

Máire Herbert
'Becoming an Exile: Colum Cille in Middle-Irish Poetry'

First published in *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition* (A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford) CSANA Yearbook 3-4 (Four Courts, 2005) , 131-140.

Published here with permission. <http://www.four-courts-press.ie/>

Becoming an Exile: Colum Cille in Middle-Irish Poetry

MÁIRE HERBERT

A considerable number of Irish poetic compositions datable from around the year 1000 onward have been attributed to Saint Colum Cille.¹ Among these are compositions concerning the saint's exile, framed as autobiographical monologues and dialogues. These poetic sentiments of love of country and longing for return became an established feature of Columban tradition, as shown, for instance, by their incorporation into the sixteenth-century Life of the saint, *Betha Colaim Cille*.² Indeed, the poems retained their resonance as emigration from Ireland continued throughout the centuries. In modern times, a further audience was gained through translation.³ The appeal of the verse lay in the assumption that it was emotionally rooted in the biographical experiences of a sixth-century saint, the first to leave Ireland for monastic life overseas.⁴ However, the literary genre of exile is first attested in the traditions of Colum Cille some four centuries after his death. J.F. Kenney's characterization of the Columban poetry as 'the earliest Irish corpus of formally nationalist propaganda' stands as a lone overview.⁵ It seems timely, then, to revisit this poetry, seeking the literary and historical contexts of its production.

The earliest poem of the exile corpus ascribed to Colum Cille is *Robad mellach, a meic mo Dé*, dated around the year 1000.⁶ In this composition the saintly speaker seeks to transcend his exile by describing the itinerary of an imaginary return. The initial focus is on his journey, *tar tuinn topur ndilenn*,

1 For listings see J.F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York: Columbia 1929, repr. Dublin: Ó Tállhúir, 1979), pp. 436–40; A. O'Sullivan and M. Herbert, 'The Provenance of Laud Misc. 615', *Celtica*, 10 (1973), 174–92 (189–92). 2 Ed. A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle, (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1918). See, in particular, sections 277–9. See also T.F. O'Rahilly, *Measgra Dánta*, 2 vols (Cork: Cork University Press, 1927), 2:126–8, and notes, pp. 197–8. 3 See Myles Dillon, 'Early Lyric Poetry' in *Early Irish Poetry* ed. James Carney, (Cork: Mercier Press, 1965), pp. 9–27. 4 Note, for instance, a modern rendering by Robert Farren, entitled *The First Exile* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1944). 5 *Sources*, p. 441. 6 The poem has been edited and translated both by Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (hereafter *EIL*), 2nd ed. (Oxford:

'over the deluged–fountain wave' back to Ireland.⁷ Welcoming sights and sounds greet him as he approaches landfall by Lough Foyle.⁸ It is clear that the prime object of Colum Cille's exilic emotion is Ireland itself. The sorrow induced by absence is expressed in the poetic opposition of agency at home and misery in a strange land:

Rom-lín múich i n-ingnais Éirenn
 diamsa coimsech,
 'san tír ainéoil conam-tharla
 taideóir toirsech.

I ever long for the land of Ireland where I had power; an exile now in the midst of strangers, sad and tearful.⁹

The place of exile and the alienation experienced there are inextricably linked.

The poem introduces elliptical narrative at this point. Colum Cille bewails his enforced departure, and expresses regret for having gone to the battle of Cúl Dreimne.

Trúag in turus do-breth formsa,
 A Rí rúine:
 ach! ní ma-ndechad bu-déine
 do chath Chúile!¹⁰

What is implied, but not made explicit, is a sense of injustice, of a deed misinterpreted. The testimony of the poem differs of course, from that of the seventh-century *Vita Columbae*, which states that the saint left Ireland *pro Christo peregrinari volens*, 'wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ'.¹¹ Yet the *Vita* elsewhere mentions the convening of a synod to censure Colum Cille, and it cites the battle of Cúl Dreimne as a reference-point in the chronology of the saint's departure.¹² Therefore, even in the saint's official Life there was material which might both reflect and generate a scenario of imposed exile.

