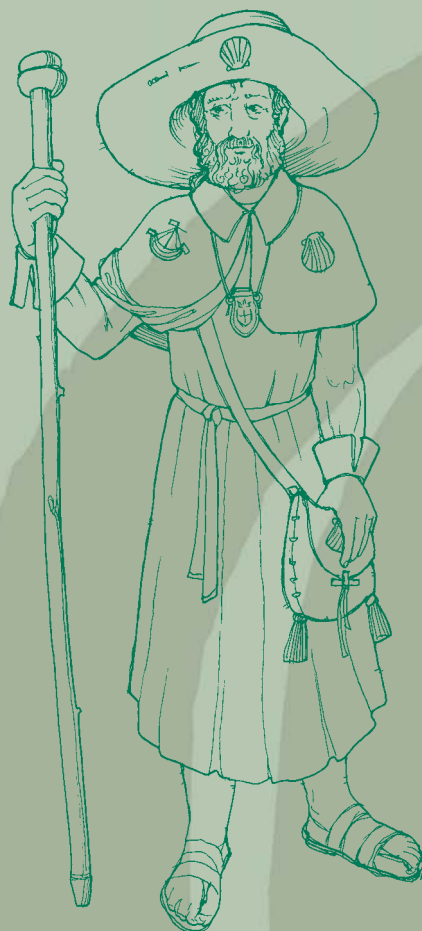


# Pilgrimage

## LESSON 1

### Journey of Worship



ARCHAEOLOGY  
time in transition

IT'S ABOUT TIME 2

**Aim(s)**

To provide the students with the opportunity to appreciate the importance of pilgrimage through the ages.

**Objective(s)**

To heighten the students understanding of pilgrimage through an investigation of the history and archaeology of pilgrimage.

**Time Period**

1st century AD to the present day.

**KEY INFORMATION****Lesson**

- Pilgrimage is an ancient ritual.
- Pilgrimage is a journey of worship.
- Pilgrims visit shrines and relics.
- In medieval times pilgrimage was very popular.

**Context**

- There is a strong tradition in Ireland of going on pilgrimage to local, national and international shrines.
- There is evidence of pilgrimage from France to Jerusalem as early as the 4th century.
- The period when pilgrimage was at its highest popularity was from the 11th to 14th centuries.

**METHODOLOGY & MEDIUM**

- Instruction
- Discussion
- **Factsheet** Relics and Reliquaries
- **Student Handout** Pilgrimage

**SECTIONS**

- Section 1** Pilgrimage
- Section 2** Why go on Pilgrimage
- Section 3** Where do People go on Pilgrimage?
- Section 4** Pilgrimage in the Medieval World
- Section 5** Pilgrimage Paths
- Section 6** Souvenirs
- Section 7** Relics and Reliquaries



### Key Question(s) What is pilgrimage?



#### Teacher Instruction

Begin the lesson by asking the students what they know about pilgrimage

- What is pilgrimage? Pilgrimage is a spiritual or religious journey made by people to a holy or sacred place. Pilgrimage is an act of worship.
- Who goes on pilgrimage? Pilgrims go on pilgrimages.

The word "**pilgrim**" comes originally from the Latin "peregrinus" ("per" through, "ager" land or field ) meaning a stranger.



#### Teacher Instruction

Ask the students to relate their own personal experience of going on a pilgrimage (e.g. Knock , Lourdes or a local holy well) using the following questions

- Where did you go?
- Who organised the trip?
- Why did you go?
- How did you get there?
- What did you do along the way?
- Where did you eat?
- Where did you stay?
- Did the place feel spiritual? Why?
- What did you do when you got there?
- Did you buy any souvenirs?

Record the key elements on the board—travel, prayer, holy place, food and accommodation.

People have been going on pilgrimage for thousands of years. The practice of pilgrimage is well established in all the major religions

- Muslims go to Mecca.
- Jews go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.
- Buddhists go on pilgrimage Kapilavastu.
- Christians go to Lourdes.

