Early Irish borrowings in old English as evidence for Hiberno-Saxon cultural contacts: a preliminary investigation

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Of the many ways in which cultures influence each other perhaps the most telling is language interaction; more specifically, the appropriation by a language of concepts and words from another language. I will examine this process as it relates to Old Irish words borrowed into Old English to see what it tells us about contacts between the two cultures during a crucial formative period for English history in the seventh and eighth century. I begin by making two broad assumptions about the borrowing process.

1. Borrowing from one language into another implies contact, whether it be physical or intellectual, whether it be brought on by trade, immigration, intermarriage, conquest, intellectual exchanges, or religious proselytizing.
2. Furthermore, borrowing "is predicated on some minimum of bilingual mastery of the two languages"[1] in contact. In other words, there must be people who have a working knowledge of the two languages, in this instance Old Irish and Old English.

Ireland and England are geographically close, so the possibilities for Irish influence on the Old English lexicon — I am not here discussing borrowing in the other direction — were in theory present for almost 500 years (roughly from *c.* 600-1100). In reality, that potential was realized mainly in the seventh and eighth centuries which witnessed an unusual degree of contacts between the two cultures. The impetus for these contacts was twofold: political, because

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1) E. Haugen, 'The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing', *Language* 26 (1950), 210-31: 210.

by the sixth century the Irish were already a strong presence in north-west Britain where they had established the kingdom of Dál Ríata on the west coast of Scotland; religious, because in 635 Irish monks from the primary ecclesiastical centre of this kingdom, the monastery of Iona, embarked on a proselytizing mission to Northumbria. Four historical realizations of these political and religious contacts are worth considering as conduits of borrowing because all of them match the two assumptions made above.

(1) The presence of Anglo-Saxon nobility in the Irish-speaking kingdom of Dál Ríata (and probably in Ireland itself) during the late sixth and throughout the seventh century, many of them living as exiles, some even as students, but all apparently actively engaged in local politics. Most of these exiles were casualties of the fierce rivalry between the kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira to dominate in Northumbria, control of which swung back and forth between the two during this period until the late seventh century. Others were victims of feuds within the two respective ruling families. Many of them seem to have learned Irish; for example, three seventh-century kings of Northumbria, Oswald (634-42), Oswy (642-670) and Aldfrith (685-705) were fluent in that language, as attested by Bede.

(2) The missionary work being conducted by Irish-speaking clerics in England, especially in Northumbria and Mercia, during the seventh century, which was most vigorous in the period of direct Irish control from 635 to 664. Many of these missionaries would have learned Old English following the example of their leader, Bishop Aidan, who according to Bede did not 'fully know Old English' when he arrived[2] — a statement which

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2) *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* III.3; trans. by J. McClure and R. Collins, *Bede: the Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1994), p. 114.

taken at face value indicates that he had some competency while also implying that he subsequently mastered the language.

(3) Anglo-Saxon converts of these missionaries attached to Irish monastic foundations in Northumbria during the period 635-664 who lived in community with their Irish colleagues presumably achieved some degree of fluency in Irish. For example, the brothers Cedd and Ceadda and probably even Wilfrid at Lindisfarne; Cuthbert at Melrose, and perhaps also the English students of Aidan such as Eata (whom Bede calls one of the 'pueri Aidani') who followed the Irish bishop about Northumbria in the earliest days of the mission.

(4) Anglo-Saxon students who went to Ireland for higher studies from the middle years of the seventh century — with an interruption caused by the plague of 664-6 — until well into the first half of the eighth century. The names of some of these students are known from Bede and other sources such as Aldhelm's letters.

A. Loanwords:

The most obvious manifestation of the borrowing process are loanwords or lexical borrowings. According to conventional wisdom the number of such Old Irish words borrowed into Old English is quite small. K. Luick lists some ten words of Celtic origins of which he identifies only two as specifically Irish;[3] A. Campbell lists six or seven;[4] A. C. Baugh and T. Cable list nine;[5] and D.

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3) *Historische Grammatik der Englischen Sprache* (Leipzig 1914-40; rpt. in 2 vols., Oxford, 1964), I, pp. 64-5 (§45).

4) *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), §565, which gives *dry, cross, brat, ancora*, and perhaps, *assa* and *stær*.

5) *A History of the English Language*, 4th edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1993), p. 74 (§55), which lists *ancor, dry, cine, cross, clugge, gabolrind, mind*, and perhaps *stær* and *cursian*.