Clarendon, 1962, repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), pp. 66–9, notes, pp. 202–4, and by James Carney, *Medieval Irish Lyrics* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1967), pp. 82–7. I have used both editions, and cite whichever translation best renders the original. ⁷ Text and translation from *EIL*, pp. 66–7, quatrain 1. ⁸ In quatrain 3, according to Murphy's reading, Colum Cille encountered *Sliag na fáilleann*, 'the flocked seagulls', while Carney opts for *Sliag na Feblán*, 'the Foyle-folk'. ⁹ I choose Carney's translation, *Medieval Irish Lyrics*, pp. 84–5. ¹⁰ The text is substantially the same in both editions. Murphy translates: 'Grievous was that journey enjoined on me, O King of Mysteries: ah, would that I had never gone to the battle of Cúl Dreimne!' Carney translates: 'Woe that journey forced upon me/ O King of Secrets/would to God I'd never gone there/ to Cooldrevne'. ¹¹ *Adomnán's Life of Columba* ed. and trans. A.O. & M.O. Anderson, revised by M.O. Anderson, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), second preface, pp. 6–7. ¹² Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*, Book 3, chapter 3 (pp. 184–7); second preface, (pp. 6–7), Book 1, chapter 7 (pp. 30–1).

Whether the author of *Robad mellach* innovatively introduced a popular tradition into learned poetic discourse, or whether he himself is the 'inventor' of the tradition, must remain undecided. What matters poetically is the poignancy of the retrospection.

The regretted past and sorrowful present then give way to further visualization of the joys to be experienced on a return home. The monastery of Durrow is called to mind, and scenes from its natural environment, such as *coicetal na cúach don fuidbaid/ar bríach shamraid*, 'cuckoos calling from the woodland on the brink of summer'.¹³ In the final quatrain the saintly speaker voices the exile's idealization of his native place: *Ro grádaiges íatha Éirenn*, 'I have loved the lands of Ireland', and the poem ends as it begins, with the projection of experiences of return: *feis ac Comgall, cuairt co Cairnech/robaid mellach*.¹⁴

The poetic features of exile encapsulated in *Robad mellach* recur in other Irish compositions in the same genre. For instance, the twelfth-century poem, *Mellach len bith i n-ucht ailiuin*, depicts Colum Cille in contemplation by the sea.¹⁵ Here again is the reverie of an exile, who declares: *comadh é m'ainm, nún no ráidim/Cúl fri hÉrinn*, 'that this might be my name, a secret I tell, "He who turned his back on Ireland"'.¹⁶ Once more we find expressions of longing for Ireland and for its natural environment: *Co n-acind a tonda troma ... co doisind guth na n-én n-ingnad*.¹⁷ Moreover, the saint's rueful regret about the past reverberates in the manner in which his very name and identity are subsumed in the statement of separation from homeland, *Cúl fri hÉrinn*. Identification of country rather than region as the saint's *patria* recurs, not only here, but throughout the Columban exile corpus. The well-known quatrain, *Fil síul nglais*, first attested at the beginning of the eleventh century, succinctly describes the saint's backward look, and the moment of his realization that he will never see again 'the men of Ireland nor her women'.¹⁸

The opposition between homeland and foreign land, between being recognized and being a stranger, is a further topos of *Robad mellach* that is elaborated in later compositions. The twelfth century verse beginning *Oibind beith ar Beind Edair*, unsubtly compares Scotland and Ireland in essentialist terms.¹⁹ The saint's place of exile lacks any redeeming features:

¹³ Text and translation from *FIL*, pp. 68–9, quatrain 8. ¹⁴ *FIL*, pp. 68–9, quatrain 9. Murphy translates: 'to pass the night with Comgall, to visit Cairnech – how pleasant that would be!' ¹⁵ Text published by Kuno Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 5 (1905), 496–7; also O'Rahilly, *Measra Dánta*, 2:120–1, notes, pp. 194–5; trans. Kenneth Jackson, *A Celtic Miscellany* (Penguin Books: London, 1971), pp. 279–80. ¹⁶ Meyer, 'Mitteilungen', pp. 496–7, quatrain 6 (with minor punctuation change); Jackson, *Celtic Miscellany*, p. 279. ¹⁷ 'That I may see its heavy waves', quatrain 2; 'that I might hear the voice of the wondrous birds', quatrain 3, Jackson, p. 279. ¹⁸ Numerous copies and editions of this quatrain exist. See, for instance, *FIL*, pp. 64–5, and notes, pp. 201–2. ¹⁹ Text and translation published by W. Reeves, *The Life of St Columba, founder of Hy* (Dublin: The Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1857), pp. 285–9.

