter is correctly dated to the early years on Aldfrith's reign, and accurately represents a ceremony some twenty years beforehand, this confirmation would have taken place c. 665 or a little later.

<sup>84</sup> *PVC* 24: *in insulis Scottorum...exulabat*; *AVC* III.6: *erat in insula quam Ii nominant...* Michael Richter believes the earlier, anonymous, life is more accurate in this, and sees Bede's deviation as a conscious manipulation: *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin, 1999), p. 95, n.24.

<sup>85</sup> Campbell maintains that the obvious reason for exile is fear, such as that of a hostile king: J. Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the Life of St Cuthbert and His Early Cult', p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, I.52. If Aldfrith had only left due to pressure from Ecgrith c. 670, he would have been in Northumbria either since very early childhood, c. 633/4, or since Oswiu's succession in 642.

<sup>87</sup> Ælfflæd had contacted Cuthbert to discover from him who would succeed her brother, Ecgrith, and when Aldfrith is hinted at, she is slow to realise who is meant. Kirby suggests that this was rather a test of Cuthbert's loyalties, which he passed by offering the name of Aldfrith, a member of Ælfflæd's own dynasty. He sees Aldfrith's succession as part of the royal family's efforts to retain power, and proposes that Irish, and even Pictish, support may have been involved with a view to seeing a more conciliatory figure than Ecgrith had been at the head of Northumbria: Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 143-4.

surprised Ælfflæd that Aldfrith would succeed Ecgrith, it appears that Aldfrith was not an obvious candidate for the kingship.<sup>88</sup> If he had indeed spent all, or most, of his life among the Irish, Aldfrith would have been, to all intents and purposes, an Irishman.<sup>89</sup> Culturally and linguistically, Flann Fína was the man who came to take the throne of Northumbria, but Aldfrith is the man who is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon sources. It would have taken a concerted effort to present this man as an Anglo-Saxon, and he must have had a great deal of support to bring about his succession.

It has been debated whether Aldfrith achieved the kingship of Northumbria through external, possibly Irish, support, or through internal, Northumbria support - for aid there must have been to put a relative outsider at the head of the kingdom. There are two ways to look at this problem, one seeing Aldfrith's accession as that of an accepted royal successor, possibly even the acknowledged successor of Ecgrith, and another perceiving the new king as an outsider. Yorke argues for the first side, believing that Ecgrith and his family were behind Aldfrith's succession, and looking to the exchange between Cuthbert and Ælfflæd, Ecgrith's sister, to support this. She sees Cuthbert's naming of Aldfrith as Ecgrith's successor as a demonstration of his acceptance by Ecgrith and his family, and Cuthbert's subsequent elevation to bishop as evidence of Ecgrith's favour.<sup>90</sup> It is surprising, then, that no Anglo-Saxon source records any direct interaction between Cuthbert and Aldfrith, which one would expect had the bishop indeed been involved in his accession.<sup>91</sup> It is true that the Anglo-Saxon sources supply no evidence of conflict on Aldfrith's succession to the Northumbrian kingship, but such omissions are not unusual, particularly when the events in question were so recent. Moisl, on the other hand, views Aldfrith's accession as the product of a Pictish-Dál Riata alliance.<sup>92</sup> He invokes Ecgrith's attack on the Irish kingdom of Brega in 684 to support his theory that Ecgrith was aware of and hostile to his half-brother. While

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<sup>88</sup> *AVC* III.6; *PVC* 24; *MVC* 21. Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty', p. 121.

<sup>89</sup> Ireland offers an argument for the likelihood of Aldfrith remaining in Ireland with his mother's family: 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', p. 76. He refers to Irish laws that declared the child of an Irish mother and a *cú glass*, or an exile from overseas, is to be reared by its maternal family. See also Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 70, 86-87; Kathleen Mulchrone, 'The Rights and Duties of Women With Regard to the Education of Their Children', pp. 196-8, and D.A. Binchy, 'Appendix: Family Membership of Women', p. 182, in *Studies in Early Irish Law*, R. Thurneysen *et al.* (Dublin, 1936).

<sup>90</sup> Yorke, *Rex Doctissimus*, p. 8; *AVC* III.6; *PVC* 24.

<sup>91</sup> The fact that Cuthbert's information is relayed to Ælfflæd in cryptic references also takes from the theory that he was a proponent of Aldfrith, or that Aldfrith was the accepted successor of Ecgrith; surely, if these were fact, Cuthbert's exchange with Ælfflæd could have been more open and direct. Instead, both Bede and the anonymous author offer scenes of vague reference and interpretation.

<sup>92</sup> Moisl, 'The Bernician Royal Dynasty', p. 121.

outside support may well have played an important role in Aldfrith's accession, he could not have become king, let alone remained king for almost twenty years, without powerful noble support within Northumbria itself. While Wood makes a case for Jarrow hostility toward Aldfrith, viewing the monastery as one heavily involved with Ecgfrith and therefore opposed to his successor, viewing him as an interloper, the sources depict Aldfrith interacting smoothly with the ecclesiastical hierarchy during his reign, including that of Wearmouth-Jarrow.<sup>93</sup> In fact, Benedict Biscop, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, is happy to conclude with Aldfrith an arrangement made with Ecgfrith prior to his death.<sup>94</sup>

In any case, such continuity is seen in the changing reigns of many kings, even ones which saw a divergence in dynasty. The silence of the Northumbrian sources on possible conflict surrounding Aldfrith's succession cannot be taken as evidence of its absence; after all, works written during his reign are unlikely to criticise his achievement of the kingship.<sup>95</sup> Nor do the Irish sources clarify the process of Aldfrith's accession. However, the fact that Aldfrith was on Iona only a year before Ecgfrith's death must be significant, and his association with Adomnán adds to the impression that Iona (and particularly Adomnán) had a part in events after Ecgfrith's death.<sup>96</sup> Symeon of Durham, writing in the twelfth century, declared that Ecgfrith was buried on Iona, and Wood has posited an arrangement that saw the Iona community take responsibility for Ecgfrith's body, perhaps as part of the return of hostages in which Adomnán was involved.<sup>97</sup> This seems very unlikely, given Ecgfrith's adherence to the orthodox practices of Northumbria rather than Columban traditions, but it may be a late echo of awareness that Iona was involved in the process that saw Aldfrith succeed his brother.

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<sup>93</sup> Ian Wood, *The Origins of Jarrow: The Monastery, the Slake and Ecgfrith's Minster, Bede's World Studies* 1 (Jarrow, 2008), pp. 11, 14. Wood thinks that the silence of Bede and the author of the *Vita Ceolfredi* on Ecgfrith's strong links with Jarrow may be due to hostility toward him in his last years (p. 30) – but would one not expect more positivity toward his successor, then?

<sup>94</sup> HA 15.

<sup>95</sup> While Wood wonders about Iurminburgh's hurry back to Bamburgh after Ecgfrith's death: Wood, *Origins of Jarrow*, p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> Immo Warntjes sees Adomnán as a vital part of the process by which Aldfrith became king of Northumbria: 'The Role of the Church in Early Irish Regnal Succession – the Case of Iona', *L'Irlanda e gli Irlandesi nell'Alto Medioevo, Settimane di Studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 57 (2010), pp. 178, 180-2.

<sup>97</sup> Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio* I.9, p. 46; Wood, *Origins of Jarrow*, p. 29. Ó Cróinín disagrees with this possibility, *The Kings Depart: The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon Royal Exile in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries, ASNC Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Gaelic History* 8 (2007), p. 15, n. 65, while Pádraig Ó Riain sees it as a possible explanation for the appearance of Ecgfrith in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, in *Anglo-Saxon Ireland*, p. 12.

When Ælfflæd meets Cuthbert on Coquet Island, the saint tells her that Ecgrith will die in a year's time.<sup>98</sup> His death occurred in May of 685, placing this meeting, and so Aldfrith's presence on Iona, in mid-684, probably just before he sent an attack on Brega in June of 684. This close conjunction looks like more than coincidence, and it is possible that Aldfrith had located to Iona to avoid his half-brother's attack. Of course, it is also possible that Aldfrith's move to Iona in fact motivated Ecgrith's actions.<sup>99</sup> One wonders what spurred Ælfflæd to ask this question of Cuthbert; it must have been a pressing need to motivate her to ask Cuthbert to travel some twenty miles to Coquet Island (and travel almost seventy miles by sea herself) to find out who would succeed Ecgrith. The urgency implied by both the anonymous and Bede's lives indicate that this was essential information, pertinent to the time. Ecgrith's raid on Ireland, or the prospect of it, could have prompted her to draw on Cuthbert's knowledge, based on his Irish connections.<sup>100</sup> Even if one sees this meeting on Coquet Island as a hagiographical construct, the creation of such a scene points to agitation within Northumbria regarding Ecgrith's heir. Bede tells us that Ecgrith attempted to persuade Ecgrith not to attack Brega, on the grounds that such a hostile act was unnecessary against the innocent and friendly Irish, and Bede's depiction of the Irish here implies that this was the attitude in Northumbria.<sup>101</sup> This Northumbrian opposition to Ecgrith's raid supports the premise that the king was firing a shot across the bows of the Irish, as it were – warning them not to challenge him, rather than necessarily reacting to conspiracies against him. It is tempting to see Ecgrith's attack on Ireland as a sign of his awareness of and hostility to Aldfrith, but that is not evidence that Aldfrith was necessarily a threat at the time.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *AVC* III.6: *numquid non paruum est licet aliquis uiuat xii menses? Illa uero statim arripiens mente de rege esse dictum* [is it not but a short time though a man were to live twelve months? She immediately realised that he spoke of the king [Ecgrith]]; *PVC* 24: *quanto magis is cui unius solum anni uita superest breui uidetur tempore uixisse, ubi mors astiterit in ianuis?* [how much more does he, to whom only one year of life remains, seem to have lived a short time, when death stands at the gates?].

<sup>99</sup> While Bede is vaguer on Aldfrith's location, merely mentioning regions and islands of the Irish, there is no reason to doubt the anonymous *Vita*'s earlier reference to Iona, particularly as the text was written during Aldfrith's lifetime.

<sup>100</sup> Cuthbert surely had Irish connections, stemming from his time at the monastery of Melrose, and later his time at Lindisfarne.

<sup>101</sup> Ecgrith's raid was evidently known of beforehand in parts of Ireland. *HE* IV.26: Bede castigates Ecgrith for attacking the innocent Irish, and records Ecgrith's opposition to the raid. Ó Cróinín believes Ecgrith and Ecgrith, linked through the *Ecg*- element of their names, may have been related: *The Kings Depart*, pp. 17-8. The nobles of Northumbria comprise a heavily interrelated group, and such a connection is plausible, but unprovable.

<sup>102</sup> Wood, *Origins of Jarrow*, p.7; A. O. Anderson, *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers, A.D. 500 to 1286* (Stamford, 1991), p. 43.

The attack could also be seen in the light of Ecgrith's aggressively expansionist policies, and this attitude chimes with scholarship that sees Aldfrith's succession as the obvious next step for the Bernician dynasty.<sup>103</sup> However, while Ecgrith's attacks on neighbouring kingdoms can certainly be explained in this manner, his dispatching of a raiding party across the sea to Brega is not so simply dismissed.<sup>104</sup> Kirby notes links between this attack and the battle with the Picts a year later, and posits Irish support for the Picts in their conflict with the Northumbrians, but this is difficult to substantiate in the Irish sources.<sup>105</sup> Such aggression can only have contributed to opposition to him, perhaps at home as well as elsewhere, particularly if Ecgrith's raid on Brega was unwarranted, as Bede's words imply. Bede writes that Irish 'imprecations' contributed toward Ecgrith's demise a year later, and this looks like a veiled reference to an Irish reaction to the attack that played a part in how events played out in Pictland in 685. That the raid attacked *plurimas aeclesias* is remarked on in the annals, and may suggest the intent of intimidating the church, and a connection between Adomnán and Fínsnechta Fledach, king of Brega at the time of the attack, could at least partly explain Ecgrith's target.<sup>106</sup> Adomnán's 'mission from his people' which brought him to Aldfrith's court at Northumbria c. 687 must have been the

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<sup>103</sup> Charles-Edwards observes that Ecgrith's raid targeted Brega, ruled by Fínsnechta Fledach of the southern Uí Néill, and so focused on "the principal centre of political power in the northern half of Ireland": *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 433. He also proposes a possibly religious dimension to the attack (p. 435), but there is no evidence that this was the motivation for Ecgrith himself. Maney suggests that mid-land politics were at the heart of Ecgrith's motivation, and remarks that Fínsnechta Fledach's temporary abdication in 688 may be linked to Adomnán's mission in Northumbria: Laurance J. Maney, 'Rethinking the Political Narrative of Medieval Ireland: The Hagiographer as Witness', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 15 (1995), p. 94.

<sup>104</sup> The 684 attack on Brega was no forgettable affair, and is thought to be referenced in two Old Irish texts: *Crith Gablach*, ed. David A. Binchy (Dublin, 1941), l. 523, p. xiv; *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* 35, in Edel Bhreathnach and Kevin Murray, *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig: Edition*, *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. Edel Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp. 73-99. Patrick Wadden argues, unconvincingly, that Ecgrith's attack was imperialist in nature, and joined political aspirations with religious domination, seeking to impose Roman orthodoxy on the north of Ireland: 'The First English Invasion: Irish Responses to the Northumbrian Attack on Brega, 684', *Ríocht na Midhe* 21 (2010), pp. 10-12. He does, however, make a case for the legacy of the attack in Irish materials, pp. 12-25.

<sup>105</sup> Kirby notes that the same family, Beornhæth and Berht, appear to be involved in both the 684 and the 685 clashes: *Earliest English Kings*, p. 100. Fraser suggests a possible alliance between Fínsnechta Fledach and the British Alt Clut (later Strathclyde) might have prompted the Northumbrian attack on Brega: *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 201, 244. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* at 680, late and problematic though they are, attribute the Northumbrian attack to fear of an Irish-British alliance: *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, ed. Denis Murphy (Dublin, 1896; repr. 1993).

<sup>106</sup> Bede also draws attention to the fact that Ecgrith's raid "spared neither churches nor monasteries": *HE* IV.26, *ita ut ne ecclesiis quidem aut monasteriis manus parceret hostilis*; *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* 67 includes stories closely linking Adomnán to the king, though these must be viewed with some scepticism due to the somewhat unreliable nature of these annals. Maney mentions Adomnán's "disdain" for Fínsnechta Fledach, but fails to provide explanation for this: Laurance J. Maney, 'High Kings and Pipe Dreams: Revisiting John Vincent Kelleher's Theory of Revision to the Early Irish Annals', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 24/25 (2004/2005), pp. 260-1.

negotiation for the release of prisoners taken in this raid.<sup>107</sup> That Adomnán was given such a role indicates, at the very least, a degree of trust between him and Fínsnechta, whose people those prisoners were.<sup>108</sup> Ecgfrith's actions must have generated massive ill-will in Ireland, and one can easily conjecture Irish support for the Picts against Ecgfrith after 684, if not before. One can also reason that a successor to Ecgfrith who would bring stability to the kingdom and who would have positive relations with the Irish would have been welcome to some both at home and abroad. It is very likely that the Anglo-Saxon sources which skip over Aldfrith's actual succession are concealing a difficult transition. This is not irreconcilable with Yorke's views on the involvement of Cuthbert, as there must have been Northumbrian support of some sort (or at some point) to install Aldfrith as king, but the position that Aldfrith was the chosen successor of Ecgfrith and part of the Bernician royal family's plans for its dynastic survival is not underpinned by the sources available to us.

None of the Anglo-Saxon sources that mention Aldfrith make any reference to his Irish background. Irish connections are, however, evident, such as his relationship with Adomnán, abbot of Iona. Adomnán calls Aldfrith *amicus* (friend) in his *Vita Columbae*, and made at least two visits to Aldfrith's court in the 680s.<sup>109</sup> The first of these, the Irish annals record, saw him gaining the return of hostages. On one of these visits, Bede tells us, Adomnán was persuaded to give up his allegiance to the Columban traditions regarding Easter, and adopt orthodox Roman practices. Although Aldfrith is not explicitly connected with this process, it occurs in the context of Adomnán's visit to him, and his support of the process is implicit. To an extent, Aldfrith can be compared to Aldhelm, who demonstrates many Irish connections; the king maintained a strong link to Ireland and to the Irish throughout his reign, though only scraps of this remain in the Anglo-Saxon texts.<sup>110</sup>

Despite the apparent suppression of Aldfrith's Irish background in the contemporary Anglo-Saxon material, his dual ethnicity must have been widely known. Bede, whose youth coincides with Aldfrith's reign, must have been fully aware of the

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<sup>107</sup> *HE* V.15: *Adamnan...cum legationis gratia missus a sua gente; AU* 687: *Adomnanus captiuos reduxit ad Hiberniam .lx.*

<sup>108</sup> Ailbhe Mac Shamhráin is unconvinced that this mission is evidence of good relations between Adomnán and Fínsnechta: '*Nebulae Discutiuntur?*: The Emergence of Clann Cholmáin, Sixth-Eighth Centuries', in *Seanchas: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne*, ed. Alfred P. Smyth (Dublin, 2000), p. 87.

<sup>109</sup> *VC* II.46.

<sup>110</sup> See Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', pp. 26-7; Yorke, 'Aldhelm's Irish and British Connections', pp. 169-75.

Irish element in Aldfrith's make-up and history, yet he omits it. One of the most obvious reasons for this would probably have been Aldfrith's own suppression of that aspect of his background. In taking the kingship of Northumbria, Aldfrith had to commit himself entirely to it. This is not to say that he severed all ties with his old life, far from it, but it must have been essential to present himself to the nobles of Northumbria as one with a legitimate claim on the kingship. While Oswiu's paternity offered this claim, his acceptance among Northumbrians would have necessitated a playing-up of his Anglo-Saxon heritage, and perhaps a playing-down of his Irishness. An obvious question to ask concerning Aldfrith is why, considering his demonstrably strong relationship with Adomnán, he is not a guarantor of the *Lex innocentium*?<sup>111</sup> He would not have been the only king from outside Ireland, or the even only Anglo-Saxon, to do so. The answer may lie in his need to distance himself in some aspects of his kingship from his Irish roots.

There are elements in his life, however, that may be construed as hints at his background, and it would be naive to suggest that his Irish background would not have affected the manner in which he was depicted by contemporaries. Bede tells us that he often went to hear Drythelm tell of his visionary journey when he was near the monastery of Melrose.<sup>112</sup> Aldfrith was, in fact, responsible for Drythelm's entrance into the monastic life at that monastery. Having listened "gladly and attentively" to the visionary's tale, the king orchestrated his acceptance into the monastery, where he was tonsured. Melrose, as discussed below, is a monastery with strong Irish connections. That Aldfrith chose this monastery in particular must indicate something of his, or its, leanings; it was certainly not the only option available. Melrose had been a place of Columban affiliations, and its brethren came into conflict with Wilfrid *c.* 661, though it certainly adopted orthodox practices along with the rest of the kingdom in the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby. Eata, a disciple of Aidan, had been abbot there, though when he died in 686 he was bishop of Hexham. It is plausible that Melrose would have maintained an affection for its past, and that Aldfrith installed Drythelm at a monastery friendly to those with Irish connections. His own time spent at Iona cannot be discounted in this context, and it is worth noting that Hæmgisl, Bede's source for the story of Drythelm, had been at Melrose before travelling to Ireland. In addition,

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<sup>111</sup> Interestingly, the twelfth-century material added to the text of the *Lex innocentium* relates that the sight of a battlefield in Brega helped inspire Adomnán's law: Barbara Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain, 600-800* (Harlow, 2006), p. 234: Ath Drochait in Uaithne in Ui Aido Odba in the south of Brega.

<sup>112</sup> *HE* V.12.

Bede's tale of Drythelm's interaction with the king inserts a quiet note of praise for the ruler, as Bede states that Drythelm told his story only to those who feared eternal damnation and would use his words as "a means of spiritual advancement".<sup>113</sup> Aldfrith seems connected especially to Melrose and to Lindisfarne, and Æthelwald, abbot of Melrose at the time of Drythelm's entrance, later became bishop of Lindisfarne.<sup>114</sup>

If one compares Aldfrith to his predecessors on the throne of Northumbria, as depicted in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, one can see a lesser role for him in the grand narrative Bede has constructed. While quantitative comparisons can be clumsy, and of limited use in a work like the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the results are worth looking at: Aldfrith is mentioned in ten chapters; Ecgfrith is mentioned in fifteen chapters, Oswiu and Oswald in sixteen chapters each, and Edwin in twenty-two chapters.<sup>115</sup> This is consistent with a general trend within the *Historia Ecclesiastica* which offers progressively less information as the chronology approaches Bede's own time (Ceolwulf, dedicatee of the text, is barely mentioned at all). Yet that does not fully explain the way in which Aldfrith is depicted. There is no doubt that Aldfrith is unique among the kings of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: his high level of learning sets him apart from the preceding Northumbrian kings, and indeed from any Anglo-Saxon king Bede discusses.<sup>116</sup> But despite this particular achievement, which Bede is happy to mention yet does not expand upon, Aldfrith is not the inspirational figure one might expect from the pen of a scholar like Bede. Even his role in the convincing of Adomnán to substitute the Dionysiac Easter for his 84-year cycle is negligible, while Bede is happy to involve Oswald in the conversion of the Northumbrians.<sup>117</sup>

Just as Boisil's part in the conversion of the Iona community to orthodoxy required the suppression of his Irishness (discussed below), is it possible that Aldfrith's

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<sup>113</sup> *HE* V.12: *Haec et alia quae uiderat idem uir Domini, non omnibus passim desidiosis ac uitae suae incuriosis referre uolebat, sed illis solummodo qui uel tormentorum metu perterriti uel spe gaudiorum perennium delectati profectum pietatis ex eius uerbis haurire uolebant.*

<sup>114</sup> His link with Lindisfarne is demonstrated by the Lindisfarne-written anonymous *Vita Cuthberti's* association of Aldfrith with the saint, and its positive words about him.

<sup>115</sup> See Appendix 3 below. It is interesting to see that the three latest kings are mentioned very little, even Ceolwulf, to whom the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is dedicated. It is also notable that Eadwulf goes unremarked in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and is only recorded in Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*, a telling reminder that Bede is an author unafraid to editorialise.

<sup>116</sup> The only other king who takes even an interest in education is Sigeberht of East Anglia, who was involved in setting up a school at which young men could be educated in literature. *HE* III.18: *instituit scolam, in qua pueri litteris erudirentur.* One should note Nechtan's interest in Easter reckoning here (*HE* V.21), but it is not presented like Aldfrith's interest in Scripture: see Chapter Seven.

<sup>117</sup> *HE* III.3, V.15: Adomnán visits Aldfrith, and while there is persuaded by many who were learned not to oppose the customs of the Church [*a pluribus, qui erant eruditiores, esset solerter admonitus...*], while Oswald is instigator and translator for the Iona mission to Northumbria.

well-known Irish background necessitated his marginalisation from the proceedings that saw the abbot of Iona convinced of the superiority of Northumbrian traditions over his own? There should be no doubt but that Aldfrith was orthodox in his practices at least by the time he became king. As a man schooled in Scripture, he must have taken a great interest in such matters, and part of his assimilation to Northumbria culture would certainly have included adherence to the appropriate set of church customs. His positive relations with Wilfrid early in his royal career indicate that he was orthodox in outlook (and not even the hostile *Vita Wilfridi* questions his Easter practices or calls him Irish), and his links with Aldhelm support this.<sup>118</sup> His later exiling of Wilfrid is never explained by Bede, though Stephen of Ripon attributes it to disagreements over church and monastic properties, but several options are possible:<sup>119</sup> Wilfrid may have found Aldfrith's continued Irish connections, particularly with Adomnán, unseemly; Wilfrid's difficult nature may have made him impossible to deal with; or Wilfrid's fraught relationship with Lindisfarne may have alienated him from the king. Stephen of Ripon admits that even before Aldfrith banished Wilfrid from the kingdom c 691, there had been on-going tension between them.<sup>120</sup>

Despite these issues, Bede is not truly critical of the king. While Bede's comment on the ebbing away of the strength of the kingdom from the death of Ecgrith has been seen as a criticism of Aldfrith's reign, Higham correctly views it as a reflection on Ecgrith's failings. Aldfrith's reign, though over a smaller kingdom, was more admirable.<sup>121</sup> Bede's description is telling, stating that Aldfrith "ably restored the shattered state of the kingdom although within narrower bounds".<sup>122</sup> In his well-known *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, Bede claims that the thirty years since Aldfrith's death have seen a collapse in the monastic life of Northumbria, with noble men and their wives setting up monasteries without a care for true religious values or the religious life.<sup>123</sup> That Aldfrith's death is given as the start of this decline must be taken as an

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<sup>118</sup> Aldhelm was a supporter of Wilfrid, as the letter he wrote encouraging the exiled bishops' abbots to remain loyal shows, and a strong proponent of orthodoxy, as his *Epistola ad Geruntium* reveals. This letter was a powerful critique of the Easter and tonsure customs of the British clergy in Dumnonia. See *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 155-60.

<sup>119</sup> VW 45: *et sic iterum in concordia atque iterum in discordia alternatim per multos annos in tali vicissitudine viventes manebant...*

<sup>120</sup> PVC 40: Bede tells us here that the year after Cuthbert's death saw so much conflict and division at Lindisfarne that many monks left the monastery. His *HE* V.29 states that Wilfrid took over the bishopric of Lindisfarne for a year after Cuthbert's death, until Eadberht was appointed in 688.

<sup>121</sup> Higham, *(Re-) Reading Bede*, p. 166.

<sup>122</sup> *HE* IV.26: *...destructumque regni statum, quamvis intra fines angustiores, nobiliter recuperavit.*

<sup>123</sup> *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 13: *Sic per annos circiter triginta, hoc est, ex quo Aldfrid rex humanis rebus ablatus est, prouincia nostra uesano illo errore dementata est...*

acknowledgement of Aldfrith's positive influence, and perhaps a hint at his involvement with the church. Although Bede presents Aldfrith's death with his rejection of relations with Wilfrid, unlike Ecgrith, whose death is explicitly conceived as divine vengeance for his raid on Ireland, Bede does not create a causal relationship between Aldfrith's scorning of Wilfrid and his death.<sup>124</sup> Bede shows Aldfrith interacting with Adomnán, admirable for his writing and for his conversion to the orthodox Easter;<sup>125</sup> with Benedict Biscop, with whom he arranged the exchange of land for a book; and with Ceolfrith, with whom this transaction was carried out.<sup>126</sup> Aldfrith confirms, with the bishops, the papal privilege Ceolfrith obtained for Wearmouth-Jarrow, and was associated with a monk named Witmar who was old, devout, and as learned in secular knowledge as he was in Scripture.<sup>127</sup>

The issue with Aldfrith's presentation in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is that the reader expects more from Bede. We expect Bede to set Aldfrith up as a paragon of kingly excellence, a man of learning, a man of peace, and a man of religion. Such expectations have led to accusations of marginalisation at the hands of Bede, and his references to the king's illegitimacy have not improved matters. In is undeniable that Aldfrith's Irish background posed a problem to Bede, but he was not alone in his manner of dealing with it: like the Lindisfarne-written anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, Bede's works avoided the issue. They included references to Aldfrith's time among the Irish and to his Irish connections, but at no point is he portrayed as what we now believe him to be: a man of both Irish and Anglo-Saxon heritage whose upbringing appears to have been more Irish than Anglo-Saxon, yet who reigned for almost twenty years in Northumbria. This element of Aldfrith's life *is* marginalised in Bede's work, and unsurprisingly so, given the text's aim of presenting a narrative of the Anglo-Saxons, centred on Northumbria, maturing as a Church and coming into their own. Such an evasion as to Aldfrith's true make-up should not be seen as negativity on the part of Bede toward the Irish, but as a component in both Bede's construction of his narrative, and in Aldfrith's regnal policy. Bede's *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* is sometimes seen as his final say on issues in the church of his time, beyond the confines of a narrative thread, and his brief mention of *rex Aldfridus* in it is telling. Aldfrith's death

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<sup>124</sup> *HE* V.19. Stephen of Ripon, on the other hand, definitely does: *VW* 59.

<sup>125</sup> *HE* V.15.

<sup>126</sup> *HA* 15.

<sup>127</sup> *HA* 15: *ueteranus ac religiosus, et in omni tam saeculari quam scripturarum scientia eruditus.*

was the *terminus a quo* of a deterioration in the church, and given Bede's belief in the importance of kings to their churches, this seems compelling praise indeed.

### iii. Boisil

Not a great deal is known about Boisil, who appears in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in two separate contexts: he is the prior of the Northumbrian monastery of Old Melrose, at which Cuthbert began his monastic career; and, in a dream, he directs a monk of the Irish monastery of Rath Melsigi to convey a message to the Anglo-Saxon priest, Ecgberht, instructing him to go to Iona rather than to the Continent.<sup>128</sup> What little is known about him must be gleaned from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Bede's metrical and prose *Vitae Cuthberti*. He was prior and priest at Melrose during the abbacy of Eata, an early disciple of Aidan of Lindisfarne.<sup>129</sup> He held the position of prior at least as early as 651, the year in which Aidan died and the year in which Cuthbert joined the monastery.<sup>130</sup> He died of the plague, presumably in 664 or thereabouts, and Cuthbert succeeded him in the position.<sup>131</sup> Boisil is generally assumed to be an Anglo-Saxon monk, but there is reason to believe he was, in fact, Irish. This would place him among the few figures categorised here as Irish whose ethnicity is not specified by Bede. For the most part, Bede explicitly states when individuals were of Irish descent, but, in the case of Boisil, this designation is based on interpreted evidence, such as characteristics and context.

Colin Ireland has argued for the Irish ethnicity of Boisil in a largely overlooked article from 1986.<sup>132</sup> Ireland used onomastics to make this argument, and contends that the name Boisil is, in fact, an Irish form of Basilus. The early Irish generally referred to St Basil as Basil, Bassil, or Baisil, and a change from Baisil to Boisil is perfectly in keeping with Old Irish phonology.<sup>133</sup> Thurneysen, author of the

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<sup>128</sup> *HE* IV.27-8; *HE* V.9.

<sup>129</sup> *HE* III.26.

<sup>130</sup> *PVC* 4.

<sup>131</sup> Alan Thacker, in his entry on Boisil in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, suggests his death in 661, and draws attention to an article by C.A. Ralegh Radford which offers the fragments of an Anglo-Saxon shrine as the possible resting place for Boisil's remains: 'Two Scottish Shrines: Jedburgh and St. Andrews', *Archaeological Journal* 112 (1955), pp. 46-7. Alan Thacker, 'Boisil [St Boisil] (d. c.661)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2781>> [accessed 12 November 2012].

<sup>132</sup> Colin Ireland, 'Boisil: An Irishman Hidden in the Works of Bede,' *Peritia* 5 (1986), pp. 400-3. Michael Lapidge has acknowledged Ireland's argument, agreeing that Boisil's name is Irish in his commentary on his edition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *Storia degli Inglesi*, p. 645.

<sup>133</sup> Ireland, 'Boisil', p. 401. St Basil was well-known in the Insular world, and was referenced, for example, as Basilus by Bede in his *De Temporum Ratione* 5, and by Gildas in *De Excidio Britanniae* 75.

seminal *A Grammar of Old Irish*, supplies several examples that, although not personal names, demonstrate this exact change with the same labial *b*: *ball* (member) has a nominative plural in *boill* and *baill*, *brat* (cloak) becomes *brot*, etc. Ireland also points out that the Irish orthography seems to be preserved by Bede, as the first *-i-* of Boisil would not have been explicit through pronunciation.<sup>134</sup> This is not the only example of Bede preserving authentic Irish orthography – his spelling of Adomnán as *Adamnan* and *Adamnanus* suggests that he had seen the name written down.<sup>135</sup> If he had not, Paul Russell explains, the *d* fricative might have been spelled with a *ð*, and the bilabial nasal fricative *m* (*μ*) would probably have been spelled with a *b* or perhaps *f*.<sup>136</sup> As Colin Ireland remarks, Bede leaves Boisil's name uninflected in the text, and gives it a masculine second-declension *-us* ending in both his prose and poetic *Lives* of Cuthbert; both decisions are in keeping with how he deals with foreign names.<sup>137</sup> Of course, the fact that this version of the name Baisil is unattested in Irish sources creates a problem, but it does not disqualify Boisil as an Irish appellation. The *Dictionary of the Irish Language* records several words that fit the same pattern: *bas* (palm, hand, etc.) rendered as *bois*; *baiscell* (wild, creature, hind) as *boiscell* and *boiscill*; and *baiseóc* (slap, cuff) as *boiseóc*, to name but a few with similar letters to Boisil.<sup>138</sup> Clearly, Baisil becoming Boisil was technically quite possible in an Old Irish context.<sup>139</sup> Although the early Irish did not commonly use saints' names as personal names, the example of the Irish Augustine, author of *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*, reveals its possibility.<sup>140</sup> An Irishman named after Basil is not an impossibility, and the fact that Basil is name-

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Basil's monastic rule had come to the notice of the Irish early on through Rufinus's Latin translation: Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 286-7; Ireland, 'Boisil', p. 403. Ireland quotes Thurneyson's *A Grammar of Old Irish* 80a to explain this, showing that an *a* between a labial and a palatal or u-quality consonant often becomes an *o*: Rudolf Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, trans. D.A. Binchy and Osborn Bergin (Dublin, 1946), p. 50. For an explanation of the phonological process involved, see Peter Schrijver, 'Vowel Rounding by Primitive Irish Labiovelars', *Ériu* 50 (1999), pp. 133-7.

<sup>134</sup> Ireland, 'Boisil', p. 403.

<sup>135</sup> *HE* IV.25, V.15; If he had not seen these names written down, he must at least have been able to check the spelling with an Irish-speaker. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* also contains some examples of correctly-spelled Irish place-names, such as Rath Melsigi (*HE* III.27) and Mag Eó (*HE* IV.4).

<sup>136</sup> Paul Russell, 'Ye Shall Know Them by their Names': Names and Identity Among the Irish and English', in *Anglo-Saxon/Irish relations Before the Vikings*, pp. 104-5. Russell does not, however, include Boisil among the Irish names in his discussion of the Durham *Liber Vitae*.

<sup>137</sup> Ireland, 'Boisil', p. 401: *HE* V.9; *PVC* 6; *MVC* 20.

<sup>138</sup> *Bas*, Column, 40, l. 46; *Baiscell*, Column 20, l. 5; *Baiseóc*, Column 20, l. 28; Ernest G. Quin (ed.), *Dictionary of the Irish Language: Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Dublin, 1983), <<http://www.dil.ie>> [accessed 21 November 2011].

<sup>139</sup> I am very grateful to Dr. Jacopo Bisagni, Dr. Frances McCormack, and Professor Máirín Ó Dhonnchadha for their invaluable help and suggestions in this matter.

<sup>140</sup> Ó Muraile, 'The Columban Onomastic Legacy', p. 195; Augustinus Hibernicus, *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*, *PL* 35, cols. 2149-200.

checked in the *Amrae Coluimb Chille*, revealing that this saint was esteemed at Iona, adds to this theory.<sup>141</sup> Charles-Edwards has commented that the Rule of Basil may have been influential at Iona in its early years, and he looks in particular at its preference for a prior (as Boisil was at Melrose).<sup>142</sup>

Against this interpretation of Boisil rests the usual assumption that he is, like most of the persons named by Bede, an Anglo-Saxon. Insley and Rollason explain Boisil as an i-mutated diminutive form of the Old English name Bosa with a strong *-ila* suffix, and equate it with the name of Bosel, bishop to the Hwicce.<sup>143</sup> They cite this explanation of the name from Ström's investigation into the names in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, though he mentions that both Boisil and Bosel are accepted as Celtic names elsewhere.<sup>144</sup> Although Ström does take Boisil to be an Anglo-Saxon name, he admits the peculiarity of the spelling. He also states that the *-oi-* of Boisil (and other names like Coifi) has a different origin from the usual variant between *Coin-* and *Coen-*.<sup>145</sup> In addition, the name Boisil is very stable in its orthography, as is the name Bosel.<sup>146</sup> There are evident difficulties, therefore, in describing Boisil as an Anglo-Saxon name, and a variant of Bosel. Manuscripts of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* consistently differentiate between Boisil and Bosel in spelling; Bede's careful orthography makes clear that these are two separate names.<sup>147</sup> Ström remarks that by Bede's time *-oi-* would most likely have been pronounced as a simple vowel,<sup>148</sup> making these two, near contemporary, forms all the more unnecessary. It would be possible for two forms of a name to exist, one with the i-mutation, and an earlier form without, but the fact that Boisil is earlier than Bosel undermines this, as does Bede's apparent ignorance of the two names being the same. Furthermore, suffixes that might cause i-

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<sup>141</sup> *Amrae Coluimb Chille* 4: *Ar-bert Bassil bráthu* [He applied Basil's judgements]: Jacopo Bisagni, *Amrae Coluimb Chille: A Critical Edition* (unpublished doctoral thesis, NUI Galway, 2008), pp. 263-4.

<sup>142</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 287.

<sup>143</sup> John Insley and David Rollason, 'English Monothematic Names', ed. David Rollason, *The Durham Liber Vitae II* (London, 2007), p. 170. Bosel, bishop of the Hwicce, appears at *HE* IV.23.

<sup>144</sup> Hilmer Ström, *Old English Personal Names in Bede's History: An Etymological-Phonological Investigation* (Lund, 1939), p. 66, n. 1. Mats Redin follows the opinion of A. Holder, who includes Boisil in his *Alt-Celtischer Sprachschatz I* (Leipzig, 1896), p. 475; Redin, *Studies on Uncompounded Personal Names in Old English* (Uppsala, 1919), p. 141.

<sup>145</sup> Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, p. 144.

<sup>146</sup> For Boisil, the variant 'Bosil' or 'Boisel' occurs in Cotton Tiberius C. ii (C), a manuscript with many unusual forms: Ström, *Old English personal names*, p. 162. Plummer, whose edition of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* Ström utilised in his study, notes the difference between this manuscript and the other early ones on which his excellent edition is based: *Baedae Opera Historica I*, p. xciv.

<sup>147</sup> Sims-Williams disagrees, insisting that Boisil and Bosel are the same name in *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 102, n. 61.

<sup>148</sup> Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, p. 145.

mutations did not do so generally in personal names, even in the earlier period, and an *-il* suffix, as a diminutive or otherwise, is unlikely to occur as late as the seventh century.<sup>149</sup> Despite efforts to fit Boisil into an Anglo-Saxon pattern, an Irish origin for the name offers a reasonable alternative explanation for its spelling and inflection.

Even if Old Irish did not offer an alternative explanation, Boisil would be a problematic Anglo-Saxon name. Both Holder and Redin in the early twentieth century viewed Boisil (and, in fact, Bosel) as a Celtic name, and more recently Briggs has deemed this “probable”.<sup>150</sup> As Colin Ireland points out, the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, carried out around the late ninth century, spells his name as Boisel, Bosel, and Bōsel, and suggests that unfamiliarity may have led to this confusion.<sup>151</sup> If Boisil is an Irish name, the Old English translator may have been unfamiliar with the orthography, and, like later scholars, may have seen it as a variant spelling. The very fact that two different spellings are used within the same text may point to uncertainty over its form.<sup>152</sup> The ninth-century original core of the Durham *Liber Vitae* lists one Boesel, *presbyter*, among the *nomina anchoritarum*, and a Bosil and a Boesil among the *nomina clericorum*.<sup>153</sup> It is difficult to know whether any of these names refers to Boisil of Melrose, but, as the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* suggests, the orthography was rather susceptible to confusion by this time. However, as the text is believed to be Northumbrian in origin, discrepancies in the spelling of names cannot be attributed to dialectal differences.

Briggs and Gerchow have argued for Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow origins for the Durham *Liber Vitae*, respectively, though neither discussion has been conclusive.<sup>154</sup> Gerchow argues against a Lindisfarne origin by pointing out the prime position given to Benedict Biscop and his successor, Ceolfrith, and emphasises the

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<sup>149</sup> Roger Lass, *Old English: A Historical Linguistic Companion* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 63-4; Redin, *Studies on Uncompounded Personal Names*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>150</sup> For Holder and Redin, see above. Elizabeth Briggs, ‘Nothing But Names: The Original Core of the Durham *Liber Vitae*’, ed. David Rollason, A.J. Piper, Margaret Harvey, and Lynda Rollason, *The Durham Liber Vitae and its Context* (Woodbridge, 2004), p. 83.

<sup>151</sup> Ireland, ‘Boisil’, p. 401. One might note that both the Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and C have been described as being of more ‘southerly’ origins than Northumbria: Ström, *Old English Personal Names*, p. xxix; Colgrave and Mynors, Textual Introduction, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. xlii; Thomas Miller, Introduction, *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People I.1* (London, 1890; repr. 1959), p. lvii.

<sup>152</sup> While Bede, on the other hand, displays no such confusion in its form, or in differentiating it from Bosel.

<sup>153</sup> Donald and Lynda Rollason (eds.), *The Durham Liber Vitae I* (London, 2007), pp. 96, 112, 114.

<sup>154</sup> Briggs, ‘Nothing But Names’, pp.63-85, and Jan Gerchow, ‘The Origins of the Durham *Liber Vitae*’, pp. 45-61, in *The Durham Liber Vitae and its Context*.

near-total inclusion of Wearmouth-Jarrow abbots, compared to those of Lindisfarne.<sup>155</sup> Both of these monasteries would have had access to the works of Bede, so it is surprising to see references to Biscop, rather than the usual Wearmouth-Jarrow form of Benedictus, for Benedict Biscop, and there are some discrepancies over Wearmouth-Jarrow abbots listed in the work.<sup>156</sup> It is clear that, despite the Northumbrian background of the Durham *Liber Vitae*, it is a problematic text, and perhaps the variants of Boisil can be ascribed to this. The duplication of the name is not unique in this work, as individuals were sometimes inserted into more than one applicable category. Briggs warns, correctly, that as Boisil of Melrose is never named as an anchorite in the sources, Boesel the priest and anchorite should, strictly speaking, remain unidentified.<sup>157</sup> However, for the priest Boisil of Melrose to have been an anchorite is no great leap; the examples of Aidan and Cuthbert on Farne Island establish that Irishmen in Northumbria and members of the Melrose community had been anchorites, and Boisil fits within at least one, if not both, of these categories.<sup>158</sup> Of the category *clerici*, Briggs admits that it is rather obscure, and suggests that it may refer to secular clergy, in which case Bosil and Boesel seem less likely to refer to Boisil of Melrose.<sup>159</sup> However, the imprecise understanding of the grouping makes a definite decision on this impossible. Colin Ireland also mentions a poem from the very early twelfth century which uses Bede's spelling of Boisil.<sup>160</sup> This poem about Durham lists men of note whose remains are at that foundation, and names Boisil directly after *breoma bocera Bede* (the famous scholar Bede), and some lines down from Aidan of Lindisfarne; it is possible that the author had read Bede's work on Cuthbert, and derived the orthography from there.

Of course, the evidence offered above cannot overshadow the fact that, if Boisil is an Irish name, Boisil of Melrose is the only individual in the historical record to possess it, and, if it is in fact an Irish version of Basil, Bede is oblivious to it. In attempting to determine the ethnicity of Boisil, to the study of onomastics must be added an examination of his characteristics and context. Boisil first appears in the

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<sup>155</sup> Gerchow, *The Origins of the Durham Liber Vitae*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>156</sup> Briggs, 'Nothing But Names', p. 64.

<sup>157</sup> Elizabeth Briggs, with David Rollason and Andrew Wareham, 'Original Core', eds. David and Lynda Rollason, *The Durham Liber Vitae III* (London, 2007), p. 84.

<sup>158</sup> *HE* III.16; *HE* IV.28; *PVC* 17.

<sup>159</sup> Briggs, 'Original Core', p. 88.

<sup>160</sup> *Durham*, in *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse*, ed. and trans. Richard Hamer (London, 1970), p. 32; Ireland, 'Boisil', p. 401. The poem refers to *Boisil abbot* as Cuthbert's teacher.

*Historia Ecclesiastica* as the prior of the monastery of Melrose, to which Cuthbert applies to join the monastic life. Boisil is described by Bede as a priest of great virtue, and as possessing the power of prophecy.<sup>161</sup> Boisil is Cuthbert's instructor in Scripture, and one whose good example inspired the young monk.<sup>162</sup> Bede's *Prose Vita Cuthberti* records a significant instance of Boisil as a teacher of scripture to Cuthbert: on his deathbed, Boisil spent his final seven days elucidating the teachings of John's Gospel. Boisil had a book of seven gatherings, and they spent one day reading and discussing each one. Bede explains that they managed this so quickly (which is in itself a reflection of the time and effort that the exegete Bede expected to be spent upon such activities) because they dealt with the simple matters of faith which works by love, rather than with deeper and more contentious issues.<sup>163</sup> Bede is very positive about Boisil, whose attributes of setting a good example and of encouraging the study of Scripture mirror those of Aidan.<sup>164</sup>

Indeed, Bede makes an implicit connection between these two holy men in his prose *Vita Cuthberti*: Cuthbert is inspired to enter religious life by the sight of a soul of remarkable brightness being borne up to heaven, and later realises that the soul was that of Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne and a man of great virtue.<sup>165</sup> When describing Cuthbert's arrival at Melrose, Bede states that he might have gone to Lindisfarne, which possessed many holy men, but the sublime virtues of Boisil drew him to Melrose. Bede remarks that Cuthbert followed Boisil in his position of prior, and it is implied that he also followed him in his way of life. Bede emphasises the continuity between these two holy men: like Boisil, Cuthbert went out to the surrounding villages to preach the way of truth to those who were going astray. Cuthbert went out on these journeys on foot for the most part, and it is implied that Boisil did likewise. The other holy men associated with this preference for travelling on foot rather than on horseback are either Irish, in the case of Aidan, or under a strong Irish influence, as with Chad.<sup>166</sup> Cuthbert was later made prior of Lindisfarne by Eata, and he persevered in teaching

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<sup>161</sup> *HE* IV.27: *praepositus Boisil magnarum uirtutum et prophetiic spiritus sacerdos fuit.*

<sup>162</sup> *HE* IV.27 *Cudberct...scientiam ab eo scripturarum et bonorum operum sumsit exempla.*

<sup>163</sup> *PVC* 8: *...fidei quae per dilectionem operatur*; Galatians 5.6. Benedicta Ward has discussed the significance of this particular reading, pointing out that John's Gospel is about Christ's divinity and the contemplation of the mysteries of God: 'The spirituality of St Cuthbert', in *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, p. 70. This may perhaps be considered in light of Bede's emphasis on the importance of *caritas* and love in the role of the Irish.

<sup>164</sup> *HE* III.5 sees Aidan setting a good example through his actions and insisting on the study of the scriptures.

<sup>165</sup> *PVC* 4: *...anima claritatis eximia... Aidanum magnae utique uirtutis uirum...*

<sup>166</sup> *HE* III.5, 28, IV.3.

through the example of his own behaviour, just as his predecessor at Melrose had done. In recording this, Bede repeats the fact that at Lindisfarne the bishop lived a monastic life after the example of Aidan, whose practice is supported by the earlier example of Augustine of Canterbury, who was in turn encouraged to do so by none other than Gregory the Great.<sup>167</sup> Bede consistently makes links between Cuthbert and Aidan, emphasising implicitly the Irish influences on the former, and defending their holiness.

Bede, having mentioned Boisil's prophetic powers in his first reference, expands on this characteristic in the chapter of his prose life that recounts the death of the prior; Boisil is said to have predicted both his own death and the plague that brought it about, and also foretold to Cuthbert the progress of his future career. Bede explains that Cuthbert became bishop reluctantly, having been persuaded for the most part by Boisil's prophecy to him.<sup>168</sup> Colin Ireland lists Boisil's attributes of virtue, learning, foresight and intervention through dreams as support for his Irishness, labelling the last two characteristics, in particular, "suggestive of the Irish tradition of saints and holy men".<sup>169</sup> Whether such characteristics can be seen particularly indicative of the Irish is open to debate, as each of these features is manifest in many holy men mentioned by Bede, regardless of ethnicity. However, Ireland makes a valid point: Irishmen in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* perform miracles of foresight and have dream-visions, so these attributes are certainly not out of keeping with Bede's presentation of Irish figures.<sup>170</sup>

Why then, in light of Bede's very positive presentation of Boisil and the evidence that he was Irish, does Bede not include him in his gallery of pious Irishmen? And how might he justify such a decision? The explanation may rest in his very involvement with Cuthbert. The anonymous *Vita Cuthberti*, written some years before Bede's own accounts, makes absolutely no reference to Boisil, an extraordinary fact when one compares it to Bede's admiring description.<sup>171</sup> Though there are difficulties in arguing from silence, such an omission is certainly striking. The anonymous life is eager to stress Cuthbert's orthodoxy, going so far as to declare that he was tonsured in

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<sup>167</sup> *HE* IV.27. This is also discussed in *PVC* 16. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* explicitly references Augustine and Gregory here, alluding to Gregory's responses to Augustine as recorded in the *Libellus Responsionum* in *HE* I.27.

<sup>168</sup> *PVC* 8; *HE* IV.28.

<sup>169</sup> Ireland, 'Boisil', p. 401.

<sup>170</sup> Examples of Irishmen with prophetic powers and dream-visions include Fursa (*HE* III.19), Adomnán of Coldingham (*HE* IV.25), and Aidan (*HE* III.14, 15).

<sup>171</sup> It was written c. 700, while Bede's Metrical *Vita Cuthberti* was written c. 705-6, and his Prose *Vita Cuthberti* around 720.

the Roman fashion at Ripon, which is quietly refuted by Bede and, in any case, seems impossible given the chronology available to us.<sup>172</sup> It is concerned with presenting a wholly orthodox picture of the saint.<sup>173</sup> This desire to play down influences not in keeping with the portrayal of Cuthbert desired by the author must have also led to the erasure of the prior, a strong indication that Boisil was problematic; if he were Irish, the author's editorial decision is intelligible. If Boisil were Anglo-Saxon, the fact that he was prior at Melrose, a monastery that followed Columban customs, would not alone preclude him from appearing in Cuthbert's life.<sup>174</sup> After all, Eata, abbot of Melrose and disciple of Aidan, warrants a minor mention, as does even Aidan himself.<sup>175</sup> When Bede wrote his own versions, he included Boisil and emphasised his importance, but he omitted his ethnicity; perhaps it constituted a leap too far? This is not to say that there were not people who remembered or had heard of Boisil and his background, but Bede's is a discreet omission, rather than an explicit denial of any details.

Ray remarks on an instance in Bede's Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, where the Anglo-Saxon author justifies Stephen's inaccurate statement on the burial place of Jacob by stating that Stephen was less concerned with the historical details than with the point he was making. Ray states: "By then he was apparently at ease to think that the narrator, among other good men, is privileged to say what he knows is false if he does it in a high cause".<sup>176</sup> While failing to mention Boisil's ethnicity does not constitute a falsehood, excluding an awkward fact is an act of authorial intent. Between the anonymous *Vita* and Bede's versions can be seen a process of official forgetting and reinstatement, but it seems that certain elements did not merit remembering. After all, Cuthbert's characterisation as a great saint and unifying figure for the post-Synod of Whitby Northumbrian Church is of considerable importance to Bede's overall narrative. Cuthbert, it is interesting to note, is also kept out of the debate over Easter in the text. While his early adherence to Columban Christianity is quietly acknowledged through his presence at Melrose and his

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<sup>172</sup> *PVC* 6: Boisil, at Melrose, obtained permission from his abbot, Eata, to have Cuthbert tonsured and received into the community there. This was clearly not a Roman tonsure.

<sup>173</sup> Goffart sees this as 'sensitivity' to Wilfridian concerns, though orthodoxy would have been a wide interest: *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 268.

<sup>174</sup> While Bede makes reference to Melrose's community following "Irish ways" in *HE* III.25 and V.19, he does not actually name the monastery. It is only on reading *PVC* 8 that it becomes clear to the reader that it was the monastery of Melrose that was in question. This is an example of Bede's careful use of history, and his willingness to omit details that would take from his greater agenda.

<sup>175</sup> *AVC* III.1, I.5.

<sup>176</sup> Roger Ray, *Bede, Rhetoric, and the Creation of Christian Latin Culture*, Jarrow Lecture 1997, p. 7.

involvement in the early establishment of and then ousting from the monastery of Ripon, once the Synod of Whitby is over he is numbered among the orthodox. Not only is he among the orthodox, but he is a proponent of the new ways at Lindisfarne as prior, patiently persuading the remaining dubious inhabitants of the rectitude of the Roman customs.<sup>177</sup> This orthodoxy is essential to the way in which Cuthbert is described, and to openly admit that one of his greatest influences, the prior Boisil, was Irish, might have undermined the simplicity and certainty of his depiction. Of course, Cuthbert's Irish influences remain apparent, but are never permitted to take from his orthodoxy.<sup>178</sup> He is a conciliatory figure, whose unifying presence necessitates the exclusion of certain elements of his background, including Boisil's Irishness.<sup>179</sup>

Boisil's other inclusion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* further demonstrates the implications of his Irishness. He plays a vital role in a climactic event in Bede's tale – the conversion of Iona's monastic community to the orthodox Easter by the Anglo-Saxon priest, Ecgberht.<sup>180</sup> Ecgberht was a *peregrinus* at the monastery of Rath Melsigi in Ireland, permanently exiled from his homeland after a desperate vow made during an illness.<sup>181</sup> He had taken the decision to travel to the Continent with a view to converting the inhabitants of Germany, whence the Anglo-Saxons themselves had come, and, if this mission was unsuccessful, he had set upon continuing on to Rome on pilgrimage. Missionary endeavours were considered very worthy, and his admirable plan to either

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<sup>177</sup> PVC 16.

<sup>178</sup> Alan Thacker emphasises the "Irish flavour" of Cuthbert's life, particularly in the strong eremitic element in his piety, and his hermitage on Farne: 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, p. 112.

<sup>179</sup> The monastery of Melrose, called *Mailros* by Bede and the anonymous author of the *Vita Cuthberti* may be an Irish name, or, more likely, a British (or Cumbric) name. There is evidence that the Tweed valley saw more continuity than usual of the British church, and it is possible that Melrose was originally a British foundation: Clare Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians'', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford, 1995), pp. 78-9. It might well be argued that Boisil, given the belief that his name was Celtic (see above), might have been British, hence Bede and the anonymous author's omission of his ethnicity or of him entirely. However, it seems very improbable that Bede would speak so highly of Boisil if he were in fact a Briton, or include him in the pivotal moment involving Ecgberht and Iona, discussed below. Boisil's description is in keeping with the Irish figures presented by Bede, not with the British. If a British figure had indeed displayed the charity to encourage the conversion of the Iona community, it seems likely Bede would have pointed to him to contrast with the majority of his people, as he did with Ninian (*HE* III.4). See also Kenneth Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain: A Chronological Survey of the Brittonic Languages, 1st to 12th century A.D.* (Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 326-7, who argues that Bede's orthography for *Mailros* may draw on Irish influences; Hall, 'Interlinguistic Communication', pp. 67-8.

<sup>180</sup> *HE* V.9.

<sup>181</sup> Rath Melsigi is identified as Clonmelsh, Co. Carlow, in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín's article, 'Rath Melsigi, Willibrord, and the Earliest Echternach Manuscripts', *Peritia* 3 (1984), p.23; Ecgberht was very ill during the plague of 664, and vowed never to return home if he were cured, but to devote his life to the service of God in exile: *HE* V.9.

convert the Anglo-Saxons' pagan cousins or travel to the central city of Christendom cannot be faulted as an orthodox and pious intention, but it was not to be his fate. When the preparations were complete, Boisil appears in a dream to a monk at the same monastery of Rath Melsigi, asking if the dreamer recognised him. Having previously been a disciple and student of Boisil at Melrose, the monk quickly established his identity, and was told that Boisil was the deliverer of a reply to Ecgberht, who had obviously been praying for guidance on his planned journey. Boisil's message was that Ecgberht could not go to the Continent, but must instead go and instruct the monasteries of Columba in the true faith. The message is (correctly) phrased as a divine command, with Boisil as the delegated messenger. Though fearful of the truth of this dream, Ecgberht asked the monk to keep the information to himself. Bede says that he feared it was an illusion, and indeed, care in telling the difference between divine commands and illusions was important for early Christians.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, Bede leaves the reader in little doubt as to the veracity of the instruction.

Some days later, the monk had another dream of the Melrose prior, where the latter demanded why he had delivered his message so lukewarmly, and insisting that, regardless of his own inclinations, Ecgberht must go to Columba's monasteries and bring them back to the right path, for they were "ploughing a crooked furrow", as Colgrave and Mynors translate it.<sup>183</sup> In Scripture, Luke 9.62 says that no one who looks back, having put his hand on the plough, is fit for the kingdom of God.<sup>184</sup> This image is discussed by both Jerome and Gregory I in their commentaries on Ezekiel, texts familiar to Bede.<sup>185</sup> Their examination of the text stresses the importance of not being drawn back into the world once committed to the Christian life, and Bede makes the same point in his own commentary on Luke.<sup>186</sup> Bede does not quote Luke's Gospel directly in this passage, instead using the image of the plough to implicitly refer to Scripture. Boisil indicates, through the metaphor of the plough being incorrectly driven, that the Columban community on Iona were busying themselves with the Christian life,

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<sup>182</sup> See Lisa M. Bitel, "'In Visu Noctis': Dreams in European Hagiography and Histories, 450-900", *History of Religions* 30.1 (1991), pp. 46-7, 50.

<sup>183</sup> *HE* V.9: Boisil warns that ...*aratra eorum non recte incedunt*, and that Ecgberht must *eum ad rectum haec tramitem reuocare*. More literally, it can be translated as 'they are not pushing ploughs correctly.'

<sup>184</sup> Luke 9.62: "Jesus said to him: No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

<sup>185</sup> Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem* 14, in *CCSL* 75, ed. F. Glorie (Turnhout, 1964); Gregory I, *Homiliae in Hiezechielem prophetam* III, in *CCSL* 142, ed. A. Adriaen (Turnhout, 1971).

<sup>186</sup> Bede, *In Lucae Evangelium Expositio* III.9, in *CCSL* 120, ed. D. Hurst (Turnhout, 1960).

but that error was causing them to do so imperfectly.<sup>187</sup> Bede's Commentary on Luke explains the significance of the plough as an instrument to reveal good works:<sup>188</sup> the Columbans on Iona were behaving like good Christians, but, through their methods of calculating the date of Easter and the form of their tonsure, they were doing so *non recte*. Plummer, in his notes to this chapter, draws attention to Bede's letter to Acca on Isaiah 24.22, in which he writes of the plough of heretical deception, but Boisil's words here are not so harsh a reproof.<sup>189</sup> Rather, Boisil's description of the plight of the Columbans is urgent in its desire to aid and correct them. Plummer also likens the figure of the plough being incorrectly driven to the vision in the Irish lives of Brigit, where the progress of the four gospels is likened to four ploughs ploughing through Ireland, while the teachings of false teachers are ploughs that cut across the straight furrows, but again, this disparaging attitude is not indicative of Boisil's (or Bede's) attitude.<sup>190</sup> Boisil's words are, however, echoed in Ceolfrith's letter to King Nechtan, which states that those who celebrated Easter from the sixteenth to the twenty-second days of Nisan are no less incorrect than those who celebrate it from the fourteenth to the twentieth: they "no less correctly turn from the straight path of truth".<sup>191</sup> This placed the Columbans in the same category as the followers of the Victorian Paschal tables, making the issue one of error, certainly not heresy.<sup>192</sup> Ecgberht was at last sure of the authenticity of the dream, but persisted in his plans for travelling to Germany. It took a fierce storm to convince him of the necessity of following the directions given by Boisil. Willibrord was eventually sent to Germany in his place, and Ecgberht agreed to travel instead to the monasteries of Columba to bring them into the fold of orthodoxy.<sup>193</sup>

Boisil's visitation of the anonymous monk, rather than Ecgberht himself, is a necessary condition for the publication of the story. It also allows Bede to distance

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<sup>187</sup> The concept of ploughing 'crooked furrows' seems to have had a proverbial history, with Pliny writing *sulco uaro ne ares* in his *Natural History*, 18.174: *Pliny: Natural History* V, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1961), p. 298. However it appears that Bede did not use Book 18 of this work, though it would have been of great interest to him: Wallis, 'Introduction', pp. lxxxii-lxxxiii.

<sup>188</sup> ...*ad proferendos operum bonorum fructus aperire*.

<sup>189</sup> Bede, *Epistola* 15, *PL* 94, col. 709; 'On What Isaiah Says', in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans. Arthur G. Holder, p. 51; Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 287.

<sup>190</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 287; The vision is found, for example, in *Betha Brigitte*, in *Three Middle-Irish Homilies on the Lives of Saints Patrick, Brigit and Columba*, ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes (Calcutta, 1877), pp. 68, 70.

<sup>191</sup> *HE* V.21: *non minore utique errore, tametsi altero latere a recto ueritatis tramite diuertunt...*

<sup>192</sup> See Charles W. Jones, 'The Victorian and Dionysiac Paschal Tables in the West', *Speculum* 9.4 (1934), pp. 409-10.

<sup>193</sup> c. 690.

Ecgeberht from Boisil: the prior was the former teacher to the unnamed monk, not Ecgeberht. Despite this distancing, it has been suggested that Ecgeberht must have had some connection to Boisil and/or Melrose for his message to have (eventual) effect.<sup>194</sup> Ecgeberht's monastic career prior to his time in Ireland is unknown, but the origins of two of his brethren are identified: Willibrord came to Ireland from the Northumbrian monastery of Ripon, under the abbacy of Wilfrid; and the monk who dreamed of Boisil had been a member of the Melrose community during the time of that prior.<sup>195</sup> One would wonder whether Ecgeberht, with his interest in orthodoxy and in missionary work on the Continent, might have joined Wilfrid's community at Ripon.<sup>196</sup> Alternatively, Ecgeberht might have been at Melrose or at Ripon during the abbacy of Eata, and remained there during the changeover into Wilfrid's hands. Such a transfer in allegiance might explain Ecgeberht's initial reluctance to follow Boisil's instructions despite his conviction that they were in earnest. No connection is made in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* between Ecgeberht and Wilfrid, however, despite demonstrable continuing links between Ecgeberht and Northumbria.<sup>197</sup> Although it is not impossible that Bede might be unaware of such a connection, or might even have omitted it,<sup>198</sup> the association specified in *HE* V.9 is with Boisil, a representative of Melrose. Of course, Ecgeberht had spent many years in Ireland, and his influences would have been largely Irish by this time, so one cannot attribute his intentions and interests to his potential Northumbrian formation alone.

Kirby argues that the traditions Bede records concerning Boisil and Cuthbert, and Boisil and Ecgeberht, were being formulated in the first two decades of the eighth century at the monastery at which he was prior. He sees the inclusion of them by Bede

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<sup>194</sup> It took approximately twenty-eight years for Ecgeberht to fulfil the mission given to him by Boisil, as Kirby has pointed out. D.P. Kirby, 'Cuthbert, Boisil of Melrose and the Northumbrian Priest Ecgeberht: Some Historical and Hagiographical Connections', ed. Michael Richter and Jean-Michel Picard, *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in Honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 52-3. Plummer remarks simply that "Egbert seems to have taken his time in executing the commission which he received", *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 335.

<sup>195</sup> Alcuin's *Vita Willibrordi* 4 states that Willibrord left Ripon for Ireland in search of a stricter monastic life and encouraged by the example of Ecgeberht himself: *MGH SRM* 7, ed. W. Levison (Hanover, 1920).

<sup>196</sup> Ecgeberht, Bede says, is among the Anglo-Saxons who came to Ireland during the episcopacies of Fínán (651-661) and Colmán (661-664), but he was already at Rath Melsigi at the time of the plague of 664 (*HE* III.27). It is possible that he joined Ripon during Wilfrid's abbacy, which seems to have begun c. 661, but his time there would have been quite short.

<sup>197</sup> Ecgeberht unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Ecgrith not to attack the innocent Irish in 684 (*HE* IV.26); he is involved in the founding of a monastery connected to Lindisfarne in Northumbria (Æthelwulf, *De Abbatibus* V, VI, p. xxvi, 11); he is visited by a Northumbrian abbot, Higeald, from Lindsey (*HE* IV.3).

<sup>198</sup> It is worth noting here that Bede never states that Willibrord had been at Ripon, though he does associate the missionary with Wilfrid on occasion: *HE* III.13, V.11.

in his prose *Vita Cuthberti* and in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as evidence of their development, and of recent interest on the part of the monastery of Melrose in the orthodoxy (or lack thereof) of Columban communities.<sup>199</sup> Against this, Bede's inclusion of Boisil in his Metrical *Vita Cuthberti*, not many years after the anonymous author's life was written, intimates that persons connected with the monastery were not ignorant of Boisil's existence.<sup>200</sup> It is not enough to argue that the anonymous author was ill-informed on Boisil's role in Cuthbert's life, or that the traditions about Boisil had yet to be developed at the beginning of the eighth century. However, it does point toward Melrose interest in the convincing of Columban monasteries to adopt the orthodox customs of Rome.

Ecgberht's persuading of the community of Iona, the foremost Columban monastery, to accept the orthodox reckoning of Easter in 716 is a climactic event in the text: it constitutes a great reversal, with an Anglo-Saxon travelling to the head of the Columban *paruchia* to bring the community there to a deeper conversion, pushing them into line with orthodox Roman traditions. This demonstrates the maturity of the Anglo-Saxon church, finally able to repay the debt accrued through the conversion of its people by Irish monks, many of whom came via Iona. O'Reilly considers the description of the conversion of the Iona community reminiscent of the spread of the Christian faith to the ends of the earth, but with Anglo-Saxons, rather than Romans, as the source.<sup>201</sup> Boisil's role as instigator in this event is fundamental, and his interest in the Irish Columban monasteries certainly makes sense if he himself were Irish. The reality that he himself had followed Columban traditions might seem to present a contradiction, but in fact his intercession on behalf of the Iona community is rooted in deep personal reverence. However if Boisil were Irish, this fact would undermine the great revolution that Bede wishes to illustrate. If Ecgberht were in fact directed in his mission by an Irishman, the significance of the Anglo-Saxons' conversion of the Columbans would be diluted, if not lost entirely. The omission of Boisil's ethnicity makes Ecgberht's mission an independent Anglo-Saxon endeavour, and allows this event to form the culmination of Bede's entire work. The role Boisil plays in the

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<sup>199</sup> Kirby, 'Cuthbert, Boisil of Melrose and the Northumbrian Priest Ecgberht', p. 53.

<sup>200</sup> The Metrical *Vita Cuthberti* has been dated to not long after 705 by Michael Lapidge, who also remarks that Bede consciously minimised the number of proper names he used in the text, aiming to give it a timeless relevance to the reader, 'Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*', in *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, pp. 78, 90. That Bede avoids naming too many names makes his mention of Boisil all the more important.

<sup>201</sup> O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth', p. 145.

*Historia Ecclesiastica*, then, is crucial, but an essential element in it is the suppression of his ethnicity.

This man was granted the first sight of Cuthbert arriving at Melrose, and prophetic foresight of the path his life is to take. This intimate connection with Cuthbert, one of the heroes of the text, is an immensely positive attribution on the part of Bede. Boisil is connected to Cuthbert not just through the bonds of affection and of monastic obedience, but as his teacher in both the monastic life and in Scripture. His foresight as to his own death is a common motif in the lives of holy men (and Cuthbert is likewise granted such information), and his understanding of Cuthbert's future career is presented as divinely granted knowledge. Kirby believes that Melrose was at the "vanguard" of the Easter debate in the early eighth century, and Boisil's essential involvement in the story of Ecgberht and Iona supports this.<sup>202</sup> The *Historia Ecclesiastica* gives no explicit indication of this, however, and leaves Melrose a rather obscure foundation. The complete absence of Boisil from the anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* speaks volumes: its careful repositioning of Cuthbert as a *Romanus* of impeccable standing, tonsure and all, necessitated the removal of the prior from the narrative. Nothing in Bede's work can definitively clarify why this would be necessary, but Boisil being of Irish extraction would serve to explain it; this then colours the depiction of Boisil in the work. Despite the difficulties in arguing from absence, it cannot be denied that, in a work devoted to Cuthbert, his earliest teacher and influence, the man who predicted his meteoric rise to prominence, would be expected to play a large role – or at least *some* role. Bede's Prose *Vita*, and his Metrical *Vita* to a lesser extent, re-insert Boisil into the narrative, and ensure the part he plays is given its due. However, Bede may have suppressed his Irish identity in an effort to maintain Cuthbert's image of orthodoxy. Of course, even without an Irish heritage, Boisil as the inspiration behind an orthodox mission seems rather incongruous as the man himself was an adherent of Columban customs. Yet, his marked importance at Melrose enables him to fulfil this role. Boisil was, it can be seen, hugely important in the careers of both Ecgberht and Cuthbert, vital figures in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It was important to Bede to downplay Boisil's Irish background because of the central roles played by those men in his great narrative; their parts in the story of the Anglo-Saxon Church necessitated the omission of their explicit associations with Irish influences and

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<sup>202</sup> Kirby, 'Cuthbert, Boisil of Melrose and the Northumbrian Priest Ecgberht', p. 48.

foundations. Unfortunately for Boisil of Melrose, the fact of his Irish ethnicity obliged both Bede and the anonymous author of the *Vita Cuthberti* to manipulate their stories to ensure a coherent message, thereby excluding a vital aspect of his identity.

*iv. Adomnán (2) of Coldingham and his Priest (Anonymous 4)*

Adomnán of Coldingham is often confused with Adomnán, abbot of Iona. This entirely separate, though contemporaneous, Irish man spent many years performing penance at the Anglo-Saxon monastery of Coldingham, in modern Berwickshire. Bede recounts his story in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: having committed an unspecified sin, Adomnán became an exiled penitent at Coldingham under the direction of his confessor, an Irish priest.<sup>203</sup> He excelled at penitential asceticism, devoting himself to prayer, fasting and performing vigils. After his confessor died, he decided to continue his pious way of life indefinitely. He became a *peregrinus pro Christo*, exiling himself from his homeland and living as an ascetic out of piety. Along with highlighting his ascetic prowess, Adomnán's story appears in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* for its lesson on divine punishment. Bede tells us that, returning from a journey one day, Adomnán burst into tears on his approach to the monastery. He eventually revealed to the abbess, Æbbe, that he had been visited by a prophetic figure, who warned that the monastery would be stricken with fire as punishment for its sinful inhabitants. The warning was effective for a short time, and the community improved their behaviour, out of fear; but, after Æbbe's death, the community at Coldingham reverted to their previous conduct, and the monastery was destroyed. Adomnán was, therefore, an example of an Irish figure as the voice and example of Christian morality in a foundation presumably populated mainly by Anglo-Saxons. Beyond his nationality, we know very little about him: we do not know where in Ireland he came from, when he came to Britain, why he came to Britain, how long he was at Coldingham, or what fate befell him after his visitation.

Bede records his name as Adamnanus, a partially Latinised version of the Irish name Adomnán. Although Bede did not have an Irish source for this story from which to copy his spelling of the Irish name, hearing it instead from an Anglo-Saxon priest named Eadgisl, he would have known the correct spelling from Adomnán of Iona,

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<sup>203</sup> HE IV.25.

whose work he knew and who had visited Northumbria.<sup>204</sup> While for the latter Adomnán Bede omits the Latin *-us* ending in the nominative, he includes it for the Coldingham man, perhaps automatically. Adomnán of Coldingham and the abbot of Iona are almost the only bearers of this name in the period, and one could speculate that that this Adomnán might also have been from Donegal, the territory of Adomnán of Iona's family, the Cenél Conaill.<sup>205</sup>

As a young man, Adomnán of Coldingham had committed a serious, though unspecified, sin. Realising the severity of his actions, he went to an Irish priest for guidance, confessing his sin and receiving instructions on how to atone for it. Bede does not state whether this exchange happened in Ireland or in Britain, and, like many of the gaps in the story, he may not have known. His priest told him that his penance would be intensive, in keeping with the seriousness of his sin, and prescribed fasting, prayer and the reciting of psalms.<sup>206</sup> Exile was reserved for severe sins, and Bede writes that Adomnán's confessor drew attention to the severity of his sin (*grande vulnus*), which would need an even more severe remedy (*medulla*). This concept, and this vocabulary, can be found in Irish penitentials, and in Cassian's writings on remedies for sin.<sup>207</sup> The idea of penance as medicine for sin originated with Cassian, and became common in medieval Christian writing. Sins were often thought to be healed or remedied by specific corresponding penances.<sup>208</sup> Adomnán, in his zealous striving for forgiveness, offered to perform week-long fasts and all-night standing prayer sessions, but his priest rejected these suggestions, warning against such extremes. Adomnán embraced austerity, often spending whole nights in vigils and prayer (presumably not while standing). Bede remarks twice that Adomnán ate only on Sundays and Thursdays, adhering to the instructions of his priest, who had said that two and three-day fasts were long enough. Adomnán's eagerness for more extreme penitence may draw on Irish penitential customs, which were often quite extreme in their severity,

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<sup>204</sup> *HE* V.21; *VC* II.46.

<sup>205</sup> Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *pers. comm.*, January 2011. The Annals of Ulster record the death of a bishop Adomnán of Ráith Maige Aenaig in 731.

<sup>206</sup> See Alexander Murray, 'Confession to 1215', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 3, *Sixth Series* (1993), p. 57.

<sup>207</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* II.11: *mederi protinus vulneri*.

<sup>208</sup> Finnian's Penitential recommends the curing (*curare*) of contraries by contraries, which Bieler attributes to Cassian's influence: *The Irish Penitentials*, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1975), p. 244, n.14. The Penitential of Columbanus remarks that the length of penance is connected with the greatness of the offence (*magnitudinem culparum*)(A1), and again recommends the curing of contraries with contraries (A12). It goes on to say that just as doctors of the body cure different wounds with different medicines, the spiritual doctor must treat different wounds (*vulnera*) with diverse cures (B).

while the priest's advice on a more moderate regime indicates an understanding of the dangers of extremes of all kinds, whether toward laxity or toward severity. The writings of the fifth-century monastic author, Cassian, may have been influential in this regard, and certainly Cassian appears to be a source for many Irish Penitentials.<sup>209</sup>

Adomnán's zeal is not solely enthusiasm, however, but also a desire to be forgiven faster. Commutations, or more excessive and thus shorter penances, were possible within some penitential systems.<sup>210</sup> In the end, however, Adomnán gave himself over to the commands of his priest, and committed himself to penitential tears, holy vigils and austerity. Adomnán's initial eagerness to finish his penance quickly is contrasted with his later decision to remain in Coldingham indefinitely, showing a change in his priorities and, to Bede, a maturing of his faith. Bede emphasises Adomnán's personal devotion to *continentia* (austerity or abstinence) and prayer, and it is these qualities that made him deserving of the honour of foreknowledge of the fate of the monastery. Follett sees Bede's description of Adomnán as particularly noteworthy in its stress on his austerity and devotion, and remarks that he is very like one of the *ordo poenitentium*, the permanent penitents deemed worthy of *glasmartre* by the Cambrai Homily.<sup>211</sup>

Several of the Irish penitentials prescribe exile for various sins, such as stealing food, striking a brother or neighbour, for murder, or for fathering a child.<sup>212</sup> Considering his priest's reaction to his sin, one might assume Adomnán had committed a very grave crime, though the different views of the time should be taken into account:

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<sup>209</sup> Cassian was very clear on the importance of moderation, even in the case of ascetic practices. Adomnán is shown to follow the middle way recommended by Cassian, fasting as long as was considered appropriate without excess: *De Institutis Coenobiorum* V.5. Bede quotes from Cassian when writing that the priest said two or three days of fasting was enough: see K. Scarfe Beckett, 'The Sources of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (L.D.1.4)', 2002, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register* <<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>> [accessed 24 June 2012].