Kastovsky in the most recent assessment gives only seven.[6] Actually, most of these authorities based their data on the work of Max Förster, a well-known scholar of Old English who also possessed a good working knowledge of the Celtic languages. He identified (with considerable plausibility) the following nine Irish loanwords in Old English: *ancor*(*a*) ('an anchorite'), *dry* ('a magician'), *cine* ('a manuscript gathering of five leaves'), *cross* ('a cross'), *clugge* ('a bell'), *cursian* ('to reprove, excommunicate'), *gabolrind* ('a compass'), *mind* ('a diadem'), *stær* ('history'). He also argued that only specifically monastic lexemes were borrowed from Old Irish.[7] More recently, A. Bammesberger in his corrections to Holthausen's etymological dictionary of Old English not only critically reviewed previous scholarship on these words but made a strong case for a few more.[8] Thus, to Förster's list can be added at least seven likely candidates, *æstel* ('a pointer'), *asal* ('a donkey'), *assa* ('an ass'), *bæzere* ('one who baptizes'), *bratt* ('a cloak'), *sacerd* ('a priest'), and **slæhtian* ('to prostrate oneself' — as a form of mortification). At least another four merit serious consideration, *Crīst* (Christ), *lorg* ('a rod, weaver's beam'), *scrin* ('a coffer'), and *stor* ('incense').

Ideally, a proposed loanword should meet three criteria:

1. phonological consistency: there must be broad phonological agreement between the word in its original donor language and the form it assumed in the

6) D. Kastovsky, 'Semantics and Vocabulary' in R. M. Hogg (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language* vol. I (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 290-408 : 319.

7) *Keltisches Wortgut im Englischen* (Halle, 1921), pp. 28-48 (rpt. from *Texte und Forschungen zur englischen Kulturgeschichte: Festgabe für Felix Liebermann*).

8) A. Bammesberger, *Beiträge zu einem etymologischen Wörterbuch des Altenglischen: Berichtigungen und Nachträge zum Altenglischen etymologischen Wörterbuch von Ferdinand Holthausen,* Anglistische Forschungen 139 (Heidelberg, 1979). As indicated by its title, this work does not discuss all the proposed loanwords from Irish.

recipient language, with due allowance for the different repertoire of phonemes in both. The borrowing, once received into the host language, should accord with phonological and morphological developments in that language (Old English) — unless of course it remains an 'alien', a word that is never naturalized, like the so-called 'learned loanwords'.

2. semantic compatibility: the meaning of the Old English word must broadly accord with that in the donor language (Old Irish) and significant deviations must be explainable by reference to recognized semantic processes (for example, semantic specialization).

3. historical plausibility: there should be a suitable historical context to explain the contact between the two languages and the specific circumstances that gave rise to the borrowing into Old English.

The great majority of the candidate loanwords listed above conform to these three criteria, though not without the occasional problem. On the phonological front, take for example, OE *dry* ('a magician'). According to Campbell, the *ui* of OIr *druí* was 'developed as $\bar{y}$, corresponding to the process in native words by which $\bar{u}$ is mutated by, and then absorbs, immediately following *i*'.[9] Somewhat different is Hogg's derivation of OE *dry* from OE **dry-i* (where $\bar{y}$ is the *i*-umlaut product of $\bar{u}$, hence earlier OE **drū-i*) with subsequent loss of the unstressed hiatus *-i*.[10] But this explanation is problematic, because by the seventh century OIr *druí* was a diphthong[11] and thus did not offer either a suitable phonological environment for *i*-mutation, or a satisfactory explanation

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9) Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §§ 237 and 565 (p. 220).

10) R. M. Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English, vol. 1: Phonology* (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, 1992) § 5.133; likewise, R. Lass, *Old English: a historical linguistic companion* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 65 (§ 3.8.2.B).

