

## Saint Columba's Avian Pilgrim: the *Grus* in Irish Hagiography

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Animal miracles are remarkably prominent in Irish hagiography. Often they appear in notably distinctive forms that are not easily assimilated to the standard *topoi* of the western hagiographic tradition between the fourth and thirteenth centuries. Stories of wolves substituting for calves they had taken, of miraculous milking, or of saints restoring or even resurrecting cooked and consumed animals, are idiosyncratic and lack precedent in preceding hagiography.<sup>1</sup> One explanation for this prominence can be to assert that Irish Christianity had a special feeling for nature. However, this is a highly generalised interpretation which does little to explain any particular story. Nor does it account for why distinctive types of miracles emerge from the Irish tradition. The story of Saint Columba's crane, or heron, is a case in point. Here Columba predicts the arrival of the bird on Iona, which is cared for while it recovers. It then flies away with no further incident.

Adomnán's (627/8–704) story appears on the surface to be a minor and simple miracle. Indeed the hagiographer suggests that it is just 'another subject, though a lesser one'.<sup>2</sup> The tale can be viewed as showing the respect of an Irish saint for animals as part of Creation. Yet if this was the serious motivation for recording the story, it sits uneasily with Adomnán's dismissive introduction. The question remains, even if the story does demonstrate a certain conception of the value of all creatures in Creation, or from another perspective an example of the Irish social virtue of hospitality, why should such values be exemplified in the particular form of this story?

The peculiarities of the miracle are revealed by closer attention. Adomnán constructed the story as a wonder of Columba's foreknowledge, and arranged it away from the other animal tales in Book Two of the *Vita*. Yet the core of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of these stories and their relationship to hagiographic tradition see D. Alexander, *Saints and Animals in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), ch. 4.

<sup>2</sup> A. O. and M. O. Anderson, ed. and trans., *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, revised by M. O. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), bk. 1, ch. 48, 86–7.

story clearly concerns the animal. It arrives at Iona hungry and exhausted, apparently having been caught in a storm, and is tended for three days before it recovers. As Columba had predicted, it then flies away back to Ireland. Columba does indeed show a certain affinity for the creature, calling it a 'pilgrim guest' and calling upon a monk to 'take care how you lift it up, having pity for it'. The reason Columba gives for his concern is that it 'comes from my own homeland'. The bird itself and its origin are certainly of some significance, but Adomnán gives no further indication what this may be. It should be noted here that the hagiographer uses the Latin word for crane, *grus*, although more recently the translation 'heron' has been preferred for this context.<sup>3</sup>

John Carey has argued that Adomnán was concerned to remove awkwardly syncretic elements in the stories told about Columba, and to remodel his saint on standard patristic lines.<sup>4</sup> Specifically at issue here were visitations by supernatural characters, as Carey has argued that, in the traditions of the saint, he 'appears as a visionary open to contact with the angelic and diabolical realms, and with the more equivocal representatives of the native supernatural'. This analysis may be relevant to the present story. The bird remains a somewhat mysterious visitor to Iona, whose significance is not explained, while Adomnán seems to have deliberately marginalised the miracle itself, grouping it separately from the section on animals in the *Vita*. The hagiographer may have been concerned to remove the story from its natural context in the legend of Saint Columba in order to downplay or obscure non-Christian associations in any original version. If Adomnán was engaged in a sort of hagiographic pruning of his saint's legend, the half-finished and perfunctory feeling of the tale would be explained.

The story is an unusual one within the animal and saint miracles in the hagiographic tradition, and so an explanation for the significance of the *grus* cannot be found easily by way of comparison outside of Ireland. However, there are a few other quite different stories of Irish saints and the *grus* from later in the Irish tradition. A comparison of these and their hagiographic connections may be able to shed light on the importance of Columba's avian pilgrim, and perhaps also on the reasons why animals were particularly important within the traditions of Irish saints.

<sup>3</sup> Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, trans. R. Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1995), 311-12, n. 203. Older editions of the *Vita* seem all to agree that 'crane' is the appropriate translation, see Wentworth Huyshe, trans., *The Life of Saint Columba by Saint Adamnan* (London: Routledge, c.1905), 86-7, and W. Reeves, ed., *Adamni Vita S. Columbae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), 119. The revised edition of Anderson and Anderson, *Columba*, also retained 'crane' as the translation.

<sup>4</sup> John Carey, "Varieties of Supernatural Contact in the Life of Adamnán," in *Saints and Scholars: Studies in Irish Hagiography*, ed. John Carey, Máire Herbert and Pádraig Ó Riain (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 61-2. Carey notes Saint Wilfrid's criticism of the cult of Columba, which implied that there were unorthodox elements in the tradition of the saint.

Before comparing Adomnán's story with other crane stories however, it would be useful to establish how far it can be determined whether the bird was understood to be a crane or heron. Richard Sharpe has translated *grus* in Adomnán as 'heron', arguing that the hagiographer's grasp of the difference between the two birds may not have been secure, particularly as the old Irish *corr* does not distinguish between the two species.<sup>5</sup> However, even if linguistically there is no distinction between crane and heron in the Irish vernacular, this does not mean that the two types of bird were not distinguished in practice. One word may serve to cover two items whose discrete identities are nonetheless understood. In fact, confusion between the two species is more likely to have arisen after the common crane, *grus grus*, became extinct in Britain and Ireland between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Despite the stimulus of a distinction in English vocabulary, the same confusion between heron and crane arose in England, probably due to the cranes' extinction.<sup>7</sup> The choice of *grus* for Saint Columba's bird cannot be considered to have been simply a default choice on Adomnán's part, since the word *ardea* did exist for heron. The Irish hagiographer would no doubt be concerned to connect the Irish story to an appropriate biblical, hagiographic or at least classical model. In the absence of significant biblical or hagiographic appearances of the birds, Adomnán would have been dependent upon classical legend for guidance.<sup>8</sup>

The two birds *grus* and *ardea* have quite distinct legends that remain consistent through classical literature into the bestiary tradition. Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* tells the story of the queen of the Pygmies who angers Juno through her vanity. She is transformed into a crane as punishment, and set to perpetual war with her own people.<sup>9</sup> The war between the cranes and Pygmies, but without the legend of the queen, is also present in Pliny's *Natural History*, where it is noted that reference to the war appears on its own in Homer's *Iliad* (bk. 3, 1:3-6). Since the story of the transformation of the Pygmy queen appears neither in Homer nor Pliny, it may be that the crane war was once, or

<sup>5</sup> Adomnán, *Life of Columba*, trans. Sharpe, 312, n. 203. The specific two species of bird at issue would be the common crane and the grey heron.

