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The Manuscripts of the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, a Bilingual Anthology of Sacred Verse

Abstract: The Irish *Liber Hymnorum* is a collection of hymns and para-liturgical material contained in two glossed and richly-decorated manuscripts from the late eleventh century. The hymns themselves, and the commentary apparatus, exhibit a pattern of alternation and even virtual merger between Latin and Old Irish. It is argued here that this interaction between languages is essential to the representation of the poems as a national poetic and spiritual canon.

Five substantial manuscripts bear witness to the collection and codification of literature in the Irish language in the period from the late eleventh to the late twelfth century CE. What survives from before that time consists almost entirely of glosses and other marginalia in manuscripts whose main language is Latin. On the other hand, from the period after c. 1200 we have virtually nothing until the rise in vernacular manuscript production under lordly patronage in the second half of the fourteenth century.¹ If this pattern is more than an accident of survival, it suggests that our five manuscripts represent a phase of intensive activity among scholars and copyists.²

Three of these manuscripts are very well known.³ Each is made up of a body of texts in prose and verse concerned with the past of Ireland – national origins, dynastic histories, chronology, the lore of place-names, heroic narrative – along with accounts of Graeco-Roman and biblical antiquity and chronology in similar

1 For surveys see O'Sullivan 2005, Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1993.

2 For an overview see Ní Mhaonaigh 2006; and for a useful illustrated survey of the manuscripts see O'Neill 2014.

3 The three are *Lebor na hUidre* the 'Book of the Dun Cow' (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 E 25), c. 1100 CE; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B502, c. 1130; the so-called 'Book of Leinster' (Dublin, Trinity College, 1339), begun in the mid-twelfth century and completed by 1200 or shortly thereafter. Arguably the number could be raised to four, since the first twelve folios of Rawlinson B502 (known as the first fragment of the 'Annals of Tigernach') were originally separate but are also dated within the time-frame given here (see Ó Cuív 2001, 163–165).

language and style.⁴ The other two, however, remain more in the shadows: the two copies of the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*,⁵ one held in Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the other in the Franciscan manuscript collection at University College Dublin (UCD).⁶ They have been discussed at length rather seldom since the publication of the standard edition in 1898,⁷ a neglect that is the more surprising because (against all statistical likelihood) they are cousins, almost certainly based on a common exemplar.⁸

This neglect is bound up with their peculiar linguistic ambiguity. They contain closely-related versions of a corpus of devotional and hagiographical poems, referred to internally as hymns (Latin *ymnus*, Irish *immun*), some of which are in Latin, some in Irish, and one in a mixture of the two languages, along with a number of devotional and para-liturgical texts from the international heritage of Latin Christianity.⁹ In the prefaces and glosses that accompany the hymns, all but one¹⁰ are claimed – no doubt spuriously – to have been composed

4 Among the vast range of scholarship on this group of manuscripts, the best starting-points are the collection of studies of *Lebor na hUidre* in Ó hUiginn 2015, and the survey of the Book of Leinster by Schlüter 2010.

5 The Irish collection should be sharply distinguished from non-Irish hymn compilations sometimes referred to by the same name *Liber Hymnorum*, most of which are associated with the international collections known as the ‘Old Hymnal’ and ‘New Hymnal’: see Milfull 1996, 1–25 for the background.

6 These manuscripts are respectively Dublin, TCD 1441 (hereafter referred to as LH-T) and Dublin UCD, Franciscan A2 (hereafter LH-F). Images of LH-F are available online at <<https://www.isos.dias.ie/english/index.html>> (accessed on 21 Oct. 2021); the images of LH-T that provided the illustrations in this book were produced through the co-operation of Caoimhe Ní Ghormáin and Dr Bernard Meehan of TCD Library, thanks to a grant to the author’s research from the Moore Institute at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

7 Bernard and Atkinson 1898. This is supplemented by Bieler’s palaeographical study (1948), and the art-historical treatment by Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1961–1963, especially 129–134, for which see also Henry 1970, 56–60; otherwise the only substantial recent discussion known to me is the shrewd treatment in Herbert 2009, cf. Herbert 1989.

8 Of the other manuscripts of this period that include Irish-language material in the main text, the closest relative in terms of its artistic programme is the fragment that forms the first part of Rawlinson B502 (see above, n. 3, with Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1961–1963, 116–117). It is doubly striking that much of the text in this manuscript shows code-switching between Irish and Latin similar in kind to the ‘intermediate language’ of the *Liber Hymnorum* prefaces (see Stokes 1895, and below).

9 The details of the relationship between the two manuscripts, and the status of the additional items added to the TCD manuscript after the work of the main scribe was complete, are beyond the scope of this study.

10 The exception is the Hymn of St Hilary (Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 35–42), which is given no explicit Irish associations but is, however, found among other *Liber Hymnorum* items

by named Irish saints of previous ages, some stretching back to the fifth-century conversion. As we will see in detail below, this editorial apparatus is couched in a mixed language variety in which elements of Latin and Irish constantly jostle with each other, even within a single syntactic clause. This presumably encouraged the marginalisation of the *Liber Hymnorum* in the ‘heroic age’ of editing and publishing early Irish texts that began in the mid-nineteenth century, when the driving project was the restoration of a pure and uncontaminated form of the Old Irish language.¹¹ Characteristically, the work done on the *Liber Hymnorum* at that time was aligned with ecclesiastical politics: the first editor published it as *The Book of Hymns of the Ancient Church of Ireland*, where the allusion to the modern (and Protestant) Church of Ireland links it to the claim that there was a primeval national Church with a part-vernacular liturgy independent of Rome.¹² It is easy with hindsight to see that this was a distorting approach, but it remains difficult to locate the *Liber Hymnorum* manuscripts in the entangled cultural history of medieval Ireland.

1 The *Altus Prosator* in the *Liber Hymnorum*

Let us begin by considering a representative folio from the TCD manuscript (Fig. 1), which is the more formally designed of the two and probably the older, dated to the late eleventh century.¹³ The page begins at the top with the antiphon that concludes the preceding item in the collection, the hymn *Te Deum* ascribed to St Augustine and St Ambrose: this antiphon is written in a large version of Gaelic minuscule script.¹⁴ Next comes the hymn *Altus prosator*,

in earlier Irish prescriptions for para-liturgical rituals (see references in notes below, with Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 2, 126–128; Curran 1984, 22–34).

11 In the modern scholarly movement away from ‘nativism’ to ‘revisionism’ and then back towards a synthesis, the classic polemical work remains McCone 1990: for an important recent contribution see Johnston 2013.

12 Todd 1855–1869. For the background see Stevenson 1987, especially lxxxiii–lxxxiv on the *Liber Hymnorum* itself.

13 Bieler dates LH-T ‘probably’ to the eleventh century, LH-F to the late eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth (1948, 177). This view is confirmed by Henry and Marsh-Micheli in their study of the decorated initials, where they show that detailed stylistic considerations link these to a group of other Latin manuscripts with Irish glosses that can be securely dated to the decades either side of 1100 (1961–1963, 111 and *passim*).

14 See Bischoff 1990 for terminology.

ascribed to St Columba (known in Irish as Colum Cille) of Iona.¹⁵ It is preceded by a lengthy Preface in a simpler, tiny version of the minuscule script, corresponding to the usual Gaelic hand seen in manuscripts of this and later periods. This is followed by the incipit of the *Altus Prosator* itself (here spelt *prositor*), written in elegant Gaelic majuscule capitals, loosely resembling the uncial scripts seen internationally in high-status display manuscripts of earlier centuries, back to the Carolingian period and beyond.¹⁶ The initial letter *A* is richly illuminated, twisted into the shape of a beast whose head forms the crossing, with its limbs bent into the linear shapes of the letter; entwined around the body is a spreading network of closely interlaced tendrils. Clearly the page was planned with a space left blank for the Preface, while the Hymn itself with its decorated initial was executed in the first stage of the campaign before the work of adding the Preface began. This is confirmed when one observes how the lower lines of the Preface are squeezed into the space allowed by the sprouting shapes of the decorated 'A' below.¹⁷ The verses of the Hymn are densely annotated: interlinear glosses provide lexical, exegetical and digressive information, with more extensive marginalia extending into the sides,¹⁸ and each six-line stanza has a prose introduction (Latin *titulus*, Irish *titul*) interpreting the theological themes and biblical passages to which it alludes.

The text of the Preface is structured by a series of Latin headwords, giving the place, time, person and cause (*locus, tempus, persona, causa*) of its composition. From this it extends into a lengthy background story. According to this, the poem was sent to Rome as a gift for Pope Gregory in return for sacred treasures that he had sent to Iona, but the monks who brought it removed three stanzas 'to put Gregory to the test', only to be found out when the Pope observed the behaviour of angels who appeared miraculously during its recitation.¹⁹ The Preface concludes with a close analysis of the metre. With this structure, it

¹⁵ On this poem see Clancy and Márkus 1995, 39–68 for text and translation; Stevenson 1999 is the major interpretative essay.