11) See D. Greene, 'The Diphthongs of Old Irish', *Ériu* 27 (1976), 26-45: 32, 39-40.

of the final -*i* in hiatus.[12] A simpler explanation is that for the unfamiliar /ui/ (long) diphthong of OIr *druí*, Old English substituted the closest equivalent, the phoneme /y:/. Conversely, OE *cursian* reveals its foreign origins because it preserved (and still preserves) the voiceless /s/, in keeping with its source, OIr *cúrsagaid*, where native words in a similar phonological environment voiced it to /z/, as in OE *fyrs* (>MnE *furze*).[13] Also reassuring is that *cursian* exemplifies the pattern whereby borrowed verbs tend to be assigned to the second class of Old English weak verbs.[14] Somewhat more problematic is relating the phonology of OIr *stoir* to OE *stær*. Förster argued that the apparent discrepancy in the vowels could be explained by reference to dialect differences in OE. Thus, he conjectures that OIr *stoir* produced diphthongized *stoer in Mercian which subsequently became *ster* and that the latter, in turn, would have been mechanically copied by West Saxon scribes as *stær* since that dialect equated Anglian ē with WS. ǣ.[15]

Semantic compatibility between the proposed loanword and its putative original is usually apparent in these loanwords. For example, OIr *cín* (which probably originally meant a gathering of five leaves, from Lat. *quinio* with the same meaning) was taken into Old English as *cíne* presumably retaining its Irish meaning — as suggested by the use of this old-fashioned (Late Antique)

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12) OIr *druí* < *druy < **druw'* < **druw'ī* < **druwi(d)-s*; see K. McCone, 'An tSean-Ghaeilge agus a Réamhstair', in K. McCone, D. McManus, *et al., Stair na Gaeilge in ómós do Pádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Maynooth, 1994), § 10. 2 (p. 88).

13) M. Förster, 'Altenglisch *stōr*, ein altirisches Lehnwort', *Englische Studien* 70 (1935-36), 51, n. 1.

14) See H. Gneuss, '*Anglicae linguae interpretatio:* Language contact, lexical borrowing and glossing in Anglo-Saxon England', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 82 (1992), 107-48: 141, where he notes that 'Three-quarters of all borrowed verbs and of Old English verbs derived from Latin loanwords belong to the second class of weak verbs'.

15) *Förster, Keltisches Wortgut im Englischen*, pp. 47-8.

method of making gatherings in early eight-century Northumbrian manuscripts. In later Old English usage, however, *cīne* shifted semantically to denote the contemporary continental method of organizing a manuscript in quaternions (gatherings of four leaves). Thus, Ælfric, the late tenth-century Anglo-Saxon scholar who was heavily influenced by the Benedictine Reform used *cīne* in the latter sense. Another loanword that underwent a semantic shift was OE *cursian*. When originally borrowed it probably had the same meaning as OIr *cúrsagaid*, 'exercizing [pastoral] solicitude' (from Lat. *curas agere*) as when a bishop in the pastoral exercise of his office warned or rebuked a wayward member of his flock. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*HE* III, 22), recounts a famous incident in which the Irish-trained missionary, Bishop Cedd, publicly reprimanded King Sigbert of the East Saxons for visiting the house of an excommunicated nobleman. Cedd touched the prostrate king with his staff, the symbol of his episcopal office. From the latter instance it is easy to see how *cursian* developed semantically from the act of reprimanding to mean 'to excommunicate' and later again with semantic broadening came to mean 'to curse' in general.

As for the third criterion (an appropriate historical context), the nature of virtually all of these loanwords fits very well with seventh/eight century contacts between Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England which were primarily ecclesiastical and literary. Thus, some refer to the missionary experience (*cursian, dry, sacerd*); others denote distinctive aspects of material Irish Christianity (*clugge, cross*) and Irish asceticism (*ancora, slæhtian*); while a few refer to Irish scribal practices (*æstel, cine, gabolrind*). Judging by the number of attested occurrences in the surviving corpus of Old English it appears that a few of these loanwords enjoyed a fairly wide distribution, notably *ancer/ancora, cross* (as a placename element), *cursian, dry*, and *sacerd*. At least two of them,

ancer/ancora and *dry* became the basis for productive compounds as in *ancor-lif* ('the eremitic lifestyle'), *ancor-stow* ('hermitage'), *dryegge* ('sorceress') and *dry-cræft* ('skill with magic'). Others are so highly specialized in character as to suggest that they should be classified as 'learned borrowings' — a conclusion borne out by the evidence that they occur but rarely in the extant Old English corpus or only in glossaries; for example, *æstel, gabolrind, mind* and **slæhtian.*

Indeed, the fact that three of these latter words are attested only once in the surviving Old English lexical corpus is a salutary reminder of how tenuous our knowledge is about the extent of Irish loanwords in Old English. It seems likely that there were other Irish loanwords that were written down but have not survived or have not been discovered. And there may have been others that were never committed to writing (either by chance or because they were the kinds of words that were not given written form).[16] But as things stand, the number of Irish loanwords that have been identified is still very small — perhaps about twenty at most — and not likely to change much.