<sup>210</sup> See the Old-Irish table of commutations, in *The Irish Penitentials*. This list says that certain sins are not permitted commutations, such as homicide. Commutations were not a general option among Irish penitentials, see Thomas P. Oakley, 'Commutations and Redemptions of Penance in the Penitentials', *The Catholic Historical Review* 18(3) (1932), pp. 341-51, here pp. 346-7. Canon 26 of the second Council of Clofesho in 747 decries the practice of giving alms to lessen the penance prescribed by a priest, so evidently it was an issue in the eighth century.

<sup>211</sup> Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 72.

<sup>212</sup> The Penitential of Finnian prescribes exile for seven years for a cleric who fathers a child and then kills him (12); ten years of exile from his country and seven in another city for premeditated murder (23). The Penitential of Columbanus agrees with these (B1-2). The Penitential of Cummean prescribes three years of penance and perpetual exile (*peregrinatione perenni*) for incest with one's mother (7) (see *The Irish Penitentials* for details). The *Vita Columbae* I.22 tells of a man who slept with his mother, and was instructed never to return to Ireland.

for example, even not giving to the poor could bring on a penance of exile.<sup>213</sup> In this light, it is quite possible that Adomnán committed some sin at home in Ireland and came to Britain as part of his penitence. However, the fact that his confessor was present in Britain complicates this view a little: either Adomnán was accompanied by his confessor, which is unlikely, or he committed this youthful sin in Britain, or he knew exile would be required and came to Britain to find a confessor. Such exile was also a punishment in early secular Irish society, with estrangement from one's people and background considered a serious penalty within that status-driven world. With the arrival of Christianity, exile for religious purposes became more common, and Bede includes several Irish examples in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

Adomnán may have been in orders and have lost his office due to his sin, or he may have been a layman. At no time does Bede refer to him as a monk or priest, though he does call him *uir Dei*, an appellation Bede generally applies to holy men in holy orders.<sup>214</sup> When referring to Adomnán's companion on his return to Coldingham, Bede says *uno de fratribus*, one of the brothers, rather than referring to *another* of the brothers and so including Adomnán among the brothers, but this is circumstantial. A twelfth-century life of Æbbe, the abbess of Coldingham, remarks that, after the death of his priest, Adomnán, having become a priest himself, did not wish to disclose his secret to anyone else, and so decided to remain at Coldingham.<sup>215</sup> If Adomnán became a priest during his time at Coldingham, he could have entered religious life upon his arrival there, or a previous office might have been reinstated. Bede makes no mention of lay penitents in Anglo-Saxon monasteries, but several can be seen in Adomnán of Iona's *Vita Columbae*, showing it to be an accepted practice among the Irish, and in the absence of other evidence, this is the most likely situation for Adomnán.<sup>216</sup> His reluctance to open up to any other confessor suggests a close relationship with his priest, though it is surprising that Adomnán, as a penitent in her monastery, did not confide in Æbbe or another confessor.<sup>217</sup> Monastic life encouraged the confession of

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<sup>213</sup> See the Old Irish Penitential III.10, *The Irish Penitentials*.

<sup>214</sup> Such as Aidan (*HE* III.5), Fursa (*HE* III.19) and Cedd (*HE* III.22).

<sup>215</sup> While this life is far later, it inserts this detail into a lengthy quotation from Bede, and it may retain certain traditions not found in Bede's work, but remembered at Coldingham: Robert Bartlett (ed.), *The Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham and Saint Margaret of Scotland* (Oxford, 2003), p. 16.

<sup>216</sup> *VC* I.21, II.39. It is clear that while penitents might become monks after their penance is completed, it is unusual for them to take vows before that: *VC* I.32, II. 39. See Richard Sharpe's note 115, in *Life of St Columba*, p. 282. Lay penitents are mentioned at the Second Council of Clonish in 747.

<sup>217</sup> Wright refers to the priest as Adomnán's *anamcharae*: Charles D. Wright, 'The Irish Tradition', *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, eds. Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford, 2001), p. 347;

sins to an abbess or abbot, though as Adomnán does not seem to have been a monk, he may not have been subject to this. The Irish practice of private penance, which then influenced Anglo-Saxon methods, can be seen in the obscurity of his sin; while his status as a penitent was known to Bede, the crime committed was not.<sup>218</sup>

Adomnán's Irish priest, once he had instructed him in his penitential plan, promised to return within a short time, when he would tell him how long his penitence should last and explain more fully what he should do. His priest does not then appear to have been formally attached to the monastery of Coldingham, for he left Adomnán there, promising to return. He may have been a wandering cleric, or a hermit in the area, who recommended Coldingham as a suitable location for Adomnán's task. The priest suddenly left for Ireland, and never returned, dying in Ireland. This suggests that the priest was not expected to depart Britain, nor was he expected to die. He was one of the many Irish ecclesiastics that Bede mentions who came to the Anglo-Saxons, and especially to the Northumbrians. When Adomnán heard that the priest had died there, he decided to continue his penitential way of life at Coldingham indefinitely, *iam causa divini amoris delectatus praemiis indefessus agebat*.<sup>219</sup> It is unclear how soon he heard of his spiritual confessor's demise, but the close contacts between Britain and Ireland, and between Northumbria and Ireland in particular, probably mean it was not too long. As Adomnán's decision to continue with his penitential life in Coldingham is framed as dependent on his priest's departure and subsequent death, it follows that he did not intend to be a penitent forever.<sup>220</sup> This sets him apart from many of the Irish *peregrini*, according to Colgrave, who combined missionary aims with their self-imposed exile.<sup>221</sup> Adomnán's resolution changed him from a penitent to a voluntary exile, a true

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the ninth-century *Monastery of Tallaght* 66 tells a story of a man who goes to three different confessors, ending with Columba, and is castigated for dismissing the judgement of the two preceding confessors. It is possible that such concerns might have influenced the actions of Adomnán, though the death of his initial confessor would seem to be a mitigating circumstance: Edward J. Gwynn and W.J. Purton, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 29C (1911/12), pp. 115-79. Barbara Yorke points out that certain manuscripts of the Penitential of Theodore proscribe women from prescribing penance (and so hearing confession), implying that Anglo-Saxon women did act as confessors: *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), p. 51. See John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (eds.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents* (New York, 1938), p. 205.

<sup>218</sup> For a discussion of confession, see Murray, 'Confession to 1215', p. 56.

<sup>219</sup> *HE* IV.25.

<sup>220</sup> Wright, rather strangely, views this story of devoted and determined penitence as "an amusing story": 'The Irish Tradition', p. 347.

<sup>221</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 268-9, n. 2. We do see some Irish *peregrini* who leave the place of their pilgrimage and return to their homeland – Cellach, Bishop of the Mercians, returned to Ireland (*HE* III.21), and possibly Adomnán's unnamed priest himself, though he apparently intended to come again to Coldingham.

*peregrinus*, whose lifestyle was then a form of martyrdom.<sup>222</sup> The penitentials stress the individual and his need to take responsibility for his soul's welfare, and Adomnán embraced this concept fully.<sup>223</sup> An English, rather than Irish, disciplinary system did not appear until Archbishop Theodore arrived in 669, and penitentials then appeared among the Anglo-Saxons, drawing on their Irish counterparts.<sup>224</sup> For Adomnán, under the direction of an Irish priest, the Irish system was certainly the one through which he received his penance and carried it out.

We do not know when or at what age Adomnán came to Coldingham, and we cannot tell when his priest left for Ireland. Adomnán's sin was committed during his *adulescentia*, probably in his teenage years, and Bede's words do not specify if he realised his error immediately or some time later. He does use the verb *redeo*, suggesting that the young Adomnán was already a Christian when he sinned, but there is no evidence of when he "came to his senses", as Colgrave translates it.<sup>225</sup> After explaining that Adomnán remained at Coldingham to continue his penance, Bede states that it was a long time before he received the warning about the coming ruin of the monastery, so clearly there was an extended period between the departure and death of his priest, and his visitation. If his priest left during the 660s, it is possible he succumbed to the plague that ravaged Ireland over that decade, killing innumerable persons.<sup>226</sup> There seems to have been no particular expectation that he would not survive to return to Adomnán, suggesting he was neither elderly nor infirm. Unfortunately, there is no way of telling who the priest was from, for example, the Irish annals. While there are records of the deaths of many noted abbots and bishops, especially in the 660s, a priest had little chance of being mentioned.

Bede does state that Adomnán had been at Coldingham a very long time when he received the message, though surmising what Bede meant by *multo tempore* is not simple. As an Irish man coming to a Northumbrian monastery, it is more likely Adomnán arrived before the Synod of Whitby in 664. This is not to say that all the Irish in Northumbria were associated with Columban Christianity or that they only travelled

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<sup>222</sup> The Cambrai Homily, usually dated to the seventh or early eighth century, describes blue martyrdom as distancing oneself from one's desires through fasting and labour, or through penance: Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, pp. 34, 38.

<sup>223</sup> Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983), p. 13.

<sup>224</sup> Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 62.

<sup>225</sup> *HE* IV. 25: *ad cor suum rediit*.

<sup>226</sup> See *AU* 664, 665, 667, and 668.

there before that date, but it is the most probable situation based on Bede's accounts. If so, Bede's 'long time' refers to – depending on when Adomnán's priest left – perhaps fifteen years or more. Adomnán's priest might even have left because of the Synod of Whitby, going to Ireland rather than be subject to Roman Easter traditions, but promising to return at some point. Bede uses the same phrase, *multo tempore*, for different time spaces in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: he refers to Paulinus's long toil over the course of a year after his arrival in Northumbria until the assassination attempt on Edwin, and he uses it to indicate the time Cædwalla was ravaging the Northumbrians, over the course of about two years; but he also employs it to refer to Offfor's time among the Hwicce, which Sims-Williams demonstrates to be perhaps as much as nineteen years or more.<sup>227</sup> These appear to be vastly varying lengths of time, in which case Bede seems to have used the phrase for generally unspecified multiples of years.

The death of Abbess Æbbe, in the early 680s, was followed by increased sinfulness at Coldingham and the destructive fire, also in the early to mid 680s. The *Vita Wilfridi* features Æbbe rebuking her nephew Ecgfrith in 681, and, if we take into account Bede's location of this Coldingham chapter, coming before Ecgfrith's ill-advised attack on Ireland in 684, one might postulate that Æbbe's death and the fire could be dated within that timeframe, and quite close together.<sup>228</sup> The twelfth-century life dates her death to 683 and it is generally followed in later sources and research; however, the later life quotes Bede, saying that she was promised the fire would occur after her death, yet it dates the fire to 680, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* dates the fire to 679. Clearly the date of the fire is not definite but the early to mid 680s are likely. Regarding the timing of Adomnán's visitor, Bede says the inhabitants repented for *paucis diebus* [a small number of days] after the message of the vision was circulated, but after Æbbe's death they fell further yet into sin. Though Bede's vaguer references to time and time passing in the text can seem uninformative, this certainly implies a short time period. This would place Adomnán's vision not too long before Æbbe's death, perhaps in the late 670s or, more probably, the early 680s.

Why did Adomnán go to Coldingham? Coldingham was a double monastery under the abbacy of Æbbe, located on the coast of Britain, north of Lindisfarne. The twelfth-century life of this saint states that she received the veil from Fínán, bishop and

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<sup>227</sup> *HE* II.9, II.20, III.1, IV.23; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 102.

<sup>228</sup> *VW* 39: she rebukes him for his hostility toward Wilfrid; Bede says that the fire happened around the same time as Cædmon died, but he does not date that either: *HE* IV.24.

abbot of Lindisfarne.<sup>229</sup> This would date her taking the veil to between 651 and 661, though whether this can be applied to the foundation at Coldingham is not certain. The anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* calls Æbbe a widow, in which case it makes sense that she would have become a nun a little later in life.<sup>230</sup> As the sister of Northumbrian kings Oswald and Oswiu, whether she was in exile among the Irish with them or not, it is logical that Æbbe would have entered religious life through the Northumbrian Church, which was dominated by the Irish mission from Iona until 664, and whose influence continued well beyond that point. Colgrave writes in his notes to the anonymous life of Cuthbert that Aidan founded the monastery, but we have no mention of another abbess before Æbbe, nor is it clear from where Colgrave got this information.<sup>231</sup> Under Æbbe, Coldingham looks very like the family monastery for the Bernician branch of the Northumbrian royal family. Not only would it be obvious for Æbbe to follow the same Christian traditions as her brothers, the successive rulers of the kingdom, but her monastery was well within the geographical sphere of influence of Lindisfarne, and she and her community would have followed Columban customs on the dating of Easter and the tonsure.

The construction of the monastery at Coldingham, insofar as can be known or postulated from the limited excavations carried out, allows for a foundation not dissimilar from that of Iona, if smaller in area, though the authors of the archaeological report on Coldingham insist that more than this cannot be said.<sup>232</sup> The fire that destroyed the foundation is said to have come about through *incuria*, carelessness or neglect. While this might be applied to neglect of the monastic rule, it more likely suggests practical carelessness, something that would have been especially important in a place with wooden buildings. If Coldingham was indeed built in an Irish style (and even if not), at least some wooden buildings would have been the norm. Bede describes

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<sup>229</sup> *The Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham* 6. While this is not confirmed anywhere else, it is very likely that she would have entered religious life under the direction of the bishop of Lindisfarne.

<sup>230</sup> AVC II.3. She was born before 617 or so, if Æthelfrith was indeed her father, though this has been questioned: see *The Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham*, p. xiii, and also Molly Miller, 'The Dates of Deira', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979). The twelfth-century life repeatedly calls her a virgin, but this is almost certainly a later conventional view being projected on the founder.

<sup>231</sup> Bertram Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 318; the twelfth-century life of Æbbe remarks that the author is unsure if she was the first to establish a religious community there: *The Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham* 10.

<sup>232</sup> Leslie Alcock, Elizabeth A. Alcock and Sally M. Foster, 'Reconnaissance Excavations on Early Historic Fortifications and Other Royal Sites in Scotland, 1974-84: 1, Excavations near St Abb's Head, Berwickshire, 1980', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 116 (1986), p. 276. Plummer remarks that the monastery was probably built "in the Irish fashion", pointing to the word *domunculae: Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 259.

the church built by Fínán at Lindisfarne of oak and thatched with reeds; such constructions would have been particularly susceptible to flames.<sup>233</sup>

The excavations at what is thought to be the location of Æbbe's Coldingham foundation, known as Kirk Hill, or St Abb's Kirk, found a palisade whose structure of oak beams and other woods had been destroyed by fire.<sup>234</sup> Using carbon dating and Clarke's calibration, a date of 635-765 has been reported for the building of the palisade, limits within which the foundation of Æbbe's monastery fits nicely.<sup>235</sup> In addition, if the foundation of Lindisfarne on a peninsula at the edge of a wild sea can be seen as a reflection of Aidan and his church's origins on Iona, the location of Coldingham at the edge of wild sea cliffs and on a natural promontory cannot be disregarded. Anachronistically, the twelfth-century life of Æbbe also states that Áedán mac Gabráin tried to force Æbbe to marry him: clearly, this was not the case, Áedán having died in the first decade of the seventh century, probably before she was born.<sup>236</sup> But, while the timeline does not work, it certainly associates her family with the Dál Riata, to whom at least some of her brothers fled after the defeat of their father in 616. Perhaps Æbbe's hand in marriage was sought by another Irish king whose details have been lost over time? Or perhaps it was a connection with Aidan of Lindisfarne that was garbled. As these Irish connections demonstrate, Adomnán becoming a penitent at Coldingham, under the instruction of an Irish priest, is perfectly reasonable.

However, the situation in Northumbria changed in 664 with the Synod of Whitby. There is no reason to believe that Æbbe and her foundation did not follow the general trend in that kingdom and adopt Roman customs in place of the Columban ones they had received initially. Queen Æthelthryth's entrance to religious life supports this. She took the veil at Coldingham from Bishop Wilfrid, who would never have countenanced her joining a seditious Columban monastery. Æthelthryth was the wife of Ecgfrith, Æbbe's nephew, and entrance into Coldingham was not her only option. Another possibility was Whitby, where Hild, connected to Æthelthryth by marriage, was abbess;<sup>237</sup> however, Hild's evident hostility to Wilfrid made this unlikely, and

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<sup>233</sup> *HE* III.25; see Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, pp. 101-2.

<sup>234</sup> Alcock *et al.*, 'Reconnaissance Excavations on Early Historic Fortifications and Other Royal Sites in Scotland', p. 272.

<sup>235</sup> Leslie Alcock, 'Kirk Hill (Coldingham p), Cliff Castle, NT 93 68', *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, eds. Edwina V.W. Proudfoot, Angela M. Parker (1981), p. 1.

<sup>236</sup> *The Miracles of Saint Æbbe of Coldingham* 6; see Chapter Seven.

<sup>237</sup> In fact, Hollis suggests that Æbbe may have been a novice at Whitby, which supports the idea that Coldingham was originally a Columban monastery: Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992), p. 257.

Coldingham kept Æthelthryth relatively nearby, and within a foundation ruled by a member of the Northumbrian royal family.<sup>238</sup> While Ecgfrith had to be persuaded to give up his pious and virginal wife in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he would have wanted an heir; and so a new wife, countenanced by a bishop, would have suited him well.<sup>239</sup> No monastic foundation of the period could escape interaction with the politics of the day, but evidently Coldingham, with its well-connected abbess and community, was quite involved. In addition, as mentioned above, Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi* counts Æbbe among Wilfrid's defenders, going so far as to scold her nephew Ecgfrith and his wife for their opposition to that controversial bishop. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Æbbe's twelfth-century life date Æthelthryth's departure from Coldingham to Ely to 673, and state she had been a year at the previous foundation. This chronology allows for her to enter Coldingham under the encouragement of Wilfrid, the foundation having presumably adopted the Dionysiac Easter tables in the aftermath of the Synod of Whitby. Bede praises Æthelthryth highly, even composing verses in her honour, and her presence at Coldingham was a most favourable association for the foundation, though Bede does not mention it in *HE* IV.25.

Bede's source for the story is Eadgisl, an Anglo-Saxon priest who had lived at Coldingham at the time of these events, but after the destruction of the foundation, moved to Wearmouth-Jarrow. If Eadgisl were indeed present at the monastery around the time of Adomnán's visitation, he too should be counted among the *omnes* idle or sinful members of that community. Of course, it may be that Eadgisl lived there at the time of its destruction only, as Bede uses the simple *tunc* to situate Eadgisl's presence there. Despite such negative associations, Bede calls Eadgisl *reverentissimus meus compresbyter* (my most revered fellow-priest), so it seems that some could escape the broad characterisation of Adomnán's night visitor, including abbess Æbbe herself. Evidently, connection with Coldingham and its impious fate was not necessarily a defining event for brethren who fled, even those who did not leave until after the fire. Eadgisl, Bede tells us, came to Wearmouth-Jarrow after Coldingham lay in ruins, leaving as many or most of the other inhabitants did. One might wonder where the women of Coldingham went, and think of the foundations Bede mentions, such as Barking or the double monastery at Whitby. Whether the rest perished in the fire is

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<sup>238</sup> Æthelthryth's departure from Coldingham was probably more to do with her desire to found her own East Anglian establishment at Ely than with problems at the monastery.

<sup>239</sup> *HE* IV.19; a connection to a different noble Northumbrian family might also have been desirable; Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, p. 68.

unclear, as there is no mention of deaths. Nor is there any mention of Adomnán's fate: whether he returned to Ireland or found a place in another monastery is not explained. While it is hard to imagine him remaining there after the true nature of the foundation's inhabitants were revealed to him, he did not depart from the monastery, but delayed for a time before relaying the vision and its message to anyone, even his abbess.<sup>240</sup> Adomnán's hesitation in disclosing his knowledge seems strange, as one would assume such a miracle and such a message would necessitate immediate dissemination. His delay may spring from humility, though this is not specified, but there are other possible explanations: as a penitent and possibly one not in orders, his position at Coldingham may not have been totally secure or high status, and criticising the rest of the brethren would certainly not endear him to them. As a praise-worthy ascetic, it is difficult to imagine Adomnán resolving to remain at Coldingham indefinitely if indeed it had been a place of ill-repute from the very early 670s. Far more likely is that it descended into such behaviour much later in the decade, not too long before Adomnán's vision, the death of Æbbe, and the punishing fire.

The anonymous *Vita Cuthberti* reports Cuthbert's visit for some days to Æbbe at her monastery, and implies a friendly connection between the abbess and the saint, though Bede's *Vita* plays this down. Evidently, the double monastery was not always a place of lapsed religious and sin, as the saint deigned to spend several days there when sent for by the abbess.<sup>241</sup> The anonymous author's source was Plecgils of Melrose, and the event seems to be during Cuthbert's time as prior of that foundation, while Bede's *Metrical Vita* calls him *iuuenis*. This suggests a young Cuthbert, possibly up to his thirties, indicating the ten years or so before 664. The Irish associations of Melrose have been discussed above, and it hardly needs to be said that Cuthbert had connections to the Irish practices and traditions on several levels, from his time at Melrose, his abbacy of Lindisfarne, his succession to Aidan as hermit of Farne Island, and his penitential actions which can be characterised as, at least, influenced by Irish practices.<sup>242</sup> The anonymous author makes no reference to the burning of Coldingham, perhaps as it was outside the remit of the hagiography or because he did not wish to associate his saint with a place destroyed by God. While there, Cuthbert was observed performing a night-long vigil standing in the sea; the cleric who observed Cuthbert

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<sup>240</sup> Adomnán tells Æbbe he had the visitation *nuper*, newly, lately, recently or not long ago.

<sup>241</sup> *AVC* II.3; *PVC* 10; Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, p. 189.

<sup>242</sup> Clare Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary', in *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, p. 41.

from afar was forgiven his intrusion, and told the story to many brethren after Cuthbert's death in 687. Bede relates the same story, including that, while the rest of the community was asleep, Cuthbert went out alone to pray, as was his custom. Whether this is a veiled reference to the community of that monastery being more likely to sleep than to pray is unclear, though even the most austere monasteries did permit their inhabitants some rest! Ward remarked, attempting to reconcile the *Historia Ecclesiastica's* account of the situation at Coldingham with Cuthbert's presence there, that he may have been driven into the water by the "atmosphere of scarcely subdued eroticism", using "that old monastic remedy for lust".<sup>243</sup> However, such extreme practices were not out of keeping with Cuthbert's general behaviour. Bede's *Prose Vita Cuthberti* argues, in reference to Cuthbert, that the daily battle of the ascetic who subdues the fires of the flesh can give them power over ordinary fire.<sup>244</sup> An echo of this idea might be seen in this episode: Adomnán is not shown to have the power to stop the fire, but his manner of living is in opposition to what the fire is coming to destroy, and he is permitted foreknowledge of it.

It may be possible to discern in the crumbling standards at Coldingham links with the ecclesiastical events of the period. In 678, Wilfrid was exiled from Northumbria after falling out with King Ecgfrith, and Æbbe, his royal aunt, became involved on Wilfrid's side.<sup>245</sup> It may be that Æbbe was distracted by happenings and developments beyond her own monastery and, without a firm hand to guide them, the inhabitants descended into sinful behaviour. Bede opens his chapter on Adomnán blaming those who should be leaders or rulers for the state of the monastery, yet he excuses Æbbe totally.<sup>246</sup> The story depicts her as ignorant of the goings-on at her monastery, a poor state of affairs for an abbess. Adomnán's delay in telling her of the message he received is ill-explained by his excuse that he hesitated out of respect for her and because he feared perturbing her; such a reason is shaky at best, and at worst, indicates a lack of faith in the spiritual leader of his monastery. Wilfrid's departure from Northumbria may have left Æbbe in a vulnerable position and, if he was as influential at Coldingham as appears to be the case, he may be among the blameworthy *maiores* in question.

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<sup>243</sup> Benedicta Ward, 'The Spirituality of St Cuthbert', in *St. Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, p. 71.

<sup>244</sup> *PVC* 14: *incentiva suae carnis edomare*.

<sup>245</sup> Æbbe had a certain authority as a royal and senior abbess, but perhaps her involvement in the removal of Æthelthryth gave her additional power.

<sup>246</sup> *HE* IV.25: *maiores esse videbantur*.

Adomnán was understandably troubled by the prospect of the destruction of the monastery, weeping at the thought of it being reduced to ashes. Even though he was fully aware of its faults, he did not wish for its ruin. Having entered the monastery for penitential purposes and leaving behind his past life, whether as a layman or a cleric, whether in Ireland or elsewhere in Britain, Adomnán had become part of a community at Coldingham and his sorrow at its looming fate is evident. Although it is not said, his tears and his hesitation in passing the message on to Æbbe may point to his knowledge that his warnings would be in vain. Perhaps, like Eadgisl, he found a new monastery, though the impression Bede gives is that Adomnán is not around to ask directly about events at Coldingham, either through relocation or perhaps death. After all, Bede was writing and researching in the late 720s, into 731, and the destruction of the monastery most probably occurred in the early 680s, depending on the dating of Æbbe's death, some forty to fifty years earlier. Bede does not tell us when Eadgisl told the story of Adomnán, whether years before, or if he still lived as what would have been a very old man around the time of the writing of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede himself would have been a young man at the time of the fire, already a member of the community of Jarrow, and the destruction of a monastery in Northumbria, not too far from Lindisfarne, must have been of note. He may even have remembered the event himself, though he preferred the account of a member of that foundation.

Adomnán, at Coldingham after the Synod of Whitby, is among the Irishmen who followed Roman Easter traditions in Northumbria, though it is likely that, if he was there before 664, he had then adhered to the Columban customs. Unlike Colmán and his disciples, Adomnán did not feel the need to leave the country over this issue, perhaps because his personal penance took priority, or because he may not have been permitted to return to Ireland. Of course, it is possible that he came to Coldingham after the Synod of Whitby, and it is important to recall he was not associated with the mission from Iona by Bede or anyone else. Although it is likely that there were Irishmen in Northumbria who followed Roman ways, beyond Rónán and Aldfrith, they are invisible in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Even beyond Northumbria, they may only include Fursa and his followers, and the small group at Bosham. In the case of Adomnán, Fursa and the community at Bosham, however, Bede avoids all reference to their proclivities regarding Easter. Of course, he may have had no evidence either way about it, but his silence still raises the question, and Adomnán is likely to have adhered to Columban traditions before the Synod. He is assumed to be the only Irishman at this

Anglo-Saxon foundation, and Bede names him as the only worthy inhabitant. More than that, he is granted a visitation that denounces the rest of the population and, as its mouthpiece, becomes an Irish figure criticising the sinfulness of Anglo-Saxons.

Although Bede never explicitly calls Adomnán's visitation a miracle or states that his messenger was angelic, the prophetic nature of the message, and the way in which the visitor managed to view every member of the community without, apparently, being noticed, lends this episode an otherworldly atmosphere. Bede records visions being granted to a variety of individuals, from the saintly Fursa's visions of the afterlife to a dying Mercian who realised he was going to hell.<sup>247</sup> Adomnán's vision is one that grants him foreknowledge of the ruin of Coldingham while distancing him from the behaviour that necessitated it. Bede writes that Adomnán suddenly saw a man who had an unknown face (*incogniti vultus*), but spoke to him in a voice that seemed familiar (*quasi familiari...voce*). This exact juxtaposing of a seemingly known voice with an unknown face is one that appears in one other chapter of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>248</sup> When King Edwin was at the court of Rædwald, he was approached by a figure whose face he did not know. This man promised his future success and salvation, and, laying his right hand on the young king's head, warned him to watch for such a sign. Having gained the throne of Northumbria, Edwin was one day approached by the Roman missionary, Paulinus, who laid his right hand on his head and asked if he recognised the sign. He then reminded the king in a voice that *seemed familiar* that he had escaped his foes, achieved the kingship, and should now convert to Christianity.<sup>249</sup> Though Winterbottom reads this as meaning that Paulinus was the initial visitor also, in fact, the unknown face does not belong to the familiar voice.<sup>250</sup> Bede does not say Paulinus was the visitor, rather calling the latter a spirit, *non hominem*.<sup>251</sup> Winterbottom reads the Adomnán situation similarly, suggesting his visitor was actually his old priest – now dead.<sup>252</sup> This identification is unsupported by the text; rather, Adomnán's visitor is simply an otherworldly prophetic figure. Like Edwin's visitor, he is *spiritus non*

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<sup>247</sup> *HE* III.19, V.13.

<sup>248</sup> *HE* II.12.

<sup>249</sup> The same incident is related in the anonymous *Whitby Vita Gregorii*, but without the face/voice contrast.

<sup>250</sup> Rædwald was convinced to accept Christianity (of a sort) by Æthelbert of Kent, at whose court Paulinus resided, so the latter might well have visited Rædwald's kingdom; *HE* II.12.

<sup>251</sup> The *Vita Gregorii* 16 also depicts them as two separate individuals.

<sup>252</sup> Michael Winterbottom, 'Conversations in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in *Colloquial and Literary Latin*, eds. Eleanor Dickey and Anna Chahoud (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 427-8.

*homo*, managing to see into every cell in the monastery.<sup>253</sup> Perhaps this contrast between recognisable voice and unrecognisable face is one Bede considered suitable to introduce an otherworldly element. It may be that Bede's inspiration here, as so often, was Biblical. In John 20.15-16, Mary Magdalene comes to Jesus's tomb and finds it open and empty. She sees Jesus, but, not recognising his face, assumes he is a gardener; only when he speaks does she realise who he is. This is clearly not the same situation, but it is possible Bede was thinking of this sort of scenario when writing about unexplained prophetic figures in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and Scriptural echoes only add to the divine element in the story.

Adomnán's visitor singles him out as the sole inhabitant concerned with his soul's welfare. This mysterious figure has visited every part of the monastery, he claims, checking the dwellings and the beds – all but Adomnán are either asleep, or awake for the purposes of sin. Adomnán, in contrast, was performing a vigil and singing psalms when his visitor surprised him, and he claimed he was in need of such to pardon his sins. His visitor remarks that many other than him need to atone for their sins and to cultivate a desire for their salvation. While Adomnán casts himself in the light of a penitent still, his visitor looks to a greater purpose, that of the ascetic, who frees himself from worldly occupations and labours for eternal rewards. Bede attributes many virtues and good works to Adomnán: he was devoted to God, lived a life of austerity and prayer, gave himself up to penitential tears and vigils, and fasted regularly.

The sleeping unconsciousness of the rest of the Coldingham community is stressed by Bede's reference to 1 Thessalonians 5.3, that when they were saying "Peace and security", destruction fell upon them.<sup>254</sup> This Biblical reference continues, stating that destruction will come like labour pains to a woman, warning that those who are not alert or awake will be taken unawares by God's punishment. Hollis insists that the women at Coldingham are depicted more negatively than the men, and certainly Bede calls Coldingham *monasterium virginum*, specifying its inclusion of women.<sup>255</sup> Bede's Biblical reference may be particularly pointed in this case, as its unquoted latter part, which Bede could expect a Christian audience to know, compares destruction befalling

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<sup>253</sup> Of course, the monastery being too open to the world is part of what is wrong with it, but his access to sleeping monks and nuns is too exaggerated for him to be an ordinary man.

<sup>254</sup> *HE* IV.25: *...pax et securitas, extimplo praefatae ultionis sunt poena multati.*

<sup>255</sup> Hollis is very clear that Bede took issue with mixed religious communities: *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, pp. 102, 245. She does, however, admit his positive portrayal of Hild of Whitby: p. 246.

the unaware to labour pains, looking back to them as punishment upon women for Eve's fall.<sup>256</sup> Of course, the inhabitants of Coldingham had no excuse for being caught napping the second time; having received warning through Adomnán, they repented and mended their ways for a time, but then fell into worse sins. Though they could have averted the impending disaster, they persisted in their incendiary behaviour, and so deserved their fate. Bede writes that, had they mended their ways with fasting, tears and prayers – things Adomnán excels at – they could have avoided disaster. They are compared to the population of Nineveh, who manage to save themselves from God's punishment by heeding Jonah's warning, thus casting Adomnán in the role of Jonah.<sup>257</sup>

Adomnán seems to be an anomaly within the community at Coldingham. Of course, the sinful behaviour described by Bede is no worse than one might expect from a family monastery, whose purpose was not solely religious, but tied up in royal power, the retention of property and the maintenance of wealth. The community's drinking, feasting and gossiping, and its nuns' self-adornment, point to secular Anglo-Saxon norms. He explicitly warns against situations like that of Coldingham in his reformist letter to Ecgberht of York in 734, exhorting the bishop to avoid what is reported of some bishops, that they surround themselves with persons given over to laughter, jokes, storytelling, eating, drinking and other seductions of the soft life. He asks Ecgberht to correct any such bishops he comes across, and to tell them that they should have suitable companions for both their day and their night activities – in this Bede must be referring to such vigils and prayers as evinced by Adomnán.<sup>258</sup> Such false monasteries preoccupy Bede in his heart-felt letter to the bishop, and it is surprising that he does not mention Coldingham's fate as a warning to such places. In the same letter, he urges Ecgberht to investigate the calibre of the monasteries in his diocese, ensuring that neither an abbot who is ignorant or contemptuous of monastic rules nor an abbess who is unworthy has authority over a monastery, or in case a group of obstinate monks rebel against their spiritual teachers. Assuming Bede is genuine in his praise of Æbbe, the latter must have been the case at Coldingham; if, however, he is as lukewarm about her as Hollis believes, it may be that neglect or ignorance on the part of Æbbe was the case,

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<sup>256</sup> Genesis 3.16.

<sup>257</sup> Bede explicitly makes the comparison, and Jonah was also reluctant to bring his message to those threatened with destruction; Jonah 3.5-10. The only other place in which Bede refers to that book of the Bible is V.9, where Ecgberht quotes Jonah's words about himself.

<sup>258</sup> *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 4.

and so perhaps his lack of enthusiasm about Æbbe was, in fact, a cautious censure of the royal abbess.<sup>259</sup>

Adomnán of Coldingham's presence is contextualised by Coldingham's position as a monastery within Lindisfarne's field of influence, founded before the Synod of Whitby. Depending on his dates, Adomnán may have been an adherent of the Columban Easter or the orthodox Roman one (or both, successively), though Bede never breathes a word on this, and his stay at Coldingham very probably spanned the Ionan mission's loss of official control over the Northumbrian church. The manner in which Bede describes him is most important, being unique in the community for his austerity, his prayerfulness and his devotional efforts. Asceticism has often been considered peculiarly characteristic of the Irish, with an emphasis on severe penance, extreme rigours and excessive regulation. Though this has been exaggerated, the Irish were certainly associated with strict practices and, at times, zealous austerities. In Bede's work, where the Irish missionaries of the seventh century act as models for the less-than-perfect church he sees around him in the eighth, the Irish and their asceticism set an edifying example. His chapter on Adomnán is carefully located in Book IV of the text: having waxed lyrical for two chapters preceding it about Hild and her foundation at Whitby, he follows it with one that records the death of Ecgrith at the hands of the Picts, retribution for his attack on Ireland the year before. Hild, whom Bede quickly associates with Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne, had been a defender of Columban traditions at the Synod of Whitby, and was hostile to Wilfrid; the contrast between her community and that of Coldingham is clear. By sandwiching Adomnán between this example of an exemplary Irish-influenced monastery and a tale of divine punishment for a king's aggression against the Irish, Bede highlights that ascetic's position as a seemingly solitary beacon of piety in a swamp of Anglo-Saxon sin. Though we are not told what fate befell him, for Bede, he had served his purpose: he had shown the dangers of flouting regular monastic life, and demonstrated the ascetic capabilities of the Irish in Northumbria. This lone Irish penitent, cast as Jonah, was graced with a message about the coming destruction of the monastery through God's wrath. Although he, unlike the Old Testament prophet, did not manage to change the long-term behaviour of the Coldingham community, his own piety is celebrated and unquestioned.

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<sup>259</sup> Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, p. 189.

Adomnán's inclusion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as a holy ascetic in the midst of sinful Anglo-Saxons, is indicative of the role of the Irish more generally in that work.

### *Conclusion*

Of these five Irishmen, only one, Aldfrith, is explicitly linked to Iona, an interesting statistic in light of the strong influence of that island-monastery in the kingdom of Northumbria. Of course, it is very likely that at least Rónán and Boisil also had connections to the Columbans, but Bede does not present them as part of that *familia*. Bede's omission of the Irish background in the cases of both Aldfrith and Boisil is evidence of the problematic nature of this ethnicity for their presentation – Aldfrith for his own sake, and Boisil for the sake of Bede's narrative arc of conversion and counter-conversion. These men represent very well the variety of Irish who populate Bede's text: an Irish *Romanus*; a king; a prior; and a penitent and his confessor. They demonstrate the social range and the attitudinal spectrum that exists within the group examined here. These men differ widely, but are linked by their positive presentations by Bede. We next look southward from Northumbria toward Mercia and beyond.

### Chapter Three: The Irish in Southern Britain

Northumbria was not the only kingdom in which the Irish made an appearance in the seventh century; they turned up in kingdoms south of the Humber also, like Mercia, Sussex, and Wessex. In some of these cases, they were associated with the Irish mission to Northumbria, while in others they seem to have been independent of that influential mission. The three kingdoms discussed here provided diverse backgrounds for the Irish religious who settled there. Mercia was a large and powerful kingdom that expanded its remit during the seventh and eighth centuries, while Sussex and Wessex were smaller kingdoms, though no less part of the dynamic political history of the period. The information provided by Bede on these men in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* cannot compare to that which he presents on Northumbrian inhabitants, reflecting both the richness of his sources and the focus of his history. Northumbria forms the heart of Bede's story, and the further from there his tale wanders, the thinner the details become. His access to information on Mercia seems to have been particularly sparse.<sup>1</sup> The Irish discussed below had varied interactions with the political elite of the kingdoms in which they settled, and varied success in their missions. Each, however, left a mark, as Bede's inclusion of them in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* reveals, and an investigation of the Irish in these kingdoms can lay bare hitherto unexamined aspects of their lives, and of the interaction between politics and the new Christian religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Yorke remarks on this in *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1997), p. 100.

*i. Diuma and Cellach*

To understand the roles of Diuma and Cellach, successive Irish bishops of the kingdom of Mercia and its dependants, one must first understand the background of that kingdom. Christianity came to Mercia later than to Northumbria, and bishops came later still. Bede dates Christianity's arrival there to the last two years of the reign of Penda, king of Mercia, who died in 655.<sup>2</sup> An important figure in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Penda is an obdurate pagan and long-time enemy of Northumbria. Both Edwin and Oswald, representatives of the two sources of Christianity in Northumbria – Roman and Columban – died in battle against him. Despite his pagan beliefs, Bede tells us that Penda did not forbid the spread of Christianity in his kingdom, but despised those who converted to Christianity in a less than wholehearted manner.<sup>3</sup> Such an attitude, accommodating of other beliefs, may perhaps be considered similar to Rædwald's more extreme syncretism.<sup>4</sup> Penda did not see the spread and development of Christianity among his people as a threat to his own rule, despite the fact that at least some of those disseminating the new religion were from Northumbria, a rival kingdom. Considering the late date of the introduction of Christianity to the Mercians, however, this open attitude may indicate the limited scope of its evangelisation during most of Penda's reign. These missionaries were not part of an orchestrated mission led by a bishop and were probably focused on a small area under Mercian control.

Two years before Penda's death at the battle of Winwæd, his son, Peada, converted to Christianity. He married Oswiu of Northumbria's Christian daughter, and returned to his homeland with four priests in tow. This took place around the same time that Peada became sub-king of the Middle Angles, and it appears that the Middle Angles more generally joined their ruler and began to embrace the new religion.<sup>5</sup> Peada's conversion does not seem to have damaged relations with his father, as he continued in the position as ruler of the Middle Angles; it may even have persuaded Penda to allow the spread of the new religion, though not to convince him to convert himself. Despite Peada's baptism at the hands of Fínán, bishop of Lindisfarne and close associate of Oswiu, Penda saw no need to remove his son from power. Indeed, he may

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<sup>2</sup> Bede treats 633 as the start of his reign, though the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* dates it to 626.

<sup>3</sup> *HE* III.21; Bede actually says that he despised those Christians who, having converted, revealed themselves not to have *opera fidei*. Penda is something of a pagan bogeyman in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, so Bede's positive depiction of his attitude toward Christians in his kingdom is likely to be truthful.

<sup>4</sup> *HE* II.15: Rædwald worshipped the Christian god and those of his older pagan beliefs.

<sup>5</sup> Bede considers this worth noting in his recapitulation: *HE* V.24.

have encouraged the conversion, using the political advantage that could be gained through religious connections. Peada's marriage to a Northumbrian princess may have been a convenient method of improving relations with that kingdom, however temporarily. Similar motives must be attributed to Oswiu, whose own *curriculum vitae* appears to have included three marriages, each a politic arrangement.

After Penda's death, Northumbria extended its rule into Mercia. Peada managed the initial change in overlord rather well, from his pagan father, Penda, to his Christian father-in-law, Oswiu, who made him ruler of the kingdom of South Mercia.<sup>6</sup> South Mercia comprised a large proportion of the kingdom, demonstrating a considerable trust in Peada. It was, however, the other side of the kingdom to the territory of the Middle Angles which he had previously held, and Oswiu may have been separating Peada from his support-base to ensure he did not pose a threat. It appears this was unsuccessful, as Peada was murdered the following spring, with Bede naming his Northumbrian wife Alhflæd as the treacherous party.<sup>7</sup> Higham sees Peada's death as a blow to Oswiu's plans to maintain control over Mercia.<sup>8</sup> While a cooperative Peada would have provided Oswiu with his best chance at this, Oswiu's daughter's involvement suggests a political motivation; Oswiu may have feared Peada was growing too powerful and initiated an assassination involving his daughter. Peada was in power for only a short period of time after his father's death, and his conversion (and so the promulgation of Christianity in the wider kingdom of Mercia with royal support) was only three years old at the time of his demise.<sup>9</sup>

It was during this short Northumbrian domination of Mercia that Fínán consecrated the Irish cleric Diuma as bishop of the Mercians, the Middle Angles, and Lindsey. Diuma was one of the four priests dispatched from Lindisfarne with Peada on the occasion of his baptism, and his consecration suggests seniority among the contingent.<sup>10</sup> Despite Peada's conversion and Penda's acceptance of it, only after Penda's death was a bishopric created in Mercia. Diuma's consecration most likely occurred in very late 655 or early 656, as the Battle of Winwæd at which Penda met his

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<sup>6</sup> *HE* III.24.

<sup>7</sup> Bede dates the murder to Easter of 656, as does the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

<sup>8</sup> N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1997), p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports that in 655, after the death of Penda, Christianity was introduced to the kingdom of Mercia.

<sup>10</sup> *HE* III.21. The other priests were Cedd (later missionary and bishop of the East Saxons), Adda, and Betti. Diuma was the only Irishman among them. Cedd's redeployment to Essex certainly suggests that Diuma, rather than he, was the leader of the group.

death took place in November of 655. The new bishop had responsibility for a very large area, covering all of Mercia and its sub-kingdoms, and Bede explains this with reference to a shortage of bishops generally. Bede was disparaging of bishops who did not closely manage their overly large sees, and he is being very careful, in discussing the creation of the Mercian diocese, that such laxity is not attributed to Diuma.<sup>11</sup> In fact, large sees were not unusual, with all of Northumbria constituting one bishopric until Archbishop Theodore's reforms in the late 670s, so Bede's desire to excuse the situation in Mercia may indicate the enormity of the task of being bishop for so large, and so newly-Christian, a kingdom, rather than merely its actual geographical dimensions.

Unlike Northumbria, where many monasteries existed and Christians were not solely reliant on their travelling bishop for instruction, Mercia was a relatively new frontier. Though Cedd was soon recalled from the Middle Angles and redeployed to the East Saxons, the other two priests presumably continued their mission under the direction of their new bishop.<sup>12</sup> Despite this support, Diuma may have found it difficult to find other missionaries among the Northumbrians willing to journey to the kingdom of their old enemy. Reluctance on the part of both ecclesiastical and political powers to over-commit to a kingdom whose control and maintenance could not be guaranteed long-term is understandable. Indeed, Oswiu did not manage to retain overlordship of Mercia for very long, and his fragile control was probably not enough to warrant a large investment of personnel and resources. Diuma could instead have drawn on the help of British Christians in the evangelisation of Mercia. The Mercians allied with the Britons against Edwin in 633, and possibly also against Oswald in 642, demonstrating a connection between the two peoples that went beyond their common frontier. British contribution to the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons is practically ignored by Bede, and it would not be surprising if such knowledge was omitted from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>13</sup> There is no reason why the two Irish bishops, Cellach and Diuma, and their priests would not have valued aid and support from British religious in the pre-Whitby period. While British territory was on the other side of Mercia to that of the Middle Angles, and one might question how much these groups could have cooperated,

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<sup>11</sup> See Bede's *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 5.

<sup>12</sup> *HE* III.22.

<sup>13</sup> Though he mentions Chad, brother to Cedd, being consecrated by bishop Wini and two British bishops, c. 665: *HE* III.28; see W. Trent Foley and Nicholas J. Higham, 'Bede on the Britons,' *Early Medieval Europe* 17 (2009), p. 171.

the greater kingdom of Mercia would have contained many Christian Britons, invisible in sources such as the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The Hwicce, for example, were a client kingdom of Mercia, and there are suggestions they may have been converted by British Christians.<sup>14</sup> However, although these Britons could have supplied some of the support necessary to evangelise a kingdom, there is no evidence of such interaction, and theories about the British contribution must remain only that.

Diuma converted many within a short span of time (*pauco sub tempore*) and died in Infeppingum, among the Middle Angles.<sup>15</sup> Although Bede does not state that he focused on a particular people or kingdom, it seems that Diuma's activities (and likewise the activities of Peada's other priests) were limited mainly to the territory of the Middle Angles. Indeed, when Oswiu recalled Cedd for the mission to Essex he sent to the Middle Angles to retrieve him. The Middle Angles were situated to the east of Mercia, bordering on East Anglia, which had a strong Christian tradition even before the 650s, and the territory of the Gyrwas, in which the famous monasteries of Medeshamstede and Ely were founded. The territory of the Middle Angles later became very important in the wider Mercian context, containing the eighth-century royal centre of Tamworth. Diuma's mission was declared a great success, with the bishop converting many people quickly. Bede's later comment, that the Mercians "rejoiced to serve their true king" after the Mercian rebellion and the ascent of Wulfhere to the kingship, supports the theory that conversion was mainly limited to the territory of the Middle Angles up to and including the overlordship of the Northumbrians.<sup>16</sup> However, Bede is unambiguous in saying that Diuma was made the bishop of Mercia as well as of the Middle Angles and Lindsey.

The *pauco tempore* Bede allows for Diuma's episcopacy was undeniably very short, and he was succeeded on his death by another Irish bishop, Cellach. Cellach soon returned to Ireland, and was followed as bishop of the Mercians, Middle Angles, and

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<sup>14</sup> Bryan Ward-Perkins, 'Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?,' *English Historical Review* 115 (2000), p. 515; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>15</sup> This place has not been identified. Diuma's relics were to be found at Charlbury, in Oxfordshire, according to the eleventh century text on the resting-places of saints: D.W. Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England,' *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978), p. 63. See the entry on 'Feppingas' by H.R. Loyn and J. Insley in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 8, ed. Heinrich Beck et al., 2nd edn (Berlin, 1991/1993/1994), p. 382. This remarks that the Worcestershire place-name Phepson (*Fepsetmatun* in a tenth-century charter) may have a similar source, and was in the kingdom of the Hwicce. Interestingly, Bede sites Augustine's Oak, the location of the ill-fated meeting between the British bishops and teachers and the Roman missionaries headed by Augustine, on the border between the Hwicce and the West Saxons, *HE* II.2.

<sup>16</sup> *HE* III.24: ...*Christo uero regi...seruire gaudebant.*

Lindsey by Trumhere, who took up the position c. 658-9. Diuma's consecration and Trumhere's succession were within two or three years, allowing very little time for Diuma's missionary work and Cellach's brief ministry. Cellach was also consecrated by Fínán, and continued the Lindisfarne mission in Mercia.<sup>17</sup> No reason is given in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* for Cellach's departure for Ireland, an action that Wallace-Hadrill, without explanation or context, deems "a very Irish thing to do".<sup>18</sup> Bede tells us that he returned to Iona, making it likely he had come from that island to take up the position of bishop, perhaps via Lindisfarne.<sup>19</sup> No details are forthcoming about his tenure as bishop of Mercia and its subject kingdoms, which must have been very brief, and he is remembered chiefly for his departure, 'not long after', for Iona, *caput et arx* of many Irish monasteries, as Bede puts it.<sup>20</sup>

Cellach's fate after his departure from Mercia is not discussed in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede says that he returned to Iona, and three chapters later, that he went to Ireland.<sup>21</sup> Whether these are intended to indicate two separate and successive journeys, or rather meaning Iona each time, is open to debate. Mynors and Colgrave insist that Bede is merely thinking of Iona as an island belonging to Ireland, as evidenced elsewhere in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>22</sup> Colmán of Lindisfarne left Northumbria for Iona, and continued on to another location in Ireland afterward, so Bede could indeed be describing Cellach returning to Iona and then proceeding on to somewhere else in Ireland. Cellach's departure to Iona puts him in a similar situation to Colmán, returning to the source of his mission for a debriefing and, perhaps, a chance to consider his options.

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<sup>17</sup> Bede does not state this explicitly, but having initiated both the mission to Mercia and the Middle Angles and its episcopacy, Lindisfarne would have maintained its connection with its bishops.

<sup>18</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 123. Perhaps the author sees Colmán of Lindisfarne's departure as part of the same pattern, but this remark is unfair, as many of the Irish remained in Britain as missionaries, and this was in no way typical.

<sup>19</sup> Although inconclusive, it should be noted that, in the cases of Aidan, Fínán and Colmán, Bede specifies that they were *sent* to Northumbria, presumably from Iona. In the case of Cellach, he simply succeeds Diuma, and so may not have come directly from Iona.

<sup>20</sup> *Non multo post* is a phrase used by Bede for various lengths of time. These include a few years (*HE* III.7), intervals of only some minutes or hours (*HE* III.9, IV.7, IV.14), some days (*HE* IV.30), weeks or months (*HE* IV.18, V.19), and even a period of some fourteen years (*HE* III.26). Thus it cannot be used to calculate the length of time Cellach spent as bishop before his departure, but does demonstrate that this could have been anything from a few months to a year or more.

<sup>21</sup> *HE* III.24: *...ad Scottiam rediit...*

<sup>22</sup> *HE* III.3: Bede mentions *regio Scottorum* in a manner that clearly includes Iona, though it may not mean only Iona.

Cellach's abandonment of his see is unusual, and Bede remarks on the fact by stressing that he did so during his life.<sup>23</sup> Whether Cellach continued in his role as bishop after his departure is not known, and no bishop of that name recorded in the Irish annals provides a real opportunity of identification. One might expect a bishop to continue to perform that function, even if he left (or was ousted from) his see. Bishop Agilbert, for example, was forced to leave his bishopric in Wessex, and went on to become Bishop of Paris several years later. In the interim he maintained his position, and was, in fact, involved in Wilfrid's elevation to both the priesthood and the episcopacy. Iona probably had its own bishop, as Northumbria had, so Cellach may have travelled on as bishop to a daughter house or diocese within Iona's *paruchia*, or he could have become a bishop without a particular permanent base. Of course, this persistence in the active role of bishop was not always the case, and Cuthbert himself provides this example: having spent two years as bishop of Lindisfarne, he returned to his life as a hermit on Farne Island.

If one accepts that a man once a bishop might not always be styled as such, Irish sources offer interesting possibilities for identifying Cellach of Mercia.<sup>24</sup> The death of Cellach, son of Sarán and abbot of Othain Mór, can be found in the *Annals of Tigernach* and the *Chronicon Scotorum* at c. 657-8.<sup>25</sup> This Cellach was abbot of Fahan monastery on Inishowen, founded by Saint Mura of the Cenél nEógain. Fínán was also of the Cenél nEógain, which controlled that part of Ireland, and this annal entry invites the suggestion that Fínán himself might have helped Cellach, whom he had consecrated, to find a new position once his episcopacy became untenable.<sup>26</sup> It suggests that Cellach may also have been of the Cenél nEógain. If this is indeed Cellach of Mercia, the length of time he and Diuna spent as bishops was very short to allow him time to come home, relocate to Fahan, and die by 657-8. This entry does not call him a

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<sup>23</sup> Cellach did not wait for death to remove him from office, instead abandoning or neglecting his see, as the use of *relicto* implies: *HE* III.24, *Cellach, qui relicto episcopates officio uiuens...*

<sup>24</sup> Or, perhaps, were not always recorded as such – Dairchell, *epscop* of Glendalough in the annals, was named only as an abbot in the Irish Litany: Ailbhe Séamus Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in pre-Norman Ireland: The Case of Glendalough* (Maynooth, 1996), p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> *AT* 657.2, and *CS* 658. The *Annals of Ulster* record a Bishop Cellach who died in 701, but this would necessitate unusual longevity on the part of Cellach.

<sup>26</sup> The monastery of Othain Mór, or Fathan, as it became known, was within the *paruchia* of Iona, and its founder, Saint Mura, was said to have written poetry about Columba. Fragments attributed to him can be found in Manus O'Donnell's sixteenth-century life of Columba: *Betha Colaim Chille, Life of Columcille, Compiled by Maghnas Ó Domhnaill in 1532* §50, 53, 54, 159, ed. and trans. A. Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (Urbana, IL, 1918; repr. 1994). A more modern translation can be found in *The Life of Colum Cille*, ed. Brian Lacey (Dublin, 1998).

bishop, but the office of abbot was one often combined with that of bishop.<sup>27</sup> This possible identification fits with the Uí Néill penchant for keeping their kinsmen in high office, in both the secular and the ecclesiastical spheres.

Despite the interesting potential familial connection of Cellach of Fahan, *Félire Óengusso* provides an even more likely candidate. This martyrology, generally dated to the late eighth or early ninth century, includes a Cellach ‘the keen’ or ‘the eager’, commemorated in October. The annotations attached to this entry call him *Cellach Sachs o Glinn da locha*,<sup>28</sup> and assert that, despite his name, he “was not English, but he came from the English to the Irish, because he was Irish”. He is said to be in the territory of the Uí Máil, a Leinster dynasty that achieved some success in the seventh century.<sup>29</sup> This Cellach, however, was a deacon rather than a bishop, and a hermit, located at Dísert Cellaig. The Martyrology of Tallaght reiterates his status as a deacon and *saxonis*, while the *Litany of Irish Saints (I)* calls him an archdeacon, and includes him among the saints of Glendalough.<sup>30</sup> Though there is confusion over his exact grade within the church, none of these sources call him a bishop. Nonetheless, this keen Cellach corresponds closely to Bishop Cellach of Mercia. He is likely to have been resident at Lindisfarne (or at least in Northumbria) for some time before his consecration as bishop, hence meriting the title ‘the Saxon,’ despite his short stint in Mercia. He could also have been part of the mission to Mercia before his consecration. The date of the annotations is unknown, and, although Stokes suggests that at least some of them might come from an early commentary on the Martyrology, they obviously postdate the body of the text.<sup>31</sup> If Cellach no longer acted in his capacity as a bishop on return to Ireland, this status might have been forgotten. If this is the case, the Cellach who settled near the monastery of Glendalough, and is commemorated in the martyrology, may well be the Irish bishop who left Mercia in the late 650s.<sup>32</sup> This could

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<sup>27</sup> This can be seen in the case of Wilfrid, for example.

<sup>28</sup> Cellach the Saxon of Glendalough: *FÓ* October 7.

<sup>29</sup> The last Uí Máil king of Leinster was one Cellach Cualann, who died in 715: *AU* 715.1. Glendalough lay within the lands of the Uí Máil.

<sup>30</sup> *MT* October 7. Ó Riain, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland*, p. 9, writes that this Cellach “by way of conjecture” may refer to the bishop of the Middle Angles; *Irish Litanies*, ed. Charles Plummer (London, 1925), p. 56. The archdeaconry was a role of great importance in its own right, and in the ninth century this role took on great responsibility on a diocesan level. Even before that, however, an archdeacon had acquired almost a right of succession to the episcopacy: *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, 2nd edn (London, 1974), p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Stokes, *Félire Óengusso*, p. xlvi.

<sup>32</sup> Mac Shamhráin points out that a Cellach appears in the Irish life of Coemgen, where he is sent to a hermitage: *Church and Polity in pre-Norman Ireland*, p. 188; Betha Caoimhgin (1) §31, in *Bethada Náem nÉrenn: Lives of the Irish Saints I*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1922), p. 129. This detail could

offer interesting insight into links between Glendalough and Iona, and certainly connections have been drawn between Glendalough and the dynastic aspirations of the Uí Máil. Mac Shamhráin has investigated Uí Máil associations with north-east Ulster and northern Britain, and shown that communication, saints' cults, and personnel travelled between the territory of the Uí Máil in Leinster and the north of both Ireland and Britain.<sup>33</sup> If Cellach was originally from this area, and had Glendalough or Uí Máil ties of his own, it would be unsurprising to see him return there, and if he were not, such links could account for his appearance near Glendalough.

Although Cellach's departure can easily be perceived as coinciding with the Mercian rebellion after three years of Northumbrian control, Wallace-Hadrill is not convinced that this was the case, and Bede's account does not make it clear.<sup>34</sup> His description of Trumhere's succession as bishop comes before we hear that Oswiu only retained control over Mercia for three years after Penda's death.<sup>35</sup> It may be that Trumhere became bishop of Mercia before the rebellion that placed Penda's son, Wulfhere, on the throne in 659. Wulfhere was Christian at the time of his ascension, possibly since his marriage to Eormenhild, daughter of Eorcenbert, the Christian king of Kent. Wulfhere's brother Peada had converted to Christianity for the privilege and the diplomatic benefits of marrying Oswiu's daughter, Alhflæd. By allying with the kingdom of Kent, Wulfhere was creating a similar system of support for himself against hostile neighbours, such as Northumbria. His marriage to Eormenhild may well have necessitated a similar acceptance of the new religion, though this time originating from Kent, where the Roman Honorius had been archbishop until 653. Allying with Kent brought with it a different form of Christianity from that accepted by his brother, Peada. Honorius was succeeded by the West Saxon Deusdedit, who was similarly orthodox, and these conversion origins, along with Wulfhere's close relationship with Wilfrid, make it more likely that Trumhere was orthodox in matters such as the calculation of Easter and the tonsure.<sup>36</sup> Ceolfrith of Jarrow's links to both Gilling, the monastery of which Trumhere had been abbot before his elevation, and to Wilfrid, make this

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indicate that Cellach had been at Glendalough even before his time in Britain, though it is difficult to reconcile the dates.

<sup>33</sup> Mac Shamhráin, *Church and Polity in pre-Norman Ireland*, pp. 119, 124.

<sup>34</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 123.

<sup>35</sup> *HE* III.24; while the order in which things are recorded in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, either in the work as a whole or within individual chapters, is not always strictly chronological, Bede generally presents events in sequence.

<sup>36</sup> During Wilfrid's exile between 666 and 669, he often carried out episcopal duties in Mercia after Jaruman's death, and Wulfhere granted him several estates: *VW* 14.

connection all the more likely.<sup>37</sup> In addition, a relationship seems to have existed between Gilling and Ripon, which Wilfrid received from Alhfrith around 660.<sup>38</sup> Trumhere's episcopacy therefore seems to link with a new, orthodox, strain of Christianity in Mercia, which had been Columban under the rule of Oswiu and Peada up to 658, and this is true whether he became bishop before or after Wulfhere's gaining of the throne.<sup>39</sup>

Bede depicts a certain continuity in the episcopacy, telling us that Trumhere was educated and consecrated *a Scottis*, referring either to the Irish of Northumbria and Iona, or the orthodox southern Irish, who had consecrated Tuda.<sup>40</sup> Bede makes it clear when discussing Tuda's consecration that it was at the hands of *Scotti austrini*, but Trumhere's consecrators were simply *Scotti*. If Bede wished to make a point about orthodoxy, as he did with Tuda, one would expect such specificity. Of course, in the era before the Synod of Whitby, the lines between Columban and orthodox Christians were far less obvious; a king like Wulfhere, however, with Kentish connections and the friendship of Wilfrid, could well have expected orthodoxy in the Roman sense from his bishop. Cellach's departure may have been less to do with concern for his own personal safety in the wake of a Mercian rebellion against the Northumbrians, and more to do with the religious and political biases of the new powerbase in Mercia; this was the case whether he left after the coup that put Wulfhere on the throne or beforehand, having foreseen the change in the political landscape.

If Trumhere was appointed before Wulfhere gained control of the kingdom, why would the Mercian have kept him as bishop?<sup>41</sup> And if he was appointed under Wulfhere's watch, why have a Northumbrian bishop? The same issues may help to answer each of these questions. Trumhere was the founder and first abbot of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ceolfrith had been member of the communities of both Gilling and Ripon: *Vita Ceolfridi* 2, 3, in *Baedae Opera Historica* I. The English translation can be found in 'The Anonymous history of Abbot Ceolfrith', trans. D.H. Farmer, in *The Age of Bede* (London, 1965; repr. 2004), pp. 213-4.

<sup>38</sup> VW 8; Roper discussed the apparent connection between Wilfrid's monastery at Ripon and that of Ingetlingum, which is generally identified as Gilling: Michael Roper, 'Wilfrid's Landholdings in Northumbria,' in *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham*, ed. D.P. Kirby (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1974), p. 61. Wilfrid's associations with Mercian territory were manifold, and he died at his monastery of Oundle, in the region of the Middle Angles.

<sup>39</sup> Wallace-Hadrill insists that Peada, though baptised by the Columban Fínán, was also under the influence of the Romanist Alhfrith, and so the Mercian conversion could have drawn on both traditions: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. 117. In fact, Alhfrith's *Romanitas* came about through Wilfrid's influence, and the latter did not return to Britain until several years after Peada's death in 656.

<sup>40</sup> HE III.26.

<sup>41</sup> Which chronology would accommodate the death of Cellach of Fahan by 658, if he can indeed be identified as such. The Glendalough Cellach's dates are unknown, and so he remains a strong possibility whether Cellach departed from Mercia before or after the ascension of Wulfhere.

monastery of Gilling, which Oswiu had financed at the request of his wife to atone for his treatment of Oswine of Deira. On the surface, this does not offer any explanation for Trumhere's acceptance in Mercia, merely demonstrating his links to the Northumbrian royal family. It may be, however, that connections existed between Gilling and Mercia separate to Oswiu. Penda's queen was called Cynewise, and, on the basis of her name, she is often believed to have been of West Saxon origin.<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the name of Cynefrith, brother of Ceolfrith, has the same name element (*Cyne-*), and was abbot of Gilling, probably succeeding Trumhere there.<sup>43</sup> Cynefrith was succeeded in turn by a kinsman, Tunberht, and it is likely that each of these abbots was related to Oswine. Trumhere may have proved acceptable due to an unattested kinship with Penda's wife, Wulfhere's presumed mother.<sup>44</sup> Though Oswine had been a dear associate of Aidan, Eanflæd, at whose instigation the monastery of Gilling was founded, was of the Roman persuasion. It would make even more sense for Northumbrian prince Ecgfrith to have been under Cynewise's care as a hostage in Mercia if she had Northumbrian connections.<sup>45</sup> Bede makes no reference to her having been Northumbrian or Christian, so this theory is problematic, though she may have converted with or after her son, Peada.

The church of Mercia was initially a daughter-church to the Northumbrian church based at Lindisfarne, and it is to that monastery its bishops would have looked for guidance and example. Its first two bishops being Irish and consecrated by Fínán, its initial phase would have been Columban in character and custom. This phase was short-lived, however, and it is likely that Trumhere's influence incorporated a Roman bent and tradition.<sup>46</sup> However, Mercia did not prove totally hostile to the mission that had begun its conversion. Bede portrays Trumhere's ascension to the bishopric as a smooth succession to Cellach, and, admittedly, the Mercians were not hostile to Northumbrian missionaries, as Trumhere himself was a Northumbrian and Chad later became bishop there. The Christianisation of Mercia was a political tactic on the part of Oswiu, and is in line with other political uses of such influence. Bede depicts it as

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<sup>42</sup> Judith McClure and Roger Collins, *Bede: the Ecclesiastical History of the English People, the Greater Chronicle, Bede's Letter to Egbert* (Oxford, 1994), p. 396.

<sup>43</sup> Cynefrith, according to the anonymous *Vita Ceolfridi*, gave up his abbacy at Gilling and travelled to Ireland to live as a *peregrinus pro Christo: Vita Ceolfridi* 2, 3, 21.

<sup>44</sup> The names Wulfhere and Trumhere both contain *-here*, possibly supporting this theory. Peada married a Northumbrian, so it is not impossible that his father, Penda, did the same.

<sup>45</sup> *HE* III.24.

<sup>46</sup> Jaruman became bishop after Trumhere, and Higham suggests he may have been Irish, (*Re-*) *Reading Bede*, p. 139, but there is no evidence whatsoever for this; *HE* III.24, 30.

Oswiu freeing his own people from the threat of Mercia, while simultaneously freeing the Mercians from the yoke of paganism. The reclaiming of the kingdom from the Northumbrians could have included a return to the old beliefs, but instead the Mercians took control of the mission in their kingdom. Bede obviously recognises the right of the Mercians not to be subject to outside rule, and he connects their freedom from Northumbrian overlordship to their free acceptance of Christianity.<sup>47</sup> It may be that Bede is commenting on the type of Christianity, suggesting that the Mercians were free to follow orthodox Christianity, represented by Trumhere. Though Trumhere's episcopacy may have straddled the political changeover in that kingdom, he was part of an autonomous Mercia. As part of the old system, Cellach's position was very weak, and his departure (or eviction) is unsurprising.

*ii. Dícuill (1) and the Monks of Bosham*

Bede mentions an Irish monk called Dícuill in his chapter on Wilfrid's time among the South Saxons in the early 680s. Sussex, located between the two Christian kingdoms of Kent and Wessex, was mainly pagan on Wilfrid's arrival, and Bede relates how Wilfrid, in typical form, corrected this. While Stephen of Ripon's account makes Wilfrid the agent of conversion in the case of the royal couple, Æthilwealh and Eafe, and the entire kingdom, Bede tells a different story.<sup>48</sup> In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Æthilwealh is said to have been baptised previously in Mercia under the guidance of King Wulfhere. In fact, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* names Wulfhere as his godfather, a role that had social as well as religious implications. In addition, Bede identifies Eafe as an existing Christian of the Hwicce.<sup>49</sup> As Wulfhere died in 675, Æthilwealh's baptism occurred at least some years before Wilfrid arrived in his kingdom.<sup>50</sup> Such an exaggeration on the part of Stephen is not uncharacteristic, and, regardless of the source, Wilfrid's achievements in Sussex were impressive. Bede acknowledges at

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<sup>47</sup> *HE* III.24:...*sicque cum suo rege liberi, Christo uero regi...seruire gaudebant.*

<sup>48</sup> *VW* 41; *HE* IV.13.

<sup>49</sup> There seems to have been a strong British element among the Hwicce, and this may explain their early conversion: Della Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it occurred by 661, when Wulfhere granted Æthilwealh the Isle of Wight and the province of the Meonware, in Wessex, the proceeds of his successful campaign against Cenwealh of the West Saxons. Bede makes out that the baptism was not too long before Wilfrid's arrival, but this may be vagueness on his part, or a gesture towards Wilfrid – while Bede denied Wilfrid converted the king, he allowed him to be the agent of conversion for everyone else.

length the work done by Wilfrid among the South Saxons, converting them and helping them survive both drought and famine.

Between Wilfrid's initial conversion of the South Saxons and the further benefits he conferred upon them, Bede inserts an aside about Dícuill at Bosham.<sup>51</sup> He tells us that among the South Saxons was an Irish monk who had a modest little monastery (*monasteriolum permodicum*) in a place called Bosham, surrounded by woods and sea.<sup>52</sup> Bede's description of it as 'surrounded' by woods and sea gives the impression that it was very isolated, almost island-like. Such isolation is characteristic for an Irish institution in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and embodies the aspiration of Insular monasteries to emulate the deserts of Egypt and the East.<sup>53</sup> Dícuill was abbot over five or six monks, whose ethnicity Bede does not specify, but the impression is of an Irish foundation. These monks were clearly *peregrini*, living in exile in humility and poverty, virtues that are echoed by other religious praised by Bede.<sup>54</sup> This outpost of Irish monks was not connected by Bede with the mission from Iona to Northumbria and his emphasis on both their geographical and, apparently, social isolation contributes toward the impression that this was a very separate foundation. The queen's Hwicce background could point to a path of entry for the Bosham community: if they had settled there at her encouragement, they may have arrived up the Bristol Channel and through Hwicce territory to Sussex. Welch suggests that they may have provided Eafe with a private chapel, and considers Æthilwealh's conversion part of the same diplomatic parcel that had him marry a princess of the Hwicce, a Mercian client kingdom.<sup>55</sup> Bede's assertion that Æthilwealh was baptised through Mercian efforts supports to this theory. Setting aside the king and queen, however, the community at Bosham found the South Saxons more generally uninterested in either their preaching or their way of life. One must wonder at the apparent reluctance of the royal court to follow the example of their ruler; even if Æthilwealh's baptism was no more than an

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<sup>51</sup> Bosham (*Bosanhamm*) means the pasture, or river-meadow of Bosa, or a similar name. Modern-day Bosham is located within Chichester Harbour, and there are several peninsular areas that might easily have been deemed surrounded (partly) by sea.

<sup>52</sup> These woods were part of the large, dense wood known as Andredsweald, or Andredsley. This seems to be the same *Ondred* (*de desertis Ciltine et Ondred*, translated by Colgrave as "from the desert places of Chiltern and the Weald") from which Cædwalla emerged in *VW* 42.

<sup>53</sup> See also Lindisfarne (*HE* III.3) and Lastingham (*HE* III.23). The monastery as desert is a theme seen in works such as the *Life of Anthony* and the writings of Cassian.

<sup>54</sup> Such as the community at Lindisfarne.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Welch, 'The Kingdom of the South Saxons: The Origins,' in *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. Steven Bassett (Leicester, 1989), p. 79. Edwin of Northumbria accepted a similar marriage arrangement: *HE* II.9.

empty political gesture, one would expect that at least some of his court would have followed his lead, if not the general population. Bede states that Wilfrid baptised Æthilwealh's *duces* and *milites*, perhaps seeking to suggest that the king's own conversion was so recent, this had not yet been accomplished.

Bede emphasises the community's humility and poverty, and states that the monks did preach to the locals, though unsuccessfully.<sup>56</sup> No connection with the royal couple is described, a relationship common with foreign and domestic missionaries, and neither the king's nor the queen's Christianity is linked to the Irish mission in Sussex.<sup>57</sup> The Bosham monks attempted to lead by example, and to preach to those they came across, rather than engaging in a royally-sponsored mission. Despite this, they considered themselves missionaries, and attempted to fulfil their pastoral duties. As *peregrini pro Christo*, their focus would have been upon their own spiritual wellbeing, and they may not have been equipped with a priest in their small community. However, what little is recorded of them stresses their worthiness and efforts to convert the pagan people, rather than their ascetic achievements, implying that it was for the former that they were remembered. Their lack of success highlights the achievement of Wilfrid, who forged a strong relationship with Æthilwealh, and converted the court and the general populace with his usual panache. The apparently almost-total exclusion of this group in a kingdom ruled by a Christian couple must be treated with scepticism, particularly in light of Wilfrid's subsequent rapid success.<sup>58</sup> It is unlikely that the Bosham community could have settled where they did without the permission of the king, particularly as it was so close to one of his own estates (Selsey, later granted to Wilfrid).<sup>59</sup> There must have been royal awareness of the Irish religious in their kingdom, whether they were involved in their presence there or not. Their inclusion in the chapter on the conversion of Sussex is a pointed reminder from Bede, along with the information of Æthilwealh's prior baptism, that Wilfrid was not the sole instigator of Christian conversion in that kingdom, whatever the *Vita Wilfridi* asserts.<sup>60</sup> Nor is

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<sup>56</sup> Kirby blames the dominance of the Wilfridian perspective for this, suggesting that Bede was forced to maximise Wilfrid's input in Sussex: 'The Church in South Sussex', in *The South Saxons*, ed. Peter Brandon (London, 1978), p. 169.

<sup>57</sup> See Aidan, Augustine, Fursa and Wilfrid, to name but a few.

<sup>58</sup> As must their complete omission from the *Vita Wilfridi*. Kirby too questions Bede's account: 'The Church in South Sussex,' p. 169.

<sup>59</sup> Today Bosham is about 10 miles from Selsey. If Æthilwealh had his royal centre at Chichester, Bosham was not far from the centre of power in the kingdom.