Is imdha toir laech leabhar,
 Imdha saeth ann is galar,
 Imdha fil ar bhecc n-edaigh,
 Imdha cridhe cruaidhetaidh.

Numerous in the East are tall champions, many the diseases and distempers there, many there with scanty clothes, many the hard and jealous hearts.

Ireland, on the other hand, possesses every possible advantage:

Imdha tiar torudh abla,
 imdha righ is righdhamhna,
 imdha airne cen cesa,
 imdha dairbre ardmhesa.

Plentiful in the West the apple fruit; many the kings and princes; plentiful its luxuriant sloes, plentiful its noble, acorn-bearing oaks.²⁰

Overall, *Robad mellach*, the earliest attested work, also appears to encapsulate most fully the *topoi* of Columban exile poetry. Was this poem a pioneering dramatization of Colum Cille's *amor patriae*? Our present state of knowledge does not permit a definite conclusion. However, *Robad mellach* may well be regarded as an important milestone in the definition of exile in Irish vernacular verse. The poem's descriptions of Lough Foyle's seabirds and of the woodland of Durrow show affinities with early Irish monastic compositions. Yet, while reflecting convention, these descriptions also subvert it. Absence rather than presence is evoked by the celebration of place. The most clearly innovative aspect of *Robad mellach*, moreover, is its presentation of Colum Cille as a distinctive exilic persona, banished because of a past deed. He reflects on his situation, contrasts the joys of home with the sorrows of alienation, and assuages the pain of separation through imaginary return.

Robad mellach thus emerges as a poem composed with a clear sense of the poetics of exile. The articulation of its topic seems less a matter of spontaneous insight than of careful craftwork. Though it may be a pioneering work, it has an air of assurance rather than of experiment in a new genre. Did literary models influence the shaping of this poetry? In our investigation we must take account of the bilingual aspect of Irish monastic culture. No vernacular forerunner suggests itself. An important classical paradigm in the development of the literary figure of the exile is, of course, Ovid's poetic charac-

Translation by Kuno Meyer, *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry* (London: Constable, 1911, repr. 1928), pp. 85–7. ²⁰ Text and translation from Reeves, *The Life*, p. 286.

terization in his *Tristia* and *Epistolae ex Ponto*.²¹ Indeed, Ovidian echoes may be discerned in the main themes constitutive of the Columban verse, the speaker's keen self-awareness, his imaginary return, retrospection about his banishment, and descriptions of harsh exilic environment and idealized *patria*.²² No obvious line of connection is immediately discernible, however, between the classical and the vernacular material. We have no evidence that Ovid's exile poetry was available in ninth or tenth-century Ireland.²³ However, some interesting possibilities emerge once we widen our enquiry to take account of the contemporary context of the Irish vernacular composition.

The framework for understanding the sixth-century departure from Ireland of Colum Cille had changed by the end of the first millennium. The motivation ascribed to the saint, *peregrinatio*, in the sense of ascetic renunciation of home and kin, was no longer a dominant feature of Irish ecclesiastical life. Contemporary texts from the eighth century onward reflect unease about movement overseas, and they assert that spiritual perfection was equally attainable through charity and self-denial at home.²⁴ Viking attacks on Ireland from the beginning of the ninth century further altered the situation. Irish *peregrini* had freely travelled to the continent since the end of the sixth century. From the early decades of the ninth century, however, there was a marked exodus of Irish scholars, for whom the journey overseas was an enforced quest for safety.²⁵ In the year 849, the Annals of Ulster introduce the term *exulavit* to signal a churchman's departure at the height of Viking pressure.²⁶ The entry provides a rare glimpse from home of a contemporary phenomenon more fully attested in sources from the exiles' destinations in continental Europe.