This modest number surely calls for comment given the central role of Irish missionaries in the conversion of northern and central England (notably the kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia). Various suggestions could be made as to why so few Irish words entered the Old English lexicon. Linguists who cherish the axiom that 'For any large-scale borrowing a considerable group of bilinguals has to be assumed',[17] would obviously draw the negative conclusion that the paucity of Irish loanwords in Old English indicates that significant numbers of such bilinguals were lacking. *Prima facie* they have a good case.

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16) A point made by T. F. Hoad, 'The Reconstruction of unattested Old English Lexical items', in *Problems of Old English Lexicography*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger, Eichstaetter Beiträge 15, Abteilung Sprache und Literatur (Regensburg, 1985), pp. 131-50: 132-3.
17) Haugen, 'The Analysis', 210.

The bulk of Anglo-Saxon converts would not have known Irish nor would they have had any reason to learn it; on the other side, Irish missionaries would have had to learn Old English to carry out their ministry — in theory they would be bilingual but in practice their work would have been conducted monolingually, in Old English. Perhaps also the number of missionaries was relatively small; one thinks for example of the Irish missions to Mercia and Suffolk which, according to Bede, were led by a handful of clerics.

The simplest explanation might be that the Irish, like their counterparts of the Roman mission, used Latin terminology rather than their native language when introducing Christian concepts and practices with the obvious result that Latin (rather than Irish) words were borrowed into Old English. This process of latinization would have been facilitated by the fact that the basic lexicon of Christian beliefs and practices had probably already been established in Old English through borrowings from Latin introduced by the Kentish mission in 597 and by its offshoot in Northumbria led by Paulinus about 625. It is surely suggestive of such a process that the loanword for ʻMassʼ, which was initially borrowed into the Kentish dialect as *messe* (Lat. *missa*), appears in Northumbrian as *measse*, a form that could only have arisen from the transference of Kentish *messe* into the northern dialect.[18] Yet these explanations, even in the aggregate, donʼt quite add up to a satisfactory answer, given what we know about the *modus operandi* of the Irish and their success at reaching different levels of Anglo-Saxon society.

Which leads to a consideration of other possibilities for borrowing. We conventionally think of borrowing in terms of loanwords, individual words that can often be readily identified, even when phonologically assimilated into the

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18) Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, § 208.

host language, because their semantic content points to an alien culture. However, there are alternative ways, other than through the straightforward process of acquiring loanwords, by which a language can borrow from another.[19] To put it simply, side by side with lexical borrowing there are several other processes whereby *meanings* rather than concrete lexical items are borrowed from the donor language. The most important of these processes are: [20]

1. semantic loan ('Lehnbedeutung'): the meaning of a foreign word is borrowed and attached to a native word already existing; thus, the meaning of the Christian Latin word *peccatum* ('sin') was attached to OE *synn*, a word which originally meant 'enmity, feud, hostility'.

2. loan translation ('Lehnübersetzung'): the morphological components of a foreign word are translated in the borrowing language; this can be effected precisely (morpheme for morpheme) where the model is a compound, as in Lat. *prae-positio* borrowed as OE *for-setness*. Where the model has a derivational morpheme, the latter element has to be improvised by using some equivalent morpheme present in the host language; e.g. Lat. *cael-estis* was rendered by OE *heofon-cund*, a process labelled as 'Lehnübertragung' ('loan transference').

3. loan creation ('Lehnschöpfung'): a foreign word supplies the semantic content but the borrowing is effected not by using a pre-existing word in the borrowing language (as in no. 1) but by creating a new formation using native elements and compositional patterns; for example, OE *sangboc* to denote Lat. *graduale*, a

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19) As shown especially by W. Betz, *Deutsch und Lateinisch: Die Lehnbildungen der althochdeutschen Benediktinerregel* (Bonn, 1949); and 'Lehnwörter und Lehnprägungen im Vor- und Frühdeutschen', in *Deutsche Wortgeschichte*, ed. Friedrich Maurer and Heinz Rupp (Berlin, 1974), I, pp. 135-63, working on Old High German translations of Latin texts.