<sup>60</sup> Thacker, on the other hand, sees Bede's depiction of this community as "deliberately diminish[ed]", 'Bede and the Irish', p. 49.

their absence from the *Vita Wilfridi* necessarily an indication of disapproval: Stephen was assiduous in giving Wilfrid centre-stage, and, just as he claimed the conversion of King Æthilwealh for his hero, he could easily omit the existence of a group of monks there prior to his advent in Sussex. Nonetheless, Bede's depiction of this small community borders on the neglectful, and Alan Thacker suggests this is due to its very independence; without a tangible connection to Lindisfarne, it could be "discreetly dismissed".<sup>61</sup>

As a successful missionary and close acquaintance of the king, Wilfrid's accomplishments in Sussex contrast with the isolation of Bosham, geographically (as implied by Bede) and socially. Wilfrid had clear advantages, of course: as a friend of Wulfhere, king of Mercia and godfather to Æthilwealh, he would have had better access to the South Saxon king; his brand of Christianity would have been the same one Æthilwealh learned about in Mercia; and he was well-accustomed to engaging with kings and aristocrats. In addition, he had men with him, of whom four priests are named, and who made up the majority of the community at his new monastery of Selsey. If indeed the Irish monks at Bosham came from the south of Ireland, they would have been orthodox in their religious practices.<sup>62</sup> No mention is made by either Bede or Stephen of Wilfrid having to correct them, which surely would have been the case had he come across Quartodeciman 'tares' in Sussex.<sup>63</sup> The Bosham monks would have been the type of Irish of which Wilfrid could approve. Nonetheless, with their admirable but not eye-catching qualities of humility and poverty, the Bosham monks may have found it difficult to compete with the worldly Wilfrid, and whether they would have seen their missions as complementary or rivalling is unknown. It is certainly difficult to imagine Wilfrid's monks and priests ministering to the South Saxons and the Irish of Bosham remaining uninvolved, especially given their recorded interest in preaching. Campbell remarks that, by 1066, Bosham was in possession of a very wealthy church, and while he admits that this does not prove anything about its standing in the 680s (or the 730s, when Bede was writing), he does suggest that Bosham might have also been an important royal vill.<sup>64</sup> Its very survival over four hundred years points to a certain success, and suggests that once the population were

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<sup>61</sup> Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', p. 49.

<sup>62</sup> The south of Ireland had adopted orthodox customs in the 630s.

<sup>63</sup> VW 47. Stephen was particularly zealous in describing Wilfrid's battles with the *plantationis virulentae*.

<sup>64</sup> Campbell, 'The Debt of the Early English Church to Ireland', in *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart, 1987), p. 338.

converted, the Bosham community were able to take a more active part in ministering to them. Wilfrid's foundation at Selsey, which continued in Bede's time, was not very far from Bosham (less than eight miles), and had been a royal estate.<sup>65</sup> Bede's statement that men who accompanied Wilfrid to Sussex made up the majority of Selsey's brethren suggests that South Saxons joined the monastery too, and perhaps even some of the Irish monks of Bosham moved to the larger foundation. Bosham was not as isolated as Bede's words imply, even if it was as inaccessible as he says. Like Lindisfarne, it seems to have combined a sense of isolation with proximity to important centres.

Æthilwealh's link to the Hwicce provides one theory as to how and why the monks of Bosham ended up in Sussex, but there is another possibility: that Dícuill of Bosham might be the same man who was a priest at Fursa's monastery of Cnobheresburg in East Anglia. This potential illumination of the previous career of Dícuill of Bosham is discussed in Chapter Four. Wilfrid was not, as we have seen, the first to evangelise the South Saxons, but nor is it certain that the Irish of Bosham were the only other missionaries in that kingdom. Wulfhere, king of Mercia and godfather to Æthilwealh, would probably have sent missionaries home with the Sussex king, as other information demonstrates that he took a keen interest in conversion.<sup>66</sup> Kirby has also pointed out that Damian, bishop of Rochester from around 655 to 664, was a South Saxon.<sup>67</sup> Sussex may not have been as pagan as we are led to believe, and, as an early outpost of Christianity in the mainly pagan (at least, as far as documentary sources tell us) kingdom of Sussex, the community of Bosham most likely had a greater influence on the South Saxons than we see in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The minimising of Bosham's impact on its chosen realm on the part of Bede must be doubted, and its importance can be inferred despite the dearth of information.

### iii. Maeldub

Maeldub is an obscure personage in both the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the history of Wessex.<sup>68</sup> Unlike the other Irishmen discussed here, Maeldub does not appear in person in Bede's text, either as an active individual or as the addressee of a letter. Instead, he figures in the name of Aldhelm's monastery of Malmesbury: *Maildufi*

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<sup>65</sup> One might wonder whether Selsey's large grant of 87 hides might have encompassed Bosham, which could have resulted in its being subsumed by the now larger monastery.

<sup>66</sup> *HE* III.30 – he sent his own bishop Jaruman to the East Saxons to combat apostasy.

<sup>67</sup> Kirby, 'The Church in South Sussex', p. 170.

<sup>68</sup> See Plummer for the various forms of his name: *Baedae Opera Historica*, II, pp. 310-1.

*urbem*, or Maeldub's city.<sup>69</sup> The spelling is not Irish, so it may have been a name Bede had heard rather than read about, or which was related in written form by a non-Irish correspondent. Bede would surely have recognised Maeldub's name as Irish, but he passes no comment on him, Aldhelm's potential connection to him, or his significance for the foundation at Malmesbury. Bede's main source for the history of the West Saxons was Bishop Daniel, who supplied Bede with written information on Sussex and the Isle of Wight, along with Wessex.<sup>70</sup> He appears to have demonstrated little interest in the Irish contingent at Bosham in his correspondence with Bede, and a similar indifference may be at play in the case of Maeldub. As a fellow bishop of Aldhelm in the bipartite diocese of Wessex, Daniel had ample opportunity to learn of the history of the monastery at which Aldhelm had been both priest and abbot.<sup>71</sup> Aldhelm was a very important and influential figure in the Anglo-Saxon church, and, as a near contemporary of Bede, one might expect more detail on him to emerge in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* than does, in fact, appear. In the same manner, one might expect *some* information on the eponymous Maeldub, whoever he might have been, as well as his obvious connection with Malmesbury. The absence of such details suggests a lack of either information or interest on the part of Bede.

In the late eleventh century, Faricius of Arezzo wrote a life of Aldhelm, in which he mentioned Meldun, who founded Malmesbury, and another eleventh-century text located his relics at Malmesbury with those of Aldhelm.<sup>72</sup> The first detailed suggestion of Maeldub's existence, and his role as early teacher of Aldhelm, comes from William of Malmesbury, c. 1125.<sup>73</sup> William's account of Maeldub as a hermit who took in students is retold in Thomas of Malmesbury's fourteenth-century work, the *Eulogium Historiarum*, who adds that Aldhelm was not only educated, but in fact

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<sup>69</sup> Plummer's critical notes show that two of the oldest manuscripts – Cotton, Tiber. C.ii, and Namur, Bibliothèque de la Ville – have *Maildubi* rather than *Maildufi*, *Baedae Opera Historica* I, p. 320; Campbell has shown that places Bede calls *urbs* are often ones that were *burgs* in the vernacular, which helps to explain where Malmesbury comes from: J. Campbell, 'Bede's words for places', in *Names, Words, and Graves: Early Medieval Settlement*, ed. P.H. Sawyer (Leeds, 1979), pp. 35, 37.

<sup>70</sup> *HE* Preface.

<sup>71</sup> William of Malmesbury states in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* that Daniel retired to Malmesbury at the end of his life, but this assertion is more likely based upon the commemoration of that bishop at the monastery rather than his actual inclusion in the community: Michael Winterbottom (ed.), *The History of the English Bishops, Volume I: Text and Translation* (Oxford, 2007), II.75.12.

<sup>72</sup> Faricius, *Vita S. Aldhelmi*, in Michael Winterbottom, 'An Edition of Faricius, *Vita S. Aldhelmi*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 15 (2005), pp. 93-147; Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting-Places,' p. 93. William of Malmesbury records the presence of Maeldub's bones at Malmesbury, among those of other abbots: William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, V.265.2.

<sup>73</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, V.189.2, 3.

tonsured under Maeldub's direction.<sup>74</sup> In both of these accounts, Maeldub's students form the monastery, and Maeldub is named the founder.<sup>75</sup> A thirteenth-century manuscript from Wessex includes an abbatial list for Malmesbury that its editor dates to the tenth century, and believes to be based, for the earlier centuries, on a list of persons commemorated at the monastery. Its first three names are Aldhelm, Daniel, and Megildulfus.<sup>76</sup> Edwards argues that the fact that this list places him third suggests he was not the monastic founder, and Dempsey agrees, drawing on the later accounts to affirm instead that Maeldub was a hermit and teacher at the place on which Aldhelm eventually founded Malmesbury.<sup>77</sup> William's account contains hints that may corroborate this, stating that Maeldub *aedificauerit* the monastery of Malmesbury, but then correcting it to *inchoauerit*.<sup>78</sup> This description of Maeldub, as the man who began or laid the foundations of the monastery, supports the theory that he had settled on the spot that later became the monastery, rather than being the actual founder and first abbot.

It is not unusual for a monastic foundation or town to be named after a holy man associated with it, such as Boston in Lincolnshire, thought to come from Botulph's town (or stone).<sup>79</sup> Most commonly, a monastery took its name from a local place-name, sometimes derived from a personal name; examples can be seen in Bosham, mentioned above, and Medeshamstede.<sup>80</sup> Either of these customs may be the case for *Maildufi urbs*, and the latter is perhaps most likely, if Edwards and Dempsey are to be believed. Such a theory still necessitates the presence of this Irishman to bring about the place-name, and, in an Old English and Latin-speaking community, the origin of such a name

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas of Malmesbury, *Eulogium Historiarum sive Temporis: Chronicon ab Orbe Conditio usque ad Annum Domini M.CCC.LXVI*. I.92, ed. Frank Scott Haydon (London, 1858).

<sup>75</sup> Edwards argues convincingly that Maeldub's status as founder can be traced back to a Latin mistranslation of an Old English version of Pope Sergius I's grant of privilege to Malmesbury, where the Latin inserts the verb *condidit* (he built, founded) in reference to Maeldub and Malmesbury: Heather Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdom*, BAR British Series 198 (Oxford, 1998), pp. 101-2.

<sup>76</sup> British Library, Cotton Vitellius A x, fo. 160r: Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdom*, pp. 82-3. Megildulfus is certainly an Anglo-Saxon rendering of Maeldub.

<sup>77</sup> Edwards, *The Charters of the Early West Saxon Kingdom*, pp. 83, 126; G.T. Dempsey, 'Aldhelm of Malmesbury and the Irish,' *PRIA* 99C.1 (1999), p. 7, n. 30. Such an explanation is supported by twelfth- and fourteenth-century traditions, see 'Aldhelm of Malmesbury and the Irish', p. 6, n.27. As Edwards points out, Bishop Daniel is also on the list, yet he was never abbot of Malmesbury (pp. 82-3).

<sup>78</sup> *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, V.197.2: *...aedificauerit, uel potius inchoauerit* [...he built, or truer to say he began...].

<sup>79</sup> Naming a foundation after the founder seems less common, though St Gallen in Switzerland, named after its founder St Gall, is one such example.

<sup>80</sup> Possibly deriving from the 'homestead of Mede'.

would have been evident.<sup>81</sup> One might argue that the use of such a name for the monastery might imply a reverence, or at least a positive association, for the individual in question, and a desire to link their name permanently to the foundation.<sup>82</sup> The use of *urbs* (and *-burh*) in the name is not unusual for a site like Malmesbury, set on a promontory that may have been a prehistoric hillfort.<sup>83</sup>

William of Malmesbury's testimony on Maeldub and Aldhelm resulted in Aldhelm's Irish influence being long taken for granted.<sup>84</sup> William asserted that Aldhelm had been trained by the Irishman, and he declared him to be "a learned philosopher and professed monk".<sup>85</sup> A letter to Aldhelm from a scholar who was presumed to be Irish mentioned Aldhelm being taught by a man of the author's race, and this epistle was generally taken as proof of Maeldub's existence and role.<sup>86</sup> As scholarship began to question both William's assertion and the ethnicity of Aldhelm's correspondent, this certainty disappeared. Aldhelm was deemed to have had less of an Irish influence than had been thought, and than one might expect from an Irish-trained cleric. Dempsey refers to "depreciation, amounting to a denial, of his indebtedness to the Irish scholarship of his time".<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Lapidge and Herren doubted the very existence of Maeldub in their 1979 monograph on Aldhelm, and, while favouring an Irish ethnicity for the letter-writer mentioned above, they are careful to declare it to be undecided.<sup>88</sup> Later research has supported the premise that Aldhelm was, at one time, taught by an Irish religious, suggested by his own letter to King Aldfrith of Northumbria, and the letter already mentioned, and Herren has more recently declared that Maeldub was probably Aldhelm's teacher.<sup>89</sup> Orchard has shown that the

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<sup>81</sup> The Old English *Historia Ecclesiastica* has *Maldulfes burgh*.

<sup>82</sup> Though of course, if one carried this idea to its fullest conclusion, one would have to posit such a connection for every monastery whose name contained a personal name.

<sup>83</sup> The fourteenth-century *Eulogium Historiarum* declares that Maeldub came to an old British settlement called Caer Bladon, named Ingelbourne by the Anglo-Saxons, I.92. Sims-Williams suggests the *-burh* and *urbs* names point to Malmesbury being a monastic city: *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 108.

<sup>84</sup> For example, Plummer names him as founder of Malmesbury, and Aldhelm's teacher and predecessor: *Baedae Opera Historica*, II, p. 310; and Mayr-Harting declares him the abbot of Malmesbury: *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 192.

<sup>85</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, V.189.2: *...eruditione filosofus, professione monachus...*

<sup>86</sup> Aldhelm, *Epistola* 6 in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>87</sup> Dempsey, 'Aldhelm of Malmesbury and the Irish,' p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> They suggest William's information may derive merely from an etymological inference: *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 7, 9, 181, n.8; *Epistola* 6, pp. 146-47. This seems an unfair presumption, particularly in light of William's self-attested aim of seeking the truth in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, V.prologue.

<sup>89</sup> Michael W. Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts between the Irish and the Southern English in the Seventh Century', *Peritia* 12 (1998), p. 30.

manuscript tradition of the anonymous letter clearly identifies the writer as Irish.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps Bede did not remark on this because he was unaware of it, and it may even have been something Aldhelm himself wished to play down. After all, he later emphasised his education at Canterbury, and spoke of the disadvantages of his early training.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, he criticised the education available in Ireland in a letter to another Anglo-Saxon, Wihtfrith, who was pursuing further studies in Ireland.<sup>92</sup> There can be no doubt that Aldhelm had Irish connections; he was a correspondent of Cellán, Irish abbot of Péronne, a friend of Aldfrith, the half-Irish king of Northumbria, and was well acquainted with the Irish curriculum, as shown in his letter to Heahfrith.<sup>93</sup> He also knew works of Irish provenance, and Hiberno-Latin influences, along with those of the Continent, are evident in his own works.<sup>94</sup> Of course, none of these facts can prove that he had an Irish teacher at an early point in his life, but they do supply circumstantial evidence.

Maeldub's presence in southern Britain hints at origins in southern Ireland, though this is by no means certain. Dempsey believes him to have been part of the seventh-century group of intellectuals in Leinster discussed by Ó Cróinín, though part of this characterisation is based on his presumed authorship of the Hisperic poem, *Rubisca*.<sup>95</sup> Efforts to identify Maeldub in Irish sources have been inconclusive, though some possibilities exist. One Maeldub *episcop* appears in guarantor list of Adomnán's *Lex Innocentium*, a list which Ní Dhonnchadha believes to be authentic and

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<sup>90</sup> Andy Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm* (Cambridge, 1994), p.4, n.16. Aldhelm's early editor, Ehwald, had edited the text in a manner that could imply that the Irish ethnicity of the writer was a presumption on his part, placing the *Scottus ignoti nominis* in square brackets: *Aldhelmi Opera*, MGH AA 15, p. 494.

<sup>91</sup> In *Epistola* 1 to a bishop (possibly Leuthere), Aldhelm refers to his "past labour of study (as being) of little value", compared to his current studies in computistics: *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, p. 153.

<sup>92</sup> *Epistola* 3, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>93</sup> Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 52. See Aldhelm, *Epistolae* 9 and 10, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, p. 167; *Epistola* 5, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>94</sup> *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, p. 7: examples are the *Liber de Ordine Creaturarum*, in *Liber de Ordine Creaturarum, un Anónimo Irlandés del Siglo VII*, ed. Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz (Santiago de Compostela, 1972), trans. into English by Marina Smyth, 'The Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin Treatise *Liber de Ordine Creaturarum*: A Translation', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 21 (2011), pp. 137-222; *Liber Numerorum*, PL 83, cols. 179-200; and, perhaps, the *Hisperica Famina*, in *The Hisperica Famina*, 2 vols, ed. and trans. Michael W. Herren (Toronto, 1974, 1987); Orchard, *Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Dempsey, 'Aldhelm of Malmesbury and the Irish,' p. 10; G.T. Dempsey, 'Claviger Aetherius': Aldhelm of Malmesbury between Ireland and Rome', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 131 (2001), p. 13; Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', p. 240. Although Herren suggested Maeldub might have been the author of this poem in 'Some Conjectures on the Origins and Traditions of the Hisperic Poem *Rubisca*,' *Ériu* 25 (1974), p. 86, David Howlett disagrees totally in 'Rubisca: An Edition, Translation, and Commentary,' *Peritia* 10 (1996), pp. 89-90, placing the poem in a later date and identifying an author named Brían.

contemporary.<sup>96</sup> It is possible that this Maeldub could be the same Maeldub whose name was taken by Aldhelm's monastery, though he would probably have been decidedly elderly by 697, and is never identified as a bishop in Malmesbury sources. There are several Maeldubs mentioned in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, none of whom can be identified as Maeldub of Wessex. The *Martyrology of Donegal* mentions one Maeldub of Cluain Conaire, of the Cenél nEógain, and another of Cluain Immerois and of Durrow.<sup>97</sup> The nineteenth-century historian, Rev. M. Comerford, believed these two to be the same man, and also to be Maeldub of Malmesbury, claiming he left his churches in Ireland to preach to Anglo-Saxons.<sup>98</sup> Herren, in his discussion of the poem *Rubisca*, also suggests the latter may be identified with Maeldub of Malmesbury, looking at his entry for October 20 in the *Féilire Óengusso*.<sup>99</sup> The annotations to this commemoration assert that he was either descended from Brían, son of Eochaid Muidmedon and half-brother to Níall Noígíallach, or of the Eoganacht of Cashel, and his *síl* was *Muintir Maíl duib*.<sup>100</sup> Herren cleverly suggests that this *muintir Maíl duib* might be the community at *Maildufi urbs*, though he himself admits that the evidence is tenuous.<sup>101</sup>

Aldhelm's acquaintance with Aldfrith of Northumbria is oft-discussed, and is best demonstrated by his lengthy letter to the Northumbrian king.<sup>102</sup> This epistle refers to time spent together some twenty years earlier (probably the mid-660s) and a ceremony that made Aldhelm godfather to the then-prince.<sup>103</sup> As Herren has pointed out, Aldhelm was most probably born in the 640s, so, if he did study with Maeldub,

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<sup>96</sup> Ní Dhonnchadha, in 'The Guarantor List of Cáin Adomnáin', p. 215, notes that this Maeldub is unidentified.

<sup>97</sup> MD December 18; this kinship would be very interesting, if indeed Maeldub of Malmesbury had a connection with Iona. The *Martyrology of Donegal* was compiled by Micheál O'Cléirigh in the seventeenth century, drawing on various Irish sources, including the *Féilire Óengusso*; MD October 20.

<sup>98</sup> M. Comerford, *History of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin, Relating to the R.C. Parish of Monasterevan* (1883) <[http://www.kildare.ie/library/ehistory/2006/11/monasterevan\\_parish\\_of\\_-comerfords\\_dioceses\\_of\\_kildare\\_and\\_leighlin.asp](http://www.kildare.ie/library/ehistory/2006/11/monasterevan_parish_of_-comerfords_dioceses_of_kildare_and_leighlin.asp)> [accessed 22 July 2011]. Certainly, a Cenél nEógain background would be appropriate for a religious at Durrow, founded by Columba.

<sup>99</sup> Herren here suggests Maeldub might have been the author of *Rubisca*. Without commenting on this, his possible identification of Maeldub in the *Féilire Óengusso* is worth examining: 'Some Conjectures on the Origins and Traditions of the Hisperic Poem *Rubisca*,' p. 86.

<sup>100</sup> FÓ October 20.

<sup>101</sup> He also omitted this identification of Maeldub of Malmesbury as the possible author of *Rubisca* in his edition, *Hisperica Famina: II, Related Poems*, pp. 50, 163-5.

<sup>102</sup> *Epistola ad Acircium*, in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 34-47. Lapidge also suggests a family connection between them, through intermarriage between Northumbrians and West Saxons, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), pp. 22-3.

<sup>103</sup> Aldhelm's reference to Aldfrith "receiving the appellations of your adoptive state" has been taken to mean that Aldfrith received his Anglo-Saxon name at this ceremony, and the common element in their names, *Ald-*, may support this, as it does not appear in other names of the Northumbrian royal family in the period.

whether he can be identified with any of the possibilities above or not, it would have most likely been in the early 660s, or perhaps a little earlier.<sup>104</sup> Aldhelm's connection with Aldfrith is generally thought to have resulted from both men having spent time studying at Iona.<sup>105</sup> How Aldhelm might have ended up on Iona is unknown, but it could conceivably have involved Maeldub, if indeed he was a teacher, or mentor, of the young Aldhelm. Although the later sources name Maeldub as a teacher, it is difficult to imagine a solitary anchorite having the resources at his disposal to equip a student like Aldhelm with the Latin proficiency he seems to have acquired at an early period, or the training in other subjects, such as computus, that is mentioned in Aldhelm's letters. It is more likely that Maeldub provided initial instruction, and once the promise shown by the young Aldhelm required scholarly resources beyond his means, the Irishman could have organised his journey elsewhere for education.<sup>106</sup> Aldfrith's Irish connections are with the Cenél nEógain, which would have made Iona an appropriate place of education, and, if Maeldub had similar connections, a possible explanation for Aldhelm's appearance on Iona or in the north of Ireland emerges.<sup>107</sup> Of course, the location of Malmesbury as Maeldub's site of settlement suggests an entrance via the Bristol Channel, and not arrival from the north of Ireland. This does not preclude a Columban connection, however, and a departure-point of Durrow could account for Maeldub's arrival in southern Britain, as well as a Columban background.

Aldhelm's time with Maeldub, however, was in Britain, as the twelfth- and fourteenth- century sources attest, and as is implied by the name of the foundation in Wessex. Bede's silence on him could be interpreted as a desire to downplay his connection to Aldhelm and his monastery.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps Maeldub had been a vocal supporter of Columban traditions (quite likely if he came from a Columban monastery like Durrow), necessitating an obscuring of his existence in the history of Aldhelm, the famed writer and alumnus of the Canterbury school. Maeldub might even have left

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<sup>104</sup> Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts between the Irish and the Southern English', p. 30. The chronology of Aldhelm's life is obscure, and many dates are supposed and argued, rather than definitive, but his time as a student at Canterbury was probably *c.* 670-2.

<sup>105</sup> Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', p. 26. Colin Ireland has challenged the acceptance of Iona as the place of Aldfrith's education, offering Bangor, Co. Down as another possibility (pers. comm. 17 August 2011).

<sup>106</sup> One might also wonder whether Aldhelm, as a member of the West Saxon royal family, and so a potential claimant to the throne, was sent into temporary exile in the 660s as a precaution; Iona had proved a suitable destination for exiled princes before.

<sup>107</sup> As with the Maeldub of Cluain Conaire from the Martyrology of Donegal mentioned above.

<sup>108</sup> It is noteworthy that Bede does not even explain the name of the monastery, something he frequently does elsewhere.

Britain after the Synod of Whitby, mirroring the path of Colmán of Lindisfarne.<sup>109</sup> While the conversion of the West Saxons was carried out by the Frankish (and orthodox) Bishop Birinus, Maeldub might have maintained his own customs as a solitary anchorite. Once Cenwealh of Wessex was converted at the court of Anna of East Anglia, and became acquainted with Wilfrid, it may have become convenient for Maeldub to relocate back to Ireland. If he was indeed involved in organising Aldhelm's education on Iona, William of Malmesbury's belief that he had been his teacher can be explained – and he may even have played a more active part in his education. If Bede had known of Maeldub (and it is difficult to imagine he did not), one would expect him to appear in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It is possible that Bede had no wish to mention him because he would complicate the picture supplied of Wessex as a Christian kingdom evangelised by the orthodox Birinus, and represented by the famed and highly orthodox Aldhelm. Just as Bede omitted any mention of Aldhelm's time among the Irish, he allowed Maeldub to slip into obscurity, referencing his name only in the unavoidable mention of Aldhelm's monastery.

Of course, as Lapidge remarks, Adomnán as Aldhelm's teacher could explain the letter mentioning the Irishman who taught him, and the evidence that suggests as Irish education.<sup>110</sup> It should be noted, however, that the traditions of the presence of Maeldub, the individual, at Malmesbury can be traced back at least as far back as the tenth century, and must rely on earlier traditions at that foundation. Though the evidence does not support the tradition of Maeldub as founder and first abbot of Malmesbury, there may still be elements of truth that attest to an Irish Christian, hermit and scholar living in Wessex, and famed enough to bequeath his name to the monastery. The commemoration provided by William of Malmesbury of Maeldub's reputation for learning in the twelfth century suggests traditions still extant at Malmesbury.

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<sup>109</sup> Such a departure could help to explain the scarcity of detail available on him. It would also locate him in Ireland, and so conveniently placed to be a guarantor to Adomnán's *Lex*, all the more likely if he had a Columban background. The absence of any other hint that he was a bishop makes this rather *unlikely*, however.

<sup>110</sup> Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm,' p. 47. Lapidge is unconvinced that Maeldub was the founder of Malmesbury Abbey, or that an abbey even existed on the site before Aldhelm's abbacy, p. 40, n. 155.

### *Conclusion*

Despite their separation in the text, and the geographical separation of their locations, the Irish discussed here show the reader that the Irish had penetrated far beyond the kingdom of Northumbria. While the Irish in that kingdom form the bulk of the Irish contingent in Britain in Bede's history, their contribution to more southerly kingdoms is a vital element in understanding the complex relationship Britain had with its neighbour. Although Bede's narrative gives greater detail and weight to the achievements and actions of churchmen in Northumbria, including the Irish missionaries whose exploits provide much of his narrative of the development of the seventh-century church, his references to Irish religious in kingdoms far beyond Northumbria's borders are telling. Despite the paucity of detailed information available to him, Bede inserts an Irish element into most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of his period. Although at times his references may be purposely brief, as in the case of Dícuill and the monastery of Bosham, or even obscure, as with Maeldub, the Irish thread of his narrative is woven throughout the country. Even these small allusions demonstrate the permeation of Irish *peregrini* right through the advancing Anglo-Saxon church. This theme continues in the kingdom of East Anglia, the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Fursa and his Companions

A discrete group of Irishmen materialise around the Irish visionary and missionary, Fursa. Fursa is awarded a chapter all his own in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and alongside him are found two of his brothers, Fóillán and Ultán; two Irish priests, Dícuill and Gobbán; two venerable holy men, Beoán and Meldán; and the Irish of the community of Fursa's monastery, Cnobheresburg.<sup>1</sup> Several sources are available to us for this group, from the seventh century onward.<sup>2</sup> The seventh-century Latin *Vita Fursei* survives in several manuscripts, the earliest of which dates to the eighth century. It was written *c.* 656-7, within a decade of Fursa's death, and appears to be a reliable source.<sup>3</sup> The *Additamentum Nivalense de Fuilano*, another near contemporary source written in the later seventh century, offers an account of the career of Fóillán after Fursa's departure from East Anglia, and the *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, of a similar vintage, contains details of Ultán's life on the Continent.<sup>4</sup> Bede's chapter in the third book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is based mainly upon the seventh-century *Vita Fursei* and focuses on the saint's time in East Anglia. The *Virtutes Fursei*, a ninth-century text written in Francia, discusses Fursa's time on the Continent and the many

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<sup>1</sup> *HE* III.19.

<sup>2</sup> Kenney's *Sources* has proven invaluable in identifying relevant texts for Fursa and his companions, especially pp. 500-6.

<sup>3</sup> Stefanie Hamann describes the reliability of the *Vita Fursei* by reference to the accuracy of its chronology: 'St Fursa, the Genealogy of an Irish Saint – the Historical Person and His Cult', *PRIA* 112C (2011), p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> *Additamentum Nivalense de Fuilano*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 4 (1902), pp. 449-51. *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 2 (1888), pp. 453-74.

miracles associated with his career there.<sup>5</sup> The *Annales Laubienses*, preserved at the monastery of Lobbes, also mention Fursa and his group.<sup>6</sup> In the early twelfth century, an *Alia Vita* was written at Lagny, under the direction of the abbot, Arnulf.<sup>7</sup> There is an Irish life, the *Betha Fursa*, which Whitley Stokes dates to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries; but, as Stefanie Hamann has remarked, it is a loose version of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* chapter and offers nothing original.<sup>8</sup> The life to which Bede had access appears to have been very close to the extant version of the seventh-century life, though Bede omits some aspects of the life and includes some details which do not appear in it. He had one other source, which can explain the latter discrepancy: an old monk of the monastery of Jarrow had heard the story from a man who had heard it from Fursa himself. More generally, Bede relied on a variety of sources for his information on the kingdom of East Anglia. Canterbury provided him with episcopal lists, and, in his preface, Bede relates that he learned the history of East Anglia from the writings and traditions of the past, and from the very reverend abbot Esi.<sup>9</sup> A further source in East Anglia can be seen in Bede's exegetical work *De Octo Quaestionibus*, in which he refers to one East Anglian Bishop Cuthwine.<sup>10</sup> Despite these other sources, Bede's chapter on Fursa remains rather apart from the rest of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as Fursa is not mentioned anywhere else, and is evidently based mostly on the *Vita Fursei* Bede had available to him.

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<sup>5</sup> *Virtutes Fursei*, in *Vita Virtutesque Fursei Abbatis Latiniacensis et de Fuilano Additamentum Nivalense*, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 4 (1902), pp. 440-9. An English translation can be found in Oliver Rackham, *Transitus Beati Fursei: A Translation of the 8th century Manuscript Life of Fursey* (Norwich, 2007), pp. 60-68. While Krusch dates the *Virtutes* to the ninth century, Rackham is less certain, and offers a wide window of the ninth to the eleventh century.

<sup>6</sup> *Annales Laubienses*, in *MGH Scriptores* 4 (1841), pp. 9-28. The annals refer to *Furseus*, in *Hybernia clarus* in 649, who came to Gaul as a pilgrim, founded Lagny, and whose brothers, Fóillán and Ultán, followed him. The annals survive in the eleventh-century manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Latin 14239 [unseen].

<sup>7</sup> This is edited in *AASS* January II, pp. 44-54. Arnulf, abbot of Lagny, wrote the prefatory letter.

<sup>8</sup> Whitley Stokes, 'Betha Fursa, the Life of Fursa', *Revue Celtique* 25 (1904), p. 387; Hamann, 'St Fursa, the Genealogy of an Irish Saint', p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *HE* Preface: *Porro in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum, quae fuerint gesta ecclesiastica, partim ex scriptis uel traditione priorum, partim reuerentissimi abbatis Esi relatione conperimus.*

<sup>10</sup> Bede, *De Octo Quaestionibus* I, in Eric Knibb's edition, 'The Manuscript Evidence for the *De Octo Quaestionibus* Ascribed to Bede', *Traditio* 63 (2008), p. 170. Dorothy Whitelock suggests that Esi might have brought Bede the manuscript Cuthwine is said to have conveyed from Rome: 'Bede and His Teachers and Friends', in *Famulus Christi*, p. 30.

*i. Fursa*

Fursa is one of the few Irishmen who appear in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* to be independently renowned in Ireland, Britain and on the Continent. This Irishman arrived in East Anglia in the 630s, founded a monastery in the kingdom, and proceeded to preach to the people of the region. He is particularly remembered for his angelic visions, which he received during periods of ill health throughout his life. Bede calls him Furseus, while the Irish Annals use this alongside Fursa and Fursu; Pádraig Ó Riain argues that Fursa may be a hypocoristic form of Furadhrán.<sup>11</sup> His arrival in East Anglia can be dated to the reign of King Sigeberht, who became king in the early 630s, and who died at an unknown date, possibly in the early 640s.<sup>12</sup> While Fursa's arrival in Britain is often dated to the early 630s, contemporaneous with Aidan of Lindisfarne's arrival, the dates of the Irish Annals and of his *Vita* suggest a later arrival, c. 637.<sup>13</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* record a vision experienced by Fursa in 627, and his *Vita* states that he spent ten years preaching in Ireland after this vision before travelling to Britain.<sup>14</sup> That Bede places his account of this visionary well after his initial chapters on the Irish at Lindisfarne reflects his own Northumbrian priorities, but may also indicate the slightly later advent of Fursa. Fursa's chapter fits well into the third book of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, describing a holy Irish man and his mission in East Anglia. As is the case with Aidan and the monastery of Lindisfarne, Fursa's influence is presented as of great benefit to the East Anglians, and the divine visions Fursa is granted demonstrate his wonderful sanctity.

Bede calls Fursa *de nobilissimo genere Scottorum, sed longe animo quam carne nobilior* [of very noble Irish stock, but far more noble in spirit than in flesh], echoing the words of the *Vita*, *nobilis quidem genere sed nobilior fide* [noble indeed by birth but nobler by faith]. As Plummer comments, Bede used this contrast between flesh and spirit many times and of many persons.<sup>15</sup> Although later lives claimed Fursa to have been of royal birth, 'noble' is the characteristic offered by the *Vita Prima* and by Bede himself. Bede states that Fursa travelled to Britain from Ireland, where he had

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<sup>11</sup> AU 656, 661, 1086; Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 357.

<sup>12</sup> Although the *LE I.7*, a text of questionable reliability, seems to date Sigeberht's death to c. 636, which would push back Fursa's arrival to East Anglia, it could also be argued that Sigeberht survived until the early 640s: see Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 206, n. 26; and Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy'', pp. 53-4, n.100.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *The Life of St. Fursey*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Hamann, 'St Fursa, the Genealogy of an Irish Saint', p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, pp. 90-1.

preached the Gospel, desiring to live a life of exile for God.<sup>16</sup> He is filled with praise for this Irish *peregrinus*, whose good example and convincing words persuaded many to adopt Christianity, and encouraged those who had already converted. Those who were already Christian, *iam credentes*, might have included British Christians, East Anglians who had converted during Rædwald's reign, and East Anglians who had been influenced by the episcopacy of Bishop Felix, Sigeberht's Burgundian prelate.

Essential to Bede's depiction of Fursa are the saint's visions, divine experiences that permitted Fursa to interact with angels, evil spirits, and holy men, as well as to observe the fate and punishment of souls in the afterlife. Fursa's visions were always experienced during episodes of illness, in which, his *Vita* says, he was paralysed and believed dead. Drythelm, an Anglo-Saxon discussed in the fifth book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, similarly experienced a vision of the afterlife after dying, and then returned to life to relate his tale for the benefit of others.<sup>17</sup> Although Bede does not include the details of his illness, he does say Fursa was snatched from his body, and was away from it for the period of the vision.<sup>18</sup> This was no dream, it is clear; rather, it was an out-of-body experience that enabled Fursa's spirit to truly see the fantastic things his *Vita* and Bede's chapter record. Such extra-body occurrences were not unknown among Christians, and can be seen in both Latin and Old English texts, such as Gregory's *Dialogues*, a letter from Boniface to Eadburg, and one of the Exeter Riddles.<sup>19</sup> Guthlac, the Anglo-Saxon saint whose *Vita* was written in the first half of the eighth century, also went on an otherworldly journey.<sup>20</sup> Fursa's visions, both on the Continent and in Anglo-Saxon Britain, were thus very much a part of a recognisable tradition. Fursa's visions can be seen to reflect comparable conventions, with the holy man being judged worthy of the visions, yet suffering during their occurrence. Fursa's worthiness is an important aspect of his influence, and the fact that he merits angelic visions is confirmation of his holiness. In the New Testament in particular, only the deserving were granted true and beneficial dreams, and in them they interact with

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<sup>16</sup> *HE* III.19: *cupiens pro Domino... peregrinam ducere uitam.*

<sup>17</sup> *HE* V.12: *Namque ad excitationem uiuentium de morte animae quidam aliquandiu mortuus ad uitam resurrexit corporis...*

<sup>18</sup> *HE* III.19: *raptus est e corpore.*

<sup>19</sup> Gregory I, *Dialogi* IV.36; Boniface, *Epistola* 10, ed. M. Tangl, *MGH Epp. Sel.* 1 (1916); Exeter Riddle 10 depicts the image of the body and soul, together but separate, *Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book*, trans. Paull F. Baum (Durham, NC, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> Felix, *Vita Guthlaci* 31-33, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956; repr. 1985).

angels.<sup>21</sup> For Gregory I, an important influence in the dissemination of instructive dreams, the visionary's integrity was a vital element in the legitimacy of their dream or vision.<sup>22</sup> As Bitel discusses, the difference between a dream and vision in Christian thought was generally not whether the recipient was awake or asleep (as visions could occur during sleep), but rather that visions had a divine origin, while dreams had another source, whether physical or from heaven.<sup>23</sup> Both Bede and the author of Fursa's *Vita* are unambiguous on this topic: Fursa had visions – *visiones* – and his description as paralysed, ill and like-dead emphasise that these were not dreams. If the recipient's trustworthiness was dependent on their piety, the fact that Fursa's visions are presented as fact and recorded in numerous sources can be interpreted backward to show that he was, in fact, regarded as holy, pious, reliable, and truthful. That Fursa's visions come to him when he is ill and seemingly close to death is also a convention, and can be seen in the cases of Wilfrid and others in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>24</sup>

The rather broad observation that dreams are a common constituent of the conversion process is asserted by Patricia M. Davis, drawing support from modern studies of conversion in Papua New Guinea.<sup>25</sup> Davis argues that dreams offer a way for cultures to accept new and difficult concepts, such as those presented by Christianity, in a way that utilised elements of their own, vernacular, traditions.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, visions like those of Fursa offer a way to submit 'eye-witness' accounts to new and potential Christians, supplying evidence that might otherwise be lacking.<sup>27</sup> No doubt, Bede was aware of the didactic potential of such reports, and his inclusion of several visions in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* attests to his belief in their efficacy.<sup>28</sup> Otherworldly visions enable conversion, whether initial or deeper.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the usefulness of such accounts, Bede does not give an exhaustive reiteration of the *Vita Fursei's* description of the saint's experiences. Fursa's *Vita*

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<sup>21</sup> Bitel, 'In Visu Noctis', p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Bitel, 'In Visu noctis', pp. 49-50: clerics were best placed to be able to judge dreams; Gregory I, *Dialogi* IV.50.

<sup>23</sup> Bitel, 'In Visu Noctis', p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> *VW* 56; *HE* IV.8, for example.

<sup>25</sup> Patricia M. Davis, 'Dreams and Visions in the Anglo-Saxon Conversion to Christianity', *Dreaming* 15.2 (2005), p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Coifi's speech in the pragmatic nature of conversion, *HE* II.13. Peter Brown, in 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 95-7, discusses the importance of holy men as the means through which believers could get closer to the divine.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to Fursa's visions, he includes: Drythelm's vision, *HE* V.12; the vision of a dying brother, *HE* V.14.

<sup>29</sup> As in the case of King Edwin, whose vision in exile led him to later accept Christianity: *HE* II.12.

records four separate visions, while Bede briefly mentions two out-of-body experiences in which Fursa saw angelic hosts and evil spirits, before giving a long account of Fursa's most famous vision. As recounted in the *Vita Fursei*, Fursa's first vision occurred when visiting his family for the purposes of inviting them to join him at his monastery, built in a region differing from his *patria*. He was taken ill and brought to his father's house, where he was paralysed and seemed dead. In his vision he was borne away by three angels, who were then instructed to place him back in his body, telling him they would return for him when his appointed task was performed. At cock-crow, he returned to his body and to consciousness, frightening his companions who told him he had seemed lifeless. This audience demonstrates the importance of verifying and sharing Fursa's visions; they were confirmed by his companions, and told to others, and so fulfilled their didactic purpose.<sup>30</sup> Three days later he was again visited by three angels, with darkness and paralysis enveloping him. The three angels accompanied and protected him as he observed a host of evil spirits who attempted to attack him. The demons asserted that Fursa was guilty for having consented to sins, if not for committing them himself. The angels challenged the evil spirits, demanding to know of major (rather than minor) sins by Fursa, and the forces of good were triumphant. It is made clear that, despite Fursa's many good qualities and deeds, even he was guilty of sin: a lesson to the reader to remain vigilant. Bede stresses this aspect of the saint's story to a lesser extent than the *Vita*, whose interest in penitence is obvious.<sup>31</sup> For Bede, Fursa's holiness was more important as it made the saint a man to be revered and emulated.

Fursa then met two venerable men, Beoanus and Meldanus (discussed below), mentioned by Bede, but he omits their names and the details of their conversation. In an infamous incident shared by Bede, a fiend grabbed a sinner from the flames and threw him at Fursa, hitting him on the jaw. On awakening in his body, his burn appeared on his flesh. This element of the story is emphasised in both the *Vita* and in Bede's account of the saint. This burn remained as a physical proof of the wondrous and terrible experience Fursa had undergone; a rare and useful example of 'evidence' in support of the intangible elements of the Christian faith. It seems likely that such physical

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<sup>30</sup> Bitel, 'In Visu Noctis', p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> See Marilyn Dunn, 'Gregory the Great, the Vision of Fursey and the Origins of Purgatory', *Peritia* 14 (2000), pp. 238-54, particularly pp. 248-50, for a discussion of the *Vita Fursei* and its understanding of penance.

confirmation could be used to persuade the uninitiated to convert, and, as Bede indeed says Fursa did, confirm the converted further in their faith.

Both Bede and the *Vita* recount that Fursa preached to the Irish, and the *Vita* specifies that he set a good example, shared the story and the lesson of his visions, expelled evil spirits and gave to the poor. The anonymous author tells us that, after a year of travelling about Ireland and studying doctrine, the anniversary of Fursa's vision fell, and he was again afflicted by illness. An angel told him what he should be preaching, and prophesied twelve years of preaching for him. After ten years of this preaching, Fursa grew weary of the crowds that drew to him and understood that some were plotting against him. With some companions, he travelled to a small island, and soon left Ireland altogether. Travelling through British territory, he arrived in East Anglia, or Saxony as the author calls it. There he was welcomed by the king, Sigebert, and civilised the heart of the foreigners (*barbarum mitigabat cor*).<sup>32</sup> Once the full twelve years were up, Fursa fell ill once more, and had a vision of angels who told him to continue preaching. He was later reminded of the mystery of one's death, and hurried to build a monastery on land king Sigebert had provided to him.<sup>33</sup> Whether this means that Fursa spent almost two years in East Anglia before founding the monastery of Cnobheresburg, or that he spent this time on the *insula* off Ireland, is not clear, but a combination of these two seems likely.<sup>34</sup>

Fursa's fame as a saint was guaranteed by the transmission of accounts of his visions, and their influence was wide.<sup>35</sup> Bede's abridgement and redaction of these visions should not be seen as a dismissal; in fact, he is diligent in encouraging the reader to read the *Vita* for themselves. Rather, Bede's account of Fursa focuses on his time in Britain, mentioning briefly his life in Ireland and giving only a bare outline of his fate on the Continent. Bede introduces one of Fursa's visions with *Ubi quadam*, blurring the details of when and where it occurred. In fact, this vision was one Fursa experienced during his time in East Anglia, and influenced his building of Cnobheresburg. Bede is always vague as to the timing and location of Fursa's visions;

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<sup>32</sup> *Barbarum* is, of course, problematic here. Rackham, *Transitus Beati Fursei*, p. viii, admits the many corruptions in this manuscript, and Krusch offers variant readings of *barbarorum* and *barbara corda*, *MGH SRM* 4, p. 437.

<sup>33</sup> *Vita Fursei: vigilate et orate quia nescitis diem neque horam*, a conflation of Matthew 25.16 and Mark 13.33: Rackham, *Transitus Beati Fursei*, p. 52, n. 82.

<sup>34</sup> Though the *Vita* says that on going to this little island, he *non multum post* left for Britain.

<sup>35</sup> Dante's *Divine Comedy* being a case in point, as John O'Shea's ornately-phrased article explores: 'The Celtic Groundwork of 'the 'Inferno' and Dante's Prototype', *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 24.October (1899), pp. 48-60.

his account of another says simply *ubi*, neglecting to mention that it took place during his time in Ireland. In describing in more detail yet another of Fursa's divine visions, Bede contextualises it as one incident among many which might be useful to the reader rather than, again, explaining that Fursa experienced it in Ireland.<sup>36</sup> In doing so, Bede makes these visions of more general interest to his (mainly) Anglo-Saxon audience. Taking them out of time allows them to be more generally representative of all that Fursa was known for.

While the *Vita* records Fursa's wish to leave Ireland, as motivated by the oppression he felt at the crowds who attended him, Bede presents him as a *peregrinus*, leaving his homeland as an action of voluntary exile for love of God. This depiction fits with his being presented primarily as a missionary *par excellence*. One of the differences between Bede's account and that of the *Vita Fursei* is that the former stresses that Fursa preached to the East Anglians. Although the *Vita* attests to his building a monastery, it makes no reference to the conversion or pastoral care of the population of the kingdom.<sup>37</sup> This is a vital difference to the life on which Bede based most of this chapter; while it might be argued that Bede was drawing on information about Fursa that concerned his time in Ireland, it looks like the Northumbrian monk is ensuring Fursa's time in East Anglia is seen in similar terms to that of the Irish elsewhere; one of mission and evangelisation. As Michelle Brown has commented, Bede emphasises two aspects of Fursa's career – those of example and instruction.<sup>38</sup> Each of these good qualities is stressed in Bede's source, the *Vita*, but in abridging the life for inclusion in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede betrays his own priorities. Fursa conforms to another characteristic associated with the Irish elsewhere also, as, after some time, he wished to escape the cares of the world, including that of ruling his monastery.<sup>39</sup> His brother, Ultán, had become a hermit after many years in the monastic life, and Fursa joined him for a year to pursue the (almost) solitary life. Charles-Edwards has used Fursa's movements to demonstrate the different levels of *peregrinatio* recognised among the Irish, moving from an early stage of locating outside of his home territory to eventually exiling himself from Ireland itself.<sup>40</sup> He left

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<sup>36</sup> *HE* III.19: *In quibus tamen unum est, quod et nos in hac historia ponere multis commodum duximus.*

<sup>37</sup> Dorothy Whitelock makes this point in her article, 'The pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia', *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *The Life of St. Fursa*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Aidan is said to have spent time at a hermitage, an act in which he was followed by Cuthbert: *HE* III.16, IV.27.

<sup>40</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', pp. 57-8.

his brother, Fóillán, in place as abbot of Cnobheresburg, with two Irish priests, Dícuill and Gobbán, to assist him. Bede writes that Fursa lived as a hermit *in continentia et orationibus, in cotidianis manuum uixit laboribus* [in continence and prayer, he lived in daily manual labour]. However, pagan attacks on the kingdom, presumably attributable to the Mercians, caused him to fear for both the kingdom and his monastery, and he resolved to leave for the Continent.<sup>41</sup>

When he arrived in Gaul is not clear. Traditionally, Fursa's departure from East Anglia is dated to c. 644, and he certainly arrived before 650, or 652 depending on when one dates the death of Itta, or Iduberga, wife of Pippin II.<sup>42</sup> On reaching Gaul, Fursa made his way to Péronne, where Erchinoald, mayor of the palace of Neustria, welcomed him. With Erchinoald's support, he founded a monastery at *Latiniacum* (Lagny), and died c. 650 on January 16. The Irish annals offer a date of c. 649 for his death, though there is some confusion over this.<sup>43</sup> His body was buried in the porch of the church at Péronne, which was awaiting dedication, and eventually reburied by the altar of the church.

The later *Virtutes Fursei* presents further details, stating that Fursa left East Anglia on the instigation of an angel to visit Rome, but promised the king (unnamed, but evidently Anna) to return. Unlike either Bede's account or the early *Vita*, this text tells of many miracles performed by Fursa, including raising the dead, punishing and converting the wicked, and curing the sick. Despite being offered lands by Erchinoald and Duke Haimo, Fursa resolved to continue on his intended journey. Eventually, Fursa was persuaded by Erchinoald to accept *Latiniacum* (Lagny), where he created a miraculous spring and built a monastery. Friends and relations joined him there, including one Saint Emmianus, thought worthy of particular mention by the author but otherwise unknown to us. After some years, Fursa decided to return to East Anglia to visit his brothers, Fóillán and Ultán, whom the author believes he had left in charge of Cnobheresburg.<sup>44</sup> Leaving Emmianus to care for the community at Lagny, he travelled

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<sup>41</sup> Whether Fursa intended to pave the way for those left behind in East Anglia, or was unable to persuade everyone to accompany him to the Continent is not known.

<sup>42</sup> Krusch draws attention to Fursa's interaction with Itta in the *Additamentum*, and dates her death to 652: B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 4, p. 424. Gerberding, on the other hand, argues for the earlier date of 650 for her death, based on the dates of the respective deaths of Pippin and Dagobert I: Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 60-1.

<sup>43</sup> *AU* offers a selection of dates: 648, 649, and even 656 (though the scribe was unsure of this date) and 661. *AT* records 649 and 654, while *AI* has 649 only. The *Vita Fursei* states that his death occurred *non multum post* his founding of Lagny.

<sup>44</sup> Repeatedly called Saxony by the author.

via *Macerias* (Mézerolles), which Duke Haimo had presented to him, where he fell ill, had a vision of angels, and died.

A dispute erupted over possession of his remains, according to the *Virtutes*; Fursa's resting-place was left to divine direction, as first two bulls, and then two boys, one from each side, were directed to carry the bier, and immediately brought it to Péronne.<sup>45</sup> Fursa was deposited there, where, as the text explains, he himself had laid the relics of many saints, including those of Patrick, Beoán and Meldán. His body remained at the church in Péronne for four years, before being translated to a tomb to the east of the altar at the instigation of Bishop Eligius of Noyons and others. There it remained, and many miracles were reported to have been performed.

King Sigebert of East Anglia was the incumbent ruler when Fursa and his companions arrived in the kingdom. He had been baptised in Gaul, while in exile in fear of the then-king, Rædwald, and Bede calls him *homo bonus ac religiosus*. On his return to East Anglia, he set up a school with the help of his Burgundian bishop, Felix, who came from Kent. Sigebert later gave up his kingship and entered a monastery, though he was forced to emerge and lead an army against Penda and the Mercians in defence of the kingdom, though this effort failed and the one-time king was killed with his army.<sup>46</sup> Ian Wood has noted the possible connection between Sigebert's time on the Continent and Fursa's destination on leaving East Anglia, and has posited a familial connection between Sigebert of East Anglia and the Merovingians.<sup>47</sup> Sigebert's successor, Anna, also seems to have had connections on the Continent, as his daughters entered religious life at Faremoutiers in Gaul.<sup>48</sup>

Fursa does not appear anywhere else in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, though some of the other important figures in the chapter, such as Sigebert, Anna, and Felix do. The self-contained nature of the chapter is reflective of Bede's source-material, and the author points explicitly to this by mentioning the *libellus de uita eius* on which he

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<sup>45</sup> Rackham, translator of this text, admits to some corruption of the text at this point: *Transitus Beati Fursei*, p. 66, n. 24. Krusch, however, makes no such comment in his edition.

<sup>46</sup> *HE* III.18.

<sup>47</sup> He draws attention to the name of Sigebert II, king of Austrasia and Burgundy in 613, and Sigebert III, king of Austrasia from 634 to c. 660: Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London and New York, 1994), p. 177.

<sup>48</sup> One cannot ignore the famous Sutton Hoo burial, which, even if identification with Sigebert's predecessor, Rædwald, is overstated, points to strong links between East Anglia and the Merovingians. See James Campbell, 'The impact of the Sutton Hoo discovery on the study of Anglo-Saxon history', in *Voyage to the Other World: Sutton Hoo and its Legacy*, ed. Calvin B. Kendall and Peter S. Wells (Minneapolis, MN, 1992), pp. 79-101; *HE* III.8. Burgundofara, founder of Faremoutiers, appears in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani* 50. Both Æthelburg, daughter of Anna, and Sæthryth, step-daughter of Anna, were abbesses of this monastery.

relies. Fursa's is depicted as a stand-alone mission in East Anglia, and Bede makes no attempt to link him to the Columban mission in Northumbria. He evidently considered this Irishman's story to fit well with the themes of his third book, demonstrating the piety and good works of the Irish in Britain. No mention is made of the issue of Easter in regard to Fursa, and it is possible that Bede was unaware of his paschal practices. Bede makes no attempt to clarify this situation, and omits any mention of Fursa's Easter practices.

Bede himself assures us many of the Irish of the south had accepted orthodox practices in the early 630s. Fursa is, however, associated with the north of Ireland, though nothing links him with the Columban traditions. In the 630s, this northern origin suggests he was using either the 84-year cycle, so often connected with the Columban church, or the Victorian tables ridiculed by Columbanus in his letter to Pope Gregory I.<sup>49</sup> The Victorian paschal tables would have been acceptable to bishop Felix, and even if he did not travel to East Anglia using those calculations, Fursa could have adopted them in the years between his arrival in East Anglia and his departure for the Continent.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, no mention is made of any problematic paschal practices on his part in Gaul.<sup>51</sup> That no conflict is recorded between Fursa and the Burgundian bishop Felix – whose Continental background, along with his time spent in Kent, and his dispatching by Honorius of Kent, attest to his orthodox practices – also supports the theory that the former had already accepted the Victorian cycle. However, Felix and Honorius are explicitly said by Bede to have been admirers of Aidan of Lindisfarne, an affirmed devotee of the 84-year cycle. It seems that orthodoxy was not their sole measure of piety, and so Fursa might well have followed less-than orthodox traditions and still retained their esteem, but from his apparently easy interaction with Continental clerics, it appears that Fursa's Easter caused offence to no one, and so is likely to have been orthodox. It is curious, then, that Bede makes no mention of it, but limited information (after all, the extant version of the *libellus* from which he took much of his material does not speak of it) may account for the dearth of detail. As a man deeply concerned with this issue, Bede cannot be deemed merely uninterested in Fursa's

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<sup>49</sup> Columbanus, *Epistola* 1; see Ó Cróinín, 'New Heresy for Old', pp. 510-2.

<sup>50</sup> Although it is difficult to imagine Bede being aware of his adoption of a 'more orthodox' Easter table and not mentioning it.

<sup>51</sup> And as Columbanus's experience tells us, Gaulish bishops were not slow to criticise on this account. See *Epistola* 2, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, pp. 12-23.

position; rather, Bede's focus is on Fursa's divine visions as a symptom of his holiness, and Easter is left unmentioned.<sup>52</sup>

Fursa was, Bede tells us, found deserving to receive an angelic vision, which prompted him to found the monastery of Cnobheresburg. The East Anglian king, Sigeberht, gave him land on which to build it, in the midst of woods, not far from the sea, and *in castro* (meaning 'built in a fortified place'). Cnobheresburg is usually thought to be the Roman fort at Burgh Castle, though this identification dates only from the sixteenth century, and has little to support it in particular beyond the 'Burgh' element of its name and its fortified Roman site.<sup>53</sup> Bede's description of its location is taken from the *Vita Fursei*, and offers no independent information, though his inclusion of the Old English name, Cnobheresburg, is unique to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and may reflect information offered by Bede's fellow monk at Jarrow.<sup>54</sup> The phrase *in castro* is translated by Colgrave and Mynors as "in a Roman camp", a leading translation, as the anonymous author of the *Vita* (from whom Bede took his words without alteration) offers no explanation of his understanding of the term.<sup>55</sup> Bede explains the Old English name as *urbs Cnobheri*, and, as Campbell has remarked, the use of *urbs* over *ciuitas* implies a non-Roman rather than a Roman site. The Old English terms *burg* and *cæstir* seem to represent the same distinction as the Latin *urbs* and *ciuitas*.<sup>56</sup> In that case, between Cnobheresburg's *-burg* ending, Bede's categorising it as an *urbs*, and its inclusion of what looks like an (unattested) Old English personal name, Cnobhere, the monastery described by Bede seems to have been situated in a

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<sup>52</sup> Hamann argues that Beoán's critique of the doctors of the church and the princes might be linked to Pope Honorius's letter rebuking the Irish for their divergence on Easter: Stefanie Hamann, 'Die *Vita Fursei* als Chronologische Quelle', *Analecta Bollandiana* 122 (2004), pp. 286-7; *HE* II.19. If true, this certainly supports the theory that Fursa's foundations on the Continent, at least, were orthodox in outlook.

<sup>53</sup> As James Campbell remarks, the earliest identification of Cnobheresburg as Burgh Castle was an apparent guess by William Camden, in his 1586 topographical and historical survey, *Brittania*: 'Bede's Words for Places', p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> *Vita Fursei*: ...*in quodam castro constructum siluarum et maris uicini*...

<sup>55</sup> *HE* III.19: *Bede's Ecclesiastical history*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 271. Rosemary Cramp followed Colgrave and Mynors, calling the *castrum* a 'Roman camp' in her chapter, 'Monastic Sites', in *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. David M. Wilson (London, 1976), p. 212. See Campbell, 'Bede's Words for Places', p. 36, n. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Campbell, 'Bede's Words for Places', pp. 36-7. Dommoc, on the other hand, has definite Roman associations, as Bede calls it a *ciuitas*: James Campbell, 'The East Anglian Sees before the Conquest', in *Norwich Cathedral: Church, City and Diocese, 1096-1996*, ed. I Atherton, E. Fernie, C. Harper-Bill and H. Smith (London, 1996), p. 4.

fortified place, but not one with a Roman history.<sup>57</sup> Campbell does admit that Bede at times blurs the distinction between *urbs* and *ciuitas*, but is confident that our author usually used them deliberately.<sup>58</sup> However, in recent years, David Parsons and Tania Styles, in their thorough examination of English place-names, have argued that *-burh* (or *-burg*) could have a wide variety of meanings, including that of a Roman site, or of an ancient fortification.<sup>59</sup> Of course, as Bede's description of the monastery's site, with the exception of the name itself, came directly from his source, the *Vita Fursei*, it cannot necessarily be guaranteed that he knew much about its location. Bede's use of the word *urbs* might have been influenced more by the vernacular name of the monastery, *Cnobheresburg*, than by details he possessed as to its site, as mentioned already, as Bede displays evidence that he connected *urbs* with *burg*, and *ciuitas* with *cæstir*.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, the very fact that Burgh Castle, a site with a very visible Roman history and fortification, has a name based on *-burg* shows that such categorisations are not always applicable.<sup>61</sup> One might, in that case, entertain the thesis that *Cnobheresburg* might have been located in a place with Roman connections, and certainly, as Hoggett remarks, existing enclosures, whether Roman or otherwise, were common sites for religious foundations, along with other "suitably delimited" sites, such as an island or peninsula. In the case of reuse of Roman locations, Hoggett suggests that the association of Christian *Romanitas* may have influenced such choices.<sup>62</sup> Whether the possible selection of a Roman site could therefore be used to infer bias on the part of Fursa or, indeed, his benefactor Sigeberht, is a tantalising, but unconfirmable, possibility.

If one accepts that it is not impossible that *Cnobheresburg* was indeed sited within Roman remains, the usual identification of Burgh Castle as the monastery in question should be examined. As Michelle Brown remarks, there is no difficulty

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<sup>57</sup> There are no examples of a personal name *Cnobhere* listed in the *PASE* database ([www.pase.ac.uk](http://www.pase.ac.uk)), but Bede writes *Urbs Cnobheri* to translate *Cnobheresburg*, placing a Latin second declension genitive ending on *Cnobhere*, and so implying a personal name.

<sup>58</sup> Campbell, 'Bede's Word for Places', pp. 36-7.

<sup>59</sup> David N. Parsons and Tania Styles, *Vocabulary of English Place-Names (brace-cæster)* (Nottingham, 2000), pp. 74-85.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell, 'Bede's Words for Places', p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Cameron lists several examples of place-names with *-burg* which had Roman histories: *English Place-Names*, 3rd edn (London, 1977), p. 112. Margaret Gelling, with Adrian Keith Midgley, asserts that *burh* is sometimes used of Roman forts in the north of England, but that it is "rare, possibly not known, in the south", and lists Burgh Castle as the most southerly example: *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 3rd edn (Chichester, 2010), p. 148. Parsons and Styles admit its rarity, but name two examples – Canterbury and Salisbury: *Vocabulary of English Place-Names*, p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 53-4.

presented by the modern difference between Bede's description of the monastery being near woods and sea, and Burgh Castle's location further inland, as a Roman port did exist nearby but has since been filled with silt.<sup>63</sup> Excavations carried out by Charles Green between 1958 and 1961 at Burgh Castle revealed a cemetery with a long history of use, and carbon dating revealed dates from the seventh to the tenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> While the excavation report on this site is hesitant in identifying it definitively as Cnobheresburg, it does admit that its findings may be explained by a small monastic community. Green identified as oval huts some "rather indistinct structures", a theory Johnson treats with scepticism, though he is happy to agree that, whatever they are, they can be assuredly dated to the Middle Saxon period.<sup>65</sup> These features were subsequently and tentatively accepted by scholars such as Rosemary Cramp and the Taylors, although Cramp warned against identifying them as Irish-influenced construction.<sup>66</sup> Of course, even their dismissal does not rule out Burgh Castle's potentially being Cnobheresburg. The fact that this cemetery was in use into the Late Saxon period might clash with the historical suggestions that Cnobheresburg was abandoned after Fóillán's departure in the late 640s, but could be explained by more general Christian use of the graveyard rather than exclusively continued monastic use, and this is supported by the presence of male and female remains, of a range of ages, in the cemetery.<sup>67</sup> Certainly, Green was utterly convinced of the accuracy of Burgh Castle's identification as Cnobheresburg, to the extent that he used Fursa's name to date some layers.<sup>68</sup> However, beyond the *-burg* name and its fortified nature, nothing particular about Burgh Castle links it to Cnobheresburg, and many other sites in East Anglia could equally fit the description. Hoggett, in his PhD thesis (a version of which was published as *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion* in 2010), presents several other possibilities within East Anglia, such as Blythburgh, Aldeburgh and Grundisburgh, each of which possesses a name containing the *-burg* element and each of which has been argued to have Anglo-Saxon origins. Hoggett does not offer these

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, *The Life of St. Furse*, p. 18. Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion*, p. 56, states that, during the Roman era, Burgh Castle was on the banks of the tidal Great Estuary.

<sup>64</sup> S. Johnson, *Burgh Castle, Excavations by Charles Green 1958-61*, *East Anglian Archaeology* 20 (1983), pp. 111-12, 119.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *Burgh Castle*, pp.37-8, 120-1.

<sup>66</sup> Cramp, 'Monastic Sites', pp. 213-4; Harold McCarter Taylor and Joan Sills Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture I* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 118.

<sup>67</sup> Sue Anderson and David Birkett, 'The Human Skeletal Remains from Burgh Castle', in *Caister-on-Sea: Excavations by Charles Green 1951-55*, ed. Margaret J. Darling with David Gurney, *East Anglian Archaeology* 60 (1993), pp. 256-60.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, *Burgh Castle*, p. 47.

alternatives in any concrete attempt to identify Fursa's monastery, but merely to demonstrate the difficulty in doing so at all.<sup>69</sup>

Burgh Castle presents as valid an option as any, regardless of any assumptions involved in its designation, and one might wonder if there were other reasons Camden believed it to be the foundation built by the Irish saint that are now lost to us. It is interesting to note that Bede is of the opinion that Fursa did not arrive to convert a completely pagan people, although, if his base of operations has been correctly identified as Burgh Castle in modern-day Norfolk, it was quite removed from the existing royal and ecclesiastical centres of East Anglia.<sup>70</sup> It is possible that, while the East Anglians were not all pagan or totally unaware of Christianity, the area in which Fursa based himself may have been rather outside of much of this. However, Aldeburgh and Grundisburgh are situated in modern-day Suffolk, and would have been far closer to East Anglian centres than Burgh Castle. In this difference can be seen the potential impact of a true identification of Cnobheresburg's location, but that cannot be offered here, as we do not learn a great deal about the monastery itself from either the *Vita* or Bede's account of Fursa. Built on royal land given by the East Anglian king, it enjoyed the support of both Sigeberht and his successor, Anna. When Fursa left the monastery to its new abbot, Fóillán, he also installed Dícuill and Gobbán to aid him in running the foundation. With two priors as well as an abbot, one imagines a large and vibrant monastery. This is supported by Bede's report that Anna enabled the monastery to add and improve, implying that such expansion was necessary. Despite the Irish names associated with Cnobheresburg, one should not view it as an exclusively Irish foundation. As its expansion suggests, its numbers grew over time, and these numbers probably included Anglo-Saxons. Concerning the regime at the foundation, Traube sees an unmistakable reference to the Benedictine Rule in the *Vita Fursei*, and suggests this might reflect Fursa's own choice of rule for his monks, though this does not preclude Fursa's foundation from using other rules also, such as that of Columba.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Hoggett, 'Changing Beliefs: The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion' (unpublished doctoral Thesis, University of East Anglia, 2007), pp. 113-5.

<sup>70</sup> Felix was based at *Dommoc*, often thought to be Dunwich, but more recently identified as Walton Castle, at Felixstowe: Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion*, p. 53.

<sup>71</sup> Ludwig Traube, 'Perrona Scottorum', in *Vorlesungen und Abhandlungen: Kleine Schriften* III, ed. Samuel Brandt (Munich, 1920), p. 110; repr. from *Perrona Scottorum, ein Beitrag zur Ueberlieferungsgeschichte und zur Palaeographie des Mittelalters* (Munich: Verlag der K. Akademie, 1900), pp. 469-537. He compares the *Vita Fursei* 9 to the *Regula Benedicti* 1. Of course, such a reference could reflect the norms of the eighth century rather than conclusively describe the realities of the seventh.

Bede only mentions Cnobheresburg in reference to Fursa in East Anglia, but, as Whitelock remarks, Bede also states that Fursa left East Anglia for Gaul fearing threats to *monasteries*, plural.<sup>72</sup> This may refer simply to the monasteries in East Anglia, rather than implying Fursa himself was connected to more than one, or it might well suggest that Fursa was involved in more than one foundation. Hoggett's comprehensive examination of East Anglian archaeology in the period of the kingdom's conversion to Christianity shows that monastic and ecclesiastical remains from the seventh century are widespread throughout the region.<sup>73</sup> The *Virtutes Fursei* speaks of multiple monasteries and churches built by Fursa, and Whitelock draws attention to the monastery at which Sigeberht attempted to withdraw from the world.<sup>74</sup>

In exploring his life, Fursa's Irish background has stimulated vigorous discussion over the years. Most recently, Stephanie Hamann contends that he is from Munster, while Ó Riain has argued cogently for Fursa's northern origins in his excellent tome, *A Dictionary of Irish Saints*, basing his findings on the earliest sources available.<sup>75</sup> Connacht has also long been regarded as the place of his origin, though both of the authors mentioned reject this.<sup>76</sup> Hamann offers a thorough critique of the various genealogical traditions associated with Fursa, but at times overemphasises the reliability of these later sources.<sup>77</sup> Even the confusing family trees of the genealogies offer information, however, as Hamann demonstrates: one genealogy for Fursa names one Brónach as his mother, and names several saintly brothers. Though not to be trusted as genuine information on Fursa, each figure in this genealogy has links to the cult of Patrick, a recurring motif in the history of Fursa and his family.<sup>78</sup> The connection with Beoán and Meldán provides a useful indication of his background, as these men are associated with Meenan Church (Tamhlachta Meanann) in the parish of Aghaderg in Co. Down.<sup>79</sup> Early sources featuring Fursa emphatically give him an east

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<sup>72</sup> Whitelock, 'The pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia', p. 5. Bede says *monasteriis quoque periculum imminere praevidens* [seeing...that the monasteries were also threatened with danger].

<sup>73</sup> Hoggett, *The Archaeology of the East Anglian Conversion*, particularly pp. 52-79.

<sup>74</sup> Whitelock, 'The pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia', p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Hamann, 'St Fursa, genealogy of an Irish saint', pp. 39-40; Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 357-59. Ó Riain's disagreements with Hamann's conclusions include particularly her suggestion that Fursa was bishop of Emly based on the life of Saint Mochaomhóg (p. 32), Pádraig Ó Riain, 'Fursa's Irish Origins: Connacht or Ulster?', Public Lecture, Galway City Museum, January 31, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Brown's pamphlet, *The Life of St Fursey*, presents Connacht and the details of Fursa's twelfth-century Lagny life as the facts of his life.

<sup>77</sup> Hamann, 'St Fursa, Genealogy of an Irish Saint', pp. 7-41.

<sup>78</sup> Hamann, 'St Fursa, Genealogy of an Irish Saint', p. 10. For a discussion of the links to Patrick, see Ultán below.

<sup>79</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 358. These two men are discussed below.

Ulster background, one with a strong Patrician element which continued at Péronne, and the martyrologies generally agree. Later accounts, beginning with the early twelfth-century life written at Lagny, present him as a Connacht-man, and still others connect him to the Eoghanachta.<sup>80</sup>

The *Martyrology of Tallaght* commemorates Fursa on his usual *dies natalis* of January 16 with a simple *Dormitatio Fursei*.<sup>81</sup> *Félire Óengusso* contains a quatrain devoted to Fursa on the same day, calling him Fursa the pious (*Cráibdig...Fursai*), and the notes name both Péronne and the Conaille Muirtheimne.<sup>82</sup> The Conaille Muirtheimne were a minor dynasty to the south of Ulster, around Co. Louth, with later links to the Ulaid.<sup>83</sup> They were what David Thornton calls a ‘buffer-kingdom’ between the Ulaid, on one side, and the Airgialla and the Uí Néill on the other.<sup>84</sup> Fursa is again commemorated in the *Martyrology of Gorman* on January 16, and the added note states he was an abbot, and of the Conaille Muirtheimne.<sup>85</sup> The *Martyrology of Donegal* preserves several conflicting genealogies for Fursa, and one which he attributes to the Martyrology of Tallaght (though it is not in the extant copy) is that Fursa’s mother was Gelgéis, daughter of Aedh Finn.<sup>86</sup> As Hamann discusses, Aedh Finn is named in the twelfth-century life of Fursa as the brother of Brénainn of the Conaille Muirtheimne, although Hamann herself is unconvinced by the connection between Fursa and this dynasty, regarding it as a cult-related invention.<sup>87</sup> Hamann’s scepticism is not unwarranted, as many discrepancies exist in the material on Fursa’s origins. By focusing on the earliest records, however, as Ó Riain has done, it appears most likely that Fursa was a man of south-east Ulster.<sup>88</sup> The kingdom of Conaille Muirtheimne appears to fit this designation, although its apparent emergence in the later seventh

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358. Ó Riain calls the Lagny life “a complete travesty of the saint’s earlier Irish history”, and remarks on the genealogical link created with the powerful Connacht ecclesiastical family of the Uí Dhubhthaigh (the O’Duffys). He also discusses Fursa’s continued popularity in Ireland as well as on the Continent (p. 359).

<sup>81</sup> *MT* January 16. Fursa’s anniversary date is quite consistently January 16.

<sup>82</sup> *FÓ* January 16: *Do Conaillib Muirthemhne do Fursa and Parona nomen urbis eius In Gallia*.

<sup>83</sup> Eoin Mac Neill notes the obvious advantages of associating one’s dynasty with Cú Chulainn Muirthemne: ‘Early Irish Population-Groups: Their Nomenclature, Classification, and Chronology’, *PRIA* 29C (1911-12), p. 97.

<sup>84</sup> David E. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies: Studies in the Political History of Early Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Oxford, 2003), p. 189.

<sup>85</sup> *The MG* January 16: *abb, do Chonaillibh Murtemne*. It also commemorates Fóillán here with Fursa. As the added notes of the *Félire* draw on those of the *Martyrology of Gorman*, such agreement is unsurprising: Hamann, ‘St Fursa, Genealogy of an Irish Saint’, p. 21

<sup>86</sup> *MD* January 16. This martyrology also connected Fursa with the Dál nAraidí through his father.

<sup>87</sup> Hamann, ‘St Fursa, Genealogy of an Irish Saint’, pp. 16-8.

<sup>88</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 358.

century means that Fursa's connection may be more geographical than necessarily political.<sup>89</sup>

Fursa received an extensive entry in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and Bede evidently considered him deserving of such space, devoting over twelve hundred words to the Irish saint. Why devote an entire chapter to Fursa? His is an important aspect of the history of the church in East Anglia, even though Bede can include very little detail on Fursa's actual contribution toward the conversion of the people there. Fursa served several purposes for Bede and his historical work: he is an example of a worthy *peregrinus*; he offers a vision of an Irish missionary working in harmony with the Canterbury mission; and his visions presented important teachings on penitence and the eternal consequences of sin.<sup>90</sup> Fursa appears in the *Monastery of Tallaght*, an Old Irish text dating to the ninth century (though the manuscript in which it survives is fifteenth century) and dealing with said monastery and the traditions of two of its inhabitants: Máelruain, its founder, and his follower, Máeldíthruib. The text seems to have been written by a monk of the monastery, who, if the text can be relied upon, knew Máeldíthruib, and possibly even Máelruain, personally.<sup>91</sup> This text tells of Fursa being granted land by the daughter of the king of the eastern country, demonstrating how easily (and how early) Fursa could fit into a text interested in good examples for the monastic and Christian life.<sup>92</sup> By the ninth century, Fursa and many of his companions were known in Germany, as their inclusion among the Irish saints mentioned in a pontifical dating from that period reveals. Fursa, Fóillán, Ultán and their successor at Péronne, Cellán, are mentioned alongside Columba, Columbanus and Patrick, among others.<sup>93</sup> He remained an important figure for medieval Christians, gaining renown in the thirteenth century as an example for penance and divine vision.<sup>94</sup> His relics were again translated in 1056, and remained mainly intact up until the French Revolution.

While Kirby reckons that Bede included so much on Fursa simply because he had a *Vita* available to him and wished to add more detail on the kingdom of East

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<sup>89</sup> Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies*, pp. 190-1.

<sup>90</sup> Or at least not explicitly in conflict with it. See Brown, *The Life of St. Fursey*, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> *The Monastery of Tallaght*, pp. 120-2.

<sup>92</sup> *The Monastery of Tallaght 19: INgen ind rig isna tirib thair adodpart ferand do fursu IS hed asbertsi fri fursa. Céta indas fir ol sisi. Cumme olsesim 7 sengobi cona indeuin fora muin. Indeuin crábaid ol sisi. Fos oc etli olsesim Cesc acus ma doberad dia deid cepp i clandta do indeuin ind ainfedea oca Ba dóig.*

<sup>93</sup> Freiburg im Breisgau, Universitätsbibliothek, MS 363. See Grosjean, 'Notes d'Hagiographie Celtique, no. 41: les Saints Irlandais dans les Litanies du Pontifical Carolingian de Fribourg-en Brisgau', *Analecta Bollandiana* 75 (1957), pp. 419-20.

<sup>94</sup> See Chris Wilson, 'The Vision of St Fursa in Thirteenth-Century Didactic Literature', in *Saints and Sanctity*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 159-70.

