

‘BRÓGA AR NÓS POLÓNIA’

IN a satirical poem which I published in *Éigse* xii. 139-40 and which was also published by Cuthbert Mac Craith in *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr I* (1967) the ostentatious lifestyle of the Franciscans of the poet's time is contrasted with the simple poverty of St Francis who is described as having possessed none of the many luxuries currently in vogue. Among the lines in this descriptive sequence is *Gan bhróga ar nós Polónia* (3 a). In a comment on this line I said that I took the last word to be a proper name which might be based on ‘Poland’ or ‘Appolonia’. No explanation was given by Mac Craith in *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr II* (1980).

My interest in the term and in its use in this context was renewed recently while I was reading the life of William Bedell attributed to his son. Emphasis is laid there on Bedell's simple lifestyle which did not meet with approval from some of his fellow prelates, as the following anecdote illustrates:

Going to visit a bishop in plain habit, with shoes made for ease and use (not with high Polonian heels, &c.), *How now, my lord*, said that bishop, *Do you weare brogues?* (so the Irish call their shoes), jearing him for his plainness, and his known affection to the Irish nation.¹

In a note on this passage the editor wrote ‘*Polonian heels* refers to some fashion of boots from Bologna. Thus a *Polony* is a Bologna sausage.’ (p. 398). There can be little doubt that Shuckburgh was wrong about the term. While the phrase ‘*Polonian heels*’ is not found in *OED* s.v. *Polonian*, seventeenth-century examples are given, s.vv. *Polonia* and *Polony*, of ‘*Polonia heeles*’ (1611), ‘*Polony shoe*’ (1610) and ‘*Polony heels*’ (1656), and medieval Latin *Polonia* (Poland) is given as the source of the geographical term.

The phrase can be traced further back. In French sources, such as Littré's *Dictionnaire* and that of Hatzfeld and Darmesteter, s.v. *poulaine*, and the *Grand Larousse Encyclopédique*, s.v. *chaussures*, the term *souliers à la poulaine* is cited as being applied to a distinctive type of pointed shoes which were in vogue in the fourteenth century.² In discussing the etymology of the phrase Littré says: ‘*Poulaine* signifie peau de Pologne . . . Les becs des souliers étant faits de cette peau furent nommés *poulaine*.’ Hatzfeld and Darmesteter say: ‘la mode des souliers à la poulaine, qui date du XIV^e siècle, a du venir de Pologne.’ Several fourteenth-century passages in Latin and French which relate to this style of footwear are quoted by Du Cange, s.v. *poulainia*.

As regards the Irish satire, we may wonder did its supposed author, Seón Mairtín, whom Mac Craith took to be a non-Catholic (op. cit. II, 324), have Bedell in mind when he composed his verses which, to judge from references to the king and to parliament in the concluding stanza, may date from fairly soon after Bedell's death in 1642.

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¹ *Two Biographies of William Bedell*, ed. E. S. Shuckburgh (Cambridge, 1902), p. 29.

² As Mairead Dunlevy of the National Museum of Ireland has pointed out to me the history of this type of footwear is discussed in various works including François Boucher, *A History of Costume in the West* (1967).