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International Vernacularisation, *c.* 1390 CE: The 'Book of Ballymote'

Abstract: The 'Book of Ballymote' is a late fourteenth-century manuscript written in Ireland and predominantly in the vernacular (the Irish language). In its focus on history, local, regional and global, it draws on and develops biblical and classical themes. It does so in a way that demonstrates how medieval Irish scholars moulded their own language to occupy this international cultural space. Their continued use of Latin in specific contexts underlies their creativity and skill.

1 Introduction: manuscripts, language and history

Medieval Irish textual culture, as represented by its manuscripts, is rich and diverse. The earliest extant manuscripts dating from the eighth and ninth centuries CE are predominantly in Latin but present the vernacular in productive, imaginative dialogue with the canonical language of education and the Church. Energised by this interaction, which had become significant with the spread of Christianity in Ireland in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, Old Irish was developed as a deft and sophisticated literary medium, nourished by the Latinate environment in which it played an increasingly vital part. From the beginnings of this recorded history, the vernacular language acquired authority and importance in the world of learning, functioning as a confident, creative partner in no way subordinate to the globalising learned language with which it was in close embrace. Too often, however, this entanglement is obscured in scholarship, since a given manuscript is often categorised as if it were the edifice of a single language, the one that is predominant in its surface code. For this reason, manuscripts in which Latin is dominant are usually set apart from those in which the vernacular, Irish, is to the fore. An important codex, the 'Book of the Dun Cow' (*Lebor na hUidre*, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 E 25), written around the turn of the twelfth century, is deemed to be a monument to medieval Irish (language) text-production. However, its principal scribe was also responsible for creating manuscripts written entirely in Latin.[1] In the same way, the 'Book of the

1 Duncan 2012.

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Dun Cow' and two other predominantly vernacular twelfth-century manuscripts, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 502 and the 'Book of Leinster' (Dublin, Trinity College, 1339), are rarely considered in conjunction with their bilingual contemporaries, a pair of interconnected copies of a single collection of hymns, the *Liber Hymnorum*, which Michael Clarke has elucidated as a compilation of canonical texts with a learned apparatus. As the *Liber Hymnorum* reflects the medieval tradition of *grammatica*, textual culture in the broadest sense, so the vernacular codices should also be read as products of, and contributions to, the same intellectual milieu in which Latin and Irish co-existed in a fluid, creative symbiosis.[2]

A primary concern of these three manuscripts in which the Irish language functions as the primary surface code – the 'Book of the Dun Cow', Rawlinson B. 502, and the 'Book of Leinster' – was *historia*, the investigation and narrative evocation of the past.[3] That past was ever-present, and contemporary occurrences acquired meaning when set against the backdrop of earlier events. In the western Middle Ages, history involved a narrative determined by Creation, Covenant and Redemption, the here-and-now being part of a linear progression moving towards salvation itself.[4] With reference to biblical and classical markers, past deeds and happenings could be placed within an overarching framework, local events being interpreted in the context of the overall destiny of the human race. Within this sphere of Latinate learning, all history was universal; the concept of *historia* was the defining principle for much medieval discourse concerned with the past, with Christology, and with the Last Things.[5]

This discourse was conducted along Latin and vernacular pathways, as well as in both languages concurrently. Authors could navigate this global space adroitly, whatever their linguistic choice. In the case of the earliest extant vernacular Irish manuscript, *Lebor na hUidre*, an expansive account of events from the era of the Patriarchs and the Flood of Noah to the present, encompassing pivotal moments from the pre-Christian and conversion periods in Ireland, is presented within its pages. The history depicted sets the Irish into a biblical structure, and a primary focus is time's trajectory, salvation in the next life.[6] The importance of eternity, the consummation of history, is underlined by the

2 On the *Liber Hymnorum*, see Michael Clarke's contribution to this volume; Hayden 2018 discusses the concept of *grammatica* as reflected in the manuscript under consideration here, the 'Book of Ballymote'.

3 Ní Mhaonaigh 2018b.

4 See Boyle 2021.

5 Goetz 1991; Goetz 2002, 143–145.

6 Boyle 2015, 129–130; Toner 2015, 132, 134.

exposition of the world's preparatory six ages, as set out in the extensive vernacular reworking of the international scheme of world history, *Sex aetates mundi* (the 'Six Ages of the World'), which frames the presentation of the past both in *Lebor na hUidre* and in the near-contemporary codex, Rawlinson B. 502.[7] Read in conjunction with a text outlining the origins of the Irish, *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (the 'Book of Invasions')[8] which may once also have formed part of *Lebor na hUidre*, the universal and local dimensions are combined. It is with the earliest surviving version of the construction of Ireland's history detailed in *Lebor Gabála* that the third extant vernacular manuscript surviving from this period, *Lebor na Núachongbála* (the 'Book of Oughavall', more commonly known as the 'Book of Leinster'), begins. History and historiography form its unifying principle.[9] It displays an image of the past bearing witness to its own present, while also preserving many traces of the process of synthesis by which this depiction came into being.

In their concern with *historia*, these three textual artefacts, produced within about a hundred years of one another, are comparable with a number of later manuscripts dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the 'Yellow Book of Lecan', the 'Book of Uí Mhaine', the 'Book of Lecan' and the 'Book of Ballymote'. These are generally treated as a decisively younger manuscript-group, though this categorisation obscures the fact that in their general structure and thematic concerns they exhibit many of the same characteristics as the earlier codices.[10] The vernacular retains its focus in these later literary specimens – not surprisingly, considering the intellectual environment in which they took form. While their predecessors are the products of ecclesiastical enclaves in which Latin and Irish intermingled, these fourteenth- and fifteenth-century codices emanated from the hands of professional families primarily concerned with secular learning in the vernacular language. Moreover, a number of them may be patrons' books, each a prestige object for a ruler whose aspirations and standing were embodied in the physical appearance and contents of the work.