Anglia, this does a disservice to both Bede and his subject.<sup>95</sup> While it seems true that Bede did not have vast quantities of information at his disposal on the conversion of East Anglia, his depiction of Fursa should not be seen in so prosaic a light. Bede's inclusion of Fursa, and his fervent recommendation of his *Vita*, point to a more purposeful perspective, in which Fursa serves to demonstrate Christian sanctity, not just Irish sanctity. Fursa's Irish background, while thematically harmonious in the *Historia Ecclesiastica's* third book, is not the main point of this chapter. His Irish ethnicity is an aspect of his story that fits well with Bede's greater narrative of Anglo-Saxon conversion, including the Irish among the *fontes* of Christianity in Britain. Bede's extra details beyond those provided by the *Vita*, minor as they may appear, reveal his attempts to expand his information on Fursa, and thus his interest in this saint and his contribution to evangelisation of the East Anglians. Bede's emphasis on this aspect of Fursa's mission sets him apart from the author of the *Vita*, who had less interest in the saint's career in East Anglia, and shows his concern with Fursa's role as an example and a missionary.

## ii. Fóillán

Bede introduces Fóillán in his chapter on Fursa as brother to the saint, and as Fursa's chosen successor at Cnobheresburg when he decided to give up the worries of the world and retire to a quiet life with Ultán. Fóillán, in Bede's chapter, plays second fiddle to his more famous brother. However, on the Continent he became venerated in his own right, and five lives from the eleventh and twelfth centuries exist.<sup>96</sup> An earlier source, the *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano*, composed not long after his death, states that, when the pagans attacked and King Anna was expelled, Fóillán was to be executed.<sup>97</sup> A rumour spread that Anna had returned to the kingdom and Fóillán's would-be executioners fled. The abbot is said to have bought his monks out of slavery and recovered the relics, books and holy vessels of Cnobheresburg, before gathering all on a ship to France.

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<sup>95</sup> D.P. Kirby, 'Bede's Native Sources for the *Historica Ecclesiastica*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1996), p. 362.

<sup>96</sup> Lynsey E. Robertson, 'An Analysis of the Correspondence and Hagiographical Works of Philip of Harvengt' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2007) <<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/526/6/Lynsey%20Robertson%20PhD%20thesis.pdf>> [accessed 11 July 2012], p. 204.

<sup>97</sup> As remarked above, these pagans were probably the Mercians. Anna is thought to have spent time among the Mægonsæte during this exile, before returning to East Anglia: Norman Scarfe, *Suffolk in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 42-3.

The Cnobheresburg community arrived at Péronne, the location of Fursa's remains. The *Additamentum* states that a *patricius* soon drove them away. This is almost certainly a reference to Erchinoald, mayor of the palace, as the text mentions *Erchinoald patricius* in the directly preceding line; this change-of-heart has long puzzled historians.<sup>98</sup> Gerberding and Fouracre suggest that it may relate to Erchinoald's connections to southern England, reflecting changing political winds.<sup>99</sup> However, such considerations would presumably have affected Erchinoald's relations with Fursa himself only a few years earlier, yet in that case the *patricius* competed to retain control of the Irishman's remains. The very fact that Fóillán quickly acquired patronage elsewhere might rather explain his dismissal from Péronne, hinting that the newcomers might have been soliciting support in more than one quarter. Indeed, the split with Erchinoald may be an exaggeration on the part of the author, as, despite this apparent conflict, Fóillán's relations with the Austrasians, Itta, and Geretrud, should not be seen as a complete break with Péronne; it continued to be seen as *Peronna Scottorum* well into the next century and beyond.<sup>100</sup> Fóillán was taken under the wing of Itta, wife to Pippin I, in Austrasia, where she had already founded the monastery of Nivelles. Fóillán founded the monastery of Fosses, known as *monasterium Scottorum*, near Nivelles, with the support of Itta, and her children, Gertrude and Grimoald.<sup>101</sup> Fóillán's arrival, his expulsion from Péronne and his setting up of Fosses all happened within a short time frame, whether Itta's death occurred in 650 or 651.<sup>102</sup>

Although Gerberding argues that Fóillán's death followed very closely upon that of Itta, as Picard has remarked, this is not necessarily the case, though it did postdate the death of Nivelles' founder.<sup>103</sup> He was murdered by thieves (according to the *Additamentum*) not far from Nivelles. After mass at Nivelles on the vigil of the feast of Saint Quentin (30 October), Fóillán had set out on a journey, presciently having

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<sup>98</sup> See Jean-Michel Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century: The Irish Exile of King Dagobert II', in *Ireland and Northern France AD 600-850*, ed. Jean-Michel Picard (Dublin, 1991), p. 33, for an alternative explanation: Picard suggests the ousting *patricius* may have been Becharius, as the *Virtutes* demonstrates his hostility to Erchinoald and his interest in the Irish missionaries. He explains it as "the reaction of local powers against the tightening of control by the mayor of the palace in peripheral territories."

<sup>99</sup> Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640-720* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 100-4.

<sup>100</sup> Traube, 'Peronna Scottorum', p. 104; Krusch, *MGH SRM* 4, p. 424.

<sup>101</sup> Traube, 'Peronna Scottorum', p. 104.

<sup>102</sup> Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century', pp. 34-5. Gerberding argues for 650: *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 61.

<sup>103</sup> Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 61: Gerberding argues this because the author of the *Additamentum* places her death and Fóillán's journey in the same sentence.

asked the brethren to find his body if he happened to die en route. He was murdered, his head being cut off, along with three companions. Gertrude expended much effort in seeking them, and seventy-seven days after their murder, on the anniversary of Fursa's death (16 January), they were found. Their bodies were recovered from the pigsty in which they had been buried, and were escorted back to Nivelles in a solemn procession. The *Additamentum* adds that Dido, bishop of Poitiers, and Grimoald, mayor of the palace, had met at Nivelles that same day, and they participated in the final stage of this procession.<sup>104</sup> Fóillán was buried, at last, at Fosses.

Like so many other Irishmen who made names for themselves beyond the island of Ireland, Fóillán is remembered in both the *Martyrology of Tallaght* and the *Féilire Óengusso* on the day of his death, October 31, alongside St Quentin. The additions to the entry in the *Féilire* name him as Fursa's brother, a martyr, and an abbot in Gaul.<sup>105</sup> The *Martyrology of Gorman* also includes him as Fursa's brother on the same date.<sup>106</sup> His inclusion in these works is tied up in his connection with Fursa, whose fame so outweighed his own. Despite his overshadowed history, however, his interactions with the political power-houses of Gaul point to a savvy and shrewd man who flourished on the Continent.<sup>107</sup>

### iii. Ultán

Ultán was another natural brother of Fursa who travelled to Britain with Fursa from Ireland.<sup>108</sup> Bede tells us that Ultán had become a hermit (*ad heremiticam peruenerat uitam*) after a lengthy time as a monk in community. Fursa desired to extricate himself from the world, just as Cuthbert did on Farne, and when he had accomplished all he set out to do in East Anglia, he joined his eremitical brother for a year. Ultán's place of seclusion was within the kingdom of East Anglia, as Fursa's decision to leave Britain was motivated by attacks on East Anglia during his time with his brother. Bede tells us that they spent their year in East Anglia in continence and prayer, and performed manual work.<sup>109</sup> As mentioned, the *Vita Fursei's* account of

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<sup>104</sup> Poitiers was part of Austrasia from Dagobert I's death in 639 until the late seventh century, so it is not strange to see this cooperation.

<sup>105</sup> *FÓ* October 31: .i. *abb in Gallia .i. brathair Fursa 7 martir.*

<sup>106</sup> *MG* October 31: *brathair Fursa Foelan.*

<sup>107</sup> Further discussion of Fóillán's interaction with Frankish politics can be found below.

<sup>108</sup> Traube assumes he was the younger brother: 'Peronna Scottorum', p. 109.

<sup>109</sup> *HE* III.19: *Hunc ergo solus petens, annum totum cum eo in continentia et orationibus, in cotidianis manuum uixit laboribus.*

Ultán's probationary time in community, before being granted permission to become an anchorite, is influenced by the first chapter of the *Regula Benedicti*. The same chapter of the Benedictine Rule declares that, having been fully prepared by life in the monastery, these anchorites were able to battle all evils.<sup>110</sup> This idea also draws on Cassian's recommendations that hermits first be thoroughly trained in the monastery.<sup>111</sup> Ultán is depicted as an anchorite in the image of the Benedictine Rule's prescripts.

Ultán was among the men who followed Fursa from Britain to the Continent, although whether he did so at the same time as Fursa or later in the company of Fóillán is not made clear by our sources. The *Vita Geretrudis* calls Ultán a *peregrinus* at Fosses in 659, the year Gertrude died.<sup>112</sup> Ultán appears in the *Vita Rictrudis*, a life written in 907 by Hucbald of St Amand. Kenney describes Rictrude's hagiographer as "a historian of honesty and good sense" who used older traditions and sources to piece together his narrative. This life famously states that Ultán was abbot of Péronne, and consented to hold St Amatus, bishop of Sens, there at the request of Ebroin, mayor of the palace. The reasons for this imprisonment are unconfirmed, but the entrusting of a banished bishop to his care must speak for Ultán's involvement with the Austrasian powerbase. After Ultán's death, Amatus was relocated to Breuil.<sup>113</sup> Two later saints' lives repeat this assertion, although we have no record of it before the 907 *Vita*.<sup>114</sup> A brother succeeding another as abbot of a monastery is not at all unusual; after all, Fóillán similarly followed Fursa as abbot of Cnobheresburg, and the monastery of Iona was headed by men of the same extended family for generations. From these two instances, it appears that Ultán was a member of the community at Fosses, presumably under the abbacy of his brother Fóillán, and later abbot of Péronne. Although historians often name him as abbot of Fosses also, there is no evidence of this in the early sources, with the *Vita Geretrudis* calling him simply a *peregrinus*.<sup>115</sup>

The date of Ultán's death is not easy to confirm. Emile Brouette dates it to 686, while Patrick Geary believes it to have occurred in 680, but neither author explains

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<sup>110</sup> Traube, 'Peronna Scottorum', p. 110. *Regula Benedicti* 1.

<sup>111</sup> Cassian, *Conlationes* 19.10.

<sup>112</sup> *Vita Geretrudis* 7.

<sup>113</sup> *Vita Rictrudis* II.24, AASS May III, p. 87. The founder and abbot at Breuil-sur-Lys was Maurontus, son of Rictrude, and possibly nephew of Erchinoald: Patrick J. Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence: The Rhône Basin at the Dawn of the Carolingian Age* (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), pp. 128, 131-3.

<sup>114</sup> The *Vita Eusebiae* and the *Vita Amati*, written around the tenth and eleventh centuries, respectively; Traube, 'Peronna Scottorum', p. 104, is happy to accept its veracity.

<sup>115</sup> Hamann calls him abbot of Fosses, 'Die *Vita Fursei* als Chronologische Quelle', p. 283.

their reasoning.<sup>116</sup> Hamann agrees that he lived until at least the latter date, looking to sources on both Rictrude and Amatus for support.<sup>117</sup> If we can rely on Hucbald's *Vita Rictrudis* account that Ultán acted as host for the banished Amatus, under the instructions of Theuderic III and his mayor of the palace, Ebroin, we may arrive at a broad date. Theuderic became king of Neustria, the kingdom in which Péronne lay, in 673 for a short period, and again in *c.* 675 until 691, and Ultán's abbacy at Péronne would have coincided with some part of his reign. The *Vita Rictrudis* states that Amatus was imprisoned at Péronne at the time when Theuderic was exercising his 'unjust tyranny' (*iniquam exercebat tyrannidem*).<sup>118</sup> Theuderic's ill-fated earlier reign allows little time for such an imprisonment to begin, Ultán to die, and the monastery of Breuil to receive Amatus, so this tyranny more likely refers to Theuderic's kingship after 675.<sup>119</sup> Geary argues that Amatus's crime was his support of Ebroin's and Theuderic III's enemies who had put Dagobert II on the throne of Austrasia in 676, and this would offer a plausible explanation for his confinement.<sup>120</sup> This moves the time of Ultán's death to after *c.* 676, and would connect him with Ebroin and Theuderic's faction, rather than with those who sought to reinstate Dagobert II.

The fact that Hucbald described Ultán as *sanctus*, contrasting with his mention of Theuderic's *tyrannidem*, does rather nuance this account: despite Ultán's facilitation of the bishop's confinement (and his selection by Theuderic, an important element of this event), he is presented in a positive light. Geary claims that this arrangement was not at the behest of Ebroin, but it is difficult to understand or to believe this statement, as Ebroin's position as Theuderic's mayor gave wide authority.<sup>121</sup> Of course, Amatus's installation at Péronne might have occurred during Leudesius's mayoralty, as he had

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<sup>116</sup> Emile Brouette, *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques* XVII (Paris, 1971), col. 1218; Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, p. 136.

<sup>117</sup> Hamann, 'Die *Vita Fursei* als Chronologische Quelle', p. 283. However, faced with the same sources, the Bollandists could not come up with a definitive date either, and it is surprising that Hamann seems so certain: Introduction to *De Sancto Amato episcopo Senonensi confessore*, AASS September IV, p. 126.

<sup>118</sup> *Vita Rictrudis* II.24.

<sup>119</sup> Hucbald's Austrasian loyalties have been invoked to explain his hostility to Theuderic III: eds. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, E. Gordon Whatley, *Sainted Women of the dark ages* (Durham and London, 1992), p. 213, n. 66.

<sup>120</sup> Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, p. 136. Louis Dupraz, *Contribution à l'Histoire du Regnum Francorum Pendant le Troisième Quart du VII Siècle (656-680)* (Fribourg, 1948), p. 103, n. 3. John F. Benton, Preface, in *Charters of St-Fursy of Péronne*, ed. William Mendel Newman, with Mary A. Rouse (Cambridge, MA, 1977), p. xv.

<sup>121</sup> Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence*, p. 136. Geary rather sees Ebroin opposed by the old Neustrian order which included Erchinoald's family, which he also associates with Amatus's later place of seclusion, Breuil.

inherited his father Erchinoald's properties.<sup>122</sup> That Amatus remained at Péronne until Ultán's death does, however, indicate that the new mayor, Ebroin, was satisfied with the situation. After Ultán's death, Amatus was moved to the monastery of Breuil, under the gentle and approving supervision of Maurantius, its abbot and the son of Rictrude.<sup>123</sup> It may be that this move reflected more than just Ultán's death however, possibly also indicating a change in policy. This could tenuously be attributed to Ebroin's death *c.* 680, and Waratto's succession, which was characterised by appeasement of the Austrasians. The year 680 can perhaps be offered as a possible date for Ultán's death, and 676 as its *terminus post quem*. Cellán is usually thought to have been abbot of Péronne from sometime after *c.* 675, and such a date for Ultán's death allows Cellán to succeed him at a time that fits other evidence.<sup>124</sup>

Perhaps because of the ill-recorded details of his life, Ultán appears in other contexts with a varying history. By the time the later life of Fursa was written in the twelfth century, the Benedictine abbey of Mont-Saint-Quentin had been founded and was claiming that Ultán had been abbot there. While Benton admits the possibility of an early foundation whose origins in some way connected to Ultán, there is no evidence of it whatsoever before the abbey's own late charter.<sup>125</sup> The abbey's traditions also claim that it dated from the time of Erchinoald and king Dagobert, an assertion that does not add to its trustworthiness.

Several Ultáns are recorded in the Irish annals and in the martyrologies, about many of whom little is known. Ultán appears in the *Martyrology of Gorman* on April 27, commemorated as the brother of Fursa (*brathair Fursa*), and similarly in the *Martyrology of Donegal*.<sup>126</sup> The latter text includes another Ultán, son of Maolsneachta, on May 1, to which the later hand has appended a note suggesting him to be the brother of Fursa and Fóillán.<sup>127</sup> *Félire Óengusso* has an Ultán inserted at September 4, and the

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<sup>122</sup> Leudesius's term as mayor was brief, from 675-676, but probably coincided with movements to return Dagobert II to the throne. Leudesius was supported by Leudegar, bishop of Autun and nephew of Dido of Poitiers, and both were part of the Neustrian faction ranged against Ebroin.

<sup>123</sup> *Vita Rictrudis* II.24.

<sup>124</sup> The 675 date is probably based on his correspondence with Aldhelm, which is presumed to have taken place sometime after 675, the year in which he is thought to have become abbot: Lapidge discusses this date, which is based on a charter, issued by Leuthere, bishop of Winchester, and preserved in William of Malmesbury's work. The charter is problematic, and Lapidge is loath to accept it as authentic, thus throwing out the 675 date. He does argue for Aldhelm being abbot by 685, and perhaps by 681: 'The Career of Aldhelm', pp. 48-51.

<sup>125</sup> Benton, Preface, in *Charters of St-Fursy of Péronne*, p. xvii-xviii.

<sup>126</sup> *MG* April 27; *MD* April 27. The *Martyrology of Tallaght* also has an Ultán on April 27, but in other places too, and without any details that specify Fursa's brother.

<sup>127</sup> *MD* May 1.

additions to this entry include a wealth of information on this Ultán of Ard Breccáin, in Co. Meath, who is not the man under discussion here. However, one of the additional notes to this entry associates Ultán, not with Ard Breccáin, but with the monastery of Mochta, in Co. Louth, stating that he succeeded Fursa as abbot there.<sup>128</sup> Such a succession is in keeping with both Fóillán's succession at Cnobheresburg and Ultán's at Péronne. If true, it might indicate that Ultán did not immediately accompany Fursa to Britain, as Hamann asserts. However, as the *Vita* tells us, Fursa travelled around Ireland for a year before his third vision, and it is likely this practice necessitated a replacement abbot at his monastery; might not Ultán have fulfilled this role? Mochta was said to have been a disciple of Saint Patrick, yet another connection between Fursa's circle and the cult of that saint. As Picard has revealed, in the eighth and ninth centuries, strong familial connections can be seen between Louth, Slane, and Péronne.<sup>129</sup> Regarding the argument that Fursa and his family hailed from the north, Ultán's name offers some possible, though uncertain, support. An Ultán appears in the ninth-century Durham *Liber Vitae*, and Paul Russell and others suggest that the name includes the stem *\*ult*, which may be associated with the tribal name *Ulaid*.<sup>130</sup> Ultán's fame is inextricably linked with that of his brother, but his relations with the upper echelons of Frankish society reveal a man who is more than merely the obscure brother of a saint.

The *Vita Sanctae Geretrudis* attests to Patrick's veneration by this Irishman. As a *peregrinus* at Fosses after the death of Fóillán, Ultán was called to the deathbed of Gertrude, abbess of Nivelles. Ultán told Gertrude that *beatus Patricius episcopus* would be there to receive her with the angels when she died, and he accurately foretold that she would die on Patrick's *dies natalis* of March 17.<sup>131</sup> The *Virtutes Fursei* states that Fursa was buried in Péronne along with the relics of Beoán, Meldán and Patrick. This veneration of Patrick ties in with Fursa and his brothers being from the north-east of Ireland, and even Beoán and Meldán are associated, though separately, with Patrick.<sup>132</sup> A poem for the dedication of a chapel or oratory to Patrick has been ascribed to Cellán,

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<sup>128</sup> Picard is happy to regard this last note as separate, and merely mistakenly associated with Ultán of Ard Breccáin: 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century', p. 34, n.16.

<sup>129</sup> Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century', p. 44. See also Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 318, n. 177. See also Hamann, 'St Fursa, Genealogy of an Irish Saint', pp. 19, 38. The abbey at Slane is mentioned in Muirchú's *Vita Patricii* I.17.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Russell with Peter McClure and David Rollason, *The Durham Liber Vitae II: Linguistic Commentary*, pp. 42-43. They also suggest an alternative coming from *\*ul*, meaning 'beard' (although this seems an unusual name to give a child).

<sup>131</sup> *Vita Geretrudis* 7.

<sup>132</sup> Hamann, 'St Fursa, the Genealogy of an Irish Saint', pp. 25-6.

abbot of Péronne c. 675-706, as one of its two survivals is in a collection of poetry associated with the abbot. This is the same Cellán who corresponded with Aldhelm of Wessex in what has been seen as a battle of words.<sup>133</sup> If authentic, this would attest to the continued veneration of Patrick at that centre, and so the continued tradition of Fursa and his family. Yet this identification of the author is subject to much discussion, as it depends largely on the poem's position in one manuscript in relation to another poem in which Cellán is mentioned.<sup>134</sup> Despite the uncertainty of this attribution or provenance, it has been hesitantly accepted by several eminent scholars in recent years including Richard Sharpe and Michael Lapidge, with Sims-Williams offering circumstantial evidence in support of the attribution.<sup>135</sup> Even without reference to this verse, the veneration of Patrick by the community of Péronne and the family (and the *familia*) of Fursa is assured.

#### *iv. Fóillán and Ultán: The Dagobert Affair*

The coming together of Dido and Grimoald at Nivelles after the death of Fóillán has often been remarked upon for its possible connection to the exile of Dagobert II, son of king Sigebert, to Ireland.<sup>136</sup> In this infamous and bold coup, Grimoald, mayor of the palace, had Dagobert II tonsured and taken from the Continent to Ireland on the death of his father, King Sigebert III. In his place, Grimoald put his own son, calling him by the Merovingian name Childebert. Years later, Dagobert was recalled from Ireland and reinstated on the throne, a transition in which Wilfrid of Northumbria was involved. The most explicit account of this series of events is found in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, an eighth-century work long considered unreliable

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<sup>133</sup> David Howlett sees Cellán's letter as highly sarcastic: 'Aldhelm and Irish Learning', *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 52 (1994), pp. 68-74. Cf. Herren, 'Scholarly Contacts between the Irish and the Southern English', p. 28, who emphasises Cellán's Latin skills.

<sup>134</sup> For an excellent summary of the evidence, see Charles D. Wright, 'Cellanus of Péronne', *Source of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (2008) <[www.http://saslc.nd.edu/samples/c/cellanus\\_of\\_peronne.pdf](http://saslc.nd.edu/samples/c/cellanus_of_peronne.pdf)> [accessed 3 August 2012], pp. 2-3. Ludwig Traube first identified Cellanus as the author of the poem mentioning Patrick, 'Peronna Scottorum', pp. 108-9.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Sharpe, *A Handlist of the Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland before 1540* (Turnhout, 1997), p. 84; Michael Lapidge, *Compendium Auctorum Latinorum Medii Aevi* II.5 (Florence, 2008), p. 584; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 351, n. 93.

<sup>136</sup> S. Hamann does not doubt Fóillán's involvement: 'Zur Chronologie des Staatsstreichs Grimoalds', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 59.1 (2003), p. 50. See also Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Merovingian Politics and Insular Calligraphy: The Historical Background to the Book of Durrow and Related Manuscripts', in *Ireland and Insular art AD 500-1200: Proceedings of a Conference at University College Cork, 31 Oct-3 Nov, 1985*, ed. Michael Ryan (Dublin, 1987), pp. 40-1.

but which Gerberding reinstated as a vital part of the canon in 1985.<sup>137</sup> Sigeberht's death is usually dated to 656, though Gerberding offers an alternative chronology centring on Sigeberht's possible death in 651.<sup>138</sup> Whether one relies on the traditional dates, and places Fóillán's death in 655 and Sigeberht's in 656, or follows the adjusted chronology, and dates these deaths to 650 and 651, respectively, the same suggestive timing is apparent: Grimoald and Dido meeting at a foundation under the former's patronage not long before the king's death in February. Considering Grimoald and his family's patronage of Fóillán, one might imagine that the latter and his Irish companions would have been the convenient route through which to spirit the young prince away, though the Neustrian Dido seems to have had connections of his own.<sup>139</sup> Fóillán and Ultán's associations with the Pippinids, and their visibility in the 650s are strong indications that they would have been involved in the organisation of this scheme. Fóillán's death in 655 may in fact have forced Grimoald to use other avenues in his coup, and the fact the Dido and Grimoald met at Nivelles directly after the recovering of Fóillán's body could imply such a change of plan was under way. Of course, Fóillán cannot have been the only one at Nivelles or Fosses with connections to Ireland; Irish monks were members of both communities, and Ultán was abbot at Péronne in the late 670s. Late eighteenth-century Irish tradition claims that Dagobert II was exiled to the abbey of Slane, and while such late claims cannot be taken at face value, their existence adds to the historical picture that associates Péronne and Fursa's family with Cos. Louth and Meath.<sup>140</sup>

Picard makes the excellent point that Ultán was the only one of the three brothers left alive when Dagobert was exiled to Ireland, and his time on the Continent spanned the entire period of Dagobert's exile.<sup>141</sup> The fact that he was involved in politics to the extent of being willing to keep St Amatus at his monastery adds to the theory that he might have been happy to be involved in yet other political intrigues. Ultán's connection with Gertrude certainly confirms that he maintained the high-

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<sup>137</sup> Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*.

<sup>138</sup> Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, p. 50. Gerberding argues cogently against Krusch's dating, pp. 50-2.

<sup>139</sup> As Picard points out, Dido's relative and successor Ansoald named an Irish bishop, Rónán, in his will. Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century', p. 39. This Rónán, it has been suggested, may have been the man of the same name who appears in Bede's *HE* III.25. See Chapter Two.

<sup>140</sup> Mervyn Archdall, *Monasticon Hibernicum: or, an History of the Abbies, Priors, and Other Religious Houses in Ireland* (London, 1786), pp. 570-1. Archdall refers to oral tradition as the source of this.

<sup>141</sup> Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century', pp. 44, 46. Picard says Ultán's time as abbot of Fosses spans this entire period, but it is not clear that he was ever abbot of Fosses.

ranking connections of his brothers, and continued to benefit from the Pippinids' patronage. It is usually thought that, in 676, changes in the political landscape led to Wulfoald, the Austrasian mayor, recalling Dagobert II from Ireland. Wulfoald was part of a faction in Austrasia opposed to the Pippinids, which could suggest an alternative Irish connection in retrieving the erstwhile king. Gerberding, however, argues convincingly for Wulfoald having died earlier than 679, suggesting 676 instead. This would place Pippin II, nephew of Grimoald I and successor as Austrasian mayor to Wulfoald, in power in time to orchestrate Dagobert II's return.<sup>142</sup> This is a more plausible situation, allowing the Pippinids to reverse the process that had placed the young prince in exile and utilise him to their political advantage.<sup>143</sup> Whether this reestablishment had always been an option in the Austrasians' political arsenal is not clear, but, evidently, their Irish connections had survived the intervening years.

Ó Cróinín believes that, as patrons of Fosses, the Pippinids prevailed upon Ultán to organise the prince's return, and that links with Wilfrid and Anglo-Saxon monasteries were part of the enterprise.<sup>144</sup> This is at odds with Hucbald's account of Ultán being chosen as jailor, however benign, of Amatus, and of his being abbot of Péronne (and being only a *peregrinus* at Fosses in 659). Of course, if Hucbald's account is disregarded, Ultán's connection to Fosses offers no change in the later associations of Fursa's family, and would place the Irishman in a likely position to contribute towards the return of Dagobert. Hucbald's history is usually considered reliable and certainly Ultán's familial link with Péronne does not take from its likelihood. The importance of Fursa's relics being at Péronne should not be underestimated in this situation, and nor should the fact that Péronne continued to be equated with the Irish well into the ninth century.<sup>145</sup> Although the *Additamentum* implies that Fóillán and the rest of Fursa's community were allied to the Pippinids not

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<sup>142</sup> Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 78-82.

<sup>143</sup> Hammer makes the point that Dido's involvement in the removal of Dagobert II from Austrasia may have been kindly motivated, as the child at least lived to tell the tale: 'Life and Passion' of St Emmeram', p. 19. He also remarks that Ansoald, a successor as bishop of Poitiers and a possible relative of Dido, supported Dagobert II. This may be a stretch, as it is difficult to see kidnapping and exile as well-motivated, but it is quite possible that the child was always meant to survive. It certainly seems to have been politically advantageous that he did.

<sup>144</sup> Ó Cróinín, 'Merovingian Politics and Insular Calligraphy', p. 41; Picard, 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century', pp. 49-50, agrees. Gerberding suggests that Austrasian concerns may have had less influence at Nivelles (and so presumably at Fosses) than might be thought, as it in fact lay in territory under Neustrian control in the 650s: *The Rise of the Carolingians*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>145</sup> Traube, 'Peronna Scottorum', p. 104.

long after arriving on the Continent, it appears that their links to Péronne did not simply disappear.

One of the few contemporary sources to mention Dagobert and his exile in Ireland is Stephen of Ripon, whose *Vita Wilfridi* states that Wilfrid met with Dagobert c. 679 while on his way to Rome. Stephen tells us that, exiled, Dagobert had sailed to Ireland to escape the machinations of his enemies, who were then in power. After many years, his friends and relations in Austrasia were notified of his survival, they asked Wilfrid to aid them in returning him home *de Scottia et Hibernia*, and the Anglo-Saxon bishop accordingly received him (presumably in Britain) and sent him home. While Wilfrid's central role in this venture might be deemed typical hagiographical hyperbole, the bishop's many connections in both Britain and Ireland could have facilitated it.<sup>146</sup> That Wilfrid was called upon to orchestrate Dagobert's transfer from Ireland implies that the networks used previously were no longer available, or no longer what they were; Dido of Poitiers had, for example, died in the late 660s. Ultán's association with Ebroin presents some difficulties to his involvement in the plan to reinstate the exiled prince, but does not preclude it.<sup>147</sup> However, while cooperation with Ebroin may not indicate full support (Ebroin was, after all, a political force to be reckoned with), being allowed responsibility for a high-profile prisoner could be interpreted as an act of confidence on the part of the Neustrian mayor. There is no doubting that relations between those who returned Dagobert II to the kingship and Ebroin's faction were rancorous, as Wilfrid's necessary detour around Neustrian territory on his way to Rome in c. 678 demonstrates.<sup>148</sup> Ultán's involvement, if factual, must have necessitated a careful management of opposing sides.

For now, a definitive account of the Dagobert Affair remains frustratingly out of reach, though recently Stefanie Hamann has offered a comprehensive examination of some of the arguments pertaining to it.<sup>149</sup> Fortunately, offering a solution to this confusing period of Frankish history is not within the remit of this project, which rather must focus on *Fursa et alii* in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Although Bede would

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<sup>146</sup> Hammer suggests that Agilbert may have been an intermediary in this arrangement, 'Holy Entrepreneur', pp. 74-6.

<sup>147</sup> It can be seen that Neustrians opposed to Ebroin were involved, or at least, connected, with those who sought to put Dagobert II on the throne: Hammer, 'Life and Passion' of St Emmeram, pp. 26-7.

<sup>148</sup> VW 26. Wilfrid had already encountered Ebroin, as he was involved in the execution of Wilfrid's mentor, Aunemundus of Lyons: VW 6. The life blames Queen Balhild for the execution, but Ebroin's participation is assured. It is also worth noting that Ebroin was himself incarcerated at the monastery of Luxeuil: Hammer, 'Life and Passion' of St Emmeram, p. 20.

<sup>149</sup> Stefanie Hamann, 'Zur Chronologie des Staatsstreichs Grimoalds', pp. 49-96.

have been aware of Dagobert's exile and Wilfrid's involvement in his restoration from the *Vita Wilfridi*, he makes no reference to it in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and offers little detail in general about Fursa and his followers after their departure from East Anglia. For Bede, Fursa's visions and his contribution in the kingdom of East Anglia were preeminent, and while his later career increased his renown, it is not Bede's focus. No early source explicitly links Fursa, Fóillán or Ultán with the events discussed here, and so it is very difficult to pinpoint what part these Irishmen played, if any. Nonetheless, their connection to members of both the Neustrian and Austrasian nobility, and to monasteries like Péronne, makes it highly likely they participated, to some degree, in the Dagobert Affair.

#### v. Dícuill (2) and Gobbán

Bede tells us simply that Dícuill and Gobbán were priests, who, after Fursa's decision to become a hermit, had responsibility for the monastery of Cnobheresburg. They were, it seems, priors of the monastery under the supervision of the head abbot, Fóillán.<sup>150</sup> That two Irish men joined the new Irish abbot in running the monastery certainly suggests they had come with Fursa from Ireland, and were part of the community from the beginning. The *Vita* attests to *pauci fratres* joining Fursa in his journey from Ireland to Britain, and it is probable these men were among them. These two men may even have been among the companions who observed Fursa during his illness-induced visions. As priests (*presbyteri*), they would have been available to perform sacraments for the community at Cnobheresburg, and they must have been trusted companions indeed to be awarded responsibility for the monastery in Fursa's absence.

Gobbán was one of the members of the Cnobheresburg community who left East Anglia with Fóillán. The *Additamentum* relates that, once the monks were rescued from captivity, they left for the land of the Franks, heading for Péronne.<sup>151</sup> A *Vita* survives to describe Gobbán's experiences on the Continent, but unfortunately both its date and its provenance are considered unreliable; Kenney remarks that it is worthy "of little trust".<sup>152</sup> Its history is vaguely described in the *Acta Sanctorum*, which relates that

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<sup>150</sup> Probably a *praepositus*, as Boisil was at Melrose.

<sup>151</sup> *Additamentum Nivalense: Monachis enim de captivitate redemptis...ipse postremum Francorum petivit terras...*

<sup>152</sup> *Vita Gobani*, AASS June IV, p. 21-5; Kenney, *Sources*, p. 506.

the life was transcribed from ‘ancient books’ (*vetustis codicibus*) by a member of the Premonstratensians. According to this *Vita*, Gobbán built a church dedicated to Peter on land granted by king Chlothar III, who reigned from 658 until 673. The life praises Gobbán for his great virtues and for the miracles he performed.<sup>153</sup> This *Vita* names several of Fursa’s companions, but, as the notes of the *Acta Sanctorum* state, the list seems to have been rather freely assembled.<sup>154</sup> The *Vita Gobani*, not unexpectedly, deviates from the Fursa traditions we are familiar with, stressing both the initiative and the importance of Gobbán, while minimising Fursa’s particular gifts.<sup>155</sup> This life associates Gobbán, and those with whom he travelled from Ireland, with the monastery of Corbie, a foundation in fact connected to the Columbanian community of Luxeuil.<sup>156</sup> He is thought to have died, a martyr, in 670.<sup>157</sup> A town bearing his name, Saint Gobain, can be found in Picardy, and is said to have been the place of his hermitage and of his martyrdom. This life can offer little more than evidence that Gobbán was venerated in northern Gaul, and so may have left Britain with Fóillán. It fails to mention Cnobheresburg, or the priest’s time in East Anglia; it omits Dícuill completely, and its references to Fursa are few and far between.

There is no trace of Gobbán specifically before his time in East Anglia. We must assume that, with Dícuill, he joined Fursa in Ireland. Several Gobbáns can be found in Irish sources, but there is no reason to associate any of them with the Gobbán who became prior at Cnobheresburg. One seventh-century Irishman named Gobbán achieved some fame as Gobbán Saer, a mythical architect.<sup>158</sup> Other holymen named Gobbán can be found in various sources, but as this Gobbán went to the Continent and did not achieve renown like that of Fursa, his chances of being commemorated in Irish martyrologies are not that strong.<sup>159</sup> A Gobbán is even thought to have been brother to Laisréne of Leighlin, son of Nasca, based on the record of the death of Gobbán, son of

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<sup>153</sup> *Vita Gobani* 2, p. 23.

<sup>154</sup> *Vita Gobani* 2, p. 23.

<sup>155</sup> See *Vita Gobani* 3 in particular, p. 23.

<sup>156</sup> Bathild and her son, Chlothar III, acted as patrons to this foundation, a connection echoed in the *Vita Gobani*’s statement that Gobbán’s church was built on land granted by Chlothar.

<sup>157</sup> Kenney gives this date, writing that Gobbán “is said to have been killed” about 670, though he does not explain the basis for this supposition, as the life offers little in this regard: Kenney, *Sources*, p. 506. Lapidge is happy to rely on this piece of information: *Storia degli Inglesi* II, p. 537.

<sup>158</sup> Gobbán the builder appears in *Betha Abáin* 37, in *Bethada Náem nÉrenn* I.

<sup>159</sup> *MT* April 1, March 30, and both March 26 and May 30, each of which names him as abbot of Airdne; the notes to *FÓ* May 30 mention Gobbán, an abbot; *MG* July 16 lists *Gobbán buan a bretha* [Gobbán, lasting his judgments].

Nasca (Gobbain m. Nascai), in the *Annals of Inisfallen* for the year 641.<sup>160</sup> The *Martyrology of Gorman* also mentions Gobbán *mac Naisc*, celebrating his *dies natalis* on March 17. This same Laisréne is believed to be the man of that name addressed in Pope-elect John's letter to the Irish deploring their divergence on Easter. Such a connection, though attractive in its possible implications for Gobbán's (and, one might postulate, Fursa's) Easter practices, is almost certainly nonexistent. It is interesting to note however that the *Martyrology of Gorman* gives this Gobbán the same *dies natalis* as Patrick, a saint whose veneration by Fursa's community on the Continent is well-attested. A Gobbán of Cell Lamraige in Ossory is commemorated in *Féilire Óengusso* and the *Martyrology of Tallaght* on December 6.<sup>161</sup> The notes to the *Martyrology of Tallaght* claim that he was of Cell Lamraige (Killamery in modern Co. Kilkenny) as does *Féilire Óengusso*, but offers another possible provenance: Tech dá Goba, in Huí Echach Ulad.<sup>162</sup> The latter's Dál nAraidi background fits in with Fursa's own Ulster background, and is notably close to the Conaille Muirtheimne, but such geographical coincidences cannot be taken as proof of identification. After all, Fursa's first monastery was outside his own *patria*. None of the Gobbáns who appear in the Irish sources are commemorated on June 20, the supposed anniversary of his martyrdom.<sup>163</sup>

Once Dícuill's role in the monastery after Fursa's departure is mentioned, he disappears from Bede's narrative. Fóillán left East Anglia for Gaul after the Mercians under Penda attacked around 651, and it is assumed that many of the brethren of Cnobheresburg followed his example.<sup>164</sup> But while we have evidence of Fóillán, Ultán, and Gobbán on the Continent, there does not seem to be any mention of Dícuill there. This alone might be deemed suggestive that he chose not to leave Britain with his brethren.

The *Féilire Óengusso* lists one Diucaill on December 18, and the additions state he is of the Mugdorna Maigen.<sup>165</sup> The Mugdorna Maigen were part of the Airgialla, and this territory was located quite close to the Conaille Muirtheimne. Thornton discusses their contact, as both allies and rivals, emphasising their

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<sup>160</sup> *FÓ* October 25; *AI* 641.

<sup>161</sup> *FÓ* December 6; *MT*: *Gobbán in flaith finnfial* [Gobbán, the fair modest prince], December 6.

<sup>162</sup> *MT*: *Ab manach eisidhe, no gomad o Tigh na gobha in Uibh Eachach Uladh...* [Or maybe he was from Tech dá Goba ('the House of Two Smiths'), in Huí Echach Ulad].

<sup>163</sup> John O'Hanlon, *Lives of the Irish Saints VI* (Dublin, 1873), p. 749.

<sup>164</sup> *Additamentum Nivialense de Fuilano*, p. 449. Anna was expelled from East Anglia for a period around this time, returning c. 653. Picard, however, dates Fóillán's departure to 649: 'Church and Politics in the Seventh Century, p. 32.

<sup>165</sup> *FÓ* December 18: *Diucaill .i. do Mug(d)arnnaib Maigen dó .i. moDiucla Lilgaig i nUib Fáelain.*

interaction.<sup>166</sup> Although this cannot be taken as proof that this is the same Dicuill, the possibility is helped by this geographic proximity, as Fursa's time in Ireland seems to have had a focus in and around Louth.

Norman Scarfe sees evidence of Dicuill's presence in the place-name of Dickleburgh in Norfolk, less than forty km from Burgh Castle, but beyond the name can offer little to illuminate the situation.<sup>167</sup> Dickleburgh, which appears as Dicclesburc in the Domesday Book, might well come from Dicuill's burgh, as Scarfe postulates, and it should be noted that the monastery at which he was resident also had a *-burg* name. On the other hand, A.D. Mills suggests it is an unattested Old English personal name such as \**Dicel* or \**Dicla* with a *-burg* suffix.<sup>168</sup> The possibility that Dicuill of Cnobheresburg is the same man of that name who appears as abbot of a small monastery in Sussex called Bosham has been voiced for centuries. The suggestion by Scarfe that Dickleburgh may retain evidence of Dicuill's career in Britain is a fascinating one, yet it does not discredit the theory that this prior of Cnobheresburg might have travelled to the kingdom of the South Saxons and settled there.

While scholars as far apart as James Kenney in 1929 and Michael Lapidge only three years ago have treated Dicuill of Bosham and Dicuill of Cnobheresburg as two separate persons, there have been previous suggestions that they might be the same.<sup>169</sup> As early as 1902, Charles Scott took it as read that Dicuill of Cnobheresburg and Dicuill of Bosham were one and the same;<sup>170</sup> Elizabeth O'Brien in 1993 suggested that, at least, it was not "beyond the bounds of possibility";<sup>171</sup> and Michelle P. Brown, in her 2001 paper on the *Life of Fursa*, also contends that both references concern the same Dicuill.<sup>172</sup> Although this theory is in no way new, none of the writers mentioned above have fully explored the possibility and examined the implications. This brings us to the possibility of seeing the fate of Dicuill of Cnobheresburg in Dicuill of Bosham's presence in Sussex. As Plummer remarks, Dicuill is not a very common Irish name, and in fact is seen only eight times in the Irish Annals; while this is, of course, not in any

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<sup>166</sup> Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies, and Genealogies*, pp. 210-1.

<sup>167</sup> Norman Scarfe, *The Suffolk Landscape* (Chichester, 1972; repr. 2002), p. 119.

<sup>168</sup> A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford, 2003).

<sup>169</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, p. 231, n. 216; Lapidge, *Storia degli Inglesi II*, p. 537.

<sup>170</sup> Charles Scott, 'St. Fursa and Burgh Castle', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, Second Series 8.4 (1902), p. 190.

<sup>171</sup> Elizabeth O'Brien, 'Contacts between Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England in the Seventh Century', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 6 (1993), p. 95.

<sup>172</sup> Michelle P. Brown, *The Life of St. Fursey: What We Know; Why it Matters, Fursey Occasional Paper* 1 (Norwich, 2001), p. 12; Westley Follett also assumes they are the same man: *Céilí Dé in Ireland*, p. 72.

way proof of this identification, it does suggest an increased likelihood, in contrast to more frequently found names, such as Rónán or Colmán.<sup>173</sup>

Bede is unfortunately vague as to when Dícuill was abbot of Bosham.<sup>174</sup> However, the Irish monks were definitely in Sussex before Wilfrid arrive *c.* 680, and Bede refers to them in a manner that does not suggest a recent arrival. Bede says merely *erat autem* to introduce these Irish monks. Though this lacks a temporal context, the insertion of the reference to Bosham, and the use of *autem*, makes it most likely that he was referring to an extant foundation when Wilfrid arrived in Sussex, and certainly Bosham flourished in later centuries.<sup>175</sup> Dícuill of Cnobheresburg was at that East Anglian monastery when Fursa left, in the early 640s, and it might be assumed he was still there when Foillán, Fursa's successor, quit the foundation with the community *c.* 651. This offers no temporal impediment to both Dícuills being the same man. One might argue that the large time gap between Dícuill's installation as prior in the 640s and his presence in Sussex around 680 or later takes from the argument. If traditions about Gobbán that survive can be relied upon, however, this may be possible. These state that Gobbán was killed in Gaul in 670. This was not a death of old age, and if we speculate that these men were not of dissimilar age, another ten years or so does not seem too much to expect from Dícuill. Similarly, Ultán, another brother of Fursa who was in East Anglia and then travelled to the Continent, died only after 676.<sup>176</sup>

In exploring this possibility, one must wonder what might have brought Dícuill from East Anglia to Bosham. His reasons for leaving the kingdom of East Anglia can be hypothesised from those that drove Foillán to leave: the attacks of the Mercians on the kingdom. Before Æthilwealh became king, Sussex was dominated by the neighbouring kingdom of Wessex. Cenwealh, king of Wessex (*c.* 642-72), had been converted to Christianity in East Anglia under the influence of King Anna, probably after Fursa's departure from the kingdom. This connection might have encouraged monks from Fursa's monastery to flee to lands under his control, and it is worth noting both that Sussex lies between East Anglia and Wessex, and that Bosham is to the west of Sussex, quite near to the kingdom of the West Saxons, and so a possible route

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<sup>173</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 226.

<sup>174</sup> Dícuill of Bosham is discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>175</sup> *Autem* usually means 'but', 'moreover', or 'nevertheless', and implies a relevance to the preceding material.

<sup>176</sup> See above.

emerges that might have brought these Irish monks from the famous monastery of the visionary Fursa to Sussex.

If, in fact, Dícuill of Bosham is the same Dícuill left in charge of Cnobheresburg by Fursa, the existence of several early churches dedicated to St Botulph in Sussex may be of some significance. Botulph was a man of saintly fame, and the *Vita Ceolfridi* states that Ceolfrith visited him in East Anglia to further his studies in the monastic life.<sup>177</sup> Botulph's eleventh-century life called him a Saxon, and Stevenson argues that this points to a Sussex origin.<sup>178</sup> There are three churches dedicated to Botulph in Sussex, possibly indicating that he spent time in that kingdom; if so, this missionary connection between East Anglia and Sussex might have set the example for Dícuill, fleeing East Anglia and seeking a new place in which to follow the monastic life. Botulph's eleventh-century life remarks on the affection the Irish had for him, calling them his neighbours, and an Irish ethnicity was even suggested for him, based on the testimony of possibly earlier materials.<sup>179</sup> Though this latter proposal is highly doubtful, a strong connection between Botulph and the Irish is indicated. In East Anglia, Botulph would easily have been in communication with the famous and Irish-founded monastery of Cnobheresburg, and, if his patron Æthelmund can be identified as king Anna of East Anglia, the latter's support of Fursa's foundation serves to further link the two.<sup>180</sup> If Dícuill did in fact travel to Sussex from East Anglia, Botulph may have had a bond with the Bosham community in Sussex.<sup>181</sup>

In examining this potential identification, it must be asked whether these two men named Dícuill shared any identifiable characteristics. Both are, obviously, Irish; both are in positions of authority in monasteries; and both are in monasteries that at

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<sup>177</sup> *Vita Ceolfridi* 4. This was probably at Iken: Francis Seymour Stevenson, 'St. Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 18 (1924), p. 29.

<sup>178</sup> Folcard of Thorney, *Vita Botulphi*, in AASS June III, p. 402; Stevenson, 'St. Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken,' p. 38.

<sup>179</sup> Folcard's *Vita Botulphi*, p. 403, and the Schleswig Breviary, in AASS June III, p. 404; Stevenson, 'St. Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken,' pp. 36, 38-40.

<sup>180</sup> Although it is never said, Anna may have also been called Æthelmund. He had two daughters with Æthel- names, Æthelthryth and Æthelburh, and his brothers were called Æthelhere and Æthelwald. If he were named Æthelmund, it would fit well with Anglo-Saxon naming patterns. Another option would be a son of Anna named Æthelmund, perhaps a sub-king of the South Angles. This is supported by the eleventh-century story that Botulph met two of Æthelmund's sisters on the Continent, and indeed two of Anna's daughters entered convents in Gaul – Æthelburh and Sæthryth. However, no son of Anna called Æthelmund is mentioned anywhere. The context of Folcard's life and the Slesvig Breviary indicate that Botulph's patron was Æthelhere's predecessor – Anna – according to Stevenson, 'St. Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken,' p. 33.

<sup>181</sup> Stevenson suggests he might even have spent time at Bosham, 'St. Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken,' p. 39. Of course, commemorations of Botulph are not limited solely to East Anglia and Sussex.

least attempted to evangelise. In regard to their traditions on the calculation of Easter, it is difficult to say. It is thought that Fursa came from the north of Ireland, but he is not usually associated with the Columban church.<sup>182</sup> Whether he and his brethren followed Roman orthodox traditions on the calculation of Easter is not completely clear: no mention of a problematic Easter is made by Bede or by his early *Vita*, and there seems to be no clash in East Anglia between Fursa's foundation and the orthodox Burgundian bishop, Felix. Of course, as Felix was an admirer of Aidan of Lindisfarne, who kept the 84-year Easter, this is not necessarily an indication of orthodoxy.<sup>183</sup> However, the involvement of King Anna with the monastery, and the subsequent careers of Fursa and Foillán on the Continent suggest that they followed orthodox traditions.

In the case of Dícuill of Bosham, there is no reference to the Irish of that community requiring correction, either by Bede or Stephen of Ripon. If Wilfrid had come across what Stephen calls Quartodeciman 'tares' in Sussex, we could expect to have heard about it.<sup>184</sup> On the other hand, we might expect Bede to refer to such orthodoxy to further emphasise Wilfrid's tardiness in bringing Christianity to Sussex, but he does not. Perhaps his divergence from the Wilfridian perspective had its limits, or perhaps limited information on Bosham can explain it. While we cannot be sure either way regarding Easter at Bosham, the silence on the part of Stephen of Ripon may point toward orthodoxy. Together, these possible similarities, the working chronology and the suggestion for fleeing to Sussex do not offer proof of identification, but they certainly support the theory.

What, then, are the implications of this theory? In the first place, it offers an explanation for the fate of Dícuill of Cnobheresburg, who might otherwise have been assumed to have followed Fursa and Foillán to the Continent, or simply to have faded into obscurity. It makes a priest of Dícuill of Bosham, capable of baptising the converted, and so encouraging the idea that the community were more involved in evangelising the populace than either Bede or Stephen tells us. It also presents an alternative explanation for the Bosham community's presence in Sussex, though, of course, this does not eliminate the possibility that they provided pastoral care for the queen and other Christians in advance of Wilfrid's arrival. The Bosham community is often assumed to be wholly Irish, comprising men who came with Dícuill from Ireland,

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<sup>182</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 357-9.

<sup>183</sup> *HE* III.25.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. *VW* 47. Stephen was particularly zealous in describing Wilfrid's battles with the *plantationis virulentae*.

possibly via the kingdom of the Hwicce. Its small size and Bede's emphasis on its lack of success in Sussex add to this belief. If they in fact came from East Anglia, there might well have been Anglo-Saxons there also. Fursa's foundation was a popular and admired monastery, and would have attracted Anglo-Saxon monks to join its Irish contingent. The monks who would have accompanied Dícuill to Sussex might therefore have included Anglo-Saxons as well as Irish. Bede's remark that none of the *prouinciales* of the kingdom of Sussex cared to emulate them might hint at this, as it specifies the South Saxons disinterest rather than that of the English generally. If Dícuill of Bosham had once been a priest at Fursa's monastery in East Anglia, his background is far more illustrious than Bede's short reference or Stephen's total omission indicates. While the *Historia Ecclesiastica* implies that the Bosham community was a small, isolated outpost, such a history links them to the vitally important Irish foundation of Cnobheresburg, one whose legend was lasting.

That Bede does not make this connection weakens the argument for this identification, but does not disprove it. After all, he had separate sources for these two men named Dícuill, and there may have been no indication of a connection between them. His source for his chapter on Fursa and Dícuill of Cnobheresburg is the *Vita Fursei*, and an old monk of his own monastery of Jarrow. His source for information on Sussex was the West Saxon bishop, Daniel; if Bede recorded all that that bishop told him of the monks of Bosham, it seems that Daniel was not well-informed about that foundation.<sup>185</sup> If these two Dícuills can be identified as the same man, as, on balance, seems a strong possibility, it reveals the continuation of Fursa's mission in Sussex; if not, they are evidence of the wide spread of Irishmen in Britain beyond Northumbria.

#### *vi. Beoán and Meldán*

One of the most striking omissions evident in Bede's chapter on Fursa is to do with two Irish figures who are identified and quoted at length in the *Vita*: Beoanus and Meldanus, or Beoán and Meldán (Mellán), to give them their un-Latinised names. Bede leaves these two men unnamed in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*; they are simply holy men from Fursa's homeland of whom he had heard, and Bede explains that they told him

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<sup>185</sup> Or, as Hammer wonders, Daniel was perhaps not interested in much beyond his own see at Winchester: 'Holy Entrepreneur', p. 31. After all, Daniel was a correspondent of Boniface, yet we hear nothing of him in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, though Bede discusses other missionaries on the Continent. For further information on Boniface, see John-Henry Clay, *In the Shadow of Death: Saint Boniface and the Conversion of Hessia, 721-54* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 55-118.

many beneficial things.<sup>186</sup> He also mentions them as ‘righteous men’ (*uiri iusti*) who, along with angels, told Fursa glad and sad things. In the *Vita Fursei*, on the other hand, a host of angels and holy men drive away fires and demons, and then Fursa meets with two venerable men of the province in which his body remains during the vision (i.e. men from Ireland). The anonymous author states that they are known even in his own time, though they must identify themselves to Fursa as Beoán and Meldán, and they spoke to him. Oliver Rackham comments that these two men are “shadowy figures”, and attempts to identify them. He points to the Beoán in *Félire Óengusso*, and to the Beoán and Meldán that appear as hermits in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, though he is sceptical about both possibilities.<sup>187</sup> On October 26 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* both Beoán and Meldán appear, in the company of Nassad, as saints *de Britonia* who were located in Uí Echach Ulad in Tamlachta at Loch Bricrenn, an addition echoed in the *Félire*.<sup>188</sup> Tamlachta Meanainn, Meenan, is in present-day Co. Down, in the parish of Aghaderg.<sup>189</sup> Despite both the *Martyrology of Tallaght* and the *Félire* stating that Beoán and Meldán were ‘from Britain’, the names are Irish. Another Beoán from Fídh Chuilinn in Kildare is commemorated on August 8, but is not the man discussed here.<sup>190</sup> Meldán was also celebrated at Errigal Trough in Co. Monaghan, and at both Inchiquin on Lough Corrib and Lettermullen in Co. Galway.<sup>191</sup> A Meldán is commemorated in the *Martyrology of Gorman* on December 6, and titled a priest.<sup>192</sup> That he is celebrated on the same day as Gobbán might be seen as a connection between the two, via Fursa.

Hamann demonstrates the difficulty in relying on the *Vita Fursei* for information on Meldán and Beoán, remarking on the textual variations that present Beoán and Meldán variously as men from the province in which Fursa was believed to have died, men from the province in which Fursa was known, and men from the province in which Fursa was born, and she takes seriously the contention of the notes to

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<sup>186</sup> *HE* III.19: *sed et uirorum de sua natione sanctorum, quos olim sacerdotii gradu non ignobiliter potitos, fama iam uulgante, conpererat; a quibus non pauca, quae uel ipsi, uel omnibus, qui audire uellent, multum salubria essent, audiuit.*

<sup>187</sup> Rackham, *Transitus Beati Fursei*, p. 26, n. 43.

<sup>188</sup> The *Martyrology of Tallaght* also mentions Beoán and Meldán on October 28. It should be noted here that one of the comments on Gobbán in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* gave him an Uí Echach Ulad provenance, as mentioned above.

<sup>189</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 104.

<sup>190</sup> *FÓ* August 8; *MT* August 8.

<sup>191</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 451-2. Hamann, ‘St Fursa, Genealogy of an Irish Saint’, p. 18.

<sup>192</sup> *MG* December 6.

the *Martyrology of Tallaght* that they were from Britain.<sup>193</sup> If Ó Riain's identification of them as holy men of Ulster is taken, all three of the variants given in the extant manuscripts can be applied. Fursa was in his *patria* at the time of this vision, and so the *prouincia* with which Beoán and Meldán are associated might refer to the larger kingdom; if Fursa is taken as a member of the Conaille Muirtheimne, and the latter as part of, or at least a dependent of, the Ulaid.

In Fursa's vision they were radiant like angels (*angelica furma radientes*), and asked leave to speak to him for a time. They told Fursa that the end of the world was not yet near, but that mankind would be afflicted by famine and pestilence.<sup>194</sup> They then reproved the clergy for their sins, who follow some holy commands but not others, and focus on minor issues while failing in the larger ones. They recommend the medicinal approach to sin, using penance to combat vices, and reminding Fursa that vices are cured by their opposites (*contraria enim uitia contrariis uirtutibus sanantur*). They also warned of the dangers of being unlearned and of the sin of pride. Beoán told Fursa personally that he should strive not to live too much in the world, and yet not too much away from it either, as setting a good example was vital.

That Bede does not name them suggests that, unlike the certainty of the author of the *Vita* over their fame, he was unfamiliar with these holy men, and felt his readers would be also. As far as Bede is concerned, further details were always available through the *libellus* of the *Vita Fursei*, and so extraneous detail like that of Beoán and Meldán was unnecessary. This supposes, in turn, that details such as the names of Ultán, Fóillán, Gobbán, and Dícuill were necessary to the story for Bede. Perhaps Bede's source from his own monastery of Jarrow emphasised the contribution of these men over the figures within Fursa's vision, or it may point to Bede's own preference for the tangible contribution over the visionary. The *Vita Gobani* includes one Melboenus among Fursa's companions, a name possibly constructed by combining Meldanus and Beoanus.

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<sup>193</sup> *Vita Fursei: duos uenerabiles uiros illius prouinciae, in qua uir domini Furseus haec uidensquasi obisse credebatur/illius prouinciae, in qua uir domini Furseus notus erat/ illius prouinciae, in qua uir domini Furseus natus erat.* Hamann, 'St Fursa, the Genealogy of an Irish Saint', pp. 3-4; Hamann, 'St Fursa, the Genealogy of an Irish Saint', p. 25.

<sup>194</sup> Hamann has used this exchange to confirm the dating of Fursa's vision, referencing the dark year recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* for 625: 'Die *Vita Fursei* als Chronologische Quelle', pp. 284-6. Rackham suggested the events of 536 in his notes to the *Transitus Beati Fursei*, p. 30, n. 48, but Hamann's explanation is far more convincing.

The *Virtutes* records that Fursa was buried at Péronne, in the same place he himself had interred the relics of saints Patrick, Beoán and Meldán.<sup>195</sup> As Corblet remarks, the fact that no more is heard of the relics of Beoán and Meldán at Péronne suggests that no cult developed around them, or certainly no lasting cult.<sup>196</sup> The aforementioned dedicatory poem possibly ascribed to Cellán of Péronne is followed in one manuscript by the line *Ambo stelligeri capientes praemia caeli*, which both Paul Grosjean and Patrick Sims-Williams argue convincingly is an orphaned line. Grosjean suggests that it may yet be linked to Péronne, and offers Beoán and Meldán as candidates for the *ambo praemia*, implying a possible continued reverence of some kind for these men, even after Fursa's demise.<sup>197</sup> These relics can only have travelled to Gaul with Fursa from Ireland itself, and so it seems these relics were at Cnobheresburg also. Although the *Vita* does not mention these relics, its description of Fursa's death and burial is brief, and lacks many of the details, whether true or otherwise, supplied by the *Virtutes*. That Fursa brought relics of these two saints with him from Ireland, and kept them with him on his relocation to Francia, is evidence of the strong regard and special reverence in which he held them. While the *Vita* omits these details, it does not follow that the *Virtutes* is necessarily mistaken in its account; though written later, and containing accounts of amazing miracles, its historical significance is not generally doubted.

### *Conclusion*

Fursa and the Irishmen associated with him populate a lively and inspiring chapter in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Fóillán, Ultán, Gobbán, Dícuill, Beoán and Meldán play tiny parts in the story of the Irish visionary in Bede's narrative, but scraps of evidence of their greater legacies can be teased out from the sources discussed here. Bede's stress on Fursa is understandable in terms of his own purpose in creating a work that put men of holy reputation on pedestals to be esteemed and emulated, and his need to offer clear and focussed examples. His name-checking of four other men who were part of Fursa's entourage reveal his interest in the details of history, and his concern

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<sup>195</sup> *Virtutes* 19: ...*ibique cum odoribus magnis condunt, ubi ipse sanctus prius multorum sanctorum condidit pignora, id est Patriciim Beoani, Meldani et ceterorum quos secum detulit.*

<sup>196</sup> Jules Corblet, *Hagiographie du Diocèse d'Amiens IV* (Paris, 1874), p. 182.

<sup>197</sup> Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams and its Continental Counterparts', *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982), p. 25; Paul Grosjean, 'Notes d'Hagiographie Celtique, no. 46: Les Inscriptions Métriques de l'Église de Péronne', *Analecta Bollandiana* 78 (1960), pp. 369-70.

with proof. Fursa's lasting renown was presciently backed by Bede, who grasped that his story of vision and mission offered an ideal example to Christians seeking to understand the spiritual and the practical sides of their religion.<sup>198</sup> From Fursa and his companions, we now redirect our gaze to the north-west, to the island of Iona.

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<sup>198</sup> As evinced even today by the Fursey Pilgrims, a group dedicated to understanding and celebrating Fursa: <<http://www.furseypilgrims.co.uk/>> [accessed 11 October 2012].

## Chapter Five: The Irish on Iona

The Irish mission that formed so integral a part of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons originated at the island monastery of Iona, making that foundation a source for much of what Bede praises in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Iona is a small island to the west of modern-day Scotland, roughly two kilometres off the coast of Mull. From this tiny landmass developed a famous and powerful monastic *familia* whose influence can be found far beyond the territory of Northumbria.<sup>1</sup> Despite the vital importance of Iona for that Anglo-Saxon kingdom, the monastery plays a distinctly behind-the-scenes role in Bede's narrative. Beyond the men who came from it to Northumbria, and some (possibly unreliable) information on its organisation, we learn little about this foundation from Bede. While the intention elsewhere in this thesis is to try and discover details about the lives of obscure Irishmen named (and unnamed) in Bede's history, this is not the case with the men of this chapter, particularly Columba and Adomnán. Ample work has been done and continues to be carried out on these renowned figures, and cannot be hoped to be equalled in a single chapter, but it is not the purpose here; the aim is to examine their depictions in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and situate them in the greater context of that text.

One might expect Iona, as the source of the Columban mission to Northumbria, to be positively reviewed by Bede. Jennifer O'Reilly states that Bede "acclaimed this island on the world's edge as a major centre of the Church's universal

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<sup>1</sup> See Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford, 1988).

mission”, but this is an implicit message, never openly declared.<sup>2</sup> In fact, little of Iona is communicated in Bede’s work, whether out of an absence of information or a lack of relevance to Bede’s purposes. While Alan Thacker believes Bede to have been essentially well-disposed toward the Iona community, Gunn objects to this and uses, among other points, Bede’s inclusion of Laurence’s letter to the Irish to dispute it.<sup>3</sup> While this letter might indeed be used (mistakenly) to demonstrate Bede’s negative feelings toward the Irish generally, it is not appropriate to apply it specifically to the question of Iona. Iona is not a very visible monastery in Bede’s writing, and it is clear that Bede places Lindisfarne far above it in importance – understandably so, in a work dedicated to the Anglo-Saxon church. The part the monastery of Iona plays in the conversion of the Northumbrians, while essential in its supply of manpower, is presented by Bede as indirect. Despite the communication and ongoing support that emanated from Iona to its daughter-house at Lindisfarne, we see little evidence of this interaction in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede does acknowledge Iona’s position as head of a large monastic *familia*, stating that it was *arx* of almost all the northern Irish and all the Pictish monasteries.<sup>4</sup> *HE* III.4 mentions the foundation of Durrow, and states that many monasteries were founded from Iona and Durrow, and that each of them owes allegiance to Iona. Later, in discussing the departure of Cellach, Irish bishop to the Mercians, for Iona, Bede calls Iona the head and leader of many monasteries.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt but that Bede was aware of the power and influence of Iona and Columba, but he chose to minimise its perceived impact in Northumbria. Though writing some sixty years after the Synod of Whitby, Bede cannot have been ignorant of Iona’s importance for Lindisfarne, and, in turn, for Northumbria during the heyday of the Irish mission there. Rather, Iona was a place he chose not to focus upon, reserving most attention for religious foundations among the Anglo-Saxons.

Notwithstanding the lesser attention offered to Iona, the monastery retains great significance in certain areas. As the point of origin for the three Irish bishops of Lindisfarne, Iona performs an acknowledged foundational role for the Northumbrian church which, though Bede does not stress it, is evident in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*’s third book. The question of Easter calculation and the Irish is played out to a large

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<sup>2</sup> O’Reilly, ‘Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth’, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> Gunn, *Bede’s Historiae*, p. 68; Thacker, ‘Bede and the Irish’, pp. 37-8. See Chapter Six.

<sup>4</sup> *HE* III.3.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Three; *HE* III.21: *ad insulam hii, ubi plurimorum caput et arcem Scotti habuere coenobiorem.*

degree in the context of Iona. While Bede is aware of the far earlier acceptance of the orthodox Easter among the southern Irish, the intractability of the northern Irish is exemplified by Iona's refusal to change their Easter tables. As early as *HE* III.4, Bede inserts the fact that, through the actions of Ecgberht, Columba's monastery would eventually be deemed worthy to accept the true orthodox Easter, presenting it as a reward for their *caritas*. Almost from the very beginning of the story of the Irish in Northumbria, Bede presents the story of Iona as a *fait accompli*. Iona's eventual embrace of the Dionysiac reckoning is dealt with two books later, in *HE* V.22, a climactic chapter of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In this chapter, Bede explains that because the Irish had readily and generously evangelised the Anglo-Saxons, they were in turn deserving of the Anglo-Saxons' – embodied by Ecgberht – help to accept the true Easter. Through this turn-about, in which those who once were teachers were brought to a more perfect way by those who had been pupils, the Anglo-Saxon church had the opportunity to demonstrate its new maturity. As O'Reilly puts it, the adoption of the orthodox Easter by the community of Iona is another form of conversion, enabling the Anglo-Saxons to bring the true faith to the isles.<sup>6</sup> Iona, then, is important both as the educator and the educated for the Anglo-Saxon, and especially the Northumbrian, church. Bede's depiction of the events on Iona *c.* 716 serves his purpose well, but it should be remembered that Ecgberht came to Iona from Ireland. Just as the mission to the Frisians was carried out by Anglo-Saxons via Ireland, the persuasion of the community of Iona to accept Roman customs was brought about by a man who had been part of the Irish monastic world for over fifty years. While Bede's intentions are to demonstrate the fruition of years of development in the Anglo-Saxon church, Ecgberht in fact represented much that was Irish too.

Bede does not record the entire abbatial succession on Iona, mentioning only those relevant to his history of the Anglo-Saxon Church. He does start at the beginning by including Columba, the founder of the monastery, but he then jumps to Ségéne, the fifth abbot of Iona, then onto Adomnán, the ninth, and finally to Dúnchad, the eleventh. These men span quite an expanse of time, from 563 to 717 (the dates used by Bede are 565 to 716), formative years for the Irish, as well as the Anglo-Saxon, churches. Three of them, Columba, Ségéne, and Dúnchad, stand outside the events of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in a way, as we do not see them among the Anglo-Saxons in Britain.

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<sup>6</sup> O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth', p. 145.

Adomnán is a different case, travelling to Northumbria itself and directly engaging with the question of Easter with Ceolfrith, Bede's beloved abbot. Despite the less immediate presence of the other three abbots of Iona, Bede saw fit to include them, their names, their position, and, obliquely, their influence, in his narrative.

### *i. Columba*

Columba, son of Eithne, daughter of Mac Naue, and Fedelmid mac Ferguso of the Cenél Conaill, is one of the most important Irish saints, and the strength of his cult attests to this.<sup>7</sup> Columba, the dove of the church, left Ireland in 563 and founded a monastery on the small island of Iona where he acted as abbot, prophet and spiritual leader. As a prominent member of the northern Uí Néill, Columba's influence extended into political matters as well as the religious sphere, but he is remembered as a monastic saint above all else.<sup>8</sup> There are many sources for details on Columba's life, career, and legacy. The earliest of these is the account by Cumméne, monk of Iona and abbot of the foundation 657-669, who wrote his *Liber de Virtutibus Sancti Columbae* in the second quarter of the seventh century.<sup>9</sup> An excerpt from this account is in some of the manuscripts of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, and Cumméne's record of the saint's *uirtutes* is evidence of early efforts to preserve traditions about Columba.<sup>10</sup> The *Amrae Coluimb Chille* is another source, an elegy that contains many interesting, if at times confusing, details about the saint, which has recently been dated to the ninth-century, though with probably far earlier origins.<sup>11</sup> The Irish annals' links with Iona also ensure that information on Columba, though not contemporary, was inserted.<sup>12</sup> The most famous, and most detailed resource is Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, a masterful piece of hagiography that helped to solidify Columba's saintliness for a wide audience. Bede

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<sup>7</sup> VC Second Preface; *Amrae Coluimb Chille*, ed. Jacopo Bisagni, *Amrae Coluimb Chille: A Critical Edition II* (unpublished doctoral thesis, NUI Galway, 2008), §8.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent introduction to Columba, see Richard Sharpe's 'Introduction' to his translation of the *Vita Columbae*, in *Life of St Columba* (London, 1995), pp. 1-43.

<sup>9</sup> It was most probably written during Ségeine's abbacy, 623-652: Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> VC III.5. Richard Sharpe discusses this excerpt in the notes to his translation of the *Vita Columbae*, admitting that we know little about how or even whether Adomnán used Cumméne's work in writing his own: *Life of St Columba*, pp. 357-9. It appears in the earliest manuscript of the *Vita Columbae*, the Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, Gen.1, and in the ninth-century Metz manuscript, Bibliothèque de la ville, MS 523 [unseen]. See Sharpe, *Life of St Columba*, p. 357.

<sup>11</sup> See Jacopo Bisagni's edition, *Amrae Coluimb Chille*, which concludes that the elegy was probably composed in the late sixth/early seventh century, then re-written and extended in the ninth century, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Introduction', *The Chronicle of Ireland I* (Liverpool, 2006), pp. 7-8; Daniel McCarthy, *The Irish Annals: Their Genesis, Evolution and History* (Dublin, 2008; repr. 2010), pp. 153-67.

was aware of the *Vita Columbae*, or at least of written records about Columba, stating that *de cuius uita et uerbis nonnulla a discipulis eius feruntur scripta haberi*.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the case of Fursa's *libellus*, there is no indication that Bede had read Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* or other specific accounts of Columba, but he certainly obtained information about him.<sup>14</sup>

Columba does not play a large role in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, though his importance is acknowledged.<sup>15</sup> While mentioned on other occasions, *HE* III.4 is the chapter in which Columba gets the most attention, and in which Bede writes that Columba, a monk, priest, and abbot, came to Britain and preached to the northern Picts. In return, Bede states, he was granted the island of Iona, where he was buried at the age of 77 and which is held by his successors up to Bede's own time. Bede goes on to explain the unusual system of organisation at Iona, in which the abbot held pre-eminence, even over bishops.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting that, despite the chronological confusion, Columba is discussed in the chapter following the one that introduces Aidan and his arrival in Northumbria. Important as Columba is, it is for his influence on Aidan and the Irish mission that he is examined. After all, although Bede describes him coming to Britain, Columba himself played no direct role in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Bede's depiction of Columba focuses on his founding of the monastery of Iona and so involves him in the origins of the Irish mission to Northumbria. Bede does not appear to have a great deal of information on Columba. He offers some details, including the (inaccurate) year he left Ireland (565), and the fact that he is also called Colmcille.<sup>17</sup> To say, as Walter Goffart did, that Columba receives no less positive attention than Gregory I in Bede's work is an exaggeration, although he certainly offers more consideration and regard to the Irish saint than did Stephen, the author of the *Vita Wilfridi*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *HE* III.4: "some written records of his life and teachings are said to have been preserved by his disciples."

<sup>14</sup> Columba is commemorated in Willibrord's calendar, though whether this results from Northumbrian knowledge of Columba or Willibrord's time in Ireland is not easy to decide: *The Calendar of St. Willibrord*, ed. H.A. Wilson (London, 1918).

<sup>15</sup> He is named in *HE* III.4, 25, and *HE* V.9, 21, 24.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter One for a brief discussion of this.

<sup>17</sup> *HE* III.4, V.9; this appellation is also found at *VW* 10. Columba, or Colmcille, was evidently not unknown before Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and is almost certainly included in Willibrord's calendar on December 31: *The calendar of St Willibrord*, pp. 14, 45. The name Colmcille, as opposed to Columba, was used only in Irish-language contexts, as Ó Muraíle remarks in 'The Columban onomastic legacy', p. 194, suggesting that Bede's sources were literate in Irish.

<sup>18</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 306; *VW* 10.

Vicky Gunn sees Bede's portrayal of Columba as "controlled", in a negative sense. The lack of a superlative epithet first directs her to this attitude, and the positive references to Ninian, a Roman-trained Briton who converted the southern Picts, despite Bede's usual issues with the Britons, seem to her to demonstrate Bede's wish to show Columba in a poor light.<sup>19</sup> Admittedly, it is impossible to see Bede's description of Ninian and his orthodox influence over the Picts as anything other than a deliberate contrast to Columba, and the comparison between *reuerentissimus et sanctissimus* Ninian and *presbyter et abbas* Columba is pointed.<sup>20</sup> However in incorporating Ninian into the chapter on Columba and the Picts (and the chapter is, after all, entitled *Quando gens pictorum fidem Christi perceperit*), Bede accounts for all of the Picts, north and south. Though the chapter is generally seen as one that centres on Columba and Iona, it is ostensibly focussed on the evangelisers of the Picts, whoever they might be. Ninian's connection to Rome is a notable attribute with which Columba cannot compete, but the Irishman fulfilled the task of evangelist among people Ninian did not reach.<sup>21</sup> By stressing the northern and southern aspects of their respective missions, Bede presents the actions of Ninian and Columba as complementary, and even gives Columba greater prestige in the region by claiming Iona had authority over all the monasteries of the Picts in *HE* III.3. Whether this was true or not, it rather undermines Ninian's contribution. Within the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Ninian's reputation does not warrant further mention, and he does not appear in Bede's summary in *HE* V.24, while Columba does. Though praised, Ninian's legacy does not compare to that of Columba through the Ionan mission. In light of references to the Irish in Book II and the history Bede relates later in Book III, Ninian's connection to Rome lends an obvious honour that Columba lacks, but the Irish abbot is far better represented in Bede's work than the Briton. Bede gives us a clear AD date of 565 for Columba's *peregrinatio* from Ireland to Iona. He gives several synchronisms, probably self-created, for his date, telling us that Justin the younger, successor to Justinian was emperor of Rome, and that the

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<sup>19</sup> Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, p. 70; Duncan suggests that Ninian never actually evangelised the Picts, but was probably associated with Britons to the south of Pictland: 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', pp. 31-2. Duncan sees this as an editorial choice by Bede, motivated by his dislike of the British.