<sup>6</sup> On evidence for the increasing rarity of cranes in Britain from the fourteenth century see D. Serjeantson, "Birds: Food and a Mark of Status", in *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*, ed. C. M. Woolgar, D. Serjeantson, and T. Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 131-47, particularly 146, and D. J. Stone, "The Consumption and Supply of Birds in Late Medieval England," in *ibid.*, 159-60.

<sup>7</sup> Herons and cranes were firmly distinguished in early English, and the latter appear in place names; see D. W. Yalden, "Place-name and Archaeological Evidence on the Recent History of Birds in Britain," *Acta Zoologica Cracoviensia* 45 (2002), 416. Also see S. Boisseau and D. W. Yalden, "The Former Status of the Crane *Grus grus* in Britain," *Ibis: International Journal of Avian Science* 140 (1998), 483-6. Cranes appear to have become extinct earlier in Ireland than in Britain, but evidence on the issue is complicated and cannot be settled here.

<sup>8</sup> Neither *grus* nor *ardea* appear in the *Vulgate*.

<sup>9</sup> P. Ovidi Nasonis *Metamorphoseon*, ed. R. J. Tarrant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), bk. 6, lines 90-3; 155.

sometimes, independent of the former tale. Pliny adds an account of how the Pygmies destroy the eggs and young of the cranes. He also notes that cranes can be tamed as individual pets. The second substantial appearance of the story in Pliny, the seasonal truce that arises when cranes migrate, turns up with a fund of crane folklore which appears to be otherwise quite separate from the Pygmy war tradition.<sup>10</sup> Later, among other scraps of folklore such as that cranes turn black with age, Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* included, perhaps from Pliny, the story that cranes hold stones in their claws when doing sentinel duty for their flock.<sup>11</sup> Many of the anecdotes from Pliny and Isidore appear later in the medieval bestiary tradition.<sup>12</sup>

The herons have a much less substantial presence within all this literature. In Ovid they are linked to the destruction of the city of Ardea by Turnus in his conflict with Aeneas; the heron first appeared from the ashes of the burning city and therefore acquired its name.<sup>13</sup> In Isidore, the heron is afraid of rainstorms and flies above the clouds.<sup>14</sup> The appearances of cranes in Classical literature at least shows that there was a large and varied fund of folklore on cranes in the ancient Mediterranean world, and if the heron is less prominent, it does appear in the same texts that were likely to have been known in some form by Adomnán. However, there is no clear resonance between any of the tales in these texts and the Columba story, or indeed in the other appearances of the *grus* in Irish Latin hagiography, apart perhaps from the idea that cranes can be individual pets. Still, the existence of this material at least implies that Adomnán would have had a clear choice of vocabulary between *grus* denoting crane and *ardea* denoting heron. The natural assumption should surely be that Adomnán knew what he was about and identified Columba's bird as a *grus* because it was a crane. There should have to be a strong positive reason to reverse this presumption.

One motive for preferring the heron to the crane in the story of Saint Columba could be that the latter is a bird which travels in flocks, while the

<sup>10</sup> C. Plini Secundis *Naturalis Historiae*, ed. Charles Mayhoff, 6 vols (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1967), vol. 2, bk. 7, ch. 2, 10; and bk. 10, ch. 23, 236-7. The story is also mentioned in Pliny at bk. 4, ch. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Isidore Hispalensis Episcopi *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), vol. 2, bk. 12, no. 7, 13-5.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Richard Barber, trans., *Bestiary* (London: The Folio Society, 1992), 127-8, which seems particularly dependent upon Isidore. Cranes were popular in bestiaries, common motifs being their sentry behaviour, holding a rock in one claw, and turning black with age; see Michelle Bolduc, "Silence's Beasts," in *The Mark of the Beast: the Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig (New York: Garland, 1999), 193.

<sup>13</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk. 14, lines 652-7.

<sup>14</sup> Isidore, *Etymologies*, bk. 12, no. 7 (21). Isidore is the clear source for the bestiary entry in Barber, *Bestiary*, 133. Other references to herons in medieval literature are noted in Simona Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 62-4, on the heron as a spiritual symbol of those able to raise their attention above worldly affairs. These notices are twelfth-century or later.

former, depending on species, is normally solitary.<sup>15</sup> Since Columba's bird appears alone, this would seem to make the heron more appropriate. However, the crane is a better fit for precisely the fact that it appears singularly in a story of the miraculous. Firstly, the saint seems to imply that the bird had been caught in a storm and that this is why it arrives exhausted and hungry. Thus it could be seen as a crane separated from its flock. Secondly, the appearance of the bird is most likely a supernatural event of more than just the saint's foreknowledge, a resonance which Adomnán chose to downplay. That a bird which is normally social should appear alone heightens the weight of the otherworldly around the tale and makes it more plausible as a narrative about Columba which would have been remembered. The great number of the other prophecies involved particular people and events which would have had some lasting significance. The *grus* story on its own does not, but allowing a greater sense of mystery or wonder to the tale would make it a more convincing part of the corpus of material on Columba.

Another Irish miracle involving *grues* has the birds appearing in a flock, as is proper for cranes, so it is not the case that Irish hagiography simply misapplied the term *grus* to birds which were in fact herons.<sup>16</sup> Thus it seems most appropriate to translate *grus* as crane, rather than heron, in the Columba story and other Irish Latin stories. This would also tend to favour the translation of the Irish *corr* as crane in the related vernacular stories. Nonetheless, for the analysis of the stories which follows, 'crane' is adopted as a convenient rather than strictly necessary translation.

