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Meeder, Sven, *The Irish Scholarly Presence at St. Gall—Networks of Knowledge in the Early Middle Ages*

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Meeder, Sven, *The Irish Scholarly Presence at St. Gall—Networks of Knowledge in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. xii, 187pp. £31.30).

Founded in 720 C.E., the Monastery at St. Gall is located in the modern Swiss city of Saint Gallus. The complex is built on the grave of its namesake and is home to wide array of texts written by Irish scholars, or reflective of Irish learning during the “Carolingian renaissance.” How these works by Gaelic-Irish scholars arrived at St. Gall is the primary concern of Sven Meeder’s intellectual history of Hiberno-Latin texts.

Meeder challenges a number of rigid perceptions about the presence of, and esteem for, Irish scholarly works in medieval Europe. Meeder argues that Irish manuscripts arrived at St. Gall—and Carolingian Europe writ large—in an indirect and piecemeal fashion. This combats assumptions that works were brought to the continent directly, where Ireland and St. Gall were bridgepoints, or points of departure and entry.

As such, it becomes possible to posit that Irish texts arrived at St. Gall by way of a significantly more complex journey—a journey that allowed for external forces to influence and shape the perceptions of Irish scholars at St. Gall. Geographic constructions of these networks of exchange tend to be straight lines, implying a direct, unfettered connection between the points of origin and departure. Such a perspective can lead to incorrect assumptions about the nature of these transregional exchanges, implying that texts were fixed and unsullied by contemporary attitudes or regional distinctions. Meeder refers to this as a ‘horizontal’ rather than top-down model for understanding the nature of interaction amongst various centers of learning in Carolingian Europe. Put another way, the Hiberno-Latin texts at St. Gall are more reflective of regional interaction and the exchange of ideas among scholars than of any orthodoxy.

The Irish presence at St. Gall was not the result of direct contact between Ireland and the Monastery. Rather, the works discussed throughout came to St. Gall in a piecemeal fashion as evidenced by the way in which Irish works were ‘trapped’ by monks at St. Gall, indicating that Irish texts came to the Monastery by way of already-extant networks of exchange.

The bulk of Meeder's work comprises chapters that are dedicated to the study of a selection of texts that originated in Ireland. The first of these concern hagiographies of Irish saints Columbanus and Gallus that are held in the Monastery's library. Surprisingly, some of the works tend to present Columbanus and Gallus as outsiders (*peregrinus*) of indistinct origin, thereby presenting them as men of god with indistinct origin and works that do discuss Ireland present it as a far-flung place 'at the end of the world.' (31)

The relative absence of the Irish context in these works speak to the emphasis on sanctity over regional origin. Meeder examines the presence of Irishmen at the Monastery, noting that there was no direct clerical connection and permanent Irish presence at St. Gall. For example, Meeder discusses the visitation to St. Gall by noted Irish bishop Marcus and his nephew Monegal (renamed Marcellus) on their way back from Rome. In this regard, the Irish intellectual presence at St. Gall was represented by a more cosmopolitan scholar informed by larger networks of continental learning where Irish scholars, among others, "facilitated the transmission of continental texts." (53)

Relatedly, Irish texts came to St. Gall due to these networks of exchanged and were kept in the collections for their utility and not a reverence for their Irishness. Nonetheless, there occurred at St. Gall a certain reverence for texts that originated in Ireland. The first of which was *De Duodeim Abusiuis Saeculi*—a treatise on the 12 main faults of the world—long associated with Irish thinking. However, as Meeder notes, this work came to St. Gall by way of Cyprus and bears the hallmarks of Irish thinking filtered through continental writers. *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, a canonical collection from the mid-ninth century is most identifiable as Irish in origin, and though there is evidence in the text of some influence from scholars at the monastery at Riechenau, the *Hibernensis* was revered as a work of Irish origin. If the Irish "saved" civilization, it was a collaborative effort of continental scholars operating within the networks of interaction present in Carolingian Europe.

~ Ken Shonk, University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse