

SANCTI ET LINGUAE: THE CLASSICAL WORLD IN THE EYES OF HIBERNIA

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Iacobo Bogowith magistro sapienti ac benevolo hunc laborem dedico.

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Introduction

“Going to Rome/ Much toil, little profit” says an oft-quoted Old Irish poem.¹ It refers to a particular trip by two of St Brigid’s companions who forgot the message they were supposed to bring back from Rome. This poem is set in the time of Christian Rome after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, but the Old Irish view of classical Rome and Greece is more elusive than their opinion of ‘modern’ Rome. Hibernian scholars had their own corpus of native literature (including epic), at first oral and then written, but they also eagerly embraced--and changed--the language of Rome and Greece. After the Carolingian Renaissance, they began to show some familiarity with the literature of the classical world as well as a better grasp of the Greek language. Classical literature was “translated” (i.e. adapted) into Irish, while Greek patristic literature was translated into Latin.

Like Herodotus, the Irish were acutely aware that other great civilizations, such as Egypt and Israel, had a worthwhile claim to their attention. Rome and Greece might lie near the center of the world but other cultures did as well. The Hibernian scholars revered the Assyrians, Egyptians, Hebrews and other ancient cultures. The Irish poem *Versus de annis a principio* begins its section on secular history with an allusion to the foundation of Nineveh, the great city of the Assyrian empire.

*Supputantur et a Nino atque Semiramide
Anni quinque et quingenti usque regnum Attice*²

¹ *Techt do Róim,*
mór saitho, becc torbai;
in Rí con-daigi i foss,
manim bera latt ní fhogbai

² “Five hundred and five years are reckoned from Ninus and Semiramis all the way to the Attic kingdom” Howlett, “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts” pg. 2.

Similarly, an Irish glossator comments on Josephus as a completion of the histories of the Old Testament³

Ioseph[us] autem refert in libris αρχαιολογίας hunc psalmum et cxliiii stairscribnid libuir historiarum isintib ata fuidell scél ind rechto

Furthermore, the Irish believed that the legendary inventor of their language studied in Egypt during the process of compilation.⁴

Thus Greece and Rome were not idolized but properly valued. Lying outside the boundaries of the former Roman Empire, saturated as it was with Greek culture, they had their own body of literature which they studied and valued alongside whatever they gleaned from classical civilization. Thus, they had a reference point from which to evaluate whatever they were able to obtain from the Romans and Greeks. As the new Roman Empire developed in the court of Charlemagne, classical literature and language became more accessible to the Irish, but they never developed an undue reverence for it.⁵ They continued to scatter their own language and literature throughout Europe, and, when they translated the classics into their own language, they felt free to paraphrase and make additions to suit their own tastes. Furthermore, they could and did mix and match what they took from each culture: Roman words in Greek letters, Greek words in Roman, Statius with Homer.

Many scholars have examined the influence of the classical world on modern-day Ireland and her literature,⁶ and classical scholars often write about the Romans' view of Ireland,⁷ but little systematic examination has been made into what the Old Irish thought about classical Rome

³ Josephus (a writer of a book of histories in which are the remains of the stories of the Law) reports this psalm and the 144th in his book Ancient Histories." Glosses on Psalm CXVIII in *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, p. 6

⁴ *Auraicept ne nEces*, 1

⁵ Stanford examines this briefly in his article, "Towards a History of Classical Influences," especially pg. 17-19.

⁶ See for example the works of Brian Arkins: *Hellenising Ireland: Greek and Roman Themes in Modern Irish Literature*, *Builders of My Soul*, *Greek and Roman Themes in Yeats*, and *Greek and Roman Themes in Joyce*. Stanford provides a brief survey in the second half of "Towards a History of Classical Influences in Ireland."

⁷ See Rankin's *The Celts and the Classical World* and Freeman's *Ireland and the Classical World*.

and Greece in the pre-Carolingian period. Covering the years from St. Patrick (end of the 5th century) to the dawn of the Carolingian age (end of the 8th), the Irish left written indications of their idea of the world that had passed them by while conquering and assimilating their Celtic neighbors in Gaul and Britain.

The evidence manifests variety and ambiguity. Irish schoolmasters are criticized by their contemporaries for teaching the immoral tales of the classical world at the expense of other, more profitable studies. They were entranced with Greek words but did not have the means to master the language. They played a part in the Carolingian renaissance, which attempted to re-found the Roman empire, but their Brehon law showed little influence from Roman--or even Christian—culture.⁸ An Old Irish poem compares a Columcille to Ovid,⁹ but Columbanus tells the pope that Rome has nothing worthwhile but the bones of the saints. Indeed, though many Irish saints doing penance left Ireland on pilgrimage for the sake of God, few ever went to Rome, Athens, or any other center of the ancient world. Their own political system, centering first upon extended family units ruled by innumerable kings and then upon monastic centers ruled by innumerable abbots, seems more like that of Homeric Greece than that of democratic Greece, republican Rome, or Rome of the empire. Indeed, classical Greece in the eyes of the Irish was Achaia in the age of the heroes who fought valiantly against both men and monsters, not the world of Pericles, Socrates or Euripides.¹⁰

⁸ The Jewish Law of the Old Testament seems to have been the most powerful influence. See for example Ó Corráin's "Women and the Law in Early Ireland" in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: women's status in church, state and society*

⁹ *Boe obeid* (p. 264, Stokes "The Bodleian Amra Choluimb chille" *Revue Celtique* 20:30-55,132-183, 248-289, 400-437). Some scholars do not accept Ovid as the translation of Obeid but the context makes it probable. A later gloss explaining the line assumes this meaning in its first explanation but not in its second

¹⁰ Socrates and the other great figures of classical Athens are mere names to the Irish as is evident from the Annals of Insfallen (see Appendix 1). The Irish may have absorbed this attitude from the only classical author with whom they had direct contact. Apparently, Vergil also skipped over the period we associate with the greatness of Greece. "The chief areas of Greek influence on Vergil, and not just in the *Georgics*, are either archaic or Hellenistic; he

Although they mastered the language of Rome, the Irish were not experts in Greek—so much is clear. The little knowledge they had was obtained through glossaries, interlinears,¹¹ Priscian’s grammar and Isidore. Contacts with Spain in the pre-Carolingian period brought the works of Isidore of Seville to Ireland. Isidore, with his etymologies and sprinklings of Greek and Hebrew words, was a great favorite with Irish scholars. In fact, Isidore may have been available in Ireland before he was on the continent. All the grammarians of this period (such as Virgilius Maro Grammaticus¹²) borrow from him liberally, sometimes without mentioning his name. On the whole, they adopted his explanations of words when these explanations reinforced their view of Rome and Greece.

Irish scholars took great pains to learn the little they did about the ancient world, and the reason for this lies in their attitude toward classical civilization. Rome and Greece each represent a language and, as an extension of this aspect, a foundation of a particular aspect of the world. In this context, language does not mean literature or texts but rather the smaller, more fundamental units of letter, number, and word. The Roman world represents the primacy of written language, as opposed to the primacy of oral language in native Irish culture, and a center, as opposed to a periphery. As the Irish were keenly aware, language is composed of both letters and numbers.¹³ Indeed, in every facet of their culture, numbers play a vital and significant role.

seems to have found little active use for the literature of the classical period” (Thomas, Introduction to the *Georgics*, pg. 6)

¹¹ Heavily influenced by the Irish, Bede’s competence in Greek, initially derived mainly from an interlinear of the Bible, was similar to that of the Irish in the early part of his life. Later, he developed more skill in the language and was able to correct many of his earlier works. (“Evidences of a Knowledge of Greek in England and Ireland in the Age of Bede”) The Irish had their opportunity in the Carolingian renaissance. John Scottus Eriugena particularly impressed his contemporaries by his translations and Greek verses.

¹² For a long time scholars believed that Vergil was a Spanish Jew because of his use of Hebrew and early familiarity with Isidore. But this view is no longer supported. He is now identified as thoroughly Irish.

¹³ I am indebted to Jim Bogowith for his discussions of the classical division of learning into letter and number with me. Howlett hints at the Irish fusion of these two aspects at the end of his “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts:” We see clear evidence of the applied genius of seventh-century Irishmen who had completely mastered grammar as the basis for the linguistic studies of the *triuuium* and computus as the basis for the mathematical studies of the *quadruuium*, and fused their studies into a comprehensively coherent unity” pg. 70.

The tendency of the Irish to see the classical world in smaller units instead of larger was the result of both cultural inclination and necessity. Because of the decline in European learning in this period, the Irish could not have obtained a more encompassing view without a great deal of difficulty, but they did not feel this loss as keenly as they did the paucity of materials on Greek and Latin words, numbers and grammar. Even if they had had more of the classical world available to them, they would probably have devoted themselves to the intriguing details, since the pagan world was not of enough importance to justify comprehensive analysis.¹⁴ Thus their understanding of classical culture is implicit in their texts but not formulated in so many words.