The implication so far is that the crane in Adomnán is in some sense a supernatural agent in itself; that the story is not simply a somewhat random instance of Columba's power of prophecy but is an incident in the saint's ongoing relations with the spiritual world. If the story was taken in isolation a reasonable conclusion would be that the crane must be a partly symbolic heavenly messenger, and that Columba's careful solicitude confirms his grace in heaven. Birds very often function as angelic messengers in hagiography, so such a reading would actually help to normalise the miracle within the wider tradition. However, if this was really the import of the crane, it is hard to see why Adomnán seems to have attempted to marginalise the incident, and obscure

<sup>15</sup> This is perhaps the reason why Whitley Stokes appears to have changed his mind at one point over the translation of *corr* to heron from crane in the preface material to the *Amra Coluim Chille*. He does not give any other explanation. See Whitley Stokes, "The Bodleian *Amra Choluim chille*," *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899), 30-55, 132-83, 248-89, 400-37; and 21 (1900), 132-6; at 133. Of course, cranes are solitary, or paired, during the breeding season. The distinction is not, in any case, entirely cut and dried. Other scholars seem to have regularly translated *corr* as crane: see for example, H. J. Lawlor, "The Cathach of Saint Columba," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Section C, 33 (1916), 310.

<sup>16</sup> *Vita Sancti Ailbe* in Charles Plummer, ed., *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), vol. 1, no. 43, 62.

its wider associations. In fact, as the other Irish crane stories suggest, the crane was probably not simply an angelic symbol.

There is little guidance from the general hagiographic tradition outside Ireland as the crane is a vanishingly rare character in saints' *vitae*. One story which may have been available to Irish hagiographers was a posthumous miracle of the martyr Thecla, written by the Bishop Basil of Seleucia in fifth-century Syria.<sup>17</sup> Here, where Thecla's grave was said to be, a boy was brought to have his eye cured by the saint. This was done, but in a manner startling for a healing miracle. A crane jumped at the boy, and poked its beak in his eye. From the resulting hole, a mass of bad matter flowed out. The boy as a result recovered the use of his eye without any mutilation. This story has some affinity to parts of the Irish material, where eye-loss by crane is a hazard rather than part of a lancing cure, but where a miraculous healing of the eye subsequently does take place. Given that the cult of Thecla existed in Britain at least by Bede's time, it is possible that this Greek story might have been known to Irish hagiographers. However, in itself it cannot be the model, in any direct way, from which the Irish stories were drawn, as will be made clear below.

One of the Irish stories can be paralleled by saintly interactions with other wild birds. A flock of cranes was causing devastation to the fields, so at the pleading of the *plebes de plaga*, Saint Ailbe directed his disciples to round the birds up like sheep and pen them. This done, the saint lectured the birds the next day after which he commanded them to leave.<sup>18</sup> This story can be paralleled closely by a number of stories from British, Breton, Norman and other sources where the wild birds are usually geese.<sup>19</sup> The role of the crane in this instance is straightforward; it is simply to show the power of the saint over wild creatures. The Ailbe story does however match very closely in its narrative structure those miracles which also feature the resurrection of a goose. It is possible that this crane miracle originally contained a resurrection motif which was stripped out. The record of the goose resurrection stories does suggest the suppression of such a motif as a possibility.<sup>20</sup>

Be that as it may, there are three other Irish crane stories which cannot be easily linked to any non-Irish *topos* that would contextualise them in the standard hagiographic treatment of saints and animals. The Latin verse *Vita* of Saint Senán and the prose *Vita* of Saint Flannán contain two stories which are

<sup>17</sup> Basil of Seleucia, 'Miracula Sanctae Theclae,' in *Acta Sanctorum* (Brussels, Antwerp, Paris: Societ  des Bollandistes, 1643-) (AASS), 23<sup>rd</sup> September, no. 63; 560.

<sup>18</sup> *Vita Sancti Ailbe*, in Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, vol. 1, 62.

<sup>19</sup> For some examples see G. H. Doble, *Lives of the Welsh Saints* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1971), 95-7, 110, Wormonoc, 'Vita Sancti Pauli Leonensis,' ed. R. P. Plaine, *Analecta Bollandiana* 1 (1882), ch. 4, 217-20, R. P. Plaine, 'Vita Antiqua Samsonis,' *Analecta Bollandiana* 6 (1887), bk. 2, ch. 12, 133-4, and others discussed in Alexander, *Saints and Animals*, ch. 5.

<sup>20</sup> See Alexander, *Saints and Animals*, ch. 5, particularly 104, n.64.

closely related.<sup>21</sup> Both stories see their saints performing wonders in a mill-house. In each, the saint miraculously mills, evidently by hand, through the night. Both stories are specific that the saint held up the fingers of his left hand which gave out light. The saint is observed by a fellow monk, whose eye is put out by the saint's pet crane, apparently standing guard. Observing the saint's miraculous work is then in some sense a sin, but the story is softened by the intervention of senior saints who, in each case, restore the lost eye.

The motif of the saint making light with his hand amounts to a *topos* of its own, as it appears in a number of other stories, usually with the saint making the light in order to read rather than to mill.<sup>22</sup> Saint Canice or Cainnech uses the five fingers of his left hand 'as if it were a candle' to read secretly and alone. In a manner similar to the crane stories, he is discovered, but there is no sign that this discovery was in any sense shameful for the observer, never mind there being any grisly vengeance.<sup>23</sup> Similarly Saint Columba of Terryglass, lacking oil to make light, held up his hand to make light to read, and is seen by one of his disciples who was curious as to what the saint was doing. Again there is no ill consequence, but it is notable that in this story the saint uses his right hand.<sup>24</sup> The story appears in slightly different form in the *Vita* of Saint Buite of Monasterboice, where it is a childhood miracle, for domestic purposes rather than for reading in solitude. Here again the saint uses the fingers of his right hand.<sup>25</sup>

In itself the 'hand of light' motif fits perfectly well within the overall hagiographic tradition, although the common specifics of these stories surely indicate their collective origin directly within Irish hagiography. The notable variation within them is the specification of the use of the right or left hand. In the two milling stories it could be said perhaps that the saint used the fingers of his left hand as the right was needed for milling. Yet, Saint Canice also uses his left hand, whereas the other related stories switch it to the right. Finally, Manus O'Donnell's sixteenth-century *Life of Columcille* tells a story which combines the saint reading by finger light, but punishing the boy who sees him, effectively by calling upon a pet crane to poke his eye out through the keyhole.<sup>26</sup> This story combines the various different motifs and stories that appear separately in earlier literature, but it is very close to the two 'hands of light' stories featuring violent pet cranes. The chief difference is that the saint in this story is using his right

<sup>21</sup> *Vita Sancti Senani Episcopi et Abbatis in Hibernia*, AASS 8<sup>th</sup> March, ch. 3, nos. 16-7, 765; *Vita Sancti Flannani in Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, ed. W. W. Heist (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1965), 280-301, ch. 5, 283.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of this *topos*, see H. J. Lawlor, "The Cathach of Saint Columba," 308-11, who notes, n.309, that the story appears in Islamic literature too.

