

ALEXANDER O'HARA

*Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia*

**Identities of Alienation in the Seventh Century\***

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Writing towards the end of the seventh century in the mountains of the Bierzo in north-western Spain, Valerius remembered the advent of the monastic life he had chosen more than forty-two years before:

Long ago when I, an unworthy sinner, a native of the province of Asturias, engrossed in worldly pleasures during my adolescence, eager for earthly riches, intent upon vain learning, in my concern for these things in the darkness of this lower world, was slackening the reins, suddenly I was driven by a desire for divine grace to attain the beginnings of the religious life. Setting out with the supreme effort of one fleeing the world, like one riding on a ship, I hastened to cross the sea to the shore of the monastery of Compludo, inflamed with an ardent desire, and terrified by the fear of future judgment, hoping through the path of conversion to attain at length the light of truth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Valerius of Bierzo, *Ordo querimoniae*, 1, in *Valerio of Bierzo: An Ascetic of the Late Visigothic Period*, ed. and trans. by Consuelo Maria Aherne (Washington, D. C., 1949), p. 69: Dum olim ego, indignissimus peccator, Asturiensis provinciae indigena, intra adolescentiae tempora mundialibus illecebris occupatus, lucrisque terrenis inhians, vanis disciplinis intentus, per infimi saeculi tenebras cura eorum frena laxarem, subito gratiae divinae desiderio coactus pro adipiscenda sacrae religionis crepundia toto nisu mundivagi saeculi fretum aggrediens, velut navigio vectans, ad Computensis coenobii litus properans transmeare immensi desiderii ardore succensus atque futuri iudicii timore perterritus, confidens per conversionis itinere tandem ad lucem pertingerem veritatis.

Valerius did not have to travel far to Compludo, the monastery founded in the hills around Bierzo in Galicia by Fructuosus of Braga in the mid-seventh century, yet he describes it as though he had embarked on a sea voyage to another land. Although Valerius never left the confines of the Bierzo – his world is a regional and localized one – he characterized his conversion in terms of *peregrinatio*. Ascetic exile (*peregrinatio*) was a voluntary form of exile that meant abandoning the native region and/ or country, the security, setting, and social bonds into which one was born.<sup>2</sup> As we see from Valerius's example, in which he uses the rhetoric of ascetic exile to express a new sense of identity as an *alienus*, the experience or perception of exile could be a powerful factor in the shaping of personal identity.

Exile is, of course, significant not only for the construction of individual but also of collective (including national) identities. The foundation myth of Rome as articulated by Virgil was based on a group of exiles,<sup>3</sup> while the concept of exile and alienation is central to Judaeo-Christian belief and identity.<sup>4</sup> Abraham's obedience to God's command to leave his native land and kindred for another made him and his descendants blessed, while the Jews's experience of exile in Egypt and their covenant with God turned them into a chosen people that established the basis of a sacred

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<sup>2</sup> On the practice of *peregrinatio* in the early Church and in the Early Middle Ages in general, see Bernhard Kötting, *Peregrinatio religiosa. Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirche* (Münster, 1950); Hans von Campenhausen, 'Die asketische Heimatlosigkeit im altkirchlichen und frühmittelalterlichen Mönchtum', in Idem. *Tradition und Leben: Kräfte der Kirchengeschichte: Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Tübingen, 1960), pp. 290-317; Arnold Angenendt, *Monachi Peregrini: Studien zu Pirmin und den monastischen Vorstellungen des frühen Mittelalters* (Munich, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Aeneid I. 1-7. On the theme of exile in Virgil and in Roman literature in general, see S. M. Bruwer, *The Theme of Exile in Virgil's Aeneid* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1974); Jo-Marie Classen, *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (London, 1999); Ernst Doblhofer, *Exil und Emigration: Zum Erlebnis der Heimatferne in der römischen Literatur* (Darmstadt, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of exile to the development of Judaism and Christianity both in historical and contemporary contexts, see *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. by James M. Scott (Leiden, 1997); *Diaspora: Exile and the Contemporary Jewish Condition*, ed. by Étan Levine (New York, 1986); Rudolf Mosis, *Exil – Diaspora – Rückkehr. Zum theologischen Gespräch zwischen Juden und Christen* (Düsseldorf, 1978).

nationalism.<sup>5</sup> In writing about Columbanus's exiled monastic community in the forests of Alemannia in the seventh century, Jonas of Bobbio likened them to the Israelites in the Desert. The starving monks came across a flock of birds covering the whole countryside, 'just as once quails covered the camp of the Israelites'.<sup>6</sup> Jonas refers to them as the 'manna of birds' and their presence there was clearly miraculous because they did not fly away when the monks attempted to capture them.<sup>7</sup> In 610 Columbanus along with the Irish and Insular contingent of his community had been banished from Burgundy by the Merovingian king, Theuderic II. Theuderic had followed an ethnic strategy in ridding the troublesome Irish monk from his kingdom by banishing him and the other foreigners for not complying with local customs. Only Columbanus's monks who came from Gaul were allowed to remain behind in the communities.<sup>8</sup> The exiled, Insular contingent, who were later joined by some of the other monks from Burgundy, would eventually make their way to Italy where they founded Bobbio in the Ligurian Apennines. For Jonas, Bobbio was the culmination of Columbanus's *peregrinatio*, a place chosen by God (an angel had directed Columbanus to Italy), and sanctified by miracles.<sup>9</sup> In his account of the birds in Alemannia, Jonas linked Columbanus's exiled community with the chosen people of Israel in order to emphasize Bobbio's pre-eminence over Columbanus's Frankish communities.<sup>10</sup> It shows how the experience of exile could be a powerful factor in the construction of identities.

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12. 1-3; Exodus 3. 7-8. See also Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis, 2002); Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York, 1991), pp. 65-76.

<sup>6</sup> Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani abbatis et discipulorumque eius*, I. 27, in *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, ed. by Bruno Krusch, MGH, *SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed.* (Hanover and Leipzig, 1905), pp. 144-294, at p. 215: *velut Israhelitarum castra coturnix olim operuit* (alluding to Numbers 11. 31).

<sup>7</sup> *Vita Columbani*, I. 27, p. 215: *alitur manna*.

<sup>8</sup> *Vita Columbani*, I. 20, p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> *Vita Columbani*, I. 27, p. 217; I. 30, pp. 220-222.

<sup>10</sup> For a new reading of the *Vita Columbani* and the context in which it was written, see Alexander O'Hara, 'Jonas of Bobbio and the *Vita Columbani*: Sanctity and Community in the Seventh Century' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of St Andrews, 2009).

Modern discourses on the sociology of exile offer a nuanced and varied discussion of this social and historical phenomenon. Exile has always been a means by which differences and boundaries between individuals and/ or groups have been monitored and maintained.<sup>11</sup> According to Frank Parkin, hegemonic groups use ethnicity, language, and religion as part of a strategy for them to acquire privileges for themselves by excluding others access to needed resources.<sup>12</sup> These processes of social exclusion are thus closely allied to the dynamics of power. However, traditional, structuralist approaches have been modified by more subtle understandings of the workings of exile. Political exile has been recognized as only one form of exile among a number of others. We can distinguish other, less obvious kinds of exile in addition to religious, cultural, sexual, economic, and penal forms. One such kind is symbolic exile, which refers to individuals who understand their lives in terms of religious, philosophical, or aesthetic notions of exile.<sup>13</sup> The *peregrini* or ascetic exiles of the Early Middle Ages are the classic examples of this kind of exile, men who abandoned everything for an ascetic ideal of alienation. To what extent did this kind of exile play a role in the shaping of their identities and did it play a part in the construction of collective identities also? How far can we understand the experiences of these men as reflecting the values, drives, and concerns of the societies in which they lived? The ritual of *peregrinatio* as a monastic expression of the monk's abandonment of society and the *saeculum* marked a further step in the individual's inner transformation modelled on Christian ideals. Such transformations, often ritually enacted, can reveal the primary intuitions, drives, and conflicts active within a culture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See *Isolation: Places and Practices of Exclusion*, ed. by Carolyn Strange and Alison Bashford (London, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Frank Parkin, *Class Inequality and Political Order* (London, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Böss, 'Theorising Exile', in *Re-Mapping Exile: Realities and Metaphors in Irish Literature and History*, ed. by Michael Böss, Irene Gilsean Nordin, and Britta Olinder (Aarhus, 2005), pp. 15-46, at p. 20. For a sociology of exile, see, e.g., Paul Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile* (London, 1972); Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*; Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in Idem. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), pp. 173-186.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *Self and Self-Transformations in the History of Religions*, ed. by David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford, 2002). This collected volume of essays considers the idea of the "self" as a cultural

The role and dialectics of exile in the shaping of identity in the Early Middle Ages remains an understudied one. There is a surprising dearth in historical and legal studies on exile in the Early and High Middle Ages. The proceedings of the 2002 International Medieval Congress at Leeds on the theme of exile, for example, although entitled *Exile in the Middle Ages*, is confined to the period c. 900-1300 and largely focuses on banishment as a form of social punishment.<sup>15</sup> Exile is briefly defined as ‘the banishment of a person by a higher authority’ reflecting the limited scope of the volume and the absence of a broader sociological approach. If we can define identity as ‘the interface between the individual and the social group’,<sup>16</sup> a dynamic process by which the individual constantly negotiates and defines himself in relation to others and social models, then voluntary exile, the conscious breaking of this bond, is also a powerful statement of identity.

It is rare in early medieval sources that we are able to see clear self-identifications or to get an insider view into how individuals thought of and expressed their own sense of identity.<sup>17</sup> There are exceptions, of course. The writings of the Irish abbot and monastic founder, Columbanus, the Italian monk and hagiographer, Jonas of Bobbio, and the Spanish hermit, Valerius of Bierzo, offer a vivid insight into how the experience or perception of alienation shaped the personal identities of these three men. Columbanus, who left Ireland as an ascetic exile in 590, wrote a series of letters

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formation like any other and how ‘the kind of transformation(s) a culture puts forward as a goal or possibility for human life always expresses the primary axioms, conflicts, and intuitions that make up its particular world’: Introduction, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Exile in the Middle Ages. Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8-11 July 2002*, ed. by Laura Napran and Elizabeth van Houts (Turnhout, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Walter Pohl, ‘Archaeology of Identity: Introduction’, in *Archäologie der Identität*, ed. by Walter Pohl and M. Mehofer, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 16 (Vienna, forthcoming), pp. 1-25, at p. 4. On identity in the early Middle Ages, see also Walter Pohl, ‘Identität und Widerspruch. Gedenken zu einer Sinngeschichte des Frühmittelalters’, in *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, ed. by Walter Pohl, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 8 (Vienna, 2004), pp. 23-36; Idem. ‘Aux origines d’une Europe ethnique: Identités en transformation entre antiquité et moyen âge’, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 60 (2005), pp. 183-208.