#### Pilgrimage is an ancient ritual

People have been going on pilgrimage for thousands of years

- The Ancient Greeks (c. 750 - 150BC) went on pilgrimage to the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.
- The Ancient Romans visited any place with sacred connections, including the prehistoric burial mound at Newgrange where they left coins as votive offerings.

- Perhaps the oldest evidence for pilgrimage in Ireland is the Neolithic (4,000 - 2,000 BC) 'cursus' or processional way. The so-called Banqueting Hall at Tara is an example of one of these ceremonial avenues.
- A day of pilgrimage in Ireland that survives from Early Christian times is Garland Sunday, which has its origins in the ancient festival of Lughnasa. Lughnasa was a harvest festival for the Celtic god Lugh. It was celebrated on the last Sunday in July. Reek Sunday, when people climb Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo, is part of this tradition.

## SECTION 2 Why go on Pilgrimage?



**Key Question(s)** Why do people feel the need to go on pilgrimage?

By far the most numerous pilgrimages in Ireland through the ages were the visit to the local **holy well**. Holy wells were usually visited on the local saint's feast day e.g. Ardmore Co. Waterford—St. Declan's Feast Day on 24th July.



**Teacher Instruction**

Divide the class into groups and ask the students to discuss the reasons why people go on pilgrimage (relating it as much as possible to their own experiences). Get the students to report back and record the information.

Christians go on pilgrimage for many reasons.

- **A spiritual journey:** pilgrimage is an important part of spiritual life. For many Christians the pilgrimage is a spiritual journey. Christians see life itself as a journey, coming from God and returning to God.
- **To express gratitude to God:** for a favour received.
- **The hope of having a wish granted:** for example, many women who couldn't have children went on pilgrimage in the hope that they could.
- **In penance:** perhaps to say 'sorry' to God for something they had done wrong.
- **Seeking miraculous cure:** the pilgrim is ill and seeks a cure.
- **In veneration of God:** this is analogous to the way people visit the grave of a famous person to venerate their memory.



Pilgrims express devotion to God by combining sacrifice, prayer and an element of discomfort. While the journey may be trying, it gives the pilgrim a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. Time is allowed to connect with God at special stages along the way. Pilgrimage, like life, is both a physical and a spiritual journey.



## Key Question(s) Where do people go on Pilgrimage in Ireland?



### Teacher Instruction

Ask the students to name places in Ireland that people go on pilgrimage to

- Knock** In 1879 villagers saw a holy vision on the gable wall of the church.
- Croagh Patrick** St. Patrick was reputed to have spent 40 days there in prayer and fasting. For over 1500 years pilgrims have climbed the 'Reek' on Reek Sunday, some in bare feet.
- Lough Derg** The ancient pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory.
- Places associated with a local saint, especially holy wells.**

By far the most numerous pilgrimages in Ireland through the ages from pre-Christian times were the visit to the local *sacred* or *holy wells*. Holy wells were usually visited on the local saint's feast day e.g. Ardmore, Co. Waterford—St. Declan's Feast Day on 24th July.



There is at least one *holy well* in nearly every parish in Ireland but not all are still visited. These provided a focus for a local pilgrimage on an annual basis. The pilgrimage to the well (usually a natural spring) is often referred to as a *round* or *patron (pattern)*. This may consist of a single visit or a number of visits. Prayers are recited at the well, and sometimes at nearby *stations*. The usual purpose for the performance of rounds is to cure an ailment by the application of water from the well. By reputation, particular wells are known to cure particular ailments. It is not uncommon to find a tree or a bush at a holy well on which 'rags' are hung by the pilgrims. These are tokens of a cure associated with the well. Many holy wells are still visited and venerated today.



### Teacher Instruction

Ask the students if they know of a holy well and pose the following questions

- Where is the holy well?
- What is its name?
- What day is it visited?
- What rounds are/were made there?
- Are there any traditions related to it?
- Has it special curative powers?