<sup>21</sup> Ian Wood makes the excellent point that by emphasising Ninian's connection to Rome, Bede makes of him "an honorary Roman", which trumps his British background: 'Britain and the Continent in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries: The Evidence of Ninian', in *St Ninian and the Earliest Christianity in Scotland*, ed. J. Murray, BAR 483 (Oxford, 2009), p. 72. Whether Ninian actually visited Rome is, of course, open to debate. See also Thomas Owen Clancy, 'The Real St Ninian', *The Innes Review* 52.1 (2001), p.6. Clancy argues that Ninian may in fact have been Finnian (\*Uinniau), a Briton who went on to become Finnian of Clonard and Movilla, commemorated as separate men, pp. 21-8.

Pictish king Bruide mac Maelchon was in the ninth year of his reign. He even asserts that a neat 150 years passed between Columba's arrival and the last Easter Iona celebrated according to their old traditions in 715. Irish sources, on the other hand, date Columba's departure for Iona to 563, and are obviously to be preferred.<sup>22</sup>

There are some unusual aspects to Bede's description of Columba but, to an extent, these reflect the expectations of modern readers, considering the successes of the Irish mission, rather than Bede's motivations. Gunn is sceptical regarding Bede's apparent lack of knowledge about Columba, viewing it as intentional (and disapproving) omission. Similarly, she sees Bede's comment concerning Columba, that *Uerum qualiscumque fuerit ipse* [Truly whatever he was himself], to have a distinctly derogatory edge, and Bede's opening words in *HE* III.5 to be critical of Aidan's background.<sup>23</sup> Yet Bede's rather vague statement seems less deliberately disdainful than a reference to the contents of the writings he had just mentioned – which Bede himself had almost certainly not read – and an acknowledgment of the limitations of his information on Columba.<sup>24</sup> This remark is then followed by praise of Columba's successors as men distinguished by moderation, divine love, and the arrangement of monastic life. Bede does then explain the problem of Easter observance among them, but offers the excuse of distance, and declares that they practised piety and chastity, as found in the books of the evangelists, the apostles, and the prophets.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to see such a description as part of a chapter criticising Columba and the monastery he so

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<sup>22</sup> See Nicholas Evans, 'The Calculation of Columba's Arrival in Britain in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the Pictish King-Lists', *Scottish Historical Review* 87.2 (2008), pp. 184-5, for a discussion of these Irish sources. For an intriguing examination of the possible implications of Bede supplying an AD date for Columba's arrival in Britain, see Mac Carron, 'Christology and the Future in Bede's *Annus Domini*', specifically §3.

<sup>23</sup> Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, pp. 71, 73. *HE* III.5 opens by referring to Iona as Aidan's place of origin, stating *Ab hac ergo insula, ab horum collegio monachorum...missus est Aedan* [Such was the island, such the community...from which Aidan was sent]. Gunn interprets these uses of *hoc* and *horum* as distinctly contemptuous, an analysis which seems to force her understanding upon the source material rather than allowing the source material to inform her understanding. The translation offered by Colgrave and Mynors may also have influenced her thinking, but Bede's words could as easily be translated to the possibly less loaded 'Therefore from this island, from this community...'

<sup>24</sup> Gunn is not alone in seeing Bede's *qualiscumque* as a criticism of Columba: as early as 1857, William Reeves remarked on Bede's words, suggesting them to be a reference to less flattering aspects of the saint's personality, *The Life of St. Columba*, p. lxxvii. Plummer, on the other hand, views this phrase as possibly pointing to Bede's limited knowledge about Columba, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 135. Bede's only other use of the word *qualiscumque*, as far as I can find, is in his commentary on Samuel, in which the word has neither positive nor negative connotations: *in quaecumque audientis cor, id est siue docile siue tardioris et augustioris ingenii...*, from *In Primam Partem Samuhelis Libri IIII* I.2, ll. 626-7, p. 26, *CCSL* 119, ed. D. Hurst (Turnhout, 1962).

<sup>25</sup> *HE* III.4: *...reliquit successores magna continentia ac diuino amore regularique institutione insignes...in propheticis euangelicis et apostolicis litteris discere poterant, pietatis et castitatis opera diligenter obseruantes.*

famously founded. Earlier in the chapter, Bede describes Columba as a monk in life and in habit.<sup>26</sup> While this is not equivalent to an epithet such as *sanctissimus*, Bede's own appreciation for the monastic life makes this a true, if restrained, compliment. *HE* III.4 also refers to Iona's authority (*principatus*) over its extended *familia*, and Bede emphasises that it is the foundation which holds Columba's body is preeminent, openly acknowledging Columba's authority.

Columba's journey from Ireland is included in Bede's summarising chapter, *HE* V.24, which states that he came to Britain to convert the Picts and then founded the monastery of Iona. Although the emphasis is again on Columba's connection to the Picts rather than to the Anglo-Saxons, Bede's very inclusion of this event is important. Not only are very few of the individuals of the text reintroduced in this chapter, but Columba's situation is particularly noteworthy, coming as it does directly before Pope Gregory's mission to the Anglo-Saxons, sent in 596. Bede explicitly names Columba as a missionary to the island of Britain prior to the Gregorian mission. Mission is an extraordinarily important aspect of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* more generally, and it is as missionaries that the Irish best achieve fame and praise in Bede's eyes. Despite efforts to downplay Columba, Bede still defines him as a missionary figure (just not to the Anglo-Saxons), a role that is but a small part of Columba's career in Adomnán's *uita*.

As mentioned above, Bede's chapter-heading for *HE* III.4 is *Quando gens pictorum fidem Christi perceperit*, a curious choice when one considers the importance of Iona and Columba for the Northumbrians, and the Anglo-Saxon church generally.<sup>27</sup> The Picts are strongly associated with Columba by Bede, and he emphasises this element of Columba's career in *HE* V.9 also, calling the abbot *doctor* to the Picts. Bede writes that Columba converted the Picts through preaching and setting an example, and that in return he was granted the island of Iona. Although Bede does not explicitly state that Columba converted King Bruide, to whose reign Bede dates Columba's arrival, or that that king gave him the island for his monastery, his account is still at odds with the information supplied by the Irish sources.<sup>28</sup> As Duncan shows, this impression of Columba as converter of the Picts is echoed in the Pictish King Lists, one redaction of

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<sup>26</sup> *HE* III.4: *habitu et uita monachi*.

<sup>27</sup> *HE* III.4: "When the Picts received the faith of Christ."

<sup>28</sup> Duncan makes this point in 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 9; *AU* 574. Thomas Owen Clancy argues for these seemingly opposing Irish and Pictish claims to in fact be facets of the same truth, linked to King Nechtan's apparent part-Irish ancestry, 'Philosopher-King: Nechtan mac Der-Ilei', *Scottish Historical Review* 83.2 (2004), p. 145.

which claims that Bruide was converted to Christianity by Columba, and so Bede's perspective seems to reflect a Pictish view somewhat.<sup>29</sup>

Columba was, for Bede, the *primus doctor fidei Christianae* to the Picts *transmontanis*, and he emphasises the reverence of the Irish and the Picts for this saint's island monastery.<sup>30</sup> Every reference to Columba in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* links him to the Picts, apart from his name-checking in the dialogue of the Synod of Whitby.<sup>31</sup> Duncan posits, following the Andersons and Kathleen Hughes, that the messengers who delivered Nechtan's query on Easter to Ceolfrith might also have given Bede detailed – and Pictish – information on Iona, Columba, the Irish annals, and much more.<sup>32</sup> He clarifies this in the same article, suggesting that rather Ecgberht of Iona might have supplied Bede with all he knew of Columba and the Picts, as the author of Nechtan's letter to Ceolfrith.<sup>33</sup> While Nechtan's letter, whoever wrote it, might well have contained information linking Columba with the Picts, Duncan neglects the visits of Adomnán to Northumbria and their potential as opportunities for the dissemination of data on Columba and his foundation. After all, Ceolfrith himself interacted with the Iona abbot, but, to Duncan's mind, Bede's source must have been Pictish. In reality, Bede was not restricted to one source for material on Columba, but he chose to stress certain aspects of what he had available.

This exclusive relationship between Columba and the Picts is not borne out by the Irish sources, although they do reveal interaction with the Picts.<sup>34</sup> The *Amrae* contains a reference to subduing the people near the Tay, and Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* does depict positive interactions between Columba and the Picts, particularly their king, Bruide, but never states that he converted him or his people as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', pp. 9-10. See M.O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (London and Edinburgh, 1980) for a discussion of these king lists, pp. 77-102. The *Series Longior* of the Pictish king lists, in which this assertion is found (lists F and I in Anderson's edition, pp. 272, 280), probably had this inserted later, and may even have relied on Bede for the information. See Evans, 'The Calculation of Columba's Arrival', pp. 196-7.

<sup>30</sup> *HE* V.9.

<sup>31</sup> *HE* III.25.

<sup>32</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', pp. 20-1; A.O. and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, revised edn (Oxford, 1991), p. 77; Kathleen Hughes, *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Scottish and Welsh Sources*, ed. David Dumville, (Woodbridge, 1980), p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Evans suggests that Adomnán may have suppressed aspects of Columba's involvement with the Picts to avoid the political implications it could have carried: 'The Calculation of Columba's Arrival', pp. 189-91.

<sup>35</sup> See James E. Fraser, 'Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe, and the Picts', *Peritia* 17-18 (2003-2004), pp. 187-8; *Amrae* §8. Not that the region of the Tay, which is in southern Scotland, fits with Bede's description either.

Adomnán does mention individual Pictish converts and monasteries founded by Columba among the Picts, but this was not a concerted evangelisation of a people.<sup>36</sup> As Sharpe observes, this pastoral connection between Iona and the Picts was probably valid in the seventh century, but whether it can be applied to Columba's time is doubtful.<sup>37</sup> Study of place-names in eastern Scotland certainly implies no particular early reverence for Columba.<sup>38</sup> Some of Bede's sources for his information may have had a strong Pictish flavour which may have coloured his discourse, but there is no avoiding the fact that Bede had ample opportunity to acquire other, *Irish*, intelligence on Columba; still he happily stresses Columba's relationship with the Picts rather than his legacy's connection with the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>39</sup> Undeniably, Columba did not himself convert the Northumbrians, but he was vitally important for the Irish who came from Iona to do just that, and this fact is poorly reflected in Bede's writing.

It is curious, considering its source and its relevance to the history of the Northumbrians, that Bede does not include the story told by Adomnán at the beginning of his *Vita Columbae*, in which Columba appears to King Oswald in a dream and is credited with Oswald's victory in battle the next day.<sup>40</sup> This episode strengthens the implications of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that Oswald spent at least part of his exile at Iona, and the vision connects the Northumbrian king with the Ionan saint, though these men never met in life.<sup>41</sup> It is certain that the tale was known in Northumbria, as Oswald himself shared the story, and Adomnán's journeys to the kingdom, and his association with Aldfrith, may have motivated its sharing. As the tentative dating of Cumméne's *liber* on Columba shows, Ségéne's abbacy was engaged in encouraging the cult of Columba, and Oswald's communications with the abbot of Iona, both in person and presumably otherwise, felt the effects of this. The absence of this dream vision from Bede's writing seems to be a down-playing of Columba and his influence in

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<sup>36</sup> VC III.14, 33, 35. Adomnán attests to the Irish and the Picts in Britain escaping the plague in 664, and attributes it to Columba's influence (VC II.46).

<sup>37</sup> Sharpe, 'Introduction', p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> See Simon Taylor, 'Seventh-Century Iona abbots in Scottish Place-Names', in *Spes Scotorum*, p. 40. Taylor wonders if this curious dearth, further underlined by the presence of commemorations of Adomnán in the area, might have a link to the expulsion of the Iona community from Pictland in 717, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Duncan sees this tendency as due to Bede's source, rather than to Bede himself, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> VC I.1. Oswald related this tale to Ségéne, abbot of Iona.

<sup>41</sup> Although the fact that Oswald did not recognise Columba might be seen as problematic, Oswald had never met the saint. It is unlikely that Adomnán would imply that Oswald was not appropriately aware of Columba.

Northumbria. After all, Columba never evangelised the Anglo-Saxons, and Bede maintains a distance from the Irish saint.

Bede's account of Columba in *HE* III.4 ends with a description of Ecgberht's arrival on Iona, explaining that the Anglo-Saxon came to the monastery to correct their error in the keeping of Easter. Bede jumps 150 years to include Ecgberht in the chapter, emphasising from the start that the Irish were destined to be shown the better way. This is a dense passage, in which Bede almost trips over himself in establishing certain facts from the outset: Columba's community at Iona did not follow the correct Easter; Ecgberht instructed them successfully in the correct Easter; they were never Quartodecimans; and they were deserving of Ecgberht's correction because they were charitable. To an extent, this passage summarises much of Bede's narrative concerning the Irish of Iona, and it follows words of praise for their way of life and excuses for their errors, at least in Columba's time. Bede writes that the community were *barbari et rustici*, continuing his argument that their position far from the civilised centre of Rome resulted in their erroneous Easter error, a description that jars with his description of the Iona mission in Northumbria and its success. Bede's references to Columba seem to stress his community's distance from Rome, and equate it with lack of knowledge. The *rusticia* of Columba and his community is brought up in both *HE* III.4 and III.25 as the reason and the excuse for their divergent Easter. While this logic cannot be reconciled with the experience of Northumbria during the episcopacies of Aidan, Fínán, and Colmán, during which the study of scripture was encouraged and Anglo-Saxons left for Ireland to learn from the Irish, or the abilities of Adomnán, it seems to offer Bede an easy way of dealing with Columba.

Columba is invoked several times at the Synod of Whitby (*HE* III.25), though for different purposes by different sides. Colmán, bishop of Lindisfarne, calls upon Columba after he has claimed the examples of the Apostle John and of Anatolius to justify his Easter practices. Columba's holiness, and that of his successors, is presented as proof of his reliability, and of the righteousness of following him in all things – life, custom and discipline. Wilfrid's scepticism over Columba's holiness is minimised by his avowal that Columba may well have been as Colmán describes, and that as long as he knew no better, his pious intentions outweighed his rustic simplicity.<sup>42</sup> While Wilfrid's remarks could be construed as, at best, patronising (and at worst insulting),

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<sup>42</sup> *HE* III.25: *qui simplicitate rustica, sed intentione pia.*

these words are placed in Wilfrid's mouth and are not declaimed by Bede's narrating voice. They are still part of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, however, and they certainly cast doubt on the veracity of Columba's claims to holiness. Columba's sanctity is not ultimately doubted, but it is placed firmly below that of Peter. Even the Columbans at the Synod of Whitby admit Peter's special position as the rock on which the Church is built, and so Rome and those who cling to its Easter customs carry the day. There is no doubt that Peter's importance trumps that of Columba, and this relationship informs the way in which Bede deals with the Irish Easter: as founders, Columba and his successors and monks were holy men, but Rome's traditions are to be preferred. In Bede's account, however, despite Wilfrid's reservations, Columba is not called a heretic or schismatic, and Bede encourages a positive attitude towards him and his successors.<sup>43</sup>

Columba's depiction certainly differs from one's expectations, particularly in light of Bede's positive portrayal of so many of the Irish. His sanctity is acknowledged only by Columbans in the text, while Bede admits his influence, his monastic example, and his missionary work. Aidan is an acceptable founder and figure of reverence, but Columba does not quite fulfil this requirement for Bede, and his description of that saint is characterised by distance. Despite his clear knowledge and, to an extent, acknowledgement, of the importance of Columba and his monastery on Iona for the Anglo-Saxon church, and for the Northumbrians in particular, Bede keeps the Irish saint at arm's length. His emphasis is on Columba's interactions with the Picts, not on his eventual impact on the Anglo-Saxons. The distance in time does contribute toward this impression, but there is no avoiding the fact that Bede does not make Columba one of his primary models of excellence. There is little opportunity for his audience to look to that saint for example, unlike figures such as Aidan, or even Fursa. Nonetheless, Bede is not critical of Columba directly, and he is protective of the Columban tradition in Northumbria.

## ii. Ségéne

Ségéne's presence in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is as the abbot who sent Aidan to Northumbria, involving him in the very origins of the Irish mission to Northumbria. He succeeded Fergna as abbot in 623 and, as abbot of Iona for thirty years, his influence on the monastery was immense. It was Ségéne who sent the first

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<sup>43</sup> Bede's next chapter, *HE* III.26, stresses the holiness and piety of the Columban community at Lindisfarne.

(unsuccessful) bishop to Northumbria, as well as both Aidan and Fínán, and he would have been a significant contributor to the monastery of Lindisfarne and the mission to Northumbria more generally, until his death in 652. Ségéne was the son of Fiachna, and the nephew of Laisréne mac Feradaig, third abbot of Iona († 605), and a member of the Cenél Conaill, just as Columba was.<sup>44</sup> In fact, he was first cousin, twice removed, to the saint himself, a kinship which was preferred, though not essential, at Iona for the position of abbot.<sup>45</sup>

Without his abbatial title, Ségéne is among the addressees of the letter written by pope-elect John and other papal personnel in 640 to the Irish, warning them to adopt the orthodox Easter.<sup>46</sup> There is no way to know whether Bede made the connection between the Ségéne of the letter and the abbot who sent Aidan to Northumbria or not, but his awareness of the Easter practices of Iona make it quite possible. The very fact that he (barely) admits that Aidan may have known other Easter tables were preferred at Rome implies he understood the position of those who sent Aidan, and knew they had been informed from the papal see itself. To acknowledge this openly would, however, undermine his careful description of Aidan as a model monk, good Christian example, and beloved holyman. Unmentioned by Bede, and probably unknown to him, is Cummián's letter on Easter addressed to Ségéne and Béccán.<sup>47</sup> Ségéne's interest in the dating of Easter, or at least in upholding the system inherited from Columba, was evidently well-known in Ireland. No doubt Ségéne's determined refusal to be convinced by the many who sought to persuade him to give up the Insular Easter celebrated by Columba influenced the continued intransigence of Iona and its daughter-churches. Ségéne's abbacy saw the adoption of the Roman Easter tables in the south of Ireland, and so experienced the protracted controversy that arose from the variance around the country. It is implied in Cummián's letter that Ségéne and Béccán had referred to Cummián and his ilk as heretics, sure evidence of the venom involved in this debate.<sup>48</sup> However, neither Adomnán nor Aidan nor Colmán demonstrate any such beliefs about those who followed different Easters, and diversity of practice seems to

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<sup>44</sup> AT 603; AU 605.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Ségéne's predecessor was not of the Cenél Conaill, and may even have been a Briton. See Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> HE II.19.

<sup>47</sup> Cummián, *De Controversia Paschali*, ll. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Cummián, *De Controversia Paschali*, l. 132: *...silete et nolite nos hereticos uocare* [...be silent and do not call us heretics.]

have been acceptable to them.<sup>49</sup> Clare Stancliffe has shown that Adomnán did not consider Easter a divisive issue, and while Ségéne may well have been more stringent in his attitude, it is also possible that Cumman's words were more defensive than reflective of reality.<sup>50</sup>

Regarding the story mentioned above in which Columba appeared to King Oswald in a dream, Adomnán explains that he heard it from his predecessor, Failbe, and that Failbe heard it from Oswald himself while the king was telling Ségéne, the then abbot.<sup>51</sup> With both Failbe and Ségéne present, this meeting probably took place on Iona itself.<sup>52</sup> Although it seems Oswald had spent time on Iona during his exile, judging from his appeal to that monastery for a bishop, Bede never explicitly places the king on Iona, so this evidence is most interesting. The Irish evidence we have here of Ségéne and Oswald interacting is consistent with the strong connection described between Oswald and his Irish bishop, Aidan. Ségéne is also part of the process through which two other anecdotes about Columba were preserved, as Sharpe remarks. In *VC* I.3, Ernéne mac Craséni related to Ségéne the story of his encounter with Columba at Clonmacnoise, and again Adomnán heard this in turn from his predecessor Failbe who was present at the conversation. In *VC* II.4, Silnán mac Nemaídon recounted a prophecy he heard from Columba himself to Ségéne and other *seniores*. Ségéne was evidently a participant, perhaps even an instigator, in the process of preserving the memory and importance of Columba, a process which had political as well as religious overtones. While Adomnán wrote the most successful and lasting expression of this, the process did not originate with him. Ségéne's long term in office was a vibrant and active abbacy, and apart from his essential role in the mission to Northumbria, Ségéne also oversaw the extension of Columba's *familia* in other directions. The Irish annals state that Ségéne founded the monastery of Rechru in 637, thought to be either Lambay Island or, perhaps, Rathlin Island. If Lambay Island, in Brega, is the location in question, there is evidence of Ségéne's personal involvement in the expansion of the

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<sup>49</sup> Even Finán, whose arguments with Rónán are described in *HE* III.25, seemed more vexed by the attempt to convert him than by the alternative paschal tables. See Chapter One.

<sup>50</sup> Clare Stancliffe, "Charity with Peace": Adomnán and the Easter Question', in *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 65-7.

<sup>51</sup> *VC* I.1.

<sup>52</sup> Although Thomas Charles-Edwards thinks this meeting took place in Northumbria, while Ségéne was visiting churches that were part of Columba's *familia*: 'Iona, abbots of (act. 563–927)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51141>> [accessed 25 January 2013].

Columban *familia*.<sup>53</sup> He was involved in the consolidation of Iona's place in the Irish church, of which the mission to Northumbria was an important aspect, defining the island monastery as a strong centre of mission. Sharpe sees a connection between Ségéne's political familial ties and a new sense of political involvement at Iona in the *Vita Columbae*'s recounting of Columba blessing Domnall, who became high king of the Uí Néill in 628.<sup>54</sup>

This interest of Ségéne in Columba's history and inheritance is in keeping with his strong stance on the subject of the dating of Easter: just as Columba's legacy is worth preserving, so too are his Paschal customs. Ségéne's term as abbot of Iona stretched up to 652, embracing all of Aidan's time at Lindisfarne and before, as well as Fínán's pre-Lindisfarne career, and possibly even some of Colmán's formative monastic years. His impact on these men's thinking regarding Columba, Iona, the mission to the Northumbrians, and the dating of Easter, would have been immense. As abbot of the foundation from which these Irish bishops hailed, his authority had long formed the guide to their monastic lives. Despite the new authority they themselves gained by their new role as bishop, Aidan, Fínán, and probably Colmán must still have felt the pull of Ségéne's instruction. Although Bede only mentioned him once in reference to Aidan's mission, Ségéne was among the most important early influences on the establishment and flourishing of the Irish mission to Northumbria.

### iii. Adomnán (I)

Adomnán is rather special among the Irishmen on Iona, as Bede may actually have met him, and certainly came into contact with others who had met him.<sup>55</sup> Adomnán travelled to Northumbria on at least two occasions, each time meeting with the king, Aldfrith. Adomnán, he himself tells us, was an *amicus* of Aldfrith, and that king was well-connected to Iona also.<sup>56</sup> Bede is very positive about the abbot of Iona, calling him *uir bonus et sapiens, et scientia scripturarum nobilissime instructus*.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 42; Sharpe, *Life of St Columba*, p. 264, n. 71. *AT* 637; *AU* 635. For the identification of the island, see Thomas Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland I* (Liverpool, 2006), p. 306, n.2.

<sup>54</sup> Sharpe, 'Introduction', p. 36; *VC* I.10.

<sup>55</sup> Such as Ceolfrith, and presumably the *eruditiores* who persuaded the abbot to abandon his Columba Easter traditions.

<sup>56</sup> *VC* II.46; see Chapter Two on Aldfrith. The relationship of *amicus* was not necessarily exclusively one of personal friendship, but also implies a good relationship between Aldfrith and the community Adomnán represented.

<sup>57</sup> *HE* V.15: "a good and wise man with an excellent knowledge of the scriptures."

Bede's depiction of Adomnán has two points of focus: his writing of *De Locis Sanctis*, quoted at some length in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his acceptance of the orthodox, Dionysiac Easter. For the abbot of Iona, loyal bastion of support for the 84-year Easter tables followed by Columba, to accept the Roman practices on the calculation of Easter at the encouragement of Northumbrians was a revolutionary occurrence, and Bede discusses it in detail.

Adomnán was the subject of a concerted effort on the part of the Northumbrians to convince him of the error of his Easter reckoning, and Bede records this as part of the process through which Iona was eventually persuaded to adopt Roman traditions.<sup>58</sup> Bede describes how Adomnán was sent as an ambassador of his people to Aldfrith in Northumbria, where he spent some time. In Northumbria, Adomnán was exposed to what Bede calls canonical rites (*ritus ecclesiae canonicos*), and was lectured by learned men. Bede records only one visit, while Adomnán himself states he went twice to Northumbria, suggesting Bede is combining both visits into one, possibly for the sake of simplicity. Indeed, it suits Bede to present Adomnán as convinced on his one and only trip to Northumbria, while admitting another visit would raise the question of why he went home unconverted the first time. Adomnán's initial visit probably had the purpose of ransoming prisoners, presumably from Ecgfrith's attack on Brega, as the Irish annals assert, and the second may have had the same agenda, if the entry at *AT* 689 is not a duplicate for *AT* 687.<sup>59</sup> Bede makes no mention of the ransoming of hostages, and his description probably applies to Adomnán's second visit to Northumbria. Aldfrith's succession as king made Adomnán an ideal diplomat, as an *amicus* of the king and as an abbot of high standing, both in the spiritual and the secular world.<sup>60</sup>

During his sojourn among the Anglo-Saxons, Bede tells us, Adomnán spent time observing the customs of the Northumbrian church, and was exposed to the exhortations of many churchmen, including some "better instructed than himself".<sup>61</sup> The argument used to persuade him was similar to that used by Cummian in his letter: that those who numbered but few and were located at the ends of the earth would be

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<sup>58</sup> *HE* V.15.

<sup>59</sup> *AT* 687: *Adomnanus captiuos reducsit ad Hiberniam .lx.*, 689; *AU* 687; *HE* IV.26.

<sup>60</sup> *VC* II.46.

<sup>61</sup> *HE* V.15: *qui erant eruditiores...*

unwise to presume they knew better than the rest of the universal church.<sup>62</sup> Bede claims that Adomnán was convinced by these arguments as he was wise and well-versed in Scripture, as though agreeing with the Anglo-Saxons was the only logical outcome.<sup>63</sup> As Clare Stancliffe has pointed out, the limitations of the 84-year Easter tables would have been increasingly apparent by the 690s, due to the discrepancy between the tables and the lunar cycle.<sup>64</sup> Bede then explains that Adomnán returned to Iona and tried to persuade the community there to join him in accepting the Roman Easter, but he was unsuccessful. Leaving Iona, according to Bede, Adomnán travelled to Ireland, where he managed to induce many of the Irish, almost none of whom were part of the Iona *familia*, to adopt the orthodox Easter reckoning. If Bede were trusted on this, Adomnán would have spent many years in Ireland, away from his monastery. Bede then records that, having celebrated the (correct) Easter in Ireland, Adomnán returned to Iona and died before Easter came around, thus conveniently sparing him of the pain of conflict with his community.

It is generally thought that Adomnán was thus persuaded by the Northumbrians in the 680s.<sup>65</sup> Bede's account tells that he then spent time trying to convince the community on Iona to join him in celebrating Easter according to the Dionysiac reckoning, and remained in Ireland for a great deal of his abbacy, but this is difficult to reconcile with the *Vita Columbae*, in which Adomnán appears in communion with the community of Iona in the 690s. The Irish annals do attest to Adomnán travelling to Ireland in 692, but, as Herbert shows, this was clearly not a permanent move.<sup>66</sup> David Woods has pointed out the unlikelihood of such a situation, and no sign of it appears in the Irish annals, compared to the confusion evident in the years following Adomnán's death.<sup>67</sup> Woods contends that Adomnán did not adopt the

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<sup>62</sup> Cummian, *De Controversia Paschali*, ll. 108-10: *utrum Haebrei et Greci et Latini et Aegyptii, simul in obseruatione precipuarum solennitatum uniti, an Britonum Scottorumque particula, qui sunt pene extremi et, ut ita dicam, mentagrae orbis terrarum.*

<sup>63</sup> Herbert argues that Adomnán may have been elsewhere in Ireland in the mid-660s and so would have missed the fallout from the Synod of Whitby, perhaps resulting in his stance being less intransigent than that of Ségéne, or, for that matter, the Irish bishops of Lindisfarne: *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 49.

<sup>64</sup> Clare Stancliffe, 'Charity with Peace', pp. 58-9.

<sup>65</sup> Other factors must have been part of this decision, such as Armagh's adoption of the Roman Easter by the 680s, which put pressure on Iona. See David Woods for a brief discussion of the evidence, 'Adomnán, Plague and the Easter Controversy', *Anglo-Saxon England* 40 (2011), pp. 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> *AT* 692; *AU* 692; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 50. Herbert points out that the annals then state that Adomnán *pergit* (proceeded) to Ireland in 697 to promulgate his *Lex innocentium*, *AU* 697.

<sup>67</sup> Woods, 'Adomnán, Plague and the Easter Controversy', p. 3. Clare Stancliffe suggests that Bede invented this to explain the untenable situation Adomnán would have found himself in on Iona, Bede being unable to imagine it: 'Charity with Peace', p. 61. This is a bold assertion, and one that can be neither proven nor disproven.

Roman Easter tables until far later, perhaps *c.* 702, and sees proof of this in certain references in the *Vita Columbae* to the absence of plague among the Picts and the Irish in Britain.<sup>68</sup> This hypothesis manages to reconcile Bede's account with the annals and demonstrates that Adomnán did deal, if obliquely, with the issue of Easter in his founder's *vita*. As part of this theory, Woods suggests that Adomnán travelled to Northumbria a third time, a trip that is not mentioned in the *Vita Columbae* as that work was written before the journey took place.<sup>69</sup> Bede's failure to mention a third visit does not count against this, as he had already omitted one of Adomnán self-verified journeys there, stating that the abbot came but once to Northumbria.<sup>70</sup>

Bede's account of Adomnán being convinced by more learned men than he may appear rather patronising to the famous Irish scholar and author, but Bede's narrative arc demands that the Irish abbot be persuaded by those who know better than him. Part of this narrative is that Adomnán, though highly educated and able, was yet bettered by the Northumbrian scholars. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* seems to have been known to Bede, at least by reputation, and Bede was intimately familiar with the abbot's *De Locis Sanctis*.<sup>71</sup> Not only did Bede write an abridged and simplified version of this text, but he included some passages from his rewrite in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, making it part of his story. Despite the attitude evinced over Easter, our author attempts to support Adomnán's reputation.<sup>72</sup> We know, from both the *Vita Columbae* and the *De Locis Sanctis*, that Adomnán was erudite and articulate. The *Vita Columbae* hints at an active scriptorium on Iona through references to writing and

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<sup>68</sup> Stancliffe, on the other hand, sees "pointers" in the *Vita Columbae* that its author was an adherent of the Roman Easter at the time of its writing: 'Charity with Peace', pp. 53-4. She does admit the voice of the *Vita Columbae* is "unpolemical" in support of Rome (p. 54). It might be argued that the *Romanitas* displayed by the *Vita Columbae* was intended to present Columba as orthodox despite his Easter practices.

<sup>69</sup> This possibility was also suggested by Thomas O'Loughlin, 'Adomnán: A Man of Many Parts', in *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697: Essays in Commemoration of the Law of the Innocents*, ed. Thomas O'Loughlin (Dublin, 2001), p. 46, and repeated by Corning, *Celtic and Roman traditions*, p. 152.

<sup>70</sup> The fact that a third trip does not appear in the Irish annals may be because the community at Iona did not wish to draw attention to the division at their monastery while Adomnán was keeping the Roman Easter and others the 84-year Easter, though the latter would not have considered the former "heretical", as Corning posits, *Celtic and Roman traditions*, p. 153.

<sup>71</sup> David Woods theorises that Adomnán could have written *De Locis Sanctis* while in Northumbria, which would surely have further impressed Bede, but which otherwise has little impact on the discussion here: 'On the Circumstances of Adomnán's Composition of the *De Locis Sanctis*', in *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 193-204. It is, however, difficult to envisage Adomnán having the time or inclination to write this text while visiting Northumbria.

<sup>72</sup> *HE* V.16-17. Bede's adaptation of Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* is dated to between 702 and 703, and W. Trent Foley remarks that it is among Bede's least original works. In this, his apparent meaning is that Bede's *De Locis Sanctis* is openly admitted to be a simplifying abridgement of Adomnán's original: 'Introduction' to 'Bede: On the holy places', in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, p. 1.

copying, and Adomnán's own works points to an active scholarly community alongside it.<sup>73</sup> The *Vita Columbae* draws on a wealth of Latin learning, containing echoes of Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, Evagrius's translation of Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*, the works of Pope Gregory I, and others, as well as a multitude of Scriptural references.<sup>74</sup> Nor was Adomnán reticent about his achievements, bringing a copy of his *De Locis Sanctis* with him to offer to King Aldfrith on his visit to Northumbria, deeming it worthy as a gift to a king, and deserving of dissemination.<sup>75</sup>

Bede does not mention the fact that the passages from the *De Locis Sanctis* that he includes are in fact his own version, instead implying that they are Adomnán's own words. In this careful acknowledgement of the Irish abbot's work, Bede makes clear that he thought highly of the abbot as a scholar and as a Christian.<sup>76</sup> Bede's revision of Adomnán's text was undertaken with a view to making the work more accessible, offering *breuioribus strictisque sermonibus* for readers. Bede believed this necessary, and the editor of Bede's version refers to Adomnán's "tortuous Hiberno-Latin".<sup>77</sup> Whether or not we accept this classification of Adomnán's linguistic style, the fact remains that Bede felt a simpler rendering of *De Locis Sanctis* would prove useful, perhaps for an Anglo-Saxon clergy that was not always educationally up to scratch.<sup>78</sup> Gunn sees Bede's re-writing of Adomnán's work as a judgement on the author's Latinity, as Bede calls Adomnán's writing *lacinosus*, a word meaning complex or wordy.<sup>79</sup> Gunn's interpretation reads too much into this one word, particularly in light of Bede's explanation in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that he rewrote Adomnán's text to make it shorter and more concise. After all, Bede recommends that readers who wish to learn more should refer either to Adomnán's text or to his own summary.<sup>80</sup> Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* provided a useful overview of places of holy import, and Bede's

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<sup>73</sup> VC I.23, 25, II.16, 18, III.15.

<sup>74</sup> See Sharpe, 'Introduction', pp. 57-9.

<sup>75</sup> HE V.15.

<sup>76</sup> Bede even drew on Adomnán's work in some of his homilies: Thomas O'Loughlin, 'The Diffusion of Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* in the Medieval Period', *Ériu* 51 (2000), p. 93. See also O'Loughlin, 'The Library of Iona in the Late Seventh Century: The Evidence from Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*', *Ériu* 45 (1994), pp. 33-52.

<sup>77</sup> Foley, 'Introduction', p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> See Bede's concern over clergy whose Latin was poor: *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 5.

<sup>79</sup> Bede, *De Locis Sanctis* 19.4, ll. 36-7, CCSL 175, ed. J. Fraipont (Turnhout, 1965). 'Bede: On the Holy Places', in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, trans. W. Trent Foley, p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> HE V.17: *breuioribus strictisque*. In fact, Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* proved hugely popular with medieval scholars beyond Bede: see Thomas O'Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London, 2007), pp. 177-83; O'Loughlin, 'The Diffusion of Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* in the Medieval Period', pp. 93-106.

appreciation of its utility was clearly the motivation behind his emendation.<sup>81</sup> A précis of longer or more difficult works of authoritative figures was not unusual, and was deemed to be still the work of the original author, and it seems Bede saw his task very much in this light. As Lawrence Martin comments, in his introduction to Bede's *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, the function of a scholar and teacher in the early medieval period was to pass on the learning of the authorities in a simpler and more easily digested form.<sup>82</sup> That Bede's excerpts from his revision in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are not referenced as such, and that Bede does not include it in his list in *HE* V.24, suggests that Bede did not see this as his work at all, but purely an adaptation to aid its use. Thomas O'Loughlin perceives Bede's inclusion of Adomnán's work as an act of promotion, presenting the Irishman as an exegete to be recommended.<sup>83</sup> The work's focus on the geography of the Bible, without mention of Iona or Columba, may have encouraged Bede to include it with Adomnán's name. Despite the complications of the process by which Adomnán, and later Iona, was converted to the Roman Easter, in matters of holy geography Adomnán was not to be doubted. His scholarship on non-Paschal topics is to be accepted, and even the very revision Bede executed speaks to the learned, and so demanding, nature of his Latinity. Bede's inclusion of Adomnán's work is an act of support and admiration.

While Bede's account of Adomnán's visit to Northumbria depicts him being convinced by *eruditiores*, or more learned men, he is deliberate in showing that Adomnán was not unlearned. While Gunn declares that Bede had little interest in the works of British, Irish, or Gaulish authors, and preferred to call upon the writings of authorities like Eusebius and Jerome to convey his orthodoxy and *Romanitas*, Bede's inclusion of Adomnán's work refutes this assertion.<sup>84</sup> The very subject on which Bede quotes Adomnán – the holy places – is in clear opposition to claims that the Irish did not understand their place in the world. While the Britons rebuked by Augustine of Canterbury placed their own traditions before those of the rest of the world, and Pope Honorius, Bede asserts, warned the Irish not to think themselves, at the edge of the

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<sup>81</sup> *HE* V.15: *legentibus multis utilimum*.

<sup>82</sup> Martin, 'Introduction', in *The Venerable Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>83</sup> O'Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places*, p. 190.

<sup>84</sup> A statement that fails to take into account Bede's great – though unacknowledged – debt to Irish computists: see Charles W. Jones, *Beda Opera de Temporibus* (Cambridge, MA, 1943), pp. 111-3; and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', *Peritia* 2 (1983), pp. 229-47; Jean-Michel Picard, 'Bede and Irish Scholarship: Scientific Treatises and Grammars', *Ériu* 54 (2004), pp. 139-48.

world, wiser than the rest of the Christian world, Adomnán's quoted work spoke to a broader comprehension of the world, demonstrating him to be a man, as Herbert puts it, "whose mental horizons encompassed the whole of Christendom".<sup>85</sup> The *De Locis Sanctis* was probably used to aid scriptural exegesis, and Bede obviously considered it useful enough to warrant a rewrite. Even though Bede's work has Adomnán being taught the better way, regarding Easter and other ordinances (*decreta*) by Anglo-Saxons, here is a clear attempt to ensure Adomnán is emphatically depicted as a man learned in his own right. Adomnán's persuasion through the arguments of religious scholars may even be evidence of his intelligence, understanding that the better way he was presented with was just that, the better way. There is no ambiguity in Bede's depiction of Adomnán: here was a man of sound intellect and profound learning. It is his very ability that makes of his persuasion a Northumbrian coup, wherein the scholars of Northumbria prove themselves by convincing this Irish abbot to come over to their side, he who was wise and learned in the scriptures.

Adomnán is also praised in Ceolfrith's letter to King Nechtan of the Picts, a document Bede includes in its apparent entirety. This letter is beautifully placed in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, coming in the last book, right before the chapter in which Bede recounts Iona's adoption of the Roman Easter, and it sets out in detail the orthodox Northumbrian stance on Easter and its calculation. Ceolfrith's letter explains the methods of dating Easter, the history of its dating, and the preferred form of the tonsure. In discussing the latter, Ceolfrith admits that the correct tonsure is not as clear a case as that of Easter, but declares that the Petrine tonsure, imitating Christ's crown of thorns, is far to be preferred to that of Simon Magus, which was used on Iona. Ceolfrith forcefully claims, however, that there are those who are catholic in faith and in deed who wear Simon Magus's tonsure, and yet they are *sanctos et Deo dignos* [holy and deemed worthy by God], and he numbers Adomnán among them. Ceolfrith calls Adomnán *abbas et sacerdos Columbiensium egregius*, praising him and connecting this praise to Columba.<sup>86</sup> Ceolfrith found Adomnán, who visited Jarrow, to have *prudens*, *humilitas* and *religio* in his words and actions, making Adomnán another holy man who lived as he preached.<sup>87</sup> According to Ceolfrith, Adomnán maintained his Insular

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<sup>85</sup> *HE* II.2, 19; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 49. See also O'Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places*, especially pp. 143-76.

<sup>86</sup> This description is perhaps echoed in Bede's words about Columba in *HE* III.4, calling him *presbyter et abbas habitu et uita monachi insignis*.

<sup>87</sup> See the importance of this for Aidan, Chapter One.

tonsure, but aspired to follow Peter, and he implies that he would have insisted on the alteration of the tonsure if he could. Corning believes Ceolfrith to be criticising Adomnán in the letter, and that he was forced to diplomatically add words of praise as Adomnán was so respected among the Picts, but this is a cynical view that ignores the strength of Ceolfrith's words and assumes the Wearmouth-Jarrow abbot had no understanding of Adomnán's position. Rather, Ceolfrith's acknowledgment of the limitations Adomnán experienced hints at a comprehension of the realities of changing long-held customs for a church like Iona. It is true that Adomnán was esteemed among the Picts, and there are a fascinatingly large number of medieval commemorations to Adomnán in modern-day Scotland, which Taylor characterises as having a "distinctly eastern Scottish bias".<sup>88</sup> Adomnán's own influence clearly spread into Pictland, perhaps in part due to his support for the orthodox Easter practices we see discussed in Ceolfrith's letter to King Nechtan, as well as his importance as abbot of Iona.<sup>89</sup> Ceolfrith writes that Adomnán, after his experience in Northumbria, was convinced of the orthodox reckoning on Easter and led many of the Irish to this conviction, though he was *necdum* (not yet) able to prevail upon his own community on Iona. Though written before Iona accepted the Dionysiac Easter reckoning, Ceolfrith clearly felt that community's persuasion would eventually come about.<sup>90</sup> Adomnán himself, dying in 704, did not live to see this.

Adomnán is a far more important and influential figure than Bede depicts in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Scholar, author, promulgator of the *Lex innocentium*, diplomat, and abbot of Iona from 679 to 704, Adomnán had a rich and varied career that is only touched upon in Bede's words. His *Lex innocentium*, or *Cáin Adomnáin*, was proclaimed in 697 at the Synod of Birr, and offered protection to women, children, clerics, and church property.<sup>91</sup> Its list of guarantors runs to ninety-one individuals, encompassing both the secular and spiritual spheres, and attests to Adomnán's ability to corral support.<sup>92</sup> This element of his career is unmentioned by Bede, probably because

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor, 'Seventh Century Iona Abbots in Scottish Place-Names', p. 57.

<sup>89</sup> Nechtan has been argued to be half-Irish by Thomas Owen Clancy, a fact that might have, at least initially, aided Ionan influence in Pictland, 'Philosopher-King: Nechtan mac Der-Ilei', pp. 125-49.

<sup>90</sup> This *necdum* suits Bede's agenda so well, looking forward to the change to come on Iona, that one might wonder if he inserted it into Ceolfrith's letter. Of course, Ceolfrith himself likely saw the change as inevitable, having seen Adomnán himself adopt the Roman Easter.

<sup>91</sup> For a concise discussion of the *Lex innocentium*, see Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, 'Birr and the Law of the Innocents', in *Adomnán at Birr, AD 697: Essays in Commemoration of the Law of the Innocents*, pp. 13-32, and see her translation, pp. 57-68.

<sup>92</sup> See Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', pp. 178-215.

of its irrelevance for the Anglo-Saxons. What was not irrelevant, but also goes unsaid, is Adomnán's likely involvement in Aldfrith's succession to the kingship of Northumbria.<sup>93</sup> Aldfrith's own Irish background, as discussed previously, required a certain minimising of the Irish input into his reign, and so Bede describes no particular relationship between Adomnán and King Aldfrith, beyond the abbot's presentation of a copy of *De Locis Sanctis* to the king. He emphasises Adomnán's research into ecclesiastical matters, rather than time spent at the royal court, but it is likely that Aldfrith himself played a part in encouraging the Iona abbot to forsake his Columban Easter for the Rome-approved Dionysiac tables.

Adomnán, like many of the other abbots of Iona, was of the Cenél Conaill branch of the northern Uí Néill, and quite closely related to Columba himself. As the son of Rónán mac Tinne, Adomnán was descended from Columba's paternal uncle, Sétna mac Ferguso, and was a first cousin to Columba, though four times removed. This connection is not mentioned by Bede, who may not have known of it, or, if he did, chose not to mention it. Whether his personal connection to Columba was something Adomnán broadcast is unknown, but there is no sign of it in the *Vita Columbae*. Bede's *Historia Abbatum* reveals distaste for dynastic abbatial succession and would have disapproved of such customs if he had known of it, but there can be no doubt that Adomnán proved himself an excellent leader of his monastery.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, his illustrious kinship must have aided him in his endeavours, supporting his spiritual powers with very real secular clout. Bede is, however, uninterested in this side of Adomnán, whose importance in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is as the first member of the Iona community – first to do so and first in eminence – to realise that the paschal practices espoused in Northumbria (and, of course, Rome) were far superior to those inherited from Columba. Whether Adomnán truly was the first to realise this is highly unlikely, but it suits Bede's plot to depict him so, setting the scene for Ecgberht's great and revolutionary success.<sup>95</sup> Adomnán is praised for his wisdom in adopting the Roman Easter reckoning, at great personal cost, Bede implies, and is also celebrated for his own learned accomplishments.

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter Two; Barbara Yorke, 'Adomnán at the Court of King Aldfrith', in *Adomnán of Iona*, pp. 36-50.

<sup>94</sup> HA 11, in *Baedae Opera Historica* I. At least, this is the impression Bede gives.

<sup>95</sup> One might think of Rónán, Fínán's adversary in the debate over Easter (*HE* III.25), who seems to have had a connection to Northumbria, and, perhaps, to Iona. See Chapter Two.

#### iv. *Dúnchad*

Dúnchad mac Cinn Fáelad is mentioned only briefly by Bede, but the context is immensely important. Dúnchad was abbot of Iona in 716, when the community there decided to adopt Roman Easter traditions rather than cling to their original 84-year cycle. Aidan's name appears in this chapter, as Bede explains that this change occurred about eighty years after his arrival in Northumbria, and so Dúnchad is the other end of a long process whereby the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons performed mutual conversions: one to Christianity, and the other to a more perfect version of Christianity. This event is a defining one in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, for the Anglo-Saxons and for the Irish, yet Dúnchad is not given a role comparable to that of Adomnán. His importance is not for himself, but for the events that took place during his abbacy, as he and Ségéne (and Aidan) bookend the period in which the Iona mission came to Northumbria and the Iona community was 'perfected' by an Anglo-Saxon.

This change of practice took place under the guidance of Ecgberht, an Anglo-Saxon monk who had dedicated his life to *peregrinatio* outside of Britain.<sup>96</sup> Ecgberht had been charged with travelling to Iona and correcting their errors by a divine vision of Boisil, prior of Melrose in Northumbria.<sup>97</sup> It is quite likely Boisil, an Irishman as discussed previously, hailed from Iona, or at least had connections to that foundation. Ecgberht was on a mission, then, which had been instigated by an Irish monk, but Bede, for the reasons discussed already, did not wish to reveal this. Ecgberht's arrival on Iona was with the express purpose, as thrust upon him by Boisil, of instructing the Iona community, and this instruction is pictured as correction of the crooked furrow being ploughed at Iona.<sup>98</sup> Ecgberht's arrival caused consternation on Iona as it threw into relief the division between those determined to retain their Columban 84-year Easter tables and those who were more open to adopting the Rome-approved Dionysiac system. While Bede presents an easy transition, with Ecgberht's arrival on Iona being received honourably and with joy, this cannot be the whole truth. Bede attributes his success to his skills as a teacher, his excellent example, and his repeated encouragement, factors which would certainly have aided his intentions, but in addition

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<sup>96</sup> It is interesting that, while Bede sees Iona as geographically part of Britain (*HE* III.3), coming to Iona did not break Ecgberht's vow never to return to his homeland, presumably because its monastic foundation made it an Irish island, culturally speaking. See *HE* III.27 for Bede's account of Ecgberht's vow.

<sup>97</sup> This is discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>98</sup> *HE* V.9. This image is discussed in Chapter Two.

Ecgerht must have displayed great diplomacy in his actions. Dúnchad's abbacy witnessed a momentous change, a change that Ecgerht brought about with far more complications than Bede acknowledges. In fact, Ecgerht's success within a year of his arrival on Iona is so impressive as to arouse doubt, and it has been suggested that he may have arrived earlier than 716.<sup>99</sup> This event is commemorated in Bede's recapitulation in *HE* V.24, stating that in 716 the *uir Domini* Ecgerht brought the monks of Iona to the catholic Easter and tonsure, a further simplification, as we know that the tonsure was not accepted at Iona until later, but a strong declaration of the importance of these developments for the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the Anglo-Saxon church it celebrates.

Some of the aforementioned complications seem to be reflected in that fact that Dúnchad's abbacy was subject to some contention: while the text of the *Annals of Tigernach* states that he gained the *principatus* of Iona in 707 and that, as *abbas* of Iona, he died in 717, it also includes the death of Conamail, abbot of Iona, in 710, and the election of Dorbéne to the *cathedra* of Iona in 713. To further confuse the matter, Dorbéne died five months later, and in 716, Faelchú accepted the *cathedra* of Columba, at the age of eighty-six.<sup>100</sup> This chronology is a tangled web, and untangling it necessitates a certain amount of supposition versus plausibility. Richard Sharpe, in his introduction to his translation of the *Vita Columbae*, suggests that Conamail and Dúnchad were both abbots of Iona during the intersection attested by the annals: 707-710. While Dúnchad continued as abbot, Dorbéne joined him in that role for a short period during 713, and Faelchú then became abbot of Iona alongside Dúnchad in 716.<sup>101</sup> Sharpe mentions an eighth-century confraternity list, which was written at Salzburg before 784, sometime during the episcopacy of Virgil, an Irishman. This list includes the abbots of Iona, from Columba himself down as far as Sléibéne in the late eighth century, and among them are Conamail, Dúnchad, Dorbéne, and Faelchú, in that order.<sup>102</sup> If this list follows the order in which these men were appointed as abbot, as it seems to, Conamail became abbot before Dúnchad, making Dúnchad the first double

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<sup>99</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 27. Duncan's theory presents an entirely new chronology for which there is little evidence.

<sup>100</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* state he was only in his seventy-fourth year.

<sup>101</sup> Sharpe, 'Introduction', pp. 75-6.

<sup>102</sup> Paul Grosjean, 'Virgile de Salzbourg en Irlande', *Analecta Bollandiana* 78 (1960), especially pp. 92-100. Virgil had, at least, a strong connection to Iona, as the list demonstrates. See Hermann Moisl, who speculates on Virgil's possible connection to Willibrord on the Continent, 'Das Kloster Iona und seine Verbindungen mit dem Kontinent im Siebenten und Achten Jahrhundert', in *Virgil von Salzburg: Missionar und Gelehrter*, ed. Heinz Dopsch and Roswitha Juffinger (Salzburg, 1985), pp. 27-37.

abbot. Bede's reference to abbot Dúnchad alone in 716 is a clear simplification of a more complex situation. Both Sharpe and Thomas Charles-Edwards see the apparent doubling of the position of abbot on Iona as part of a greater crisis over the calculation of Easter.<sup>103</sup> As Duncan remarks, the very number of abbots after Adomnán's death points definitively to controversy, if not necessarily schism. Duncan suggests that there were never two abbots on Iona, and posits that Conamail resigned in 707 and Dúnchad succeeded him, and that Dúnchad lost his position to the short-lived Dorbéne, who was succeeded in turn by their predecessor. Duncan then offers that, like Conamail, Dúnchad resigned his abbacy in 716 before his death, allowing Faelchú to take his place.<sup>104</sup> This neat chronology assumes that the Irish annals ignore the chaos that would have resulted in such a situation, and simply records each new abbot, but is perhaps a little *too* neat.

Another option is to interpret the word *cathedra* in the case of two of these supposed abbots, Dorbéne and Faelchú, as episcopal references, and see them as bishops alongside the abbots of Iona.<sup>105</sup> There are three men named Faelchú without any attached location in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, and one is indeed called a bishop.<sup>106</sup> However, this does not explain the Conamail/Dúnchad situation between 707 and 710, and nor does it fit with Faelchú being called abbot on his death in 724, unless it is assumed he became abbot after Dúnchad's death in 717.<sup>107</sup> In addition, Dorbéne is described as an abbot in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*.<sup>108</sup> By comparison, Dúnchad's *principatus* is a clear reference to abbatial authority and signifies the Ionan abbot's dominion over Columban daughter houses (Bede uses the same term to describe Iona's supremacy over its daughter houses in *HE* III.4). If Dorbéne and Faelchú were in fact bishops at Iona, this could explain the crossover in tenure of these men, but the Salzburg list, among other sources, makes this very unlikely, as does the fact that the death of Coéti, bishop of Iona, is recorded in 712 as a simple and clear *espoc*.<sup>109</sup> The

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<sup>103</sup> Sharpe, 'Introduction', pp. 75-6; Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Iona, abbots of'. Sharpe makes the valid point that if it were an issue of different men being recognised by different factions as abbot, it is highly unlikely they would all be included in the Irish annals as though nothing were amiss, p. 75.

<sup>104</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> Alexander Souter defines *cathedra* as a bishop's seat in *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600AD* (Oxford, 1949), p. 43. The Andersons raised this possibility in their edition of the *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (p. 102), but in the revised edition in 1991, M.O. Anderson commented that this suggestion had not met with much support, p. xlv.

<sup>106</sup> *MT* April 30.

<sup>107</sup> *AT* 724; *AU* 724.

<sup>108</sup> *MT* 28 October; *MG* also calls him abbot of Iona in the annotations at 28 October.

<sup>109</sup> *AT* 712; *AU* 712 calls him *episcopus Iae*.

story told by the annals looks like a doubling of abbots, and the complexities created by the changeover from the 84-year Easter cycle to the Dionysiac does offer a context, if not an exact solution, to this problem.

Dúnchad was a member of the Cenél Conaill, and part of the ruling line, being the grandson of Máel Coba, and great-grandson of Áed mac Ainmirech. He resembles Adomnán in this, belonging to the same branch of the Cenél Conaill and, as Herbert remarks, might have been the “expected successor” to Adomnán, but Conamail succeeded instead.<sup>110</sup> He is part of the tradition that seems to have favoured abbots attached to the Cenél Conaill, Columba’s own dynasty, and his prestigious heritage would have granted him powerful connections. While it is tempting to discern political and familial conflict in the confused abbatial record of the annals, Dorbéne and Faelchú follow after Dúnchad in the genealogies, and are said to be members of the Cenél Conaill also, if less prestigious branches.<sup>111</sup> Herbert suggests that Dúnchad shared his kinsman’s stance on Easter, but lost out to Conamail who had the support of loyalists to the 84-year Easter tables, and Bede’s inclusion of him looks like approbation.<sup>112</sup> Herbert speculates that Dorbéne, whose abbacy coincides with that of Dúnchad, was the scribe of the oldest surviving copy of the *Vita Columbae*, and may have followed Adomnán in his Easter practices, but this would place both Dúnchad and Dorbéne on the same side, making their dual abbacy even more confusing.<sup>113</sup>

In suggesting that this list of dual abbots reflected divisions on Iona, Charles-Edwards goes so far as to categorise them as ‘Hibernian’ and ‘Roman’, and supposes that Dúnchad’s powerful familial connections attest to the Cenél Conaill’s support for the orthodox Easter tables, while his co-abbots (or rival abbots, depending on how one views the situation) were from far less important backgrounds, possibly betraying the besieged perspective of those holding on to their older customs. Charles-Edwards wonders if the Cenél Conaill were in a position to insist on their kinsman, Dúnchad, holding the position of abbot at Iona even though Conamail was still in situ.<sup>114</sup> In 713, the 84-year cycle and the Dionysiac reckoning coincide, giving the same date of April

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<sup>110</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 57. See also the genealogies in the Book of Lecan, *CGSH* 340-1, which makes Dúnchad and Adomnán fourth cousins, p. 54. Conamail is not in this genealogy, and does not seem to have been of the Cenél Conaill.

<sup>111</sup> *CGSH* 342 and 343, pp. 54-5.

<sup>112</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 58.

<sup>113</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 58. Dorbéne’s manuscript is Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Gen. 1 [unseen].

<sup>114</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Iona, abbots of’: Conamail was of the client people Uí Moccu Uais, from Co. Derry, and Dorbéne was from the Cenél Conaill, but a far less influential branch than Dúnchad.

16 for Easter. Between 714 and 743, there would be no more synchronisation, and it is possible this situation exacerbated tensions on Iona.<sup>115</sup> Looking at the available tables, the community would have realised that they were looking at another long period of uncertainty, and perhaps Dorbéne was appointed abbot by those who wished to maintain the 84-year cycle. After all, Dorbéne's role as scribe of the *Vita Columbae* indicates reverence for Columba above all else, not necessarily that he would have agreed with Adomnán after his transfer to the Roman tables. If Adomnán had indeed written the *Vita Columbae* while still adhering to the 84-year tables, as Woods has argued, it would strengthen this point. Dorbéne's death after only a few months ended the hopes of his electors, and it was not until 716 that yet another second abbot was appointed. Again, one might associate Faelchú's election with paschal events on Iona, as that was the year in which the community as a whole first celebrated Easter in accordance with the Roman tables. In the run up to this, one can imagine a certain panic among those who still preferred the old calculations. Another abbot might have been elected in the hope of avoiding what came to pass, but, as Bede and the annals tell us, eventually all were persuaded, including, it seems, Faelchú, who continued as abbot of Iona until 724.<sup>116</sup> The Roman tonsure was adopted in 718, under Faelchú's supervision, indicating that he had embraced the move to orthodoxy. Of course, it is possible that what we are seeing is an expression of communion, with the community electing a second abbot to support the first in times of difficulty, whether spiritual, political, or even health. Unfortunately, without further information, it is not possible to ascertain the actual series of events that led to the record we find in the annals.<sup>117</sup>

The Irish annals add further confusion to the story, stating that the Columbans were ousted from Pictland under Nechtan in 717, and that was followed in 718 by the Iona community receiving the Roman tonsure.<sup>118</sup> Whether the ejection of the Columbans from the territory of the Picts had any connection to Dúnchad's death can

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<sup>115</sup> See Corning, *Celtic and Roman traditions*, Table 9.2, p. 163.

<sup>116</sup> AT 724 records Faelchú's death. Faelchú is called *mac Dorbene*, which may point to Faelchú's close relationship with abbot Dorbéne, rather than a true familial connection. If so, it would support the theory that Faelchú followed Dorbéne, being his spiritual son, and may have, like Dorbéne, also followed the 84-year Easter tables right up until Easter 716. The 84-year tables gave an Easter date of April 12, while the Dionysiac tables gave April 19, so the decision to follow the latter needed to be made by February, at the very latest. See Corning, *Celtic and Roman traditions* for the Easter tables, Appendix 1, p. 188. Grosjean wonders if Dorbéne was actually Faelchú's father, and whether a previous marriage prevented him from being regularly elected abbot of Iona, 'Virgile de Salzbourg en Irlande', p. 94, but this seems both unlikely and, considering Faelchú's supposed age on becoming abbot, improbable.

<sup>117</sup> Sharpe, 'Introduction', p. 75.

<sup>118</sup> AT 717, 718; AU 717.

only be postulated, and depends on whether Dúnchad was still abbot in 717 or had been replaced by Faelchú alone in 716.<sup>119</sup> If Faelchú had indeed been previously a proponent of the 84-year Easter tables, Dúnchad's death might have raised fears abroad as to whether the Iona community would stick with their newly-adopted Easter practices, and perhaps Nechtan's ejection of the Columbans in Pictland was connected to this. Dúnchad is remembered in two place-names in Fife, Kilconquhar parish and Kilduncan. Simon Taylor believes these names (and other *cill*- names in the area) are evidence of Pictish enlistment of orthodox Columbans in the process of bringing its church into line with Rome.<sup>120</sup> Dúnchad, as a proponent of the Roman Easter traditions, might have cooperated with Nechtan in promoting those practices among the Picts, and so earned himself a legacy reflected in these place-names.<sup>121</sup>

In 716, as both the annals and Bede announce, Iona's monastic community finally accepted the Roman Easter reckoning, substituting the Dionysiac Easter tables for their existing ones.<sup>122</sup> Bede's account of this is a vital element in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, proving the maturity of the Anglo-Saxon church and exposing the Divine Plan through which the students become the teachers.<sup>123</sup> Bede writes that because the *gens Scottorum* had volunteered to evangelise the Anglo-Saxons, the Anglo-Saxons in turn helped them come *ad perfectam...normam*. While Bede uses the word *gens*, as though referring to all of the Irish, he was in fact speaking specifically of the community of Iona. Bede was in his forties when this took place, and, considering his interest in computus, must have taken great interest in this change at Iona. That he chooses to mention only one abbot at Iona is probably an editorial decision, selecting the most straight-forward and easily explained option. The politics of Iona, beyond their conversion to the orthodox Easter, were of no concern to the narrative of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and such irrelevance may partially explain his skating over the details. *Féilire Óengusso* records Dúnchad as abbot of Colmcille's Iona, and the notes

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<sup>119</sup> The abbatial confusion did not end with Dúnchad, as Faelchú died in 724 and was succeeded by Cilléne, but the *Annals of Ulster* include another entry for 722 which states that one Fedilmid became abbot of Iona in that year (though he is not among the Salzburg list of Ionan abbots, as Charles-Edwards points out: 'Iona, abbots of'.)

<sup>120</sup> Simon Taylor, 'Place-Names and the Early Church in Eastern Scotland', in *Scotland in Dark Age Britain*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen, 1996), p. 100. See also Taylor's Appendix 2, p. 106.

<sup>121</sup> In contrast, no place-names seem to preserve the names of either Dorbéne or Faelchú. Several place-names utilising Faolán, a diminutive of Faelchú, can be found in Scotland, but none can be connected to the Ionan man: William J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926; repr. 1993), pp. 164, 193, 227, 284-5.

<sup>122</sup> HE V.22; AT 716; AU 716.

<sup>123</sup> HE V.22: Bede says of it, *Quod mira diuinae constat factum dispensatione pietatis* [It is clear that this happened by a wonderful dispensation of divine mercy].

add that under him the community of Iona accepted the *caisc ndligthig*, the right Easter.<sup>124</sup> Bede favours a clear chronology and narrative in this situation. While the Irish annals present a more complicated picture of events with confused abbatial terms and the Roman tonsure only following the Roman Easter at Iona in 718, along with the ejection of the Ionans from Pictland in the intervening year, Bede simply writes that the change to the Roman paschal tables took place in 716 during Dúnchad's abbacy. In fact, Bede goes further than this, stating that the change was adopted under Dúnchad (*sub abbate Duunchado*), implying agency on the abbot's part (though Ecgberht's instruction is given pride of place). Dúnchad's naming in *HE* V.22 identifies him with the changes that took place on Iona in 716, and Bede makes him an active participant, even a promoter, in the adoption of the Dionysiac Easter tables among the monks of his monastery.

#### v. *Elders of Iona*

Early in the story of the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede relates that King Oswald of Northumbria applied *ad maiores natu Scottorum* for a bishop for his people.<sup>125</sup> These *maiores* included important churchmen in Ireland, such as Ségéne of Iona, the eventual dispatcher of the bishop, and the *seniores* of Iona might have counted among them also. The *seniores* of Iona first appear in council, deciding how to deal with the return of Aidan of Lindisfarne's predecessor as bishop of the Northumbrians, so it appears that senior monks at the monastery were called upon to help and support the abbot in his decisions.<sup>126</sup> Among them were probably a prior and, at times, a bishop, although there is no evidence of active bishops permanently located on Iona before Coéti in the early eighth century.<sup>127</sup> Aidan's predecessor, like Aidan himself and the other Irish bishops of Lindisfarne, was consecrated bishop before his arrival in Northumbria, so bishops may have come to Iona to carry out the ceremony or the bishops-to-be may have travelled elsewhere. In the case of Coéti, the bishop must also be numbered among the *seniores* of Iona, the community regarding the office of bishop highly.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *FÓ* May 25.

<sup>125</sup> *HE* III.3.

<sup>126</sup> *HE* III.5.

<sup>127</sup> His death is recorded in *AU* 712, and he is among the guarantors of Adomnán's *Lex innocentium*.

<sup>128</sup> *VC* I.44: bishop Crónán arrived at Iona incognito, and Columba insisted he alone break bread at the eucharist, in reverence for his position.

Aidan (later of Lindisfarne) was present at the meeting of elders that followed the return of the first bishop dispatched to that Anglo-Saxon kingdom, placing him among them. It seems likely that abbots were often chosen from these *seniores*, and so that many of the abbots had once counted among them, including the men discussed here. Having found Aidan among these elders, it also seems plausible to suggest that other men sent as bishops to the Northumbrians – Aidan’s predecessor, Fínán, and Colmán – were numbered amongst them. These *maiores* of Iona were heavily involved in Adomnán’s project to write the *Vita Columbae*, and he lists them as his main source of information, calling them trustworthy men (*fidelesque uiri*).<sup>129</sup> These elders were an essential part of the process through which Columba’s cult was developed, acting as repositories of information and as teachers. They are depicted in the *Vita Columbae* hearing the testimony of Silnán mac Nemaídon with Ségéne, and Failbe, Adomnán’s predecessor as abbot, may also have been among them, as we see him alongside Abbot Ségéne when the latter is hearing accounts of Columba.<sup>130</sup> Adomnán praises their expertise, describing them as *expertis quibusdam fidelibus antiquis*, and so intimating a cohort of respected elders, among whom knowledge of Columba was conserved.<sup>131</sup> Judging from the number of Iona abbots who could claim kinship with their founder, it is likely that a proportion of the *seniores* were likewise members of the Uí Néill, and, more specifically, the Cenél Conaill.

If indeed, as seems likely, Oswald and his brothers spent time on Iona, presumably these elders were involved in the decision to take them in, and in their conversion. These senior monks played a role in the continued education of the community on Iona, novices and full monks alike. Aidan, Bede tells us, insisted his companions persisted in religious study daily, and one imagines he learned this habit on Iona. As learned men, the controversy over Easter would have engaged them thoroughly, and extended discussion and debate would have ensued among the *seniores*, probably with the rest of the community looking to them, as well as the abbot, for guidance. During the knotty abbatial succession after Adomnán’s death, the crisis we see reflected in its complexities must echo the dynamics among this group of men at Iona, as the abbots were probably from among them, and the controversy must have been played out among them to a great extent. If these men were indeed participants in

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<sup>129</sup> VC Second preface.

<sup>130</sup> VC I.3, II.4

<sup>131</sup> VC Second preface: “certain informed and trustworthy aged men”.

the decision to welcome Æthelfrith's exiled children, the political aspect to such an action cannot have escaped them. The interest exhibited by the powers-that-be at Iona in happenings in northern Britain, as some of the entries in the Irish annals attest, recording the battles and deaths of various Northumbrian kings.<sup>132</sup> Following on from their founder, the senior men of Columba's community seem to have maintained a world-view that appreciated Iona's place in the secular world as well as the spiritual.

#### *vi. Community on Iona*

The general monastic community on Iona was mostly made up of Irishmen, though we have evidence of British and Anglo-Saxon monks there already in Columba's time.<sup>133</sup> Although the Irish annals and other sources give us glimpses of the community at different points, Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* offers the richest fund of information on life at the monastery. In examining this, it must be remembered that this is an account of Columba's time written at the end of the seventh century, comprising stories and details gathered from many sources, by many persons, over many years. As such, it cannot be considered an accurate account of either Columba's time or of Adomnán's, but an amalgam of both and the intervening period. As Aidan MacDonald argues, Adomnán's work also assumes an air of idealism, which may skew his presentation of the religious life at the monastery, and this too must be kept in mind.<sup>134</sup> The *Vita Columbae* shows a community who live closely together, praying and leading a life of strict rule. Men at various stages, novices and monks, were present at Iona, and instruction was part of their monastic life. Columba and Báithéne, his successor, are mentioned writing and copying, and presumably there was a scriptorium, a library, and an active school.<sup>135</sup> The many Anglo-Saxons that Bede describes going to Ireland during the episcopacies of Fínán and Colmán would have included some who journeyed to Iona, under the influence of those Columban *antistites*.<sup>136</sup> They were

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<sup>132</sup> For example, *AT* 627, 634, 641, 686. The other Irish annals support these entries, and it is notable that they record events in the life of Edwin of Northumbria along with those of Northumbrian kings with Irish connections, like Oswald.

<sup>133</sup> *VC* III.6, 10, 22: an unnamed British monk, Anglo-Saxon Genereus the baker, and Anglo-Saxon Pilu.

<sup>134</sup> Aidan MacDonald, 'Adomnán's Monastery of Iona', in *Studies in the Cult of Saint Columba*, p. 25.

<sup>135</sup> *VC* I.23, 25, III.23.

<sup>136</sup> *HE* III.27.

largely self-sufficient, as the Andersons have shown, growing and saving barley, utilising seal stocks, and tending cattle and sheep.<sup>137</sup>

As far as Bede's text is concerned, the community of Iona is present only in the abstract. The community engendered the Irish bishops of Lindisfarne, and as such provided Northumbria with some of the foundational elements of its church. Despite this, we learn very little about the community itself, beyond its apparently unusual organisation and its emphatic devotion to its 84-year Easter cycle. Bede's knowledge of the community at Iona was probably far more extensive than he demonstrates in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Adomnán's two (at least) visits to Northumbria and the kingdom's acknowledged debt to the island monastery could not but encourage interest in Iona among Northumbrian religious. If Bede himself met Adomnán, he surely learned a little about the visitor's home, and Ceolfrith could have provided a medium of communication on the topic. However, despite this reasonable supposition, Bede displays little interest in the wider community at Iona beyond their utility in validating the Anglo-Saxon Church's maturity.

The adoption of the orthodox Dionysiac Easter reckoning on Iona is a fundamental turning-point in the development of the Anglo-Saxon church for Bede. The Columban monks of Iona had so long been intractable on this issue that their eventual persuasion deserved particular attention. For Bede, that the entire community on Iona decided to leave behind the traditions they had inherited from Columba indicated a deeper conversion to the unity of the catholic Church, and a great achievement on the part of the Anglo-Saxons, through Ecgberht's efforts. Despite the problems hinted at by the confused abbatial succession on Iona in the early eighth century discussed above, Bede presents it as a simple process, taking place during Dúnchad's abbacy. Bede's depiction of this event is clearly simplistic, but it is important to him to be able to show the community of Iona coming whole-heartedly into the fold of orthodoxy. The issue of Easter was an emotive one for the community of Iona, as rejection of the 84-year cycle used by Columba could be construed as rejection of Columba himself. It is difficult not to see in the *Vita Columbae*, which avoids discussion of Easter almost entirely, an attempt by Adomnán to buttress support for and faith in Iona's founder, both on Iona and beyond.<sup>138</sup> The Irish annals, as

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<sup>137</sup> M.O. Anderson, 'Introduction: Historical', in *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, pp. xlix-l; VC I.37, 41, II.16.

<sup>138</sup> Adomnán does mention it in VC 1.3, but remarkably just states that Columba foresaw the controversy.

mentioned above, describe the ejection of the Iona community (*familia Iae*) from Pictland in 717, and their acceptance of the Roman tonsure a year later.<sup>139</sup> Evans posits that their expulsion was at least partly due to a failure of this *familia* to recognise Nechtan's claims in Dál Riata territories, and even if one wonders if their failure to fully embrace the Roman tonsure might have prompted animosity from Nechtan, political factors played their part.<sup>140</sup> During the course of the eighth century, Iona's importance and influence on the mainland of Ireland, in both spiritual and secular fields, continued.<sup>141</sup>

### Conclusion

The four abbots listed here, Columba, Ségéne, Adomnán, and Dúnchad, are not treated uniformly in Bede's work. Columba and Adomnán are of interest in their own right and were men whose consequence shines through. Ségéne and Dúnchad, while themselves influential, are not depicted as such in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede's appreciation for neatness led him to include both Ségéne and Dúnchad, abbots of Iona at two vitally important moments: the sending of Aidan to Northumbria and the adoption of the orthodox Easter. Bede was not truly interested in Iona for itself, and these men appear in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* because of the immensity of the moments they oversaw, rather than for their own sake. Bede knows nothing of them beyond the contexts in which they are introduced (or, at least, appears to know nothing), but the addition of their names adds to the reliability of his text. Ségéne and Dúnchad are almost a metonym for the narrative interaction of the Columban church in the development of the Anglo-Saxon church – or, at least, in the Northumbrian church. They delimit the story Bede tells of Aidan's dispatch and of Ecgberht's conversion of the community on Iona. There is orderliness to the structure of Bede's narrative in this: he names Ségéne, the beginner of the Irish chapter in the history of the Northumbrian church, and he names Dúnchad, both as a witness and a recipient of the grace of the Northumbrian church's repayment of their debt.

Columba and Adomnán, on the other hand, are named and discussed not for their structural convenience but for their reputations. Columba does not receive the

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<sup>139</sup> *AT* 717, 718; *AU* 717, 718.

<sup>140</sup> Evans, 'The Calculation of Columba's Arrival', p. 192.

<sup>141</sup> See Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, pp. 61-7 on the fortunes of the monastery of Iona in the rest of the eighth century.

same treatment he does in Irish sources and, in comparison, Bede appears rather lukewarm about the saint. His sanctity is not emphasised, rather his foundation is. Columba's importance, for Bede, was in Iona and its later mission. Otherwise, there is a certain sense of distance in the saint's depiction. Columba is invoked in discourses on the dating of Easter, and while his *familia*'s persistence in cleaving to his paschal reckoning is acknowledged as understandable, if not quite excusable, his name is still associated with error. The fact that Columba was unaware of his error should, by Bede's reasoning, excuse him the mistake, and Bede stresses the right intentions and doctrine of those from Iona. Nonetheless, Bede is circumspect in his portrayal of Columba, and cautiously highlights the accomplishments of Aidan rather than Iona's founder. One might argue that Aidan's contribution to the Anglo-Saxon church was more direct and present for Bede, but the fact remains that the reader is struck by Bede's tepid description of Columba. Adomnán's treatment is positive and admiring, comprising excerpts from Bede's revision of his *De Locis Sanctis* and an account of his acceptance of the Roman Easter dating. While one might read condescension in Bede's description of Adomnán being schooled by more learned men in Northumbria, our author is not attempting to patronise the Ionan abbot. He is instead pointing out that the scholars of Northumbria, in following the orthodox Easter championed by Rome, were more correct than Adomnán and were able to persuade him to see this. Adomnán's own erudition is given prominence as Bede is eager to show that he understood Adomnán was not a rustic foreigner.