²¹ The edition and translation cited here is that of A.L. Wheeler, *Ovid*, vol. 6: *Tristia. Ex Ponto* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1924, repr. 1975). ²² See, for instance, *Tristia* 3, 4, 5; *Ex Ponto* 1. For general commentary, see Jo-Marie Claassen, *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (London: Duckworth, 1999); B.R. Nagle, *The Poetics of Exile: Program and Polemic in the Tristia and Epistolae ex Ponto of Ovid* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1980). ²³ Ovid's exilic writings are not among classical works attested in early Ireland, though there is a possibility that some of the poet's other writings were known. See B.K. Martin, 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare: A Critical Evaluation', *Medium Aevum*, 38 (1969), 245–63; T.J. Brown, 'An historical introduction to the use of Classical Latin authors in the British Isles from the fifth to the eleventh century', *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 22 (1975), 237–93. ²⁴ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *peregrinatio*', *Celtica*, 11 (1976), 43–59; Kathleen Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 11 (1960), 143–51. ²⁵ See, for instance, Gerard Murphy, 'Scotti Peregrini: The Irish on the Continent in the Time of Charles the Bald', *Studies*, 17 (1928), 39–50, 229–44; Pierre Riché, 'Les Irlandais et les princes carolingiens aux VIIIe et IXe siècles', in *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. H. Lowe, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), 2:735–45; J.J. Contreni, *Carolingian Learning, Masters and Manuscripts* (Hampshire and Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 1992). ²⁶ *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131)* ed. S. Mac Airt & G. Mac Niocaill, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), entry 849.8: *Robartach m. Colgen, abbas Slane, exulavit*.

The emigrés who sought safety abroad from Viking depredation came from various regions in Ireland, their common motivation being the wish for peaceful scholarly life. In the usual Irish manner they would have identified themselves according to their diverse co-ordinates of kin and locality.²⁷ In their host territories, however, their assigned identity took account only of the land of their birth, *mater Hibernia*.²⁸ In a prologue to the ninth-century *Vita* of St Germanus, Heiric of Auxerre asks: 'What am I to say of Ireland which, to a man, despising the sea that lies between, is migrating with a multitude of writers to our shores?'²⁹ Irish exiles themselves came to adopt their externally-assigned national identification. An anonymous poet pleads: *O vos Francigenae, sumite Scottigenam*, 'O you Franks, receive the Irishman'.³⁰ The common bonds of Irishness created community abroad in the ninth century for scholars like Sedulius Scottus,³¹ who praises four fellow-countrymen as *quadrigae domini, Scottensis lumina gentis*, 'the chariot-team of the Lord, the lights of the Irish race'. It is Sedulius also who urges the prelate Hartgar: *Sophos Scottigenas suscipe corde pio* 'Cherish the learned Irish with gentle heart'.³² The great philosopher, Johannes, is designated *Eriugena* 'born in Ireland', the vernacular name for Ireland being compounded on the model of the Virgilian *Grauiгена*.³³ Irishness and exile combine to distinguish a poet named simply as *Hibernicus Exul*.³⁴ Indeed, the practice of poetry itself is a further bond and distinguishing characteristic of these ninth-century Irish abroad, whose Latin verse is infused with native belief in the importance of their art.³⁵

Much of the surviving output of the Irish exiles is public poetry, designed to gain reward or patronage. However, some glimpses of exilic sentiment

27 Note, for example, marginalia on the St Gall Priscian (194a), *de inis maddoc dún .i. meisse 7 coirbbre*, 'We are from Inis Maddoc, Coirbbre and I'. See *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ed. W. Stokes & J. Strachan, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901–03; repr. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1975), 2:xxi. 28 For the most part, Latin texts are cited from *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* (hereafter *MGH Poetae*), ed. Ernst Dümmler and others, 4 vols. in 5 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881–1923). For usage of the term *mater Hibernia*, see Alcuin's elegy for the Irishman Virgil of Salzburg, *MGH Poetae*, 1:340. 29 *Quid Hiberniam memorum contempto pelagi discrimine pacis totam cum grege philosophorum ad littora nostra migrantem*: text, *MGH Poetae*, 3:429; translation from Murphy, 'Scotti Peregrini', p. 41. 30 Text, *MGH Poetae*, 3:691. See also Murphy, 'Scotti, Peregrini', p. 232. 31 For a full listing of the works of Irish *peregrini*, see Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1985), pp. 165–221; for Sedulius in particular, see pp. 177–80. On Irish scholarly interconnections, see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'The Irish as Mediators of Antique Culture on the Continent', in *Science in Western and Eastern Civilization in Carolingian Times*, ed. P.L. Butzer and D. Lohrmann (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1993), pp. 41–52. 32 Murphy, 'Scotti Peregrini', p. 236; Carney, *Medieval Irish Poetry*, pp. 48–9; Lapidge and Sharpe, *Bibliography*, pp. 177–8. 33 J.J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1969), pp. 1–2; Lapidge and Sharpe, *Bibliography*, pp. 183–4. 34 Texts in *MGH Poetae*, 1:395–412. Text and translation, P. Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London: Duckworth, 1985), pp. 175–9. 35 See, for instance, the work of *Hibernicus Exul* himself: Godman, *Poetry*, pp. 175–9.

