

financial terms and also in its effect on the archaeological fraternity in Ireland – it remains to be seen whether the Tara Project in the Discovery Programme will continue with its work. The volume here reviewed gives good grounds for hoping that it will.

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BOBBIO IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES: THE ABIDING LEGACY OF COLUMBANUS. By Michael Richter. Pp 211, illus. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2008. €55.

Of all the famous Irish ‘wandering scholars’ of the early Middle Ages, undoubtedly the best known – and certainly the most influential – was Columbanus (d. 615). Born in Leinster, drawn by a youthful asceticism to Bangor (County Down), he eventually set sail for the continent, in the company of twelve other monks, probably c.595, and established three monasteries in Burgundy: Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaine. Of the three, Luxeuil was to be by far the most influential in the later Frankish Church, but even Luxeuil pales into insignificance beside Columbanus’s last foundation (and final resting place): Bobbio, near Piacenza, in north-west Italy. Although Columbanus was destined to spend only his last three years there, Bobbio’s fame lived on long after him, and still looms large today. It is all the more surprising, therefore, to find that this new book by Michael Richter is the first lengthy study of the monastery in the English language.

The book contains twelve chapters and an epilogue recounting (1) the earliest period, with the Latin texts (but no translation) of the oldest surviving foundation charters; (2) a potted history of the saint’s life and career; (3) a similarly brief synopsis of the careers of Columbanus’s successors as abbot: Attala (615–c.625/6), Bertulf (c.625/6–43), Bobulenus (c.643–c.654) and Comgall [Camogallus] (dates uncertain); there follows (4) a cursory account of the monastic scriptorium; (5) a chapter entitled ‘A dark century’, based on the fact that ‘After Comgallus, no name of an abbot of Bobbio is known with certainty for a century’ (until 747) (p. 87); a chapter (6) on the Carolingian century is followed by three on (7) the physical layout of the monastery, (8) its economy and (9) its library; the last three chapters are concerned with (10) the career of Abbot Agilulf (c.883–96); (11) ‘Columbanus’s last journey’ (the procession of the saint’s relics to Pavia, and back again to Bobbio); and, finally, (12) a cursory (three-page) account of ‘Manuscripts with Irish-language material’. This last chapter would have sat better with the earlier one (4) on the Bobbio scriptorium; even so, it is clear that the author’s expertise lies elsewhere. For a definitive treatment of the subject, we must await the publication of Professor Mirella Ferrari’s magisterial 2007 Oxford Lyell Lectures on Bobbio’s library and manuscripts. (Her essay on the ‘spigolature ambrosiane’ from Bobbio, in the 1989 *Traube-Gedenkschrift*, pp 59–78, is not mentioned.)

The principal sources for these chapters are the (later) copies of the foundation-charters and papal exemptions; Columbanus’s own letters (of which six survive); a vita of the saint composed by a monk of Bobbio, Jonas, and ‘published’ by him in 643; a late tenth-century text known as the *Miracula Sancti Columbani*, as well as the magnificent mid-eighth-century monumental marble epitaph of Bishop Cummian still extant in the abbey museum; a late seventh-century Latin *Carmen de Synodo Ticinensi*, and a number of eighth-century Lombard royal rescripts. There is no discussion of the many textual problems attached to any of these (though the author does admit (p. 17) that the charters are ‘three documents [that] bristle with difficulties’). There is no discussion, either, of the tortuous manuscript history of Jonas’s vita, and the implications for the proper evaluation of its statements concerning Columbanus’s successors. Perhaps the author intended (or intends) to take up these matters elsewhere.

Most remarkable of all – by its absence – is any account of Bobbio’s fame in the

Renaissance period, when book hunters such as Poggio Bracciolini and Coluccio Salutati scoured the library for remnants of classical Roman manuscripts and brought many previously unknown texts to light. Towards the end of the seventh century, Bobbio scribes reused leaves from a pre-Jerome Old Testament in order to copy a number of grammatical texts associated with the famous name of Probus. What survived of the original seven fascicles became a single codex, fated to be removed from Bobbio in 1493, to come into the possession of Aulo Giano Parrasio, to pass to the library of the Augustinians of S. Giovanni a Carbonara, to be taken to Vienna in 1718, to be handed over to the Italian state in 1919, and to come to rest eventually in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples (Cod. Lat. 1). It is arguably one of the most important collections of Latin grammars from late antiquity. The most spectacular find of the Renaissance period, however, was the palimpsest copy of Cicero's *De re publica* (the only surviving fragment of that work). The classic account (and still the most comprehensive) is Amadeo Peyron's (Latin) introduction to the 1824 facsimile edition. Almost equally sensational was the rediscovery in the Bobbio library in 1493 of Rutilius Claudius Namatianus's poem in two books, *De reditu suo* (composed in 417) by Giorgio Merula, historian to the house of Ludovico Maria Sforza, duke of Milan. Professor Ferrari discovered and published further fragments of the same manuscript twenty-five years ago.

The Bobbio catalogue – probably the richest of all from the early Middle Ages – has been the object of numerous studies, not the least important being that by 'our own' indefatigable Mario Esposito (1931, though curiously omitted from his collected essays, vol. 2, 1990). It was Esposito who pointed out that, but for the chance purchase (in 1803) of the Bobbio manuscripts now housed in Turin by an Irishman, Edward Butler (who took his medical degree at the University of Pavia), that collection might have been lost for ever. Of all this, however, there is no mention; instead, Dr Richter, unfortunately, repeats outdated discussions of those Bobbio manuscripts that were glossed in Old Irish (in particular, MS C 301 inf., the supposed psalm commentary of Columbanus). He would have rendered a far greater service if he had simply reproduced Michele Tosi's magnificent 1985 edition of the Bobbio catalogues.

On the whole, however, the author is to be commended for having at least provided (most of) the raw materials for the first half-century of Bobbio's history. Where the book is deficient (for example, in its treatment of the Bobbio library and scriptorium), he is not to be too severely criticised as he admits quite candidly that he is 'not a trained palaeographer' (p. 10). The bibliography of works cited is useful, if not comprehensive. There is food for thought in the occasional questioning of previously held views. In that regard, it is perhaps apposite to cite one of the author's statements in his epilogue: 'It must be emphasized that when we look at Ireland in this same period, there is no monastery that offers a comparable variegated richness of information' (p. 187).

Finally, it is appropriate to praise the late lamented Michael Adams, whose Four Courts Press did so much over so many years to make possible the publication of studies such as this one. The quality of production – enhanced by a set of excellent plates – reflects his high standards. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.*

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A SHORT HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT: ENGLAND, GREAT BRITAIN, THE UNITED KINGDOM, IRELAND AND SCOTLAND. Edited by Clyve Jones. Pp 400. Woodbridge: Boydell Press. 2009. £75.

Even when members of the public affect surprise and disgust at the behaviour of their elected representatives, fascination with the institution through which they are governed remains undimmed. Equally, while the study of representative assemblies is no longer the highest priority for academic historians, there remains a solid constituency for traditional political