Being able to call upon the names of the abbots is part of Bede's verifiable history and he acquired them in various places. Ségéne's name, as discussed, is in a letter Bede excerpts in Book II of the text, although it is not certain whether Bede made the connection between these men. Ségéne's name was surely preserved along with other stories about Aidan at Lindisfarne, enabling Bede to include him. Dúnchad's name must have become known through correspondence between Iona and Northumbria, doubtlessly from Ecgberht himself, and perhaps from other sources also. Both Columba and Adomnán were well-known in their own right, and their names were within easy reach of Bede. As no other names associated with Iona are recorded in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, we must presume that Bede knew of no other men on Iona, or, if he did, chose not to incorporate them. It seems likely that Adomnán would have mentioned other Ionans on his trips to visit King Aldfrith but they were not preserved by Bede for posterity; after all, their story was not truly pertinent to his purposes. For

Bede, the importance of the abbots of Iona was in the context of his narrative arc, describing the development of the Anglo-Saxon church. The next chapter focuses on men who are based mainly on the island of Ireland, but who are categorised, not by geographical location, but by their epistolary presence in the text.

## Chapter Six: The Irish in Letters

Bede includes a series of letters within the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a practice that is part of his assertion that he writes in accordance with *uera lex historiae*. He states in the preface to this work that the priest Nothhelm travelled to Rome, and returned to Britain with copies of papal letters. Bishop Albinus instructed him to bring them to Bede, who inserted several into his history. Bede categorises these letters with the other information he received from his informants, among whom Albinus was primary.<sup>1</sup> Bede was interested in reliability and veracity, and often offers support for his information by referencing its source. Sometimes this is a witness who was present at the event in question, or who spoke to someone who was; at other times it is a book, like that of Fursa's life.<sup>2</sup> In yet other cases, Bede actually transcribes the words of documents to back up his statements and to offer an authentic perspective. Bede places the efforts of Albinus and Nothhelm at the forefront of his account of his sources, and writes confidently that he has gathered the materials for the *Historia Ecclesiastica* from the writings of his predecessors.<sup>3</sup> Bede lived in a world where oral tradition and literary tradition were beginning to interact more, and his history reflects this.<sup>4</sup> It has many references to oral reports, but it also relies on episcopal lists, saints' lives, and the written works of authors both patristic and medieval. Bede's use of written sources was not, however, always reverently conservatory; he paraphrased Adomnán's *De Locis*

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<sup>1</sup> *HE* Preface.

<sup>2</sup> See *HE* IV.19, 25; *HE* III.15; *HE* III.19, for examples.

<sup>3</sup> *HE* Preface: ...*ex priorum maxime scriptis hinc inde collectis ea...*

<sup>4</sup> James M. O'Toole, "'Commendatory Letters': An Archival Reading of the Venerable Bede", *The American Archivist* 61.2 (Fall, 1998), pp. 271-3.

*Sanctis*, and was happy to report on the contents of certain letters, rather than transcribing word-for-word, like that of Pope Honorius to the Irish.<sup>5</sup>

Bede was not original in his utilisation of excerpts to support his writings and to move the narrative forward. Eusebius also used letters and documents in his ecclesiastical history, employing them as a convenient method of establishing fact. It is clear that letters carried authority, and none more so than those emanating from the papal see, as demonstrated by Archbishop Theodore's commendatory letters, proving him to be the pope's representative.<sup>6</sup> Bede uses letters in much the same way in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, supporting his history with the evidence of these weighty epistles. He never offers them in a vacuum, always supplying the context to encourage the reader to approach them as Bede wishes them to. As James O'Toole puts it, the "emerging air of authority" of written sources was an excellent way for Bede to show that his history was true.<sup>7</sup> Just as Bede refers to eye-witnesses where possible, letters give him a tangible, unquestioned link to the past. O'Reilly argues that the letters Bede chooses to include are not merely instruments of historical veracity, but also have a didactic purpose, offering "a whole pastoral theology of conversion" and a strong statement concerning Rome's preeminent place in the evangelisation of the world.<sup>8</sup> The Old English translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* omits many of the papal documents, an act that George Molyneaux attributes to its focus on teaching through Christian examples, while Bede's original Latin text maintains a strong interest in Rome's missionary role among the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>9</sup> As Thomas F.X. Noble has thoroughly explored in his 1990 article, literacy and the preservation of papal documents were of immense importance to the papacy from very early in its development. As Noble puts it, the papacy used literacy "to act in the world, to rule, to govern", and letters like those of Honorius and John, examined below, are excellent examples of this.<sup>10</sup> Writing letters like these, which would then be preserved in the

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<sup>5</sup> HE II.19. Bede also made use of countless sources without reference to their originator, though he did utilise a much-remarked system of marginal source-marks. See M.L.W. Laistner, 'Bede as a Classical and a Patristic Scholar', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth Series 16 (1933), pp. 80-1; 'Source-Marks in Bede Manuscripts', *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1933), pp. 350-4.

<sup>6</sup> HE IV.1. See O'Toole, 'Commendatory Letters', p. 273.

<sup>7</sup> O'Toole, 'Commendatory Letters', p. 278.

<sup>8</sup> O'Reilly, 'Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth', p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> George Molyneaux, 'The *Old English Bede*: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', *English Historical Review* 124, No. 511 (2009), p. 1315.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F.X. Noble, 'Literacy and the Papal Government in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', in *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge, 1990), p. 108.

papal archives, enabled the papacy to demonstrate and safeguard their prerogative to judge on church matters in lands even as far away as Ireland, on the edge of Europe.

Thirteen of the Irishmen who appear in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* are revealed within the words of letters, as both addressees and figures mentioned in the body of the epistle. Several more general groups can also be seen, such as unspecified Irish *doctores* or *episcopi*. The addressees, particularly, must be treated carefully as their presence differs from those of the Irishmen Bede weaves into his narrative elsewhere. They are not 'players' as such in Bede's history, as they exist within it only as passive recipients of letters.<sup>11</sup> But, even in their cases, their very presence is important. It is true that Bede generally includes the opening address of the letters he inserts, and so the preservation of these Irish names is not unexpected. That said, Bede was not afraid to edit texts to suit his purposes, even papal letters, and so his preservation of the names of the addressees is worth noting. Names are precious things in a work like the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, where many persons appear whose appellations have not withstood the passing of time. That Bede went to the trouble of transcribing – and therefore safeguarding – these names should not be dismissed.

#### Laurence's Letter to the Irish

In *HE* II.4, Bede states that Laurence, having succeeded Augustine as bishop of Canterbury, attempted to "bestow his pastoral care", as Colgrave and Mynors translate it, among both the Britons and the Irish.<sup>12</sup> Laurence became bishop of Canterbury on Augustine's death, *c.* 604, and he himself died in 619, placing the writing of the letter within these parameters. As has been remarked by Roy Flechner, the letter was probably sent before the death of Æthelbert of Kent in 616, as the chaotic aftermath of that king's demise saw his son and successor reject Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Presumably, Bede gained access to this letter through Canterbury, which probably held a copy of the letter, just as the Roman archives would. Augustine's prior attempts to involve himself with the Britons proved fruitless, and we have little on which to judge Laurence's efforts.<sup>14</sup> Laurence had been part of Pope Gregory I's initial mission to the Anglo-Saxons, accompanying Augustine on his journey from Rome to Kent, and had

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from Ségéne.

<sup>12</sup> *HE* II.4: ...*pastoralem impendere sollicitudinem curabat*...

<sup>13</sup> *HE* II.5; Roy Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus, and the Gregorian Mission', *Peritia* 19 (2005), pp. 69-70.

<sup>14</sup> *HE* II.2.

himself been sent by Augustine to acquaint the pontiff with their progress.<sup>15</sup> This places Laurence in close association with Gregory, just as Augustine had been, and stresses his pope-given authority as bishop. However, while Gregory had emphatically bestowed upon Augustine, and hence on his successor, jurisdiction over the Christian Britons, no mention was made of the Irish.<sup>16</sup> As Bede fails to question Laurence's right to claim authority over the Irish, he may have thought it justified as there was no metropolitan or archbishop in Ireland, and he emphasises Ireland's close proximity to the island of Britain, as though such adjacency had relevance. Bede gives no actual reason, however, and Laurence's letter seems to demonstrate the Roman mission's preoccupation with drawing peoples into their fold. How this claim to authority was received in Ireland is, of course, unknown, but one cannot imagine a favourable response, particularly in light of the letter's criticisms.<sup>17</sup> Laurence's letter is written in the same vein as papal letters: by writing this letter, he was claiming the right to adjudicate on matters in the Irish church, such as Easter. Laurence's letter addresses the Irish churchmen with an air of authority and knowingly echoes papal letters, particularly in its use of the title *seruus seruorum Dei*, regularly employed by popes, such as Gregory I.<sup>18</sup>

Laurence, with his fellow-bishops Mellitus and Justus, wrote to the Irish bishops and priests to protest at their teachings on Easter. This aim is known only from Bede's assertion, because the extract in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* makes no explicit reference to Easter, as Flechner has commented.<sup>19</sup> If Bede had access to the full text of the letter, and there is no reason to suppose he had not, this assertion must be based on the remaining portion.<sup>20</sup> The text of the letter, as preserved by Bede, mentions only that the Roman missionaries were surprised to discover that the Irish followed the Britons in

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<sup>15</sup> *HE* I.23, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *HE* I.27: Bede includes a series of questions Augustine sent to Pope Gregory I, and the pope's answers. Augustine's seventh question queried his authority over the Frankish and British bishops. Gregory did argue that Laurence had no authority over the Frankish bishops, as the bishop of Arles had long held a pallium, granted by the Roman see. How this reflected on the Irish does not arise.

<sup>17</sup> Grosjean believes the appearance of Laurence, Mellitus and Justus in the Stowe Missal, along with Dagán's name, indicates that the letter was not ill-received by the Irish, 'Recherches sur les Débuts de la Controverse Paschale Chez les Celtes', *Analecta Bollandiana* 64 (1947), p. 232. Flechner, however, argues that the compilers of the missal simply took the names from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 'Dagán, Columbanus, and the Gregorian Mission', pp. 69-70, n. 14. In either case, it would be, perhaps, anachronistic to presume to read the reaction of a disparate group of churchmen in the early seventh century in the compilations of the early ninth century.

<sup>18</sup> Even within the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, this can be seen: *HE* I.23, 24, 28, 29. Michael Edward Moore sees Boniface's use of this title in his letters as a conscious adoption of a papal tone, *A Sacred Kingdom: Bishops and the Rise of Frankish Kingship, 300-850* (Washington, DC, 2011), pp. 218-9.

<sup>19</sup> Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus, and the Gregorian Mission', p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> Flechner believes the letter to be incomplete, 'Dagán, Columbanus, and the Gregorian Mission', p. 68.

diverging from the practices of the universal Church. Bede had no issue setting aside ample space and effort for the inclusion of other letters in their entirety, and, although his omission of part of Laurence's letter may be due to its non-papal origin, it might also be significant. Perhaps Laurence made clear and unsupportable claims to episcopal jurisdiction in Ireland, which Bede left out as he knew them to be tenuous. After all, Laurence's letter begins by stating that Gregory sent the Roman missionaries to *occiduis partibus*, rather than just to Britain. Flechner has examined this letter at length, and sees it as a scene-setting device, wherein Bede demonstrates that both the Irish and the British came from the same defiant position, but, as the *Historia Ecclesiastica* reveals, the Irish eventually embraced the 'better way'.<sup>21</sup> The letter explicitly compares the Irish to the Britons, recalling the earlier chapter in Bede's second book (*HE* II.2), in which Augustine's attempts to gain the cooperation of the British Christians failed.<sup>22</sup> Bede writes there that the Britons followed 84-year Easter tables, and had other practices that were contrary to church unity.<sup>23</sup> The Irish too, it appears, were guilty of practices contrary to church unity; Bede tells us, though he does not include the exact wording of Laurence's letter on this, that Easter was the main matter at issue, and to this we might add the form of the tonsure, and perhaps some liturgical variances. Bede remarks, in explaining that Laurence also wrote a letter to the Britons on their uncatholic practices, that present-day British behaviour reveals how unsuccessful Laurence's exhortations were.<sup>24</sup> By implication, Bede invites the reader to ponder on the present-day attitudes of the Irish, which the following books of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* show to have come round to the orthodox, Roman view. Although this letter expounds on Irish divergence from the customs of the centre of Christendom, it also points the reader in the direction of Irish salvation through their successful missionary work among the Anglo-Saxons and their eventual adoption of the true Easter.

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<sup>21</sup> Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus, and the Gregorian Mission', p. 71; *HE* V.22.

<sup>22</sup> Jones calls this Laurence's "proverbial slur", *Bedae Opera de Temporibus*, p. 82, n.3.

<sup>23</sup> *HE* II.2: ...*et alia plurima unitati ecclesiasticae contraria faciebant.*

<sup>24</sup> This linking of Irish and British divergence can also be seen in Cummian's *De Controversia Pachali*, ll. 109-10: ...*an Britonum Scottorumque particula, qui sunt pene extremi et, ut ita dicam, mentagrae orbis terrarum.*

### *i. Irish Bishops and Abbots*

The Irish bishops and abbots to whom the letter is addressed are unnamed, presumably both because Laurence did not know the names of the men he addressed and because the letter was to be a general reproach and exhortation to betterment for all of the leading churchmen in the country. To whom it was delivered and who might have read it are questions that cannot be answered: Ireland of the early seventh century had a multitude of bishops, abbots and priests, often caught up in their own power-struggles and conflicts over jurisdiction. Laurence's address to them all might seem a naive attempt to actually contact them, but was more likely a statement of his position as an archbishop sent from Rome.

### *ii. Dagán*

Bishop Dagán is mentioned in Laurence's letter as a man who told Laurence and the other signatories to the letter that the Irish acted as the Britons did. He informed them of this when in Britain, and demonstrated the chasm that separated him from the Romans by refusing to eat with them or even be in the same building as them. This reaction seems unusually harsh for an Irishman in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as the attitudes of the Irish tend more toward acceptance of diversity in Bede's depiction. His meeting with the Romans probably took place in the kingdom of Kent; yet, despite his willingness to meet them, he refused to break bread with the bishop and his clerics. Dagán's purpose in Britain is not made explicit, but while it is possible he was a very early missionary among the Anglo-Saxons, he is far more likely to have been connected with the Britons. Close relations between the Irish and the British churches are known to have existed very early on, and Dagán's role as explicator of the similarities between these two churches may support this supposition.

Dagán's refusal to eat with the Romans is a fascinating interaction, revealing that he was convinced of *their* error, despite their origin at Rome. In light of Laurence's rather high-handed letter to the Irish, as well as his predecessor's interactions with the Britons, one inevitably wonders how Laurence dealt with this Irish bishop. Dagán's emphatic actions may have stemmed from his treatment by the Romans, or from defensiveness at their criticism. Although we cannot be sure what motivated Dagán to behave so, it is instructive to refer to some of the Irish penitentials which speak of the necessity to anathematise the contentious and vainglorious, though whether such

qualities could be applied to the Roman missionaries is surely a question of perspective.<sup>25</sup> As Colgrave and Mynors, followed by Flechner, noted, Dagán's refusal to break bread in the same house as the Romans is similar to behaviour by the British described by Aldhelm in his letter to Geraint. In that case, the British bishops of Dyfed refused to eat with what Aldhelm sees as orthodox Christians, and even required that vessels they had touched be purified.<sup>26</sup> Aldhelm's criticism here is focussed on these bishops' failure to exhibit charity, and their refusal to dine together is an important part of this lack of *caritas*. This lack of charity is an accusation Bede throws at the Britons also, and is one of the ways in which they differ from the Irish, who happily shared the gift of Christianity with the Anglo-Saxons. This uncharitable Irish bishop is utterly out of keeping with the tone of Bede's third book, which celebrates the sharing spirit of the Irish churchmen.

Plummer judged this figure to be the Dagán, son of Colmaid, of Inber Dáile (modern-day Ennereilly in Co. Wicklow), whose death appears in the Irish annals *c.* 642.<sup>27</sup> His renown was enough that a battle fought in 908 was dated to his *dies natalis* of September 13, which is recorded in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*.<sup>28</sup> His ecclesiastical rank is not specified in the Irish sources, leading Grosjean and those who followed him to question this identification's accuracy.<sup>29</sup> Lapidge, like Grosjean, prefers the bishop Dagán who is included in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* on March 12, but without any indication of his location.<sup>30</sup> Grosjean also remarks on the Bishop Dagán who appears in the *vita* of Molua, of Clonfertmulloe, bringing the rule of Molua to Gregory I in Rome.<sup>31</sup> This same Dagán, of the unidentified Áth (or Achad) Dagáin, helped Molua to chose a successor. It may be possible to discern from the context of the latter event that Dagán was located in the south of Ireland, possibly not too far from Roscrea, to which

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<sup>25</sup> For example, the Penitential of Cummean recommends this practice: Penitential of Cummean VII.1, in *The Irish Penitentals*, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Dublin, 1975). The Canons of the Alleged Second Synod of St Patrick IV state that an excommunicated person be excluded from communion, *the table*, Mass, and the *kiss of peace* [my emphasis]: *The Irish Penitentals*. This is not to say that Dagán was drawing on these penitentals for his actions, but that he may have been looking to similar traditions.

<sup>26</sup> Aldhelm, Letter to Geraint in *Aldhelm, The Prose Works*, pp. 155-60. *Opera Aldhelmi*, pp. 480-6.

<sup>27</sup> AT 642; AI 641; CS 640. For further information on this individual, see Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 251-2.

<sup>28</sup> AU 908; MT 13 September; FÓ 13 September.

<sup>29</sup> Grosjean, 'Recherches sur les Débuts de la Controverse Paschale', p. 235; Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's ecclesiastical history*, p. 146, n. 1; Lapidge, *Storia degli Inglesi I*, p. 359.

<sup>30</sup> Lapidge, *Storia degli Inglesi I*, p. 359; MT 12 March. Grosjean, 'Recherches sur les Débuts de la Controverse Paschale', p. 235.

<sup>31</sup> *Vita prior S. Lugidi seu Moluae* 64, in *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. W.W. Heist.

Molua travelled after his conference with Dagán.<sup>32</sup> This connection with Rome, late though the tradition is, suggests a different attitude from the man presented in Laurence's letter; that Dagán would not even contemplate eating in the same building as the Romans, and his journeying to Rome to offer a gift to the pope who sent them, seems far-fetched. Of course, later hagiography cannot always be relied upon to offer genuine historical fact, and associations with Gregory I are not uncommon.<sup>33</sup> Bishop Dagán may never have journeyed to Rome, but his associations with Molua are probably real.<sup>34</sup> Whether this is the same Bishop Dagán who left the Roman missionaries so disappointed cannot be proven (indeed, Ó Riain believes the Dagán of Molua's *vita* to be Dagán of Inber Dáile), but it does offer appealing information.<sup>35</sup> Flechner presents an interesting argument that combines Bishop Dagán of Laurence's letter with Dagán of Inber Dáile, making one man of them, and a man who accepted the Roman Easter reckoning at that.<sup>36</sup> While the preference for seeing these two men as separate cultic manifestations of the same person is understandable, Flechner's argument strains the evidence to its limit and is not fully convincing. Ultimately, there is no way to confirm the identity of the Dagán of Laurence's letter.

### *iii. Columbanus (1)*

This abbot is almost surely the famous Columbanus, correspondent of popes, founder of monasteries, and writer of a monastic rule. His appearance in Laurence's letter, in light of his own expressed views on Easter, is apt. Columbanus left Ireland for the Continent *c.* 590, and spent several years in Gaul. This appears to be where Laurence *et alii* met him. Columbanus's views on Easter have been conveniently preserved in a letter he wrote to the pope, criticising the Victorian Easter tables and arguing for toleration of diversity in this matter.<sup>37</sup> Columbanus's letter to Pope Gregory

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<sup>32</sup> *Vita prior S. Lugidi seu Moluae* 68.

<sup>33</sup> Grosjean comments on the questionable coincidence of bishop Dagán's death occurring on the same date as that of Pope Gregory I, 'Recherches sur les Débuts de la Controverse Paschale', p. 236. It should also be stated that zealous disagreement with Roman policies on Easter does not indicate a lack of reverence for Rome, as the correspondence of Columbanus testifies. See Damian Bracken, 'Authority and Duty: Columbanus and the Primacy of Rome', *Peritia* 16 (2002), pp. 168-213.

<sup>34</sup> Flechner surmises, however, that Dagán might be present in a veiled reference in Columbanus's letter to Pope Gregory I, an innovative suggestion which, if accepted, certainly calls for a re-examination of Dagán's interactions with the Roman missionaries, and the role the man of this name plays in Molua's *vita*: , 'Dagán, Columbanus and the Gregorian Mission', pp. 86-9.

<sup>35</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 251.

<sup>36</sup> Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus and the Gregorian Mission', pp. 83-5.

<sup>37</sup> Columbanus, *Epistola* 1.

I on Easter was written *c.* 600, and another letter, written to the Gaulish bishops in about 603, dealt with the same topic. Laurence travelled through Gaul on his way to Britain *c.* 597, and again *c.* 601. Flechner suggests that an official meeting was engineered between the Roman missionaries and the Irish cleric, and it appears the Romans learned then that Columbanus differed from them in some respects.<sup>38</sup>

Bede offers no comment on this Columbanus, indicating that he was either unaware of this Irishman's renown, or felt it had no place in his history of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The latter is the more probable situation, as Anglo-Saxon links with Frankish monasteries and society were manifold. Columbanus had a large profile in Gaul, and his reputation would have reached the Anglo-Saxons. The monastery of Faremoutiers, for example, is mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as the destination of two members of the East Anglian royal family, and this foundation had strong connections with Columbanus.<sup>39</sup> Bede does not include any context or further information on Columbanus, possibly as this vigorous defender of non-Roman practices would complicate the image he was creating of the Irish, but more probably as his sphere of influence was the Continent. Just as Fursa's career in Gaul receives comparatively little attention in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, so Columbanus's life is of little pertinence to Bede's narrative. It is worth noting, however, that while Bede transcribes and records the Roman missionaries' dissatisfaction with Columbanus's attitudes, he does not add any criticism of his own.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Pope Honorius's Letter to the Irish*

Bede tells us in *HE* II.19 that Pope Honorius sent a letter to the Irish on the subject of Easter. This same pope, Bede had shown in his previous two chapters, had also written to King Edwin and to Archbishop Honorius. In this instance, Bede does not supply the letter, probably as he did not have a copy of it. Instead, he paraphrases it, describing Honorius's exhortation to the Irish not to celebrate an erroneous Easter, and

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<sup>38</sup> Flechner, 'Dagán, Columbanus, and the Gregorian Mission', p. 72. Flechner draws attention to Columbanus's mention of Candidus in his letter to Pope Gregory, and posits that he may have been the connection between the two parties.

<sup>39</sup> *HE* III.8. Burgundofara, founder of the monastery of Faremoutiers-en-Brie, was blessed as a child by Columbanus, who predicted her monastic future: Jonas, *Vita Columbani* 50; Jonas, *Vita Burgundofarae* 7 (in Jonas's *Vita Columbani Liber II*): ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 4 (1902). Eustasius of Luxeuil, successor to Columbanus, also played an important role in Burgundofara's life. See also Campbell, 'The First Century of Christianity in England', p. 59, where Birinus of Wessex is posited as a Columbanian.

<sup>40</sup> Nor does he comment on Dagán's uncooperative and uncharitable behaviour. Jones sees Columbanus's association with Dagán in the letter as evidence of the Romans' dislike of him: *Bedae Opera de Temporibus*, p. 82, n.3.

not to believe themselves special or wiser than the rest of Christendom as they were at the edge of the world. Whether Nothhelm had seen such a letter in Rome, noted it, but decided not to copy it is uncertain but plausible: although he may have read it and remembered it, his attention was on epistles relating to the Anglo-Saxon mission. This letter was, Bede tells us, written to the *gens Scottorum*, and must have been addressed to the bishops and abbots, or teachers, of the Irish church. The letter has not survived elsewhere, and if Bede had seen it, he does not seem to have it before him when writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>41</sup> Lapidge sees this letter, and the one discussed below, as evidence of papal contact with the Columbanian mission in Neustria.<sup>42</sup>

This letter is mentioned in Bede's *Chronica Maiora*, where our author juxtaposes Edwin's support for Paulinus's mission with Honorius's letter condemning Irish Quartodecimanism.<sup>43</sup> It may be that Bede omitted the text of the letter, if indeed he had a copy, as it unfairly accused the Irish of this Judaising practice, of which Bede himself exonerated the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. It is this letter, sent c. 629, which is thought to have motivated the Synod of Mag Léne, at which the southern Irish decided to accept the Roman Easter.<sup>44</sup> Pope Honorius's letter addressed real issues in the Irish church, and instigated a change that Bede acknowledged in *HE* III.3: the Irish of the south had, *ad admonitionem apostolicae sedis antistitis*, learned the correct way of calculating Easter.<sup>45</sup> Although Bede does not state here that at least some of the Irish were persuaded to abandon their previous customs and adopt those of Rome by this letter, he makes this point later, in the third book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* whose interest in the Irish is self-evident.

#### Pope-elect John's Letter to the Irish

Bede examines Pope-elect John's letter to the Irish directly after his description of Pope Honorius's, setting both letters (though the first is not transcribed here) in the same light: both were instruments of admonition for the erring Irish.<sup>46</sup> Bede writes that John's letter dealt with the same issue as Honorius's – the correct dating of

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<sup>41</sup> Of course, Bede may have had a copy, but decided not to include it.

<sup>42</sup> Lapidge, *Storia degli Inglesi* I, p. 394.

<sup>43</sup> Bede's understanding of Quartodecimanism and the Irish acceptance (or otherwise) of it had not, at the time of writing the *Chronica Maiora*, reached the level he displays in *HE* III.17.

<sup>44</sup> See Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 82C (1982), pp. 405-6, repr. in *Early Irish History and Chronology*, pp. 99-130.

<sup>45</sup> It is likely that its criticisms were not confined to general accusations of Quartodecimanism.

<sup>46</sup> *HE* II.19.

Easter, and, more specifically, the importance of celebrating Easter between the fifteenth and twenty-first days of Nisan. He also, Bede adds, warned the Irish to stamp out the Pelagian heresy, which, it was reported, was being revived on that island. Bede includes the beginning and another section of the letter, a disjointed presentation that might be attributed to brevity, irrelevance, or, most probably, his editorial hand.

This letter was written by Pope-elect John, Archpriest Hilarus, John the chief secretary, and John the counsellor of the apostolic see, in response to one sent to Pope Severinus, and presumably the list of addressees reflects the names of the men who sent the letter to Rome in the first place.<sup>47</sup> The letter is addressed to *dilectissimis et sanctissimis* bishops Tómméne, Columbanus, Crónán, Díma, and Báithéne; to priests Crónán, Ernéne, Laisréne, Sillán, and Ségéne; and to Sarán, and the rest of the doctors and abbots of Ireland. Its date is firmly established as 640, as it was in December of that year that John became Pope John IV, his predecessor, Severinus, having died in August the same year. The men named in the list of addressees seem to be located in the north of Ireland, and John's reference to *prouincia vestra* suggests that there is a geographical connection between them. Ó Cróinín has looked closely at this letter, and sees in it evidence for the use of the Victorian Easter tables in northern Ireland c. 638, along with the 84-year cycle. Although Pope-elect John's response simply rejects the celebration of Easter on the fourteenth day of Nisan, and, Bede tells us, explains the correct method of calculating Easter, then warns of the dangers of Pelagianism, Ó Cróinín argues compellingly for the latter accusation to be a reference to the unsuitable Easter limits utilised by the Irish clerics.<sup>48</sup> It seems uncertainty over the date of Easter in 641 motivated the original epistle, and John's haste in replying before he had been consecrated pope is due to the fast approach of the paschal season.<sup>49</sup> Immo Warntjes disagrees with Ó Cróinín on this, seeing the letter instead as a response to one from the northern Irish arguing against the Victorian tables in use in the south.<sup>50</sup> Kenney infers from the letter that a synod was held in 639 or early 640 by those who clung to the 84-year Easter tables, and that an application for clarification was then sent to the then pope, Severinus.<sup>51</sup> If Warntjes is to be followed, this synod dealt with upcoming issues with the Victorian tables and the letter was sent, not to seek clarification, but to draw

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<sup>47</sup> For the sake of simplicity, Pope-elect John will be referred to as the author.

<sup>48</sup> Ó Cróinín, 'New Heresy for Old', pp. 514-6.

<sup>49</sup> See Ó Cróinín's discussion of Bishop Braulio of Zaragoza's letter of 640, clarifying the Easter to be celebrated the following year: 'New Heresy for Old', pp. 512-4.

<sup>50</sup> Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, pp. lxxxv-lxxxvii.

<sup>51</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, p. 222.

attention to the short-comings of the southern Easter tables. Faith Wallis offers another suggestion, asserting that the pope-elect's letter was sent to the northern churchmen after a letter from the *south* arrived to notify Severinus of the northerners' use of the 84-year cycle.<sup>52</sup> How the specific list of addressees can be explained if this were the case is not considered by Wallis. It is possible that these men were named as proponents of the incorrect Easter in such a letter from the south of Ireland, but it is far more likely that John's letter is addressed to a list of signatories.

Bede only supplies extracts from this letter, and, while we could give him the benefit of the doubt and presume he only had a partial copy of it, it is far more likely that he chose the excerpts that best suited him.<sup>53</sup> That he included the list of addressees in the limited sections he transcribed indicates that he viewed this as an element of import. As Ó Cróinín has observed, evidence that the letter was received and noted in Ireland can be found in the Munich Computus, which quotes an otherwise unknown line from the letter, ascribed to John the counsellor (*Iohannes consilarius*), one of Pope-elect John's co-writers.<sup>54</sup> This line, absent from Bede's version, is discussed by Ó Cróinín, who suggests that one of the issues dealt with in the epistle was Quartodecimanism.<sup>55</sup> Bede's later clear assertion that the Irish were not Quartodecimans may have encouraged him to omit this accusation, not wishing to attach such a mistake to the Roman see. Warntjes rather believes this line to refer to problems with the Insular 84-year cycle from the Roman perspective, though why then Bede would omit it, and other parts of the letter, remains unanswered.

The ability to date this letter is most helpful in looking at the addressees, as each had to be alive when the letter that prompted this one was sent to Pope Severinus, who was elected pope in October 638. This long list of men has been examined by Charles Plummer, who suggested the following identifications: Tómméne, bishop of Armagh; Columbanus, abbot-bishop of Clonard; Crónán, bishop of Nendrum; Díma, bishop of Connor; Báithéne, bishop of Bangor; Crónán, abbot of Moville; Ernéne, abbot of Tory Island; Laisréne, abbot of Leighlin; Ségéne, abbot of Iona; Sillán, bishop of Devenish. Although Plummer includes alternate identifications offered by previous authors, in many cases his suggestions have stood the test of time. Of course in seeking

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<sup>52</sup> Wallis, 'Introduction', p. lxi.

<sup>53</sup> Ó Cróinín states Bede "doubtless deliberately" made these omissions: 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus', p. 409.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

to define who these men were, we are limited by the sources at our disposal. It is entirely possible that some of the men addressed in John's letter have disappeared from the rest of the historical record, but, as we must utilise the resources available to us, the following are offered in good faith.

#### iv. *Tómméne*

Tómméne mac Rónáin, abbot and bishop of Armagh, died in 661 according to the Irish annals.<sup>56</sup> Ó Cróinín posits that, as bishop of Armagh, and first among the addressees in this letter, he was considered the leading churchman of those mentioned. Richard Sharpe disagrees, believing rather that the order of addressees simply mirrors the signatories to the original petition.<sup>57</sup> These two positions are not mutually exclusive: surely heading the list of signatories is as honorific as heading the list of addressees? Sharpe himself admits that Armagh was an important and prominent ecclesiastical centre from c. 640, and so Tómméne's prime position among the signatories to the letter to Severinus could indeed imply Armagh's prominence among the churches associated with the endeavour.<sup>58</sup> Of course, this is not to say that the Roman See itself recognised Armagh's position, but rather that its address reflects evidence of it in the original letter sent. The last abbot of Armagh of whom we have knowledge before Tómméne is Mac Laisre, who died c. 624, and if he was in fact Tómméne's direct predecessor, this would grant Tómméne a very long abbacy of almost forty years.<sup>59</sup> His death is recorded in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* on January 10, where he is called *Tommine comarbae* with the last word obscured. Presumably, this designated Tómméne the coarb, or successor to Patrick, as the addition to the *Martyrology of Gorman* does on January 10: *Tomein (comurba Patraicc)*.<sup>60</sup>

#### v. *Columbanus (2)*

Bishop Columbanus, or Colmán (Columbanus being a Latinised diminutive of Colmán) has been identified as Colmán mac Uí Telduib, whose death is recorded in the

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<sup>56</sup> *AU* 661; *AT* 661; *AI* 660.

<sup>57</sup> Ó Cróinín, 'New Heresy for Old', p. 507, n. 15; Richard Sharpe, 'St Patrick and the See of Armagh', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 4 (1982), pp. 39-40. Michael Lapidge also sees this as evidence of Armagh's special place among northern Irish churches: *Storia degli Inglesi* I, p. 396.

<sup>58</sup> Sharpe, 'St Patrick and the See of Armagh', pp. 34-5.

<sup>59</sup> *AT* 624; *AU* 623.

<sup>60</sup> *MT* January 10; *MG* January 10.

annals in 654.<sup>61</sup> This bishop was also, the annals tell us, abbot of Clonard, Co. Meath. Clonard was a prominent monastery, founded by Saint Finnian in the sixth century near the river Boyne, in territory that lay between Leinster and the north.<sup>62</sup> It was associated with the northern Uí Néill, and extended its influence into Connacht in the centuries after Finnian's death. This monastery was said to have housed an important school in Finnian's time, and such a characteristic would tie well with its later abbots taking an interest in computus.<sup>63</sup> Colmán is commemorated on both February 8 and 9 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*: the former is *mc. h. Thelluibh*, and the latter is *Moc[h]olmoc Clúana Iraid*. The *Martyrology of Gorman* follows this pattern, with February 8 annotated as *mac uí Thelduibh epscop*, and the next day's Colmán as 'of Clonard', indicating that dual entries apply to our bishop Columbanus.<sup>64</sup> The annotations to the *Féilire Óengusso* on February 8 add *mo Cholmoc* of Clonard to the entry, a hypocoristic version of the name Colmán. As Paul Byrne reports, Colmán's patronymic links him to Finnian of Clonard's family.<sup>65</sup> The community of Clonard, headed by Colmán, was apparently involved in the expulsion of Mochuta (Carthach) from Rahan at Easter, an incident thought to be linked to the Easter controversy, and one which probably resulted from the Munster-born Mochuta following orthodox Easter practices.<sup>66</sup> By implication, Colmán of Clonard can be seen as an upholder of the Insular 84-year Easter cycle, a position that suits him as one of the addressees of John's letter.

*vi. Crónán (1)*

Bishop Crónán is identified by Plummer as Crónán Bec, bishop of Nendrum. The monastery of Nendrum is situated on Mahee Island, the largest island in Strangford Lough. He died in 644, just a few years after John's letter was sent.<sup>67</sup> He is

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<sup>61</sup> AT 654; AU 654

<sup>62</sup> Finnian is also called mac Uí Telduib: AT 550; AU 549.

<sup>63</sup> *Betha Fhindéin* 2640, in *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes (Oxford, 1890).

<sup>64</sup> MT and MG February 8 and 9. These paired entries are repeated in the *Martyrology of Donegal*.

<sup>65</sup> FÓ February 8: *7 mo Colmoc Cluana Iraid*; Paul Byrne, 'The Community of Clonard, Sixth to Twelfth Centuries', *Peritia* 4 (1985), p. 160.

<sup>66</sup> CS 636; AU 636. *Vita Carthagi* 53-60, in *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* I, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1910). Recent work by Constant J. Mews questions this interpretation, however, seeing the Easter reference simply as a dating method: 'The Flight of Carthach (Mochuda) from Rahan to Lismore: Lineage and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland', *Early Medieval Europe* 21.1 (2013), pp. 3-4. But see pp. 19-21 for Mews's support for Carthach's orthodox Easter practices. A Middle Irish life, *Indarba Mochuda a rRaithin* names Colmán of Clonard among those who persecute Carthach: *Indarba* 9, in *Bethada Náem nÉirenn* I, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford, 1922).

<sup>67</sup> AT 644; AU 643.

commemorated on January 7 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* simply as *Cronani episcopi*, and in the *Martyrology of Gorman* as Crónán, with the annotations adding *Becc* (little) and *epscop Naondroma*.<sup>68</sup> The *Annals of Tigernach*, generally thought of as among the more reliable of the Irish annals, record the death of Crítán, bishop of Nendrum in 641, which would rule out Crónán. Disputing this, the *Chronicon Scotorum*, which usually agrees with the *Annals of Tigernach*, dates Crítán's death to 639, as do the *Annals of Ulster*, allowing a short but adequate time for Crónán to become bishop and join the others as a signatory on the letter to Severinus before news of his death reached them.<sup>69</sup>

#### vii. Díma

Díma is thought to be Díma Dub, son of Oengus, and bishop of Connor, whose death is recorded in 658 in the Irish annals.<sup>70</sup> As Plummer points out, another Bishop Díma appears in the annals at 663, but without any details that could aid identification.<sup>71</sup> The church of Connor was an important one, closely connected to the Dál nAraidi.<sup>72</sup> Díma appears in one of the lives of Colmán Elo, as a member of the community at Lynally, where his future achievements are predicted by Colmán.<sup>73</sup> Connor's location in Co. Antrim is probably the reason Díma of the letter has been so often associated with the bishop of that foundation, following the northern bias that has been identified among the addressees.

#### viii. Báithéne

Báithéne is thought to be bishop of Bangor in Plummer's notes, and Bangor's reputation for learnedness, personified in the Bangor-educated Columbanus's erudition, certainly fits involvement in paschal queries.<sup>74</sup> There are problems with this identification, however, as Báithéne of Bangor is usually named as an abbot rather than

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<sup>68</sup> *MT* January 7; *MG* January 7.

<sup>69</sup> *AT* 641; *CS* 639; *AU* 639.

<sup>70</sup> *AT* 658; *AU* 659; *AI* 657. See Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 266.

<sup>71</sup> *AU* 663; *AT* 663. Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 112.

<sup>72</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 55.

<sup>73</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 61-3. Rory Masterson has also demonstrated the continuing connection between Lynally and Connor: 'St. Colmán and the Early Medieval Monastery of Lynally', *Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society* 2007 <<http://www.offalyhistory.com/articles/42/1/St-ColmAAAn-and-the-Early-Medieval-Monastery-of-Lynally-c600-1100/Page1.html>> [accessed 19 December 2012].

<sup>74</sup> *Vita Columbani* 4. Columbanus was previously educated under Sinell in Leinster, so Bangor cannot take all the credit for his abilities: *Vita Columbani* I.3.

a bishop (though holding both positions was quite possible), and, most pertinently, his predecessor as abbot of Bangor, Mac Laisre, died only in 647 (see Laisréne below).<sup>75</sup> A similar chronological issue arises in the case of abbot Báithéne moccu Chormaic of Clonmacnoise, whose death is recorded in the annals in 664, and whom Kenney believes to be the man named in the letter.<sup>76</sup> The annals call him an abbot while the *Martyrology of Tallaght* alone names him as *episcopus* of Clonmacnoise.<sup>77</sup> Clonmacnoise's more southerly position detracts from this suggestion, even if we were to accept that Báithéne might have been bishop and abbot of the monastery, but the main difficulty with this identification is Báithéne of Clonmacnoise's succession to his position only after the death of Aedlug mac Cammáin in 652. Neither of these men can be identified as the Báithéne of the letter, as neither was in situ in 638-40.

Colgan's suggestion of Báithéne, son of Cuana, bishop of Tech-Baeithin (Tigh Baoithín, or Tibohine) in Connacht, is disputed by Plummer, who looks to that man's interactions with Columba to temporally disqualify him from contention.<sup>78</sup> The *Martyrology of Tallaght* gives Báithéne mac Cuana the title of *episcopus*.<sup>79</sup> Ó Riain believes Báithéne mac Cuana to be the same Báithéne who succeeded Columba as abbot of Iona, drawing on both territorial and hagiographical evidence, which would exclude him from candidature.<sup>80</sup> Of all the men named Báithéne in the Irish annals, in the martyrologies, and discussed by Ó Riain in his dictionary, not one fits the position as Bishop Báithéne of John's message. Disappointing as it is to be unable to offer a real contender for the identification, this situation emphasises the preciousness of this letter's survival, revealing, as it does, the existence of a (presumably) northern bishop named Báithéne, interested in matters computistical, who seems otherwise unattested.

#### ix. Crónán (2)

Crónán has been identified as the abbot of Movilla (Maigh Bhile), the famous monastery founded by St Finnian in the sixth century. The annals claim that Crónán died *c.* 649, with August 7 as his *dies natalis*.<sup>81</sup> The Irish annals contain another

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<sup>75</sup> M.O. Anderson also makes this observation: *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, p. 23.

<sup>76</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, p. 222, n. 192; *CS* 664; *AU* 664.

<sup>77</sup> *MT* March 1. *MG* March 1 calls him solely an abbot, however.

<sup>78</sup> Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 17; Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, pp. 112-13.

<sup>79</sup> *FÓ* February 19; *MG* February 19; *MD* February 19.

<sup>80</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p.89; Manus O'Donnell, *Betha Colaim Chille* 340.

<sup>81</sup> *AT* 650; *AU* 650. *MT* August 7.

contender: Crónán, abbot of Clonmacnoise, who died in 638.<sup>82</sup> It is just possible that he might have been among the signatories to the original letter, sent *c.* 638, and died soon afterwards. However, this allows only a small window for the letter to be sent to Severinus, who was elected pope in October 638. Furthermore, it cannot be reconciled with the identification of Bishop Crónán, discussed above, as bishop of Nendrum, who only succeeded to that position in 639.<sup>83</sup> In addition, if one accepts that this list of addressees constitutes a generally northern contingent, Crónán of Movilla is a more plausible candidate than Crónán of Clonmacnoise.

*x. Ernéne*

Ernéne the priest is most likely the abbot of Tory Island (Torach), a monastery within the Ionan *familia*.<sup>84</sup> The monastery on Tory Island was laid waste in 617, the annals tell us, and the *Annals of Tigernach* record that a church was built at Torach in 621, seemingly a reconstruction. Reeves believes Ernéne to have been the first abbot of that church.<sup>85</sup> An Ernéne is commemorated in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* on August 17, and again in the *Martyrology of Gorman* on the same day.<sup>86</sup> It is only the *Martyrology of Donegal* that offers his provenance, stating that he was from Tory Island and of the Cenél nEógain, a kinship supported by genealogical evidence.<sup>87</sup>

Other options exist in Irish sources, though Plummer's identification remains the most likely. One Ernéne does appear in the *Vita Columbae* III.23, as an old monk who, Sharpe states, survived into the 640s at least. This identification would site him in the north, but Adomnán calls him a *sanctus monachus*, not a priest. Another Ernéne is described earlier in the *Vita Columbae*, at I.3, who, when a boy at the monastery of Clonmacnoise, attempted to secretly touch the hem of the saint's cloak. This boy, Adomnán writes, went on to garner fame throughout Ireland, and is shown to have been in contact with Ségéne, abbot of Iona. Although this connection makes him a tempting alternative, the *Annals of Tigernach* give his death in 635, making him chronologically

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<sup>82</sup> *AU* 638.

<sup>83</sup> Although Crónán could have been bishop before Nendrum became his responsibility.

<sup>84</sup> The Middle Irish life of Columba claims he founded this monastery: *Betha Coluim Cille* 49, in Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*.

<sup>85</sup> Reeves, *The Life of St Columba*, p. 279.

<sup>86</sup> Ó Riain is a little sceptical about this commemoration, coming as it does on the day prior to the remembrance of Ernéne mac Craséni, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 292.

<sup>87</sup> *MT* August 17; *MG* August 17; *MD* August 17: *Ernan, Toraige, do cenél Eoghain, mic Néill*; Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 287-8.

incapable of writing to Pope Severinus.<sup>88</sup> Colgan offers two options: Ernéne of Tory Island, and Ernéne mac Aeda, who lived around 660 and died on May 16, though he includes no further details on the latter.<sup>89</sup>

### *xi. Laisréne*

Laisréne, a priest, is usually thought to be the abbot of the monastery of Leighlin, also known as Molaise. This identification is complicated by the fact that Laisréne died *c.* 639, but, as Plummer remarks, this would not preclude him from having written the original letter to Severinus, and his death would not have been known in Rome.<sup>90</sup> Of course, as Plummer also comments, Leighlin's location in Co. Carlow does place the identification in some doubt, as the other men mentioned are overwhelmingly northern in their distribution.<sup>91</sup> The identification is strengthened by Laisréne of Leighlin's participation in a synod at Campus Ailbe in Co. Carlow, at which his attempts to introduce the Roman Easter tables were opposed by Fintan (Munna) of Taghmon.<sup>92</sup> A twelfth-century life, partly surviving in the *Codex Salamanticensis*, relates miraculous stories of the saint and states that he was educated by Fintan of Taghmon.<sup>93</sup> This life emphasises a reverence for Rome on Laisréne's part, esteem also demonstrated, as Ó Riain notes, in the life of Fintan.<sup>94</sup> It is the latter twelfth-century Life that places Laisréne in the middle of a debate about the new and the old Easter (*inter nouum Pascha et uetus Pascha*), with Fintan pushing for the existing Easter tables and Laisréne arguing for the new Roman methods.<sup>95</sup> Kenney writes that the synod in Carlow and the Synod of Mag Léne described by Cumman probably took place quite close together, but suggests that the former may have occurred after the return of the Irish delegation from Rome, and theorises that Laisréne,

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<sup>88</sup> Although the *Martyrology of Tallaght* inserts on August 18 *Ernine mac Cresine* of Ráith Noí in Uí Garrchon which is in Co. Wicklow, on January 11 one finds Ernine of Clúain Deochra, thought to be Clondara in Co. Longford. The twelfth-century Irish life of Columba calls the Ernéne mac Craséni of VC I.3 Ernéne of Cluain Deochra: *Is esin Ernan Cluana Deochra indú*, in *Betha Choluim Chille*, in *Three Middle-Irish Homilies*, pp. 114-7.

<sup>89</sup> Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 17; *MT* May 16; *MG* May 16.

<sup>90</sup> *AU* 639. This also potentially accommodates Bishop Crónán's succession.

<sup>91</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 113. Ó Riain mentions a possible Ulaid connection in Laisréne's genealogy: *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 486.

<sup>92</sup> *Vita Munnae* 26. See *Vita Columbae* I.4, ed. Reeves, n. 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Vita Lasriani* 4, in *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. W.W. Heist (Brussels, 1965).

<sup>94</sup> *Vita Lasriani* 7, 8, 10-13. Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 487.

<sup>95</sup> *Vita Fintani seu Munni* 29-30, in *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. W.W. Heist (Brussels, 1965). Fintan has been nominated as the *paries dealbatus* (whitewashed wall) mentioned in Cumman's *De Controversia Paschali*, l. 271, pp. 50-1.

called *apostilice sedis legatus* in his *vita*, might even have been part of it.<sup>96</sup> Laisréne of Leighlin's interests in the calculation of Easter is evident in the sources, late though they are. His *dies natalis* is April 18.<sup>97</sup> Of course, Laisréne's inclusion among churchmen who were definitely *not* proponents of the Roman Easter raises doubts as to this identification. While we do not have the entire text of the letter, and so a reference to Laisréne's attempts to convince his colleagues of their error might be simply lost, it would be surprising if Bede had made no reference to it. Although the issue in question, as discussed by Ó Cróinín, was of interest to adherents of both the Roman and the Insular Easter, the letter that survives gives no reason to separate Laisréne from the other addressees. Another identification should, perhaps, be sought for *presbyter* Laisréne.

Colgan offered the alternative of Laisréne mac Nasca, whose association with the monastery of Ard mic Nasca on Belfast Lough certainly situates him in a suitably northern location, and who is dated by Colgan to in or around 650.<sup>98</sup> John Lanigan, however, in the early nineteenth century, cast some serious doubt on Colgan's suggestion, demonstrating that the latter's hypothesis rested on connecting one Laisréne from Mochutu's monastery at Rahan with the monastery of Ardmicnasca in Co. Down solely on the basis of this Laisréne's father being named as Nescainn.<sup>99</sup> Plummer does not comment on Colgan's proposition, merely pointing the reader in the direction of Lanigan's remarks, but he seems to have believed Laisréne of Leighlin to be the man in question. Kenney half-heartedly posits Mac Laisre, abbot of Bangor, as an alternative to Colgan's proposal, a solution also offered more assuredly by Marjorie Anderson, and supported by Ó Cróinín.<sup>100</sup> As Ó Riain remarks (of a different Mac Laisre), *mac* can act as a diminutive, and so Mac Laisre is an acceptable hypocoristic form of the name Laisréne.<sup>101</sup> Mac Laisre's death in 646 makes him abbot of Bangor at the correct time and, as discussed above, Bangor's high standing and interest in computus make it a likely location for a participant in synods about the dating of Easter. His death is

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<sup>96</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, p. 221, n. 187.

<sup>97</sup> *MT* April 18; *MG* April 18 calls him abbot of Leighlin; *FÓ* April 18 even names him "king of the synod" (*rí in tseaid*) in the annotations.

<sup>98</sup> Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 17.

<sup>99</sup> John Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, from the First Introduction of Christianity Among the Irish to the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century II*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 1829), pp. 358, 363.

<sup>100</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, p. 222; M.O. Anderson, *Kings and kingship in early Scotland*, p. 23; Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Mo-Sinnu Moccu Min and the Computus of Bangor', *Peritia* 1 (1982), p. 294, n. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, p. 417.

entered into the *Martyrology of Tallaght* on May 16, and the *Martyrology of Gorman* refers to him as *Macc Laisre ard* (lofty).<sup>102</sup>

### xii. Sillán

There are several men named Sillán in the Irish annals, but only Sillán, bishop of Devenish died after 638, making him the only possible candidate among them.<sup>103</sup> It seems that Sillán became bishop after the letter to Pope Severinus was written, a reconcilable fact as he did not die until 658, allowing twenty years for his consecration as bishop. The monastery of Devenish, in Loch Erne in Co. Fermanagh, was founded by Mo Laisse (Laisréne) in the sixth century. Devenish was in territory subject to the Uí Chremthainn branch of the Airgíalla, and seems to have been connected with the Dartrige, a client people.<sup>104</sup> Whether this reflects on Sillán of Devenish's background cannot be discovered. Lanigan and Colgan differed from Plummer on Sillán, with the former scholar believing him to be Sillán from Armagh, and Colgan identifying him as Stellanus, or Colmán Stellanus, abbot of Inis Cealtra.<sup>105</sup> The latter is remembered on May 26 as Colman Stellain of Terryglass, and Colgan asserts that he flourished around 650.<sup>106</sup> Lanigan's identification is an attempt to refute that of Colgan, which he deems insupportable, and he looks to Scellan (Sillán) the leper of Armagh.<sup>107</sup> One abbot Sillán is remembered on October 10 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, and many men named Sillán appear in the various martyrologies without any identifying features.<sup>108</sup> Without any other clues as to his identity, Sillán of Devenish is the best prospect available.

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<sup>102</sup> *MT* May 16; *MG* May 16.

<sup>103</sup> *AT* 658; *CS* 658.

<sup>104</sup> T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Ulster, saints of (act. c.400–c.650)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <[www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51011](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51011)> [accessed 9 January 2013].

<sup>105</sup> Colgan transmitted the text of the letter preserved by Bede as having the name *Stellano*, rather than the usual *Scellano*: *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 16. This identification has continued in places up to the present day, and was used as recently as 2008 in Gerard Madden's *Holy Island, Inis Cealtra, island of the Churches* (Mountshannon, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> *MT* May 26; Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 17, n. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland II*, pp. 414-5. Lanigan may be mistaken in calling this Sillán a leper, as the *Martyrology of Gorman*, while it mentions one Scellán on September 1, as Lanigan states, it does not refer to him as a leper, but applies that condition to another entrant for September 1, Lupus.

<sup>108</sup> *MT* May 28;

### xiii. Ségéne

This Ségéne is surely the abbot of Iona, whose abbacy stretched from *c.* 623-652.<sup>109</sup> His abbacy saw the dispatch of Aidan, Aidan's predecessor, and his successor to Northumbria, and he was abbot of the island monastery when Cummian wrote to argue for the Roman dating of Easter. His presence among the addressees speaks to an engagement with the issue that is not otherwise seen in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He is discussed in more detail elsewhere.

Plummer, though adhering to the theory that Ségéne of the letter is Ségéne of Iona, adds that Colgan, followed by Lanigan, thought him to be Ségéne mac ua Cuinn, abbot of Bangor (though Colgan also offered Ségéne of Iona as a possibility).<sup>110</sup> Colgan erred in this, as Ségéne was not, in fact, abbot of Bangor at the time the letter was written, the position rather being held by Mac Laisre, as discussed above.<sup>111</sup> Ségéne of Iona is the most likely candidate, as Máire Herbert believes, and it would, in fact, be surprising if the head of so important a monastery were completely uninvolved in this matter.<sup>112</sup> Lanigan makes the point that one might expect the abbot of Iona, holder of an illustrious position, to be further up in the list of addressees.<sup>113</sup> While it is true that the abbacy of Iona was a prestigious office, the abbot might not have been among the most zealous of the signatories on Severinus's letter; Iona had clearly decided to remain dependent on the Insular 84-year tables in the 630s, and so Ségéne's name might have been appended to the list of applicants to the pope as a formality of his having been party to the discussion that inspired the letter-writing, rather than as an active and enquiring petitioner. As can be seen from Cummian's letter, addressed to this same Ségéne, Iona and its abbot were intransigent devotees of the Insular 84-year Easter cycle.<sup>114</sup> Warntjes uses this fact to argue that the northern churches – or at least Iona – cannot have been using Victorian Easter cycles *c.* 640.<sup>115</sup> Although this is the case for Iona, and so for Ségéne, his own adherence to the Insular 84-year cycle is not evidence that the letter sent to Severinus did not demonstrate use of the Victorian tables; Ségéne, as remarked, was not at the head of the list of signatories to that first letter, and so was doubtless not the chief instigator. He might well have appended his name to a letter

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<sup>109</sup> His death is recorded for 652: *AU* 652; *AI* 652. See Chapter Five.

<sup>110</sup> Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae*, p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> Ségéne, abbot of Bangor, seems to have succeeded Mac Laisre, and died in 663: *AU* 663; *AT* 663.

<sup>112</sup> Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, p. 41.

<sup>113</sup> Lanigan, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland II*, p. 415.

<sup>114</sup> Cummian, *De Controversia Pachali*, e.g. ll. 112-4, 210-2, 294-5.

<sup>115</sup> Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, pp. lxxxiii-lxxxiv.

requesting clarification from the papal see. Of course, it is even more surprising that his name is not nearer the head of the list, if one takes it that the initial epistle was a criticism of the Victorian tables in favour of the 84-year cycle; but Iona's decision to maintain the Easter tables of its founder may have made it secure in its calculations, and so less defensive about the Victorian tables called ridiculous by Columbanus.<sup>116</sup>

#### xiv. *Sarán*

Sarán, coming last in the list of addressees, is thought to be the man of that name mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster*, recording the death of Sarán, grandson of Crítán and a *sapiens*.<sup>117</sup> Whether Sarán was a monk or cleric, or simply a scholar, is not known. His interest in the calculation of Easter suggests an ecclesiastical bent, but his status within the church is not specified. Many men named Sarán are included in the martyrologies, often without reference to an ecclesiastical or monastic title. As the Sarán of the letter is given no title, and providing he is indeed the Sarán of the annals who is simply called *sapiens*, we may exclude those men entered into the martyrologies who are bishops or abbots; in light of the northern character of the rest of the men addressed, it seems sensible to disregard those Saráns from the south of Ireland also, and so the list of possibilities decreases. A Sarán is commemorated on January 20 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght* and the *Martyrology of Gorman*, without any further details of who he is or where he comes from.<sup>118</sup> The *Martyrology of Tallaght* also celebrates one Sarán of Cúil Crema on January 8, a place-name its editors Best and Lawlor tentatively identify as Coolcraff in the parish of Abbeylara in Co. Longford, following Whitley Stokes. This northern location would certainly fit with the group in which Sarán finds himself, and the *Martyrology of Gorman* echoes this entry.<sup>119</sup>

Three men by the name Sarán are among the long list of Munnu's monks that appears on October 21 in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*; a *sancti Sarani* is commemorated on September 15; meanwhile, July 30, September 16, and October 22 each present a Sarán without comment or addition in the same martyrology.<sup>120</sup> An interesting example, the Sarán of September 21, is inserted into the margins of the

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<sup>116</sup> Columbanus, *Epistola* 1.3: ...sed magis risu uel uenia dignum quam auctoritate.

<sup>117</sup> AU 662.

<sup>118</sup> Plummer includes the January 20 commemoration in his notes on Sarán, but he is unconvinced: *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 113. Ó Cléirigh identifies this Sarán as the man linked to Tisaran in Co. Offaly: MD January 20. See Ó Riain, *Dictionary of Irish Saints*, pp. 547-8.

<sup>119</sup> MG January 8.

<sup>120</sup> MG September 16: *Saran co sogradh* [Sarán the amiable].

*Martyrology of Tallaght*, and the corresponding entry in the *Martyrology of Gorman* calls him *sogemm*, a good gem, a commendation that indicates great esteem.<sup>121</sup> This Old Irish word, *gemm*, meaning jewel or gem, can also mean eye or pupil.<sup>122</sup> Considering Sarán the *sapiens* in the *Annals of Ulster*, might one view this *gemm* as implying vision, or wisdom?<sup>123</sup> If this is accepted, Sarán son of Tigernán, son of Móenach, commemorated on September 21, could be a strong contender for the Sarán of John's letter. According to the annotations to the *Martyrology of Gorman*, this Sarán was from Lessán in Sliab Calann, and from Cluain Dá Acra in the Cechair. Lessán is in either Co. Derry or Co. Tyrone, both supplying an appropriately northern location for an addressee in this letter.<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately, certainty on this matter proves elusive.

#### *xv. The Other Irish Teachers and Abbots*

Although the letter is addressed to specific men, it also includes the rest of Ireland's churchmen, both Christian teachers and abbots. The Irish letter that inspired this response is likely to have spoken of its queries applying to more than just those named among the signatories, including men whose status did not place them among the latter, yet whose concerns were as acute. Perhaps this applies to the other attendees at the conjectured synod that led to the writing of the original message, and, no doubt, the papal see wished to ensure its comments were disseminated throughout Ireland. If one follows Ó Cróinín's logic, these men were using Victorius's Easter tables, possibly in conjunction with the 84-year tables, to calculate the date of Easter. If one follows Warntjes's, they were probably proponents of the Insular 84-year cycle alone. In either case, it is quite likely that some sort of colloquium or synod led to the writing of the

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<sup>121</sup> Methuselah is called a *gradgemm* ("dignified jewel") in *Saltair na Rann*, Canto 12, ll. 2253-4, and this laudatory term is applied to one Muiredach, who was a gem of purity (*in gem gloine*) in *AU* 1173; *Saltair na Rann*, ed. Whitley Stokes (Oxford, 1883); trans. David Greene (Dublin, unpublished edition) <<http://www.dias.ie/images/stories/celtics/pubs/saltairnarann/canto011-020.pdf>> [accessed 6 December 2012].

<sup>122</sup> *Gemm*, Column 65, l. 62: *Dictionary of the Irish Language* <<http://www.dil.ie>> [accessed 6 December 2012].

<sup>123</sup> As Vivien Law discusses, the concept of the eyes of the heart or the eyes of the mind (*oculis cordis/mentis*) as necessary to understand spiritual matters was a common one from St Paul onward among Christian writers: *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 18. Gemmán was a teacher of Columba (*VC* II.26), a name that seems to contain the word *gemm*, and this man is associated with divine wisdom. It seems plausible that to praise someone as a *sogemm* might be a reference to spiritual learnedness.

<sup>124</sup> Cluain Dá Acra is simply said to be the meadow of the acres in the Cechair (quagmire) in Stokes's index to the *Martyrology of Gorman*. Stokes locates Lessán in Co. Tyrone, while Best and Lawlor place it in Co. Derry in the index to the *Martyrology of Tallaght*. Several places called Lissán can be found today in Cos. Derry, Tyrone, and even Fermanagh.

letter to Rome, and their application to the *sedes* of Peter was in keeping with orthodox practices.

Nothhelm is Bede's most likely source for this letter, having brought back copies of other pieces of papal correspondence relating to the Anglo-Saxons. In explaining his sources in the preface to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede focuses on the provenance of his information for Britain, with Nothhelm referenced in this context. Perhaps, knowing Bede's interest in computus, this London priest took it upon himself to bring home copies of epistles with interests beyond the Anglo-Saxons. A copy or copies survived in Ireland also, as discussed above, and might have been available to Bede through the same avenues that made Irish computistical materials accessible to him. The letter in question deals with issues that are also discussed in Ceolfrith's letter to King Nechtan (*HE* V.21), and some monks from the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow did travel on to Rome after Ceolfrith's death en route in 716; men with interest in such matters may have been among them.<sup>125</sup> While the latter two options offer reasonable alternatives, Nothhelm's known investigation in the papal archives remains the most plausible origin of this letter for Bede. The provenances of these men form a relatively coherent group, dotted around the north of Ireland, particularly the north-east. Iona's inclusion would speak for several churches, like that of Derry. It makes sense that the head men of some of the more important ecclesiastical or monastic centres would come together to discuss the vital issue of Easter's date, and come to the conclusion that applying to Rome would lead to a solution.

### *Conclusion*

The Irish who appear in the letters discussed here can very often be found in other sources beyond Bede's writings. That they are named at all, in Bede's text or elsewhere, is evidence that they were men of significance beyond their appearance in these epistles. Despite the title of Bede's work, specifying the *gens Anglorum*, these letters to the Irish offer context that adds to the narrative our author has created. The Anglo-Saxon church did not develop in a vacuum, and these references to Irish practices, or papal perceptions of Irish practices, are part of the story of the spread of Christianity. Moreover, these letters play into Bede's depiction of the interaction of the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons, an important element in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

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<sup>125</sup> *Vita Ceolfridi* 37; *HA* 21.

The placement of Bede's reference to Honorius's letter, and of John's letter is significant, as they are chronologically unsynchronised with the chapters around them. *HE* II.18 includes the death of Archbishop Justus in 627, and the text of Pope Honorius's letter to him, sent in 634. *HE* II.20 details the death of King Edwin in 633, and his wife's flight to Kent with Paulinus, leaving only James the deacon behind to continue the Roman mission in Northumbria. Each of these chapters contains a clear AD date. Inserted between these two chapters is Bede's entry comprising a summary of Pope Honorius's letter to the Irish, written *c.* 629, and excerpts from Pope-elect John's letter to the Irish written in 640, but Bede omits any explicit date. The only connection between this chapter and the preceding one is Honorius, but it constitutes a jump back in time, from 634 to 629, although Bede does not give this second date. The extracts from John's letter, sent in 640, are even more chronologically jarring, but again Bede offers no date for this letter. John's letter, judging from both its date and its subject, would seem to be better placed in the third book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, dealing as it does with the Irish in 640.

Why then does Bede include it almost at the end of the second book? For Bede, his third book aimed to present a coherent picture of the Irish. Although he admits that Aidan, following Iona policies, maintained the Insular Easter, the contribution of the Irish is one of immense positivity. The letter from John detailing, in part, the failings of the Irish, and the letter from Honorius on a similar topic, have no place in the third book. Like Laurence's descriptions of Dagán and Columbanus, these letters in the second book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* offer an image of the Irish discordant with the message Bede weaves through his third book. While Bede does not state that the southern Irish, probably in response to Honorius's letter, adopted orthodox methods of calculating Easter when discussing said letter, he does refer to it, rather obliquely, in the third book.<sup>126</sup> The chapter containing details of Honorius and John's letters to the Irish is followed by the last chapter of the second book, dealing with Edwin's death and ending with news of James the deacon, who continued the mission in Northumbria. This sets up the third book, which introduces the Irish, not as a people castigated by the bishop of Rome for their failings, but as successful missionaries, and an essential element in the story of Northumbria's (and the Anglo-Saxons more generally) conversion. There is a sense that Bede's references to the Irish in Laurence's

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<sup>126</sup> *HE* III.3: Bede states that the Irish in the south had adopted canonical practices, thanks to a papal communiqué.

letter, along with those of Honorius and of Pope-elect John, are there to be contrasted with his depiction of the Irish in the next book. There, not only does he tell us that Honorius's letter had the desired effect, but he shows that, whatever the flaws of the Ionan Irish customs, they were not Quartodecimans, and they were important contributors to the development of Christianity in Britain. The following chapter gathers up the remaining Irishmen of the text, who range greatly in status and position.

## Chapter Seven: The other Irish

Inevitably, there are some Irish figures (or possibly Irish figures) who do not fit into the loose geographical categories devised for this project. These are discussed here, in the full acknowledgement that several of them are deemed to be Irish on purely circumstantial grounds. The people explored below range from kings to laymen, monks to battle survivors. Unusually for this project, only a few of them are ecclesiastics. Some of the men examined below are far more important and powerful than the lines of Bede's work reveal, while others are unnamed and unidentifiable, unimportant in their own right but performing a function in the text.

### *i. Reuda and the Dalreudini*

Reuda is not an individual in the truly historical sense, but refers to Bede's etymology of Dál Riata, as explained in *HE* I.1. The Dál Riata were the territorial people who became rulers of the Irish in and around Argyll. Reuda is part of Bede's scene-setting at the very beginning of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and demonstrates the author's authoritative and knowledgeable voice to his audience. Bede recounts how Britain, once home only to the Britons and the Picts, acquired a third ethnic group in the form of the Scots (the Irish) who migrated over under the leadership of Reuda, and that they took their name from him, calling themselves the *Dalreudini*. Bede explains that *daal* (*dál*), in Irish, means *pars* [part, region, faction], and *dál* does indeed mean

part, share or division.<sup>1</sup> The spelling Bede uses, *daal*, points to a written Irish source, or at least a source that could read Irish.<sup>2</sup> Although Bede gives the name Dál Riata in the first chapter of his work, he does not really use it throughout, preferring to refer to the Irish in Britain, or sometimes to *Scottia*, meaning the territory of the Irish in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

This Reuda is an origin myth for the coming of the Irish to northern Britain, and Bede is an early source for this story. Dál Riata, the territory of north-east Ireland, around Co. Antrim, was named after Cairpre Riata (Cairpre Rigfota), son of Conaire Mór, and Bede's Reuda seems to be some version of this figure.<sup>4</sup> H.M. Chadwick considered *reud-* a simple corruption of *riad-* or *riat-*, and attributed Bede's Reuda to poor oral transmission, a conjecture that jars with Bede's accurate use of *daal*. Chadwick notes, however, that Kenneth Jackson commented to him that *Reuda* was actually an orthographic rendering of the Late Archaic Irish form *\*Rēāda*, using the transitional form *-ēā-* which was used between the older *-ē-* and the later *-ia-*, and can be dated to *c.* 700.<sup>5</sup> Conaire's death is dated to 165 AD, placing Cairpre Riata somewhere in the second or early third centuries.<sup>6</sup> The Book of Leinster contains a tale called *De Maccaib Conaire* which describes how some of the Érainn septs came from the sons of Conaire Mór, of whom Cairpre Riata was one. This story claims that these septs left the north and went to Munster, where they settled. The prefatory material to the *Amrae Coluimb Chille* in the Leabhar Breac and the Yellow Book of Lecan adds that Cairpre Riata led his people to the north after a famine, and some then crossed over to Britain.<sup>7</sup> While this is an origin story for Irish Dál Riata, Bede seems to believe that it applies directly to Scottish Dál Riata also, as though northern Britain were settled around the same time as the beginnings of Irish Dál Riata.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Dál*, Column 42, l. 49: *Dictionary of the Irish language* <<http://www.dil.ie>> [accessed 21 February 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Duncan makes this point, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 3. See also Stephen J. Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York and London, 2003), pp. 72-4.

<sup>4</sup> Also known as Eochaid Riata: see Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* I, 162 d 21, p. 328.

<sup>5</sup> H.M. Chadwick, *Early Scotland: The Picts, the Scots and the Welsh of Southern Scotland* (Cambridge, 1949), p. 120-21, p. 159. Kim McCone would date the completed shift from *ē* to *īa* to the end of the seventh century, which might suggest that Bede's source was not contemporary, but older: *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change* (Maynooth, 1996), p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> *FM* 165.

<sup>7</sup> See John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 122-3.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Sharpe comments on the fact that Irish raiders were a presence in Britain by the year 300, and wonders if some had settled on the island by then: 'The Thriving of Dalriada', in *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297*, ed. Simon Taylor (Dublin, 2000), p. 49. James E. Fraser believes Bede's account to come from a Pictish source, as it grants precedence to the Picts in northern Britain: *From Caledonia to Pictland*, p. 145.

Generally accepted by early Irish sources, another story explaining the presence of the Irish in northern Britain is that Fergus Mór mac Eirc came to Britain at the end of the fifth century, and that the dominant families of Scottish Dál Riata – the Cenél nGabráin, the Cenél Loairn, and the Cenél nÓengusa – descended from him.<sup>9</sup> Richard Sharpe notes that there is an important distinction to be made between “the beginning of dynastic data and the period of settlement”.<sup>10</sup> The *Genealogia Albanensium*, found in one of the manuscripts of the *Senchus fer nAlban*, includes Cairpre Rigfota, son of Conaire Cóem, as an ancestor of Fergus Mór.<sup>11</sup> While Plummer says the story of the sons of Erc “seems to be the most historical account”, Bede had obviously heard a very early account in which Cairpre Riata, named as Reuda, settled Scotland c. 200 AD.<sup>12</sup> Bannerman suggests Adomnán might have told Bede this story, though it is impossible to confirm Bede’s source. Alex Woolf shrewdly declares that the discussion of origin legends “is just that”, and should not be relied upon in investigations into the beginnings of the Dál Riata.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Dál Riata was, to all intents and purposes, Irish, as the testimony of Adomnán’s *Vita Columbae* shows, depicting Irish-speaking people who interacted easily with Ireland, and Bede’s Reuda story, if indeed Cairpre Riata is in question, offers a far earlier account than that of Fergus mac Eirc.<sup>14</sup> James Fraser, in discussing the question of the Dál Riata in northern Britain, is unconvinced by the traditional migration theory, and traces Bede’s *Reuda* back to Domangart Réti,

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<sup>9</sup> AT 501 states that Fergus Mór held part of Britain with the people of Dál Riata, and died in 501. The *Senchus Fer nAlban*, dating originally from the seventh century but heavily rewritten in the tenth, places Fergus Mór at the head of the Dál Riata in Scotland. See Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 68, 130-32; Sharpe argues that Cenél nGabráin was in fact *the* ruling line, and that the *Senchus Fer nAlban* offers a distorted view of Scottish Dál Riata, ‘The Thriving of Dalriada’, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Sharpe, ‘The Thriving of Dalriada’, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix to the *Senchus*, Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 65. That Cairpre Riata’s father is listed as Conaire Cóem, rather than Conaire Mór (who is another five generations back) is probably an attempt by the compilers to fit generations to the chronological space.

<sup>12</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 9. See also Bannerman’s comments in *Studies in the History*, p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Alex Woolf, ‘Ancient Kindred? Dál Riata and the Cruithin’ (unpublished paper, 2012) <[http://www.academia.edu/1502702/Ancient\\_Kindred\\_Dal\\_Riata\\_and\\_the\\_Cruithin](http://www.academia.edu/1502702/Ancient_Kindred_Dal_Riata_and_the_Cruithin)> [accessed 13 November 2012], pp. 6-7. David M. Dumville rejects both the theory of Fergus Mór and that of Reuda, ‘St Patrick and the Christianisation of Dál Riata’, in *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993*, ed. David M. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1993), p. 187. Sharpe muses that the settlement took place too early to be properly examined in the historical sources, ‘The Thriving of Dalriada’, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> See Moisl, ‘The Bernician Royal Dynasty’, pp. 103-4, and Sharpe, ‘The Thriving of Dalriada’, pp. 47-61, for a broad overview of the beginnings and development of Dál Riata.

son of Fergus Mór, and the name *Dalreudini* back to the Corcu Réti, though the latter probably did not technically include all the peoples of Dál Riata.<sup>15</sup>

Bede writes that Reuda's people acquired territory in northern Britain *uel amicitia uel ferro* [either by friendship or by the sword], revealing that Bede has few details of this story, and probably knew little more than the name and the translation of *dál*. Bede's source supplied him with the information that Reuda was the leader of the Irish who came to the region of the Picts and claimed space for themselves, which they hold *hactenus* [to this day]. These Dál Riatans are among the five nations of Britain, as described in Bede's very first chapter.<sup>16</sup> It shows that he had Irish, or at least Irish-literate, sources. Though sparse in detail, this tale enables Bede to explain the existence of an Irish kingdom in northern Britain, and to offer an etymology of its name to his audience.

## ii. *Áedán mac Gabráin*

Áedán mac Gabráin of the Dál Riata was a powerful Irish king in northern Britain and is, as Sharpe puts it, "the first king of Scottish Dalriada to be more than a shadowy figure".<sup>17</sup> He appears only once in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but is well represented in other sources, such as Welsh poetry, English chronicles, and Irish hagiography.<sup>18</sup> *HE* I.34 records Áedán, king of the Irish in Britain, losing the battle of Degaстан to the Bernician Æthelfrith in 603 despite having superior numbers, and Bede tells us that almost all of his army was slain.<sup>19</sup> Áedán himself was put to flight, and that from then on, according to Bede, no Irish king dared to wage war on the Anglo-Saxons. Áedán was from the Cenél nGabráin branch of the Dál Riata, based in Kintyre in Argyll. The Cenél nGabráin generally held the kingship of Dál Riata until the eighth century.

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<sup>15</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 144-9. See also James E. Fraser, 'Dux Reuda and the Corcu Réti', in *Cánan & Cultar/Language & Culture*, ed. W. McLeod and James E. Fraser, *Rannsachadh na Gaidhlig* 3 (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 1-9.

<sup>16</sup> *HE* I.1.

<sup>17</sup> Sharpe, *The Life of St Columba*, p. 270, n. 84.

<sup>18</sup> See Jonathan Jarrett's 'The Political Range of Áedán Mac Gabráin, King of Dál Riata', *Pictish Arts Society Journal* 17 (2008), pp. 1-7 <<http://www.oxford.academia.edu/JonathanJarrett/Papers>> [accessed 21 March 2012], for a detailed discussion of the sources. Jarrett also brings together the references to Áedán in the Irish annals, demonstrating the interest shown in this king by the compilers, pp. 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> The Irish annals place this battle at 600: *AU* 600.