<sup>17</sup> Pohl, ‘Archaeology of Identity’, p. 3.

on the Continent to ecclesiastical leaders in which he sought exemption from complying with Gallic ecclesiastical norms.<sup>18</sup> He wanted to continue in the ecclesiastical traditions he had followed in Ireland in the face of opposition from the Gallic bishops. These letters are the most personal expressions of how the saint conceived of his own identity.

Jonas, who grew up in a frontier town in the Italian Alps and who became a monk at Bobbio in 616, less than a year after Columbanus's death there, is unusual because, for a hagiographer, he occasionally writes about himself in his *Vita Columbani*.<sup>19</sup> Although he never characterizes himself as an ascetic exile, Jonas wrote the *Vita Columbani* as a missionary on the north-east frontier of the Frankish kingdom near the English Channel. His later career as a missionary and as an abbot lay far from Italy and the town in which he was born and remembered fondly and the monastery of his youth. One did not necessarily have to travel overseas to consider oneself a *peregrinus*. As Arnold Angenendt has discussed, leaving one's home, family, and

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<sup>18</sup> On the corpus of Columbanus's writings, see *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. by G. S. M. Walker, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae II* (Dublin, 1957, repr. 1970); Johannes Wilhelmus Smit, *Studies on the Language and Style of Columba the Younger (Columbanus)* (Amsterdam, 1971); *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, ed. by Michael Lapidge (Woodbridge, 1997). On Columbanus and aspects of his career, see, e.g., Donald Bullough, 'The career of Columbanus', in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, pp. 1-28; Damian Bracken, 'Juniors Teaching Elders: Columbanus, Rome, and Spiritual Authority', in *Roma Felix – Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*, ed. by Éamonn Ó Carragain and Carol Neuman de Vegvar (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 253-276; Idem, 'Authority and Duty: Columbanus and the Primacy of Rome', *Peritia* 16 (2002), pp. 168-213; Clare Stancliffe, 'Columbanus and the Gallic Bishops', in *Auctoritas: Mélanges offerts à Olivier Guillot*, ed. by Giles Constable and Michel Rouche (Paris, 2006), pp. 205-215; and the contributions in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. by Howard B. Clarke and Mary Brennan, BAR International Series 114 (Oxford, 1981).

<sup>19</sup> On Jonas and his hagiographical corpus, see, e.g., Alexander O'Hara, 'The *Vita Columbani* in Merovingian Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe* 17 (2009), pp. 126-153; Idem, 'Death and the Afterlife in Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani*', in *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. by Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon, *Studies in Church History* 45 (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 64-73; Albrecht Diem, 'Monks, Kings, and the Transformation of Sanctity: Jonas of Bobbio and the End of the Holy Man', *Speculum* 82 (2007), pp. 521-559; Clare Stancliffe, 'Jonas's *Life of Columbanus and his Disciples*', in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, ed. by John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin, 2001), pp. 189-220; Christian Rohr, 'Hagiographie als historische Quelle: Ereignisgeschichte und Wunderberichte in der *Vita Columbani* des Ionas von Bobbio', *MIÖG* 103 (1995), pp. 229-264; Ileana Pagani, 'Ionas-Ionatus: a proposito della biografia di Giona di Bobbio', *Studi Medievali*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 29 (1988), pp. 45-85; Ian Wood, 'The *Vita Columbani* and Merovingian Hagiography', *Peritia* 1 (1982), pp. 63-80.

native region for a monastic life, crossing the Alps to live in another land, and undertaking missionary work to foreign peoples, were all forms of *peregrinatio*.<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen with Valerius, who spent all his life in a peripheral region in the north-west of the Visigothic kingdom, he too conceived of his eremitical life in terms of ascetic exile. In comparison to the travels of Columbanus and Jonas, the world of Valerius can seem regional and limited. Yet Valerius has left an autobiographical account that in its conception and originality is unique in the Early Middle Ages. Valerius lived during the second half of the seventh century and died within a decade or so of the Muslim conquest of the Visigothic kingdom in 711. He lived in a peripheral, conflict zone of the kingdom where the Visigothic kings waged frequent campaigns against the Basques and Astures, whom they never fully succeeded in conquering.<sup>21</sup> Nothing is known about Valerius apart from what he tells us in his writings, the 'Account of my Grief, Explanation of My Trials' (*Ordo querimoniae praefatio discriminis*), the 'Further Account since First Conversion' (*Item replicatio sermonum a prima conversione*), and 'What Remains from Former Grievs' (*Quod de superioribus querimoniis residuum*) which together comprise his autobiographical writings.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this work, which he conceived of as a whole and wrote for other ascetics in the Bierzo, Valerius wrote a number of other religious works and poems.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Arnold Angenendt, 'Die irische Peregrinatio und ihre Auswirkungen auf dem Kontinent vor dem Jahre 800', in *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. by Heinz Löwe (2 vols., Stuttgart, 1982), I, pp. 52-79.

<sup>21</sup> On Visigothic campaigns against the Basques and Astures, see Abilio Barbero and Marcelo Vigil, *Sobre los orígenes sociales de la Reconquista* (Barcelona, 1974), pp. 51-67.

<sup>22</sup> Consuelo Maria Aherne provides a Latin edition and English translation in *Valerio of Bierzo: An Ascetic of the Visigothic Period*. Ramón Fernández Pousa published the complete works of Valerius in *San Valerio, Obras* (Madrid, 1942); see also the edition in *PL 87*, cols. 439-457.

<sup>23</sup> These works are in Pouza's edition, *San Valerio, Obras*. *De vana saeculi sapientia* is a short treatise on spurning worldly vanity in which Valerius gives a résumé of biblical history, an account of some esoteric royal and noble martyrs, stories from the Lives of the Desert Fathers, and a description of Heaven. His *Vita et epistola beatissimae Egeriae*, likewise written for the monks of the Bierzo, is an account of a fourth-century pilgrimage made to the Holy Land by the nun Egeria in which the nun is presented as an example of fortitude and perseverance to the monks. Another treatise, *De genere monachorum*, is concerned with pseudo-monks and the problem of landowners who forced their *coloni*

Valerius's story is anything but ordinary and prosaic, but a vivid and fascinating portrait of a religious mind reflecting on his life as a hermit over forty-two years. It is a candid, if eccentric, narrative of a religious exile within his own country. Although there are numerous studies on Valerius in Spanish historiography, he is little known in Anglophone scholarship.<sup>24</sup> In considering the question of the individual in the Early Middle Ages, Walter Pohl has remarked that 'Hardly anybody, for instance, knows the seventh-century author Valerius of Bierzo and his repeated attempts to come to terms with his trials and grief'.<sup>25</sup> Valerius is one of the few cases from the Early Middle Ages by which we can study in-depth the efforts of an individual to fashion his self-identity in terms of Christian dialectics. Roger Collins, one of the only Anglophone scholars to study Valerius, considered him to be 'at first sight, the oddest, certainly the least well understood, and the most unjustly vilified' of all the

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to become monks in the monasteries they had established on their lands. His *Dicta beati Valerii ad beatum Donadum scripta, De Bonello monacho, De caeleste revelatione* describes three visions of heaven and hell which were told to Valerius by Maximus, a monk of Compludo, and two hermits of the Bierzo, Bonellus and Baldarius. The description of Heaven related to him by these monks closely resembles the description he gives of his garden in his autobiographical accounts. Valerius also wrote hagiography and a number of interesting acrostic poems: Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, 'El corpus poético de la herencia literaria de Valerio del Bierzo', in Idem. *Anecdota Wisigothica I: Estudios y ediciones de textos literarios menores de época visigoda* (Salamanca, 1958); on Valerius's hagiography, see Idem. 'Sobre la compilación hagiográfica de Valerio del Bierzo', *Hispania Sacra: Revista española de historia eclesiástica* 4 (1951), pp. 3-25.

<sup>24</sup> On Valerius and his works, see, e.g., Roger Collins, 'The "autobiographical" works of Valerius of Bierzo: their structure and purpose', in *Los Visigodos: historia y civilización*, ed. by Antonino González Blanco (Murcia, 1986), pp. 425-442, reprinted in Idem. *Law, Culture and Regionalism in Early Medieval Spain* (Aldershot, 1992), IV; Francisco José Udaondo Puerto, 'La autobiografía de Valerio del Bierzo', in *Actas del I Congreso Nacional de Latín Medieval*, ed. by Maurilio Pérez González (Léon, 1995), pp. 379-386; Idem. 'Apuntes para una cronología de Valerio del Bierzo', *Helmantica* 56 (2005), pp. 125-157; Idem. 'Las entidades geográficas en las obras de Valerio del Bierzo', *Helmantica* 48 (1997), pp. 205-234; Lina Fernández Ortiz de Guinea and Pablo de la Cruz Díaz, 'Valerio del Bierzo y la autoridad eclesiástica', *Helmantica* 48 (1997), pp. 19-36; the issue of *Helmantica* 48 (1997) especially dedicated to Valerius; Judith Pauli, 'Valerius von Bierzo, ein vergessener Eremit. Eine Gestalt aus dem spanischen Mönchtum des 7. Jahrhunderts', *Erbe und Auftrag* 59 (1983), pp. 291-299; Donatien de Bruyne, 'L'heritage littéraire de l'abbé Saint Valère', *Revue Bénédictine* 32 (1920), pp. 1-10; Adalbert de Vogüé, "Martyrum in occulto": Le martyre du temps de paix chez Grégoire le Grand, Isidore de Séville et Valerius du Bierzo', in *Mélanges Gerard J. M. Bartelink* (1989), pp. 125-140.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Pohl, 'Introduction: Ego trouble?', in *Ego Trouble*, pp. 9-21, at p. 12.



major literary figures of Visigothic Spain.<sup>26</sup> Others have judged Valerius as being 'childish', 'tough and intransigent', and of having a persecution complex.<sup>27</sup>

The difficult character of Valerius is similar in so many respects to that of Columbanus. Both were unyielding, driven in their single-minded pursuit of an asceticism unconstrained by episcopal supervision. Both suffered persecution and elicited conflict with ecclesiastical authorities. While Columbanus was the archetype of the travelling, sea-faring Insular monk, Valerius was a land-locked hermit content to endow his experiences with maritime metaphors. Both were independent, stubborn, holy men in the true fashion of Late Antiquity. Jonas, on the other hand, is a representative of a different, more distinctly medieval, kind of monasticism. He was a product of Columbanus's monastic experiment that stressed the sanctity of the institution and the community above that of the individual ascetic. Jonas would pursue his monastic vocation within the structured bounds of a more institutionalized monasticism, yet this did not prevent him from occasionally writing about himself in his hagiography.