¹⁶ On scripts in this manuscript see Bieler 1948, 179. Bieler compares the majuscule script to that of the Macregol Gospels, which are dated to the first quarter of the ninth century: if this is right, it strongly suggests that this script was an archaising choice for our eleventh-century scribe.

¹⁷ Sometimes (though not conspicuously in the present case) the scribe of the Prefaces seems to have found his space inadequate, and the tiny script is squeezed into the furthest margins at left and right.

¹⁸ Preface and glosses from both manuscripts are published by Bernard and Atkinson with the main text of the poem (1898, vol. 1, 62–81, with translations of the Irish, vol. 2, 23–26, 142–169).

¹⁹ Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 63–65.

corresponds in form to the *accessus* or introductory matter set down in texts of sacred and pagan Latin authors – especially Vergil, Boethius, and Martianus Capella – throughout this period in the Christian West, and likewise the presence of copious glosses is typical of such manuscripts.²⁰

In international terms, however, one extreme oddity stands out. The Preface, glosses and *tituli* are written neither in Latin nor in Irish, but in a fine-grained mixture of the two languages. The following extract, from the final section on metre, will give a sense of the mode of code-switching deployed, with a translation in which Irish is represented as underlined and Latin as *italics*:

Ord aipgitrech fil hic more Ebreo. asind iris Cathalcda tucad fotha in chaiptil-se .i. cretem óenatad co foisitin tredatad. tre rithim dano doronad 7 di ernail fuirri-side .i. artificialis 7 uulgaris. *artificialis* ubi fiunt traigid comamserda comfodlaide co cutrummas fo airse 7 teis. 7 corop subsequens tí i lloc *precidentis* inna tuaslucad. uulgaris *immorro* du i mbi im-recra sillab 7 cethraimthin oculus lethrann 7 is *ed* ón fil hic. (LH-T, fol. 11' 25–29)

It is alphabetical order that is here, in the Hebrew manner. From the Catholic faith was taken the foundation of the first verse, viz. belief in unity with confession of trinity. It was made through rhythm, and two divisions in that, viz. artificial and vulgar. Artificial where there are made feet co-timed and co-divided, with equal weight in arsis and thesis, and it is the following one that comes in place of the preceding in their resolution. Vulgar, however, where there is a correspondence of syllables, and quarter-verses and half-verses, and it is this which is here. (translation Atkinson 1898, vol. 2, 26, adapted)

The alternation between Latin and Irish takes place at every level of the discourse: between sentences, between clauses, and frequently within the clause. Here is another example, from the Preface to the Hymn of St Óengus mac Típraite (d. 745 CE) in honour of St Martin, in this case following the version in the Franciscan manuscript (LH-F):

Causa *imorro* Adamnan bóí for cuairt cell Coluim Cille in Hérind co roacht co Uisnech Mide co rogaire do cech fer *graid* fora rabi liud issin tir co roacht in t-eruacra co hÓengus i n-

²⁰ On this structure in the prefaces to texts of canonical Latin authors see Quain 1945, still the standard treatment, with Irvine 1994, 121–126; Ziolkowski 1998, especially 705–706; and compare the edition of a twelfth-century *accessus* collection by Wheeler 2015. For Irish engagement with the genre see Poppe 1999; cf. Bischoff 1976 [1954], especially p. 84, on arguments for Irish origins. Along with the *Liber Hymnorum* prefaces, which have not been systematically studied in recent times, the principal relevant example of comparable date is the Preface to the late Old Irish poem *Amrae Coluimb Cille* (The Eulogy of Colum Cille), a copy of which in fact appears as a later addition to the LH-T manuscript: see Herbert 1989. The structurally similar Preface to the poetic martyrology *Féilire Óengusso* (The Calendar of Óengus) has been dated significantly later, to the second half of the twelfth century: see Ó Riain 2000–2001, 237–238.

aidche feile Martain 7 timuit valde. ut fecit hunc ymnum in honorem Martain dia soerad. Tanic tra Oengus dochum arnabarach 7 a ymmum erlam leis. Ocus tarfas do Adamnan Martan fora laim deis Oengussa ocus atraracht tra Adamnan reme. Et honorificavit eum osculo 7 omnes mirabantur causam honoris. Et dixit Adamnan quod vidit Martinum secum conid ar Martan do bith immalle fris dorat honoir do. Ro soerad tra Oengus amlaid sein. Et ostendit Oengus ymnum suum 7 laudavit Adamnan ymnum 7 dixit gnúis-ermitiu forin tí gebas ic dul dochum dala no airechta [...]²¹

The cause, indeed²² – Adamnán was on a journey round the churches of Colum Cille in Ireland, until he reached Uisnech Mide, and there was summoned by him every man of [clerical] grade against whom there was an accusation in the land, and the summons reached Óengus on the night of Martin's feast, and he feared greatly, so he made this hymn in honour of Martin for the freeing of himself. Óengus indeed came in the morning having his hymn ready with him. And there was shown to Adamnán Martin by the right hand of Óengus, and Adamnán rose up before him. And he honoured him with a kiss and all wondered at the cause of the honour. And Adamnán said that he had seen Martin with him, so that it was because of Martin's being together with him that he gave honour to him. Thus Óengus was freed. And Óengus showed his hymn and Adamnán praised the hymn and he announced face-honour²³ for the one who recites it going to an assembly or a court [...]

There are no obvious syntactic ‘triggers’ for the switch between languages, nor is one language preferred to the other for content-related reasons – as, for example, for a particular kind of subject-matter, or for direct speech against narrative, or for digressive comments external to the story being told. To all appearances, then, the *accessus* has been composed in an intermediate variety which takes words and groups of words at random from both languages, as if the lexicon has been assembled as parallel sets of items with functional equivalence and the writer chooses from either at will.²⁴

This impression is strengthened when a given passage in one of the manuscripts is compared word by word and phrase by phrase with the corresponding

²¹ Transcribed from LH-F, p. 23, with the original punctuation and minimal editorial adjustments. The folio is badly faded and rubbed, and in a few cases it has been necessary to rely for guidance on the readings followed by Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 46 with apparatus, while removing their editorially-imposed punctuation.

²² The manuscript contraction here could be expanded either as Latin or as Irish.

²³ Taking *gnúis-ermitiu* as a compound noun.

²⁴ On the phenomenon of code-switching between Latin and early Irish the fundamental study is Bisagni 2013–2014, principally based on the *prima manus* Würzburg glosses, which significantly pre-date the Prefaces studied here; a closer comparandum would be the glosses to *Féilire Óengusso*, which are studied in depth by Stam 2017. In Clarke 2018 I discuss the development of more extended narrative composition in the intermediate variety, especially *Bethu Brigte* (‘The Life of Brigit’), in comparison with the *Liber Hymnorum* poems and prefaces.

passage in the other. Often the sense is identical but the TCD manuscript uses Latin where the Franciscan manuscript uses Irish, while the opposite is the case in other instances.²⁵ The most economical explanation is that the composers and copyists were moving back and forth between languages and were effectively translating and re-translating in both directions as they worked – with a tendency, perhaps deliberate, to treat the alternation itself as the defining feature of this genre or register.

2 The Irish-language hymns

So far, we have seen the use of the ‘intermediate language’ as the medium for scholarly presentation and interpretation of a Latin hymn. A more stark indication of the involvement of the vernacular in the programme of the *Liber Hymnorum* is the inclusion in both manuscripts of a series of poems entirely in Irish. In the TCD manuscript, a subtle distinction in status is made between the Latin and Irish hymns.²⁶ In the folio illustrated here (see Fig. 1), we saw that the main text of the *Altus* was in Gaelic majuscule, while the closing antiphon of the *Te Deum* was in minuscule. Consistently throughout this manuscript,²⁷ the main text of each Latin hymn is in majuscule script; minuscule is used for the closing antiphons of the Latin hymns, for the entire text of each Irish-language hymn, and for the scholarly apparatus throughout.²⁸ The implied ‘hierarchy of scripts’

25 The Preface to *Altus Prosator* presents this pattern of variation in a particularly noticeable form (see Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 62–65). Note also that the whole Preface is found in a much longer form in the fifteenth-century *Leabhar Breac* (‘The Speckled Book’, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 23 P 12, pp. 237b–238b); Bernard and Atkinson print the variants in their apparatus. Where a given sentence is witnessed in both manuscripts, here too they often show different choices between Latin and Irish.

