

SAINT COLUMBANUS AT THE TOMB OF SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS



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Abstract

The life story of Saint Columbanus was written by Jonas of Bobbio, who became a monk at the monastery in Bobbio three years after the death of the legendary abbot, in his work Vita Sancti Columbani. Jonas gives a detailed account of the conflicts that forced Columbanus to leave the monastery he had founded in Luxeuil, and how he set out on his journey back to his native Ireland. During their journey along the Loire, Columbanus and his exiled monks arrived in the city of Tours, where special and miraculous events took place that had an impact on Columbanus's entire future destiny. The study focuses on the question of where Columbanus's veneration of St. Martin originated: whether it was influenced by his time on the continent, where he held the confessor bishop in high esteem, or whether we should rather think that he brought the most essential elements of the cult with him from Ireland. Considering other Irish hagiographies and the folk customs and rituals associated with the feast of St. Martin in Ireland, Columbanus's tradition from his homeland laid the foundation for his unparalleled veneration of the saint.

KEYWORDS

Saint Columbanus, Jonas of Bobbio, cult of Saint Martin, miracle, biography

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Saint Benedict may still have been alive when, around 540, another influential figure in Western European monasticism – Saint Columbanus (or Columban) – was born in Ireland. The first four decades of his life passed almost uneventfully, as nothing remarkable is recorded of him except that he lived the ordinary life of a monk. He first lived at Lough Erne (Loch Éirne) in County Fermanagh, where he composed his now-lost commentary on the Book of Psalms, and later entered the famous monastery of Bangor, under its abbot, Saint Comgall (Comgallus in Latin).²

Here he received permission from Comgall to leave the monastery and undertake a pilgrimage to the Continent. Columbanus was already over forty when he set out with twelve fellow monks. They first crossed the Irish Sea – landing first on the coast of Britain – and in 585 arrived in Brittany, now part of France, then inhabited by Celts. The memory of Columbanus remains strong in this region even today.³

The Irish monks did not remain in Armorica, however, but travelled on to Burgundy, where King Gontram received them with respect and granted them the abandoned Roman fort of Annegray for settlement and the founding of a monastery. A few years later, the king granted them another site at nearby Luxovium (modern Luxeuil), where they established what would become a renowned monastic center on the ruins of another Roman fort.

Columbanus's influence extended far beyond the founding of monasteries.⁴ He acted with great vigor and determination in matters concerning the Gallic Church and the political life of the region, which inevitably led to conflicts with both ecclesiastical leaders and secular authorities.⁵ As an Irish monk, Columbanus represented the distinctive ecclesiastical and monastic tradition of the Irish Church, in which authority was typically exercised not by bishops but by abbots, the heads of monastic communities. For this reason, Columbanus felt justified in dealing with bishops as equals.

Several issues caused tension, but the most significant was the dispute over the calculation of Easter. The Celtic churches followed a different method of determining the date of Easter from that used by Rome, with the result that some Christian communities – especially those under Irish influence – celebrated the Resurrection at a different time from those in Italy or North Africa. Columbanus took an extraordinarily firm position in favor of the Celtic

² For Saint Comgall, see Saint Comgall of Bangor, *Omnium Sanctorum Hiberniae*, the online database of Irish saints: www.omniumsanctorumhiberniae.com.

³ Jacques Baudoin: *Grand livre des saints, Culte et iconographie en Occident*, Créer, Nonette, 2006, 173.

⁴ About his interacting with local residents see: O'Hara, Alexander (ed.), *Columbanus and the peoples of post-Roman Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁵ George Metlake: *Life and Writings of St. Columbanus, 542–615*, Philadelphia, The Dolphin Press, 1914, 145–154.

calculation,⁶ as is most clearly demonstrated by his letter to Pope Gregory I on the subject.

This dispute was still unresolved when Columbanus became entangled in conflict with the Frankish royal family. After the death of King Gontram (532–592), Childebert II (570–596), the son of Sigebert I of Austrasia (535–575) and Brunhilda (543–613), ascended the throne.⁷ Upon Childebert's death, his two sons, Theuderic II (587–613) and Theudebert II (585–612), divided the realm between them: Theuderic became ruler of Burgundy, while Theudebert ruled Austrasia. Because both were minors, real power fell to their grandmother, the formidable Brunhilda.