20) See Kastovsky, 'Semantics and Vocabulary', § 5. 2. 1. 5. 1-6 (pp. 309-17).

book of liturgical hymns in Latin.

4. hybrid formation: a blending of a loan word with a native lexicon; e.g. *dry-cræft* ('magical skill'), where the first element is an Irish loanword and the second element is native Old English.

How these processes operated on Old English borrowings from Latin has been well studied.[21] The exclusive focus on Latin is understandable. It was the official language of Western Christianity, the ultimate source — excepting some Greek words — of many of the concepts and terminology relating both to religious practices (the Mass and the liturgy of the Divine Office) and to ecclesiastical learning (especially the study of the Bible). Indeed, the relatively large number of identifiable Latin borrowings in Old English can be seen as confirmation of its privileged status. On a more practical level there is added attraction that the relationship between Latin and Old English, especially the dependence of the latter on the former for new vocabulary, can be studied in a 'secure' environment because many Old English works represent word-for-word renderings of Latin originals.

However, like the 'sterile' environments created by scientists in their laboratories, such studies run the risk of producing results that poorly reflect the linguistic complexities of real life. For example, many of the borrowings (both lexical and semantic) may be purely bookish, the product of an immediate need to find a vernacular equivalent for an unfamiliar and recondite Latin word. However interesting (and perhaps valid) the broad conclusions of these studies, they must be treated with caution.

With that caveat in mind, we will proceed to consider some of their findings.[22] In Old High German, about 18% of the total vocabulary was found to

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21) Especially by German scholars, notably Helmut Gneuss and his students at Munich.

22) Data taken from Gneuss, '*Anglicae linguae interpretatio*', 143-4.

be borrowings, an artificially high proportion which no doubt reflects the literary nature of their source. This total comprised 3% conventional loanwords, another 5% semantic loans, and 10% loan translations or creations. Similar results were obtained for Old English though based on a smaller body of evidence. The message from these studies seems clear enough: in investigating the influence of a foreign language on the Old English lexicon the prospects for finding semantic loans and loan formations are more promising than those for finding the more conventional loanwords. And of course what holds good for Old English borrowings from Latin may also offer similar possibilities for Old Irish, albeit on a more modest scale.

Unlike loanwords, semantic loans and loan translations represent an indirect form of borrowing; one may plausibly posit their existence but proving it is a much more difficult task. Of these two indirect processes, loan translation is probably easier to establish.

The following criteria are proposed for investigating possible Irish loan translations in Old English (in addition to the two criteria already laid down for loanwords, contextual appropriateness and semantic compatibility — obviously, phonological consistency is not relevant):

(a) No comparable loan translation should be attested in the cognate Germanic languages (especially Gothic); otherwise it would raise the possibility that the word belonged to the Common Germanic lexical stock inherited by Old English. The issue can be further complicated by the presence in the West Germanic languages of certain loan translations closely matching those of Old English even though the former could conceivably be the result of direct borrowing from Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

(b) The proposed candidate should involve a concept that was patently

foreign to the Anglo-Saxons; most plausibly, concepts that deal with Christianity and its concomitant Latin learning (especially grammar). But since Latin was the primary source of most Christian borrowings (of all types) in Old English, the burden of proof rests heavily on claims for Irish loan translations. In effect, to be considered as a candidate, an Irish word or concept should be quite distinctive (either morphologically or semantically) from anything comparable that Latin might offer.

The following example of a likely loan translation from Irish demonstrates these criteria at work:

OE *godspell* ('the Gospel') corresponds to Latin *euangelium* (itself a loanword from Greek $εὐαγγέλιον$), though obviously not a loanword from the latter. Equally, a semantic loan seems unlikely since there is no evidence that such a compound existed in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England (*god spell would be a possible collocation but not a compound). A loan translation from Latin is also unlikely, based as it is on a proposed derivation from Isidore who explains *evangelium* as Greek $εὐ$ ('bonum') and $αγγέλια$ ('adnuntiatio').[23] The objection here is that the OE element -*spell* is hardly an accurate translation of *adnuntiatio* because the former's primary denotation has to do with storytelling and narrative but that of the latter with reporting and preaching. Even less plausible is a loan translation based directly on the Greek etymon ($εὐαγγέλιον$) that underlies the Latin word. Such a process for either word would require a degree of linguistic expertise that was simply not available in Anglo-Saxon England, at least not until the 670s (with the arrival of Theodore at Canterbury) — much too late for the early missionaries who would surely have needed a word for such a central concept. Nor does Gothic offer any help since

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23) W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911), VI. ii. 43.