This thesis will examine Irish views of the classical world primarily through texts written in Ireland and on the continent by Irishmen up to the beginning of the Carolingian period (with brief glances to the period ahead¹⁵), but also through some archaeological evidence and a few references to Irish scholars by their contemporaries. This Irish evidence will show that the Greeks represented the law of number together with great, ancient deeds (associated with each other through the primal act of Creation) while the Romans represented the law of letter with the accompanying great words.¹⁶ Taken individually, remarks made by early medieval Irish writers about classical language and literature may seem random or trivial to the casual observer, but this is not the case. Though they did not make their conception of Rome and Greece explicit, they nevertheless betrayed this very conception by their use of classical material.

¹⁴ St. Augustine, widely read by the Irish and the entire Christian world, compares the Christian use of the pagan past with the Hebrew slaves taking the spoils of Egypt with them in their exodus. As only certain Egyptian objects would be suitable/useful for plundering, the Christian should take what is suitable/useful and leave the rest. The irony, of course, is that St. Augustine himself proposed and elaborated one of the most comprehensive and wide-ranging analyses of classical culture in his *City of God*.

¹⁵ As there is always some dispute about dating for this period, I have generally taken the majority view or the most thoroughly examined view. If the evidence for settling on a particular date (or range of dates) seems too slim, then I have not used the text in my paper.

¹⁶ I use translations of texts, when available, as references but I usually make them more literal to demonstrate the various points I am making.

This paper begins by demonstrating in the first chapter the use of Roman authors as a mine of great words. The second chapter outlines the employment of the Greek language for numerical purposes associated with noble, foundational themes. The connections of these themes in Greek culture are the subject of the third chapter along with the use of Roman myth and history in their more humble role. As the fourth chapter shows, this role is primarily one of law and arrangement of the world and objects in the world.

Latin Letter: Great Words

The power of a word was not underestimated in the Irish world. During the pre-Christian era, the Irish were a pre-literate society that relied on an elite caste of experts to memorize and compose their literature. This group of highly trained poets was very powerful through their ability to satirize¹⁷ anyone who displeased them. The uttering of a satire against an individual was believed to have the power to cause physical blemishes. Certainly, it took away a person's honor until such time as it was removed. The fear of being satirized continued long after the Christianization of Ireland.¹⁸ Horace, who was known and referenced in Ireland when he had been forgotten elsewhere, may have been congenial to their native tradition of satire. The very word for satire in Old Irish, *aer*, was later given a Latin pedigree: *aer ab erumna*.¹⁹

Although the Irish believed that their Ogam alphabet had Greek ancestors, they referenced the Latinists when formulating its grammar. *Auraicept na nEces*,²⁰ (“The Scholars Primer”) an early Irish primer that went through numerous editions from the seventh century all the way through the Middle Ages, begins each section with a comparison between Latin and Irish grammar:

*Attaat di ernail forsind apgitir Laitindai .i. guttai 7 consona. Attat dano di ernail forsind beithi-luis-nin ind oguim .i. feda 7 taebomnae.*²¹

¹⁷ “Satirize” in this context is a technical term for an elaborate and powerful Irish ritual, *aer*.

¹⁸ This is evident in many of the saints' lives. In my paper “St. Brigid's Lepers”, I suggest that the numerous stories portraying obnoxious lepers (who seem to do and take whatever they want until St. Brigid takes them in hand) reflect the fear non-lepers had of being satirized by the lepers, who were themselves immune through their deformation.

¹⁹ “*Aer* from hardship” (O'Mulconry's Glossary, entry 75)

²⁰ Ahlquist has analyzed the texts we have and ascertained the early seventh-century core upon which the later accretions were built. He has published this “canonical text” omitting the later material in *The Early Irish Linguist*.

²¹ “There are two categories in the Latin alphabet, that is vowels and consonants. There are two categories in the Ogam B-L-N, that is vowels and consonants” (2,1-2,2). Notice the word for alphabet *apgitir* (originally *aibgitir*) which is based on the first three letters of the Greek alphabet. See chapter 2. Ogam B-L-N is the equivalent of A-B-C.

In some aspects, the two grammars are not exactly equivalent, as the Irish grammarian notes. For instance, Irish grammar did not recognize a class of semivowels. However, the differences are slight compared with the numerous similarities. Chapters three and four of the Irish grammar begin much as the second chapter did:

*Insce tra: cis lir insci do-chuisin? Ni ansae: a tri ferinsce 7 baninsce 7 deminsce lasin nGoidel .i. mascul 7 femem 7 neuter lasin Laitneoir.*²²

*Secht n-etargaire tra do-chuisin .i. a ngrad condeilg lasin Laitneoir is etargaire a n-ainm lasin filid.*²³

Thus, the Irish scholars associated Rome with the law of letters as they associate Greece with the law of number.²⁴

The Muses play a role in several places in the Annals of Inisfallen.²⁵ The nymph Carmentis is responsible for giving letters to the Latins. The Greeks, on the other hand, received letters from one of their legendary kings, Cadmus, the founder of Thebes.²⁶ Thus, the Romans were the recipients of supernatural letters while the Greeks had only human intervention. This may account for the deficiencies perceived by the Irish in Greek grammar.

The Greek grammatical rules are specifically identified as different from the Latin laws—and much less clear. Virgil the grammarian complains,

*Hic accusatiuus casus est, qui non Grecus, sed Latinus, non dubius, sed fortis et stabilis. Et enim Grecus accusatiuus tam incertus est et tam obscurus, ut, utrum sit accusatiuus an alius, non nisi per uerbum agens facile posit agnosci. Vnde et multi nostrorum pro explanandis casuum declinationibus Latinam regulam in Grecis extorquere uoluerint.*²⁷

²² “Gender then: how many genders are there? Not difficult: three, man-gender, woman-gender, and non-gender according to the Irishman, masculine feminine and neuter according to the Latinist” (3,1-3,2)

²³ “There are seven distinctions then, that is the degree of comparison according to the Latinist, distinction is the name according to the *fili* (Irish poet)” (4,1)

²⁴ See chapter 2

²⁵ Number 16 in Appendix 1

²⁶ Number 6 Appendix 1

²⁷ “This is the accusative case, which is not Greek but Latin—not doubtful, but strong and stable. For the Greek accusative is so uncertain and so obscure that, whether it may be accusative or otherwise is not able to be known

Further on, he refers to the universally acknowledged *inscientiam Graeci sermonis*²⁸ when he discusses the substitution of the infinitive for other moods. He and his (imaginary?) grammarian colleagues name themselves after Roman figures, both imaginary and genuine. Two other grammarians share his own name of *Virgilius* although he adds for himself the epithet Maro on the strength of his teacher's praise. *Hic filius meus Maro uocabitur, quia in eo antique Maronis spiritus rediuiuit.*²⁹ Other modern 'sources' include 'scholars' named Cicero, Terence, Aeneas and Lucan. Even if these scholars did not exist and the Irish Virgil was writing a satire as some scholars claim, a satire or parody is only effective if it contains some element of truth. Despite, the prestige of Greek (or even of Hebrew and Egyptian for that matter), Irish teachers named themselves after famous Latin figures as more appropriate to their field of study.

The Latin heritage from classical authors was a source of wise words for the Irish *literati*. There is an Irish gloss that contains an explanation of a reply--from St. Jerome to someone asking to translate his works into Greek--that is a direct quotation of Horace: *in siluam ne ligna feras.*³⁰ The Irishman notes this maxim means that the Greeks have many translations already so that it is useless to make one. While Irish scholars do not quote from Greek classical sources,³¹ they frequently draw upon Latin ones. Although these quotes are sometimes dubious, the Irish themselves did not know this and at least thought they were quoting from classical Latin sources. One author uses Cicero to illustrate a grammatical point.

easily unless going though the verb. Whence many of ours wish to twist the Latin rule in the Greeks for explaining the declensions of cases."

²⁸ "the ignorance of Greek speech/grammar" (*Epistola*, III, 499)

²⁹ Epitoma XII, 125-126 "This my son will be called Maro because in him the spirit of the ancient Maro lives again"

³⁰ In the Milan glosses on the Psalms *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* 1, pg. 10

³¹ They do not even quote Greek prayers exactly. The Greek Our Father written by Dorbbene at the beginning of the 8th century shows some Byzantine spelling changes from the New Testament text (Howlett, *Insular Inscriptions*, pgs. 142-3).

*Suate inquit uiri ut paci sint Romanae. Hic Cicero inuentuosissimus est in omni arte ut in prouerbium ueniret apud omnes philosophiae auctores: Non legit qui non legit Ciceronem.*³²

At Columbanus' Irish foundation in Bobbio, Italy, a palimpsest of Cicero's *De republica* shows that this author was avidly read in the early days of Irish scholarship.