Áedán reigned from 574 to 608, and his seems to have been a reign filled with conflict.<sup>20</sup> It is likely his succession was the result of a bloody struggle, and the historical record depicts him involved in multiple battles.<sup>21</sup> He was clearly connected to Iona through political interests, and his multiple appearances in the Irish annals are evidence of Iona's interest in him and his family.<sup>22</sup> His father, Gabrán mac Domangairt, was king of Dál Riata also, though he was succeeded by Conall mac Comgaill, the man the Irish sources claim to have given Iona to Columba. The *Vita Columbae* asserts that Áedán was part of the convention at Druim Cett, at which he and Áed mac Ainmirech, king of the Uí Néill and, like Columba, a member of the Cenél Conaill, met. The purpose of the meeting was to establish the relationship between Irish Dál Riata and each of these men and the kingdoms they held.<sup>23</sup>

Áedán appears in the *Vita Columbae* in interesting circumstances, as an angel visits Columba while he is in a mental trance (*extasi mentis*) and gives him a glass book (*uitreum librum*) in which the saint is told to ordain Áedán mac Gabráin king; but Columba refuses, preferring his brother, Eoganán. The angel insists that Áedán is the right candidate, striking Columba, and reappearing on two more occasions, before the saint obeys.<sup>24</sup> Columba ordained Áedán as directed, prophesied as to the fates of his descendents, and blessed the king. The excerpt from Cumméne's *Liber de Virtutibus* included in Dorbéne's manuscript of the *Vita Columbae* is inserted at this point, and offers Columba's prophecy about the Cenél nGabráin. Whether this passage reflects the truth of events at Áedán's succession is still under debate, and Áedán's later fame as ancestor of the Cenél nGabráin makes him a coveted connection which must inspire some scepticism.<sup>25</sup> It is, as Bannerman calls it, a "curious story", more interested in courting the Cenél Gabráin than specifically flattering Áedán, although other appearances of Áedán in the *Vita Columbae* suggest positive relations between the saint

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the recorded battles he fought, see Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 83-8.

<sup>21</sup> See *AT* 574, which records the death of many of the followers of Gabrán's sons. This entry appears also in the *Annals of Ulster*, in which it is cut in half, with a piece in 575 and another in 576. This battle took place in Kintyre, home territory of the Cenél nGabráin; to name a few: he fought battles in Manu, which may be the Isle of Man or Manau Gododdin in the north (*AT* 579, 580 and, erroneously, 505); the battle of Leithri was won by Áedán (*AT* 588); he went on an expedition to the Orkneys (*AU* 580).

<sup>22</sup> Jarrett, 'The Political Range of Áedán Mac Gabráin', p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *VC* I.49. The annals date this meeting to 575, but, as Francis J. Byrne points out, Áed was not king at that stage, and so the date should be brought forward to after 586: *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 110-1. See Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 157-70 for discussion of the convention of Druim Cett.

<sup>24</sup> *VC* III.5. Áedán is also mentioned in *VC* I.8, 9, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Fraser does not believe the *VC* III.5 depicts actual events, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, p. 121.

and the king.<sup>26</sup> In another chapter, Adomnán writes that before a battle between Áedán and a people called the Miathi, Columba enquired of Áedán as to his successor, surely a topical subject if the king were frequently in battle, and foretold which of his sons would follow him as king.<sup>27</sup> Iona's role in the succession of kings has not been fully defined, though the matter has attracted much attention, but there was definitely a special relationship between Iona and the Cenél nGabráin in Dál Riata, and Adomnán emphasised it.<sup>28</sup> This special relationship is utterly ignored in Bede's text, either due to ignorance or, possibly, irrelevance.

The battle of Degsastan is the context for Áedán's inclusion at the end of the first book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede writes that, worried about the progress of Æthelfrith's conquests, Áedán mustered a large and mighty army and challenged the Bernician king. Æthelfrith had attacked the Britons to the north of Bernicia, and either made them submit to him or ousted them from their lands, settling it then with Anglo-Saxons. In VC I.8, Columba exhorted his community to pray for *hoc populo* and for king Áedán, going into battle. Áedán's opponents, the Miathi, are thought by Sharpe to be an isolated highland group, while earlier scholars equated them with the Maeatae, located near the Antonine wall by the third-century Roman historian, Cassius Dio.<sup>29</sup> Peter Hunter Blair reasons that, by occupying the Britons, Áedán's presence in the lands between Manau Gododdin and the southern Picts might have enabled Anglo-Saxons in their push northward, and that this might have led to the conflict between Áedán and Æthelfrith. He also suggests that the conflict was over control of the British territories between the Tweed and the Forth.<sup>30</sup> This is likely to have been the case, perhaps augmented by Áedán's suspicions that Anglo-Saxon aggression northward would eventually directly affect the territories of Dál Riata. Unfortunately, Degsastan has never been convincingly identified.<sup>31</sup> The battle of Degsastan seems to have had an

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<sup>26</sup> Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 81-82. As Bannerman shows, some rather later sources depict difficulties between Columba and Áedán around the time of the latter's succession, though he puts it down to misinterpretation of this passage in the *Vita Columbae*; such as VC I.9.

<sup>27</sup> VC I.9.

<sup>28</sup> See Warntjes, 'The Role of the Church in Early Irish Regnal Succession – the Case of Iona', pp. 155-213. See also Ewan Campbell, 'A Cross-Marked Quern from Dunadd and Other Evidence for Relations between Dunadd and Iona', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 117 (1987), pp. 105-17.

<sup>29</sup> Sharpe, *The Life of St Columba*, pp. 268-9, n. 81; Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, p. 84; Peter Hunter Blair, 'The Bernicians and Their Northern Frontier', in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. Nora K. Chadwick (London, 1954; repr. 1959), p. 155, repr. in Peter Hunter Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Northumbria* (London, 1984), VIII, though Blair is less certain than Bannerman.

<sup>30</sup> Blair, 'The Bernicians and Their Northern Frontier', pp. 155, 158.

<sup>31</sup> Blair, 'The Bernicians and Their Northern Frontier', pp. 157-8, n.2.

unexpected result, as Áedán had far superior forces and was a very powerful king, perhaps the most powerful in the north of Britain at that time. Æthelfrith's victory, despite its costs, is presented as a great triumph, as it implicitly paved the way for the Christian Northumbrian *imperium*.<sup>32</sup> Only a few years later, Æthelfrith gained control of the kingdom of Deira, and Northumbria became a unified kingdom.<sup>33</sup>

Duncan stresses the importance of Bede's remark that, after Áedán, no Irish king attempted to wage war on the Anglo-Saxons, and introduces the context offered by Bede much later in Ecgrith's ill-fated attack on the innocent Irish in 684.<sup>34</sup> Áedán's battle with Æthelfrith is presented as the last time the Irish bore the Anglo-Saxons any ill-will, and this was borne out by the great beneficence bestowed upon the Anglo-Saxons through their conversion. Áedán's defeat marked a turning point in Irish/Anglo-Saxon relations; while before it, the Irish were marauders and attackers in Britain, after it the dynamic changes, and the Irish are seen as missionaries and as a *gens innoxia*.<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Jarrett speculates that a daughter of Áedán might have married Æthelfrith, and wonders if that might explain the absence of conflict between the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish of Dál Riata after Áedán's defeat.<sup>36</sup> King Æthelfrith is also depicted as part of God's divine plan, though he was not a Christian.<sup>37</sup> Æthelfrith was instrumental in the forging of Northumbria, and Bede calls him very powerful and eager for glory.

The survivors of the battle are another group to be considered. They appear in *HE* I.34, as Bede writes that almost all (*omnis pene*) of Áedán's army were slaughtered,

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<sup>32</sup> These included the death of his brother, Theobald, and most of the forces under his command. *AT* 598 records a battle between Áedán and the Saxons, and names Æthelfrith's slain brother as Eanfrith. Bannerman suggests this is a confusion with Æthelfrith's eldest son, who died in 634, *Studies in the History*, p. 87, n.8; *HE* III.1. Duncan, however, sees this as the battle Bede envisioned when describing Degsastan, and believes the latter actually took place after Áedán's death, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', pp. 16-19.

<sup>33</sup> *Historia Brittonum* 63 states that Æthelfrith ruled Bernicia for twelve years, and both Bernicia and Deira for another twelve; The Moore Memorandum gives Æthelfrith a reign of twenty-four years: Peter Hunter Blair, 'The Moore Memoranda on Northumbrian history', in *The early cultures of North-West Europe*, ed. Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickens (Cambridge, 1950), p. 246; repr. in *Anglo-Saxon Northumbria*, VI.

<sup>34</sup> Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 19; *HE* I.34; *HE* IV.26.

<sup>35</sup> See *HE* IV.26.

<sup>36</sup> Jarrett, 'The Political Range of Áedán Mac Gabráin', p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> Bede likens Æthelfrith to Saul, king of Israel, and of the house of Benjamin. Saul appears in 1 Samuel, a Biblical Book on which Bede wrote a commentary, in *Primam Partem Samuhelis Libri IIII*, and so his depiction of Æthelfrith as Saul, and simultaneously as Benjamin, ancestor of Saul, is a very deliberate image. Saul defeated Israel's enemies, just as Æthelfrith defeated the enemies of the Northumbrians. Alan Thacker sees Bede's commentary on Samuel as context for his depiction of the perfidious Britons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 'Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine E. Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, and David Pelteret (Farnham, 2009), p. 144, and Bede does contextualise his comparison of Æthelfrith and Saul with references to his dealings with the Britons, not with Áedán.

and they fled with Áedán back to Dál Riata. Jarrett remarks that, based on the evidence of the *Senchus*, Dál Riata had a “developed system of military service”, and in Bede’s time Áedán’s army was remembered as an impressive force.<sup>38</sup> The army was made up of more than the Cenél nGabráin, as Bannerman has shown, with the *Annals of Tigernach* including the name of one of them, Máeluma mac Báetáin. Máeluma was of the Cenél nEógain of the northern Uí Néill, and Bannerman conjectures that he may have been the leader of a group of warriors at the battle.<sup>39</sup> There is an Old Irish text, called *Compert Mongáin*, in which Fiachna mac Báetáin of the Dál nAraide is said to have supported Áedán in conflict against the Saxons, leading Bannerman to wonder if the Dál nAraide were involved in the battle of Degsastan.<sup>40</sup> The army itself was probably made up of Scottish Dál Riatan men for the most part, and possibly some from Irish Dál Riata, along with various allies of Áedán from Ireland.<sup>41</sup> Bede makes no mention of the Britons being involved in the battle of Degsastan, despite the fact that Æthelfrith’s harrying of the Britons had antagonised Áedán in the first place.<sup>42</sup> It is quite possible that some northern Britons did join the fight, seeing as Æthelfrith’s army had been attacking them, but it seems not in numbers enough to merit recording. Many of these men, Irish and British, would have been Christian, and Áedán himself was a Christian. Æthelfrith was a pagan, but Bede does not mention this distinction. Æthelfrith was not a stranger to aggression towards Christians, as his massacre of British monks at Chester reveals, and Bede presents Æthelfrith’s defeat of Britons as a

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<sup>38</sup> Jarrett, ‘The Political Range of Áedán Mac Gabráin’, p. 9; Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 146-54.

<sup>39</sup> Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, pp. 87-8; AT 598.

<sup>40</sup> Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, p. 4; *Compert Mongáin 2*, in, *Compert Mongáin and Three Other Early Mongán tales: A Critical Edition*, Nora White, Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 5 (Maynooth, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> One manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (E) records Hering, son of Husa, leading the army to Degsastan in 603. While Hering might have been leading either side to the location, Bannerman believes he was more likely to have been leading the Irish, who would have been far from their own territories, *Studies in the History*, p. 87. Seeing as the location of Degsastan is unknown, and that Áedán’s dominion was not limited to Dál Riata alone, this is unconvincing, but the fact that Hering’s involvement was deemed worthy of record might point to it being unexpected – an Anglo-Saxon aiding a rival people’s army. Hering may also have been a member of a rival dynasty to Æthelfrith in Bernicia, as one Husa had been king in the later sixth century, as found in the Moore Memorandum: see D.P. Kirby, ‘Bede and Northumbrian Chronology’, *English Historical Review* 78 (1963), pp. 515, 525-7; Moisl, ‘The Bernician Royal Dynasty’, pp. 112-4, argues that this is likely. If Hering was leading the Irish, some Anglo-Saxons were probably among Áedán’s men too. For discussion and dating of the Moore Memorandum, see Blair, ‘The Moore Memoranda’, pp. 245-57.

<sup>42</sup> As Bannerman explains, *Studies in the History*, p. 88, the fourteenth-century chronicler, John of Fordun, asserts in *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* III.30 that the Britons and Irish were to fight Æthelfrith, but that the latter pre-empted their attack and fought only the Irish: *The Historians of Scotland* I, ed. William F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1871). Beyond this late and unreliable attestation, there is no indication that the Britons were part of the battle of Degsastan.

positive thing.<sup>43</sup> Although Christians were the victims of his aggression, Bede justifies it as punishment for the Britons' refusal to accept orthodox practices at Augustine's encouragement. While Áedán's Christianity is conveniently omitted from *HE* I.34, Bede must have known of it, and likewise might have justified Æthelfrith's defeat of this Christian Irish king as part of God's plan for the kingdom of Northumbria.

Áedán mac Gabráin died towards the end of the first decade of the seventh century, probably *c.* 609, though there is some confusion in the sources on this.<sup>44</sup> The *Martyrology of Tallaght* commemorates his death on 17 April.<sup>45</sup> Degsastan was a crushing blow to the Dál Riata king, and there is some evidence that he may have lost his kingship as a result.<sup>46</sup> Despite the strong connection between the Columban community on Iona and Áedán mac Gabráin and his dynasty, Bede records Áedán simply as king of the Irish in Britain. Although his only appearance in Bede's work is as a powerful opponent of Æthelfrith, this did not define him in the historical record. Nor, it seems, did it define his legacy, as at least some of Æthelfrith's sons probably spent their exile among the Cenél nGabráin's allies on Iona.<sup>47</sup> Áedán's wide reach and powerful influence is of no concern in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as Bede's objective for him is to act as a foil to Æthelfrith, and to be a marker in the text, highlighting where conflict between the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons ended.

### *iii. Irish scholar (Anonymous 2)*

This unnamed Irishman, *scolasticus quidam de genere Scottorum*, is found in *HE* III.13, in a story told by Acca to Bede, which he had in turn heard from Bishop Willibrord. Acca and Bishop Wilfrid, while journeying to Rome, spent some time, probably at Echternach, with Willibrord, who was evangelising the Frisians.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *HE* II.2, I.34.

<sup>44</sup> Compare *AU* 606 and *AT* 604; see Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, p. 80, and M.O. Anderson, 'Áedán mac Gabrán (*c.*535–609?)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/222>> [accessed 6 March 2013].

<sup>45</sup> *MT* 17 April: Aedan mac Garbain; *MG* 17 April records the death of *Garbhán grádgein* [Garbán a loveable birth], presumably a mistake for Áedán mac Gabráin.

<sup>46</sup> Bannerman, *Studies in the History*, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> Eochaidh Buide, son of Áedán, succeeded him as king of Dál Riata on his father's death, and was king until *c.* 629 (*AU* 629, *AT* 632). *VC* I.9 describes Columba predicting Eochaid Buide's succession, and this Cenél nGabráin king was evidently supported by Iona.

<sup>48</sup> This journey took place *c.* 704. It might have been at Utrecht, where Willibrord had his episcopal *sedes*, or at the monastery of Echternach, founded by Willibrord *c.* 697/8 and with which he is most strongly associated. Thacker presumes Echternach was the location of Oswald's relics: 'Membra Disjecta: The Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, pp. 115-6.

Willibrord, in relating tales of the efficacy of King Oswald's relics among the Frisians, narrated an anecdote set in Ireland, where he had been a member of the community of Rath Melsigi. He told the story to show just how far and how quickly the fame of Oswald's sanctity had spread, and Bede includes it for the same reasons. Though related second-hand, this story is fastidiously presented as verifiable through its witnesses, Willibrord, Acca, and Wilfrid. Acca is likely to have given Bede an oral account of the story told by Willibrord, and so the words of this chapter are, in the main, Bede's own.

The story goes that during the plague that ravaged Britain and Ireland, an Irish *scolasticus* became ill. The scholar sent for Willibrord and revealed his fears that, when he died, he would find himself in hell. He begged Willibrord to help him, and asked if he had any relics of Oswald, of whose sanctity he had heard. Willibrord had in his possession a splinter from the stake on which Oswald's head was impaled after his death, and, putting it into some water, he gave to the scholar the water to drink. The man recovered, and went on to live a long and holy life. Plummer draws the connection between Bede's description of this man's fear of his fate after death, and Bede's discussion of 1 John 4.17 in his Commentary on the seven Catholic Epistles.<sup>49</sup> This was a theme that interested Bede, and the example of the lapsed but repentant Christian serves as an example to his readers.<sup>50</sup>

Though Christian, the *scolasticus* had allowed himself to fall into sin, and it was only the prospect of imminent death that moved him to hope for the chance to emend his life. He realised that his survival would be through no merit of his own, but depended on the mercy of God and the intercession of his servants. Bede's report states that this scholar was *doctus litterarum*, or learned in literature, so he was certainly literate. Later, the man is said to have mentioned his long time spent in *diuina lectio*, but laments that despite this he had fallen into sin. The latter reference to divine reading signifies that the man, though remiss in his application of Christianity, is learned in scriptural studies. The initial mention of *litterae* may mean that he was also learned in secular matters, perhaps vernacular learning, more classical learning, or both.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Plummer, *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 161. Bede saw this fear as a first step in repentance: *In Epistulas VII Catholicas* I John 4.17; *Bede the Venerable: Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, p. 210.

<sup>50</sup> Lapidge also sees it in Bede's chapters on Judges, which was dedicated to Acca: *Storia degli Inglesi* II, p. 524. Perhaps this was a theme in which Acca was particularly interested also.

<sup>51</sup> Aldhelm, in his letter to Wihthfrith, warns the student about secular philosophers and beseeches him not to waste time learning about classical myths like those of Proserpina and Hermione, *Epistola* 3, *Aldhelm*:

Vernacular learning was well-respected in Ireland, and the man named here may have been what the Irish annals call a *sapiens*. It is interesting that this is the only use of the word *scolasticus* in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and it probably reflects Acca's words. One might expect Bede to use some version of *sapiens*, as he does of Adomnán.<sup>52</sup> In the Irish sources discussed by Charles-Edwards, *sapiens* signifies a learned teacher, not necessarily ecclesiastical, but usually so.<sup>53</sup> Bede benefitted from Irish scholarship, which influenced his computistical works and others, like *De Orthographia* and *De Natura Rerum*, and so we may see in his attribution of *scolasticus* an acknowledgement of high levels of learning.<sup>54</sup> That this scholar was a student of Christianity did not preclude him from secular learning. His education marks him as Christian, as does the fact that he is not seeking baptism before death, as this had clearly been carried out previously. As a lapsed Christian, he had been given the gift of salvation and let it slip from his grasp, and Bede's story reveals that only Oswald's merits enabled the man to live.

Willibrord, in Acca's account, was close by the place where the scholar lay on his deathbed, though whether he meant at Rath Melsigi itself, or that he was travelling nearby, is uncertain. However, it was probably still in the neighbourhood of Rath Melsigi, and the scholar discussed here was probably in the vicinity, in the south-east of Ireland. Bede does not place the *scolasticus* in a monastic context and he is not identified as a monk, but he may have had some connection to a monastic school to facilitate his *lectio diuina*. Willibrord's presence in Ireland dates this episode to pre-690, when he travelled to the Continent to evangelise the Frisians, carrying out Ecgberht's plan, and the reference to the plague points to the period between 684 and 687 which saw pestilence afflict both Ireland and Britain. Willibrord expected Acca and

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*The Prose Works*, p. 154. Herren and Lapidge note there is little evidence of particular Irish interest in classical learning in the late seventh century (p. 140), so whether this can be taken as evidence of Irish learning in literature is not certain. Of course, this does demonstrate that Aldhelm himself knew of such things.

<sup>52</sup> *HE* V.15.

<sup>53</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 270-1. That a *sapiens* was not always a cleric or monk can be seen in the example of Aldfrith, as discussed by Colin Ireland, 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Learning of a *Sapiens*', pp. 63-77. See also Chapter Two.

<sup>54</sup> See Picard, 'Bede and Irish Scholarship: Scientific Treatises and Grammars', pp. 139-48; Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', pp. 229-47. *De Orthographia* and *De Natura Rerum* are in CCSL 123A, ed. C.W. Jones, et al., (Turnhout, 1975).

Wilfrid to be able to date his anecdote from this context, and so presumably meant a noted time of *mortalitas*.<sup>55</sup>

This Irish man's awareness of and trust in Oswald's powers of intercession are an early indicator of the spread of Oswald's cult in general, not just in Ireland. Oswald died in 642 at the battle of Maserfield against the Mercian king, Penda, and his British allies, and Bede relates several stories of miracles associated with the place of his death and his relics afterwards.<sup>56</sup> After death, Oswald's body was interred at Bardney, in Lindsey, at the instigation of Osthryth, Oswald's niece. Oswald's head, hands and arms had been severed from his body after he died, and his opponent had them set up on stakes, and Oswiu later had his head buried at Lindisfarne and his arms and hands at a church in Bamburgh.<sup>57</sup> Willibrord's relic is a splinter from the stake used to hold Oswald's head, which was destined to be buried at Lindisfarne. Thacker argues that Wilfrid probably began to promote Oswald's cult after King Aldfrith's death in 705, as he was uninvolved in the translation to Bardney and does not seem to have found an ally in Osthryth in 681 or, as far as can be seen, in 686. Thacker suggests that it was Wilfrid's support of Osred that led to his interest in the cult of Oswald.<sup>58</sup> Hexham had a particular devotion to Oswald, annually holding a vigil to commemorate his death at Heavenfield, the location of his renowned victory over Cædwalla, and Acca's relating of the story reflects this interest.<sup>59</sup> Bede notes that Oswald set up a cross before the battle, and that people took splinters from it to put in water and use as healing relics. The similar use of Oswald's stake is clearly connected to this, and stories like the one Willibrord told Acca and Wilfrid formed an important element of their support for Oswald's cult in the eighth century.

Willibrord would have brought the relic of Oswald's stake with him to Ireland from Northumbria, perhaps as a personal relic, but it would also have been a tool of conversion. Ireland had plenty of saints of its own, so it is particularly interesting that the *scolasticus* would seek Oswald's relic, and he probably knew of some connection

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<sup>55</sup> It cannot have been the widespread plague of the mid-660s, as Willibrord did not arrive in Ireland until the mid-670s, and while small outbreaks did occur between the plague of the 660s and that of the mid-680s, a large-scale spread of disease must be in question. Compare Adomnán's comment on the two plagues of his lifetime, which the Irish and the Picts escaped: VC II.47. See J.R. Maddicott, 'Plague in Seventh-Century England', *Past and Present* 156 (1997), pp. 7-54.

<sup>56</sup> HE III.9-13. See also Clare Stancliffe, 'Where Was Oswald killed?', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, pp. 84-96.

<sup>57</sup> HE III.12. Alan Thacker remarks on the lack of explicit veneration for Oswald's head at Lindisfarne, though it seems it was valued: '*Membra Disjecta*', pp. 101-2.

<sup>58</sup> Thacker, '*Membra Disjecta*', pp. 109-10.

<sup>59</sup> HE III.2. Acca succeeded Wilfrid as bishop there on his death, HE V.20.

between Willibrord – or perhaps Rath Melsigi – and the Northumbrian king. The Anglo-Saxon community at Rath Melsigi probably promoted this cult, which could have brought it to the scholar’s attention. He was probably of high social status (though no mention is made of this), and one might imagine he felt some affinity for the holy martyred king. He was not unique in Ireland for his veneration for the Anglo-Saxon king, as is shown by Oswald’s inclusion in the *Félire Óengusso* on 5 August as a noble high-king (*ardrí Saxan sóerdae*), and in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*.<sup>60</sup> The persons involved in this episode are closely connected in Northumbria, Willibrord having been part of Wilfrid’s community at Ripon, and Acca being strongly associated with Wilfrid at Hexham.<sup>61</sup> Acca is the source of much of the material about Oswald’s cult in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>62</sup> In *HE* IV.3, discussed below, Bede writes that Ecgberht was visited in Ireland by Higeald, an abbot in Lindsey. It is interesting that one of Ecgberht’s *fratri* at Rath Melsigi was Æthelhun, brother to both Æthelwine, bishop of Lindsey (c. 680-692), and Æthelhild, abbess of a monastery near Bardney. The latter was an active participant in Oswald’s cult, using dust from the pavement on which the water used to wash Oswald’s bones had been thrown to cure a possessed man.<sup>63</sup> As Thacker points out, Lindsey may well have been part of the promotion of Oswald in Ireland, and, if so, it seems it was earlier than Wilfrid’s involvement.<sup>64</sup> He also wonders how widespread devotion to Oswald was in Ireland, remarking that his appearance in the martyrological texts may be the result of direct Northumbrian influences on the Hieronymian martyrology.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Oswald’s cult was known in Ireland, and evidently there were those who subscribed to it, as discussed above.

Bede’s purpose in including the *scolasticus* in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is to demonstrate the wide spread and great efficacy of Oswald’s cult, even beyond the edges of Britain. His reliance on the intervention of Willibrord and, more especially, Oswald, is a small indication of Anglo-Saxon influence on the Irish, as opposed to the reverse, which we see so much of in Book III of this work. In this there is a small presaging of Ecgberht’s later role on Iona, with an Anglo-Saxon performing the role of

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<sup>60</sup> *MT* August 5; *FÓ* August 5, at which the annotations mistake him for Aldfrith, and gloss him as Flann Fína, son of Oswiu.

<sup>61</sup> Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi*, pp. 81-141.

<sup>62</sup> Thacker, ‘*Membra Disjecta*’, pp. 107-8.

<sup>63</sup> *HE* III.11, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Thacker, ‘*Membra Disjecta*’, pp. 114-5.

<sup>65</sup> Thacker, ‘*Membra Disjecta*’, p. 115, n. 108; see also Ó Riain, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland*, pp. 9-10, 20-2.

confessor and spiritual guide to an Irishman.<sup>66</sup> Bede was part of the process through which Oswald's cult was disseminated, and he supported it through the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which sets up Oswald as an idealised Christian king, proven by the miracles of his relics.<sup>67</sup>

*iv. Man who saw Chad's soul (Anonymous 3)*

In *HE* IV.3, Bede relates that a man in Ireland was lucky enough to see the soul of Chad, a very holy Anglo-Saxon, ascend to heaven. Ecgberht is the source for this tale, and though unnamed, Bede does state that the man in question might have been Ecgberht himself. The implication is that Ecgberht was too humble to tell this story of himself, and so put it into the third-person.<sup>68</sup> However, Bede leaves open the possibility that it was another man altogether, and it is worth noting that the individual in question is called simply *homo*, and not a monk or priest.<sup>69</sup> This episode concerns similar circles to those of *HE* III.13, Chad, bishop of Mercia, having been at Rath Melsigi with Ecgberht in Ireland.<sup>70</sup> While in conversation with Higeald, the abbot in Lindsey, who had come to visit Ecgberht in Ireland, Chad was mentioned, and Ecgberht recounted that a man in Ireland, still alive as Ecgberht told the tale, had seen the soul of Cedd, Chad's brother, and a company of angels, descend from heaven to retrieve Chad's soul after he died.<sup>71</sup> These two brothers were closely connected, as Chad succeeded Cedd as abbot of Lastingham after the latter's death.<sup>72</sup> The chapter simply states that Cedd and angels came to transport Chad's soul, but a possible parallel for Bede's envisioning of the situation may be found in his prose *Vita Cuthberti*. *PVC* 4 describes Cuthbert's vision of Aidan's soul being carried up to heaven, and characterises it as a stream of light in a dark sky accompanied by a choir of angels, with the soul itself is said to be of extraordinary brightness (*claritatis eximiae*).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Of course, Oswald's strong links with the Columbans should be remembered in this context.

<sup>67</sup> See Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy'', pp. 33-83.

<sup>68</sup> A similar case occurs in *PVC* 7, in which Cuthbert's humility regarding his own gifts is likened to Paul's humility in 2 Corinthians 12.2. Bede begins Ecgberht's testimony with *Scio hominem*, just as Paul's begin, but these are Bede's words rather than Ecgberht's, and reflect his conscious echoing of the scriptural text.

<sup>69</sup> Colgrave presumes too much in calling him an Irish priest, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, p. 312.

<sup>70</sup> *HE* IV.3.

<sup>71</sup> Higeald appears in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, and Plummer believes him to have been abbot of Bardney: *Baedae Opera Historica* II, p. 209.

<sup>72</sup> *HE* III.23.

<sup>73</sup> Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 312-3, suggests that the *Vita Antonii* might contain the inspiration for such passages at c. 32.

Chad and Cedd were the two most famous of four religious brothers mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the remaining two being Cælin and Cynebil.<sup>74</sup> Chad and Cedd had strong links to Ireland. Chad had studied under Aidan at Lindisfarne and spent time at Rath Melsigi in Ireland.<sup>75</sup> Cedd had been brought up in the Irish traditions at Lindisfarne, was a translator for the Columbans at the Synod of Whitby, and also formed part of the mission sent by Bishop Fínán of Lindisfarne to the Middle Angles in 653, joining the Irishman Diuna, who later became bishop there.<sup>76</sup> Chad probably went to Ireland some time after Aidan's death in 651, and died at Lichfield, at which he had his episcopal see, in March 672. Cedd, who also appears in the vision discussed, had died in 664. Chad's death clearly dates the vision to March 672. It is not made clear by Bede whether this vision was seen by the unnamed man in Ireland or in Britain, though the man was certainly resident in Ireland at the time of Ecgberht's recounting of the story, and geographical proximity was not a necessary element in such visions. After all, Cuthbert saw Aidan's soul taken up to heaven while he was, presumably, nowhere near the location of Aidan's death: Cuthbert was caring for sheep on distant mountains (*remotis in montibus*), and Aidan died on a royal estate, not far from Bamburgh.<sup>77</sup> If the man had been named as a monk, one might imagine that he, like Ecgberht, Chad, Willibrord, and many others, had travelled to Ireland to pursue religious study and the religious life, but as he is not identified as a monk, it seems more likely that he was a religious layman who was graced with a heavenly vision. If indeed he were a layman, he was probably an Irishman, but there is no way to learn more about him.<sup>78</sup> The story is further confirmation of the links between the monastery of Rath Melsigi and Northumbria, and reveals active interaction between them. Higeald may have been the source for this story, or Ecgberht himself. This unnamed man is included in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* to add to the evidence of Chad's holiness, and, to a lesser degree, the holiness of his brother, Cedd.

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<sup>74</sup> *HE* III.23.

<sup>75</sup> *HE* III.28.

<sup>76</sup> *HE* III.21, 23, 25. See Chapter Three.

<sup>77</sup> *PVC* 4; *HE* III.17.

<sup>78</sup> Of course, if one takes Ecgberht's words *Scio hominem* as his own deliberate Scriptural reference, the use of *homo* might not preclude this man from being in religious orders. However, no mention is made anywhere to his being a monk, and Bede seems genuinely unsure of whether Ecgberht was speaking of himself or not.

v. *Ecgberht's monk (Anonymous 5)*

*HE* V.9, as discussed in Chapter Two, describes how Ecgberht was motivated to go to Iona to correct its community's Easter practices by a fellow-monk's reports of dreams of Boisil of Melrose. Boisil appeared to this monk and instructed him to pass on a message to Ecgberht, that he was not to travel to the Continent to convert the pagan Frisians, but should instead travel to Iona to help them embrace the orthodox Easter. The monk's ethnicity is not given, but one might presume him to be Irish because of his location in Ireland. This is not a definitive conclusion, however, as Ecgberht and this monk were members of the community at Rath Melsigi, identified as Clonmelsh in Co. Carlow by Kenneth Nicholls.<sup>79</sup> Rath Melsigi is named only once by Bede, but it is possible to discern connections between it and other Anglo-Saxons named in the text, and it attracted many Anglo-Saxon *peregrini*. However, while we only have Anglo-Saxon names associated with the foundation, it does not necessarily follow that it was an exclusively Anglo-Saxon monastery.<sup>80</sup>

It seems likely that Ecgberht had a connection to Boisil, probably through the monastery of Melrose in Northumbria, and this connection prompted Boisil's intercession and Ecgberht's subsequent (if delayed) obedience. The monk into whose dreams Boisil entered also had a strong connection to the prior of Melrose, having been his disciple in Britain, at Melrose. In relating his dream to Ecgberht, the monk calls Boisil his beloved *magister* and his *nutritor*. The monk had, in that case, been at Melrose before 664, the year in which Boisil died, and would have been a *frater* of Cuthbert, who had been at Melrose from 651.<sup>81</sup> His dream of Boisil happened at a remove of at least twenty-five years from his time with Boisil, and his ready identification of his teacher after this length of time supports his strong connection to Boisil, to whom the monk was, in Bede's words, *discipulus...et minister*. Boisil announced that Ecgberht was not to travel to the Frisians, but was to travel to the Columbans and *reuocare* them to the right path. The word Easter is never mentioned in this chapter, but the implications of the episode are clear: Ecgberht was to go to Iona and convince the Columbans to accept the correct Easter tables. Bede's previous reference to Ecgberht in *HE* III.4 ensured that this was understood. Rath Melsigi was

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<sup>79</sup> As reported by Ó Cróinín, 'Rath Melsigi, Willibrord', p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Ó Cróinín, 'Rath Melsigi, Willibrord', pp. 22, 32, 38.

<sup>81</sup> *PVC* 4, 8.

evidently using the correct Easter reckoning by this time, which the southern Irish location of Clonmelsh supports.<sup>82</sup>

Whether this monk was Irish or not is not at all clear from the context. While Bede often states the ethnicity of even unnamed individuals, in this case he offers neither the monk's name nor his ethnic background.<sup>83</sup> Having studied with Boisil at Melrose, the monk had also been under the abbacy of Eata, one of Aidan's disciples, and so had been part of a heavily Irish-influenced monastery. Rath Melsigi is associated only with Anglo-Saxons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but is in reality unlikely to have been a purely Anglo-Saxon house, so that detail cannot confirm or deny the monk's origins. His having spent time at Melrose in Northumbria might be deemed evidence of his Anglo-Saxon heritage, but again this is not a black-and-white situation. While Melrose was indeed a foundation in Anglo-Saxon England in which Anglo-Saxon monks dwelt, there was a strong Irish influence at the monastery and Boisil himself, as discussed above, was an Irishman. There may well have been other Irishmen at that foundation, and one of them might have found his way back to Ireland to continue his monastic vocation.

Bede says that Ecgberht was living a life of exile, *uita peregrina*, in the hopes of achieving a place in heaven, but he makes no such claim for the monk who dreamed of Boisil. While this monk is one of the brothers of Rath Melsigi, Bede does not call him a *peregrinus* or fellow exile. His hazy details could obviously come from Bede's lack of knowledge on this man, located far away in southern Ireland, but the story made its way back to Bede at Wearmouth-Jarrow, and Ecgberht's subsequent achievements on Iona were central to Bede's opus. So often, Bede manages to include the name of a bit-player in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, impressing the reader with the depth of his knowledge and the reliability of his accounts. Rather than knowing nothing of this monk, whose efforts eventually changed the course of many lives, it seems possible that Bede is leaving out what he does know, in which case the monk is most likely an Irishman. If a name had survived, and it was easily identifiable as Irish, might Bede have omitted it? It has been argued above that Boisil's Irish ethnicity is erased from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* so that Bede can present Ecgberht's mission to Iona as a purely Anglo-Saxon endeavour. This monk might be left without an ethnic context for similar reasons, maintaining the impression that those involved in this episode were all Anglo-

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<sup>82</sup> *HE* III.3; Ó Cróinín, 'Rath Melsigi, Willibrord', p. 24.

<sup>83</sup> Such as the blind Anglo-Saxon whose sight was restored by Augustine, *HE* II.2.

Saxons. However, it is difficult to argue from silence in this case, and as this monk's role is solely that of a messenger, his personal details may have simply been lost.

Hæmgisl has been suggested as a possible communicator of this story of the anonymous dreamer to Bede.<sup>84</sup> It is a pity that Bede did not name him as his source if this is the case, but he is a likely link. Bede tells us that Hæmgisl was living a solitary life in Ireland at the time of writing, prior to which he had been connected with the monastery of Melrose. Hæmgisl is named among the *nomina anchoritarum* in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, in which he comes in the same column as one Boesel, possibly Boisil of Melrose.<sup>85</sup> Rath Melsigi would certainly be a suitable monastery to which Hæmgisl might have attached himself, and, if he did, Melrose would appear to have had a strong connection to the Irish location. Kirby has argued for Melrose actively concerning itself with Columban diversity in the early eighth century, and the Melrose monk's role in redirecting Ecgberht attests to this.<sup>86</sup> Kirby also believes this concern was only conveyed to Ecgberht in the early eighth century, suggesting that Bede's placement of the monk's vision is too early, and thus unfairly depicting Ecgberht as tardy in carrying out his mission. Although Kirby sees the story of the vision of Boisil as a creation of the eighth century, revealing efforts by Melrose (perhaps in the person of Hæmgisl) to insert itself into Ecgberht's mission, and used by Bede to explain Ecgberht's decision not to carry out his mission to the Frisians, traditions about Boisil had survived since his death *c.* 664, and he is name-checked in Bede's metrical *Vita Cuthberti*, which was written very early in the eighth century. If Kirby is correct, the dreaming monk looks more like a mere instrument of narrative, rather than a real person, but such an invention would be a harsh accusation.<sup>87</sup>

It is unfortunate that no identifiable men from Melrose present themselves as potential matches to our dreamer, and his anonymity seems unresolvable. Nevertheless, he is an essential element in Bede's description of the origins of Ecgberht's mission to correct the Columbans of Iona, a momentous event in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

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<sup>84</sup> Kirby, 'Cuthbert, Boisil of Melrose and the Northumbrian Priest Ecgberht', p. 53; *HE* V.12.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter Two for the possibility that this Boesel is Boisil of Melrose. *Nomina anchoritorum*, 18r, *The Durham Liber Vitae*, p. 96. Uichbercht is the name above Boesel in this list, and has been identified as Wihthberht, another Anglo-Saxon from Rath Melsigi, *HE* V.9. Ó Cróinín has argued for this Wihthberht being the *Ictbricht epscop* among the guarantors of Adomnán's *Lex innocentium*: 'Rath Melsigi, Willibrord', pp. 25-6, n.1.

<sup>86</sup> Kirby, 'Cuthbert, Boisil of Melrose and the Northumbrian Priest Ecgberht', p. 53.

<sup>87</sup> An existing story containing these elements from the early eighth century might have been transposed back to the later seventh century in an attempt to explain Ecgberht's actions, but the 690s were not so remote from Bede and his readers that he could blatantly alter the chronology if it were known.

Despite the lack of a name, he performs an important function in Bede's narrative and, in linking Boisil to Ecgberht's mission without mention of the prior's Irishness, demonstrates the heavy editorial hand of our author. If he were an Anglo-Saxon, this monk would be another example of a *peregrinus* in Ireland. If he were Irish, he and his unspecified background fit with the argument that Boisil himself was Irish.

#### *vi. Nechtan*

Nechtán is an unusual entry in this project. Bede absolutely considered Nechtán to be a Pict, and he was indeed the king of the Picts. The Picts are not well-represented in Bede's work, and it seems he had little information available to him about them, so Nechtán is already an anomaly in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Thomas Owen Clancy has made the case for his part-Irish ancestry in his excellent article on Nechtán.<sup>88</sup> In this piece, Clancy draws on a variety of sources to show that Nechtán had an Irish father, a very plausible scenario considering the close proximity of the Irish in Argyll and the Picts. Nechtán's genealogy connects him to the Cenél Comgaill, which had been a branch of the Cenél nGabráin up to c. 700.<sup>89</sup> As Clancy has opened up this fascinating prospect, it remains only to summarise his 2004 article.

We are lucky that we know the names of both the mother and father of Nechtán Der-Ilei. His name includes the matronymic *Der-Ilei*, and his father was one Dargart.<sup>90</sup> This has been deduced from sources that give Bruide Der-Ilei a father named Dargart, Bruide being Nechtán's brother and predecessor, who died in 706.<sup>91</sup> This same Bruide was among the guarantors of Adomnán's *Lex innocentium*, illustrating the close connections between Iona and Pictland.<sup>92</sup> The *Annals of Ulster* record, in 710, the deaths of two sons of one Nechtán mac Doirgarto, and this seems to confirm that Nechtán was indeed fathered, like his brother Bruide, by Dargart. Dargart is a rare name, and the man in question is likely found in the *Annals of Tigernach*, with his

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<sup>88</sup> Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', pp. 125-49.

<sup>89</sup> Kenneth Veitch, 'The Columban Church in Northern Britain, 664-717: A Reassessment', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland* 127 (1997), p. 635.

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of *Der-Ilei*, see Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', pp. 128-9, and Appendix A, pp. 147-8.

<sup>91</sup> *AT* 706; *AU* 706. Clancy points to the hagiography of Saint Serf and Pictish king lists for evidence of Bruide's father's name, 'Philosopher-King', p. 130. M.A. Anderson suggested one Drostan as father of Nechtán, looking at the annal entry that mentions one Talorc son of Drostan who was brother to King Nechtán (*AU* 713), while Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', p. 36, and, following Duncan, Benjamin T. Hudson, 'Kings and Church in Early Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review* 73 (1994), p. 151, saw Nechtán mac Der-Ilei and Nechtán mac Drostan as two separate persons, and the latter as Ceolfrith's addressee. Clancy argues forcibly against this perspective, p. 134.

<sup>92</sup> See Ní Dhonnchadha, 'The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*, 697', p. 214.

death recorded for 686 as Dargart mac Finngaine.<sup>93</sup> Clancy argues that Dargart was a member of the Cenél Comgaill, and that Nechtan was a direct descendant of Conall mac Comgaill, the king said by the Irish sources to have given Iona to Columba.<sup>94</sup> Though Irish through his father, then, Nechtan's Pictish claim to the kingship came through his mother.<sup>95</sup> It is worth noting that Bede, in writing that the Picts chose kings from the female line when there was doubt, states that this continues to the present time; might not this be a reference to Nechtan?<sup>96</sup> It would help explain the fact that Nechtan is best known through his mother's name, as it was his mother that gave him a claim to be king. Clancy is particular in specifying that Nechtan does not seem to have come from the Dál Riata branch then in power, and that Nechtan (and his brother Bruide) did not represent an Irish takeover of the Pictish kingship.<sup>97</sup>

Nechtán appears in only one chapter of Bede's work, and is an admirable kingly figure in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* whose interest in ecclesiastical matters motivates him to write to Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow, and request information on the correct and orthodox Easter, the correct tonsure, and to ask for architects to help him build an appropriate church in stone. Bede devotes *HE* V.21 to Ceolfrith's letter of reply. While Bede has at times been proposed as the true author of this letter, there is no reason to believe Ceolfrith himself did not write it.<sup>98</sup> The letter does reflect many of the concerns and interests of Bede, which may be why he chose to include it in its entirety, lengthy though it is. Nechtan, Bede explains, had already adopted the Roman Easter reckoning on writing to Ceolfrith, and was seeking a fuller explanation of the calculation of Easter from the abbot. Veitch has suggested that he

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<sup>93</sup> As Clancy explains, the *Annals of Ulster* record Dargart's death in 686 too, but also in 692, but the presence of his death solely in *AT* 686 makes this the more likely date: 'Philosopher-King', p. 131.

<sup>94</sup> Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', pp. 132-3. Clancy also remarks that Bede's contention that Bruide mac Maelchon awarded Iona to Columba may not be in opposition to the claims of the Irish sources, as both assertions link Nechtan's family to the granting of Iona, one on his Pictish side, and one on his Irish side, p. 145. Interesting as this comment is, it does not explain why these different sources would make such connections without mentioning Nechtan himself.

<sup>95</sup> For discussions for and against the phenomenon of Pictish matriliney, see W. David H. Sellar, 'Warlords, Holy Men and Matrilineal Succession', *Innes Review* 36 (1985), pp. 36-41; Alex Woolf, 'Pictish Matriliney Reconsidered', *Innes Review* 49.2 (1998), pp. 1347-67; Alasdair Ross, 'Pictish Matriliney?', *Northern History* 34 (1999), pp. 11-22.

<sup>96</sup> Woolf makes this point in 'Pictish Matriliney Reconsidered', p. 149; *HE* I.1: *quod usque hodie apud Pictos constat esse seruatum*.

<sup>97</sup> Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', p. 137.

<sup>98</sup> Masako Ohashi has expounded this view in her thesis and in two conference papers: 'The Impact of the Paschal Controversy: Computus, Exegesis and Church History in Early Britain and Ireland (unpublished D.Phil thesis, Nanzan University, 1999), pp. 80-6; 'Did Bede Write Ceolfrith's Letter to King Nechtan of the Picts?', paper presented at the *International Medieval Congress*, University of Leeds, 11 July 2007; 'Who Was the Author of the Letter to King Nechtan of the Picts (AD 710)', paper presented at the *4th International Conference on the Science of Computus*, NUI Galway, 15 July 2012.

was originally encouraged to adopt the orthodox Easter by adherents of the Dionysiac tables from Iona, which is possible but difficult to confirm.<sup>99</sup> Nechtan's appeal to Northumbria implies an acknowledgement of Northumbria's recognised orthodoxy in this matter, though this is not necessarily proof of the source of his Easter practices. Nechtan is often referenced in discussions of Easter and Iona due to the entry in the Irish annals which states that, in 717, he ejected the community of Iona from his territory.<sup>100</sup> The reasons behind this expulsion have been hotly debated for decades. Hudson sees it as corroboration for Nechtan's "anti-Gaelic/pro-Anglo-Saxon attitude", but such an opinion seems simplistic and, considering Nechtan's own background and connections, one-dimensional.<sup>101</sup> Veitch posits that Nechtan ejected the Columbans from Pictland in 717 as a result of dynastic strife, such as the Columbans supporting a political rival.<sup>102</sup> As discussed in Chapter Five, it is possible that questions were raised in Pictland after the death of Dúnchad, abbot of Iona, which may have resulted in the ejection of the Columbans. While Veitch's theory would also explain the situation, there is no other evidence to support it, and in light of Nechtan's confirmed interest in orthodoxy, it seems best to look to what we have for answers.

Nechtán, the annals tell us, entered religious life in 724.<sup>103</sup> Whether this was voluntarily, as his interest in religious matters might suggest, or the result of political opposition, is not known, though the latter is frequently the case for overthrown kings. Conflict and political machinations can be dimly seen in the annal entries concerning Nechtán between 724 and 732, the year in which he died.<sup>104</sup> Nechtán appears to have retaken the kingship of the Picts in 728 and been defeated by rivals in 729, and Bede would have heard about much of this at Wearmouth-Jarrow, though none of it appears in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>105</sup> Not only was the Pictish king an immensely important political figure, but Wearmouth-Jarrow likely maintained an interest in Nechtán after his letter. Nechtán was king of the Picts for much of Bede's later life, and his reclaiming of the kingship in 728 must have been followed with interest in Northumbria. Nevertheless, while the historical record preserves much detail of this

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<sup>99</sup> Veitch, 'The Columban Church in Northern Britain', p. 636.

<sup>100</sup> *AT* 717; *AU* 717. Discussed above, Chapter Five.

<sup>101</sup> Hudson, 'Kings and Church', pp. 151-2.

<sup>102</sup> Veitch, 'The Columban Church in Northern Britain', pp. 641-2. Smyth sees the expulsion in similar terms, *Warlords and Holy Men*, p. 75.

<sup>103</sup> *AT* 724.

<sup>104</sup> See Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', pp. 144-5; *AT* 732.

<sup>105</sup> *AT* 728; *AU* 729.

long-reigning king, Bede's work remembers simply a king concerned with ecclesiastical matters and happy to look to Northumbria for help.

Nechtan is an unusual man to categorise as Irish within the bounds of this project. While in the case of Aldfrith, discussed in Chapter Two above, Bede certainly knew of his king's Irish roots and wrote about him in such a way as to disguise these origins, Bede may not have known of Nechtan's Irish heritage. Unlike Aldfrith, who was a Northumbrian and a zealous supporter of the church, Nechtan was a more distant figure to Bede, possibly known only through his correspondence with Ceolfrith and popular report. Of course, one might take Bede's comment on Pictish matriliney in *HE* I.1 as one supporting Nechtan's kingship, in which case he did know at least that Nechtan's claim to the Pictish kingship came through his mother.<sup>106</sup> However, even if Nechtan's family background were known to Bede, it was likely irrelevant in the context of his narrative. Nechtan was, to all intents and purposes, a Pictish king, and it is as such that he is presented in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede himself did not class him among the Irish, and whether he had any sense of being Irish as part of his own social identity is impossible to tell from the sources, in which he is emphatically Pictish. The Picts have a hint of the exotic about them in Bede's work, as they were long enemies of the Anglo-Saxons, and are not a large element in the text. Bede avoids the enmity between these two peoples when discussing Nechtan, and fails to mention the battle fought between the Northumbrians and the Picts in 711 at Campo Manann, or Manau Gododdin, in the main text of his history.<sup>107</sup> It does appear in the recapitulation of *HE* V.24, where Bede states that *praefectus* Berctfrid fought with the Picts in 711, but this antagonism is kept out of the narrative flow of the fifth book. *HE* V.22 represents the culmination of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*'s coming-of-age narrative for the Anglo-Saxon Church, and *HE* V.21 is a fitting lead-in to it. Just as the Irish of Iona are eventually persuaded of the correct Easter, the Picts too are guided towards orthodoxy by Anglo-Saxons. While the latter case is not as powerful a story as that of Iona, as Nechtan was already a proponent of the orthodox Easter and had himself applied to the Northumbrians for clarity and support, Ceolfrith is yet a foreshadowing of Egberht in the following chapter. Bede maintains an air of diplomatic peace about the exchanges between Nechtan and Ceolfrith, leaving out references to conflict

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<sup>106</sup> Woolf, 'Pictish Matriliney Reconsidered', p. 152.

<sup>107</sup> *AT* 711; *AU* 711.

between their peoples, as this peace is part of the unity created by orthodoxy and christian communion.

### *Conclusion*

This miscellaneous group of Irish – and possibly Irish – men completes the prosopography of Irishmen in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Although not an intentionally coherent grouping, a certain harmony emerges throughout. Three of these unnamed Irishmen are connected with Rath Melsigi, an unsurprising situation as that monastery housed many Anglo-Saxon monks and presents a fruitful point of communication between Ireland and the Anglo-Saxons. These were the stories trickling back to Northumbria from that monastery in Ireland, through the movement of persons and intelligence. Reuda, the mythic founder of Dál Riata is part of Bede's geographical history, an etymological explanation for the name of the Irish territory to the north of Bede's home kingdom of Northumbria. Áedán mac Gabráin was an important ruler of this same territory, though his significance is minimised in Bede's work, and he is shown in the context of Northumbrian might rather than in his own right as a powerful Irish king. Lastly, Nechtan is a man who has been shown to have Irish roots – and indeed, it is simplistic to think that ethnic groups were discrete and utterly separate – but to Bede, and many other medieval sources, is a purely Pictish king. These men span the full status range of Irishmen in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, from the highest king to the smallest unnamed layman, and are an excellent representation of the range of Irishmen offered by the Northumbrian monk, despite the strong religious emphasis of his work. Having examined all of the Irishmen in the text, it only remains to look at the Irish as a whole, as presented in Bede's work, and to bring together the various strands of the project.

## Chapter Eight: The Irish as a group

Up to now, this project has looked at individuals and specific groups of Irishmen. Now, we must look at the Irish as a group in and of themselves. After all, if part of the purpose of this project is to examine Bede's attitudes towards 'the Irish', we must investigate them as a whole. Following on from the discussion regarding 'peoples' and ethnicities in the Introduction, there can be no doubt that early medieval persons saw themselves as belonging to certain social communities. These communities could be ethnic, political, and religious communities. The Irish can be seen as varieties of any and all of these: they are distinctly classed, both by themselves and others, as one *gens*, but within that *gens* are a wide spread of political communities, septs, and, in the time period dealt with by Bede, groups following different Easter tables. Though Bede understands that the *Scotti* are not an unvarying, monolithic group, citing as he does, for example, the difference in Easter reckoning between the Irish of the south and those of the north, he yet uses *Scotti* as a general signifier.<sup>1</sup> Despite the nominal homogeneity of the Irish he discusses, who are almost uniformly the *Scotti*, if sometimes *Scotti septentrionales* or *Scotti australes*, Bede's account reveals Irishmen in Britain who have different backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Bede could conceive of a *gens Anglorum*, while simultaneously describing the histories of various kingdoms and peoples, he could speak of the *Scotti*, and just as he could speak of various missions coming to the English people as a whole,

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<sup>1</sup> He does speak of the Irish of northern Britain, meaning the Dál Riata, and when writing of the *Scotti* he often specifically means the Columban Irish, for example, *HE* I.1, 34; III.1, 13.

<sup>2</sup> *HE* III.3.

though they might in fact have come to individual kingdoms, Bede could also speak of the Irish in a general sense, while he might have meant persons from specific kingdoms or monastic *familiae*.<sup>3</sup> The Columban Irish, associated with the island monastery of Iona, are the best example of this, as they played such a significant role in Bede's own Northumbrian church and are often the *Scotti* of whom Bede writes. They are not, however, always the Irish in question, and Bede's representation of many Irish who were not apparently connected to the Iona mission is an important factor to bear in mind. The Irish were not a uniform group in Britain, and Bede knew this. Bede's interest in ethnicity is evident in his many references to the ethnicity of individuals. As Nicholas Brooks has remarked, he frequently mentions a person being of the *gens Anglorum* when they are among other peoples, such as the Gauls or the Irish. Similarly, the Irish in his text are mostly in Britain, among Anglo-Saxons, and so his identification of them as Irish may be linked to this contextualisation. As is the case in even modern understanding of ethnicity, Bede defines it in relation to 'other' ethnicities.<sup>4</sup>

Bede was, at heart, a Christian scholar and exegete. While he has been best remembered in the last few centuries as an historian (though he would have disputed whether exegesis and history were mutually exclusive), his work on the Scriptures was what defined him as a scholar in his own lifetime. It would be naive to assume that this does not inform his historical writing also, and so we must approach the *Historia Ecclesiastica* with that in mind.<sup>5</sup> Bede's exegetical writing has many layers, and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* can be read similarly: it is the bare facts of history; it is history with an exhortatory purpose; it is a depiction of providential history. Bede peppers his text with Biblical allusions, aimed at encouraging his audience to consider the lessons he teaches and to see this history of the Anglo-Saxon church as one similar to that of the Scriptures. This approach can be applied to the Irish also, by examining his exegetical works for context that can help explain his thinking on them. Of course, Bede's many works were written over many years and so we cannot always apply the

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<sup>3</sup> See Brooks, *Bede and the English*: Pope Gregory I saw the Anglo-Saxons as a unified English people, see pp. 13-5.

<sup>4</sup> Brooks, *Bede and the English*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> As discussed in the introduction. See, for example, DeGregorio, 'Bede's "In Ezram et Neemiam" and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', *Speculum* 79.1 (2004), pp. 1-25; Thacker, 'Bede and the Ordering of Understanding', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, pp. 37-63.

understanding of a far earlier work onto the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but reading his exegesis can help to better comprehend the latter.

The Irish permeate Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, appearing in every book and in fifty of the work's 151 chapters.<sup>6</sup> The very fact that Bede names so many Irish individuals is evidence of his regard, ensuring, as it does, that the Irish contribution to the story of the Anglo-Saxon Church is preserved for posterity. It is reflective of his sources too, but Bede goes to the trouble of naming a very great many Irishmen. There are fifty-one identified men and groups of Irish or part-Irish extraction in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Of the forty-two individuals mentioned, seven are unnamed by Bede. The *PASE* database lists 526 individuals and groups from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and 353 named individuals.<sup>7</sup> This means that 10% of the named persons in this large-scale work are Irishmen (or, in the cases of Aldfrith and Nechtan, part-Irish).<sup>8</sup> Of the forty-two individuals discussed here, only twelve are explicitly connected to Iona. Considering the overwhelming focus placed upon the Columbans in this text, this is a surprising figure, and shows that the Irish of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* are a varied group.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Bede had proportionally so many Irishmen, named and unnamed, available to him for inclusion in his work reveals the deep roots they had put down in Britain. Considering the intention of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* to tell the story of the Anglo-Saxon Church, this is an extraordinary number, and attests to the fundamental involvement of the Irish, through the Iona mission and beyond, in the development of that church.

### *i. The Irish*

Bede does discuss 'the Irish' in general, as well as Irish persons individually. For Bede, they are the *Scotti*, the *gens* that inhabited the island of *Hibernia*. They first appear, as discussed in Chapter Seven, as the third people to inhabit Britain, the Irish of the north. They are among the five peoples of Britain that Bede lists in his first chapter,

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 2: Chapters that mention the Irish and/or Ireland. Of these, the references to the Irish in Books III, IV and V are overwhelmingly positive, while in Book I they are almost equally positive and negative, and in Book II they are negative.

<sup>7</sup> 'Bede HE', Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England <<http://www.pase.ac.uk>> [accessed 25 March 2013].

<sup>8</sup> See Chapters Two and Seven.

<sup>9</sup> The men who are addressed or referenced in letters may skew these figures a little, but if we remove twelve of them from the equation (leaving in Ségéne, as abbot of Iona), we are still left with only twelve men out of thirty that are clearly linked to the Columban monastery of Iona. Some of those I have not counted are likely to have had connections to Iona, such as Rónán or Boisil, but Bede does not associate them with that monastery.

who speak one of the five languages used in Britain.<sup>10</sup> The Latin language is given precedence over the others as, through Christianity, it is common to all. As described previously, Bede offers an etymology for the name of Dál Riata, explaining how the Irish came to inhabit part of the north of Britain.<sup>11</sup> As this explanation shows, Bede sees the Irish as an identifiable people, including those in northern Britain, and although he discusses the origins of the name, Dál Riata, he generally calls them the *Scotti* in Britain.

There was no question in Bede's mind but that the Irish were a *gens*, separate from the other *gentes* of the world.<sup>12</sup> They were seen as a people with their own language, as both Isidore's and Bede's comments attest.<sup>13</sup> Language is an important distinguisher for Bede, who, in his commentary on Genesis, explains that the sons and descendants of Noah were divided into "separate peoples and kindreds of different languages".<sup>14</sup> Language was a signifier of ethnic difference, but not a defining one. Bede understood well that languages could be learned: he himself had learned Latin in addition to his native Old English, and he laments unlearned priests and their inadequate Latin in his letter to Bishop Ecgberht.<sup>15</sup> He also describes the case of Oswald, king of Northumbria, who himself acted as interpreter for Aidan when that bishop first arrived among the Anglo-Saxons. Although he spoke Irish, Oswald was not an Irishman.

After the first chapter, in which Bede describes Britain and Ireland and explains the presence of the Dál Riata in northern Britain, the Irish next appear in the guise of pirates who attack the Britons of the south.<sup>16</sup> Bede writes that the Irish came from the west, while the Picts attacked the Britons from the north, and being without defence, the Britons requested that the Romans return to save them. Bede called both the Irish and the Picts very savage peoples, and, though calling them foreign, he

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<sup>10</sup> Bede was not alone in his differentiating between the different peoples of Britain. Stephen of Ripon emphasised the geographical spread of Wilfrid's bishopric by including in it Britons, Picts, *Scotti* and the Anglo-Saxons: VW 21.

<sup>11</sup> *HE* I.1; see Chapter Seven.

<sup>12</sup> Isidore mentions them in his *Etymologiae* 9.2.103, explaining their names as coming from their vernacular for 'painted', as they were said to be tattooed.

<sup>13</sup> *HE* III.3: *linguam scottorum...didicerat*.

<sup>14</sup> *In Genesim* III.10, p. 143: *...qui hic commemorantur filii Noe uel nepotes filiorum Noe singulas gentes siue cognationes diuersarum facere linguarum; On Genesis*, p. 217.

<sup>15</sup> *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 5, in *Baedae Opera Historica* I, pp. 405-23. Written in 734, this letter sees Bede criticising the church of the day to Bishop Ecgberht of York, and offering remedies for its ills. DeGregorio discusses this letter and its application to the Anglo-Saxon Church in 'Bede's "In Ezram et Neemiam" and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', pp. 6-9.

<sup>16</sup> *HE* I.12. Bede's description of Ireland is discussed in the Introduction.

clarifies that these attackers did not come from outside Britain, but from far away from the Britons, implying that some Irish were already resident on the island of Britain. The Romans obliged, and returned to Britain, where they killed many of the Britons' harassers and drove them out of their territory. Once the Romans had left, the attackers returned again by sea, presumably again comprising the Irish and the Picts. Yet again, the Romans were called upon to rescue their former colony, and travelled to Britain to battle with the marauders. They vowed that this was their last rescue mission, so when they again departed, the Irish and Picts came again and, Bede relates, growing in confidence, they took over all of the north of Britain. This seems to be an oblique reference to the kingdom of Dál Riata in the north of Britain, as the Picts had long been based there. This appears to be the first half of the fifth century, a date that fits with neither the Cairpre Riata origin myth, or that of Fergus mac Eirc, discussed in Chapter Seven, though Sharpe's insightful remark on the important difference between actual settlement and records of it may come into play here.<sup>17</sup> The Britons were eventually scattered by their enemies.

*HE* I.13 relates the sending of Palladius to the Irish Christians. This famous account states that Pope Celestine sent Palladius in 431 as the first bishop to the Irish, drawing on Prosper of Aquitaine's chronicle, and has long been an integral part of the discussion of Christianity and Ireland.<sup>18</sup> Evidence of Palladius's mission to Ireland has not survived to fully challenge the monopoly Patrick holds over the conversion of Ireland in the popular imagination, but Bede's short reference reveals the more complicated history that lies behind often accepted versions.<sup>19</sup> It is important in showing that there were Irish already Christian by 431, proving that the religion had arrived on Irish shores very early. It also reveals that the conversion of Ireland was, like that of Britain, initially a papal exercise, and although Bede does not expand on this, the early Roman connection of the Irish Christians may have caught his attention. Certainly, he thought to include it in his summary at the very end of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sharpe, 'The Thriving of Dalriada', p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> *HE* I.13; Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronica Minora* 1307, ed. T. Mommsen, *MGH AA* 9 (1892). His *Liber Contra Collatorem* §21, *PL* 51, col. 271, reiterates this statement, crediting Pope Celestine with converting the barbarian island of Ireland. See T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: Mission and Primatial Authority', in *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493-1993*, pp. 1-12.

<sup>19</sup> See Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Who Was Palladius, "First Bishop of the Irish"?', *Peritia* 14 (2000), pp. 205-37.

<sup>20</sup> *HE* V.24: *Anno CCCCXXX, Palladius ad Scottos in Christum credentes a Caelestino papa primus mittitur episcopus*. He also includes it in his *Chronica Maiora*, s.a. 4403.

*HE* I.13 again reveals that the Britons sent to the Romans for help, as they were being assailed by *barbari*, presumably again the Irish and the Picts. Although Bede does not explicitly name the Irish as the barbarians in question here, this chapter reveals two notable facets of the Irish: they are Christians, the role in which they will have the greatest impact in the third book; and they are attackers of the Britons, a role that will cease by the end of the first book. *HE* I.14 sees the Britons repel their aggressors, and the shameless Irish bandits are said to have returned home for a time.<sup>21</sup> The *gentes aquilonales* attacked again, and in response to this the Britons invited the Saxons to come to their aid, setting off the chain of events that led to the *gens Anglorum* and the Anglo-Saxon Church. Bede's account of the battle at Degrastan between Áedán mac Gabráin and Æthelfrith is one of his few references to political conflict between the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, or, more specifically, the Irish in Britain.<sup>22</sup> Generally speaking, once the battle of Degrastan is over, Bede presents the Irish as a *gens innoxia*, whose interactions with the Anglo-Saxons are characterised by mission rather than conflict.

It would be difficult not to compare the Irish with the Britons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Both were Christian before the Anglo-Saxons, but while the Britons refused to convert the interlopers, the Irish were very involved in their conversion. This is the fundamental difference stressed by Bede, who evidently does not see the Anglo-Saxons' invasion as an excuse for the Britons neglecting their salvation. The Britons, for refusing to evangelise the Anglo-Saxons, are called a *gens perfida*.<sup>23</sup> In rebuking the Britons for their failure, Bede asserts that God had other plans for "his people whom he foreknew", presenting the Anglo-Saxons as a chosen people, and appointed and sent "more worthy preachers" to them.<sup>24</sup> This chapter is followed by one introducing the Roman mission to the Anglo-Saxons, making the Romans the worthy preachers, and impressing upon the reader the Anglo-Saxons' place in providential history. While Bede's words clearly point to Gregory's mission, in the context of the work the Irish

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<sup>21</sup> *HE* I.14: *inpudentes grassatores Hiberni*.

<sup>22</sup> *HE* I.34. The Irish of Brega were attacked by the Northumbrians later, but this is presented as a serious error on the part of King Ecgrith: *HE* IV.26. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has a reference to King Ceolwulf of Wessex fighting the Angles or the Britons or the Scots or the Picts in 597. J.N.L. Myres sees the mention of the Scots and the Picts as a possible formal fiction to augment the reputation of a warrior king, *The English Settlements* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 171-2, but it is plausible that the kingdom of Wessex, with its long coastline, was the victim of attack by Irish pirates, just as Bede had described earlier in British history.

<sup>23</sup> *HE* II.2.

<sup>24</sup> *HE* I.22: *Sed non tamen diuina pietas plebem suam, quam praesciuit, deseruit, quin multo digniores genti memoratae praecones ueritatis, per quos crederet, destinauit.*

can be included among those whom God sent to bring the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, thus making the Irish a part of God's divine plan also.

Bede's strong condemnation of Ecgrith's attack on the Irish at Brega in 684 is an unambiguous demonstration of his positive attitude toward the Irish.<sup>25</sup> Bede writes that Ecgrith sent an army to attack the Irish, a *gens innoxia* that had always been very friendly to the Anglo-Saxons. Of course, Bede himself had recorded evidence that this was not in fact always the case, as Æthelfrith's battle with Áedán mac Gabráin shows. However, Bede wrote in *HE* I.34 that the Irish were forevermore at peace with the Anglo-Saxons, and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* bears this out. The Irish are never shown to be in political conflict with the Anglo-Saxons after this exchange, and Ecgrith recognised this, warning Ecgrith not to send an offensive against the *Scotti* who had never harmed him. Ecgrith's refusal to listen and persistence with his plan was punished by God, according to Bede, through his defeat against the Picts the following year.<sup>26</sup> Bede, though usually writing about individual Irishmen or small discrete groups, such as the Irish clergy of Lindisfarne, is happy to speak of the Irish as a whole, seeing them as an identifiable *gens*. The work of individual missionaries is of more pertinence to him as it influenced the development of the church among the Anglo-Saxons, but his criticism of Ecgrith's raid on the harmless, innocent Irish is a synecdoche for his perception of the Irish generally.

For Bede, the most important function of the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is missionary. The Irish mission to Northumbria from Iona is embodied by Aidan, one of the most important figures in Bede's text, and the majority of the Irish he mentions have an element of mission about them. Book II of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* ends with a chapter in which the Britons are characterised as persisting in refusing to respect the faith of Anglo-Saxons and treating them as though they were pagans.<sup>27</sup> Bede writes that this attitude continues to the present day, and it provides a distinct contrast with the attitude of the Irish as examined in the following book. Book III begins with an explanation of the fate of Æthelfrith's children after his defeat by Edwin, stating that they were exiled and instructed in the Christian faith by the Irish.<sup>28</sup> This sets the scene

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Hunter Blair sees it as one of the "most fervent condemnations" in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and as proof against those who see Bede as "prejudicial against all Celts", 'The Historical Writings of Bede', *Settimane di Studio della Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 17 (1969), pp. 212-3; repr. in *Anglo-Saxon Northumbria*, X.

<sup>26</sup> *HE* IV.26.

<sup>27</sup> *HE* II.20.

<sup>28</sup> *HE* III.1.

for much of the central book of Bede's text, with the Irish heavily involved in the evangelisation of Northumbria. Oswald was among these converted sons, and he is one of the most celebrated Christian Anglo-Saxons in the entire text. Oswald, whose faith was overseen by Irish teachers, is presented as an ideal Christian king.<sup>29</sup> Bede does not deal with the fact that this model king followed the Insular, and so unorthodox, Easter throughout his life, simply praising him for his piety.

The mission of the Columbans did not stop at Northumbria. *HE* III.3 asserts that, after Aidan's arrival from the Columban monastery of Iona, many came from Ireland to Britain, preaching Christianity with great devotion, and Bede writes that the Irish taught advanced studies and the observance of the discipline of monastic life.<sup>30</sup> Fínán of Lindisfarne is described as baptising Peada, king of the Middle Angles, and Sigeberht, king of the East Saxons.<sup>31</sup> Men from Iona, Diuma and Cellach, became bishops of the Mercians, the Middle Angles and Lindsey.<sup>32</sup> The Irish in this work are not just made up of men from Iona, and, apart from that mission, Bede details the presence of Irishmen up and down the island of Britain. Fursa and his followers were renowned in East Anglia, Dícuill and his community at Bosham had an outpost in Sussex, and Maeldub left a mark, ill-defined though it is, in Wessex.<sup>33</sup> Even in Northumbria itself, men without explicit Iona connections appear, as in the case of Adomnán of Coldingham. While Bede's focus, and indeed his area of expertise, was undoubtedly the kingdom of Northumbria, he is meticulous in painting a picture of the contribution of the Irish, not just of the Columbans, that permeates Anglo-Saxon England in the seventh century.

The Irish, particularly Aidan, were of vital importance in training the generation of Anglo-Saxon religious who succeeded them as the personnel of the church in Anglo-Saxon England. Aidan's influence on Hild, abbess of Whitby, is made clear by Bede. She supported the 84-year Easter tables at the Synod of Whitby, and while abbess at Hartlepool she instituted a rule that emulated the teachings of many learned men, including Aidan. She established the same discipline at Whitby, characterised by rejection of material goods, where she was often visited by important men seeking to benefit from her prudence, just as Lindisfarne and Colmán were

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<sup>29</sup> See Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy'', pp. 33-83.

<sup>30</sup> *HE* III.27.

<sup>31</sup> *HE* III.21, 22.

<sup>32</sup> *HE* III.21, 24.

<sup>33</sup> *HE* III.19, IV.13, V.18.

respectively characterised in *HE* III.26.<sup>34</sup> Bede asserts that Hild's monastery (and therefore rule) produced five bishops, renowned for their holiness. While Whitby certainly adopted orthodox Easter practices, there is no indication from Bede that Hild felt any need to alter the monastic rule followed by her community, and so these holy bishops too were products of Aidan's influence.<sup>35</sup> Her soul's ascension into heaven is reminiscent of that of Aidan in the Prose *Vita Cuthberti*.<sup>36</sup>

## ii. Teachers and Preachers

Alan Thacker has discussed the importance of *doctores* (teachers) and *praedicatores* (preachers) for Bede, and our author associates these terms with the Irish on several occasions: Columba is the first *doctor* to the Picts, Lindisfarne-trained Cedd is sent as a *doctor* to the East Saxons, and the Irish of Lindisfarne are called *doctores*. Even Aidan's predecessor in Northumbria is called a *praedicator*, despite the failure of his mission, while Cuthbert follows in Boisil's footsteps as a *praedicator*. Thacker examines their presence in Bede's exegesis, concluding that they were "an intellectual and moral elite".<sup>37</sup> Aidan is a model of Christian teaching in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, following the Pauline strategy of beginning with simple things and then moving on to more advanced lessons in the faith. In his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Bede uses Paul's speech to the Athenians to examine this method, praising the series of steps through which he led his pagan audience. As Bede comments, "For what difference does it make in what order anyone believes? Perfected things are not sought at the start, but from beginnings one comes to the things which are perfect".<sup>38</sup> A little later in the same commentary, he commends Paul again, saying that "Surely it is the mark of great knowledge to give fellow servants their fare at the proper time, and to take into account the particular individuals who are one's listeners".<sup>39</sup> A similar theme

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<sup>34</sup> *HE* III.25, IV.23. Hild's predecessor at Hartlepool had been consecrated by Aidan.

<sup>35</sup> Gunn wonders whether Whitby might not have been more Romanised than we think prior to the Synod of Whitby, as she sees a contrast between "Aidan-associated Hartlepool" and Whitby: *Bede's Historiae*, p. 39. However, Bede clearly states that Hild instituted the same rule at Whitby as she had at Hartlepool, and her support of the Columbans at the Synod of Whitby is the strongest evidence against this hypothesis.

<sup>36</sup> *PVC* 4; *HE* IV.23. Both descriptions are filled with light: *fusam lucem* and *fusum lumen*.

<sup>37</sup> *HE* III.4, 5, 22, 26, IV.27. Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', pp. 130-1. See also Thacker, 'Bede and the Ordering of Understanding', pp. 43-6.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 17; Bede, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum* XVII.24: *Quid enim interest quo quisque credit ordine? Non in principiis perfecta quaeruntur, sed de initiis ad ea quae perfecta sunt pervenitur; Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 143.

<sup>39</sup> *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum* XVII.28: *Magnae quippe scientiae est, dare in tempore cibaria conservis, et audientium considerare personas; Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 145.

is found in his *De Tabernaculo*, in which he asserts that the same message cannot be used for everyone.<sup>40</sup> He also declares that “the holy preachers who are higher in merit ought to be that much more humble in spirit”.<sup>41</sup> While these traits are not explicitly exhibited by all of the Irish mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, they are found in Aidan, the founder of Lindisfarne and the Irishman *par excellence* of the work.