<sup>23</sup> *Vita Sancti Cainnici* in Plummer, vol. 1, 152-169; ch. 35, 165.

<sup>24</sup> *Vita Sancti Columbae de Tir Dá Glas* in Heist, 225-33; ch. 6, 226.

<sup>25</sup> *Vita Sancti Boecii* in Plummer, 87-97; ch. 19, 92-3.

<sup>26</sup> Manus O'Donnell, *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille*, ed. and trans. A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1918), ch. 14, 117-8.

hand for illumination. The use of the left hand to produce miraculous light is clearly significant, and is certainly startling in its implication of otherworldly power. Perhaps the motif was originally intended to illustrate the Christian saint's dominance over other supernatural forces, but it is at least ambiguous in its resonance. It is conversely possible that some hagiographers actively changed the hand from left to right to remove any associations contained in the original stories they were recording or adapting.

Following the hand of light motif, the two milling stories carry on almost identically. Spied upon by a messenger, the saint essentially curses the miscreant, whose eye is then poked out by a crane as prophesised. In both stories, the intervention of a senior saint, Molua in Flannán's case, secures the restoration of the sinner's eye. It should be apparent that these miracles cannot be derived in any direct or literary way from the Thecla miracle. Nonetheless, the fact that the Thecla miracle involves a crane poking at an eye, leading to a healing miracle, may point to an underlying motif possibly once in wide circulation in Europe that otherwise has been lost.

The plots and details of the two Irish stories are so very close as to be almost identical, and yet there is little sign in the phrasing and vocabulary of direct dependence of one upon the other. It seems likely therefore that the two share a common literary ancestor, but at some remove. Any original version of the story would very likely therefore have been considerably earlier than the extant versions. Given that both stories require the saint to have been using a hand-mill, the origin of the story lies perhaps as early as the seventh century, by which time water-mills appear to have become well established in Ireland.<sup>27</sup> Of course hand-mills continued in use long afterwards, but their routine use in a monastic context would be more probable in earlier centuries than by, for example, the twelfth century. The two stories thus represent a specifically Irish *topos* that was probably relatively widespread in Irish hagiography. Nonetheless, the 'hand of light' motif, to which they are connected, clearly could stand on its own.

A related vernacular story of Ciarán of Clonmacnois contains a somewhat different narrative, and here the fault of the servant is to withhold food from the saint.<sup>28</sup> In this story the saint completes the milling with the aid of an angel

<sup>27</sup> On mills in Ireland see Seán Duffy, Ailbhe MacShamráin and James Moynes, *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge 2005), 335; Adam Lucas, *Wind, Water, Work: Ancient and Medieval Milling Technology* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 79-81, and Nancy Edwards, *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1990), 63.

<sup>28</sup> Whitely Stokes, ed., *Lives of the Saints from the Book of Lismore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899); *Life of Ciarán of Clonmacnois*, 269-70. Another story may have some very distant relationship with these stories. Saint Aed Macc Bricc warns his charioteer not to look while the saint flies the chariot in the air. Inevitably the charioteer peeks and loses his eye, which is restored by the saint; Heist, *Vita S. Aidi Episcopi Killariensis*, 167-81; ch. 36, 178. Observing a saint's exercise of power is indeed generally dangerous. Also see the comments on this story by Joseph Falaky Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 239.



rather than light from his hand. The crane again takes vengeance for the saint, but not for the crime of observing the miraculous deeds and prayers of the holy man. Another difference is that this time it is the saint who removes the curse he himself had laid, and cures the eye in exchange for the mill, which is clearly more than the simple hand-mill implied by the other stories. The grain milled by the saint turns out to have miraculous power to heal all the sick monks in the monastery. The meaning of the Ciarán story is thus notably altered from the earlier two, demonstrating that the basic *topos* must have circulated widely at some point for this distinct version to emerge. The presence of a complex mill also likely indicates a later date of origin. The meaning of the Senán and Flannán stories is clearly bound up with the notion that it was a dangerous sacrilege for one secretly to observe the saint at prayer, performing miraculous labour. The crane in the *topos* is the agent of the saint's vengeance, but the association of this particular bird with saintly power does not seem to be incidental.

While the *topos* itself is specifically Irish, it remains important to seek out stories elsewhere in hagiography that might be related and help elucidate the resonances of the story, or at the least to rule out certain possible connections. One miracle which does offer a parallel is the story of Saint Cuthbert and the otters. Here the saint's wonder is his ascetic prayer immersed in the North Sea, out of which come otters to dry the saintly body with their fur. A monk from the House which Cuthbert was visiting, 'seeing him go silently out, followed in his footsteps secretly, seeking to discover whither he meant to go and what he intended to do'.<sup>29</sup> This is certainly dubious behaviour, and the monk, having witnessed the miracle, is suitably shamed for 'the guilt of his foolish daring'. Cuthbert forgives him for the fault so long as the wonder is not revealed until after his death. This sense that secretly observing a saint's wondrous communion with the spiritual is sinful is shared with the two Irish stories, but where the Irish monks are brutally punished, Cuthbert forgives the Northumbrian brother. Also while the secret of the animals' submission to Cuthbert is presumably kept for the duration, in the Irish *topos* the saint's secret is revealed right away to the senior saint of the monastery.

Another difference between the Irish miracles and Cuthbert's follows. While the implied context of Bede's story is that the host monastery needed Cuthbert's ascetic example, and that he rose above lax standards there, there is no such implication in either of the Irish stories. Indeed the contrasting roles of the animals highlight this. Where the Edenic *topos* of Creation submitting itself to the saint can only occur outside the Northumbrian monastery, the cranes' act of revenge on behalf of the Irish saints implicitly occurs within the monastery. The fault of a particular brother is being punished, but within the Irish monastery's precincts, where creatures are naturally in tune with the *virtus* of a saint.

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<sup>29</sup> Bede, *Vita Sancti Cuthberti in Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), ch. 10, 188-91.

The crane and the punishment of the miscreant by the loss of an eye are thus central to the miracles. They are the elements that cannot be explained by comparison with the story of Saint Cuthbert, or indeed with the other Irish 'hand of light' stories.

The violent intervention of a bird, and the loss of an eye which is later restored, are essential elements to another early medieval miracle story. This is from the ninth-century Breton *Vita* of the sixth-century Saint Winwaloe. The hagiographer himself claims this miracle as 'new and astonishing'. The saint's sister loses an eye in an attack by a domestic goose during a 'girlish chasing game'.<sup>30</sup> Directed by an angelic visitation, the saint gathers the geese together, isolates the miscreant goose, eviscerates it, retrieves his sister's eye unharmed, and restores her to her former whole beauty. Somewhat as an afterthought, it is noted that the goose is returned to its flock, also whole and healthy. In this account the sister is named twice as 'a virgin' and also as 'a most tender girl' implying that she is a young woman or an adolescent.

A second version of the *Vita* compresses the whole story to the bare details, removing reference to the 'girlish chasing game' but naming the sister as Creiruaia, and says she is an infant [*infantula*], reducing the cause of her injury to a childhood mishap.<sup>31</sup> This version also makes it clear, where the first version was reticent, that the goose's stomach was restored. A third version of the story restores the detail of the first, and the impression that the sister was a young woman, while suppressing the clarity on the resurrection of the goose by simply noting that it was 'restored' to its flock.<sup>32</sup> There is no real change in didactic or thematic purpose within these different versions that would explain the varying detail. The only motive for the repeated changes to the story appears to be some embarrassment on the part of the hagiographers about the nature of the miracle; specifically, the resurrection of the goose, and the 'girlish chasing game'.

The hagiographic use made of the story is to emphasise the saint's power of knowledge, through angelic visitation, and his power of healing. Analysis of hagiography tends to assume a great deal of freedom for the writers to create and borrow miracles for their own saints. However that model is difficult to apply in the case of this goose miracle, given its highly distinctive plot. It is also difficult to understand why a hagiographer would create such a peculiar miracle if his purpose was to demonstrate a fairly conventional *virtus* for his saint; there were many unproblematic miracles of power and knowledge that a ninth-century hagiographer could borrow.

The miracle is thematically integrated into the rest of the *Vita* to some degree by a later story in which, during a horse-racing 'spectacle', a young knight in Winwaloe's father's household is thrown and killed.<sup>33</sup> Winwaloe appears, again knowing of events miraculously. The youth is duly returned to

<sup>30</sup> Wrdisten, *Vita Sancti Winwaloei Abbatis*, AASS 3<sup>rd</sup> March, ch. 1, no. 6, 251.

<sup>31</sup> *Vita Winwaloei, Alia Vita*, no. 6, 254.

<sup>32</sup> *Vita Winwaloei, Tertia Vita*, no. 13, 357.

<sup>33</sup> Wrdisten, *Vita Winwaloei*, no. 9, 252.

life, paralleling the restoration of Creirua. The injury in each case is caused by secular celebrations or activities. The superiority of ecclesiastical life and customs over secular pursuits is thus proven, but this theme does not in itself explain the content of the goose miracle. The correspondences between the two stories highlight an unexplained parallel; the male military celebration of skill and daring in horse riding as against the female profane event, the 'girlish chasing game'. The male-orientated miracle is not in any way problematic, but if its purpose was partly to be an explanatory parallel to the goose miracle, then it actually serves to highlight the peculiarity of the evisceration and resurrection of the goose, and the mysterious girls' game that involved geese in some way.

The mysterious aspects of Winwaloe's goose story can be resolved if this miracle is related to the later resurrection of geese miracles, largely appearing at the end of the eleventh and in the twelfth centuries in England, Normandy and the Belgian region. Most of these miracles, the key examples involving Saints Wereburga, Pharailde, Amelberga, Opportuna, Vigor and Waldebert, are performed by female saints, itself unusual in the hagiographic tradition.<sup>34</sup> In all these stories, the saints cause wild geese to be gathered and penned, and subsequently resurrect a goose that had been eaten by an erring servant. Some of these stories occur explicitly at harvest time. I have argued elsewhere that these stories are best explained if an underlying folk tradition was the common source. This tradition would have been not just a story but also a village harvest ceremony, most likely, where the symbolic resurrection of a goose would probably have been carried out by a young woman.<sup>35</sup> Such a tradition would explain the story of Saint Winwaloe. The 'girlish chasing game' was in fact the goose ceremony, whose pre-Christian origins would have caused embarrassment to the hagiographers given their saint's role. Thus the tradition was reduced to a child's game.

However, the hagiographer was not simply dismissing the peasant ritual as childish, but was also symbolically linking it to death and disfigurement, which can be interpreted in a spiritual sense. By participating in a non-Christian practice, the young woman is exposing herself to grave spiritual danger, symbolised by the loss of her 'jewel-like eye'. Her parents are also reduced to extreme grief as they witness her slipping into death as a result of the injury. Fortunately for her, her brother is an *athleta Dei*, and is able to restore her to physical, or spiritual, health. The restoration of the goose, while presumably mirroring the popular story, also represents the saint's dominance over pre-Christian rites, and his restoration of earthly and spiritual harmony to the state before it was disrupted by the heathen rural 'game'. While the later goose resurrection stories attempt to absorb a rural practice into Christian miracle, the Winwaloe story represents an older strategy of denigration and suppression of pre-Christian beliefs and practices.

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Saints and Animals*, 51-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-12.