Although Theuderic II respected Columbanus, the monk openly expressed his disapproval when the king fathered an illegitimate child. This provoked Brunhilda's anger. Determined to take revenge, she sought to turn both ecclesiastical and secular leaders against him. She succeeded to some extent: Columbanus was arrested and imprisoned at Besançon. He escaped, however, and returned to the monastery at Luxeuil.

Brunhilda then resolved that Columbanus could no longer remain in the kingdom and that he should be sent back to Ireland. Under military escort he was taken to the town of Nancy on the banks of the Loire, from where he and his companions were placed on a small boat – or perhaps a somewhat larger vessel, described in the Latin text as a *scapha* – to be transported back to Ireland.

We know the stages of Columbanus's journey – as well as many later events of his life — thanks to Jonas of Bobbio, who entered the monastery founded by Columbanus at Bobbio (near Piacenza) three years after the abbot's death and composed the *Vita Sancti Columbani* on the basis of eyewitness testimony from those who had known the Irish abbot personally. The next major city along the Loire was Orléans, and shortly thereafter the group reached Tours, also situated on the river and renowned as the city of Bishop Saint Martin. Jonas provides a detailed account of the events that occurred there, unsurprising given that Tours represented one of the most significant points on Columbanus's journey and that the cult of Saint Martin was already widely established.⁸ The credibility of Jonas's narrative is further strengthened by the near-contemporary nature of the *Vita*: even if one were inclined to question the author's reliability or to suspect later embellishment of the cult of Saint Martin, such doubts are substantially diminished by the fact that the text is not a compilation produced

⁶ On the controversy surrounding the date of Easter, see E.T. Dailey, 'To choose one Easter from three: Oswiu's decision and the Northumbrian synod of AD 664', *Peritia* 26 (2015), 47–64.

⁷ Yitzhak Hen: *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481–751*, Brill, Leiden – New York – Cologne, 1995, 201.

⁸ The question of what Irish roots Columbanus's veneration of St. Martin had can obviously be raised, but this study does not deal with it because it would lead too far afield. On the knowledge of Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Sancti Martini* see: REEVES, William: *The Memoir of the Book of Armagh*, Lusk Vicarage, 1861, 4.

centuries – or even decades – after the events. As an almost contemporary record, it offers accounts, particularly those concerning the cult of a saint, that are far less open to suspicion and far more deserving of trust.

According to the *Vita Sancti Columbani*, when Columbanus arrived at Tours by river, his escorts, who were supervising and controlling his departure, refused to allow the boat to moor, despite the monk's pleas. At this point, however, a miraculous event occurs, which Jonas recounts as follows:

Sailing along the Loire they come to the city of Tours. There the holy man begs the guards to take the boat into port and allow him to visit the tomb of the blessed confessor Martin. The guards refuse and force the oarsmen to move on energetically, urging them to pass the port quickly, while ordering the helmsman to keep the boat mid-stream. Seeing this, blessed Columba sadly raises his face to Heaven, complaining that he is so loaded with sorrows that he is not allowed to see the tombs of the saints. Although everyone is straining hard, as soon as they came opposite the port, the boat comes to a standstill, as if someone had dropped anchor, and its prow began to turn towards the port. When the guards could not stop it, they reluctantly allow the boat to go where it would. In an amazing way it speeds, as if winged, from mid-stream to the port and having reached it opens the way for the man of God. Columbanus gives thanks to the Eternal King, who does not disdain to comply with the wishes of His servants. Having safely landed, Columbanus goes to the tomb of blessed Martin and spends the whole night there in prayer.⁹

This scene serves merely as an introduction to the marvelous and significant events in Tours, yet it remains unclear what caused the guards' efforts to fail and Columbanus's wish to be fulfilled. Was it the power of Columbanus's prayer, or that of Saint Martin, whose relics Columbanus sought to venerate? The narrator's words at the beginning of the episode do not indicate that Saint Martin played any role in making the miracle possible, so it seems most likely that the author intends to suggest that the will of the otherwise stubborn and determined Columbanus prevailed. This is not surprising, considering what Columbanus wrote in his fourth letter while in exile: although his superiors wished him to return to Ireland, his guards were not particularly strict with him, leading him to suspect – rightly, as it later turned out – that he could escape if he desired.¹⁰ Indeed, they eventually allowed him to depart for northern Italy instead of returning to his homeland.