While their milieu may differ from that of earlier learned compilations, these manuscripts remain poised between languages, straddling linguistic worlds. Their intellectual ideology is informed by the same Latinate, multilingual

7 Ó Cróinín 1983, Tristram 1985.

8 See Carey 2005.

9 Schlüter 2010.

10 Dublin, Trinity College, 1318 (the 'Yellow Book of Lecan'); Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, D.ii.1 (the 'Book of Uí Mhaine') and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy 23 P 2 (the 'Book of Lecan'). Images and information concerning these manuscripts are available on the Irish Scripts on Screen website: <www.isos.dias.ie> (accessed on 21 Oct. 2021).

learning that is more readily visible on the manuscript page of earlier scribes; their content reflects intense ongoing interaction between and among languages in significant ways. The voice may be predominantly vernacular, but its timbre has been influenced by the Latin with which it was in sustained contact: this is a vernacular that supports a complexity of themes and is capable of subtle exposition, as well as nuanced speculation. These manuscripts are inextricably linked with their predecessors from the twelfth-century period, as noted above, and in many cases may be directly derived from them.[11] Whatever the precise association, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century scribes had frequent recourse to earlier texts. Inheriting a highly-developed scribal culture shaped by its bilingual milieu, later literary craftsmen remained drawn to the past to create textual monuments of relevance for their own day. *Historia*, therefore, retained its significance in the changed context within which the secular scribes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were writing, demonstrated most tangibly perhaps in the detailed genealogical material preserved in manuscripts such as the 'Book of Lecan' and the 'Book of Ballymote'.[12] Local and regional history is represented in these later codices, but when viewed in its entirety, the picture presented has a global hue. The extent to which Latinate learning has become internalised in these manuscripts, informing their structure, as well as outlook, will become clear from our analysis of one such codex, the 'Book of Ballymote'.[13]

2 Introducing the 'Book of Ballymote'

The 'Book of Ballymote' is a monumental compilation with a specific historical focus, in which themes recur and texts are made to chime with one another. Its large collection of varied texts includes genealogies, origin legends, king-lists, saga narratives and stories explaining place-names, among other genres. This subject-matter clearly reflects the interests of its scribes, who worked closely

11 Herbert 2015, 90–97.

12 Ó Corráin 1998, 178.

13 A facsimile of the manuscript has been published: Atkinson 1887. Digital images of the manuscript are available at <www.isos.dias.ie> (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, the 'Book of Ballymote'), from which illustrative images here are drawn by kind permission of the Library of the Royal Irish Academy. This contribution is based on Ní Mhaonaigh 2018a, but with an additional focus on the interplay between languages in the manuscript. The reader is referred to the earlier contribution for further detail on history-writing in the 'Book of Ballymote'.

together, the most prolific of them being Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin.[14] A member of a professional learned family associated with several hereditary elite groups in Connacht (the western part of Ireland), he can be seen to continue the provision of historical learning (*senchas*) with which his earlier scholarly kinsmen had been concerned in previous generations of text-production. He was also connected to another learned family, that of Mac Aodhagáin, and a colophon in the manuscript suggests that he was the pupil of one of their number, Giolla na Náemh Mac Aodhagáin.[15] On his death in 1399, this Giolla na Náemh was described as belonging to the highest grade of scholar (*ollamh*) in law.[16] It can be assumed, therefore, that legal learning also formed part of the training of Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin, as it may well have done in the case of at least one of his collaborators, Solamh Ó Droma. In any event, both scribes wrote part of the manuscript in the house of the younger brother of the teacher-figure, Giolla na Náemh. Another section of the manuscript was written in the house of a secular lord, Tomaltach Mac Donnchadha, in Ballymote (Co. Sligo), from where the manuscript acquired its name.[17] It has been argued that this Connacht chieftain may have been the patron for whom the compilation was made, notwithstanding a comment by Maghnus Ó Duibhgheannáin that he himself was the owner of the book (*fear in leabhairsea*).[18] The manuscript's elaborate programme of illumination, including historiated initials and marginal arabesques, suggests that it was designed, at least partially, for formal display.[19] Evidence for Mac Donnchadha's interest in the past is suggested by specific mention of his name after his pedigree had been recorded.[20] A work of local, regional and world history, therefore, may have been a fitting tribute to him. Ornate lettering and skilfully executed images underline the esteem in which these varied historical texts were held (see, for example, Fig. 1). The 'Book of Ballymote' was a book by and for those with an abiding interest in history. History-writing of all types, Irish, biblical and classical, provides the manuscript's unifying thread.

In this, as we have seen, the manuscript was not unique. In conception and content the 'Book of Ballymote' bears closest comparison with the 'Book of

14 Elizabeth Duncan (2018) has argued that the script previously associated with this single scribe represents eight distinct palaeographical hands, a number of whom worked closely together and some of whom acted as relief scribes for others.

15 Ó Concheanainn 1981, 21; Ó hUiginn 2018b, 201–204.

16 Freeman 1944, 372–373.

17 Ó Concheanainn 1981, 19–21; for the historical context, see Ó hUiginn 2018b, 192–201.

18 Carey 2009, 23; Ó hUiginn 2018b, 203–204.

19 See Ralph 2018.

20 Mulchrone 1934, 436.

Lecan', which was also being written around this time. Much of the same historically-orientated material is preserved in the two manuscripts, and there are references to many of the same sources.[21] The connections between these two parchment compendia, as well as others of this period, most notably the 'Yellow Book of Lecan', are illustrative of intense, ongoing intercourse among proponents of learning in this period. In this mobile textual culture, sections of one manuscript might have functioned as a model for another, particularly when scribes were writing with similar intentions in mind. Like the Ballymote patron, Tomaltach Mac Donnchadha, the chieftain with which the 'Book of Lecan' is associated, Ruairí Ó Dubhda, would also have benefitted from the presentation of his dynasty's past within a broader historical framework. Common themes and texts bind this group of manuscripts together; yet each of these codices was meticulously designed and executed for its own particular purpose and bears witness to the specific concerns of patrons and households in terms of ancestry, identity and traditions. The elusive nature of the multifaceted meaning of each manuscript in its own right, may be challenging, but the glimpses it provides of individuality within an interconnected textual community should not be allowed to disappear from view.

3 Universal language

The grouping of material, as well as a manuscript's overall structure, can provide significant insights into the particular approach taken by its scribes. The 'Book of Lecan' commences with the 'Book of Invasions' (*Lebor Gabála Érenn*), positioning Ireland's history within that of the wider world. Moreover, one of the scribes included a different version of the same text later in the codex, to conclude it, if its current foliation records an earlier state of affairs. This particular recension of the 'Book of Invasions' also forms part of the 'Book of Ballymote', where it is surrounded by other biblical material, as well as texts pertaining to specific Irish dynasties. However, our manuscript opens with *Sex aetates mundi*, a universal account of the 'Six Ages of the World' in Irish. The subsequent narratives, which pertain specifically to Ireland, are to be read within this broad sweep of Christian, 'global' history. Significantly, it is with a group of vernacular adaptations of classical material, which do not form any part of the 'Book of Lecan', that the 'Book of Ballymote' ends. These are (in order of

21 Ó Muraíle 2018.

appearance) *Togail Troí* ('The Siege of Troy'), a dramatic expansion in Irish of *De excidio Troiae historia* ('The History of the Destruction of Troy') by Dares Phrygius; *Merugud Uilixis* ('The Wandering of Ulysses'), a revisionist recreation of the tale of Ulysses; and *Imthechta Aeniasa*, a prose rendering of the story of Vergil's *Aeneid*.[22] This particular grouping and the manuscript as a whole finishes with a history of Alexander the Great.[23] In commencing the codex with the 'Six Ages' text and in concluding with thematically related matter concerning Alexander the Great, the scribes of the 'Book of Ballymote' were following a carefully constructed and logical chronological plan. Moreover, the texts contained between these book-ends were interpreted in the light of the very deliberate focus on world history and historiography with which the manuscript begins and concludes. The local becomes global when viewed in this textual constellation; Irish events are positioned within a framework pertinent throughout the wider Christian scholarly world.

In employing this universal language, Irish scribes in this period do so primarily by means of the vernacular, though Latin is occasionally employed, as in a short text dealing with the 'Ages of the World', beginning *Ab Adam usque ad diluuium* in the 'Book of Ballymote'.[24] More frequently, Latin functions as a structural marker, orientating the reader and signalling the beginning of a new text. Its prominent use at the beginning of a number of interconnected chronological texts has added significance, since the narratives in question anchor world history, and Irish history as part of it, within a frame formed by precise synchronisms between events plotted to the same historical moments in different nations and empires.[25] The juxtaposition of histories is signalled linguistically with the dual Latin-Irish wording with which these texts begin. The beginning of the series is highlighted by the Latin phrase, *Prima etas mundi*, immediately followed by a translation: *.i. in ced ais don doman* 'i.e., the first age of the world' (Fig. 2).

Similarly, a cycle of poems on world kingdoms related to it is hailed with a Latin flourish announcing Adam, the first father (*Adam primus pater fuit*), followed by a description of Eve, the world's first woman, in the vernacular (Fig. 3). In introducing the 'Book of Invasions', the scribe repeats in Latin and the vernacular the biblical phrase 'in the beginning God created heaven and earth' (see Fig. 1). A compilation of British and Pictish pseudo-history based on the Latin text *Historia Brittonum* (the 'History of the Britons'), is prefaced by the

22 Mac Gearailt 2018.
23 Peters 1967.
24 Boyle 2018, 54–55.
25 See Boyle 2021, 137–140.

words of its supposed author *ego Neinnius Eluodugi discipulus* (Fig. 4).[26] Genealogical material is similarly introduced with a Latin account of the Flood (Fig. 5). Latin is thus an important part of the authors' scholarly discourse, but as part of an integrated linguistic and learned world. This integration is demonstrated clearly in the text of an elaborate topographic narrative contained in the manuscript, *Dindshenchas Érenn*, 'Historical Knowledge about Ireland's Notable Places' (Fig. 6).

Authority is established with reference to a fabricated account of how the material was related to the scholar Amairgen, at a gathering hosted by the sixth-century king, Diarmait mac Cerbaill. Amairgen's informant was a venerable elder, Fintan, who had lived since the Flood in various bodily forms, and so recounted how the land of Ireland had been inhabited from the time of Cessair, granddaughter of Noah, to Diarmait's own time.[27] The account then commences with the story of Tara (*Temair*), a place depicted as of central importance in Ireland's pre-history. The title 'king of Tara' signified the most powerful king of Ireland in early medieval sources. Explanations of the name link it with Ireland's early settlers; etymologically deconstructed as *Tea-múr*, Temair is explained as the rampart (*múr*) of Tea, who was married, according to successive versions, to a grandson or son of Míl of Spain, from whom the origins of the Irish are traced in texts such as the 'Book of Invasions' and elsewhere. Alternatively, according to the account, the name is derived from *Teipe-múr*, the rampart of Teiphis, daughter of the king of Spain, which Tea imitated in having her own *múr* constructed and which became her burial mound.[28]

The explanatory approach adopted here is that of Isidore of Seville, whose seventh-century *Etymologiae* became influential in Irish learned circles very soon after its composition. Isidorean analysis of words through their division into distinct elements was taken up in medieval Ireland with creativity and skill and also applied to the vernacular, as this example of Temair shows.[29] In the narrative of *Dindshenchas Érenn*, a third explanation of the name is then given in Latin, in which *Temair* is claimed to have its origin in the 'Greek word' *temorio*, the Latin equivalent of which *conspicio* is also provided.[30] The name is taken as a single entity and unnamed authors affirm (*auctores affirmant*) that 'every

26 Van Hamel 1932: 1–2.

27 Stokes 1894, 277, 278–279.

28 Stokes 1894, 277–279, § 1–2.

29 See Baumgarten 1990.

30 This is etymology based on a constructed correspondence with the first element of Temair. Michael Clarke has suggested to me that the underlying word implied here is probably θεωρέω 'I observe, I watch', as the exact semantic match with the Latin *conspicio* wold suggest.

conspicuous and eminent place, whether on a plain or in a house, or wherever it may be, may be called by this word *Temair*'.[31] In this way, the pre-eminence of the place Temair, positioned as the first in a narrative of conspicuous and eminent places, and the name of which itself designates 'a conspicuous and eminent place' (*locus conspicuous et eminens*) is underlined. And this additional emphasis is provided in Latin, Tara's special status being highlighted linguistically as well.

The linguistic intermingling continues, the Latin passage on Tara making reference to a further mark of the esteem of the place 'in an Irish proverb' (*in prouerbio Scotico*) which is then given in the vernacular *Temair na tuaithe agus Temair in taige* 'Temair of the land and Temair of the house'. The following explanation in Latin interprets the Irish phrase as meaning that Temair surpasses all other territories and households, and so legitimises what is understood as the appropriation by Temair, the best of eminent places, of a common noun, *temair*, meaning 'eminent place'. Moreover, the source for the proverb quoted is said to be a Glossary, specifically termed in a parallel manuscript – but not in the 'Book of Ballymote' – as a 'Glossary of Cormac'.[32] A ninth-century glossary associated with a king-bishop of Cashel, Cormac mac Cuilennáin, has survived in a number of versions, some of which do indeed preserve the proverbial phrase, while associating the name Temair with a 'corrupted Greek form', *temorio*, equated with Latin *conspicio*.[33] The proverb in this Glossary is linked to the meaning of Temair proposed therein: an eminent place with a view, whence is said 'Temair of the land and Temair of the house'. 'Temair of the land' is then specified as a hill (*tulach*), while 'Temair of the house' is a sunny bower or upper room (*grianán*).[34] Notwithstanding this variation and the contrast between the vernacular of 'Cormac's Glossary' and the predominant Latin of this passage in the *Dindshenchas*, it is clear that both relate to a common source.

In the context of the version of *Dindshenchas Érenn* in the 'Book of Ballymote' (and related manuscripts),[35] the alternation between Latin and Irish is an integral part of the introduction to the narrative, highlighting the superior status of

31 Stokes 1894, 278, 280 § 4. Stokes' edition and translation is from a variant manuscript, Rennes, Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole, 598, identical with the 'Book of Ballymote' in the case of this passage, except in one instance discussed below.

32 Rennes, Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole, 598: see Stokes 1894, 278, 280 § 4.

33 See Moran 2011, 45, no. 102.

34 Meyer 1912, 105 § 1212. The variant versions of this text, including the entry of Temair, can be compared with one another on the Early Irish Glossaries Database (search term *Temair*): <https://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/> (accessed on 21 Oct. 2021).

35 See Stokes 1894, 279.

Temair, the first place described in this extended landscape narrative. A Latin source may also underlie this section, as we have seen, while biblical citations, as well as passages from other Latin texts, are found elsewhere in the manuscript as well. In other instances, Latin words and phrases function as stylistic markers, a number of which were noted above. Deliberately used in tandem, therefore, Irish and Latin form part of a learned cultural continuum within the manuscript in which both languages play their part. What is revealed in the 'Book of Ballymote' is an extended, unified space of inter-language transfer and connection in what could have been a crevice between languages. The interstices between languages have become core and give meaning to the whole.

4 Universal history

In the same way, the biblical and classical Latin history within the manuscript's pages accords significance and structure to the entire content. The international context has been internalised, and through it Ireland's history is enriched by and incorporated into a Latinate cultural world, expressed predominantly in the vernacular, though Latin is used for strategic and stylistic effect throughout the 'Book of Ballymote', as described above. The strategic positioning of *Sex aetates mundi* and material concerning Alexander the Great as the manuscript's two pole points provides a potent illustration of this approach. Following on from the story of Troy, the journey of Ulysses and the adventures of Aeneas are related in correct chronological order, the story of Alexander is also given its proper place on the same timeline some centuries on. Though thematically linked to the preceding classical material, in that it too relates the adventures of a hero conquering the east, it is more firmly anchored in time than are the distant Trojan tales, being located in the fourth century BCE. It is the Alexander material, however, which draws the story of Troy and its aftermath into the purview of world history as recounted in the 'Book of Ballymote' (and elsewhere). Troy becomes part of universal history structured by the Christian concept of time when linked with the biblical material with which the manuscript opened, the 'Six Ages of the World' and related texts. Moreover, Alexander functions as a chronological lynchpin for the whole, since it is in his person that imperial power was seen to have shifted from Babylon in the east, via Alexander's Macedonia, to Rome, the Babylon of the West. At the centre of this fundamental concept of *translatio imperii*, Alexander's rulership was pivotal in the successful 'transfer of rule' between kingdoms that defined the ordered passing of time

signalling continuity.[36] In Aeneas' Rome, cradle of Christianity, the new religion could then go on to triumph and thrive.

For medieval authors, Alexander's importance also stemmed from the fact that he was a biblical figure, featuring in the first chapter of the First Book of Maccabees (1: 1–10). This in turn ensured that he was assigned pivotal importance in the elucidation of the scheme of world kingship by the Church Fathers.[37] Jerome, who produced the Vulgate translation of the Bible, cast Alexander as the third of four beasts that emerge from the water in the account of Daniel's vision in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7: 3, 17–18, 22).[38] In this interpretation, Daniel's four great kingdoms represented by the beasts are the Assyrians and the Persians, the third being Alexander's Macedonians, and the fourth the Romans.[39] According to the Ages of the World chronology, Alexander's kingdom was in the fifth age. In returning to Alexander, therefore, to complete his history, the conscious creator of the interlinked network of texts preserved in the 'Book of Ballymote' was reminding his reader of contemporary history before Christ was due to come again. Having commenced with the 'Six Ages' as set out in his version of *Sex aetates mundi*, he brought his reader round once more to that pivotal point in time before the final age.[40]

When taken together, the universal history to which these opening and closing accounts contribute became greater than the sum of its parts. In the case of the story of Alexander and *Sex aetates mundi*, which are most intimately linked, the periodisation of ages of the latter, when read alongside the division into kingdoms of the former, provided a unified history of space and time. Moreover, that history becomes more comprehensive when one text is read in light of the other: specifically, 'The Story of Alexander' (*Scéla Alaxandair*) provides an augmented account of the fifth age. While this period is also related in the Irish *Sex aetates mundi*, that text is concerned with the earlier ages to a much greater degree. In this way, in conjunction with one another, *Sex aetates mundi* and *Scéla Alaxandair* provide a punctuated linear world history of universal time. Read within the framework provided by the 'Six Ages' text, the account of Alexander's

36 The classic discussion remains Goez 1958 and see Rubenstein 2019 for a recent contribution, for which reference I am indebted to Elizabeth Boyle; the concept in an early English context is analysed in Leneghan 2015. Elizabeth Boyle (2021, especially 118–150) provides a detailed analysis of the chronological framework and underlying concepts in an Irish scholarly milieu.

37 Tristram 1989, 148.

38 Migne 1884, cols 529-534 (S. Eusebius Hieronymus, *Commentariorum in Danielis* VII).

39 Tristram 1990, 660.

40 See Boyle 2021, 118–150.

kingdom is anchored in concrete fashion in relation to other world events and the Alexander material links Trojan origins and Christian history, as we have seen. These book-ends then provide a context for the account of Ireland's history developed in other narratives in the 'Book of Ballymote'.

The many historiographical compositions, co-ordinating and juxtaposing discrete histories and lineages in a universal frame, furnish details for aspects of that history in turn. The 'Six Ages' theme continues to be explored in a series of synchronistic texts following on from *Sex aetates mundi*, as noted above. *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, which then follows, was also clearly understood as part of this wider scheme. Moreover, the focus on nations so prevalent in *Sex aetates mundi* is augmented by the account of the origin of their languages at the Tower of Babel, as recounted in *Auraicept na nÉces* ('The Poets' Primer'), also preserved in our codex.[41] In addition, a foundation is provided for the exploration of the history of Britain set out in *Historia Brittonum*, an Irish version of which is also found in the 'Book of Ballymote', as we have seen (see Fig. 4). The classical adaptations with which the manuscript closes provided an extra dimension. In the case of the Troy material, its links with a universal history are consciously highlighted and these are explained further by means of Alexander at the end. In this way, the manuscript offers a coherent, comprehensive account of regional, Irish and world history within a carefully constructed frame.

5 Language, history and learning

History of all hues, local, national and 'global', as interpreted by medieval scholars, therefore, is what we find in the 'Book of Ballymote'. This is a learned compendium and scholarly interests predominante. The authors looked to earlier sources and the manuscript preserves material which predates its compilation by some considerable extent, including *Sex aetates mundi* and *Scéla Alaxandair*, both of which may be tenth century in date. Eighth-century material is also included, the core text of *Auraicept na nÉces* being a prominent example. Among the named poets whose work is featured are the early eleventh-century eulogist, Cúán ua Lothcháin, as well as twelfth-century practitioners, Gilla Mo Dutu ua Casaide and Gilla na Náem ua Duinn. A poem by a contemporary of the Ballymote scribes, Seán Ó Dubhagáin, is also recorded in the manuscript. In the main, however, our manuscript presents the writing of previous centuries, with

41 See Hayden 2018.

tenth-, eleventh- and twelfth-century material being to the fore. The authority of many now lost codices is acknowledged; the names of a number of them, such as *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (the 'Book of Drumsnat') and *Lebor Lothra Ruadáin* (the 'Book of Lothra, of Ruadán'), are known also from elsewhere. The focus of the 'Book of Ballymote' on history-writing links it to earlier extant vernacular manuscripts, as noted above. Synchronisation and the construction of integrated history, encompassing sacred and secular, local and 'global', ages and empires, were matters of immense import in the learned milieu of medieval Ireland. Compositions dating from the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, including *Sex Aetates Mundi*, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, as well as a plethora of classical adaptations, attest to cultivation of this interest in particular in that period. This intellectual activity retained currency, however, as our analysis of the content of the 'Book of Ballymote' has shown.

The 'Book of Ballymote' is a monumental testimony to the use of universal history as a structuring principle and conscious craft. Read as part of a 'global', providential continuum, local genealogies and the dynastic history of Tomaltach Mac Donnchadha, the Book's possible patron, were granted added status and prestige. In opening the codex with *Sex aetates mundi*, the scribe may have been following the pattern of earlier codices; closing with material on Alexander which deliberately sought to echo the 'Six Ages' narrative was much more creative and skilful and accords the manuscript as a whole a polished structure based on a sense of synoptic unity. Reading the 'Irish Alexander' and the 'Six Ages' material as ends enveloping thematically related narratives illuminates the overall coherence of the 'Book of Ballymote'. It is as a classical, biblically-influenced account of a pivotal age in world history that the material is presented; its language of expression reflects the centuries of scholarly enterprise which informed its creation. In occupying the cultural space once between languages, it and its manuscript predecessors showcase a vision of history and a language of authoritative communication that is uniquely Irish, and simultaneously an up-to-date expression of outward-looking intellectualism positioning Ireland within a wider world.

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Fig. 1: The opening of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (the 'Book of Invasions'), Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, fol. 8ʳa, beginning *In principio creauit deus celum* et *ter*ram id est *ro thuissim*h *dia neam*h agus *talum*h *ar tus* (a vernacular translation following the Latin, 'in the beginning God created heaven and earth'). © Dublin Royal Irish Academy.

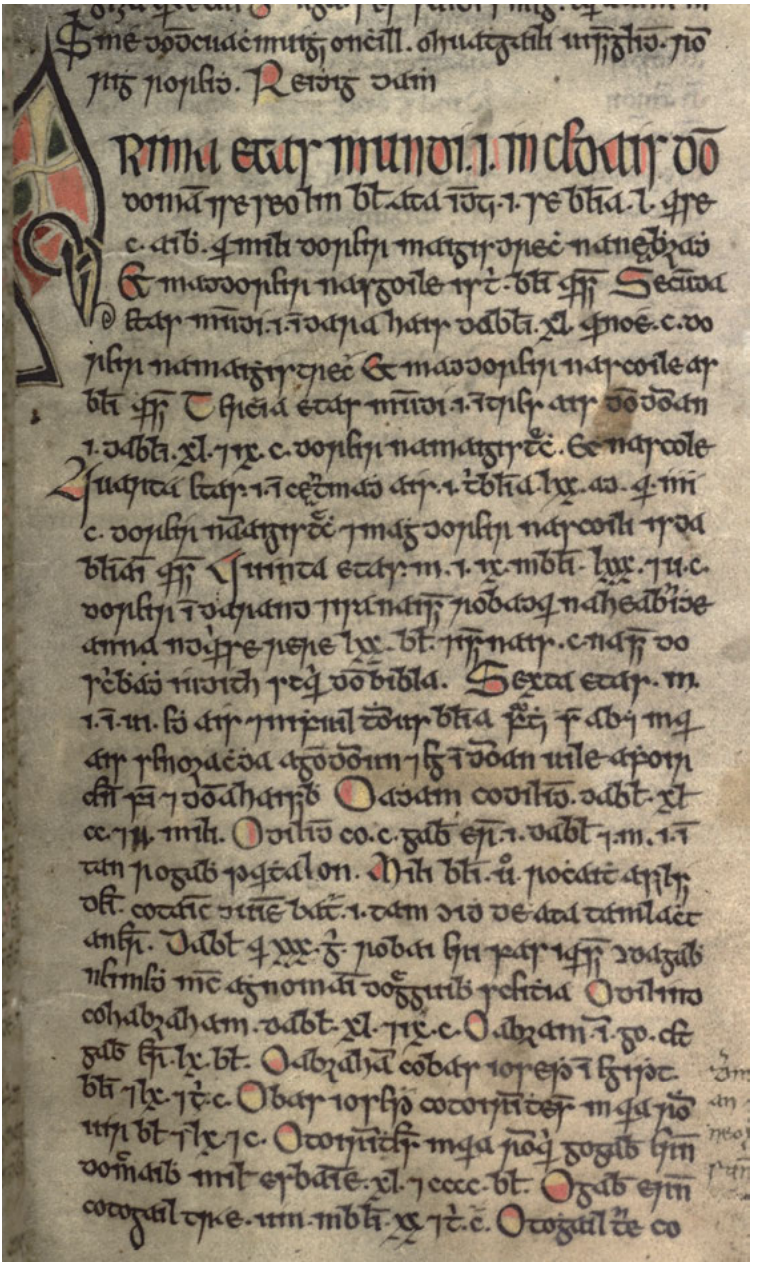

Fig. 2: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, fol. 5ra (detail), *Prima etas mundi .i. in ced ais don doman* (a vernacular translation following the Latin 'the first age of the world'). © Dublin Royal Irish Academy.

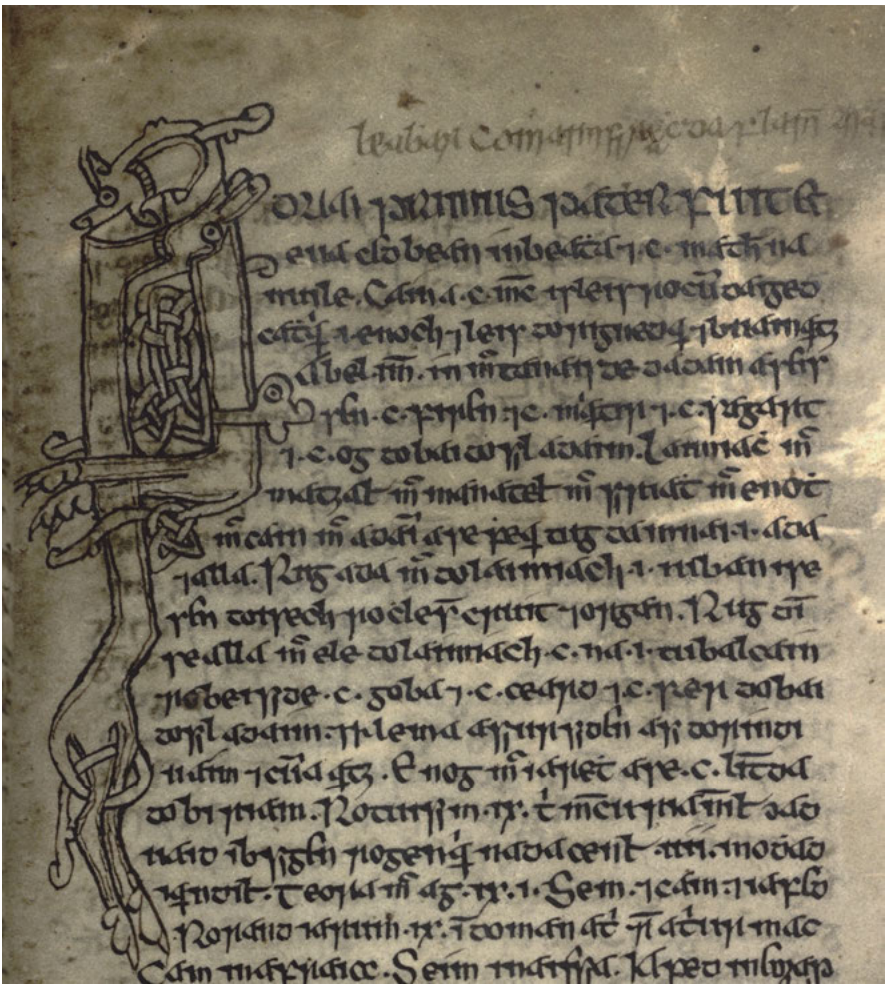

Fig. 3: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, fol. 6ra (detail), *Adam primus pater fuit* 'Adam was the first father', followed by a description of Eve in the vernacular: *Eua cedbean in beatha* 'Eve was the first woman of the world'. © Dublin Royal Irish Academy.