We can study these three individuals, Columbanus, Jonas, and Valerius, writing during the early, mid, and late seventh century respectively, as examples of the way in which early medieval individuals wrote about and constructed their identities. As we shall see, the theme of exile and alienation played an important role in this. It also leads us to consider how these individual identities of alienation can be understood in the wider context of the development of a more distinct Latin Christian consciousness during this time.

## COLUMBANUS

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<sup>26</sup> Collins, 'The "autobiographical" works of Valerius of Bierzo', p. 425.

<sup>27</sup> See Collins, citing the views of two Spanish scholars (T. González García and Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz), 'The "autobiographical" works of Valerius of Bierzo', p. 425.

When Columbanus was a young man in Ireland he was greatly tempted by the local *lascivae puellae*. Troubled by this sexual desire he came across a female anchorite whom he asked advice as to how he could overcome these temptations. The woman told him that for fifteen years she had been living there in her cell but that, if she had not been a woman, she would have left Ireland for a *potioris peregrinationis locus*. As he was a young man, she advised him to undertake this course of action. He would never be free from these temptations as long as he remained in his native land. She then reeled off a litany of biblical femmes fatales to emphasise her point:

“Do you not remember the urgings of Eve which ruined Adam, Samson’s seduction of Delilah, David’s corruption from former righteousness by the beauty of Bathsheba, the deceiving of wisest Solomon by the love of women? Flee! O young man flee! Escape ruin, through which you know for certain many have been ruined. Shun the way that leads to the gates of Hell!”<sup>28</sup>

Columbanus duly left his family home and his native region of Leinster (*natalis solum*),<sup>29</sup> to study first with a biblical scholar before entering the monastery of Bangor on the north-east coast of Ireland. Columbanus’s departure from his kin-group and native region made him an exile within Ireland, the lesser grade of *peregrinatio* which the female anchorite herself had undertaken.<sup>30</sup> After many years as a monk at Bangor, Columbanus was ready to undertake the superior type of *peregrinatio*. Despite initial hesitation at not wanting to lose a valuable member of the community, Comgall, his abbot, consented to allow Columbanus to leave as he realized that it would be beneficial for the salvation of others. Comgall gave Columbanus twelve companions to accompany him, and, with the blessing of the community, this elite

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<sup>28</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 3, pp. 155-157, at p. 157: “Non reminisceris suasu Evae Adam dilapsus, Samsonem a Dalida seductum, David a pristina iustitia pulchritudine Bersabae corruptum, sapientissimum Salomonem mulierum amore deceptum?” ‘Perge’, inquit, ‘o iuvenis, perge, evade ruinam, per quam multos conperis corruisse, declina viam, quae inferi ducit ad valvas’.

<sup>29</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 3, p. 157.

group of monks embarked on their voyage. They landed on the coast of Brittany where they decided to travel further into Merovingian Gaul.<sup>31</sup> During the course of the next twenty-five years, until his death in Northern Italy in 615, Columbanus berated Merovingian kings, shunned Gallic bishops, exhorted popes, preached against Arian heretics, founded monasteries, and generally exerted his spiritual *potentia* wherever he went.

Although the concept of *peregrinatio* was not unique to the Irish, it became a distinctive feature of Irish monasticism during the course of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries.<sup>32</sup> Undertaking *potior peregrinatio* was a commitment to spending the rest of one's life in voluntary exile and submitting oneself completely to the will of God. It is clear that Columbanus had no clear plan as to where he would ultimately go on his arrival on the Continent,<sup>33</sup> as in the case of the three Irish *peregrini* who arrived at the court of Alfred the Great in 891. These men had left Ireland in a thin, hide-covered boat without any oars and with only a week's supply of provisions. They allowed the boat to drift on the sea as their only concern was to be exiles wherever they happened to land.<sup>34</sup>

Such extreme, ascetic heroism was seen by the Irish as a form of martyrdom.<sup>35</sup> As Jonas was aware, it was only undertaken after many years had been spent in the monastery and was then dependent on the permission of the abbot.<sup>36</sup> Underlying the

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<sup>30</sup> On the two distinctions between exile within Ireland and exile overseas, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976), pp. 43-59, at p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 4, pp. 159-160.

<sup>32</sup> On Irish *peregrinatio*, see Angenendt, 'Die irische *Peregrinatio* und ihre Auswirkungen', pp. 52-79; Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', pp. 43-59; Kathleen Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11 (1960), pp. 143-151.

<sup>33</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 4, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* a. 891, ed. by Charles Plummer and John Earle, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (Oxford, 1892), I, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> On the various concepts of martyrdom as understood by the Irish, see Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, Rosomond McKitterick, and David Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 21-46.

<sup>36</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 4, p. 159.

practice of ascetic exile was the ritual of the monk's total separation from the world. Whereas Columbanus had been an *ambue*, an exile within Ireland, when he left his native region, he became a *cú glas*, a 'wolf', a total outsider, when he undertook *potior peregrinatio*.<sup>37</sup> Yet this renunciation of the world may also have served to raise Columbanus's legal standing in Irish society. By the mid-seventh century the *peregrinus* had attained a legal status equivalent to that of the normal Irish king and bishop.<sup>38</sup> This might go some way in explaining Columbanus's indifference to the authority of the kings and bishops he encountered on the Continent. According to T. M. Charles-Edwards it is probable that this high status given to the *peregrinus* developed in the second half of the sixth century (thus before Columbanus had left Ireland) and was then codified in the seventh-century legal codes.<sup>39</sup> It also translated into close ties between kings and *peregrini*. The exile could count on the protection of kings and we see this in practice in the way that Columbanus always went directly to royal courts on the Continent. Columbanus undoubtedly felt that his status as a *peregrinus* entitled him to royal hospitality and protection.

The concept of *peregrinatio* as understood by the Irish substantially shaped the way Columbanus conceived of his own identity and the way he related to the new society in which he found himself in on his arrival on the Continent. He still had a strong sense of being Irish and, from his letters, we can see how determined he was to maintain Irish monastic custom and traditions. These two identities for Columbanus, of being Irish and a religious exile, were compatible. In writing to Pope Boniface IV in 613 on behalf of the Lombard king and queen, Agilulf and Theodelinda,

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<sup>37</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', p. 46.

<sup>38</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', p. 53. The law is *Bretha Crólige* 4, ed. by D. A. Binchy, *Ériu* 12 (1938), pp. 6-55. It is also likely that the family and kin-group of the *peregrinus* also gained in prestige. On this, see Michael J. Enright, 'Iromanie-Irophobie Revisited: A Suggested Frame of Reference for Considering Continental Reactions to Irish *Peregrini* in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries', in *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit*, ed. by Jörg Jarnut, Ulrich Nonn, and Michael Richter (Sigmaringen, 1994), pp. 367-379, at p. 372.

<sup>39</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background', p. 54.

Columbanus describes himself as a *peregrinus Scotus*.<sup>40</sup> His neutral identity as an exile might have been seen by the Lombard king and queen as beneficial in his role as mediator between them and the Pope in trying to resolve the divisions of the Three Chapters controversy.<sup>41</sup> In the opening address of the letter Columbanus lists a series of comparisons that emphasise the contrast in status between himself and the Pope, among which is Columbanus's awareness that he is a foreigner (*peregrinus*) writing to a native (*indigena*).<sup>42</sup> He further emphasises his foreignness while at the same time clearly expressing a strong sense of Irish identity:

For all we Irish, inhabitants of the world's edge, are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who wrote the sacred canon by the Holy Ghost, and we accept nothing outside the evangelical and apostolic teaching; none has been a heretic, none a Judaizer, none a schismatic; but the Catholic Faith, as it was delivered by you first, who are the successors of the holy apostles, is maintained unbroken.<sup>43</sup>

Here Columbanus is at pains to reassure the Pope that the Irish are thoroughly orthodox and that Christianity has been preserved there unadulterated. He outlines their veneration for Rome, not as the former capital of the Roman Empire, but as the seat of the bishops of Rome and the site of the apostles' relics.<sup>44</sup> With his customary

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<sup>40</sup> *Epistula V. 14*, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 52.

<sup>41</sup> P. T. R. Gray and M. W. Herren, 'Columbanus and the Three Chapters Controversy – a New Approach', *Journal of Theological Studies* ns. 45 (1994), pp. 160-170. Although Gray and Herren have pointed out that 'Columbanus appears to be an honest broker and not – wittingly at least – a partisan in the initiatives undertaken by the Lombard court.' p. 170; see also Ian Wood, 'The Franks and Papal Theology, 550-660', in *The Crisis of the Oikoumene: The Three Chapters and the Failed Quest for Unity in the Sixth-Century Mediterranean*, ed. by Celia Chazelle and Catherine Cubitt, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 14 (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 223-241, esp. pp. 238-239.

<sup>42</sup> *Epistula V. 1*, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 36. This is also evident in his letter to Gregory the Great where he describes himself more as a stranger than a scholar (*magis peregrino quam sciolo*): *Epistula I. 4*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Epistula V. 3*, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 38: Nos enim sanctorum Petri et Pauli et omnium discipulorum divinum canonem spiritu sancto scribentium discipuli sumus, toti Iberi, ultimi habitatores mundi, nihil extra evangelicam et apostolicam doctrinam recipientes; nullus hereticus, nullus Iudaeus, nullus schismaticus fuit; sed fides catholica, sicut a vobis primum, sanctorum videlicet apostolorum successoribus, tradita est, inconcussa tenetur:

<sup>44</sup> *Epistula V. 11*, p. 48.

directness, Columbanus explains his audacity in speaking out and urging the Pope to resolve the Three Chapters schism by declaring that this is partly due to the *libertas paternae consuetudinis*, a tradition of free-speech in his native land.<sup>45</sup> Emphasising the cultural differences between the norm in his country and on the Continent, Columbanus goes on to say that ‘amongst us (i.e. the Irish) it is not a man’s station but his principles that matter’.<sup>46</sup> While Columbanus embraced the scriptural idea that the Christian has no true home on earth, this did not, in practice, mean a relinquishing of his Irish identity. Rather, if anything, the experience of ascetical exile reinforced his Irish identity as he continually strove to justify his position in Gaul by recourse to Irish traditional practice.

For Columbanus, remaining faithful to Irish monastic tradition was of particular importance. This is especially evident by his ridged adherence to the Irish method of calculating the date of Easter.<sup>47</sup> This divergence from the continental norm and his unwillingness to submit to the authority of the Gallic bishops caused considerable tensions between Columbanus and the bishops.<sup>48</sup> Columbanus seems to have believed that his status as a *peregrinus* entitled him to complete immunity – that somehow he was outside Gallic ecclesiastical jurisdiction and that he was free to establish and live the same kind of monastic life he had led in Ireland. This is most evident in a letter Columbanus wrote to one of Gregory the Great’s successors, either Sabinian or Boniface III, in 604 or 607.<sup>49</sup> As he was writing during a vacancy in the Papacy, it is unclear to which Pope the letter was addressed. He had written to Gregory the Great in around 600 to try and secure his support in defending his

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<sup>45</sup> *Epistula* V. 11, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> *Epistula* V. 11, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 48: Non enim apud nos persona, sed ratio valet.

<sup>47</sup> On the Easter controversy and its importance, see, e.g., T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 391-415.

<sup>48</sup> On this, see now Stancliffe, ‘Columbanus and the Gallic Bishops’, pp. 205-15.

<sup>49</sup> Neil Wright, ‘Columbanus’s *Epistulae*’, in *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, pp. 29-92, at p. 29.

stance on Easter against the Gallic bishops, but this does not seem to have been successful.<sup>50</sup> Columbanus again sought this immunity from Gregory's successor:

that you may grant to us pilgrims in our travail the godly consolation of your judgement, thus confirming, if it is not contrary to the faith, the tradition of our predecessors, so that by your approval we may in our pilgrimage maintain the rite of Easter as we have received it from generations gone before. For it is admitted that we are in our native land, while we accept no rules of the Gauls, but dwelling in seclusion, harming no one, we abide by the rules of our predecessors.<sup>51</sup>

What does Columbanus mean here when he says that *Constat enim nos in nostrum esse patria*? He is clearly not in his *patria* anymore, yet he seems to envisage that, by adhering to Irish tradition, he is, in some theoretical way, still in Ireland or, at least, outside Gallic jurisdiction.

We see a similar identification between being an ascetic exile yet remaining faithful to Irish traditions in Columbanus's letter to the Gallic bishops which he wrote in lieu of attending a synod of bishops to which he had been summoned to defend his position over Easter. He again outlines that he has come to Gaul for the sake of Christ as a *peregrinus* and that he seeks to maintain the traditions of his predecessors.<sup>52</sup> He asks them to show compassion on 'your poor veterans and aged pilgrims'<sup>53</sup> and that, despite differences, they are all united in Christ: 'for we are all joint members of one body, whether Franks or Britons or Irish or whatever our *gentes*

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<sup>50</sup> In the letter to Gregory's successor Columbanus bemoans the machinations of Satan in preventing 'the bearers of our letters' from reaching Gregory: *Epistula* III. 2, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> *Epistula* III. 2, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 24: Ut nobis peregrinis laborantibus tuae pium sententiae solatium praestes, quo si non contra fidem est nostrorum traditionem robores seniorum, quo ritum Paschae sicut accepimus a maioribus observare per tuum possimus iudicium in nostra peregrinatione. Constat enim nos in nostra esse patria, dum nullas istorum suscipimus regulas Gallorum, sed in desertis sedentes, nulli molesti, cum nostrorum regulis manemus seniorum. Walker translates nullas ... regulas Gallorum as 'no rules of your Frankish friends' which I have amended.

<sup>52</sup> *Epistula* II. 6, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Epistula* II. 6, p. 18: veteranos pauperes et peregrinos senes.

may be.’<sup>54</sup> Here, Columbanus, echoing the Gospels and St Paul, advocates the unity of Christian identity that is not dependent on biological or ethnic identities. This generic Christian identity is one that is more apparent in Columbanus’s Sermons where he writes about the Christian as having no home on earth ‘since our Father is in heaven’<sup>55</sup> and on the necessity for the true Christian, who has abandoned everything – home, family, country – for Christ to ‘live as travellers, as pilgrims, as guests of the world’.<sup>56</sup> Yet, as we see from his letters, Columbanus did not abandon his Irish identity when he became a *peregrinus*. It was compatible with his identity as a *peregrinus* and one which he was forced to defend as he struggled to gain tolerance for his Irish peculiarities. When Columbanus was finally expelled from Burgundy in 610 and was sentenced to be deported back to Ireland, this was above all the result of a cultural conflict. Columbanus was unwilling to accommodate himself to both local ecclesiastical and secular customs, and so Theuderic expelled him not only from his kingdom but from the country.<sup>57</sup> Columbanus was resolute that he would not return to Ireland as by undertaking *potior peregrinatio* he knew that this entailed leaving the country for the rest of his life: “I do not think it is pleasing to my Creator that I return once again to my native land which I left behind out of fear of Christ.”<sup>58</sup> Jonas’s words echo those of Columbanus himself in his letter to the bishops where the sentiments expressed are the same.<sup>59</sup> While Columbanus embraced the notion he expressed to the bishops of a common Christian unity irrespective of nationality which was reflected in the multi-ethnic make-up of his communities, the Franks were less charitable. When Columbanus gave the option to his monks of either following

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<sup>54</sup> *Epistula* II. 9, in *Sancti Columbanii Opera*, p. 22: Unus enim sumus corporis commembra, sive Galli, sive Britanni, sive Iberi, sive quaeque gentes. I have chosen not to translate *gentes* here as ‘ethnic group’ or as ‘race’ as appears in Walker’s translation.

<sup>55</sup> *Instructio* VIII. 1, in *Sancti Columbanii Opera*, p. 94: Patriam ergo non habemus in terra, quia Pater noster in caelis est.

<sup>56</sup> *Instructio* VIII. 2, in *Sancti Columbanii Opera*, p. 96: Vivamus in via ut viatores, ut peregrini, ut hospites mundi.

<sup>57</sup> *Vita Columbanii* I. 19, p. 191: ut qui ab omnium saecularium mores disciscat, quo venerit, ea via repetare studeat.

<sup>58</sup> *Vita Columbanii* I. 20, p. 195: “Non enim”, inquit, “reor placere conditore, semel natali solo ob Christi timorem relicto, denuo repedare”.

<sup>59</sup> *Epistula* II. 7, p. 18.



him into exile or remaining in Luxeuil, he was told that only his compatriots or those who had come to him from Brittany were permitted to accompany him. Those from Gaul were forced to remain.<sup>60</sup> The distinction which Columbanus would later make in his address to Pope Boniface IV, 'foreigner to native', was not mere rhetoric.

### JONAS OF BOBBIO

While Columbanus had a strong dual identity of being Irish and a *peregrinus*, Jonas's sense of identity is more difficult to discern. Jonas's voice is a more subtle one, constrained as he was by the genre in which he was writing. Nevertheless, Jonas's individuality is sufficiently apparent that we do get a sense of his identity.

Jonas was born around the turn of the seventh century in the Alpine town of Susa which was, at that time, part of the Frankish kingdom of Burgundy.<sup>61</sup> The ancient Roman town, situated on the banks of the Dora Riparia below the Alpine passes that, for centuries, had allowed travellers to cross to and from Gaul and Italy, was a frontier outpost of the Franks.<sup>62</sup> Susa was a town situated on the boundaries of Byzantine, Frankish, and Lombard territories and was contested by all three. However, it does not appear to have been part of the Lombard kingdom. It was still in Byzantine hands in the early 570s, a military outpost that had withstood the Lombard conquest. In this respect it was like a handful of other strategic positions in

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<sup>60</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 20, p. 196: *custodes regii inquit, nequaquam hinc se sequi alios permissuros, nisi eos quos sui ortus terra dederat, vel qui e Brittanica arva ipsum secuti fuerant; ceteros, qui Gallico orti solo, preceptis esse regis inibi remansuros.*

<sup>61</sup> For the history of the Susa region in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, see Mario Gallina, Giuseppe Sergi, Giampietro Casiraghi, and Gisella Cantino Wataghin, 'Dalle Alpi Cottiae al ducato longobardo di Torino', in *Storia di Torino I: Dalla preistoria al commune medievale*, ed. by Giuseppe Sergi (Turin, 1997), pp. 351-378; Giuseppe Sergi, 'La Valle di Susa medievale: area di strada, di confine, di affermazione politica', in *Il patrimonio artistico della Valle di Susa* (Turin, 2005), pp. 37-43.

<sup>62</sup> The eleventh-century monk Rodolfus Glaber praised Susa as 'the oldest of Alpine towns': *Historiarum libri quinque*, IV. 7, ed. and trans. by John France (Oxford, 1989), p. 182.