Many of the Irish are teachers through the example they set.<sup>42</sup> Bede draws attention to this in the case of Aidan, who practised what he preached, and calls it the best recommendation of his teaching. In his *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, Bede highlights this trait in Jesus himself, seeing it as the pattern of a good teacher.<sup>43</sup> His *De Tabernaculo* III.6 contends that “the priest’s work is never inconsistent with the sound of the word that he speaks, and the sound of his tongue never disagrees with the rectitude of his work, even when he is plagued by adversities”.<sup>44</sup> Although Bede does not say it in so many words, the point of the chapter that follows his account of the Synod of Whitby is that the Irish of Lindisfarne were characterised by leading by example. This is applied to Colmán and *locus ille*, but must be understood as a general comment on the Columbans at Lindisfarne: their purpose was to serve God and the soul, and not the world and the flesh.<sup>45</sup> This attribute of teaching through example and words is an essential part of the depiction of the Irish missionaries in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and not just at Lindisfarne. Columba is described as converting the Picts through preaching and example. Fursa also, Bede writes, was famed for his words and actions, and the Irish at Bosham are said to have preached and set an example with their way of life.<sup>46</sup> The Irish manage to combine the contemplative life with the active one, just as Cuthbert did.<sup>47</sup> Many of the Irish are depicted actively engaging in conversion and example-setting, such as Aidan and Fínán, but the contemplative aspect is not

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<sup>40</sup> *De Tabernaculo* I.7, ll. 832-3, p. 26; *On the Tabernacle*, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> *De Tabernaculo* II.3, ll. 369-71: ...*quia nimirum sancti praedicatorum quo altiores merito eo humiliores esse debent animo iuxta uiri sapientis*; *On the Tabernacle*, p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> As Kendall states, Christ is the original *exemplum*, which Christians imitate: ‘Imitation and the Venerable Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*’, pp. 167-8. This is an important theme in both the *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* and Bede’s commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, as DeGregorio discusses: ‘Bede’s “In Ezram et Neemiam” and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church’, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum* I.1: *Primo facere, postea docere. Quia Jesus bonum doctorem instituens, nulla nisi quae fecit docuit*; *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> *De Tabernaculo* III.6, ll. 716-9, p. 111: ...*cum neque opus sacerdotis umquam a sonitu uerbi quod loquitur discrepat neque a rectitudine operis territum adversis linguae sonitus dissentit*; *On the Tabernacle*, p. 128.

<sup>45</sup> *HE* III.26: *Tota enim fuit tunc sollicitudo doctoribus illis Deo seruiendi, non saeculo; tota cura cordis excolendi, non uentris*.

<sup>46</sup> *HE* III.4, 19, IV.13. In the case of the latter, Bede says their efforts were unsuccessful.

<sup>47</sup> See Stancliffe, ‘Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary’, pp. 22-44.

neglected, as again Aidan along with figures such as Adomnán of Coldingham show.<sup>48</sup> This quality was not limited to the Irish, and is used to acknowledge holiness throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but it is certainly strongly associated with Irish missionaries and teachers.

Aidan's emphasis on *lectio diuina* is very important in his role as a teacher, and his insistence that those who accompanied him, whether in monastic orders or laymen, devoted time daily to its study is immensely positive in Bede's eyes.<sup>49</sup> Influenced by Aidan, Hild stressed the study of Scripture at Whitby.<sup>50</sup> Although Bede does not describe either Fínán or Colmán as teachers, the fact that many Anglo-Saxons travelled to Ireland during their respective tenures may suggest that they actively encouraged the pursuit of advanced studies. Bede praises them for offering a warm welcome, and freely giving sustenance, books and teaching to those who sought them.<sup>51</sup> Bede passes no ill-judgement on the education these Anglo-Saxons received in Ireland, and indeed refers to Æthelwine as being *bene instructus* on his return home from that island.<sup>52</sup> Bede mentions the twelve Anglo-Saxon boys who became his disciples, Eata and Chad among them, and this sounds as though Aidan taught them directly.<sup>53</sup> As DeGregorio observes, *lectio diuina* is something Bede took very seriously, and he displays his personal engagement with it through his writings, both historical and exegetical; Bede had committed large parts of Scripture to memory, and they came easily and naturally to him throughout his writing.<sup>54</sup> Bede also refers to Agilbert travelling to Ireland to study the Scriptures, and while this was to the south of Ireland, it attests to the learning of the Irish.<sup>55</sup> No mention is made of Aidan or any of the Lindisfarne bishops actually writing anything, but we do have the example of

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<sup>48</sup> Both were essential to Bede: Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', pp.132, 144. See pp. 136-42 for a discussion of Cuthbert as one who embodied the ideals of both the active and the contemplative life.

<sup>49</sup> *HE* III.5. He also recommended the daily learning of the psalms.

<sup>50</sup> *HE* IV.23. Hild insisted upon this to ensure there would be persons suitable for holy orders, a consideration that arises in Bede's *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 3.

<sup>51</sup> *HE* III.27: *Quos omnes Scotti libentissime suscipientes, uictum eis cotidianum sine pretio, libros quoque ad legendum et magisterium gratuitum praeberere curabant.*

<sup>52</sup> *HE* III.27.

<sup>53</sup> *HE* III.28.

<sup>54</sup> He recommends it to Bishop Ecgbert, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 3: *diuinis autem eloquiis ac meditationibus scripturarum linguam simul et mentem occupes*; DeGregorio, 'Introduction', p. xxiii, n.1.

<sup>55</sup> *HE* III.7. Agilbert lost his bishopric among the West Saxons due to King Cenwealh's apparent frustration with his *loquella barbara*. Evidently 'barbarism' is always relative! Bede's own debt to Irish learning is, by now, well attested: Charles W. Jones, *Beda Opera de Temporibus*, pp. 111-3; Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish Provenance of Bede's Computus', pp. 229-47; Ó Cróinín, 'Bede's Irish Computus', in *Early Irish history and chronology*, pp. 201-24; Picard, 'Bede and Irish Scholarship: Scientific Treatises and Grammars', pp. 139-47. Cf. Thacker, 'Bede and the Irish', p. 50.

Adomnán, whose *De Locis Sanctis* is recommended and excerpted in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>56</sup> Although Bede offers no details on Maeldub, Aldhelm's renown as a scholar could be taken as evidence of his teacher's abilities, if their relationship were known. Bede's *In Ezram et Neemiam* stresses the importance of the work of teachers in spreading the faith and in defeating heresy.<sup>57</sup>

Boisil is another example of an Irish teacher. Although his role is not fully explored in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede's prose *Vita Cuthberti* offers far more detail. In that work, Bede describes how Cuthbert was Boisil's student, and we see in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that the monk of Rath Melsigi who dreamed of Boisil had also had him as a tutor.<sup>58</sup> It is as a teacher that Boisil is remembered in the Old English poem known as *Carmen de Situ Dunelmi*. While this poem seems to have drawn on Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and so this impression reflects Bede's depiction, it is still important that Boisil is explicitly defined as a teacher.<sup>59</sup>

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* has, at its heart, the intention of presenting models, good and bad, to the reader. In his preface, Bede writes that history can offer good examples, which encourage the reader to do good, as well as bad examples which can further motivate the reader to good deeds.<sup>60</sup> Bede tends to emphasise good examples over bad, and the Irish follow this trend in his work. The Irish depicted are almost all good Christian examples, and models of the correct life Bede wishes for his readers. In *HE* III.4, when discussing Columba, Bede asserts that his *successores* were distinguished for their moderation, their love of God, and their observance of regular life. He adds, at the end of the chapter, that they were worthy to be educated in the correct calculation of Easter because they had upheld the grace of charity.<sup>61</sup> By teaching through both words and their example, the Irish present excellent Christian models to be emulated by Bede's audience. Humility, for example, is an important

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<sup>56</sup> *HE* V.15-17.

<sup>57</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* I.350; DeGregorio, 'Introduction', p. xxx.

<sup>58</sup> *HE* V.9.

<sup>59</sup> Though it does incorrectly call him abbot. *Carmen de Situ Dunelmi* probably dates to the very early twelfth century, and can be found in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: a collective edition* VI (New York, 1942), p. 27. For its date, see Calvin B. Kendall, 'Let Us Now Praise a Famous City: Wordplay in the OE "Durham" and the Cult of St. Cuthbert', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 87.4 (1988), p. 507, n.2.

<sup>60</sup> *HE* Preface: *Siue enim historia de bonis bona refera, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus instigatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuitando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda ea, quae bona ac Deo digna esse cognouerit, accenditur.*

<sup>61</sup> *HE* III.4. Bede quotes Paul's letter to the Philippians 3.15, suggesting that the persuasion of the Columbans is part of God's plan. See also Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, pp. 27-8.

quality for Christians, and Aidan possessed it. Bede calls it the guardian of virtues in *In Ezram et Neemiam*.<sup>62</sup> Gunn regards Bede's portrait of Aidan as one made up of "safe images, attainable to his readers, qualities worth imitating", and sees this as suggestive of Bede using the bishop as a conventional model of behaviour, once his serious errors have been alluded to.<sup>63</sup> If this were, in fact, the case, Aidan's exemplary attributes would still make of him an important individual in Bede's gallery, but it is a one-dimensional view. The historicity of the individuals Bede describes, particularly in the case of one as foundational and, it seems, well-known as Aidan, added to his significance as a good example. The Irish mission to Northumbria, and the Irish missionaries in other parts of Britain, were not very chronologically distant from Bede and his immediate audience. That they were not separated by vast periods of time made their examples all the more compelling.

The Irish also form a contrast to the ills Bede sees in the Anglo-Saxon church of his own time. In Book I of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede praises the Roman mission, headed by Augustine, for imitating the apostles and the primitive church.<sup>64</sup> The manner in which Bede describes these laudable practices is reminiscent of the way in which Lindisfarne and its Irish bishops are portrayed in the third book.<sup>65</sup> In *De Tabernaculo*, Bede laments the fact that in his own time some priests and teachers "prefer the fire of cupidity to the fire of heavenly love".<sup>66</sup> Bede remarks that priests should never be sluggish or slothful, but must always have ardent zeal for God's calling.<sup>67</sup> Aidan is explicitly said to be a contrast to slothfulness of Bede's own time.<sup>68</sup> Adomnán of Coldingham is another virtuous Irish example, presented against a backdrop of Anglo-Saxon excess and impiety. While he was devoted to God, and spent his nights in prayer and vigils, other members of the community at Coldingham, identified by Bede as Anglo-Saxons, indulged in feasting and other sins.<sup>69</sup> DeGregorio

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<sup>62</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* III. 375.

<sup>63</sup> Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>64</sup> *HE* I.26.

<sup>65</sup> *HE* III.26, IV.27. Bede invokes the primitive church explicitly when describing the way of life at Whitby under Hild's guidance, which echoes the situation at Lindisfarne under the Irish bishops, and was itself influenced by Aidan, *HE* IV.23.

<sup>66</sup> *De Tabernaculo* III.2, ll. 140-1, p. 96: *...dum ignem cupiditatis igni supernae dilectionis anteponunt...; On the Tabernacle*, p. 110.

<sup>67</sup> *De Tabernaculo* III.5, ll. 415-8, p. 103: *necesse est per omnia cor sacerdotale nequaquam segne et desidiosum manere sed ardente semper studio extendi ad comprehendendum brauium supernae uocationis Dei in Christo Iesu: On the Tabernacle*, p. 119.

<sup>68</sup> *HE* III.5: *In tantem autem uita illius a nostri temporis segnitia distabat.*

<sup>69</sup> *HE* IV.25

sees many connections between Bede's reformist commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah and his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>70</sup>

The issue of Easter is commonly brought up as a negative aspect of Bede's depiction of the Irish.<sup>71</sup> It applies mainly to the Columbans and the Irish of the north, as those of the south had accepted the Roman Easter in the 630s, but as so many of the Irish he mentions are connected to Iona, this issue is relevant to his general depiction of the *Scotti*. Bede is emphatic on the question of heresy however, and the Irish were not heretics in his book. He explicitly demonstrates that the Columbans were not Quartodecimans, and never had been, a charge thrown at them in the *Vita Wilfridi*.<sup>72</sup> Bede sees the Samaritans of *In Ezram et Neemiam* as figures for heretics and bad catholics, who claimed to be helping the Christians while actually impeding them.<sup>73</sup> The Irish cannot be placed in this category, as, despite Bede's wariness over their celebration of Easter, their contribution toward the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons is never questioned. In the same commentary, Bede writes that heretics claim to believe as the true believers do, so that they might be allowed to teach, and then they sow *zizania* (weeds) among the faithful.<sup>74</sup> This word, *zizania*, is the same term used by Pope Vitalian in his letter to King Oswiu, and recalls the way in which Stephen of Ripon depicted the Irish in the *Vita Wilfridi* as *uirulenta germina* (poisonous weeds); but Bede's depiction of the Irish stands against such accusations.<sup>75</sup> In his commentary on the biblical Book of Samuel, Bede numbers heretics and bad catholics among the *perfidii*, along with faithless Jews and false brethren. Alan Thacker has argued for *perfidia* as a defining characteristic of the Britons in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a people with whom the Irish are positively contrasted, and he draws attention to Bede's comment on 1 Samuel 30, in which he states that heretics are far apart from catholic

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<sup>70</sup> DeGregorio, 'Introduction', p. xxx. For detailed discussion, see Scott DeGregorio, 'Nostrorum Socordiam Temporum': The Reforming Impulse of Bede's Later Exegesis', *Early Medieval Europe* 11.2 (2002), pp. 107-22, in which DeGregorio calls the commentary "an Ecgberht letter in miniature", p. 114; DeGregorio, 'Bede's "In Ezram et Neemiam" and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', pp. 1-25.

<sup>71</sup> Gunn, *Bede's Historiae*, pp. 73-4; Pepperdene, 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*: A New Perspective', p. 254.

<sup>72</sup> *HE* III.17; *VW* 12, 14.

<sup>73</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* I.1575; *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 67. DeGregorio notes that Augustine had defined the difference between heretics and bad catholics, deeming the former to believe wrong things, and the latter to believe the right things but not living accordingly: *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 67, n. 4, referencing Augustine's *Quaestiones XVII in evangelium Matthaeum* XI.1.

<sup>74</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* I.1575; *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 68.

<sup>75</sup> *VW* 47: *Scotticae uirulenta plationis germina eradicarem*. One is reminded of Bede's claim that things from Ireland could be used to cure poisonings: *HE* I.1.

perfection, in both their beliefs and in their love for their neighbours.<sup>76</sup> The latter is not a charge that can be thrown at the *Scotti* of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, who are defined for Bede by their *caritas* in teaching the inhabitants of their neighbouring island.<sup>77</sup> Higham contends that Bede's *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum* condemns the Jews who refused to be converted by the apostles, and that the community on Iona are compared to these Jews in *HE* V.22, a harsh reading of Bede's words and one difficult to reconcile with his positive presentation of the Irish.<sup>78</sup> O'Reilly argues, like Thacker, that the Britons are the faithless Jews, those who refused to believe in Christ, while the Columbans are the faithful Jews who accepted him as Messiah but had at one point a hard time letting go of their previous traditions.<sup>79</sup> This is alluded to in his commentary on Tobit, where Bede writes that the Jews will eventually be converted by the gentiles, and through this the gentiles will repay their spiritual debt to the Jews. Scully convincingly argues for this being prefigured by the Irish being repaid *their* debt by the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>80</sup> Central to Bede's handling of the Irish errors over Easter is his declaration that, while they may have differed from the rest of the Church in their calculations, they were the same in the essentials, believing in and celebrating the passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven of Christ.<sup>81</sup> Bede applies this to Aidan, but it can be extrapolated to apply to all of the Columbans: their doctrine was sound, even if their calculations were not.

### *iii. Unity of the Church*

The question of unity despite diversity is very pertinent in the issue of Easter.<sup>82</sup> The Columbans were content to celebrate Easter according to their own customs alongside those who followed the Roman traditions – or at least that is the impression given by Bede. One might contrast this with Columbanus's letter to Pope

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<sup>76</sup> *In Samuhelis* IV.30, p. 266, ll. 2297-300: *Et nota non solum in credendo Deum sed et in diligendo proximos multum hereticos a catholica multum a christiana perfectione distare gentiles*. Thacker discusses this point, and the *perfidia* of the Britons, in 'Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel', pp. 129-47, especially p. 143.

<sup>77</sup> *HE* III.4.

<sup>78</sup> Higham, (*Re-*) *Reading Bede*, p. 194.

<sup>79</sup> O'Reilly, 'Introduction', p. xxxvi.

<sup>80</sup> *In Tobiam* 11.16-18, ll. 80-2: *Scientia quoque scripturarum quas aliquando gentibus commodabant tunc eidem redditur*, CCSL 119B, ed. D. Hurst (Turnhout, 1983); *On Tobit*, p. 60; Scully, 'Introduction', pp. 36-37. Unfortunately, we do not know when *In Tobiam* was written.

<sup>81</sup> *HE* III.17.

<sup>82</sup> For an excellent discussion of this theme, see Paul Meyvaert, 'Diversity Within Unity, a Gregorian Theme', *The Heythrop Journal* 4 (1963), pp. 141-62, repr. in *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others*, VI.

Gregory, in which he unforgivingly warns of the problems inherent in the Easter tables being used by Rome in the early seventh century.<sup>83</sup> The questions Augustine of Canterbury asked of Pope Gregory I include one on diversity of church practice. Augustine asks why, when the Christian faith is a catholic one, different practices can be found in different churches in the one faith. In response, Gregory instructed him that practices are not to be loved for the sake of where they come from, but for their inherent goodness, and that if he found something in another church preferable to the practices of Rome, he should make use of it.<sup>84</sup> This tolerance for diversity within unity did not stretch as far as the calculation of Easter, the central festival of the Christian religion. Augustine's Question 8, dealing with the practicalities of pollution, led Gregory to reply that, while the Old Testament focussed on outward signs, the New Testament, and so the new dispensation brought by Christ, was more concerned with inward thoughts than appearances.<sup>85</sup> Bede is conscientious in confirming that, despite his difference in the calculation of Easter, Aidan had the same intentions as the orthodox, namely to celebrate the redemption of humanity through Christ.<sup>86</sup>

In Ceolfrith's letter to the Pictish king, Nechtan, he described a conversation with Adomnán, abbot of Iona, in which Ceolfrith admitted that wearing the Insular tonsure, which resembled that of Simon Magus rather than the crown of thorns popularised by Peter, did not render a Christian a heretic.<sup>87</sup> Regardless of the Simoniac tonsure worn by the Columbans, the Irish, as depicted in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, are emphatically not guilty of such purposes, as Bede always describes their intentions as pure. While heretics and bad catholics are outcasts from the Church, the Irish are very much an important, even foundational, part of it in Bede's own kingdom.<sup>88</sup> Bede is very clear that heresy taints all, and even when mixed with good and Christian things, remains heretical, yet he celebrates the contribution of the *Scotti* to the church of his

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<sup>83</sup> *Epistola* I; Rome was using the Victorian tables at this time, Easter tables Columbanus considered laughable.

<sup>84</sup> *HE* I.27, Question 2: *Non enim pro locis res, sed pro bonis rebus loca amanda sunt.*

<sup>85</sup> *HE* I.27, Question 8: *Sicut enim in testamento ueteri exteriora opera obseruantur, ita in testamento nouo non tam, quod exterius agitur, quam id, quod interius cogitatur, sollicita intentione adtenditur...*

<sup>86</sup> *HE* III.17.

<sup>87</sup> See Edward James, 'Bede and the Tonsure Question', *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 85-98; Daniel McCarthy, 'On the Shape of the Insular Tonsure', *Celtica* 24 (2003), pp. 140-67. Bede saw Simon Magus as an example of those who enter the church, not through true faith, but so that they might disrupt it from within: *In Ezram et Neemiam* I.1650; *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 69. This is not reflected by Bede's presentation of the Irish.

<sup>88</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* I.1625; *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 69.

kingdom and his *gens*, revealing that they were not thus tainted.<sup>89</sup> However, as Ceolfrith argued, the Petrine tonsure was to be preferred, and he advised Adomnán that he had better show outwardly that he followed Peter's example inwardly.<sup>90</sup> While Ceolfrith acknowledged the holiness of many of those who bore an incorrect tonsure, he believed that it was vastly preferable to reflect inner behaviour in outward appearance, while Adomnán wore the Insular tonsure in loyalty to his traditions, and did not perceive a conflict with his faith. For the Columbans, faith and belief were not undermined by outward appearance, as written by Gregory, while Ceolfrith wished both to be in accord. Adomnán is still depicted as a good, wise, and humble man, and while Bede seems to state that a change of tonsure would have been preferable, he does not condemn the Columbans for it.<sup>91</sup> It is interesting that Ceolfrith's letter ascribes to Adomnán a wish to change the tonsure, but claims his authority did not stretch to that. The Irish annals assert that it was only in 718 that the community of Iona changed their tonsure, over a decade after Adomnán had died.<sup>92</sup>

Diversity in practice had been acceptable at one point, as Gregory's words in Question 2 of his responses show, but there came a time when it was no longer tolerated. Wilfrid makes this point at the Synod of Whitby, and it can be applied to the contrast between Aidan's depiction, and Bede's clear portrayal of the Columbans as being in the wrong by 664. O'Reilly sees the difference as one of undermining unity, with Bede's description as one of such disharmony that the Columbans were refusing to break bread at Easter with the rest of the Church, placing themselves in a position similar to the Britons, who refused to see the Anglo-Saxons as brethren in Christ.<sup>93</sup> Ceolfrith's interest in outward manifestation of inward thoughts and beliefs is therefore very pertinent to the question of Columban conversion, and helps us to understand the crucial significance of the Iona community's eventual conforming to orthodox practices: the Church was finally united in all matters.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* II.300; *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 90.

<sup>90</sup> *HE* V.21.

<sup>91</sup> At the Synod of Whitby, the tonsure was among the items discussed, but Bede's focus is upon the calculation of Easter, *HE* III.25.

<sup>92</sup> *AT* 718.

<sup>93</sup> O'Reilly, 'Introduction', pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

<sup>94</sup> Or, at least, this is the impression given by Bede, as the Anglo-Saxons, the Irish, and the Picts were finally all in unity with Rome.

#### *iv. The Excuse of Ignorance*

Another intriguing question is that of the excuse of ignorance. Early on, when describing Columba, Bede offers this excuse for the Irish, writing that they were so far away that they did not receive the synodal decrees on the calculation of Easter.<sup>95</sup> One of the responses of Pope Gregory I to Augustine declares that those Anglo-Saxons who had married in error, violating the rules about consanguinity, should not be punished if it was done in ignorance, before being baptised and admitted to the Christian faith. However, once aware of the error, they would not be suffered to carry it out and would be excluded from the Christian community.<sup>96</sup> Although Bede does not refer to this passage in his discussions of the Easter controversy, it must have appeared relevant to him. The Irish, while they were ignorant of the better way, could be excused their error over Easter, but once the truth was made known to them, refusal to acquiesce merited exclusion from the Church. While this might have been the Bede's expected reaction, he actually remains positive about the Irish, even after it is clear they were fully informed. Even considering the precedent offered by Pope Gregory, the contribution of the Irish to the Anglo-Saxon Church saved them from such condemnation. The Columban *Scotti*, though it was appropriate that they left Northumbria in 664 due to their obstinacy over the Easter question, remained a foundational element in the story of the Anglo-Saxon Church, and were yet deserving of aid to bring them into the fold of orthodoxy.

#### *v. Wilfrid*

It is interesting that Wilfrid first entered religious life at Lindisfarne, where he followed the ethos of that monastery.<sup>97</sup> He arrived there during Aidan's episcopacy, and it seems to have been early in Fínán's tenure that he decided to leave. He realised that the customs practised there, while virtuous, were not perfect, and he resolved to travel to Rome to find a better way.<sup>98</sup> Wilfrid's later exchange with Colmán at the Synod of Whitby contains no hint that Wilfrid had once lived among the Columbans at

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<sup>95</sup> *HE* III.4. Bede does not limit this comment to Columba, however, and offers it in the context of his successors.

<sup>96</sup> *HE* I.27, Question 5.

<sup>97</sup> *HE* V.19, *VW* 2.

<sup>98</sup> One wonders whether Aidan's death in 651 influenced Wilfrid's decision to leave Lindisfarne. It certainly influenced Cuthbert's choice of monastery, leading him to choose Melrose over Lindisfarne: *PVC* 6.

Lindisfarne, as he suggests that he is not absolutely sure as to the sanctity of their forefathers and founder, but this ties in with Wilfrid's emphatic embrace of Rome over Lindisfarne. The community of Lindisfarne encouraged him in his initial decision to travel to Rome to seek greater perfection, demonstrating their open attitudes to diversity. Despite the binary view that has at times been applied to this situation, with Columban Irish ranged against the Roman orthodox, this was certainly not the perception of the Columbans. Thomas Charles-Edwards's comment on the *Romanitas* of Wilfrid's gospel-book as 'opposition' to the Columbans was not the attitude of the latter.<sup>99</sup> The Irish had long acknowledged Rome's primacy, as Columbanus's letters reveal.<sup>100</sup> Stephen's account of Wilfrid's departure from Lindisfarne avoids any mention of Wilfrid's dissatisfaction with life at Lindisfarne, while Bede's includes his recognition that the monastery was less than perfect.<sup>101</sup> Despite this lack at Lindisfarne, Bede describes Wilfrid as beloved and respected by the community there, and there seems to have been no conflict at the time. Wilfrid's return to Northumbria saw a different attitude emerge. Ripon, which had been given to Eata of Melrose and inhabited by monks who followed Irish doctrine, including Cuthbert, was transferred to Wilfrid, who had gained the trust of Alhfrith, son of Oswiu.<sup>102</sup> Bede writes that the community at Ripon preferred to give up the monastery and return to Melrose than change their Easter practices and "other canonical practices", perhaps the tonsure. Bede's words are harsher than usual here, stating that Alhfrith, having exposed and banished the sect of the Irish, sent Wilfrid to be consecrated bishop in Gaul.<sup>103</sup> The evident clash between the Columbans and Wilfrid was not reflected in Wilfrid's relations with all of the Irish, as Stancliffe has discussed, the issue being Easter practices, not xenophobia.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Even Fínán's stringent opposition to Rónán's arguments was focussed on maintaining Columban traditions, not rejecting Roman ones: *HE* III.25.

<sup>100</sup> See Bracken, 'Authority and duty', pp. 168-213; Columbanus, *Epistolae*, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*.

<sup>101</sup> Compare *HE* V.19 and *VW* 3. For Bede, Wilfrid's quest for a 'better way' at Rome is an important catalyst in the history he records. In the case of Stephen's account, it is tempting to believe that Wilfrid's departure was amicable and was not a criticism of the community of Lindisfarne, but one cannot rely on such an argument *ex silentio*.

<sup>102</sup> *HE* V.19; *PVC* 7-8.

<sup>103</sup> *HE* V.19: *Uerum quia illi postmodum optione data maluerunt loco cedere quam pascha catholicum, ceterosque ritus canonicos iuxta Romanae et apostolicae ecclesiae consuetudinem recipere, dedit hoc illi, quem melioribus imbutum disciplinis ac moribus uidit. ...detecta et eliminata, ut et supra docuimus, Scottorum secta...*

<sup>104</sup> Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid, and the Irish*, pp. 2-5, 21.

vi. *Contrast between the Historia Ecclesiastica and the Chronica Maiora*

Bede's commentary, *In Ezram et Neemiam*, was written after 725, the year in which Bede completed *De Temporum Ratione*. The latter text contains his *Chronica Maiora*, in which the Irish are given short shrift and portrayed rather harshly.<sup>105</sup> The *Chronica Maiora* presents a different picture of the Irish from that of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the commentary may manifest the process of this change of heart. Whether Bede would have seen the Irish as the bad Catholics or heretics of his commentary when he originally wrote it is impossible to say; but certainly, by the time he wrote the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, his attitude toward them had become far more nuanced and they are shown to be good teachers and good Christians despite their paschal issues. It is difficult not to be surprised at the difference between the representation of the Irish in Bede's *Chronica Maiora* and in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The former mentions them only a few times, and the story of the mission from Iona, and its successful conversion of the Northumbrians, is completely omitted.<sup>106</sup> Bede refers to the Irish predations on the Britons, inserts Prosper's record of Palladius's dispatch to the Irish Christians in 431, carefully including the Roman see in the origins of the Irish church, and further mentions the Irish as a people to whom both Pope Honorius and Pope-elect John wrote reproving their Easter practices, and whom Egberht persuades to accept the orthodox Easter in 716.<sup>107</sup> The contrast between these two texts in this regard is prominent, and all the more notable for their close chronological proximity and their shared intention – to show God's unfolding of history and the spread of the Christian faith.<sup>108</sup> In the time between the completion of the *Chronica Maiora* and the writing of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede had come to very different conclusions regarding the *Scotti*, and it is hard to see it as a mere coincidence.<sup>109</sup> The process of writing *In Ezram et Neemiam* may have moved Bede to view the Irish in a different light. Rather than being an example of unorthodoxy to be

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<sup>105</sup> For a discussion of the dating of *In Ezram et Neemiam*, see DeGregorio, 'Introduction', pp. xxxvii-xli. DeGregorio wonders whether it might have been written closer to the early 730s, considering its interest in church reform. The *Chronica Maiora* forms chapter 66 of Bede's *De Temporum Ratione* (pp. 461-535; trans. pp. 157-237).

<sup>106</sup> As is King Oswald, with Bede mentioning no Anglo-Saxon history between Edwin's conversion and the arrival of Archbishop Theodore and abbot Hadrian: *Chronica Maiora* s.a. 4591, 4622.

<sup>107</sup> *De Temporum Ratione* 66: s.a. 4349, 4377, 4403, 4591, 4670.

<sup>108</sup> See Diarmuid Scully, 'Bede's *Chronica Maiora*: Early Insular History in a Universal Context', in *Anglo-Saxon/Irish relations Before the Vikings*, p. 48.

<sup>109</sup> There is certainly a change between the *Chronica Maiora*'s accusation of Quartodecimanism via Pope Honorius and Pope-elect John (s.a. 4591) which had utterly changed by the time of the writing of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (HE III.17).

rescued by Ecgberht, the Irish became Christian soldiers, toiling for the conversion of the Northumbrians and beyond, whose contribution to the spread of the faith merited their own deeper conversion and embrace into full union with Rome.<sup>110</sup>

It seems plausible that the process of writing *In Ezram et Neemiam* played a part in Bede's new appreciation for the *Scotti* by the time he was writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This commentary was a work preoccupied with reform, and it is fascinating to see that the way in which Bede describes the community of Lindisfarne under Colmán and his predecessors is completely at odds with the portrait he paints of the contemporary Northumbrian church in his reformist letter to Ecgberht. The Lindisfarne bishops and community are characterised by abstemiousness and frugality. They were free from the taint of avarice, and were slow to accept land or possessions. Bede describes their enthusiastic and determined efforts to preach to and convert the general population, and that their only purpose in visiting villages was to tend to the spiritual needs of the people. Nor is it only the community of Lindisfarne who are described so, as Bede stresses the efforts of Fursa in East Anglia and Dícuill in Sussex in this regard. Bede's example of the Irish at Lindisfarne contrasts vastly with the ills he describes in the letter to Bishop Ecgberht, and his final comment in the chapter, that these customs persisted in Northumbria for some time afterward, attests both to the positive and long-lived example of the Columbans and the different situation he sees in the 730s, by which time, it is implicitly communicated, these habits were no longer kept.<sup>111</sup>

The seventh century is presented by Bede as a Golden Age in which the Anglo-Saxon Church was built up and developed, and his contemporary time is found lacking by comparison. In his own time, he sees corruption, falling standards and sin, even within the Church, and his letter to Ecgberht put into words many of the fears and criticisms Bede felt, but minimised in or omitted from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. This work was to be a reforming force through its 'gallery of good examples' rather than through open criticism.<sup>112</sup> Bede's commentary on the book of Nehemiah raises many of the same issues he addresses in his epistle to Ecgberht, such as the burden of exacting

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<sup>110</sup> Thacker sees the works of Bede's later years as an ordered and "interconnected program of writing", 'Bede and the Ordering of Understanding', p. 62.

<sup>111</sup> See *Epistola ad Ecgbertum* 5, 7, 8 and 11, for example.

<sup>112</sup> Campbell, 'Bede I', p. 25.

wealth from the people yet failing to teach them properly.<sup>113</sup> The influence of the Irish, particularly the Columbans, as models and examples to the Northumbrian church that grew from their efforts, can be seen throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

Bede's clear portrayal of Aidan as an immensely important founding figure can be seen echoed in the descriptions of other later prominent churchmen. Cuthbert's Irish influences have often been discussed, and many can be traced back to Aidan, such as his practice of travelling around on foot to preach, and his occupation of Farne Island as a retreat. He is strongly linked to both Boisil and Eata of Melrose, the former a (hidden) Irishman and the latter a disciple of Aidan. Of course, his entrance into religious life was also inspired by Aidan, whose soul he saw ascend to heaven.<sup>114</sup> Bede's presentation of Aidan and Lindisfarne in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* offers context for his earlier prose *Vita Cuthberti*, as it clarified that the Aidan who inspired Cuthbert was, in fact, Irish.<sup>115</sup> When discussing Cuthbert at Lindisfarne, Bede takes the opportunity to explain that the bishop of that monastery lived with his clergy and the abbot with his monks, Aidan having been the first to do so there. This is likened to Augustine's practices at Canterbury, which Bede attributes to Pope Gregory's guidance. This mention of Aidan is unnecessary to the chapter here when surely the important thing to emphasise was Gregory's influence. Nevertheless, Bede inserts Aidan into the narrative while celebrating Cuthbert.<sup>116</sup> Chad is similarly shown to have preferred to tour the countryside on foot and, having also been a disciple of Aidan, preserved the monastic rule he learned at Lindisfarne when he was abbot of Lastingham.<sup>117</sup> While Gunn sees Bede's determination to remind the reader of the connections between the Iona mission and all Northumbrian monasteries founded

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<sup>113</sup> *In Ezram et Neemiam* III.825, 850: *Sed uae illis sacerdotibus ac ministris, qui sumptus quidem cum gaudio debitos sumere a populo delectantur, sed nil pro eiusdem populi salute laborare, non aliquid sacri ducatus ei recte uiuendo praebere, non de suauitate regni coelistis ei quidpiam dulce praedicando canere, sed nec iamquam ei supernae ciuitatis aperire, municipatum in coelis habendo, uerum potius occludere peruerse agendo probantur* [But woe to those priests and ministers of holy things who are happy to take from the people the payments due to their rank but are not at all eager to labour for the salvation of this same people, nor to offer them any holy guidance by living uprightly, nor to sing of the pleasantness of the heavenly kingdom by preaching something delightful to them; instead, so far from opening the doors of heaven, they are proven rather to shut these doors by acting perversely, and so far from rejoicing in the works of these ministers when confessing or praising the Lord, the people are compelled to be all the more afflicted]; *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 218.

<sup>114</sup> *HE* III.5, 16, IV.27; *PVC* 4.

<sup>115</sup> Goffart remarks on this, 'Bede's Agenda and Ours', p. 33. Bede omits any mention of Aidan's (or Lindisfarne's) Irish background in his *PVC*, which is thrown into relief by their celebration in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

<sup>116</sup> *HE* IV.27.

<sup>117</sup> *HE* III.23.

before the Synod of Whitby as a way of ‘tainting’ these monasteries, the positive way Bede recounts the history of the church of the earlier seventh century contradicts this.<sup>118</sup> For Bede, the Irish he describes were well-suited for inclusion in his gallery of good examples, and they fit into the picture of the church that he held up as an example to his audience.<sup>119</sup>

Miracles are often an important element in the early stages of evangelisation, and Aidan, founder of Lindisfarne and a pioneer of Christianity in Northumbria, is a miracle-worker of whom Bede records five miracles.<sup>120</sup> These take various forms, and include gifts of foresight, control over the elements, and the creation of an indestructible secondary relic.<sup>121</sup> Fursa too experiences a miraculous vision-dream in which two Irish saints, Beoán and Meldán, are present, and Boisil also appears in dreams.<sup>122</sup> Although Bede alludes to the potential problem with miracles, as they can lead to vainglory, in these cases, Bede used them to solidify claims of holiness.<sup>123</sup> Wilfrid, in Bede’s account of the Synod of Whitby, quoting Matthew 7.22-23, declared that miracles were not always signs of divine favour, ostensibly questioning the holiness of Columba and his successors.<sup>124</sup> However, Irish miracles are offered by Bede as unambiguous evidence of sanctity, and Wilfrid (in Bede’s account of the synod) does not condemn the Columbans, as he does not know this to be true of them.<sup>125</sup> The rest of the Scriptural account, which states that good men will be known by their ‘fruit’, shows that this uncertainty does not apply to the Columbans.<sup>126</sup> The Irish, by the success of

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<sup>118</sup> Gunn, *Bede’s Historiae*, pp. 75-6.

<sup>119</sup> Thacker, ‘Bede’s Ideal of Reform’, pp. 145-6.

<sup>120</sup> As discussed by McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, p. 56, Bede describes miracles performed by the apostles moving Jews and gentiles to embrace the Christian faith in *In Habacuc 32*, CCSL 119B, ed. D. Hurst and J.E. Hudson (Turnhout, 1983). *Bede: On Tobit and on the Cantic of Habakkuk*, trans. Seán Connolly (Dublin, 1997). See also McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, pp. 115-23.

<sup>121</sup> *HE* III.5, 14, 15, 16, 17.

<sup>122</sup> *HE* III.19, V.9. Other miracles associated with Irishmen include Aidan’s soul being miraculously seen ascending to heaven, and a similar event was witness by a (probable) Irishman in *HE* IV.3. The former occurrence is not in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but Bede records it in *PVC* 4.

<sup>123</sup> *HE* I.31 contains a letter from Pope Gregory I to Augustine of Canterbury, warning him not to take credit for them himself.

<sup>124</sup> It is, of course, worth noting that Bede includes very few miracles connected with Wilfrid, particularly compared to the many miracles of the *Vita Wilfridi*: contrast *HE* V.19 with *VW* 1, 13, 18, 23, 36, etc.

<sup>125</sup> In Aidan’s case, Bede writes that “He who judges the heart showed by signs and miracles what Aidan’s merits were...” [*Qui cuius meriti fuerit, etiam miraculorum signis internus arbiter edocuit...*], *HE* III.15.

<sup>126</sup> Matt 7.18: “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them. Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in thy name,

their mission to Northumbria, and so being shown to be deserving of the correct Easter, have been shown to have borne good fruit.

vii. *Easter and the Irish Revisited*

Bede uses the phrase *habentemque zelum Dei, quamuis non plene secundum scientiam* of the Irish on two occasions in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>127</sup> He uses this same Pauline quote in his commentary on Tobit, applying it to the Jews who refused to believe in Christ, and, in his commentary on the Song of Songs, he wrote that many of the Jews had zeal without knowledge, as they wished to maintain the ‘imperfect’ and ‘immature’ observance of the letter of the law, rather than fully comprehending its purpose.<sup>128</sup> In the Irish case, though they had the right intentions, they were not operating in full unity with the Universal Church. Just as Tobit continued to preach despite his blindness, the (Columban) Irish were converters and missionaries despite their error on the calculation of Easter. For Bede, the Irish were not always the faithless Jews, but the metaphor was, in this case, useful.<sup>129</sup> At the Synod of Whitby, Wilfrid likened the Columbans to the Jews who could not bring themselves to abandon their traditions, despite their acceptance of Jesus.<sup>130</sup> Bede, in *In Tobiam*, declares that the Jews are said to have zeal for God, but not based in knowledge, and then quotes Paul, who says that in asserting their own righteousness, they fail to submit to God’s righteousness.<sup>131</sup> The community of Iona’s adoption of the orthodox Easter in 716 is the climax of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. As O’Reilly has pointed out, Bede does not depict their acceptance of the orthodox Easter as a conversion from paganism, but as a deeper conversion for those already spiritually advanced. O’Reilly envisions this deeper conversion as a sort of conversion from idolatry, but the idols in this case are the traditions of the Columbans.<sup>132</sup> The Irish were guilty of putting their own traditions before the unity of the universal church, but they are carefully presented as doing so with the right motivations.

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and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.”

<sup>127</sup> *HE* III.3, V.22: they had zeal, but not according to knowledge; Romans 10.2-3.

<sup>128</sup> *In Tobiam* 34; *On Tobit*, p. 58; *In Cantica Canticorum* I, ll. 466-9; Scully examines these themes in detail in his ‘Introduction’, pp. 28-9.

<sup>129</sup> Indeed, the Britons are generally presented as such, as discussed above. See Thacker, ‘Bede, the Britons and the Book of Samuel’, pp. 129-47. See above.

<sup>130</sup> *HE* III.25.

<sup>131</sup> *In Tobiam* 11.13-5, ll. 45-7: *Habent enim zelum Dei sed non secundum scientiam, et sicut iterum dicit, suam iustitiam uolentes constituere iustitiae Dei non sunt subiecti*; *On Tobit*, pp. 58-9; Rom 10.2-3.

<sup>132</sup> O’Reilly, ‘Introduction’, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

There is no doubt in Bede's mind that the Dionysiac Easter reckoning was the correct method of calculating Easter. The Columbans, with their 84-year Easter tables, were absolutely wrong, and it is important to Bede to make this point. He does so repeatedly, beginning with his inclusion of Laurence's letter to the Irish in *HE* II.4. Throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede is emphatic that the Columbans are mistaken in the tables they use, stating that the successors of Columba are said to have used uncertain cycles in calculating Easter.<sup>133</sup> Aidan, on his very first introduction, is said to have celebrated Easter between the fourteenth and the twentieth day of the moon, an unmistakable reference to the 84-year cycle.<sup>134</sup> Some chapters later, Bede asserts that he does not condone Aidan's "imperfectly understood" Easter practices, and in fact despises them, referencing his *De Temporibus* as evidence of his disagreement.<sup>135</sup> As discussed above, it is possible to read in Bede's account a certain amnesty for Aidan, who is attributed with *discretio*, the ability to tell good from bad, and who either, Bede says, did not know the orthodox reckoning or was compelled by public opinion not to adopt it.<sup>136</sup> Bede was, of course, fully aware that the Irish of the south had adopted the orthodox Easter in the first half of the seventh century, and he does not mention the Easter controversy in discussion of the non-Columban Irish of his text.<sup>137</sup> The Synod of Whitby, which forms the thematic – and literal – centre of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, was the scene at which the differences between the orthodox Easter reckoning and the 84-year cycle came to a head.<sup>138</sup> Wilfrid is made spokesperson for those who supported the Dionysiac Easter tables at the Synod of Whitby, and, through his words, Bede makes clear that Irish were incorrect in their calculations. Wilfrid demonstrates their mistake in associating the 84-year Easter tables with Anatolius and John. There can be no question over how Bede felt about the Insular tradition of following 84-year tables to calculate Easter: it was manifestly incorrect. Bede depicts Adomnán of Iona's conversion to the orthodox Easter as a coup for the Northumbrians, and the eventual persuasion of the monastery of Iona to adopt the

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<sup>133</sup> *HE* III.4.

<sup>134</sup> *HE* III.3.

<sup>135</sup> *HE* III.17.

<sup>136</sup> Even Gunn admits that Bede tried to explain away Aidan's error on Easter, *Bede's Historiae*, p. 75.

<sup>137</sup> This would have been the Victorian Easter, a detail that Bede omits.

<sup>138</sup> Roger Ray calls it a fulcrum, and compares it to Luke's account of the Council of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles: 'The Triumph of Greco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in pre-Carolingian Historiography', in *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900*, ed. Christopher Holdsworth and T.P. Wiseman (Exeter, 1986), p. 80.

Dionysiac Easter tables is the climax of the entire work.<sup>139</sup> The Synod of Whitby was a watershed moment for the Irish in Northumbria, though it did not end Irish influence on its church.<sup>140</sup>

However, this fact is not the full story when it comes to the Columban Easter customs in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Yes, the Columbans followed the wrong Easter, but they did so for many of the right reasons. They believed Anatolius and the Apostle John had celebrated thus, and Bede is crystal clear on the fact that, while the practice was erroneous, the intentions and doctrine behind it were not.<sup>141</sup> Bede has Oswiu say, at the beginning of the synod, that it is fitting that those who serve the same God follow the same way of life, and that they should identify the truest tradition and follow it together, which does not make the ‘less true’ way heresy.<sup>142</sup> Wilfrid concedes that, as long as the Columbans knew no better, there was little harm in their error. While it was manifestly not the case, Bede allows the flow of the chapter to suggest that Colmán and his monks were only now learning of the right way to celebrate Easter. Bede excuses Columba, and, it seems, Aidan, of their problematic Paschal practices, and while he does not offer Fínán and Colmán similar allowances, he does make sure that their other qualities and achievements are not overshadowed by their Easter tables. To say that Bede’s account of the Synod of Whitby reveals his scorn for the Ionans, as Gunn has claimed, is to look at it out of the context of the rest of the book.<sup>143</sup> That the Synod of Whitby is decided, not by the complex arguments of computists, but by an appeal to the greater sanctity of Peter over Columba, places it in the context of obedience to the Church of Rome and expression of catholicism, rather than doctrinal divergence.

Bede writes in *HE* III.28 that Wilfrid brought catholic practices to the Anglo-Saxons, and that all the Irish who dwelt among them had to either adopt orthodox customs or return to their homeland. This chapter is interestingly structured. Its main focus is Chad, who is described as learned in the Scriptures and a diligent follower of their teachings, devoted to ecclesiastical truth, and who, like the apostles, travelled

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<sup>139</sup> *HE* V.15, 21, 22.

<sup>140</sup> See *HE* III.28, which states that after Wilfrid returned to Britain as a bishop, the *Scotti* either conformed to orthodox practices or returned home. This small reference reveals that the Synod of Whitby did not see the end of Irish presence in Northumbria, let alone their influence.

<sup>141</sup> *HE* III.4, 17, 25.

<sup>142</sup> *HE* III.25: *...oporteret eos qui uni Deo seruirent, unam uiuendi regulam tenere, nec discrepare in celebratione sacramentorum caelestium, qui unum in caelis regnum expectarent; inquirendum potuis, quae esset uerior traditio, et hanc ab omnibus communiter esse sequendam.*

<sup>143</sup> Gunn, *Bede’s Historiae*, pp. 72-3.

about on foot to preach to the people.<sup>144</sup> Bede explicitly states that Chad was a disciple of Aidan and followed his example in his teachings. Wilfrid does not get the same level of praise or attention in this chapter as Chad, whose connections are Irish, and yet Bede ends the chapter with an affirmation of Wilfrid's importance. His words imply that some Irish remained in Britain after Colmán's departure, and conformed to orthodox Easter practices. As Bede asserts that Colmán brought all the Irish of Lindisfarne with him when he left Northumbria, the Irish referenced here must not have been part of that community. Several other monasteries may have housed them, such as Whitby or Melrose, to name some connected with the Irish in Northumbria. They may well have inhabited many other monasteries, as these Irish are not limited to the Columbans. The change of Easter tables on Iona is presented as a great moment for the Anglo-Saxons church, proving its maturation in returning the favour it once received from Iona: just as the Columbans had once converted the Northumbrians (and other Anglo-Saxons) from paganism to Christianity, so a Northumbrian manages to convert the community on Iona from a flawed practice of Christianity to a full embrace of orthodox, universal practices.

### *Conclusion*

For Bede, 'the Irish' did not signify solely the Columbans, though they play the most visible role in his work. He knew of the Irish as persons from the same ethnic and social background, defined, in the main, by the geographical limits of the island of Ireland, but maintaining this *Scottica* ethnicity even when settled in northern Britain. They are a *gens* to him, just as the Anglo-Saxons are; but, as with the latter people, he could discern variety within that *gens*. Bede is aware of ethnic divisions and speaks in terms of peoples: Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Irish, Britons, Romans, Picts, etc. Bede sees these *gentes* as interacting groups, and ones who are, aspirationally at least, united as one *gens Christianorum*. Bede is able to see these *gentes* as layered categories; just as the *gens Anglorum* can comprise various *gentes*, such as the *gens Nordanhymbrorum* and the *gens Cantuariorum*, so the unity of Christianity can include the Anglo-Saxons, the Irish, and the other peoples of the earth.<sup>145</sup> The unity of this *gens Christianorum* can be complicated at times by the divergence of some, as in the case of the Britons and, for a time, the Irish, and his concern for unity contextualises his celebratory presentation of

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<sup>144</sup> Just as Aidan did, *HE* III.5.

<sup>145</sup> See Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, pp. 65-6.

the adoption of the orthodox Easter by the Columbans of Iona. In *De Templo*, Bede wrote that Christians, “removed from each other though they may be in space, time, rank, status, sex, and age, are nevertheless linked together by one and the same faith and love”.<sup>146</sup> *HE* I.7 tells of Saint Alban, a Briton and a martyr, who, when asked from what family and what people he came, answered that he was a Christian.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, while Bede is interested in supplying the details of the persons he mentions, whether they are from Kent or East Anglia or, indeed, Ireland, their Christianity unites them. Although barbarians are almost always ‘other’, Bede records that the first bishop sent from Iona to Northumbria returned home exasperated by the Anglo-Saxons, whom he castigated as untameable and having barbaric hearts.<sup>148</sup> In this case, the Northumbrians could be characterised as ‘barbaric’ because they were in a pre-Christian state. Bede’s common identity with them is brought to its fullness by their conversion – without adoption of Christianity, Bede can barely see them as part of his community. The *Scotti* of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Columban and otherwise, were frequently instruments in this process. Central to Bede’s depiction of the Irish is their role as converters of the Anglo-Saxons, a role that earned them a like reward: their full persuasion to unity with Rome.

Bede’s depiction of Irishmen beyond the Columbans shows his awareness of the Irish as a more varied people, and many of the other Irish are also missionaries, teachers, and Christian examples. Among them too are laymen, whether kings, scholars, or penitents, and the rich and diverse group that Bede presents demonstrates the scope of his history. Campbell worries that Bede has given an “inadequate” picture of the non-Columban Irish foundations in Britain, yet even this ‘inadequate’ account reveals their prevalence.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, to a great extent, the Columbans are representative of the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and Aidan is particularly important in the context of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as a whole. His vital role in the founding of Lindisfarne, the early centre of the mission to Northumbria, and the hub from which mission spread out beyond the limits of that kingdom, makes of him a

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<sup>146</sup> *De Templo* II, ll. 399-402, CCSL 119A, ed. D. Hurst (Turnhout, 1969): *ut uita fidelium et locis et temporibus et gradu et conditione et sexu et aetate multum secreta ad alterutrum nihilominus una eademque fide ac dilectione sit ad inuicem cuiuncta*; *Bede: On the Temple*, trans. Seán Connolly (Liverpool, 1995), p. 78.

<sup>147</sup> *HE* I.7: *Quid ad te pertinet qua sim stirpe genitus? Sed si ueritatem religionis audire desideras, Christianum iam me esse Christianisque officiis uacare cognosce.*

<sup>148</sup> *HE* III.5.

<sup>149</sup> Campbell, ‘The First Century of Christianity in England’, p. 51.

fundamental figure for Bede. If Aidan were not exonerated by the text, much of the church would be inevitably undermined. By making of him a central model of Christian excellence Bede consolidates the image of a strong Anglo-Saxon church. While Gunn argues that Bede subtly undermines the spiritual authority of Columba's island monastery, in fact he celebrates it, and narrates a history in which the foundation of Aidan's mission offered a solid base on which to build the Northumbrian church.<sup>150</sup> Bede inevitably acknowledges the problems that did exist in the Ionan connection – namely Easter – and despite this emphasises that mission's importance for the Anglo-Saxon Church. By doing so, Bede ensured he could not be accused of omitting that difficulty or of suppressing inconvenient aspects of history, and yet he celebrates the Columban contribution.<sup>151</sup>

Bede's recapitulation at the end of the fifth book of his work is a fascinating summary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* – fascinating both for what he includes and what he omits. Palladius's dispatch to the Irish is among the entries, as is Columba's arrival on Iona, Áedán's battle with Æthelfrith, Aidan's death, and Colmán's return to Ireland with his Irish clergy, dated to 430, 565, 603, 651, and 664, respectively. Other events inserted into this summary are indirectly linked to the story of the Irish in Northumbria, such as Edwin's death in 633, which saw Oswald ascend to the throne and so Aidan's arrival in Northumbria, and the conversion of the Middle Angles and the Mercians, both of which involved churchmen of or connected to the Iona mission to Northumbria.<sup>152</sup> Ecgfrith's death in 685 is entered also, a death Bede explicitly categorises as divine punishment for his attack on the innocent Irish the year before. Bede's intention is to aid memory, he claims, and so it seems plausible that he considers the events mentioned in the summary as particularly worthy of noting. Even if one rejects this as a pattern of inclusion of the Irish throughout Bede's summary of important events, it shows that the Irish are inextricably part of the entire *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

Of course, not all references to *Scotti* are favourable, and Bede's recording of early Irish predation and Irish divergence in the matter of Easter is essential to the story he is telling. Yet there is no denying that Bede's attitude to the Irish as a *gens* is

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<sup>150</sup> Gunn believes that Bede was forced to do so implicitly because of Iona's importance to Northumbria: *Bede's Historiae*, p. 73.

<sup>151</sup> One might recall the accusation of heresy levelled at Bede in 708. See Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 36-9.

<sup>152</sup> *HE* III.21, 24, IV.3.

overwhelmingly positive. They are interwoven throughout the tapestry of his text and perform integral functions in the narrative arc of the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Although Bede goes out of his way to specify the Irish ethnicity of many of the Irishmen who appear in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he is very clear that they are an intrinsic part of the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Their separate ethnicity does not separate them from his providential history. Not just that, but they are part of the catholic Church and are eminently suitable persons to grace the pages of his gallery of good examples. As Thacker has commented, Bede did not see them as good Irish Christians, but as good Christians, and they act as models to be held up for emulation by his audience.<sup>153</sup> The Irish are not special, as that would imply novelty or difference, but they are good and early Christian models, and, particularly through Aidan, the defining figure for the mission from Iona, their affectionate and positive presence resonates through the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

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<sup>153</sup> Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', p. 146.

## Conclusion

This prosopography of the Irish individuals has demonstrated the integral role the *Scotti* played in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Examining them individually (and as discrete groups, when necessary) has allowed them to be seen as historical figures in their own right, and as persons written into Bede's text for his own purposes. The numbers involved and the space allocated to them throughout the text and in the recapitulation reveal the strong part they played in Northumbrian and Anglo-Saxon history in Bede's mind. The prosopography shows the wide range of Irishmen in the text, from the best-known, like Aidan, bishop of Lindisfarne, to anonymous men like the man who was saved from death through Oswald's relic. Although the Columbans dominate discussions of the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and unsurprisingly so, considering their great contribution to Bede's own kingdom of Northumbria, they are evidently not the only Irish Bede discusses, and this is perhaps one of the more important things to come out of this study. The Irish are consistently placed in many locations around Britain, often very early in the conversion period, and are shown to have been instrumental in the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons. This attribution is not limited to those who came to Britain as part of the Iona mission, but it is headlined by them.

The Irish are portrayed very positively by Bede. There are some mild exceptions to this rule, such as Áedán mac Gabráin, who is depicted simply as the opponent of Æthelfrith, and the Irish *scolasticus* whose vices put him in fear of his immortal soul, but the impression Bede gives the reader of the *gens Scottorum* is

favourable.<sup>1</sup> These men are missionaries, teachers to the Anglo-Saxons, and Christian models to be emulated. Bede's concerns over the Columban celebration of Easter are inescapable in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but he does not allow them to overshadow the Irish contribution to the Anglo-Saxon Church. One of the questions that began this project was whether it is accurate to talk about 'the Irish' in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and the answer to that is: Yes, we can – because Bede thought we could. However, in doing so, we must understand that 'the Irish' were not truly a homogeneous group, even if their variety is not always obvious. The Irish often mean the Columbans, but not always, and Bede makes sure the reader knows that is not the full story. The Columban Irish make up a sizeable portion of the Irish mentioned by Bede, and the vast majority of discussion of the Irish, but they are not the sole Irish representatives in Bede's texts. Bede very deliberately places Irish figures around the island of Britain – in Mercia, among the Middle Angles, in East Anglia, Sussex, Wessex, and even among the Picts. They are ubiquitous to his story of the development of the Anglo-Saxon Church, both through their presence and through their influence.

While Bede is alert to their ethnicity as part of the *gens Scottorum*, his emphasis is less on their geographic origins and more on their efforts, as part of the Christian community, to teach and to preach. Although he categorises them as Irish, they are not defined by this, and their efforts to convert the Anglo-Saxons are the most memorable thing about them. For Bede, what is important is not where they come from – though he is interested in that – but their actions and intentions. Just as Gregory remarked that things should not be loved for the place they come from, but places for their good things, so Bede appreciates the Irish for what they do.<sup>2</sup> This may help to explain his very few references to Iona itself, as this origin was not the most significant thing about those who came from that monastery.

Of course, the Columbans are central to any discussion of the Irish in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. As the instigators of a very successful mission to Northumbria, their presence has inevitable significance for Bede's story. The three Irish bishops of Lindisfarne – Aidan, Fínán and Colmán – are justifiably celebrated for their contribution to Bede's home kingdom. Bede certainly presents them as a coherent group, and Aidan's vital influence sets the tone for the bishops, and for Lindisfarne. The thirty years during which the Irish held the episcopacy of Lindisfarne are held up

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<sup>1</sup> *HE* I.34, III.13.

<sup>2</sup> *HE* I.27, Question 2.

as idealised time for the church in Northumbria during which an exemplary spirituality held sway. It becomes apparent from Bede's text that things were not as simple as all that, and Fínán, particularly, seems to have been an active participant in the political application of Christianity. The first bishop sent to the Northumbrians, tantalisingly but briefly alluded to by Bede, is not included in this thirty-year period, just as he is not part of the story of the successful mission to the Northumbrians, and his biggest input to the narrative is the contrast he offers for Aidan's qualities. Aidan is *the* Irishman of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, creating the foundation from which the mission built. Bede is, as has been discussed here and elsewhere, careful to make clear from the beginning that Aidan's Easter practices were incorrect, but this certainly does not overshadow his role for the Northumbrian church. Bede's excusing of Aidan's methods allows him to keep the roots of the Northumbrian church – and, to an extent, the Anglo-Saxon Church – unsullied. Notwithstanding Aidan's importance, which reiteration should not be allowed to dim, his Irish successors were influential figures themselves, and while Bede does describe Colmán's departure from Lindisfarne rather than renounce the traditions of his Columban forefathers, he also uses Colmán to head up his description of the wonderful example set by the community of Lindisfarne under that man and his two predecessors.

The other Irishmen in the kingdom of Northumbria are a far more varied lot, ranging from the king to a penitent at the monastery of Coldingham. They have little to unite them beyond their geographic location, offering a broad spectrum of attitudes, from the determined proponent of Roman Easter practices, Rónán, to the prior of the monastery of Melrose, which followed Irish (here Bede certainly means Columban) traditions, Boisil. The latter is, of course, not identified as Irish by Bede, for reasons that affect both the presentation of Cuthbert and Ecgberht's reforming mission to Iona. Each of them, from King Aldfrith to Adomnán of Coldingham's Irish confessor, is presented favourably, a trend that continues when we look at the Irish Bede describes beyond Northumbria's bounds. The Columban mission extended its reach to the south of Northumbria, into the territory of the Mercians and Middle Angles. The Columban mission is not the only player, however, and Bede writes of an Irish community among the South Saxons who present a good example to the people of that kingdom. Despite their efforts, the locals are unmoved to accept Christianity, circumstances which alter on the arrival of Bishop Wilfrid. While Wilfrid is given the glory of the conversion of the Sussex people, Bede's inclusion of Dícuill and his small community at Bosham is a

reminder that the controversial Northumbrian bishop was not the pioneer his hagiographer presented. Rónán offers a similar comparison in Northumbria, preempting Wilfrid's efforts to bring the kingdom around to Rome's best practices.

Fursa and his Irish companions occupy one chapter of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and their importance far beyond Bede's work reveals part of our author's motivation in including them. Fursa is a renowned visionary in the Christian tradition, disregarding his Irish heritage, and his story would have been useful as part of a missionary's kit. Bede focuses on the Anglo-Saxon element of Fursa's mission, for obvious reasons, and makes him part of the evangelisation of East Anglia, a kingdom whose royal family were heavily involved with the Church. Fursa being an Irishman is not a defining characteristic of his appearance in Bede's work, but it does chime well with the general depiction of the *Scotti* as evangelisers and preachers. Fursa's visions are not only evidence of his great piety, but are tools in the process of conversion, a role in which Bede repeatedly places the Irish of his text.

The abbots of Iona, apart from Adomnán, are not main characters in Bede's history, but they are important as markers for key events. Columba's significance needs little explanation, as his founding of Iona was to be of immense import for Northumbria through its mission. Adomnán is presented as the counter-balance to Columba, as the learned abbot who is persuaded by the Northumbrians to accept Rome's Easter tables. The other two abbots named, Ségéne and Dúnchad, form either end of the same process as it relates to Northumbria, places at the sending of the Columban mission and the acceptance of Northumbria's (and Rome's) example on the matter of Easter. Bede is less interested in these men for themselves than he is for their implications for the Anglo-Saxons, but he includes them. The Irishmen who appear in the letters Bede details in the text point to a world beyond Britain's shores, and, through their naming in the text, vastly increase the Irish presence in Bede's work. The last group of Irishmen is a miscellany, exploring those men and groups who were not easily categorised with the rest. They are, again, a varied group, comprising a monk, a Pictish king, a *scolasticus*, and a layman, not to mention the Dál Riata as a whole and one of their early kings. Some of these, the two kings, in particular, are not part of the general trend regarding the Irish in Bede's text – they are not missionaries. For some of them, the very issue of ethnicity is not decided, and can only be construed from their descriptions in this text and others. Nechtan is particularly interesting in these terms, as he is very much a Pictish king, and we cannot tell how Irish he considered himself or was considered. If

we relied on Bede, there would be no hint that he had an Irish father. This applies to several of the individuals discussed by Bede and here presented as Irishmen, including Aldfrith and Boisil, two important figures. This chapter also helps to reveal the importance of Rath Melsigi in Ireland as a source for Bede, as several episodes he relates connect to it.

Kirby wrote that Ceolwulf's influence may have resulted in Bede writing more favourably of Aidan and the legacy of Lindisfarne than he might otherwise have liked, but this is an unfair hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> Bede highlights the Irish presence and contribution throughout the text, and the Irish fit well with the broad themes of Christian example, mission, reform, and providential history he explores. Goffart argues that the new regime in Northumbria in the early 730s, with the reinstatement of Ceolwulf, the rising star of Ecgberht, and the departure of Acca, was seen as an opportunity by Bede to push through the reform he desired in the church. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* then offered the examples needed for such reform, as seen in his letter to Ecgberht of York.<sup>4</sup> The Irish formed part of this agenda, and actively so, as the contrast between Bede's earlier works, like the *Chronica Maiora* and his prose *Vita Cuthberti*, and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* reveal. Goffart also makes the point that it is in his treatment of the Irish that Bede is most different from Stephen, author of the *Vita Wilfridi*, and in this he is undoubtedly correct.<sup>5</sup> While Goffart's thesis that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was a response to Stephen's text is too simplistic to define the entire work, Bede's choices reveal a conscious effort to differentiate his text from the earlier one, and his depiction of the Irish is an important part of that. Goffart calls the *Historia Ecclesiastica* "a studied construction", and in this he is entirely accurate: Bede did not describe the various Irishmen of this text and go to the effort of naming so many of them without reason.<sup>6</sup> He was intent on making them a fundamental part of the story of the Anglo-Saxon Church.

The change that can be seen to have taken place between Bede's writing of the *Chronica Maiora* and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is very important, and it seems likely that Bede's consideration of issues of reform and heresy in writing his commentary on

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<sup>3</sup> D.P. Kirby, 'King Ceolwulf of Northumbria and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *Studia Celtica* 14-15 (1979-80), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> Goffart, 'Bede's Agenda and Ours', pp. 43-5. Whether one fully endorses Goffart's theory or not, his remarks on the links between his desire for reform and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* hold true.

<sup>5</sup> Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 326.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Goffart, 'Bede's History in a Harsher Climate', in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, WV, 2006), p. 225.

the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah was part of this process. Bede's depiction of the Irish evolved over time, from their part in his prose *Vita Cuthberti*, in which they are present but unidentified, to his great historical work, in which they are celebrated enthusiastically.<sup>7</sup> Bede does not avoid the complication of the reckoning of Easter in this task, but he stresses that, despite their errors, they deserved their places among his great and good. That Bede mentions Irish figures in the *Vita Cuthberti* but does not say that they are Irish (and, in the case of Boisil, never says so) suggests that even then he felt the need to allude to their presence and contribution yet was hesitant to praise them as Irish. This may have been due to his own concerns over their Easter (and possibly Quartodecimanism, though he had resolved that issue by 731), or perhaps pressure from those who did not feel the Irish were appropriate examples for an Anglo-Saxon, or Northumbrian, audience. By the time he was writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede's opinions on the Irish had solidified, and they are unabashedly presented as some of the heroes of the text. Walter Goffart observantly asked, in his *Narrators of Barbarian History*, "What is a retrospective Golden Age but a stick with which to beat the present?", and this question precisely characterises the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>8</sup> The Irish of the text are very much part of that Golden Age, and, therefore, part of the mechanism by which Bede admonishes the church of his own time. Despite the paucity of detailed information available to him, Bede inserts an Irish element into most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of his period. Although at times his references may be purposely brief, as in the case of Dícuill and the monastery of Bosham, or even obscure, as with Maeldub, the Irish thread of his narrative is woven throughout the country. Even these small allusions demonstrate the permeation of Irish *peregrini* right through the advancing Anglo-Saxon church. More often, however, the Irish figures he writes into the back-story of his own church are men with remembered careers, large players on the stage of history, and a fundamental component in his history of the Anglo-Saxon Church. It is hoped that this project illuminates the presence of the *Scotti* in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and can prove a useful addition to Bedan studies. A detailed prosopographical study of all the persons in Bede's work would greatly aid our understanding of this text and its author's methods and intentions, and it is anticipated that such a project will be undertaken in the future.

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<sup>7</sup> This applied, more than likely, to Aidan, the monastery of Lindisfarne, and Boisil and his monastery of Melrose. It also applied to the many Irish-trained religious of Northumbria in Cuthbert's time.

<sup>8</sup>Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 254.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: Prosopography of the Irish in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*

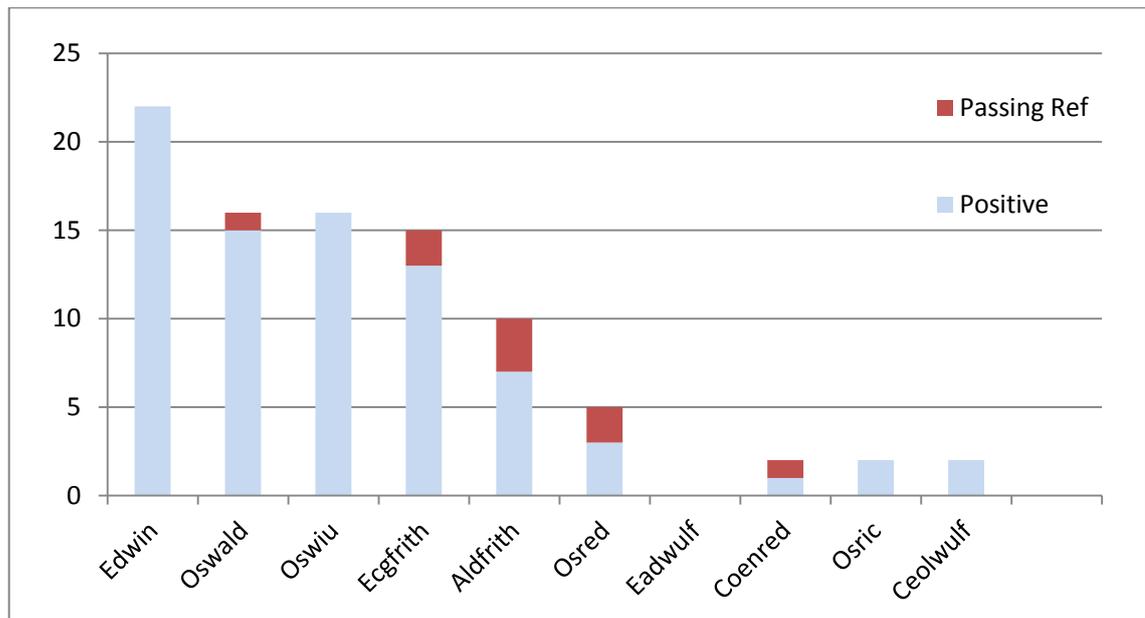
|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Adomnán (1) of Iona       | <i>HE</i> V.15, 16, 17, 21                                    |
| Adomnán (2) of Coldingham | <i>HE</i> IV.25   |
| Áedán mac Gabráin         | <i>HE</i> I.34  |
| Áedán mac Gabráin's army  | <i>HE</i> I.34  |
| Aidan of Lindisfarne      | <i>HE</i> III.3, 5, 6, 14-17, 25, 26, 28; IV.23, 27; V.22, 24 |
| Aldfrith                  | <i>HE</i> IV.26; V.1, 2, 7, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21, 24            |
| Anonymous 1               | <i>HE</i> III.5   |
| Anonymous 2               | <i>HE</i> III.13  |
| Anonymous 3               | <i>HE</i> IV.3  |
| Anonymous 4               | <i>HE</i> IV.25   |
| Anonymous 5               | <i>HE</i> V.9   |
| Báithéne                  | <i>HE</i> II.19   |
| Beoán                     | <i>HE</i> III.19  |
| Boisil                    | <i>HE</i> IV.27, 28; V.9                                      |
| Cellach                   | <i>HE</i> III.21, 24  |
| Colmán                    | <i>HE</i> III.25-27; IV.1, 4; V.24                            |
| Columba                   | <i>HE</i> III.4, 25; V.9, 21, 24                              |
| Columbanus (1)            | <i>HE</i> II.4  |
| Columbanus (2)            | <i>HE</i> II.19   |
| Crónán (1)                | <i>HE</i> II.19   |
| Crónán (2)                | <i>HE</i> II.19   |
| Dagán                     | <i>HE</i> II.4  |
| Dalreudini                | <i>HE</i> I.1   |
| Dícuill (1)               | <i>HE</i> IV.13   |
| Dícuill (2)               | <i>HE</i> III.19  |
| Díma                      | <i>HE</i> II.19   |
| Diuma                     | <i>HE</i> III.21, 24  |

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Dúnchad                     | <i>HE V.22</i>  |
| Elders of Iona              | <i>HE III.3, 5, 25</i>  |
| Ernéne                      | <i>HE II.19</i>   |
| Fínán                       | <i>HE III.17, 21, 22, 25-27</i>   |
| Fóillán                     | <i>HE III.19</i>  |
| Fursa                       | <i>HE III.19</i>  |
| Gobbán                      | <i>HE III.19</i>  |
| The Irish                   | <i>HE I.1, 34; II.4, 19; III.3-6, 13-17, 19, 21, 22, 24-27, 28; IV.1, 3, 4, 13, 23, 27; V.9, 18, 21, 22, 24</i> |
| Irish bishops and abbots    | <i>HE II.4</i>  |
| Irish clergy of Lindisfarne | <i>HE III.25, 26; IV.4</i>  |
| Irish community at Bosham   | <i>HE IV.13</i>   |
| Irish community on Iona     | <i>HE III.4; V.22</i>   |
| Irish teachers and abbots   | <i>HE II.19</i>   |
| Laisréne                    | <i>HE II.19</i>   |
| Maeldub                     | <i>HE V.18</i>  |
| Meldán                      | <i>HE III.19</i>  |
| Nechtán                     | <i>HE V.21</i>  |
| Rónán                       | <i>HE III.25</i>  |
| Reuda                       | <i>HE I.1</i>   |
| Sarán                       | <i>HE II.19</i>   |
| Ségéne                      | <i>HE II.19; III.5</i>  |
| Silán                       | <i>HE II.19</i>   |
| Tómméne                     | <i>HE II.19</i>   |
| Ultán                       | <i>HE III.19</i>  |

APPENDIX 2: Distribution of the Irish and/or Ireland in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*

| Book I |       | Book II |     | Book III |     | Book IV |       | Book V |       |
|--------|-------|---------|-----|----------|-----|---------|-------|--------|-------|
| Pref   | N     |         |     |          |     |         |       |        |       |
| 1      | Y     | 1       | N   | 1        | Y   | 1       | Y     | 1      | Y     |
| 2      | N     | 2       | N   | 2        | N   | 2       | N     | 2      | Y     |
| 3      | N     | 3       | N   | 3        | Y   | 3       | N     | 3      | N     |
| 4      | N     | 4       | Y   | 4        | Y   | 4       | Y     | 4      | N     |
| 5      | N     | 5       | Y   | 5        | Y   | 5       | N     | 5      | N     |
| 6      | N     | 6       | N   | 6        | Y   | 6       | N     | 6      | N     |
| 7      | N     | 7       | N   | 7        | Y   | 7       | N     | 7      | Y     |
| 8      | N     | 8       | N   | 8        | N   | 8       | N     | 8      | N     |
| 9      | N     | 9       | N   | 9        | N   | 9       | N     | 9      | Y     |
| 10     | N     | 10      | N   | 10       | N   | 10      | N     | 10     | Y     |
| 11     | N     | 11      | N   | 11       | N   | 11      | N     | 11     | N     |
| 12     | Y     | 12      | N   | 12       | N   | 12      | N     | 12     | Y     |
| 13     | Y     | 13      | N   | 13       | Y   | 13      | Y     | 13     | N     |
| 14     | Y     | 14      | N   | 14       | Y   | 14      | N     | 14     | N     |
| 15     | N     | 15      | N   | 15       | Y   | 15      | N     | 15     | Y     |
| 16     | N     | 16      | N   | 16       | Y   | 16      | N     | 16     | Y     |
| 17     | N     | 17      | N   | 17       | Y   | 17      | N     | 17     | Y     |
| 18     | N     | 18      | N   | 18       | N   | 18      | N     | 28     | Y     |
| 19     | N     | 19      | Y   | 19       | Y   | 19      | N     | 19     | Y     |
| 20     | N     | 20      | N   | 20       | N   | 20      | N     | 20     | N     |
| 21     | N     |         |     | 21       | Y   | 21      | N     | 21     | Y     |
| 22     | N     |         |     | 22       | Y   | 22      | N     | 22     | Y     |
| 23     | N     |         |     | 23       | N   | 23      | Y     | 23     | Y     |
| 24     | N     |         |     | 24       | Y   | 24      | N     | 24     | Y     |
| 25     | N     |         |     | 25       | Y   | 25      | Y     |        |       |
| 26     | N     |         |     | 26       | Y   | 26      | Y     |        |       |
| 27     | N     |         |     | 27       | Y   | 27      | Y     |        |       |
| 28     | N     |         |     | 28       | Y   | 28      | N     |        |       |
| 29     | N     |         |     | 29       | Y   | 29      | N     |        |       |
| 30     | N     |         |     | 30       | N   | 30      | N     |        |       |
| 31     | N     |         |     |          |     | 31      | N     |        |       |
| 32     | N     |         |     |          |     | 32      | N     |        |       |
| 33     | N     |         |     |          |     |         |       |        |       |
| 34     | Y     |         |     |          |     |         |       |        |       |
| 5/35   | 14.2% | 3/20    | 15% | 20/30    | 66% | 7/32    | 21.8% | 15/24  | 62.5% |

APPENDIX 3: Comparing Northumbrian kings in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*



References to Christian Northumbrian kings in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, demonstrating the decrease in frequency as time moves forward.

APPENDIX 4:

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