⁹ Iona Bobbiensis *Vita Sancti Columbani*, 1, 22. Translated by Alexander O'Hara. In: *Jonas of Bobbio, Life of Columbanus, Life of John Réomé, and Life of Vedast*, translated with introduction and commentary by Alexander O'Hara and Ian Wood, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2017, 147.

¹⁰ CELT, Letters of Columbanus, Epistula 4,7: *Nunc mihi scribenti nuntius supervenit, narrans mihi navem parari, qua invitatus vehar in meam regionem; sed si fugiero, nullus vetat custos; nam hoc videntur velle, ut ego fugiam.* (Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition, <https://celt.ucc.ie>)

In this scene, however, what stands out is Columbanus's intense desire to visit the tomb of Saint Martin. This raises several questions. On the one hand, it is clear that Columbanus was motivated not only by personal reverence but also by the broader, contemporary ecclesiastical cult of Saint Martin, which had already made Tours a major pilgrimage site. On the other hand, it is uncertain what lay at the root of Columbanus's devotion to Saint Martin. Did he bring it with him from Ireland, or was it a relatively new development, something he encountered only after arriving on the Continent? In other words, was Columbanus shaped primarily by the cult of Saint Martin as it existed in the Irish Church, or by that of the Gallic Church? To answer this question reliably, we must look back a little further.

Saint Martin is regarded as the founder and primary promoter of Eastern monasticism within the Western Church.¹¹ By establishing monasteries, he contributed immeasurably to the spread of monastic life. Irish monasteries later came to play a particularly significant role in the history of Western monasticism, owing to the combined effect of several factors. Among these, one should emphasize that, unlike other regions of Western Europe, the island of Ireland was never conquered by the Romans. Thus, while in Italy, Gaul, and North Africa Christianity emerged as a cultural rival to pagan Roman and other cults within a Roman or heavily Romanized social environment, in Ireland it was Christianity itself that brought cultural benefits – such as literacy – that elsewhere were not the exclusive preserve of Christians.

In this way, Christianity offered the Irish the possibility of remarkable cultural advancement compared with their traditional oral culture. They embraced these opportunities, and in the decades following the mission of Saint Patrick, roughly during the 5th century, at a time when the Western Roman Empire was disintegrating, the Irish succeeded in compensating for the developmental “gap” created by the absence of Roman conquest. As a result, during the 5th and 6th centuries – on an island where no towns existed prior to the Viking Age – the monasteries founded in rapid succession became important centers of learning and culture.

Although scholarly opinion is not entirely uniform on the subject, it appears, as the example of Saint Patrick suggests, that the Christianization of Ireland was influenced in part by the Gauls, who were themselves Celtic Christians, as well as by Welsh and pre-Anglo-Saxon British Christianity, and by the

¹¹ Sylvie Labarre: Szent Márton és a szerzetesség a Vita Martini prózai és verses változataiban [Saint Martin and Monasticism in the Prose and Verse Versions of *Vita Martini*], *Világtörténet*, 2016, 1, 69–85. Especially p. 69. Allan Scott McKinley: Tours-i Szent Márton tiszteletének első kétszáz éve [The First Two Hundred Years of the Veneration of Saint Martin of Tours], *Világtörténet*, 2016, 1, 119–145.

Church of Hispania.¹² This implies that Irish Christians maintained close ties with other Celtic churches.¹³ (In the case of Saint Patrick, for example, the view that he studied in Gaul was not totally rejected.) Therefore, even if we assume that Columbanus brought the cult of Saint Martin with him from Ireland, we may still conclude that the form of the cult he encountered ultimately originated in Gaul.¹⁴

Among the valuable documents of hagiographic literature are the Irish hagiographies,¹⁵ whose monastic authors often lived long after the saints whose lives they recorded and who, for the most part, remained anonymous and thus unknown. In these works – significant from historical, literary, cultural, and theological perspectives – we encounter several references to Saint Martin. In the work entitled *The Life of Saint Tigernacus, Bishop of Clones, Co. Monaghan* (Cluain Eois) (†549), written by an unknown author, we read the following:

Then, having received his master's blessing, he went to Rome and brought back the relics of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, after which he hurried home, as the aforementioned vision had warned him. When the blessed man set out on his journey, accompanied by Saint Keranus, the son of Euchodius, they reached the city of Saint Martin in the middle of winter. They were taken in for the night at a pilgrims' hostel, where nine dead bodies lay outstretched. Saint Keranus, moved by the immeasurable grief of the mourners, said to Saint Tigernachus: 'Let us pray through the night to Almighty God, that in His unspeakable mercy He may deign to raise these dead.'