Northern Italy, such as Aosta and the fortified island of Comacina in Lake Como, which had remained imperial garrisons. In 574, Susa was under the control of Sisinnius, the imperial military commander in the region (*magister militum*). However, Gregory of Tours, Fredegar, and Paul the Deacon all mention how Susa was ceded to the Franks following an incident in which Lombard warlords took refuge in the town after a failed invasion of Gaul.<sup>63</sup> Gregory tells of how two of the Lombard leaders, Zaban, and Rodan, following their severe defeat at Embrun by the Gallo-Roman general, Mummolus, retreated to Italy where they took refuge in Susa. He adds that they received a harsh welcome by the locals but, nonetheless, Sisinnius – for a reason unknown to us – gave them asylum. Mummolus pursued the fugitives and sent a messenger on to Susa to inform Sisinnius of his imminent arrival, the news of which prompted the Lombards to leave. When Amo, the third member of the raiding party who had been more successful, heard the news of his companions' defeat, he likewise fled Gaul.<sup>64</sup> Neither Gregory nor Paul, who relied on Gregory's account, mentions the outcome of this incident, which was the cessation of Susa to the Franks. For this we rely on Fredegar's account which relates how, 'as retribution for their audacity', the Lombards 'ceded the cities of Aosta and Susa, with all their lands and inhabitants, to King Guntramn' as well as agreeing to pay a yearly tribute

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<sup>63</sup> Gregory of Tours. *Decem Libri Historiarum*, IV. 44, ed. by Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, MGH, SS rer. Merov. 1/1 (Hanover, 1937), pp. 178-179; *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, IV. 45, ed. and trans. by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London, 1960), p. 38; *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, III. 3, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH, SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed. (Hanover, 1878), pp. 116-117.

<sup>64</sup> *Decem Libri* IV. 44, pp. 178-9. For English translation, see *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks*, trans. by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp. 240-1.

of 12,000 gold *solidi* to the Franks whose over-lordship they also acknowledged.<sup>65</sup> Fredegar was mistaken in thinking that Aosta and Susa were Lombard cities (an understandable error if most of the surrounding territory was under Lombard control). He also, unlike Gregory and Paul, mentions nothing about Sisinnius or his decision in aiding the fleeing Lombards (despite the fact that Gregory's *Histories* was one of his major sources). Wallace-Hadrill suggested that Fredegar must have meant that the Lombards acquiesced in the town's surrender, but there is no evidence for this.<sup>66</sup> Rather, the Franks may have either seized or claimed Susa from the Byzantines for having given refuge to the Lombard dukes. It remained in the *regnum Francorum* for centuries thereafter. By the time of Jonas's birth, therefore, Susa was in Frankish control. Although cisalpine, its political orientation had shifted northwards as it reflected the growing rise to dominance of the Franks.

Susa's nodal position at the conflux of competing polities is important when we come to consider Jonas's ethnic identity. Jonas's biblical name gives us no clue as to his ethnic identity. Perhaps we should be hesitant to give him one. He wrote of Bertulf, third abbot of Bobbio and the man who commissioned him to write the *Vita Columbani*, that he was 'of noble, though barbarian, origin' (*genere nobilis, licet gentilis*) and a relative of Bishop Arnulf of Metz.<sup>67</sup> In other words, Bertulf was a Frank. In Fredegar, writing slightly later than Jonas, we see a similar differentiation between 'Roman' and 'barbarian'.<sup>68</sup> This is probably no indication of ethnic allegiances,<sup>69</sup> but it

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<sup>65</sup> Fredegar IV. 45, p. 38.

<sup>66</sup> Fredegar, p. 38, n. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Vita Columbani* II. 23, p. 280.

<sup>68</sup> Fredegar, for example, mentions Merovingian kings such as Chlothar I taking possession of cities *rito barbaro* while he sometimes differentiates between those of Frankish and Roman birth. The patrician, Quolen, is presented as *genere Francus* as is Bertoald, mayor of the palace, while Protadius, the lover of Queen Brunhild, was *genere Romanus*: Fredegar IV, 17, 18, 24, at pp. 11, 14, 15.

<sup>69</sup> See Eugen Ewig, 'Volkstum und Volksbewusstsein im Frankenreich des 7. Jahrhunderts' in *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien: Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*, ed. by Hartmut Atsma (2 vols., Munich, 1976), I, pp. 231-273.

is noteworthy nonetheless that Jonas makes the differentiation. He was a man conscious of the classical past and of Italy's pre-eminent position in the ancient world.<sup>70</sup> We can detect what, perhaps, may be described as Jonas's Italian sense of identity – his cultural ethnicity – when he notes, 'to us of Ausonia there are, according to the poet' (*nobis Ausoniae iuxta poetam sunt*) in reference to Virgil.<sup>71</sup> Here Jonas borrows the poetical term used by Virgil for Italy while he uses the term *Italia* a total of eight times in his hagiography.

A similar cisalpine orientation is evident in Jonas's interesting comments on beer where it is apparent that he was writing from the perspective of those whose habitual drink was wine. Beer, he explained, was a fermented beverage 'boiled from the juices of grain or barley' which, apart from people in the Balkans, was drunk 'by all the people in the world who live beside the Ocean, that is Gaul, Britain, Ireland, Germany, and others who are not dissimilar from them in their customs.'<sup>72</sup> Adalbert de Vogüé has seen this as one example that the *Vita* was primarily intended for an Italian audience.<sup>73</sup> Jonas's comments, which he makes in the context of narrating a beer miracle that took place in Luxeuil, are also illustrative of his ethnographic awareness. Not all people drank beer. The Scordisci and the Dardanian peoples (*gentes*) in the Balkans didn't. It was only those northerners living by the Ocean – Gauls, Britons, Irish, and Germans – who were characterised by their drinking of beer. This, therefore, was an ethnic indicator. We see a similar ethnographic awareness throughout the *Vita* and this is the more notable because it contrasts to other narrative sources from this period where, on the whole, it was rare for people

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<sup>70</sup> See for example Jonas's remarkable poem on Columbanus in which he praises the saint's fame as eclipsing the great deeds and figures of classical Antiquity: *Vita Columbani, Versus ad mensam canendi*, p. 225.

<sup>71</sup> *Vita Columbani, Epistula ad Waldebertum et Bobolenum*, p. 148.

<sup>72</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 16, p. 179: *ex frumenti vel hordei sucos equoquitur, quamque prae ceteris in orbe terrarum gentibus preter Scordiscis et Dardanis gentes quae Oceanum incolunt usitantur, id est Gallia, Brittania, Hibernia, Germania, ceteraeque ab eorum moribus non discunt.*

<sup>73</sup> *Vie de Saint Colomban et de ses disciples*, ed. by A. de Vogüé (Bellefontaine, 1988), p. 50, n. 41.

to be identified by their ethnic group.<sup>74</sup> The table illustrates the variety of ethnic terms used by Jonas in his three saints' Lives:

### The Ethnic Terms in Jonas of Bobbio's Hagiography

TERMS                      FREQUENCY

Aethiopes	1
Alemanni	3
Baioarii	2
Britto genere	1
Burgundionorum genere	1
Dardani gens	1
Franci	6
Neustrasi Franci	1
Francorum reges	2
Galli	1
Hiberus	1
Populus Israhel	5
Israhelitae	1
Langobardi	4
Poenus	1
Sabaei	1
Saxonorum genus	1
Scordisci gens	1
Scottorum gens	4
Scytha gens	1

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<sup>74</sup> Patrick J. Geary, "Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the early middle ages", *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983), pp. 15-26, at p. 21.

Sicambri	2
Suevi	2
Syrorum genus	2
Venetii qui et Sclavi dicuntur	2
Warasqui gens	2

Jonas thus characterizes various people as ‘Lombard’, ‘Frankish’, ‘Burgundian’, ‘Irish’, ‘Brittonic’, ‘Saxon’, ‘Suebian’, and ‘Syriac’. In some cases, specifically when writing about the Lombards and Franks, Jonas used these terms when designating kings while in others he was less status specific. Athala, for example, was *ex Burgundionorum genere*<sup>75</sup> while the nun Willesuinda was *ex genere Saxonorum*.<sup>76</sup> Columbanus, while gathering the harvest during bad weather at Fontaine, placed four monks at each corner of the field: Cominus, Eunocus, and Equonanus were, Jonas notes, *ex Scottorum genere*, while the fourth, Gurganus, was *genere Brittonem*.<sup>77</sup> His few references to the Lombards all concern their kings. Although Jonas (in contrast to Paul the Deacon) viewed them as Arian heretics, he does not display the pejorative rhetoric found, for example, in Gregory the Great’s letters.<sup>78</sup> He did not identify with the Lombards in any way. Neither did he with the Franks, although he attested to their pre-eminence in Gaul. ‘Their name’, he wrote, ‘is considered foremost before all the other peoples who live in Gaul’.<sup>79</sup> He was writing as an outsider. In narrating the time when one of Columbanus’s gloves was stolen and returned by a raven at Luxeuil, he noted that the Gallic name for ‘gloves’ (*tegumenta*

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<sup>75</sup> *Vita Columbani* II. 1, p. 230.

<sup>76</sup> *Vita Columbani*. II. 17, p. 268.

<sup>77</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 13, p. 174.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory disliked the Lombards and spoke of them as ‘the unspeakable nation of the Lombards’ while the phrase ‘swords of the Lombards’ repeatedly appears in his letters. See R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 99.

<sup>79</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 6, p. 162: quorum eximium nomen prae ceteris gentibus quae Gallias incolunt habetur.

*manuum*) was *wantos*.<sup>80</sup> This piece of linguistic trivia indicates a differentiation Jonas was making between what he called a ‘glove’ and that of the Gauls who called it something else. Another instance is his reference to the Neustrian Franks. Jonas mentions Chlothar as a king who ruled over the Neustrian Franks who, he adds, were those Franks who lived in ‘the furthest confines of Gaul by the Ocean’.<sup>81</sup> There would have been no need to give a geographical idea of where the Neustrian Franks lived for a Frankish audience, but maybe there was for Jonas’s Italian audience. These examples are indications that Jonas was primarily writing from an Italian perspective.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, what these examples reflect is Jonas’s awareness that he and those he wrote about lived in a multi-ethnic society, a perception that would have been reinforced by his monastic life in a mixed community of, amongst others, Irish, Frankish, and Lombard monks. Nevertheless, these distinctions were not highlighted by more precise descriptions of the ways in which different peoples could be distinguished.<sup>83</sup> In speaking of the Suebians, for instance, he does not refer to the distinctive way in which they wore their hair, the ‘Suebian knot’,<sup>84</sup> nor does he mention the famed long hair of the Frankish kings.<sup>85</sup> He was also silent on Lombard habits of hairstyle and dress such as we find in Paul the Deacon.<sup>86</sup> Thus, while Jonas was conscious of different ethnic groups he was not concerned to further illustrate their differences.