Ulfilas's Bible simply borrowed the Greek word as a loanword. The most plausible explanation is that OE *godspell* is a loan translation of the Old Irish word for 'Gospel', *soscél*.[24] It is a compound of *so* ('good') and *scél* ('story') and thus exactly matches the two morphemes of Old English *godspell* (*so: god* and *scél: spell*) to make a loan translation.

A more problematic candidate is OE *neorxnawang* ('Paradise') which according to P. L. Henry can be reconstructed as OIr *erc* ('heaven') + OE *suna* ('of the sons') + OE *wang* ('plain'), a compound corresponding to Irish *mag muinntire nime* ('the plain of the community of Heaven').[25] That would make *neorxnawang* a loan creation in respect to its two Old English elements but overall a hybrid formation. Unfortunately, Henry's reconstruction is highly dubious on several grounds: OIr *erc* is a rare word found only in glossaries; the comparanda do not match in their second element; and the Irish phrase *mag muinntire nime* is attested only once, in a work of tenth/eleventh-century date. [26]

Whereas loan translations combine a morphological and a semantic component, semantic loans are harder to establish since they must rely on semantic evidence alone. One would also expect the 'new' meaning attached to the native word to be semantically related to its previously attested meanings. Thus, one can readily understand how OE *synn* with its native meaning of 'enmity' could acquire an additional Christian meaning (from Lat. *peccatum*) in the related sense of 'a state of enmity with God'. Yet even here where foreign

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24) As argued by A. Bammesberger, 'Vieil Irlandais *sacart* et vieil anglais *sacerd*', *Études celtiques* 16 (1979), 187-9 : 189.

25) P. L. Henry, *The Early English and Celtic Lyric* (London, 1966), pp. 195-208.

26) *Fis Adomnáin* ('The Vision of Adomnán') §7. Another hybrid suggested by Henry (pp. 205-08) is OE *tintreg* ('torment'), which he analyzed as a compound of OIr *teine* ('fire') and OE *trega* ('pain, grief'), originally meaning 'the affliction of fire'. However, the first element of *tintreg* more likely derives from OE *tinnan* ('to burn').

influence on a native word can be plausibly posited, it may be difficult to determine which language the semantic influence came from. One could, for the sake of argument, propose that OE *synn* was influenced by OIr *peccad* rather than Lat. *peccatum*. Likewise, OE *weorold* with the Christian meaning 'this temporal (as opposed to eternal) life' evidently suggests a semantic loan. One thinks immediately of Lat. *saeculum* with a similar meaning, but OIr *saegul* (itself a loanword from *saeculum*) with the meaning of 'the world' (in the Christian sense) could also be a candidate.

Of course, given the primacy of Latin in the Old English borrowing process, the burden of proof must rest on any claim for Irish semantic influence. Ideally, one would need to find Irish words that share specific Christian meanings with Old English words — meanings for which Latin offers nothing comparable. Consider OE *halig* ('holy'). Its obvious comparandum as a source of semantic influence is the Latin word which it normally translates, *sanctus*. But the problem here is that the semantic fields of the two words are quite different. *Halig*, in keeping with its etymology from *hal*, would have originally denoted 'well, healthy', whereas *sanctus*, which means 'sacred, consecrated, holy', belongs to a different semantic field. Significantly, the Christian denotation of *sanctus* is rendered in Ulfilas's Bible with a different etymon, *weihs*. Thus, it is difficult to posit a semantic connection between OE *halig* and Lat. *sanctus* such as would facilitate semantic borrowing of the latter by the former. Now consider OIr *noíb*, from a root signifying 'vigour, a powerful force', which subsequently appropriated (through semantic loan from Christian Latin) the denotations of Lat. *sanctus*. Like OE *halig*, OIr *noíb* translates Lat. *sanctus,* in the sense of 'holy' as well as 'sacred, consecrated'. The affinity is even more evident in the substantival use of OE *halig* which, in addition to its primary denotation of 'a saint' or 'holy person', has a specialized application to

venerable figures of the Old Testament, as, for example, in *Genesis A* line 1592, *þam halgan* (referring to Noah), and *Exodus* line 307, *haliges lare* (referring to Moses). (Although *sanctus* in ecclesiastical Latin occasionally denoted such Old Testament figures it was always restricted to its plural form to denote collectively all the holy people (*sancti*) of the Old Testament.) The singular (in both senses of that word) use of OE *halig* matches a similar meaning for OIr *noíb*, the latter reflecting the cult of individual Old Testament 'saints' that was practised in early Christian Ireland.[27]