survive. Colmán, bidding farewell to his namesake who is returning to Ireland,³⁶ accepts that love of *patria* cannot be thwarted: *Vincis amor patriae: quis flectere posit amantem?* 'I yield to your love of our homeland. Who can gainsay a lover?'³⁷ He goes on to pray: 'Let Him be the pilot of your ship in the wash of the waves/ borne over the ocean by gusts of the cloud-bearing east wind/ may He bring you back to the coasts of beloved Ireland'.³⁸ Just as local identity is subsumed into national identity abroad, so too, *patria* becomes synonymous with the land of Ireland. Donatus of Fiesole, around the second half of the ninth century, prefaces his metrical Life of St Brigit with verses in praise of his homeland, 'the noblest share of earth in the far western world'.³⁹ Ireland is described in paradisiacal terms, as a prosperous, benign land, flowing with milk and honey, free of dangerous creatures. Moreover, it is a land fit for the Irish to dwell, 'a race of men renowned in war, in peace, in faith'.⁴⁰

National consciousness, idealization of Ireland as *patria*, and a context of enforced rather than freely-chosen clerical migration from Ireland, are elements which bridge the temporal and linguistic divide between the Hiberno-Latin poetry of ninth-century exiles and Irish vernacular representations of the exiled Colum Cille. Moreover, the Irish themselves drew parallels between classical literature and their own exilic situation as we see from marginal comments in the ninth-century Codex Bernensis 363.⁴¹ The plaintive *de Scottis qui moriuntur in aliena regione*⁴² and *sicut mac Cialláin* combine emotional and scholarly response to the Latin texts.⁴³ But what of the dramatized exiled persona who addresses his situation in Ovidian terms? We do not find a prototype surviving among the works of Irish exiles.⁴⁴ Yet there is evidence to show that Ovid's *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto* were influential texts in the learned circles to which Irish scholars belonged in the ninth century.

³⁶ Ed. Kuno Meyer, 'Colman's Farewell to Colman', *Ériu*, 3 (1907), 186–9; See Mario Esposito, 'The Poems of Colmanus "Nepos Cracavist" and Dungalus "Praecipuus Scottorum"', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 33 (1932), 113–31; Godman, *Poetry*, pp. 280–1. ³⁷ Godman, *Poetry*, pp. 280–1. ³⁸ *Ipse tuae liquidis rector sit navis in undis/Aequore nubifere devectum flatibus Furi/ Reddat ad optatae Scottorum litora terrae*. Text and translation, Godman, *Poetry*, pp. 280–1. ³⁹ The poem begins: *Fimibus occiduis describitur optima tellus*. Ed. (as part of *Vita metrica* of Brigit), D.N. Kissane, 'Vita metrica sanctae Brigitae: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Commentary and Indexes', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 77 C (1977), 57–192 (83). The poem has been translated in various anthologies. I quote from the rendering of Liam de Paor in Máire and Liam de Paor, *Early Christian Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958, repr. 1978), p. 130. ⁴⁰ *In qua Scottorum gentes habitare merentur: Inclita gens hominum milite, pace, fide*. ⁴¹ Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, 2:xxv; Kenney, *Sources*, no. 364, vii (pp. 559–60); John J. Contreni, 'The Irish in the Western Carolingian Empire (According to James F. Kenney and Bern, Burgerbibliothek 363)', *Carolingian Learning, Masters and Manuscripts*, chapter 9. ⁴² Ludwig C. Stern, 'Bemerkungen zu den Berner Glossen', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 4 (1903), 169–86 (180); Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947, repr. 1970), pp. 38–9. ⁴³ Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus*, 2:235. ⁴⁴ Extracts from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are included in the content of the Codex Bernensis 363, however. See Kenney, *Sources*, no. 364 (p. 560).