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<sup>80</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 15, p. 178.

<sup>81</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 24, pp. 206-207: qui Neustrasis Francis regnabat, extrema Gallia ad Oceanum positus.

<sup>82</sup> *Vie de Saint Colomban*, p. 128, n. 6 and p. 153, n. 1.

<sup>83</sup> On the various ways in which Jonas could have distinguished those ethnic groups he wrote about see, Walter Pohl, ‘Telling the difference: signs of ethnic identity’, in *From Roman Provinces to Medieval Kingdoms*, ed. by T. F. X. Noble (London & New York, 2006), pp. 168-188.

<sup>84</sup> Jonas describes how Columbanus, while walking in the forests around Annegray, heard the voices of ‘many Suebians’, who were raiding in the area. He also notes that the neighbouring peoples of Columbanus and his monks in Bregenz were *nationes Suaeavorum*: *Vita Columbani* I. 8, p. 167; I. 27, p. 213.

<sup>85</sup> His account of King Theudebert’s deposition and forced clericalization would have been a perfect opportunity to mention the long hair of the Frankish kings, but Jonas mentions nothing about this: *Vita Columbani* I. 28, p. 219.

<sup>86</sup> Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, IV. 22, p. 155.

Jonas's entry into Bobbio as a monk in 616 also raises the question of whether he took a religious name on becoming a monk. The Hebrew name Jonas is very rare in the Middle Ages and so we need to consider whether this had a particular significance for its bearer: did his family single him out from birth for an ecclesiastical career by giving him such a name or did he himself choose it to mark a new religious identity? Names are, of course, potent indicators of identity, whether individual, ethnic, devotional, or familial, and this was especially true of the Early Middle Ages.<sup>87</sup> In early medieval society where the vast majority of people bore Germanic names, Jonas would have stood out alone by his name. At Bobbio, for instance, he would have been in the company of men such as Baudacharius, Blidemundus, Fraimeris, Hermenoaldus, Meroveus, and Theudoaldus, all of whom bore Germanic names.<sup>88</sup> Christian names were much less prevalent during this period than they were from the eleventh and twelfth centuries when a revolution in the Christianization of naming practices took place. In sixth-century Ravenna, for example, only 6% of names were Christian while the peasants of Saint-Martin of Tours in the seventh century, with the exception of Peter, bore no scriptural names.<sup>89</sup> Thus, while Christian names were on the whole rare, Old Testament names were extremely rare.<sup>90</sup> Jonas's is the only instance of this name from Lombard Italy.<sup>91</sup> An idea of how rare the name was can also be shown from later monastic books of

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<sup>87</sup> On this see, e.g., Stephen Wilson, *The Means of Naming: A social and cultural history of personal naming in western Europe* (London, 1998), esp. pp. 86-114 (on Christian names); Jörg Jarnut, 'Avant l'an mil', in *L'Anthroponymie: Document de l'histoire sociale des mondes méditerranéens médiévaux*, ed. by Monique Bourin, Jean-Marie Martin, and François Menant (Rome, 1996), pp. 7-18.

<sup>88</sup> On the sixteen Bobbio monks mentioned by Jonas and the areas in which they may have come from see Alessandro Zironi, *Il Monastero Longobardo di Bobbio: Crocevia di uomini, manoscritti e culture* (Spoleto, 2004), pp. 28-46. Zironi argued on this evidence that Irish monks were not prominent in the early community. However, Michael Richter (*Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages: The Abiding Legacy of Columbanus* (Dublin, 2008) has recently re-vindicated the Irish presence in and influence on Bobbio.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson, *The Means of Naming*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>90</sup> Wilson, *The Means of Naming*, p. 88.

<sup>91</sup> Jörg Jarnut, *Prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Langobardenreich in Italien (568-774)* (Bonn, 1972), p. 150. On Lombard naming practices in general, see Maria G. Arcamone, 'Die langobardischen Personennamen in Italien: *nomen* und *gens* aus der Sicht der linguistischen Analyse', in *Nomen et gens: Zur historischen Aussagekraft frühmittelalterlicher Personennamen*, ed. by Dieter Geuenich, Wolfgang Haubrichs, and Jörg Jarnut (Berlin, 1997), pp. 157-175.



commemoration that became popular from the Carolingian period onwards.<sup>92</sup> Remiremont, a Columbanian foundation in Burgundy and which Jonas mentions, began commemorating its dead by writing their names in a book in the early ninth century.<sup>93</sup> This *Liber memorialis* lists about 11,500 names, most of which are Germanic. The name 'Jonas' appears three times. Likewise, the island monastery of Reichenau on Lake Constance lists ten instances of the name 'Jonas' in its famous necrology containing about 40,000 names.<sup>94</sup> This gives some idea of the rarity and hence significance of the name.

Columbanus himself identified with the plight of Jonah when he was about to be deported back to Ireland.<sup>95</sup> The Irish saint on other occasions clearly associated himself with the prophet. In letters to two popes he emphasised the spiritual nature of his name: in Latin (Columba) and Hebrew (Jonah) it meant "the dove". In his letter to Gregory the Great he used the Hebrew version, *ego, Bar-iona (vilis Columba), in Christo mitto Salutem*,<sup>96</sup> while in his letter to Boniface IV, written from Milan, he wrote: 'I am called Jonah in Hebrew, Peristera in Greek, Columba in Latin, yet so much is my birth-right in the idiom of your language, though I use the ancient Hebrew name of Jonah, whose shipwreck I have also almost undergone.'<sup>97</sup> It is tempting to see in Jonas's name a conscious decision of the monk to identify himself with his hero. It is, however, unlikely that Jonas took this name on becoming a monk. This practice was not yet established during this period as can be seen from the list of Bobbio monks, none of whom bore religious names. There was not yet a marked distinction in terms of nomenclature between the clergy and laity. It is more probable

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<sup>92</sup> On these sources, see Nicolas-Norbert Huyghebaert, 'Les documents nécrologiques', *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental* 4 (Turnhout, 1972).

<sup>93</sup> *Liber Memorialis von Remiremont*, ed. by Eduard Hlawitschka, Karl Schmid, and Gerd Tellenbach, MGH, *Libri Memoriales* 1 (Dublin and Zurich, 1970).

<sup>94</sup> *Das Verbrüderungsbuch der Abtei Reichenau*, ed. by Johanne Autenrieth, Dieter Geuenich, and Karl Schmid, MGH, *Libri Memoriales et Necrologia* n.s 1 (Hannover, 1979).

<sup>95</sup> *Epistula* IV. 8, in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 34.

<sup>96</sup> *Epistula* I. 1, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Epistula* V. 16, p. 54: mihi Ionae hebraice, Peristerae graece, Columbae latine, potius tantum vestrae idiomae linguae nancto, licet prisco utor hebraeo nomine, cuius et pene subivi naufragium.

that, like Paul the Deacon, Jonas's family gave him a biblical name at birth. In Italy and elsewhere the sons of the nobility destined for the Church could be given particular religious names. We can only speculate as to how Jonas came to have this name and, if it was his from birth, as seems likely, why his family chose to give him this particular name. We are more certain, however, of the particular significance that this name would have had within the monastic community at Bobbio and the wider Columbanian *familia*.

Jonas, then, is an unusual example of a cultural and religious exile. While he is remarkably consistent in noting the ethnic identities of others, he is abstruse when writing about his own. Although he grew up in a Frankish garrison-town near the Lombard kingdom, he did not identify himself with either the Franks or the Lombards. Rather, he appears to have had an Italian cultural identity. His comments on beer, the Neustrian Franks, and the Gallic name for gloves, suggests that he was writing as a cultural outsider. It is also probable that, as a monk and missionary in Merovingian Gaul, he too would have considered himself a *peregrinus*.

#### VALERIUS OF BIERZO

Unlike Columbanus and Jonas, we cannot detect any sense of an ethnic or cultural identity in Valerius. If we can ascribe one to him at all, his was a provincial one. As we have already mentioned, when Valerius went to the monastery of Compludo he characterised it in terms of exile and of leaving his native province of Asturias. Many years later when he was a hermit in this region he mentions how his nephew, John, came to him 'from the land of my birth' (*de terra nativitatis meae*).<sup>98</sup> John had been in the service of the Visigothic king and, together with his servant, Evagrius, had left everything, including his wife and children, in order to live a religious life with his uncle. It is evident from this that Valerius's family must have been of high status

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<sup>98</sup> *Replicatio* 15, p. 145.

with connections to the Visigothic ruling elite. Although very much living in a peripheral, frontier region of the kingdom, Valerius mentions that he received the support of the king on a number of occasions.<sup>99</sup> His level of education and knowledge of legal terminology are also evidence of Valerius's high social level.<sup>100</sup> Valerius, therefore, was not an ignorant rustic but a sophisticated, well-educated man with connections to the Visigothic court. It is all the more interesting then that he does not display more of an elite identity, but this may be due to the ascetic sensibilities and conventions he had adopted.

In contrast to Columbanus and Jonas, Valerius does not identify people according to ethnic identities. The only instance in the whole of his autobiographical writings in which he distinguishes someone in ethnic terms is one of his enemies, the priest Justus, whom he characterizes as 'a weakling of puny stature, and with the colour very black to behold of the barbarous Ethiopian people'.<sup>101</sup> Even in this case he is following an ancient ascetic and exegetical *topos* in likening an evil or demonic person to the Ethiopians.<sup>102</sup> In a separate instance he describes another of his enemies, the priest Flainus, as a *vir barbarus* and *valde lubricus* ('very shifty').<sup>103</sup> Aherne thought that Valerius's use of the term *barbarus* here probably denotes a Visigoth,<sup>104</sup> which raises the same questions as Jonas's comment on Abbot Bertulf of Bobbio mentioned above. Given Valerius's family status and links with the Visigothic court, however, we cannot infer any ethnic identity from this.

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<sup>99</sup> *Ordo* 8, p. 101; *Replicatio* 15, p. 147.

<sup>100</sup> On Valerius's knowledge of legal terminology, see Collins, 'The "Authobiographical" Works', pp. 433-435.