The gracious father, whose whole being was filled with love, immediately obeyed the holy man's request and poured out pure and fervent prayers before the Lord on their behalf. And since God did not wish the pleas of His beloved servant to be in vain, He restored the nine dead to life, to the praise and glory of His name and of His saints. Saint Tigernachus and Saint Keranus then sealed their friendship by joining their right hands.¹⁶

We encounter a similar expression of reverence in the biography of Saint Lasrianus, or Molaissus, abbot of Dam Inis (25 October 650):

¹² Cf. Jocelyn Nigal Hillgarth: Visigothic Spain and Early Christian Ireland. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 62 (1961), 167–194.

¹³ Nora K. Chadwick: *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, 56–59.

¹⁴ Michael Richter: *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, Dublin, 1999, 225–230.

¹⁵ VSH I. – *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae tomus primus, Partim hactenus ineditae ad fidem codicum manvscriptorum recognovit prolegomenis notis indicibus instruxit Carolus PLUMMER*, Oxonii, 1910. For Irish Saints' Lives generally, see Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. An introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

¹⁶ VSH II., 262–269.

It happened that a poisonous snake, which had previously caused great harm to people, behaved so gently towards him that it ate from his hand and did him no injury. Later he arrived in the city of Saint Martinus, where he found the church he wished to enter sealed with seven seals. When the man of God could not enter, he asked the gatekeeper to open the door. But the guard refused to obey his request, treating him as a stranger and ignoring him. Then, by God's will, the church door immediately opened, although it had been securely locked. After these and other miracles, he continued on his way and at last reached Rome.¹⁷

The city of Saint Martin is also mentioned in the biography of Findanus, another renowned Irish saint of the ninth century: "However, Findanus remembered his promise. He gathered companions around him, and after receiving permission from his bishop, he prepared to travel to Gaul. He first arrived at the seat of Martinus."¹⁸

These quotations clearly demonstrate Saint Martin's popularity among Irish Christians, but they also highlight the significance of Tours' location along the route taken by Irish pilgrims travelling to or from Rome. Because of this, Irish pilgrims – often travelling on foot – likely visited the city on every such journey. However, the favorable geographical position of Tours was only one external factor. The other – illustrated particularly by the biographies of Bishops Tigernacus and Lasrianus, and of course by the *Vita Sancti Columbani* – is closely connected with the cult of Saint Martin, with prayer (including all-night vigils), and with miracles.

A shared motif in the biographies of both Columbanus and Lasrianus is that they are initially prevented from visiting Saint Martin's tomb or entering the church. Columbanus is kept away by the guards accompanying him, while Lasrianus is refused entry by the gatekeeper responsible for maintaining the peace of the church. In both cases, however, a miracle occurs, and Columbanus and Lasrianus – desiring to venerate the saint – are ultimately able to reach the relics of Saint Martin.

The biography of Bishop Tigernacus does not report any refusal of entry; on the contrary, he and his companions are received with compassion and immediately welcomed into the pilgrims' hostel. Here, however, they face a different obstacle: they discover nine dead bodies in the lodging. After Bishop Tigernacus prays throughout the night, the dead are restored to life. Yet, as in the case of Columbanus, the narrative does not clarify whether this

¹⁷ VSH II., 131–140.

¹⁸ VSF: *But Findanus, remembering his promise, gathered his companions, obtained permission from his bishop, and prepared to travel to Gaul. From there, seeking the seat of Martin, he then travelled through France, Alamannia, and Langobardia, and finally arrived in Rome on foot. (VSF – Vita Sancti Findani, ed by Reidar Th. Christiansen, Electronic edition compiled by Beatrix Färber, Funded by School of History, University College, Cork. – CELT.)*

miracle occurred through the intercession of Saint Martin or whether it should be attributed entirely to Bishop Tigernacus.

Although Bishop Tigernacus lived earlier than Saint Columbanus, his biography was probably written later than the work composed by Jonas of Bobbio, who became monk in the monastery three years after Columbanus's death. We might therefore suspect that the biography of the sixth-century saint reflects the influence of the later, extensive cult of Saint Martin. Although this possibility cannot be ruled out, it is reasonable to assume that the Irish bishop – and, like him, other Irish pilgrims – arrived in Tours already shaped by the cult of Saint Martin, a devotion that was itself spreading as a result of these very pilgrimages. Ultimately, these were mutually reinforcing processes: the more Irish pilgrims visited Tours on their journeys, the more widely the cult of the saint spread in Ireland through the pilgrimage routes.