26 In Bieler’s estimation, in ‘the main part of [the TCD manuscript]’ (i.e. the first 25 hymns) all the hymns and versicles (and perhaps some of the glosses) are the work of a single scribe (1948, 178 with n. 4), so it is reasonable to seek an ordered explanation here.

27 This does not apply to the items in the final sections of the manuscript, which were added by other scribes and are beyond the scope of this article, as they do not overlap with the Franciscan copy and do not form part of the original *Liber Hymnorum*.

28 Cf. Bieler 1948, 179: I have clarified his brief observations by checking the alternations directly against the manuscript. It turns out that Bernard and Atkinson indicate the switch to large Gaelic minuscule accurately every time by using a slightly smaller font size, though this practice is left obscure when they state it in their Introduction (vol. 1, x). The principle that the alternation between scripts is determined by the movement from individual to communal voices is neatly confirmed by the fact that the minuscule script is used for the breviate Psalter

– a term originally used for a broadly comparable pattern used in scholarly Latin manuscripts from Northumbria two centuries earlier²⁹ – seems to imply that the voice of the *individual saint communicating in verse in the Latin medium* stands in contrast not only to the voice of a saint composing in Irish, but also to the collective Latin voices of those responding in the antiphons, and those of the scholarly community responsible for the glosses and Prefaces. In other words, the majuscule script marks out a special combination of individuality and universality for the authorial voices of the Latin hymns.

However, this should not be taken to imply that the Irish-language hymns have been given a less exalted status. Their minuscule is the same size as the majuscule of the Latin hymns,³⁰ their incipits are decorated to the same level, and they are preceded by equally elaborate Prefaces and glossed with the same level of linguistic and exegetical engagement. This impression is corroborated in a different way by the *mise-en-page* of the Irish-language hymns in the Franciscan manuscript, of which an example is shown in Fig. 2.

The main text here is the hymn *Génair Pátraic*, telling of the life and holiness of St Patrick and asserting the primacy of his episcopal seat of Armagh.³¹ It is preceded by a Preface on its supposed composition by St Fiacc of Sleaty, a contemporary of Patrick himself: this is similar in theme to the Preface of the *Altus*, and characterised by similar switching between languages, albeit in this case the proportion of Irish to Latin is rather higher. On the hymn itself there are short interlinear glosses, whose functions are relatively simple – explaining words, supplementing the sense, identifying and briefly explaining proper names where they occur. These are largely shared word-for-word with the copy in the TCD manuscript, and they presumably go back to the same lost exemplar.

(LH-T, fols 22^v–25^v, 29^r–31^r; Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 144–156), which is not the authoritative text of the Psalms but a digest intended for recitation, as the Preface itself states (*si devota mente cantetur ...*, see Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 144; vol. 2, 216–218).

²⁹ The classic study is Parkes 1991, referring specifically to Northumbrian manuscripts of the ninth century: ‘The study of ancient manuscripts [...] led Anglo-Saxon scribes to adumbrate the concept of a hierarchy of scripts [...] Anglo-Saxon scribes came to regard [uncial and rustic capitals] as peculiarly appropriate for such authoritative texts. As a result scribes began to employ these ancient scripts to distinguish the extracts from such authorities, which were incorporated into texts or commentaries copied in Insular Minuscule’ (Parkes 1991, 14, illustrated by the Wearmouth-Jarrow copy of Bede’s commentary on Proverbs, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 819). Parkes associates the ‘hierarchy of scripts’ with a ‘hierarchy of authority’ (14–15), though this is necessarily more speculative.

³⁰ I have confirmed this by measurement.

³¹ Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 96–104; see also Stokes and Strachan 1901–1903, vol. 2, 307–321.

But in the margins of the folio there is another series of annotations pursuing an entirely different level of interpretation.³² Each item here is introduced by a lemma repeated from the words of the poem: sometimes (but not always) the initial letter of the lemma is highlighted in red, and the gloss then proceeds into a discursive commentary. I give one example to show the overall character. The hymn describes (lines 7–8) how the angel Victor instructed Patrick to leave Ireland, and this is followed by the following lines:³³

Do faid tar Elpa uile,	<u>He went over all Elpa,</u>
De mair, ba amru retha. (9–10)	<u>Great God, it was a wondrous course.</u>

In the marginal paratext, the first word of this verse reappears as a lemma followed by a commentary entry:³⁴

do faid .i. ro faid *no* ro fuc Dia *no* in t-angel. Cinnas *dono* a rad dar Alpain? ni *ansa*. Do Bretnaib ro fuc in t-angel *commad* dar Alpain *dano* ba chóir and .i. dar sliab nElpa ar robo ainm do inis Bretan ule olim Alba ut Beda dicit in principio suae historiae, Britania insola cui quondam nomen erat Alban eo quod pars quam illi tenuerunt suo vocabulo nominaverunt et vetus nomen Alpan quod invenerunt mansit.

'Do faid', viz. 'he went', or God brought him or the angel. How does he say 'over Alpa'? Not difficult. From Britain the angel brought him, so that 'over Alpan' was appropriate there, viz. over the mountain of Alpa, for the name for all the island of Britain was Alba of old, as Bede says at the beginning of his history: 'Britain, the island whose name long ago

³² The glosses to 'Fiacc's Hymn' have been published by Stokes 1887, vol. 2, 412–427, and by Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 97–103. Neither is fully reliable: Atkinson has matched glosses to particular lemmata even where the manuscript offers no indication as to which words they relate, and Stokes has rearranged the material into what seemed to him the right sequence but without clear reference to the placing of the materials on the manuscript page. Atkinson prints text in many places where the ink of the manuscript is now faded towards illegibility. It is impossible to tell whether this deterioration was subsequent to (caused by?) his work, or whether he relied at times on hope and guesswork; but I have yet to find a word printed by Atkinson for which *nothing at all* is visible in the manuscript. (The text published by Stokes and Strachan 1901–1903, vol. 2, 307–321, is still further removed from the evidence of the manuscripts and cannot be relied on).

³³ Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 98, line 9.

³⁴ I rely here on the transcription by Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 98. An independent new edition is not possible because the manuscript is badly faded here: there is just enough visible to inspire confidence that Atkinson's transcription is trustworthy and that more was to be seen when he worked. Note, however, that here as elsewhere he was unsystematic in the use of italics to indicate expansion of contractions, and where the word was Latin he tended not to italicise.

was Alban': because the part which those men held they named by their own word, and the old name 'Alpan' which they had invented remained.

This example shows the technique of the commentator: clarifying the sense of the original, elucidating its elusive style, and explaining a difficult word – the name Alba – by citing Bede and then further elucidating its semantic history.³⁵ Other items among the marginalia are still more substantial, being accounts of events in the life of the saint that explain allusive references within the poem and expand into full narration, with the characteristic switching between Irish and Latin that we have observed throughout this discussion. These narratives usually correspond to episodes in the separately-attested Lives of Patrick, but they do not allow a precise match to any one surviving text.

What process led to this configuration? The evidence points in the following direction. First, a scholar produced a set of interlinear glosses on linguistic issues and background information, including the proper names and events referred to: from his work come the short items that are shared between our two manuscripts. Then at some later stage a (presumably different) scholar took the proper names and events alluded to in the poem and cross-referenced them to other texts, including Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and a Life of Patrick, and from this there was produced a new independent series of discursive notes – in effect, a full-scale literary and historical commentary – which provides the deep framing border of commentary. However, there is a further complication. The marginal commentary does not run continuously alongside the text: rather, it is divided into several parts that have been dislocated and rearranged. In the present folio, for example (see Fig. 2), the commentary begins at the upper edge of the page with a discussion of the name *Nemthur* from the first line of the poem; it proceeds down the left-hand margin until it reaches the decorated initial *G*, where it breaks off with a cue mark *Q.:-*.³⁶ The cue mark reappears near the middle of the opposite margin, where the commentary continues from where it had broken off; this section in turn ends

³⁵ Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 2, 179, similarly Stokes 1887, vol. 2, 417) take *sliab nElpa* here to refer specifically to Drumalban, the mountain ridge separating Argyllshire from Perthshire, which is indeed standard in early medieval sources as the western boundary of the Pictish kingdom of Alba (see Hudson 1998, 137). In this case the *illi* 'those men' of our passage will be the ancient inhabitants of Scotland whose names were the first to be imposed on the landscape – presumably a reference to the Picts.

³⁶ Many of these cue marks are formally identical to the 'technical signs' used by the scribes of manuscripts of Irish authorship as early as the Carolingian period (see Steinová 2017), though there appears to be no correspondence in function.

with another mark L, which again reappears in the left margin just below the illuminated letter, from where the commentary continues down to the bottom of the page, eventually breaking off with the mark A final chunk of glossing, higher in the right margin, apparently comes next in the sequence,³⁷ though there is no cue mark to indicate this; and in the upper margin of the next folio (p. 37 of the manuscript) there appear notes corresponding to the words *Temrach* and *druïd* from the final lines of poetry in the illustrated p. 36 (see Fig. 2). What, then, has happened? The scribe seems to have been working not from a glossed copy of the poem but from an independent commentary text arranged by lemmata: he proceeded to copy this commentary into the marginal spaces, which had probably been left wide for this purpose; yet he made little or no effort to arrange the commentary in a way that would serve the needs of a reader trying to understand the poem.

3 Manuscripts as reliquaries?

The glosses, marginalia and *accessus* signal that the texts in these manuscripts have been gathered for study and exegesis, both in terms of their language and their content; but the richness of the illumination, and the formal regularity of the layout, suggest that the manuscripts were intended at least partly for display.

This encourages a closer look at the decorative programme, which is similar in overall conception across the two manuscripts. The principal embellishments are the decorated initials at the beginning of each hymn. These fall into three types. Some seem to reprise or continue the style of the decorated initials of the great age of Insular illuminated manuscripts two centuries earlier, the period of the 'Book of Kells' (Fig. 3a);³⁸ others are based on the body of an animal, curved into the shape of the letter and interlaced with narrower twisting forms (Fig. 3b); others again follow the form known as 'bent wire' shape and resemble the initials of learned Latin manuscripts produced in Irish scriptoria over the preceding centuries (Fig. 3c).³⁹ The TCD manuscript includes a higher number

³⁷ Bernard and Atkinson print accordingly in their arrangement of the note to line 16 (1898, vol. 1, 99).

³⁸ The initials of this type are closely aligned with those of the continuous tradition of Irish manuscript illumination in the tenth century: see Henry 1960–1961.

³⁹ For analysis of these three types of initials in LH-T see Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1961–1963, 129–134.

that fall into the first two types, whereas in the Franciscan manuscript the 'bent wire' type preponderates, confirming the likelihood that the two manuscripts were created in different scriptoria.⁴⁰ At the same time, however, the affinities between the two are obviously close. For example, in Fig. 3d, from the Franciscan manuscript, the letter is the initial S of Colmán's Hymn *Sén Dé*, as is the S shown from the TCD manuscript in Fig. 3b. Although the body of the letter is constructed in completely different ways, the head of the beast is very similar in both, with the same ears and the same curlicue on the snout: a clue, perhaps, to their derivation from a common source manuscript, at whose date can only be guessed.

In terms of the overall communicative significance of these illuminations, there is a close parallel in a different Irish art-form of the same period, roughly 1000–1100: the metalwork embellishment of shrines enclosing relics, a significant number of which were made to contain sacred manuscripts of earlier date.⁴¹ Among these, the *Soiscéal Molaise* (the Gospel of St Molaise) enclosed a (now lost) manuscript associated with St Molaise, and the front panel of the shrine is decorated with cast images of the symbols of the Evangelists which reprise the classic style of ninth-century Insular Gospel illuminations, perhaps those of the book within.⁴² A still closer parallel is offered by the shrine of the *Cathach* (c. 1080 CE), which enclosed an earlier Psalter manuscript, said to have belonged to St Columba. The shrine's decoration⁴³ combines animal and abstract motifs from indigenous tradition with others aligned with the Norse style known as Ringerike, which has a strong international diffusion in the first half of the eleventh century and may have been introduced into Irish artists' repertoire via the Scandinavian settlement at Dublin.⁴⁴ Significantly, there are strong Ringerike influences in the decorated initials of the *Liber Hymnorum*, most obviously in the TCD copy, and it has been noted that the forms of the foliate ends of the

⁴⁰ See Henry 1970, 57–59.

⁴¹ Besides those that I discuss here, other potentially relevant examples include the Shrine of the Stowe Missal (c. 1030) and the Misach (late eleventh century): for a survey see Moss 2014, 297–303. On the stylistic affinities of decorated metalwork in Irish shrines and reliquaries in this period see Ó Floinn 1987, 1994, 1997, and further references below; on the later development of the shrine-making tradition from the later twelfth century onward see Hourihane 2004, 115–137. It is difficult to tell whether there is an element of deliberate differentiation from international norms in the stylistic choices made by Irish artists in this period: cf. Harbison 2001, Murray 2015.

⁴² Mullarkey 2007.

⁴³ See Ó Floinn 1987, 180–181; 2001, 91–93, with figs 4–5; Moss 2014, 44 fig. 38 c, d.

⁴⁴ For a survey see Graham-Campbell 2013, 127–133.

tendrils are closely comparable to those of the Shrine of the *Cathach* and other artefacts in the same group.⁴⁵ The Ringerike influence could be pursued further: for example, the design of the letter S in Fig. 3b could be associated with the classic Norse schema of the so-called ‘Great Beast’, its sinuous body intertwined with a narrower snake-like creature of more slender curvilinear forms. A slightly later group of Irish shrines combines indigenous metalwork traditions with those of the Urnes style, which succeeds the Ringerike in the Norse developmental sequence: examples include the Shrine of St Manchán enclosing the bones of the saint of c. 1120⁴⁶ and the Cross of Cong enclosing a fragment of the True Cross (1123 CE).⁴⁷ These metalwork artefacts offer a suggestive parallel to the *mise-en-page* seen in the *Liber Hymnorum* manuscripts: on the one hand, we have sacred objects, from body parts to prayer-books, re-contextualised artistically as objects of veneration, on the other, we have sacred poetry codified and canonised in manuscripts of equal decorative splendour.

4 Irish and international contexts in manuscript culture

It remains difficult to characterise the manuscripts in terms of the known norms of book-production in this period. In terms of layout, the most similar surviving example of Irish origin is a Latin Psalter manuscript: the Psalter of Caimín, dated likewise to the eleventh century.⁴⁸ The text here shows a similar spatial arrangement, with a rudimentary version of the ‘hierarchy of scripts’, abundant glossing, and decorated initials similar to the Franciscan *Liber Hymnorum*. It comes in all likelihood from the same scriptorium. In terms of status and function, however, this parallel should not be pushed too far: the makers of the *Liber Hymnorum* were hardly giving the same kind of authority to the hymns of

⁴⁵ ‘A specific characteristic of the lobed tendrils [...] is the occurrence of a semicircular notch where the tendril springs from the stem’ (Ó Floinn 1987, 181). Ó Floinn identifies the two *Liber Hymnorum* manuscripts as close parallels.

⁴⁶ Murray 2014, 230–261.

⁴⁷ Murray 2014, especially 186–201. Murray compares the style of the metalwork in the Cross with that of the group of eleventh-century Irish illuminated manuscripts to which the *Liber Hymnorum* belongs (164–166, citing Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1961–1963).

⁴⁸ Dublin, University College, Franciscan A1: images are available online at <<https://www.isos.dias.ie/>>. On the texts see Ó Néill 2007, and on the decorative programme see Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1961–1963, 117–19.

the Irish saints as to the psalms of David. Similar problems attend any attempt to characterise the *Liber Hymnorum* as a service book for real-life religious ritual. Although some of the hymns in the collection also appear as a group in paraliturgical prescriptions for sequences of prayer, preserved in sources dating back as far as the ninth century,⁴⁹ and in the later period there is one reference to the use of such a set of hymns in a rite of intercession,⁵⁰ nonetheless the scholarly apparatus of our *Liber Hymnorum* manuscripts makes it hard to see them as service-books. In plan and in presentation, the compilation was clearly designed for the study of a literary canon, not for saving one's soul.

A more satisfactory context can perhaps be found in the international development of scholarship in the period. Throughout the post-Carolingian world of north-western Europe, monastic libraries and scriptoria were the focus for the growth and systematisation of collections of Latin texts glossed and annotated for the purpose of linguistic and exegetical study, collectively known as *grammatica*.⁵¹ In an important study of this movement in book-production, Martin Irvine distinguishes two distinct categories of text, constantly cross-referenced to each other and often combined in a single compilation: on the one hand, treatises and manuals of grammatical study (*artes*), on the other, annotated texts of major authors constituting the proximate object of such study (*auctores*).⁵² Irvine highlights the characteristic forms of the manuscript context for such texts: '[M]ost extant manuscripts of the canon of Christian Latin poets (Arator, Juvenius, Sedulius, Prudentius) and of the major classical writers studied in the early Middle Ages present the texts as part of an integrated corpus interpreted through an accompanying apparatus of glosses and prefaces'.⁵³ Although the works of the most prominent individual authors often occur in single-author manuscripts, multi-author compilations are also prominent. The

49 For an overview of the evidence for the use in ninth-century ritual of hymns corresponding to items in the *Liber Hymnorum* collection, see Jeffrey 2000.

50 In the Irish text known as the 'Second Vision of Adomnán' (Volmering 2014), a number of *Liber Hymnorum* works appear in a sequence of prayers prescribed to 'turn back the plague from the men of Ireland' (see text at §11, with note on p. 680).

51 Debate continues on the function of manuscript glossing in this period, and in particular on whether the presence of a gloss corpus in a given manuscript indicates that it functions as a 'class book' or a 'library book' – or perhaps both simultaneously. For key contributions to the debate see Holtz 1982; Wieland 1985, 1998; Teeuwen 2011. For the current state of scholarship on manuscript glossing, the essays in Teeuwen and van Renswoude 2017 are invaluable.

52 Irvine 1994, especially 334–404. On the (sometimes overlapping) categories of *artes* and *auctores*, see 334–344.

53 Irvine 1994, 346.

resulting ‘prestigious and universally practised curriculum of *artes*, *auctores* and other poetry’ was established by the mid-ninth century on the Continent and in England by the mid-tenth.⁵⁴ Significantly, at least one classic early example of such a compilatory manuscript, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 363, is the work of a group of Irish *peregrini* working in northern Italy and is glossed in Irish as well as Latin, providing a dramatic demonstration of the central involvement of Irish scholars in the growth of this cultural movement.⁵⁵

Surviving evidence for Irish *grammatica* manuscripts from closer in time to the *Liber Hymnorum* is relatively slight,⁵⁶ but this gap is less problematic than it seems – the vicissitudes of time and dampness made it almost impossible for manuscripts of secular Latin from this period to survive in Ireland,⁵⁷ and there is every reason to expect that what survives from neighbouring parts of Europe in the same period will correspond well to the kind of manuscripts that were known and used in Ireland. There is a particularly suggestive group of examples from the *scriptoria* of the two monasteries at Canterbury, which were major centres for the production of such manuscripts of *artes* and *auctores*.⁵⁸ One example will suffice⁵⁹ to illustrate the conventional forms of the *mise-en-page* that characterises the Canterbury manuscripts (Figs 4a and 4b).

The manuscript shown here is an assemblage dominated by collections of riddles (*aeinigmata*), a genre associated with metrical and poetic education – the page shown is the opening of Aldhelm’s *Aenigmata* with its double acrostic.⁶⁰ The opening of the main text is marked by display capitals and a decorated initial letter with interlaced foliage, and there is a well-ordered ‘hierarchy of scripts’ in the design of the page.⁶¹ The text itself is marked both by interlinear

⁵⁴ Irvine 1994, 355.

⁵⁵ See Contreni 1982; Gavinelli 1983; Vocino 2017.

⁵⁶ For examples of direct and indirect evidence for engagement by Irish-language scholars and students with Latin *grammatica* and related learning c. 1000–1150 CE see Duncan 2012; Ó Néill 1997, 2005; Clarke and Ní Mhaonaigh 2020.

⁵⁷ Sharpe 2010; Ó Corráin 2011–2012.

⁵⁸ See Brooks 1984, 267–278; Gameson 2000; Gameson 2012b, 104–105, 109, 114–115; Gameson 2012c; cf. Irvine 1994, 343, 383. The relationships and rivalries *between* the two Canterbury monasteries, and between their scriptoria, are beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵⁹ For a further, particularly close parallel, compare Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F.I.15 (Canterbury, c. 950–1000).

⁶⁰ The Old English glosses to the *aeinigmata* of Aldhelm in London, BL, Royal 12.C.23 have been edited by Stork 1990. The riddles themselves are translated by Lapidge and Rosier 1985, 61–95.

⁶¹ On the hierarchy of scripts in this group of *grammatica* manuscripts, Irvine notes a descending hierarchy: square capitals for titles, ‘canonical minuscules’ for main text, ‘less formal

glosses and by the more extensive commentary in the margins, which were plainly ruled very wide for this purpose.⁶² In overall conception and design, this exactly matches what we have seen for the *Liber Hymnorum* – and presents a far closer parallel than does anything of comparable date from within Ireland.

It is of course unnecessary to specify Canterbury in particular as the source of the models used by the Irish *literati*, but our examples illustrate how influence from more prestigious centres of book-culture could have inspired the design of the *Liber Hymnorum*. Similar modes of contact, in this case based on lay patronage, have been posited for the influence of eleventh-century English, as well as Continental ecclesiastical architecture on the development of the Irish Romanesque style in the following century and a half.⁶³ Strikingly, however, at the higher levels of ecclesiastical power-politics in this period the particular relationship between Canterbury and the Irish Church was a recurring point of contention. Initially, this primarily involved the Hiberno-Norse towns, several of whose bishops professed the primacy of Canterbury in the late eleventh century, but it probably also played a part in the shifting fortunes of the older monasteries both before and after the Synod of Cashel in 1101.⁶⁴ Below that level, contacts between ecclesiastical personnel (confrontational as well as benign) may well have provided a stimulus for innovation in cultural life, including the movement of prestige manuscripts across the Irish Sea and their imitation or emulation in the development of the Irish schools of book-production.

If this parallel is useful, it invites the hypothesis that the *Liber Hymnorum* manuscripts either result from or assert the claim that the hymns of the Irish saints are on a level with those of the key works of canonical Latin authors then enshrined in the most authoritative glossed manuscripts. There is, so far as I know, no parallel elsewhere in Europe in this period for assembling the works of the poets of the modern nation into such a corpus, nor for elevating the study of *auctores* writing in a vernacular language onto the same level as those in Latin. Here, however, the Canterbury tradition will again offer a possible transnational parallel.

minuscules' for gloss and commentary (1994, 383–384, citing Bischoff 1990, in which see especially 79).

⁶² See Love 2012, especially 90 for this manuscript.

⁶³ See Stalley 1981, and cf. O'Keeffe 2003, especially 89–90 (St Flannan's Oratory, Killaloe), 152–165 (Cormac's Chapel, Cashel), 179–181 (St Cronan's, Roscrea), 214–215 (Freshford church), 228 (Ardmore cathedral), 273–278 (Clonfert cathedral), with summary, 280–281; Ó Carragáin 2010, 248–253, 258–262.

⁶⁴ Brett 2006; Flanagan 2010, 6–10.

A somewhat later product of the same cultural milieu is the mid-eleventh-century compilation from St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury known as the 'Cambridge Songs' manuscript (Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg.5.35). It is less elaborately produced than the manuscript illustrated in Figs 4a and 4b, but its contents are closely related: many of the poems occur in both, and the glosses to Aldhelm in the two manuscripts have clearly been taken from a single source (if not the one from the other).⁶⁵ The 'Cambridge Songs' manuscript falls into four parts, of which the first three form a collection of learned Latin texts in the mainstream *grammatica* tradition: these include hymns as well as secular-themed poems and riddles, and are heavily annotated with exegetical glosses and also with some examples of syntactic letter-glossing, in which the words of a sentence are indexed to the letters of the alphabet so that they can be rearranged in simpler sequence – a system, incidentally, which is paralleled in the TCD copy of the *Liber Hymnorum*.⁶⁶ It is possible to suggest specific Irish affinities, including the mysterious poem on the alphabet ascribed in the manuscript to *quidam Scottus*, 'a certain Irishman';⁶⁷ but for our purposes it is more significant that a generic parallel can be made with the *Liber Hymnorum*'s combination of established Latin texts with others of more vernacular affinities. This is because the fourth part of the manuscript adds to the corpus a range of Latin verse texts of much more recent composition, the so-called 'Cambridge Songs' themselves.⁶⁸

Internal evidence shows that many of these 'Cambridge Songs' were composed at most a few decades before the making of the manuscript itself, and topical references and personal names suggest that they originated in the Rhineland. They include two examples in which Latin intermingles with the German vernacular, usually switching from half-line to half-line in a single

⁶⁵ The standard survey remains Riggs and Wieland 1975; see also Ziolkowski 1998, xxvi–xxx; Irvine 1994, 358–364, with list of the contents of the first three parts of the manuscript. The glosses to Arator and Prudentius are edited by Wieland 1983.

⁶⁶ See Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 38 at lines 25–26; on the syntactic glossing in the 'Cambridge Songs' manuscript, which includes dot-sequence as well as letter-glossing, see Rigg and Wieland 1975, 115; Wieland 1983, 98–107. The fundamental discussions of this species of glossing are Robinson 1973 and Korhammer 1980.

⁶⁷ *Versus cuiusdam Scotti de alfabeto*, fol. 381^r–382^r, one of the poems shared with London, BL, Royal 12.C.23, fol. 137^v. The poem is edited by Glorie 1968, 729–741. For other potential Irish affinities, note the presence of the hisperic poems *Rubisca* (fol. 419^v) and *Adelphus Adelpha meter* (fol. 420^r) and the hymn *Sancte sator legis lator suffragator* (fol. 388^r), its vocabulary particularly reminiscent of the *Altus Prosator*.

⁶⁸ Edition by Ziolkowski 1998, replacing Breul 1915.

syntactic unit.⁶⁹ The ‘Cambridge Songs’ section is an integral part of the manuscript as a whole, and its scribe was also a major contributor to the classical Latin sections that precede it. It is clear, therefore, that the entire compilation was conceived as – or grew into the shape of – a curriculum that embraced not only established classics but also recent poetry from a geographically-defined region close to the world of the compilers, in which a non-Classical vernacular could potentially be admitted into a poetic canon defined by Latin composition.⁷⁰ As such, it offers a partial parallel for the assembly of texts of indigenous origin into a compilation supplementing the established canon of internationally-studied Latin *grammatica*.⁷¹

5 A dual-language poetic canon

Despite the suggestive implications of this parallel, it is clear that the *Liber Hymnorum* goes vastly further than the ‘Cambridge Songs’ manuscript both in the scale of its scholarly apparatus and in its focus on a national literary corpus. How are we to conclude our attempt to characterise its purpose and affinities? The clue, I suggest, is in the very fact that it combines Latin with the vernacular so pervasively, both in the main texts and in the scholarly apparatus. Various

69 The key example is that usually known as *De Henrico* (no. 19 in Ziolkowski 1998), fol. 437^vb27–437^va23. In the other example, *Clericus et nona* (no. 28 in Ziolkowski 1998), the text has been virtually obliterated and little can be read, but there is enough to see that it followed a similar structure of language-switching between half-lines, the subject being a cleric’s attempted seduction of a nun.

70 See Ziolkowski 1998, xxi–xxv, arguing that the entire manuscript is a unified anthology into which the ‘Cambridge Songs’ have been subsumed; and compare the more ambitious reconstruction of Rigg and Wieland 1975, who see the ‘Cambridge Songs’ as the culminating section of a graded curriculum running from the beginning of the manuscript to the end. This latter view is problematic, not least because the ‘Cambridge Songs’ section is not glossed, so that any claim that it formed part of the *educational* programme of the manuscript is speculative.

71 A further, more speculative analogy has been drawn between the curriculum of the ‘Cambridge Songs’ manuscript and of the poetic compilations in Old English, of which the Exeter Book and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11 are the most spectacular examples (Tyler 2016). It remains a difficulty, however, that the parallel is easier to pin on book-collecting than on book-production. It is certainly significant, as Tyler points out, that the Exeter Book was juxtaposed with Latin *grammatica* manuscripts in Leofric’s library, as seen from his bequest to Exeter Cathedral in 1072, but this does not shed light directly on its origins or constitution. The Exeter Book is not glossed or provided with a scholarly apparatus analogous to the *grammatica* studied in the present paper, so its value for the present discussion remains doubtful.

enactments of a mode of composition characterised by free intermingling between Latin and a vernacular, both between and within sentences and clauses, characterised the learned discourse of educational communication in the monastic communities of early medieval Europe, and are occasionally reproduced in written form in surviving manuscripts. A noteworthy and well-studied example is the bilingual prose variety (*Mischprosa*) between Latin and German used by Notker Labeo in his translations and exegetical reworking of the canonical texts studied in his school at St Gall around the year 1000.⁷² In Irish-language circles from at least the eighth century onward, the evidence of glossed manuscripts shows that intermediate varieties combining Latin and Irish with varying degrees of closeness were characteristic of the culture of the scholarly classes in the monasteries, and the Old Irish gloss corpora represent the written trace or re-enactment of a bilingually functioning speech-community. It is also possible (but cannot be proven) that the Irish monastic communities of the eighth century, especially those associated with the ascetic *céli Dé* movement, gave an especially active role to the vernacular and may even have incorporated its use into the liturgy.⁷³ As we have seen, however, all the evidence is that the scholarly apparatus (and presumably the work of compilation) represented by the *Liber Hymnorum* dates to the early eleventh century: in which case its overall effect is to act as a monument not only to the compositions of the national saints but also to the prestigious heritage of monastic education and scholarship from the Irish past.

A sidelight is thrown on this by the one poem in the collection that enacts the confrontation between languages not only in the scholarly apparatus but within the words of the verses themselves, as in the examples from the ‘Cambridge Songs’ mentioned above. The hymn *Sén Dé*, supposedly by Colmán ua Cluasaigh (d. 661 CE),⁷⁴ is interlaced with bilingual lines like the following (in the translation, the Irish is again printed underlined and the Latin in italic):⁷⁵

Soter soeras Loth di thein,
qui per secula habetur,
ut nos omnes precamur
liberare dignetur.

*The saviour who saved Lot from the fire,
who is held through the ages,
as we all pray
may he see fit to liberate us.*

⁷² Grotans 2006.

⁷³ See Follett 2006, 209–212.

⁷⁴ I present this section of text with more detailed notes and discussion in Clarke 2018, 9–12. See also Ó Dochartaigh 2007 for an important discussion of the metrical configuration binding together the two languages in this poem.

⁷⁵ The text is from Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 27–28, with minor revisions from the LH-T manuscript.

Abram de Ur na Galdai,
 snaidsiunn ruri ron-snada,
 soersum soeras in popul
 limpa fontis in Gaba.

Ruri anacht tri maccu
 a surnn tened, co ruadi,
 ronn-ain amal ro anacht
 Daud de manu Gólaí.

Flaitheam nime locharnaig
 ar-don-roigse diar trógi
 nat leic suum profetam
 ulli leonum ori.

Abram from Ur of the Chaldees.
may the king protect us, let him protect us,
may he free me, he who saved the people
from the liquid of the pool in Gaba.

The king who saved the three boys
from the fiery oven, with redness,
may he save us as he saved
David from the hand of Goliath.

The ruler of lamp-filled heaven.
may he spare us for our wretchedness,
he who did not leave his prophet
for any lions' mouth.

One way of accounting for this peculiar bilingual composition is preserved in the Preface, which records the story that only part of the hymn was written by Colmán himself: he composed the first two quatrains, which are entirely in Irish, while the remaining quatrains (including those cited here) were composed in turn by the pupils of his school (Irish *scol*), each one contributing half a verse – in other words, one pair of half-lines as printed on a single line above.⁷⁶ As imagined in this story, the individual pupil was liable to switch languages within the section of verse that he contributed: and the patterns show that such a switch was liable to take place at any point in the flow of syntax and metre, often within a clause or within a single half-line (as, for example, in the second-last line cited above). Although there is no reason to doubt that this story is an eleventh-century invention, what is significant is that its maker associated the bilingual pattern with the linguistic environment of the schoolroom of an earlier age.

6 Conclusion

If we can extrapolate from this last example, it suggests that the project represented by the compilation as a whole was designed to enact and canonise the literary and educational achievement of that earlier age of Irish Christianity, perhaps at a time when its culture and language were seen to have passed away in the educational and devotional life of the nation and the Church. As such, the

⁷⁶ See the Preface, Bernard and Atkinson 1898, vol. 1, 25, lines 12–15; detailed discussion in Clarke 2018, 11–12.

Liber Hymnorum may have made sense as something analogous to a reliquary – a reliquary enclosing not the remains of a saint, but the grammatical and literary culture of a world for whom both Hiberno-Latin and Old Irish sacred poetry could be placed on a level of cultural authority commensurate with Vergil or Boethius. If this compilation is unique in the European manuscript culture of its time, it is so because nowhere else was the dignity of a national literary inheritance asserted with such boldness in the Latinate world of *grammatica* and sacred verse. In the absence of any direct external evidence for the use or reception of the manuscripts, we can only guess at the cultural politics that motivated this extraordinary project.

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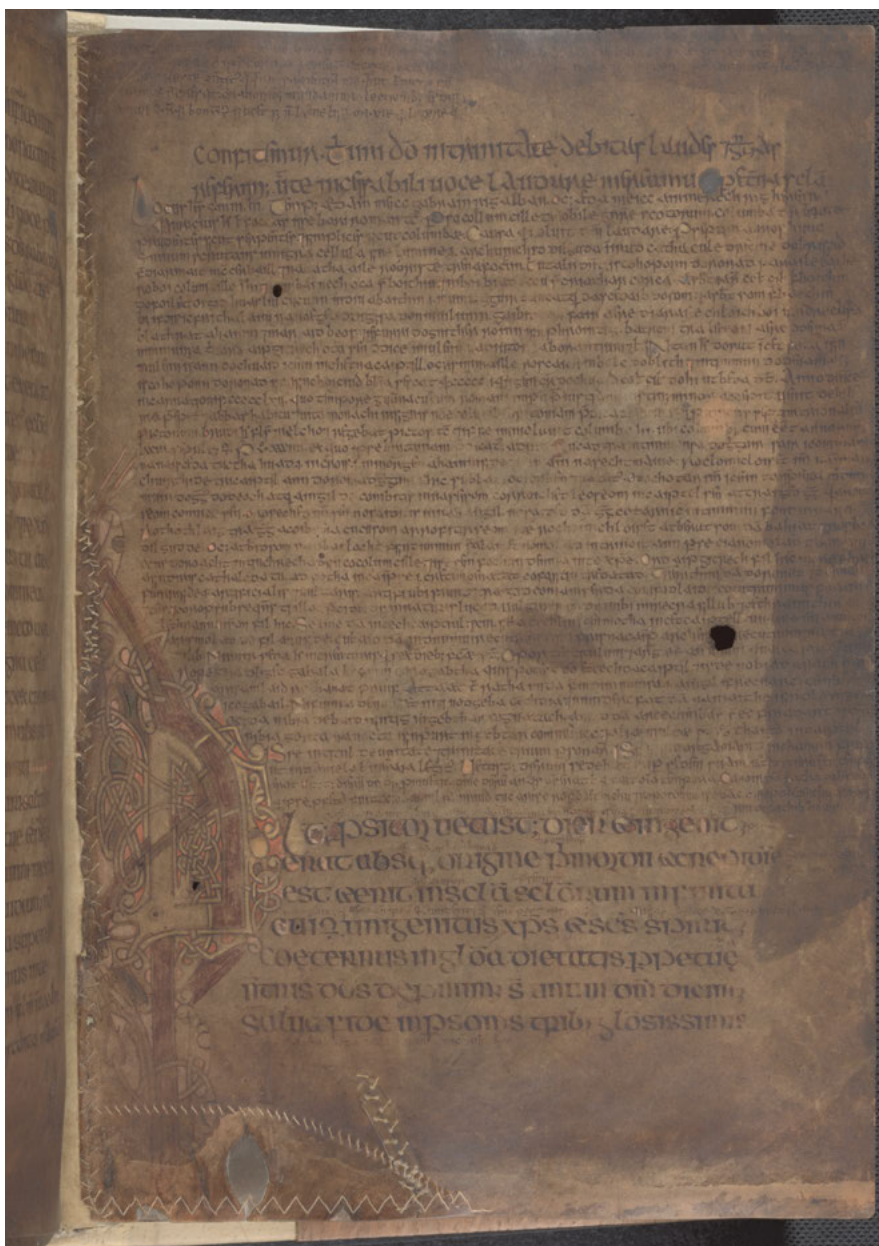


Fig. 1: Dublin, Trinity College, 1441, fol. 11r; courtesy of the Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, Trinity College Dublin.

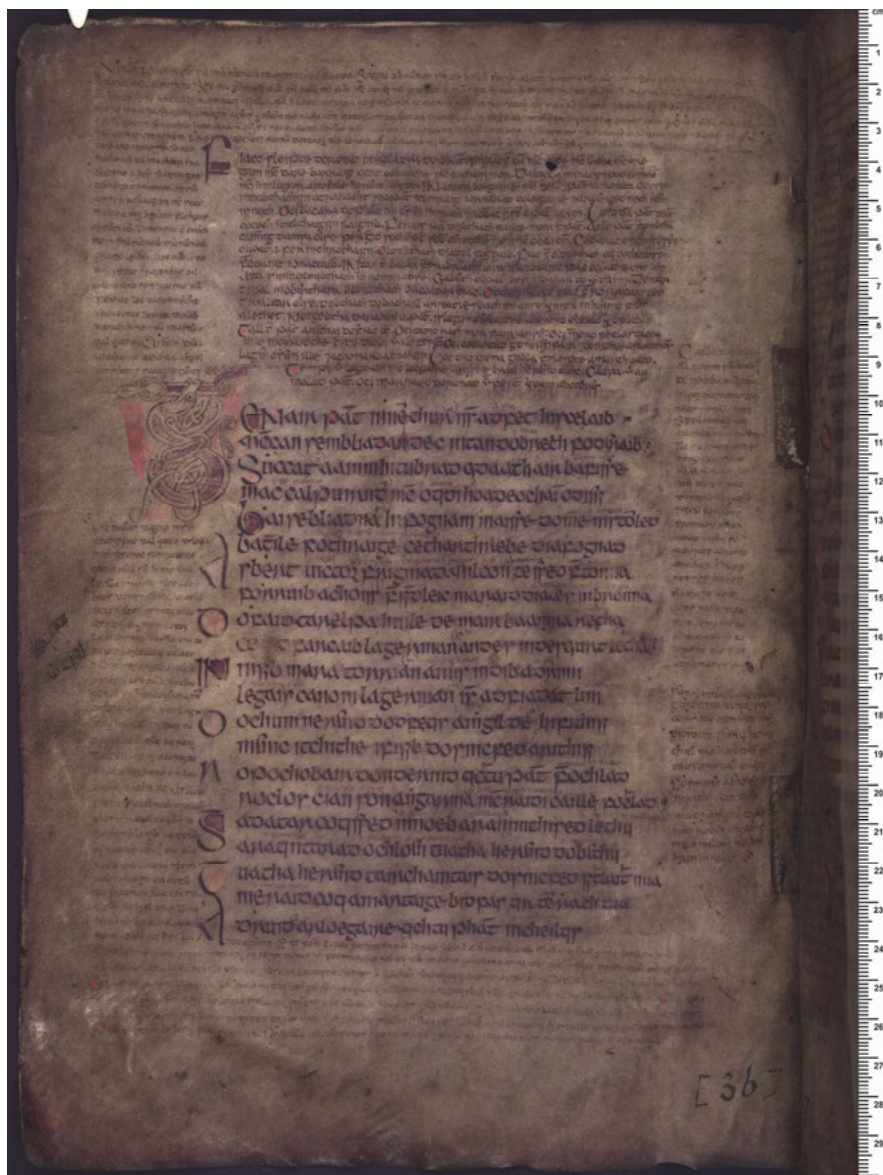


Fig. 2: Dublin, University College, Franciscan A2, p. 36; courtesy of UCD Archives, University College Dublin, and the Irish Script on Screen project, School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies <<https://www.isos.dias.ie/>>.

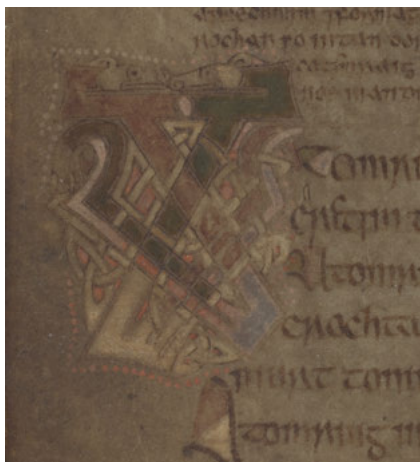


Fig. 3a: Dublin, Trinity College, 1441, fol. 19^v (detail); courtesy of the Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, Trinity College Dublin.



Fig. 3b: Dublin, Trinity College, 1441, fol. 5^r (detail); courtesy of the Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, Trinity College Dublin.

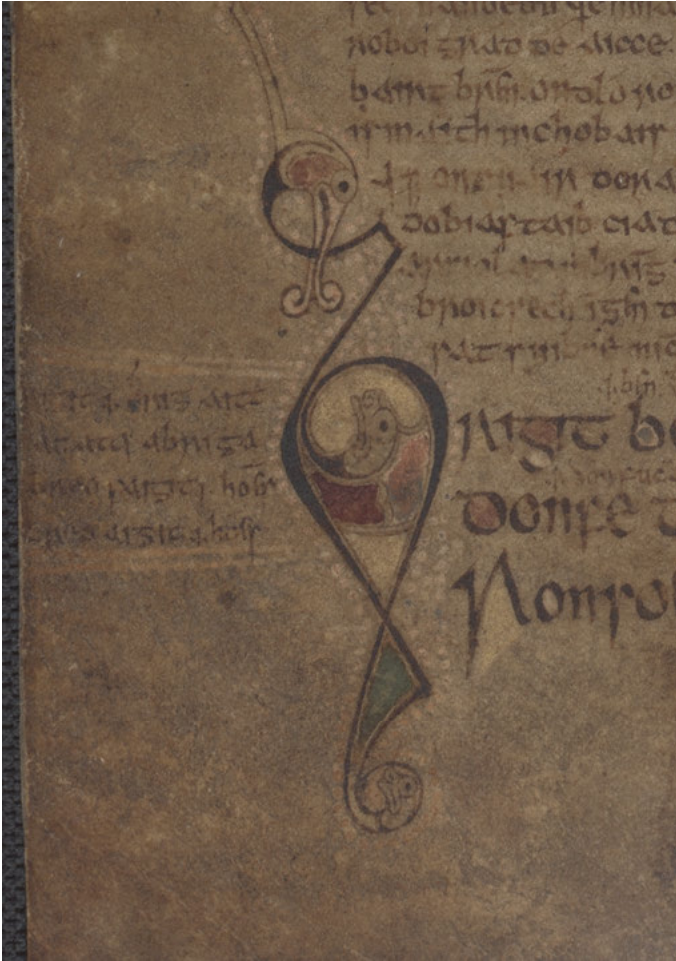


Fig. 3c: Dublin, Trinity College, 1441, fol. 16^v (detail); courtesy of the Keeper of Manuscripts, Trinity College Library, Trinity College Dublin.

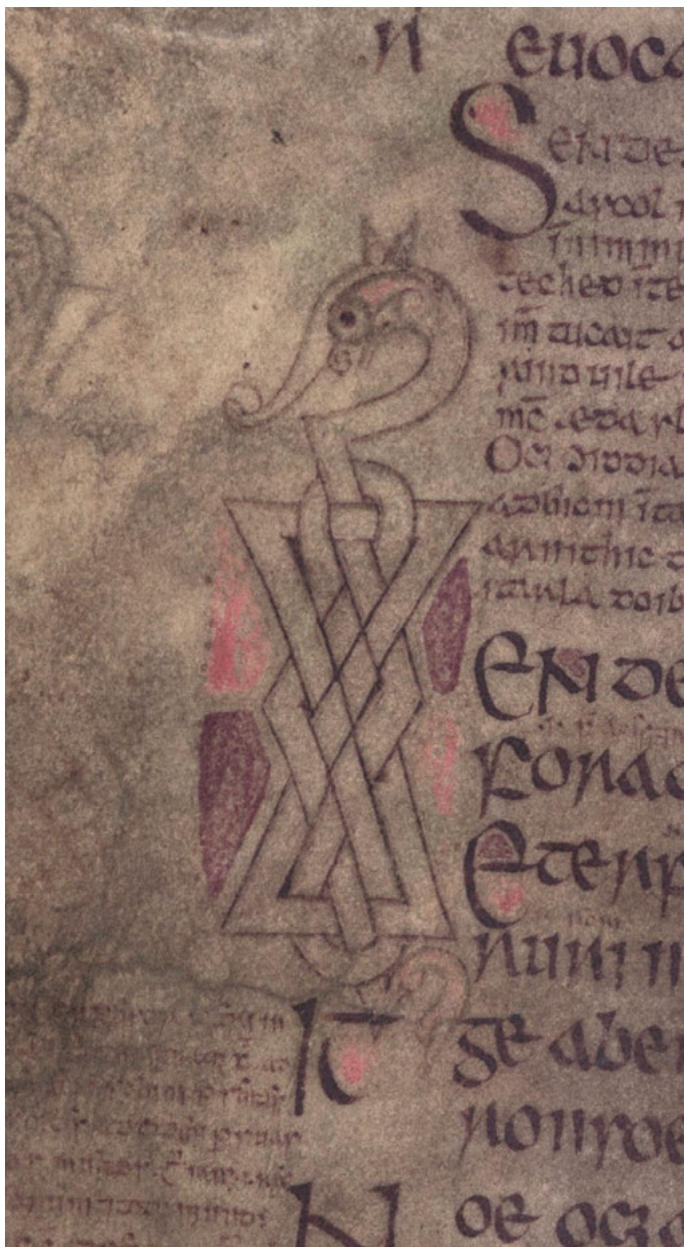


Fig. 3d: Dublin, University College, Franciscan A2, p. 28 (detail); courtesy of UCD Archives, University College Dublin, and the Irish Script on Screen project, School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies <<https://www.isos.dias.ie/>>.

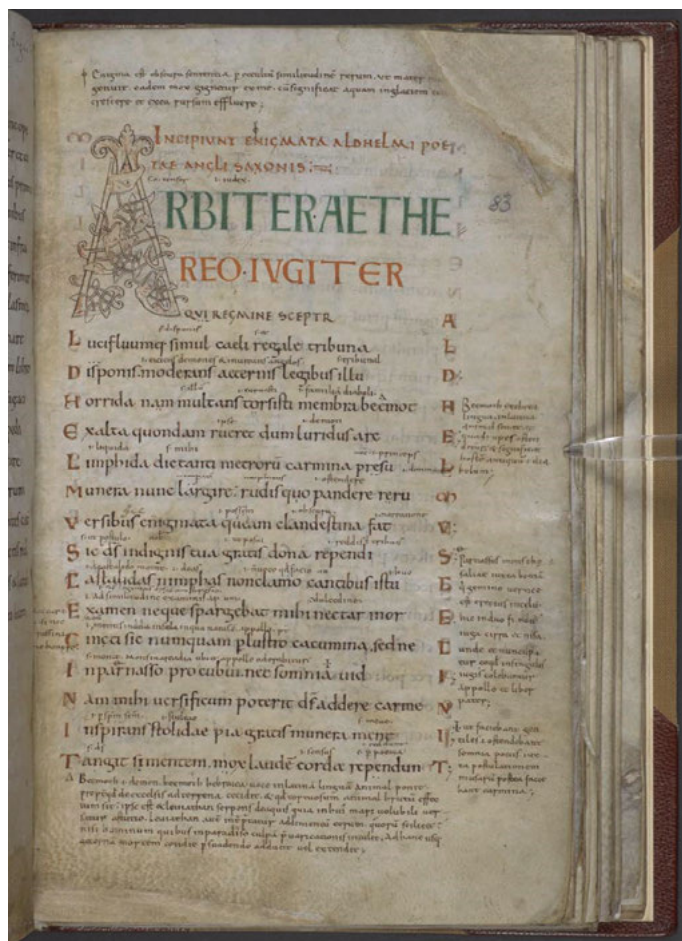


Fig. 4a: London, British Library, Royal 12.C.23, fol. 83r, Aldhelm, *Aenigmata* with glosses (Canterbury, c. 1000 CE). © The British Library Board (Royal 12.C.23).

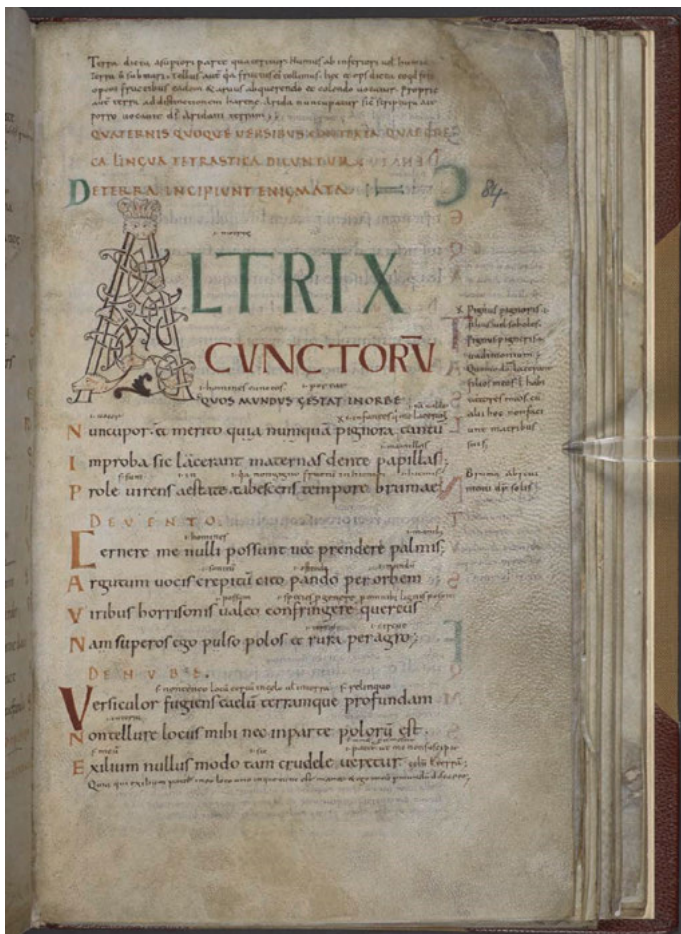


Fig. 4b: London, British Library, Royal 12.C.23, fol. 84r, Aldhelm, *Aenigmata* with glosses (Canterbury, c. 1000 CE). Image © The British Library Board (Royal 12.C.23).