<sup>101</sup> *Ordo* 6, p. 87: *forma exiguae pusillitatis tantillum, ac teterrimae visionis colore barbaricae nationis Aethiopum.*

<sup>102</sup> See, e.g., Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> *Ordo* 2, pp. 73-75.

<sup>104</sup> *Valerio of Bierzo: An Ascetic of the Late Visigothic Period*, n. 29, p. 168. On attempts to identify this Flainus, see n. 30, p. 168; on *barbari* in the Visigothic laws, see Hagith Sivan, 'The appropriation of Roman law in barbarian hands: "Roman-barbarian" marriage in Visigothic Gaul and Spain', in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, ed. by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, 1998), pp. 189-203.

Like Columbanus, who, according to Jonas, left Ireland out of fear of Christ (*ob Christi timorem relicto*),<sup>105</sup> Valerius was driven by a similar compunction and belief in the imminence of Doomsday. He writes how initially he was ‘terrified by the fear of future judgement’<sup>106</sup> to become a monk and, in an acrostic poem at the end of his first autobiographical account, he asks God to forgive him his sins at the approach of Judgement Day.<sup>107</sup>

This apocalyptic fear was coupled with a very real belief in the Devil and the power of his agency. In contrast to Columbanus, who hardly ever mentions the Devil, or in Jonas, where the Devil is a passive force, Valerius’s Devil is the traditional antagonist of the Desert Fathers. He is a constant presence and menace in Valerius’s accounts to such an extent that the autobiographical writings could be seen, as Collins noted, as Valerius’s *In Diabolum*.<sup>108</sup> Yet, as Collins cautions, Valerius’s accounts of the Devil ‘should not be interpreted as evidence of peculiar personal obsessions.’<sup>109</sup> Valerius was writing in an established ascetic tradition of demonology and his accusations against the Devil follow the form of a logical, Roman legal argument.<sup>110</sup> In another acrostic poem at the end of the *Ordo querimoniae*, Valerius appeals to God as the *Justissime iudex* to repeal the legal document that places him in the Devil’s power, the *Diabolicae cautionis adversum me conscripta ... chirographa*.<sup>111</sup> The Devil was, in a sense, an essential component of Valerius’s ascetic identity, a necessary villain to the hermit’s heroic individualism. David Brakke has studied how conflict with demons in Late Antiquity was a central component in the discourse and

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<sup>105</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 20, p. 195.

<sup>106</sup> *Ordo* 1, p. 68.

<sup>107</sup> *Item epitameron propriae orationis*, p. 113.

<sup>108</sup> Collins, ‘The “Autobiographical” Works’, p. 434.

<sup>109</sup> Collins, ‘The “Autobiographical” Works’, p. 434.

<sup>110</sup> Collins, ‘The “Autobiographical” Works’, p. 434.

<sup>111</sup> *Epitameron proprium praefati discriminis*, l. 9, p. 111.

formation of individual and collective monastic identities.<sup>112</sup> It was the means by which monks asserted their spiritual prowess and what distinguished them as holy men. In Jonas, demons and the Devil have little power but are the foils for displays of prayer by Columbanus and his monks, often acting in concert.<sup>113</sup> In this respect, Valerius cuts an old-fashioned, solitary figure in his independent, real struggles against the Devil. Valerius, for example, is tormented and attacked by the Devil and demons for a whole year,<sup>114</sup> is subjected to the Devil farting in his face while praying,<sup>115</sup> and is terrified by the Devil who appears in the guise of a giant, 'of huge stature, towering even to the clouds'.<sup>116</sup> The Devil is, therefore, an active, constant protagonist through the course of Valerius's eremitical career and is often the only figure against whom Valerius asserts his struggle for ascetic independence.

While Valerius displays a more intimate knowledge of the Devil than does Columbanus, his worldview was the same in many respects. Both expressed similar philosophies on how one should live as pilgrims and shun the world, while Valerius likewise conceived of his ascetic undertaking as *peregrinatio*. He notes that copying books was for him 'a consolation of my ascetic exile and a correction of my way of life'.<sup>117</sup> We see a similar polarization between the monastic sphere and the wider world as we find in Columbanus and Jonas. Valerius relates how, after he had been badly beaten by robbers, Christians took him to the estate of Ebronato. He missed his former solitude and dreaded this more social environment.<sup>118</sup> He decided to become an *inclusus*, imprisoning himself in a cell near the altar of the church, so 'that my foot should no longer go into the turmoil of the outside world, and that through the

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<sup>112</sup> David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass. 2006).

<sup>113</sup> On this, see Albrecht Diem, 'Encounters between monks and demons in Latin texts of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages', in *Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Germanic and Latin Literature*, ed. by K. E. Olsen, Antonina Harbus, and Tette Hofstra (Leuven, 2004), pp. 51-67.

<sup>114</sup> *Ordo* 4, p. 80.

<sup>115</sup> *Ordo* 7, p. 96.

<sup>116</sup> *Replicatio* 5, p. 127.

<sup>117</sup> *Ordo* 3, p. 77: pro consolationem peregrinationis meae atque correptionis disciplinae.

slave-camps of this present life, the divine right hand should keep me from the eternal dungeon of the abyss.'<sup>119</sup> When Ricimer evicted Valerius from his cell because he wanted to make him a priest of his proprietary church, Valerius describes this in dramatic language, 'as if falling from heaven, rushing into hell', he was cast, 'out again into the theatre of the world.'<sup>120</sup>

The way Valerius characterizes his abandonment of society, from the 'obscene contagion of the world',<sup>121</sup> is also evident in his vivid descriptions of his hermitages. These accounts reflect a keen naturalist sensibility. For example, he compares the high mountains around him in his final place of retreat, the cell of St Fructuosus above the monastery at Rufiana, to the Alps of Gaul. Although there was a narrow and perilous path leading from the farms on the other side of the mountain to his hermitage,<sup>122</sup> Valerius characterises this as a place cut-off from the world and the society around him:

For it is such a place of ordered quiet like that of Paradise that even though, ..., it is surrounded by a wall of very high mountains, nevertheless it is not darkened by the sombre shadows of any one of them, but is bright with the lovely glory of flooding light and lush with unusually beautiful green verdure. Far from the world, free from the distraction of anything worldly, and undisturbed by the intrusion of women, it is quite evident to all the faithful fleeing from worldly pleasures and business that it is prepared by the Lord for the sake of attaining perfectly the summit of holiness.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Ordo* 4, p. 77: *coepit anima mea rursus anxietudinum molestiis aestuare publica habitatione horrens pavescerem.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ordo* 4, p. 79: *et pes meus commotionem ultra foris exiret, atque ut per haec presentis lautomiae castra ab eterno voraginis carcerem me dextera divina sustolleret.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ordo* 5, p. 81: *Me simul ruentem quasi de coelo ad infernum prolapsus, in saeculi rursus projecit theatrum.*

<sup>121</sup> *Item epitameron propriae orationis*, p. 113.

<sup>122</sup> *Residuum* 1, p. 153.

<sup>123</sup> *Ordo* 11, pp. 107-109: *Quia tantus existit congruentissimae quietis ad instar paradisi aptissimus locus, ut etiam licet, ..., sit eminentissimorum montium munitione circumsaeptus, nullius tamen instet*

Like Columbanus, Valerius's independence from ecclesiastical authorities led to conflict.<sup>124</sup> He is particularly scathing of the local priests whom he characterises as violent drunks and of the pseudo-monks at Rufiana. He never became a priest and appears never to have wanted to. In his first hermitage in the mountains between Astorga and Castro Pedroso, Valerius managed to live there for some years until his reputation as a holy man began to attract people who wished to help him and to bring him food. This provoked the envy of the local priest, Flainus, who came in a rage to confront Valerius at his hermitage.<sup>125</sup> Valerius is not more specific as to why this priest reacted so strongly against him except that he was envious. Flainus succeeded in driving Valerius away to another, more remote, hermitage where he continued to persecute the hermit.<sup>126</sup> He stole some religious books which Valerius had copied, while he attributed being attacked by robbers to the instigation of Flainus or 'his patron', the Devil.<sup>127</sup> When Ricimer later wanted to make Valerius a priest of his new church and built an altar on the site of the hermit's hut. Valerius saw Ricimer's intention as being instigated by the Devil as his becoming a priest would mean being 'ensnared by many worldly attractions, enriched by many fat offerings,'<sup>128</sup> which would lead to his downfall. The proof of Ricimer's wickedness was seen when the church he was building collapsed, killing him, and leaving the hermit once again 'miserable in my often repeated catastrophes.'<sup>129</sup> After this, Valerius came into conflict with another local priest, Justus. Valerius gives a

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tetrarum umbrarum opacitate fuscatus, nisi luciflui splendoris venutissimo decore conspicuus atque vnatissimi viroris eximia amoenitate fecundus, procul a mundo remotus, nullarum secularium actionum tumultibus, neque feminarum occursibus infestatus, ut cunctis liquido patescat pro adipiscendo perfectae sanctitudinis culmine fidelibus a mundanis illecebris commertiisque recedentibus a Domino esse praeparatus.

<sup>124</sup> On this, Santiago Castellanos has remarked: 'Valerio y sus actividades representaban, entre otras cosas, un conflicto permanente entre la autoridad oficial, episcopal, y sus propias iniciativas personales, generalmente ajenas a la acreditación oficial': *La Hagiografía Visigoda. Dominio Social y Proyección Cultural* (Logroño, 2004), p. 338.

<sup>125</sup> *Ordo* 2, pp. 73-75.

<sup>126</sup> *Ordo* 3, p. 77.

<sup>127</sup> *Ordo* 3, p. 77.

<sup>128</sup> *Ordo* 5, p. 83: me quasi secularibus illecebris captum multis opulentiae stipendiis ditatum.