Moreover, the fact that Saint Martin's feast day fell during a period already marked by cultic significance among the pagan Celts – namely Samhain, celebrated from 31 October to 1 November (the festival often considered a precursor to Halloween, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day) – can be linked in many ways to the night of purification from 10 to 11 November, known in Irish as *Oíche Shean Shamhain*, meaning "Old" or "Great Samhain".¹⁹

When we examine the Irish customs associated with Martinmas (Saint Martin's Day), their pagan roots become readily apparent. One of the most widespread traditions involved animal sacrifice: on the eve of Saint Martin's Day, a hen or goose – and in some regions a sheep or pig – was slaughtered, and the blood of the animal was sprinkled around the house or smeared on the threshold as a ritual intended to ward off evil spirits and misfortune.²⁰ According to the Christianized version of this ritual, the blood was collected in a cup, and the members of the household dipped their hands into it to make the sign of the cross to protect themselves from harm. Crosses or cruciform signs were often drawn on the doorway with the animal's blood.

From these pagan-rooted Christian rituals associated with the feast of Saint Martin – rituals intended to protect against evil – and from the written Christian sources, it is clear that the saint's cult had acquired a special significance among the Irish after the arrival of Christianity. Here too we observe a mutually reinforcing interaction between elements of tradition. One of the most striking examples is the tradition that Saint Patrick's mother was the sister of Saint Martin, making Saint Martin the uncle of Ireland's apostle, and that Patrick was educated at the Gallic monastery of Marmoutier, founded by his supposed

¹⁹ Lisa Morton: *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween*, Reaktions Books, London, 2012, 28–29.

²⁰ Richter, 225–230.

maternal uncle.²¹ The persistence of this belief is confirmed by the fact that the *Book of Armagh* manuscript – Armagh being the seat of Saint Patrick’s bishopric – contains, in addition to the entire *New Testament* and texts relating to Saint Patrick, the writings of Sulpicius Severus on Saint Martin.

We do not know whether Columbanus believed that Saint Patrick was Saint Martin’s nephew, but given the intensity of the cult in Ireland, we can be almost certain that the reverence he showed for Saint Martin in Tours did not stem from his brief stay on the Continent but from the influence of the cult of Martin in his homeland. This may explain why the Martyrology of Tallaght includes an entry for 20 April stating: *Communis sollemnitas omnium sanctorum et virginum Hiberniae et Britanniae et totius Europae et specialiter in honorem sancti Martini episcopi*.²²

The miracles that occur through Saint Martin’s intercession and in the vicinity of his relics also attest to his special power: Tigernacus raises nine dead people at the pilgrims’ hostel, Columbanus’s boat moors at Tours despite all contrary efforts, and the seals on the church gate fall open before Bishop Lasrianus. Although it is unclear what literary intentions guided Jonas of Bobbio and the anonymous authors of the other saints’ biographies, we cannot ignore the symbolic message of these scenes. If we regard the representatives of the continental Church as the guardians of the cult of Saint Martin, then in the Irish monks whom they attempted to restrain – Columbanus and Lasrianus – we may see the Irish Church itself, which, although remaining faithful to Rome in matters of doctrine, was increasingly in conflict with other Western churches. This tension would reach its climax in Columbanus’s bitter dispute over the date of Easter.

Seen against this ecclesiastical and historical background, the miracle that took place at the shrine of Saint Martin – whereby neither Columbanus nor Bishop Lasrianus could be prevented from reaching the saint’s relics – suggests that the principles they upheld enjoyed the approval and support of the holy bishop of Tours. This interpretation lends even greater significance to the miracles associated with Saint Martin.

This special significance is further underscored by what happens to Columbanus after he spends the night praying at the saint’s tomb. Jonas of Bobbio continues his account as follows:

[...] and spends the whole night there in prayer. At dawn he was invited to eat by Leupecharius the bishop of that city. He did not refuse to go, especially as he wanted

²¹ This conviction remained firmly established in the 19th century. Cf. William Bullen Morris: *The Life of Saint Patrick, Apostle of Ireland, with a preliminary account of the sources of the saint’s history*, London and New York, Burns and Oates, 1888³, 59.