The Winwaloe story and the complex of 'goose resurrections' do not directly explain the Irish crane stories, of course, but they do suggest the context in which an explanation may be sought. The story of a saint observed holding up his left hand to create miraculous light, and the subsequent loss of an eye by the spying onlooker, is not one that is readily explicable within standard Christian expectations of sanctity. Comparison with one story which can be interpreted within the normal hagiographic tradition, that of Saint Cuthbert and the otters, only serves to highlight the anomalous role of the vicious crane serving a cursing saint. However if the story is considered alongside that of Saint Winwaloe, where there is a context of pre-Christian beliefs and practices related to death and rebirth, and the harvest, then the two Irish miracles appear more explicable. Even the circumstances of the story, the saint's grinding of grain, looks relevant, if a complex of notions involving ambiguous supernatural powers and the harvest are involved. This is not to say that the crane stories are themselves remnants of some sort of harvest ritual like that proposed for the goose resurrections. This would seem most unlikely. In addition, the stories of Senán and Flannán are clearly related at a literary level, unlike the goose resurrections. Nonetheless, the full resonance and meaning of the miracles need to be sought outside a strictly Christian context.

The obscure meaning of the two miracles might well have been deepened by the hagiographers' awareness that the material had to be *adapted* into something acceptable to Christian hagiography. If this was so, then the significance of the crane may have lain in a generally accepted role for the bird, in terms of the supernatural powers which governed such crucial matters as the turning of the seasons and the harvest. These underworld powers may have been seen as being related to or working through the crane. The saint's connection with the crane thus says something about the saint's miraculous powers in popular understanding. Here again the prominent detail in both stories of the saint holding up his 'left-hand' to create light is significant; it implies a connection between the underworld and the saint's power. That connection, suitably bloodthirsty and dangerous, is the crane.

At first sight the crane might seem an odd creature to carry significant supernatural weight, but cranes do appear regularly in folklore and marvel stories, not only in Ireland but elsewhere. One reason would be that migrating birds are well suited to associations with harvest rituals, and therefore with the liminal and supernatural. From ancient Greece, Theognis noted that when the flocks of cranes appeared that was the signal for the ploughman to attend to his fields. The crane may have been associated with Demeter.<sup>36</sup> Theseus'

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<sup>36</sup> Edward A. Armstrong, *The Life and Lore of the Bird in Nature, Art, Myth and Literature* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975), 61; Theognis, *Elegies in Greek Elegy and Iambus*, trans. J. M. Edmonds (Loeb Classical Library 258, London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 376-7, lines 1197-2102; James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 12 vols; vol. 7, 45.

companions, after landing with Ariadne on Delos danced a maze dance called 'the crane'.<sup>37</sup>

Amongst the Yakut of Siberia, the cranes' migrations were associated with the god Yussagai-Teyon. Numerous other appearances of cranes in religious contexts can be found from ancient Egypt to Bhutan.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps some of these examples are incidental rather than necessarily indicating an association of the crane with the supernatural. However, folklore of the Sami does assimilate water-birds as shamanic animals, because they cross the liminal boundaries of water and air, and can therefore be spirit guides for the shaman.<sup>39</sup> In European folklore, cranes can be associated with elves and the Otherworld, as in a story of the castle of the 'crane-men', where the hero finds an empty castle, only to be surprised by the return of its eponymous inhabitants.<sup>40</sup> The cranes of Ibycus are indicative of the supernatural capacities of the birds, as they are able to interact with the dead. Here a murdered man calls on some cranes as the only witnesses to his murder. The cranes are able to follow the murderer and point him out.<sup>41</sup>

If cranes produce a wide cultural echo, it is less easy to establish any exact role for the bird in Irish culture, despite the suggestion that it was, in Antiquity, a Celtic cult animal. The significance of the many fragments of archaeological evidence on cranes could easily be disputed, whether it is a crane on a first-century slab from Paris, in Roman military contexts or on stones from British altars.<sup>42</sup> In any case, how relevant this sort of evidence is to Ireland is at least debatable, and it certainly would be dangerous to conclude that the crane was definitely a pagan cult animal in Ireland on the basis of such evidence alone.

It is possible to point to comments by Gerald of Wales to support this hypothesis; however, these passages are not definitive in any way.<sup>43</sup> In the *History and Topography of Ireland* he is largely borrowing from Isidore or the bestiaries.<sup>44</sup> In the *Conquest of Ireland* there is only the laconic reference to the notion that the Irish lords disliked eating cranes before the Norman invasion.

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<sup>37</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, vol. 4, 75.

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, *Life and Lore*, 65, 210-18.

<sup>39</sup> Juha Pentikäinen, *Shamanism and Culture* (Helsinki: Etnika, 1998), 50, and Marek Zvelebil, "People behind the Lithics: Social Life and Social Conditions of Mesolithic Communities in Temperate Europe," in *Peopling the Mesolithic in a Northern Environment*, ed. Lynne Bevan and Jenny Moore (British Archaeological Reports International Series 1157, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybrass, 4 vols (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1888), vol. 4, 1420. This is in fact a 'Goldilocks' type of story.

<sup>41</sup> Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1957), 6 vols; for Ibycus see motif N271.3 and for other motifs involving cranes see B522.4.1, J1052, A137.7, J451.2 and F535.5.1.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain* (London: Cardinal, 1974), 351-3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 354-55.

<sup>44</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Historia Topographica Hiberniensis*, ed. James F. Dimock, *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland During the Middle Ages or Rolls Series 21* (1867), vol. 5, *distinctio* 1, ch. 14, 46-7.

This is not sufficient in itself to demonstrate it was 'tabu' because it was a pagan cult animal.<sup>45</sup> It is, still, indicative of a special, perhaps broadly sacred, status for cranes in twelfth-century Ireland. Indeed, the *Conquest* anecdote is followed straightaway by a comment referring to the desecration of trees planted by old saints in the cemetery of Finglass, as if for Gerald the one had brought to mind the other. The association here suggests, if anything, that cranes were primarily associated with the saints by this time.