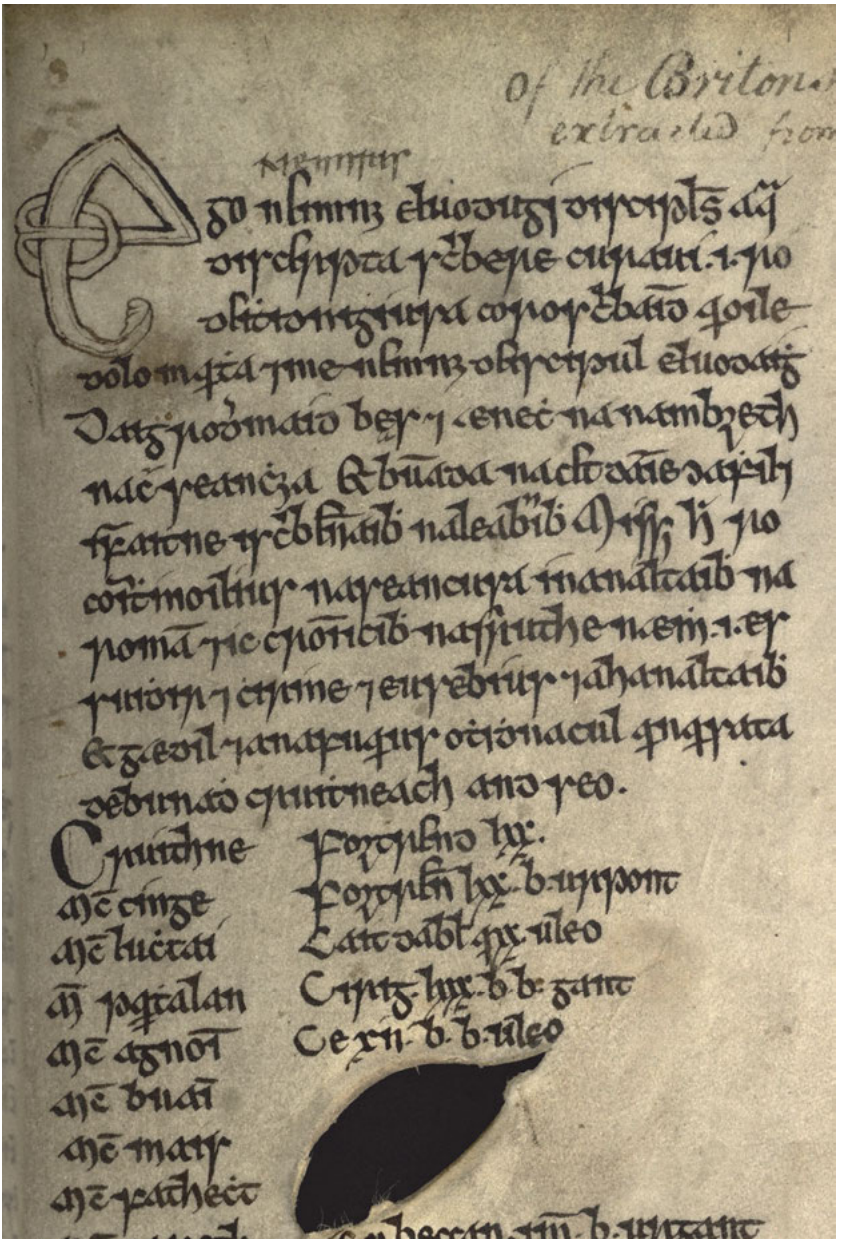

Fig. 4: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, fol. 113ra (detail), opening of the Irish version of the *Historia Brittonum* (the 'History of the Britons'), beginning *Ego Neinnius Eluodugi discipulus*. © Dublin Royal Irish Academy.

Fig. 5: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, fol. 43^{r}a (detail), genealogical tract beginning *Diluuium factum est .xl. diebus* et *.xl. noctibus super terram.* © Dublin Royal Irish Academy.

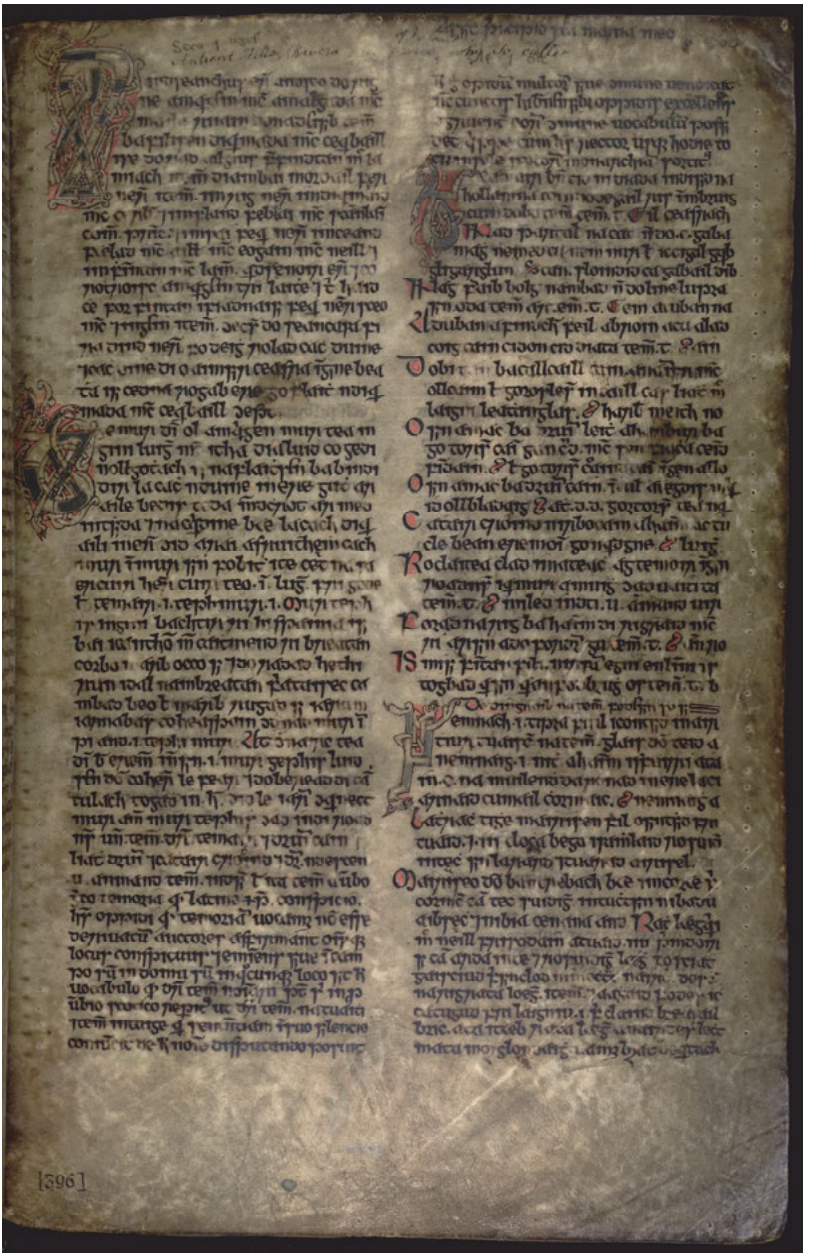

Fig. 6: Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 23 P 12, fol. 188r, beginning of *Dindshenchas Érenn*, the Latin passage discussed is at the bottom of column a and the top of column b. © Dublin Royal Irish Academy.