²² John Hennig: Britain’s Place in the Early Irish Martyrologies. *Medium Aevum* 26, no. 1 (1957), 17–24, especially p. 17.

to allow the brothers to rest, and so he spent that day with the bishop. When it was time for the meal, Columbanus sat down at table with the bishop who asked him why he was returning to his country. 'Because that dog Theuderic has driven me away from the brothers', Columbanus replies. Then one of the guests named Chrodoald, who was married to one of Theudebert's aunts, but who was a follower of Theuderic's, replies humbly to the man of God that it was better to drink milk than wormwood. The man of God says to him, 'I know that you want to maintain your fidelity to King Theuderic.' Chrodoald declares that he will keep his oath of fidelity to Theuderic, as he had sworn, for as long as he could. He [Columbanus] says, 'If you are joined in treaty to King Theuderic, you will be happy to act as an envoy from me to your friend and lord. Announce, therefore, to Theuderic that he and his children will be destroyed within three years and that the Lord will annihilate his descent and lineage.' 'Why, servant of God', says the man, 'do you say such things?' 'I am unable to conceal what the Lord has ordered me to reveal', replied Columbanus. All the peoples of Gaul saw this fulfilled later, and this confirmed the sentence that had been announced previously to Ragumund.²³

Columbanus clearly refers to the night he spent at the tomb of Saint Martin. The bishop receives him with respect – evidence that Columbanus's influence had not completely vanished despite his disgrace and banishment – and Columbanus even allows himself to speak with unvarnished bluntness about the reason behind his attempted deportation to Ireland. He goes still further, delivering a dark prophecy concerning King Theuderic and his sons.

After this historical and political digression, the author of the *Vita Sancti Columbani* resumes his account of Saint Martin's miraculous intercession and intervention:

After consuming the meal, the man of God returns to the boat where he finds his companions depressed by a great sadness. On enquiring what had happened, he learnt that those things they had kept on the boat had been stolen during the night and also the gold coins which he had not distributed as alms to the poor. Having heard this, Columbanus returns to the tomb of the blessed confessor and complained that he had not spent the night in vigil by the relics of the saint in order that Martin should allow him and his brothers to be robbed. Without delay, the thief who had stolen the bag of gold began to shout out amidst lashes and bodily torment and to reveal that he had hidden the gold pieces in this place and that. Seeing this, all his associates rush to return all that had been stolen and beg the man of God to pardon such a great crime.²⁴

²³ Iona Bobbiensis *Vita Sancti Columbani*, 1, 22; translated by O'Hara, 2017, 147–148.

²⁴ Ibid., 148–149.

This miracle filled everyone with profound fear, so that those who heard of it no longer dared to touch anything belonging to God's saint, treating such objects as sacred. Leuparius then provided Columbanus with everything he needed and took his leave of him.

After dining with Bishop Leuparius, Columbanus bitterly reproaches Saint Martin for allowing their alms money to be stolen, confronting him in his characteristic blunt manner. Yet the former holy bishop of Tours demonstrates his power in a striking way: the thieves are seized with torment and confess their crime. Viewed in light of Irish folklore concerning Saint Martin, it becomes clear that Columbanus is accusing the saint of failing to offer the protective intervention that plays such an important role in Irish devotional tradition.

At the same time, in Jonas of Bobbio's narrative, the powers of two saints seem to meet: those of Saint Martin and those of Saint Columbanus, who compels the holy bishop to act. Although the favorable turn of events enhances the authority of Saint Martin, who proves that he can still be relied upon for protection; it is ultimately Columbanus whose authority grows even more. As Jonas says of the late founding abbot of his monastery: "This miracle strikes terror into all, so that those who heard of it did not dare to touch anything which belonged to the man of God, as if it had been consecrated."²⁵

If we interpret these events in terms of Columbanus's later life, it becomes evident that what happened at Tours marked a turning point in his decision-making. Since the events at the shrine of Saint Martin, however stylized, must ultimately go back to Columbanus himself or to one of his companions, from whom Jonas later received the account, we may assume that Columbanus attached great significance to them. The night spent in prayer beside the saint's relics and the miracles that manifested Saint Martin's protective support may have served as confirming signs, prompting Columbanus to continue his journey not to Ireland but to Italy. In this way, the founding of Columbanus's monastery in northern Italy can ultimately be traced back to Saint Martin.

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²⁵ Ibid., 149.

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