

Why Byzantium?

Oedipus and Job would never have gone
Near her. But the psalmist says that the mouth
Of the just man murmurs wisdom, so we
Shall say it was a higher attraction,
Perhaps the purest patriotism possible,
Love for a Dark Age capitol. But why
Justinian's city? Why not Moselle,
Or Jerusalem? And whatever you
Choose, was the darkness ever deeper than now?
Perhaps because Ireland was the only
Beacon to Byzantium, a light in
The corner of northwest Europe, noted
On some scribe's map. *Hic sunt Monasteria
Hiberniae . . .*

And on the Irish maps
At the other end? Here lives the Emperor . . .
And on our maps? Here is the desperate
Century, when the experts finally took
Over and filing was perfected and
The German officer of Engineers
Studying the pale square lake on his desk,
The blueprint of pipes, ducts and chambers
Realizes what problem he is solving,
Discovers a country he'd never believed
Existed, and the drawing board becomes
A scribe's desk where each pencil stroke counts as
Never before.

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