Several texts survive in which Carolingian churchmen, expelled to distant regions because of local enmities, are likened, or liken themselves, to Ovid.⁴⁵ The framing of experience in Ovidian terms extends throughout the reign of Louis the Pious through to that of Charles the Bald, and those whose personal circumstances were thus dramatized ranged from Theodulf, author of stinging anti-Irish invective,⁴⁶ to Walahfrid Strabo, whose Irish contacts were considerably friendlier.⁴⁷

Indeed, Walahfrid had specifically Columban as well as Irish connections, as indicated by his authorship of a poem commemorating the Iona monk, Bláthmac, slain in the year 825 while defending the shrine of Colum Cille.⁴⁸ Moreover, Reichenau, from which Walahfrid was expelled in 840, and subsequently restored in 842, held the earliest surviving copy of the *Vita Columbae* in its library, at least by the tenth century.⁴⁹ Yet Reichenau is by no means the only monastery where cultural fusion between Irish exile experience and Carolingian refashioning of its classical representation might have occurred.⁵⁰ A feature of the verse of ninth-century 'outcasts' is a listing of famous exiles. Ovid comes first, of course, but also mentioned are Boethius, Seneca, and Virgil, and Saints Peter and Paul.⁵¹ Could a patriotic Irishman have added a saint of his own nation to the list?

It is possible, then, that the literary representation of Colum Cille's exile could have drawn on the classical models and their imitations which were circulating in the Carolingian world. The cultural circumstances of transmission to Ireland are not difficult to envisage, since there was interaction in both directions between exilic destinations and homeland. Surviving verses reflect the ninth-century travels of Irish émigrés. Sedulius Scottus prays for a friend's safe arrival from his homeland, while Colmán, as we have seen, bids farewell to a returning exile.⁵² Moreover, the Annals of St-Bertin in the year 848 record an Irish victory over the Vikings, after which 'the king of the Irish' sent envoys to Charles the Bald.⁵³ The Irish king in question is probably Máel Sechnaill of Southern Uí Néill, the most prominent ruler in the country at the time.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ For detailed discussion, see Peter Godman, 'Louis "the Pious" and his Poets', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 19 (1985), 239-89, (especially pp. 244-58, 266-71, 287-9); Godman, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987). ⁴⁶ See Godman, *Poetry*, pp. 150-62; Kenney, *Sources* no. 342 (pp. 536-7). ⁴⁷ Kenney, *Sources*, no. 358; Godman, 'Louis', pp. 287-8; Godman, *Poetry* pp. 224-5. ⁴⁸ See M. Pöörnbacher (ed.), *Walahfrid Strabo; Zwei Legenden; Blathmac, der Martyrer von Iona (Hy), Mammes der Christliche Orpheus* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1997). ⁴⁹ Indeed, the *Vita Columbae* had been circulating on the continent since the eighth century. See Jean-Michel Picard, 'Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and the Cult of Colum Cille in Continental Europe', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 98 C 1 (1998), 1-23 (2-10). ⁵⁰ See map of continental sites with attested Columban associations, Picard, 'Adomnán's *Vita*', p. 3. ⁵¹ Godman, 'Louis', pp. 250-4, 266-71, 287-8. ⁵² Murphy, 'Scotti Peregrini', p. 236, and note 35 above. ⁵³ *The Annals of St-Bertin*, trans. and annotated by Janet L. Nelson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 65-6. ⁵⁴ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*,

While his designation as 'king of the Irish' reflects expected continental usage, nevertheless in subsequent Irish records Máel Sechnaill is called, or, indeed, calls himself, 'king of Ireland'.⁵⁵ The coincidence may be fortuitous. On the other hand, there is an observable move toward 'national' titles and concepts in Irish annals records from the mid-ninth century.⁵⁶ While awareness of national identity was awakened significantly through the alterity of the Viking presence in Ireland,⁵⁷ Irish contact with its expatriates in Europe surely also brought heightened consciousness of *patria*, exile, and its representations.