Nonetheless, the many scattered fragments implying an ancient sacred role for the crane cannot all be dismissed. In Ireland, the uncanny associations of cranes were not restricted simply to dealings with the saints. The cranes of Midir, from the story in the Book of Leinster, clearly have supernatural associations as birds of ill omen attached to a magical figure. The range of crane stories certainly also suggest a general association with magical transformations.<sup>46</sup> The crane is also associated with transformation in thirteenth-century romance outside Ireland.<sup>47</sup> If the crane in Irish hagiography can be seen in the context of birds associated with the folklore of harvest, and the cycle of death and rebirth, an association with transformation is particularly significant. It is in a wide context of folklore and myth then, that the story in the prefatory material to the *Amra Choluim Chille*, where Columba transforms a queen and her servant into cranes, should be considered.<sup>48</sup>

The various versions differ to an extent, some containing more elaborate word play than others, but all retaining the same essential elements. Colum Cille is accused by the queen of being a 'crane-cleric', however that may be translated, and the saint turns the insult upon the queen in transforming her into a crane. That the queen's insult may be translated as calling Colum Cille a 'tricky cleric', 'crooked cleric' or 'stooped cleric', does not dilute the 'magical' quality of power expressed by the saint in performing the metamorphosis. The word *corrchléirech* clearly functions as a pun, actually underlining the significance of

<sup>45</sup> Ross, *Celtic Britain*, 355. Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, ed. James F. Dimock, *Rolls Series* 21 (1867), vol 5, bk. 1, ch. 33; 279-80.

<sup>46</sup> See Ross, *Celtic Britain*, 337, 356-61, also for the 'crane-bag' type of story.

<sup>47</sup> Bolduc, "Silence's Beasts," 193-4.

<sup>48</sup> Stokes, "The Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*", 40-1, and also 49. Other versions are in Stokes, *Book of Lismore, Life of Colomb Cille*, 311; R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin, ed., *Lebor Na Huirde: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929), 12. The latter version is very similar but not identical to the Bodleian version. Also see the variant in J. H. Bernard and R. Atkinson, ed., *The Irish Liber Hymnorum*, 2 vols (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1897-98), vol. 1, no. 38, 187. See also the appearance of the episode in Manus O'Donnell, *Betha Colaim Chille*, 348-9. On the dating of this material, see Máire Herbert, "The Preface to *Amra Choluim Chille*," in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, ed. Donnchadh ● Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 68 for the precise dating of the redaction to 1007-8.

the *corr* in this episode.<sup>49</sup> At base this is a shocking wonder story in which the saint, connected with a somewhat sinister animal, is behaving in a way that is well outside the usual parameters of saintly behaviour in the general hagiographic tradition. In these same terms, it is still remarkable even within the Irish tradition.

The story brings to mind, of course, the many classical transformations of humans into birds. Most striking is the structural resemblance between this and the story of the Queen of the Pygmies. In both a mortal angers a metaphysically powerful figure with the consequence of being permanently transformed into a crane. Even more clearly than in the classical story, the Irish tale implies that the consequence of the transformation is immortality. One version quotes a poet to that effect: 'Aed's wife and her handmaid, / Are changed into marsh-cranes./ They still remain; they give groans/ In Driim Ceat without denial'.<sup>50</sup> Clearly there is no direct relationship between Ovid's story and Colum Cille's crane-queen, but the similarity in their fundamental architecture indicates that this Columba story may well derive ultimately from ancient stories circulating across Europe in various forms. The pull of pre-Christian associations of the crane seem hard to ignore in interpreting the crane in the *Amra* story, and consequently in the other appearances of the bird in Irish hagiography.

To insist on this relatively simple connection is not to deny that there are many complex resonances in the story. The redactors of the apparatus of the *Amra Choluim Chille* were surely conscious of the connections and implications of every element, and must therefore have been aware of the un-Christian associations they were pinning onto Columba. One way out of that problem is to interpret the story in terms of a quite complex web of literary symbols, as Joseph Falaky Nagy has done, setting up a series of reconciliations of past and present, pagan and Christian, of poets and clerics in Irish society.<sup>51</sup> The crane here becomes a complex symbol for the contradictions in the saint's psyche as he saves the pagan poets from banishment, and reconciles Christian Ireland to their older lore, even as the superiority of the Christian complex is underlined. Such an analysis may well reveal important resonances and functions for the traditions in the *Amra* apparatus, particularly in respect of the most sophisticated listeners and readers in eleventh-century Ireland. However, the legends were

<sup>49</sup> Sharpe, *Life of Columba*, 312; Nagy, *Angels and Ancients*, 184; and Stokes, 'Bodleian *Amra*', 49 for the 'tricky-cleric' translation; Stokes, *Book of Lismore*, 349 for the straight 'crane-cleric' translation.

<sup>50</sup> Stokes, *Lismore*, 349. The Bodleian version carries the same implication differently, having Colum Cille say to the Queen that she shall be a crane 'outside on this ford for ever, with one of thy wings broken as half of thy hair (is) washen'; Stokes, 'Bodleian *Amra Choluim Chille*', 49.

<sup>51</sup> Nagy, *Angels and Ancients*, 182-9; the above is just an indication of the argument in Nagy. Also see Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'The Herons of Druim Ceat Revisiting, and Revisited,' *Celtica* 21 (1990), 370, where he notes the view that the apparatus of the *Amra* 'represents a "mythologisation" of a genuine gradual *rapprochement* between pagan and Christian possessor of knowledge'.

surely known well beyond such an audience, and were presumably significantly older than their first appearance in written form. Indeed the crane tale's presence in the preface to the *Amra Choluim Chille* probably represents the literary adaptation of a story, or type of story, that existed independently. In that respect, for many listeners the point of the legend would have lain more simply in the nature of the power the saint is able to command.

The nature of the connection between the saint and the crane therefore remains the issue outside of its meaning in strictly literary terms. The value of that connection is curiously ambivalent, since the saint's transformative miracle seems to confirm his own association with the bird, clearly derogatory in the literary version, perhaps precisely because of its pre-Christian overtones. The very ambiguity of the queen's insult, and its different possible meanings, hints at that understanding of the saint's power. The character of the cranes' role may be explained if the story is read with such folklore as the castle of the fairy-like 'crane-men' in mind. Like other wading birds, cranes are themselves liminal creatures, their habitat being between air and water, and their habits being mostly migratory. They are then ideal creatures to bear the weight of ideas about the powers of transformation, which are inevitably ways of discussing life and death, rebirth and restoration.