## Popular Christian Pilgrimages



### Teacher Instruction

Ask the students to name destinations abroad where people from Ireland go on pilgrimage

- Lourdes** In 1858, a young girl called Bernadette Soubirous had a vision of Jesus' mother, Mary. The spring waters that flow from the fountains are believed to bring miraculous healing from God.
- Medjugorje** Since 1981, in this small village in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Virgin Mary has been appearing and giving messages to the world.
- Fatima** The Virgin Mary appeared six times to three shepherd children in 1917.
- Rome** Visiting the Basilica of St. Paul and the Papal Chapels.



**Key Question(s)** Where did people go on pilgrimage in the medieval period?  
How did the pilgrims travel?

In the Middle Ages going on pilgrimages was very popular amongst Christians. There is evidence of pilgrimage from France to Jerusalem as early as the 4th century.



The most popular places of pilgrimage in medieval Europe were

- Places where a saint was buried.
- Places where there were sacred relics.

As travel to the Holy Land became more difficult and dangerous from the 4th century onwards the focus of pilgrimage shifted to Western Europe itself.

The period when pilgrimage was at its highest popularity was from the 11th to 14th centuries. In this period the most popular shrines in Europe were St. Peters in Rome, the Holy Land and the shrine of St James at Santiago de Compestela in north-west Spain. The Compestela pilgrimage (known as *The Camino*) was so popular that anything up to 10,000 pilgrims a day might visit the Cathedral which held the relics of the Saint.

### How did medieval pilgrims travel?

Pilgrimage to far away places were very difficult in medieval Europe, not lightly undertaken and subject to major perils and constant discomforts. The pilgrims would usually travel in groups to protect themselves from outlaws. Organised companies of pilgrims would gather at agreed meeting points and travel on from there with a guide, and sometimes with armed guards. The most difficult pilgrimage in medieval times was to the Holy Land. Military orders of knights were formed to look after pilgrims, including the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller. Wealthy people sometimes paid other people to go on pilgrimage for them.

They travelled

- **By boat**—to cross the sea.
- **On horseback**—wealthier pilgrims often travelled on horseback and sometimes in organised groups.
- **On foot**—many pilgrims walked, sometimes over hundreds of kilometres.



Monasteries played an important role in pilgrimages. Many had guesthouses where pilgrims were fed and accommodated. In turn, pilgrims made donations to the monastery which helped with their upkeep.

**Key Question(s)** How did pilgrim paths develop?**Pilgrim Paths**

Travel in the medieval period was not as easy as today

- Maps were not readily available.
- As pilgrimages became more popular roads were often created or improved, to make the journey easier.
- Money for the creation or upkeep of roads was paid for largely by the pilgrims themselves by way of bequests and gifts. Such gifts were accepted as part of the pilgrimage.
- As the popularity of the pilgrimage routes increased churches, monasteries and inns were built along them to cater for the pilgrims .



An example of a new road created by a popular pilgrimage was the road from Dover to Canterbury to facilitate visitors from France to the tomb of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. This was the most popular pilgrimage in medieval England.

Examples of famous pilgrim paths abroad include

- Routes leading to Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain.
- The Pilgrim's Way in England, a route from Winchester to Canterbury.

Famous Pilgrim Paths in Ireland include

- St. Kevin's Way in Wicklow.
- St. Declan's Way in Waterford.
- Cosán na Naomh in Kerry.

**The Heritage Council's Pilgrim Paths Project****1. Cosán na Naomh**

This pilgrimage is along the Saint's Road from Ventry Strand to Mount Brandon, on the Dingle Peninsula. Its origins are pre-Christian and associated with the Lughnasa festival of Domhnach Chrom Dubh. The route includes many important early ecclesiastical sites like Gallarus and Kilmalkedar.

**2. St. Kevin's Way**

This was a very popular pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Kevin in Glendalough, Co. Wicklow. The route travelled south from near Dublin up through the Wicklow Gap and on to Glendalough. Parts of the medieval paved road survive—a short section was archaeologically excavated.

**3. Lough Derg**

This pilgrimage in Co Donegal is still very popular. The focus of the pilgrimage in medieval times was St. Patrick's Purgatory, a deep pit on Station Island. Any pilgrim who spent a day and a night in the pit would receive special dispensations and be purged of their sins.