The vernacular creation of Colum Cille as an Ovidian figure, however, required also that his exilic destination be regarded as alien from his homeland. Such a situation would have been unthinkable in the pre-Viking era when Iona appeared as an extension of Ireland, at the heart of a federation of churches, and a unity of peoples, which spanned the Irish Sea. Yet a fissure had opened up as Vikings came to dominate the seas, and Iona fell under the sway of Hebridean invaders. By the beginning of the tenth century the headship of the Columban federation of churches had moved from Iona to Ireland.⁵⁸ Politically, the Irish-descended rulers of Dál Riata, Iona's patrons, had begun to establish themselves in southern Pictish territories. From the mid-ninth century, they held kingship there over Picts and Gaels, a kingship which forged its own Scottish identity.⁵⁹ At all levels, therefore, the relationship between Ireland and Colum Cille's exilic destination changed fundamentally from the ninth century onward. By the end of the first millennium, Iona, from an Irish perspective, was located in an area dominated by foreigners, and fraught with danger and difficulty.⁶⁰ It could undoubtedly be perceived as a destination of enforced exile.

Ultimately, then, we can trace a set of circumstances wherein the milieu of exiled Irish scholars in continental Europe could have provided literary exemplars for the creation of Colum Cille's exile persona. We can point to a contemporary historical milieu in which the concept of *peregrinatio* had altered,⁶¹ and Iona residence signalled estrangement and desolation. Beyond that, we can only speculate. An intriguing footnote to our enquiries about the definition of Colum Cille's role as exemplar of exile is found, however,

848.4. ⁵⁵ Máire Herbert, 'Rí Éirenn, Rí Alban: Kingship and Identity in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', in *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson* ed. Simon Taylor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 62–72 (in particular, pp. 62–6). ⁵⁶ For example, Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*, 825.2, 862.7, 870.1, 887.5. ⁵⁷ Herbert, 'Rí Éirenn', pp. 63–4. ⁵⁸ M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988, repr. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 68–84. ⁵⁹ Herbert, 'Rí Éirenn', pp. 66–72. ⁶⁰ Note the record of renewed attack in which the abbot and fifteen of the community were killed (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*, 986.3). ⁶¹ We may note also that *peregrinatio* is used of pilgrimage to Rome in Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, *Annals of Ulster*, 929.3.

in the eleventh-century commentary on the *Amra* of Colum Cille in the manuscript Rawlinson B 502.⁶² A gloss on the *Amra* line *Boe obeid* reads *ara heolcha hi flidecht. Nó humal hé. ondhi is oboediens*.⁶³ The second part of the gloss occurs in other copies of the commentary, and suggests some consensus that the *Amra* phrase *Boe obeid* might mean 'He was obedient'.⁶⁴ However, the Rawlinson glossator interposes his own interpretation, clearly reading the phrase as 'He was an Ovid', which he glosses 'for his science in poetry'. So, in the era of composition of our exile poetry, at least one learned Irishman was asserting affinity between Colum Cille and Ovid.

⁶² Text and commentary ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra Choluimb Chille*', *Revue Celtique*, 20 (1899), 31–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–37; corrections and additions, 21 (1900), 133–6. For general commentary on the material, see M. T. Davies, 'Protocols of Reading in Early Irish Literature: Notes on Some Notes to *Orgain Denna Ríg* and *Amra Coluim Cille*', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 32 (Winter 1996), 1–23. ⁶³ 'For his science in poetry. Or he was humble (*obid* being derived) from *obediens*', text and trans. in Stokes, 'The Bodleian *Amra*', pp. 264–5 (section 80). Similar material, apparently derivative of the Rawlinson copy, is found in the unpublished *Amra* commentary in National Library of Ireland MS G 50, p. 79. Another late version is reflected in the unpublished quatrain in MS Laud Misc. 615, p. 53: *Boi cen bron ag les aoigheadh/ís ba lor ú les oiged/aigen fña croide gach fhir/ocus file mar Obnid.* ⁶⁴ See the notes in the eleventh-century *Liber Hymnorum*, ed. and trans. J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1898), 1:176, and the unpublished version in the Yellow Book of Lecan, f. 78. The phrase is glossed *auidus .i. laind* in the eleventh-century *Lebor na hUidre* – see the diplomatic edition of R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929, repr. 1970), p. 32, line 93.