Through the stories of the saint milling at night, using his sinister hand to make light, attended by a dangerous creature of the otherworld, the problematic power of the holy man in hagiography is revealed. That power is reconciled in the Christian community in the stories of Senán and Flannán by the presence of a senior saint who is able to cure the damage done. The senior saint's healing of the eye demonstrates the reconciliation or transformation of a dangerous power within a controlled Christian context. In the parallel and probably later story of Ciarán of Clonmacnois, the milling saint himself is the one that performs the cure. Here the need for only one layer of sanctity perhaps reveals a more confident Christian appropriation of older traditions of wondrous power in relation to the natural world.

The transformation miracle highlights the dangerous power of the saint; those who anger him and oppose him may find themselves supernaturally reduced to being his otherworldly servants. At this point it is unnecessary to wonder why the saint would turn his enemies into a creature which is associated with himself.<sup>52</sup> There is no paradox there. The crane is a spirit-animal of sorts, being and revealing the saint's link with uncanny powers, its probable pre-Christian role being the reason why it became attached to the saint. In the same way as a Breton saint like Winwaloe re-enacts a pre-Christian wonder to tame and supplant the previous culture, so the same process was surely at work here in the legend of Colum Cille. The accretion of pre-Christian cultic elements in the legends of saints was in this sense a conscious strategy, one that does not need to be explained away. No doubt as the Christianisation process advanced,

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<sup>52</sup> The reading in Nagy, *Ancients and Angels*, 185-6, is nonetheless worth bearing in mind.



such accretions could appear embarrassing to some clerics, motivating a further process of literary absorption, as is likely to have been the case of the vengeful transformation miracle. In other cases outright suppression might be expected to occur. The strategies of absorption or suppression likely alternated in unpredictable rather than linear progress through the centuries.

Evidently, as early as Adomnán's time, there were reasons for the hagiographer to prefer the suppression strategy in dealing with the pilgrim crane. Nonetheless, the story of Saint Columba and the crane becomes richer by comparison with the other Irish crane stories. Adomnán's project in this *Vita* was to emphasise how far Columba's tradition fitted neatly within the general hagiographic tradition. His procedure would then certainly have been to reduce to invisibility the non-Christian associations in the link between the crane and the saint, and hence the inscrutability of that story. In that case why would the hagiographer include an episode with which he was evidently so uncomfortable? If there was a widespread identification of certain birds as having supernatural connections with saints, and if such a story had become attached to Saint Columba, Adomnán may have judged it impossible to leave out altogether. The story could however be reduced to a story of the saint's foreknowledge and his Edenic connection with Creation. If this strategy moulded the legend of the saint to the requirements of the orthodox hagiographic tradition, it did not in itself suppress the circulation of more complex versions of Saint Columba's power. Evidence of this then resurfaces in a much later literary attempt to absorb their meaning in the apparatus of the *Amra Choluim Chille*.

If the crane was one of the creatures perceived as a possible link between magical or miraculous powers in this world, and given the otherworld origins of these powers, it reflects more widely on the remarkably prominent place of animals in Irish hagiography. Unlike Francia or England during the conversion period, the Irish Church did not have strong aristocratic or royal power to rely upon in the suppression of pre-Christian beliefs. Rather, Christianity would have had to co-exist with pagan belief over a much longer period, and across the social scale. In England and Francia, the aristocratic elite could be converted more thoroughly to an orthodox Christianity, and their social power could be used to marginalise popular belief. The absence of strong institutional power in Ireland provides a context for a much more pervasive interpenetration of Christian and pre-Christian belief, which could therefore find its way into hagiography in a systematic way.

The seventh-century generation of hagiographers, including Adomnán, was very concerned to marginalise this aspect of Irish saintly legend, but later hagiography appears to have been more often permeated with such syncretic traditions.<sup>53</sup> Hence it is possible to fill out the context of an old story, such as Saint Columba's crane, with material that first appears in the written record from later centuries. It seems very likely that much of the later miraculous

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<sup>53</sup> See Alexander, *Saints and Animals*, 72, 77-83.

tradition involving the crane was present in the early period. If Irish saintly legend was relatively open to pre-Christian elements, then the various likely connections of animals to Otherworldly or supernatural power in pre-Christian Ireland would have frequently transferred themselves to Christian saints.<sup>54</sup>

In this respect, the ubiquity of animals in Irish saints' legends likely reflects in general terms a substratum of belief that was present in most of western Europe, and is simply more visible in Irish hagiography due to the particular social circumstances of the Irish Church. The likelihood is that pre-Christian beliefs and stories that were broadly similar in nature to those found in the Irish corpus existed in much of the rest of Europe, and so what appears fragmentary elsewhere is clearer in the Irish material. In this respect the remarkable stories of saints and animals reveal both the distinctiveness of the Irish tradition and yet also its continuity with the cultural dynamics of European hagiography as a whole.

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<sup>54</sup> For other pre-Christian associations see, for example, Miranda Aldhouse Green, "The Symbolic Horse in Pagan Celtic Europe: an Archaeological Perspective," in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*, ed. Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 2.

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## Vorwort

Der vorliegende Band von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* zeigt recht klar die Bedeutung, welche unterschiedliche Themen der mittelalterlichen Alltagsgeschichte und Geschichte der materiellen Kultur in der internationalen Forschung erhalten haben. Beiträge von SpezialistInnen aus England, Argentinien, Dänemark und Deutschland setzen sich mit Problemen auseinander, die von hagiographischen, theologischen, archäologischen und architekturhistorischen sowie fechttechnischen Grundfragen ausgehen und gut vermitteln, auf welche Art und Weise dieselben auf breitere alltagsrelevante Lebensbereiche Einfluss nehmen bzw. dieselben betreffen. Damit lassen sich auch neuerlich die vielfältigen trans- und interdisziplinären Ansätze und Methoden erkennen, die für eine umfassendere wissenschaftliche Aufarbeitung des mittelalterlichen Alltagslebens zu berücksichtigen sind und welche *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* und seine Publikationsreihe zu fördern versuchen.

Gerhard Jaritz