<sup>129</sup> *Ordo* 5, p. 85: infelicitatem meam in ipsa saepe revoluta reliquit naufragia.

wonderful description of this man. To his disgust, Justus was ordained a priest for no other reason than that he was funny and was a fine musician.<sup>130</sup> Valerius was given aid and shelter by a local man, Simplicius, with whom he began to perform the Divine Office. Justus could not stand this and so:

Raging, and gripped by a heavy drunkenness that could not be shaken off, he burned in such madness of frenzied insanity that he would allow me no quiet even during the night. ... goaded by his arrogant madness and drunkenness, and glaring like a mad dog, raging with teeth gnashing in unspeakable revilings, full of drink and foaming at the mouth, [he] struggled to tear me apart with his own hands.<sup>131</sup>

This conflict reached its climax when Justus tried to cut Valerius's throat with a sword in church. Valerius was only saved by the intervention of other monks there.<sup>132</sup> Justus was completely drunk when he attempted to kill Valerius as afterwards he began to dance around singing 'wicked ditties'.<sup>133</sup> When, after this, Valerius had settled in the Bierzo, he relates how Isidore, bishop of Astorga, wanted to bring him to Toledo, presumably to make him a priest. For Valerius, Isidore, even though he was a bishop, was acting in concert with the Devil because he wanted to take him from his place of retreat. The bishop's sudden death was seen as just punishment, Valerius even remarkably asserting that 'everlasting hell swallowed him.'<sup>134</sup>

In addition to being harassed by local priests and bishops, Valerius also came into conflict with the local population. He does not distinguish them as Basques or Astures, but the image he presents of them is of a barbarous and semi-pagan people.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ordo* 6, pp. 87-89: Per quam multorum domorum convivia voragine percurrente, lascivia cantilenae modulatione plerumque psallendi adeptus est celebritatis melodia.

<sup>131</sup> *Ordo* 6, p. 91.

<sup>132</sup> *Ordo* 6, pp. 91-93.

<sup>133</sup> *Ordo* 6, p. 93.

<sup>134</sup> *Ordo* 7, p. 101: illum vero perpetuus absorbit infernus.



He mentions, for example, how people venerated pagan shrines on the summit of one of the mountains which were destroyed by Christians and a basilica dedicated to St Felix erected on the site.<sup>135</sup> In writing about others he especially distinguishes people who are Christian, which suggests that not everyone was Christian. When he was beaten up by robbers he was rescued by 'some very faithful Christians',<sup>136</sup> while he later writes of getting alms from 'good Christians'.<sup>137</sup> The local priests and monks at Rufiana, against whom his treatise *De genere monachorum* was intended, were also dangerous, uncivilized men. When Valerius received a gift of two horses from a *vir illustrissimus*, the jealous monks stole the horses and then drove them off a cliff. When the horses miraculously survived one of the monks then murdered Valerius's *minister*, John, by slitting his throat. Visitors who used to come to Valerius to consult his collection of books were also often attacked and killed by the locals. The locals also killed Valerius's animals, eliciting a comparison Valerius makes between himself and the prophet Elias, writing, 'I remained alone' (3 Kings 19: 14).<sup>138</sup> This is perhaps an apt biblical borrowing to describe Valerius's plight, a man, who, alone, had overcome the trials and difficulties of the eremitical career he had embraced. Valerius was a fiercely independent holy man, preoccupied with his own ascetic struggles and wary of ecclesiastical interference. His identity was quintessentially that of the Christian *alienus*. We have little idea of his own sense of ethnic identity because he did not bother to write about it, while he was uninterested to distinguish others according to their ethnic group.

Valerius was similar in many ways to Columbanus except that Columbanus actually left his country as a *peregrinus*. This ritual shaped his identity on the Continent and influenced his relations with others. His identity of alienation also shaped his monastic communities which he envisaged as independent entities

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<sup>135</sup> *Replicatio* 1, p. 115.

<sup>136</sup> *Ordo* 4, p. 77.

<sup>137</sup> *Ordo* 8, p. 101.

<sup>138</sup> *Residuum* 2, p. 154.

separate from ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction. This would also lead to a new type of legal document that developed in the mid-seventh century to ensure these communities remained independent.<sup>139</sup> Columbanus's unwillingness to compromise his traditional Irish practices and religious observance led to his banishment from Burgundy in 610. As we have seen, he had a strong dual identity of being an ascetic exile and Irish. Nevertheless, he advocated the unity of Christian identity above that of particular ethnic groups. In his letters to Gregory the Great and Boniface IV he refers to Europe not in a geographical sense but as a distinct social and religious unit of which the Pope is the spiritual head.<sup>140</sup> As Peter Brown has argued, the period between the mid sixth and mid seventh century was one in which a profound change in the imagination took place and which saw the rise of western Christendom as a religious and cultural unit.<sup>141</sup> Christianity became for the first time an otherworldly religion in the true sense – one more intently focused on sin, repentance, death, and

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<sup>139</sup> On the privilege of immunity, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1999); Eugen Ewig, 'Das Formular von Rebaix und die Bischofsprivilegien der Merowingerzeit', in *Spätantikes und Fränkisches Gallien*, 2, pp. 456-484; Idem. 'Bemerkungen zu zwei merowingischen Bischofsprivilegien und einem Papstprivileg des 7. Jahrhunderts für merowingische Klöster', in *Mönchtum, Episkopat und Adel*, ed. by Arno Borst (Darmstadt, 1974), pp. 215-249.

<sup>140</sup> In both instances Columbanus uses the phrase *totius Europae* in the sense of a whole, distinct cultural area over which the Bishop of Rome has an especial religious authority. This is very much a European, not a regional, perspective. See *Epistula* I. 1. in *Sancti Columbani Opera*, p. 2 (to Gregory the Great): *Domino Sancto et in Christo Patri, Romanae pulcherrimo Ecclesiae Decori, totius Europae flaccantis augustissimo quasi cuidam Flori*; *Epistula* V. 1, p. 36 (to Boniface IV): *Pulcherrimo omnium totius Europae Ecclesiarum Capiti, Papae praedulci, praecelso Praesuli, Pastorum Pastori*. We see a similar emphasis on Rome's authority in the *Vita Columbani*, where Jonas cites Matthew 16:18 as the biblical foundation for Papal primacy. This is cited in the context of the rebel monk, Agrestius, who joined the schismatic Aquileans who defended the Three Chapters controversy. Rome's primacy here is clearly emphasized as Jonas notes that once Agrestius became a member of this schismatic group, he was 'separated from communion with the See of Rome and divided from the communion of the whole world' (*Romanae sedis a communionem seiunctus ac divisus est totius orbis communionem, quicumque Romanae sedis iungerentur, damnans*): *Vita Columbani* II. 9, p. 247.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford, 2003), p. 220. Brown speaks of 'a watershed in the Christian imagination that falls somewhere in the late sixth century' in 'Images as a Substitute for Writing', in *East and West: Modes of Communication: Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida*, ed. by Evangelos K. Chrysos and Ian N. Wood (Leiden, 1999), pp. 15-34, at p. 32; see also R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990). For Latin Christendom as a theopolis, a Christian culture subordinated to a religious ideal, see Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique. "Retractatio"* (Paris, 1949), p. 695, Idem. 'La place du haut moyen âge dans l'histoire du christianisme', in *Il passaggio dall'antichità al medioevo in occidente*, *Settimane di Studio* 9 (Spoleto, 1962), pp. 595-630, at p. 608.

the afterlife – and which has been seen as marking the end of ancient Christianity.<sup>142</sup> We see this in Columbanus and Valerius, men whose mentalities were distinctly otherworldly and who were preoccupied with the problems of sin and repentance. Both shunned episcopal oversight and relied to some extent on royal patronage. This is especially true of Columbanus whose status as a *peregrinus* meant that he depended on royal patronage. This served to bring his monasteries more fully into the orbit of royal and aristocratic networks and ultimately triggered a process that led to monasteries becoming more integrated in social power structures.

The individualism of Valerius and Columbanus comes across strongly in their writings. Such individual ascetic careers would become increasingly rare, however, during the course of the Early Middle Ages, and it is as a representative of a new kind of monasticism that Jonas wrote. In a way, Jonas's monastic career was Columbanus's *peregrinatio* in reverse, taking him from Bobbio across the Alps where he became a missionary on the north-east frontier of the Frankish kingdom. As an assistant to Bishop Amandus, he was an important figure in the missionary impulse of the seventh century.<sup>143</sup> He too might well have considered himself a *peregrinus*. He writes, for example, about a Frankish monk who wanted to follow Columbanus's example and undertake *potior peregrinatio* to Ireland.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> See, e.g. Peter Brown, 'Glorious Obitus: The End of the Ancient Other World', in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. by William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor, 1999), pp. 289-314; J. N. Hillgarth, 'Eschatological and Political Concepts in the Seventh Century', in *The Seventh Century: Change and Continuity*, ed. by Jacques Fontaine and J. N. Hillgarth (London, 1992), pp. 212-235.

<sup>143</sup> On this seventh-century missionary impulse, see Wolfgang Fritze, 'Universalis gentium confessio. Formeln, Träger und Wege universalmissionarischen Denkens im 7. Jahrhundert', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 3 (1969), pp. 78-130; and Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe 400-1050* (Harlow, 2001).

<sup>144</sup> *Vita Columbani* I. 11, p. 170.

Jonas does show a remarkable ethnographic awareness, but he was not concerned to illustrate ethnic differences. He was the first, for instance, to depict Ireland and the Irish in a wholly positive light, even though he must have been aware of the classical ethnographic traditions that characterized Ireland and the Irish as particularly barbaric.<sup>145</sup> This change in perception that marks a break with the classical and Late Antique ethnographic tradition undoubtedly stemmed from Jonas's experience in a community of exiled Irish monks. His experience of monastic life in multi-ethnic communities that included Irish, Briton, Frankish, and Lombard monks is also indicative of this new, idealized Christian identity where ethnic differences were subsumed under the overarching religious edifice of Latin Christendom.

Columbanus, Jonas, and Valerius are thus individual examples that I have chosen because they span the course of the seventh century and because of the personal nature of their writings. Nevertheless, they are also representatives of an ecclesiastical elite whose understanding and practice of the Gospel in terms of 'a therapeutics of exile and distress'<sup>146</sup> led to the fashioning of a new Christian political and social order.

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<sup>145</sup> See Jonas's comments on Ireland and the Irish in *Vita Columbani* 'I. 2, p. 153. For the classical and Late Antique ethnographic tradition, see, e.g., Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World* (Austin, Tex., 2000); J. F. Killeen, 'Ireland in the Greek and Roman Writers', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 76 C (1976), pp. 207-215.

<sup>146</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 82.

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