**4. Tóchar Phádraig**

This is now the most popular pilgrimage in Ireland when as many as 30,000 pilgrims climb Croagh Patrick, Co Mayo, on the last Sunday in July. The medieval pilgrimage took a different route to the summit, starting at the Augustinian Abbey of Ballintubber, 35.5 kilometers away.

Other pilgrimages included in the Pilgrim Paths Project are St. Declan's Way to Ardmore, Co Waterford, the Pilgrim Path from Ballycumber to Clonmacnoise in Co. Offaly and the Turas at Glencholmcille in Co. Donegal.



### Key Question(s) What souvenirs did the medieval pilgrims buy?

Souvenirs are a key element of pilgrimage. They act as a reminder of the trip and a proof to other people that you have made the journey.



### Teacher Instruction

Pose the following questions to the students

- What souvenirs do they collect themselves? Stickers? Autographs? Mugs?
  - Why did they buy them? Momentos? To give as presents?
- (Draw attention to their own list of pilgrimage souvenirs mentioned earlier.)

One of the most popular souvenirs the medieval pilgrim bought was lead or pewter badges to show that they had visited a particular shrine. These badges were

- Mass produced.
- Inexpensive.
- Decorative.



Pilgrimage badge

Medieval paintings show that even the poorest pilgrims might wear pewter badges. The badges were usually worn attached to a hat.

Another popular item with pilgrims was the ampullae—a very small two-handed lead or earthenware flask used to hold holy water or oil. These were often worn, tied to a piece of string, around the neck.

*The most famous pilgrim badge was a scallop shell which showed that the pilgrim had visited the shrine of St. James in Santiago. It was not unusual for a pilgrim to be buried with his/her scallop shell. (See **All the way from Tuam**, T1, U3, L2).*

Word of miracles associated with a particular shrine greatly increased its popularity. Some pilgrimages became very popular and these places became wealthy enough to build very large cathedrals, as at Canterbury, Chartres and Santiago. These pilgrimage churches are very important in the development of European Architecture. Pilgrims brought back new ideas particularly in relation to new church architecture.



The scallop design symbolised the many European starting points from which medieval pilgrims began their journey, all drawn to a single point at the hinge of the shell.



**Key Question(s)** What is a relic? What is a reliquary?

### Relics

In the New Testament there are references to the miraculous healing powers of objects that were touched by Christ and the Apostles. By the Middle Ages relics were a fundamental part of the Christian experience. There are essentially two types of Christian relic

- Ordinary everyday objects which became holy because they were touched by holy people or places (brandae). This also includes water which was regarded as holy if it came from a holy place.
- A part of the Saint's body, normally a bone.

### Reliquaries

Relics became so important that special containers were made to house them. These are known as reliquaries.



### Teacher Instruction

Distribute **Factsheet: Relics and Reliquaries**

Some of the finest works of art surviving from the Early Christian and Medieval periods in Ireland are reliquaries. These are elaborately made containers for holy relics and include the Shrine of Lachtin's Arm, the Shrine of St. Patrick's Bell and the Moylough Belt Shrine. Many of these are on display in the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare Street.

### House-shaped shrines

At a number of early monastic sites along the west coast of Ireland there are small stone shrines known as *house-shaped shrines* (although they are probably meant to resemble a church more than a house). They are simply constructed of stone slabs and are thought to have contained the bones of a local saint.

### Relics as holy objects

A major influx of relics flowed into Europe followed the Crusades of the 11th and 12th centuries. These relics, often of doubtful authenticity, were brought back by returning Crusaders and given to their local church or monastery. As few people in medieval Western Europe could make the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, these relics became very popular as places of pilgrimage.

The most common relics at shrines in the Middle Ages were nails and pieces of wood said to come from the cross on which Jesus was crucified (The True Cross). These bodily relics became so important that special containers were made to house them. These are known as reliquaries.

*See Projects section: Organise and go on a Pilgrimage*



Pilgrimage [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/NORpilgrimage.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/NORpilgrimage.htm)

Youth in Europe [www.youthineurope.com/](http://www.youthineurope.com/)

Walk for Italy—the via francigena [www.walkforitaly.com/eng/](http://www.walkforitaly.com/eng/)

Pilgrims Forum [www.caminosantiago.com](http://www.caminosantiago.com)

Medieval Europe [http://www.besthistorysites.net/index.php/  
medieval-history/europe](http://www.besthistorysites.net/index.php/medieval-history/europe)

(All of the following artefacts are housed in the National Museum of Ireland)



#### Shrine of St. Patrick's Tooth

- Dates from the 12th century AD.
- Substantially altered in the 1370s when it took on its purse-shaped form.
- This is a complex piece made up from parts of different objects.
- In the early 19th century it was used as a folk cure for sick animals.



#### Moylough Belt Shrine

- Dates from the 8th century AD.
- Found in a bog at Moylough Co. Sligo.
- Consists of a set of four hinged metal plates which enclose the fragments of a leather belt.
- Wonder-working belts are mentioned in the lives of the early Irish saints; they had the power to cure or establish truthfulness when worn around the waist.



#### Shrine of St. Patrick's Bell

- The bell shrine was made around 1100 AD to house St. Patrick's Bell (5th century AD).
- It is a box with sloping sides made of bronze plates.
- A semicircular cap covered the handle of the bell.
- Cast silver-gilt plates with applied gold foil cover the box. It also has settings for oval jewels, some of which survive.







#### Shrine of St. Lachtin's Arm

- The shrine, in the shape of a forearm, bears an inscription which dates it to between 1118 and 1121 AD.
- It is made of bronze plates inlaid with silver over a wooden core.
- It is associated with the ancient monastic site of Aghabullogue, in Mid-Cork.



#### Two Tomb-Shaped Shrines

- Dates from the late 8th or early 9th century AD.
- Found by a fisherman in Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh.
- The smaller, plain shrine was found inside the larger.
- It is probable that the smaller shrine contained the relics.

	<p><b>Pilgrimage</b> is an act of worship. People have been going on pilgrimage for thousands of years therefore it is an ancient ritual. The practice of pilgrimage is well established in all the major religions and continues to this day. Key elements of pilgrimage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel.</li> <li>• Prayer.</li> <li>• Holy Place/objects.</li> <li>• Food.</li> <li>• Accommodation.</li> <li>• Souvenirs.</li> </ul>
<p>Christians go on pilgrimage for many reasons these may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A spiritual journey, pilgrimage is an important part of spiritual life. Christians see life as a journey, coming from and returning to God.</li> <li>• To express gratitude to God.</li> <li>• Penance.</li> <li>• Miraculous cure.</li> <li>• To praise God.</li> </ul>	<p>Popular pilgrimage sites in Ireland include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knock.</li> <li>• Croagh Patrick.</li> <li>• Lough Derg.</li> <li>• Holy Places: e.g. holy wells.</li> </ul> <p>Abroad</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lourdes.</li> <li>• Medjugorje.</li> <li>• Rome.</li> </ul>
	<p>The most popular places of pilgrimage in medieval Europe were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places where a saint was buried (e.g. Rome, Santiago de Compostela).</li> <li>• Places where there were sacred relics (e.g. Canterbury Cathedral, England).</li> </ul>
	<p><b>How did they travel?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By boat—British and Irish pilgrims had to cross the sea to mainland Europe.</li> <li>• On horseback—wealthier pilgrims could afford a horse.</li> <li>• On foot—many pilgrims walked.</li> <li>• Pilgrim paths developed.</li> </ul>
	<p>Souvenirs were an important part of pilgrimage. One of the most popular souvenirs the medieval pilgrim bought were lead or pewter badges to show that they had visited a particular shrine. Another popular souvenir was a very small two-handed flask called an ampullae which contained holy water or oil.</p> <p>The most famous pilgrim badge was the scallop shell (pecten maximus). This showed that the pilgrim had visited the shrine of St. James in Santiago. It was not unusual for a pilgrim to be buried with his/her shell.</p>