Perhaps the most convincing example of semantic loan is OE *elþeod-* from OIr *ailithir*.[28] At first glance the pair seems to exemplify the process of loan translation. They present a set of rather neat morphological correspondences with approximately matching morphemes *el-*: *aili-* ('other' or 'foreign') and *þeod*: *tír* ('people': 'land'). Semantically, both words can denote (among other things) the ascetic practice of voluntary exile (Lat. *peregrinatio pro amore Christi*). However, OE *elþeod* is a native formation and its second element does not match that of OIr *ailithir* — if it did, one would expect the OE elements **el-land-*, a compound actually attested in OE *ellende* ('foreign country'). To put the matter another way: to qualify as a true loan translation OE *elþeod* should have as its source a hypothetical OIr **alithuath*. If not a loan translation, then perhaps a semantic loan? The closest semantic parallels between the two comparanda lies not in their base forms but in derivative formations, especially

27) See J. Hennig, 'Ireland's contribution to the devotion to Old Testament saints', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 104 (1965), 333-48.

28) D. Whitelock, 'The Interpretation of the *Seafarer*', in C. Fox and B. Dickins (edd), *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe* (*H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies*) (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 259-72 : 268-9, was the first to propose that the phrase *elþeodigra eard gesece* (*Seafarer*, line 38) referred to the Irish practice of 'peregrinatio pro amore Christi'. See also the discussion in Henry, *Early English and Celtic Lyric,* pp. 195-8.

their respective abstract nouns, OE *elþeodignes* and OIr *ailithir*. The former denotes 'residence abroad' or 'exile', either in the secular or religious sense, though the great majority of some fifty surviving attestations refer to the religious motivation. Likewise, the Irish term almost always has the religious meaning of *peregrinatio pro amore Christi*. And since *peregrinatio* was an ascetic practice especially favoured by the Irish and introduced by them to their Anglo-Saxon converts, one may plausibly suggest a semantic loan, whereby this meaning of the Irish word influenced the meaning of an already existing Old English word, through their common denotation of 'a state of exile'. Whether the loan process operated in the first instance on the base form *elþeod* is difficult to say; it certainly influenced adjectival *elþeod-ig* as evident from a few instances of the latter to denote voluntary exile for religious reasons.[29]

Granted that these Old English forms are semantic loans, it could still be argued that their origins should be sought in Lat. *peregrinus/peregrinatio* (in the religious sense) rather than OIr *ailithre*. After all the great majority of religious borrowings in early Old English derived from Christian Latin, and these two Latin terms were well known on the Continent. But that seems unlikely on several counts. The notion (and practice) of exile *pro amore Christi* was assiduously (though not exclusively) cultivated by Irish ecclesiastics and passed on by them to their Anglo-Saxon disciples. Already by the 650s, as Bede makes clear, Anglo-Saxons such as Ecgbert and Wihtberct were practicing voluntary exile, and Ireland was the favoured destination for fulfilling it. The semantic borrowing process that supplied the term would more likely take

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29) A diPaolo Healey *et al.*, *Dictionary of Old English A-G* (Toronto, 2008) s.v., no. 2. A further formation based on *elþeodig* is the weak verb *elþeodigian* ('to go into voluntary exile').

place via Old Irish rather than Latin. Secondly, whereas Lat. *peregrinus* (as used by Anglo-Saxon writers) always implies exile overseas, OE *elþeod-* agrees with OIr *ailithre* in that both may apply to someone from another kingdom rather than from abroad; and both may also 'refer to a foreigner or alien who has not become an exile for religious or ascetic reasons'.[30] Thus, the semantics of OE *elþeod-* very closely matches that of OIr *ailithre*.

The number of Old English loanwords verified as borrowings from Old Irish is unlikely to be augmented much beyond what has already been identified. And while the number of Old English candidates for semantic (rather than lexical) borrowing also remains small, it seems to offer better prospects for further investigation of Irish influence on the Old English lexicon.

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30) T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', *Celtica* 11 (1976), 43-59 : 44-6.