Not all quotations are spurious, however. In Muirchu's *Vita Sancti Patricii*, there is a line taken almost entirely from Vergil's *Aeneid*, *nox non inruit, et fuscis tellurem non amplexerat alis*.³³ Immediately afterwards, he quotes from a later, Christian source, Sedulius' *Carmen Paschale noctis et astriferas non induxerat Hesperus umbras*.³⁴ "O'Mulconry's Gossary" quotes from Varro.

*Varro autem dicit: 'Eolus rector fuit istarum insularum', et quia ex earum nebulis et fumo futuros praedicabat flatus uentorum ab imperitis deus uenti dictus est.*³⁵

Vergil the grammarian takes a line from Vergil's *Eclogues* (3:90, *Qui Baviium non odit amet tua carmina, Maevi*) and makes a few changes: *Qui favum mellis non amat, odit tua carmina, Maevi*.³⁶ An Irish glossator was not able to discover who this Maeuius was and makes a note of the fact, presumably so that future readers can apply themselves to clearing up the mystery, as if every word of Vergil is precious, even an obscure name. Another Virgilian quotation is found in

³² "He says, 'Men, persuade your brothers that they may be for a Roman peace.' This Cicero is the most clever in every art so that he came into the proverb among all the authors of philosophy: 'He does not read who does not read Cicero'" (Virgil Maro Grammaticus, *Epistola*, I, lines 219-223)

³³ Book 2, chapter VIII, lines 5-6, echoing *Aen.* VIII 369, in Howlett's *Muirchu Moccu Mactheni's Life of Saint Patrick*, pg. 120-121

³⁴ *Carm. Pasch.* III 221

³⁵ "Varro however says, 'Aeolus was the ruler of those islands', and because he was predicting the future blasts of the winds from their clouds and steam, he was called god of the wind by the unskilled" (entry 404). See chapter 3 for the Irish tendency to make the gods concrete by re-designating them as ancient heroes rather than deities.

³⁶ "Whoever does not love the honeycomb of honey, hates your songs, Maeuus." Law, *Wisdom Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century*, pg. 14.

the *De ratione computandi: Casta faue Lucina*.³⁷ A few lines from the beginning of the *Hisperica Famina* are reminiscent of the *Georgics* (2, 452 & 4, 178-9):

*Uelut innumera apium concauis discurrunt examina apiastris
Melchillentaque sorbillant fluent alueariis
Ac solidos scemicant rostris fauos.*³⁸

Here, also, the bees are being compared to men fighting (*in agonem*),³⁹ although the ‘fight’ is actually a verbal contest. A few lines later, the world of the *Eclogues* appears.

*Seu tinolam tensis suscitata odam chordis
Forte concauas sonoreis proflas cicutas armoniis...
Quod lanigeras odorosa obseruas per Pascua bidentium turmas.*⁴⁰

Bidens can refer to anything with two prong/horns, or to any animal of sacrifice (although sheep is the most common meaning in this context). In an Irish context, it may mean cow or bull so that Vergil’s pastoral world is transferred to Ireland.

The Irish knew Vergil first hand, although he is often quoted from memory. Explanations of context for grammatical illustrations in grammar books prove that they were not relying solely on secondary material for their knowledge of Vergil.⁴¹ “O’Mulconry’s Glossary” explains the word ‘eclogues’ *eclogue .i. congregaciones*.⁴² The Irish were quite familiar with Vergil’s

³⁷ (63) This is taken from Isidore. Lucina is the goddess of childbirth and in this context she is the source for the word moon. The Irish would have connected childbirth with a Roman goddess rather than a Greek one because of their association of the Romans with ordering and ruling (see chapter 4 below) the earth—which for the Irish was intimately bound up with childbearing since God’s command in Genesis. *Benedixitque illis Deus et ait crescete et multiplicamini et replete terram et subicite eam et dominamini piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli et universis animantibus quae moventur super terram* (1 :28). God’s curse after the fall also links childbearing with tilling the soil.

³⁸ “As when countless swarms of bees run about in the hollow beehives from the bee-eaters and swallow the flowing honey-flood and construct the solid honeycombs with their beaks” (lines 41-43).

³⁹ (Line 36). Later the comparison is used to illustrate how much the speaker surpasses his opponent:

Sonoreusque certantium frangor militum

Mellisono antecedit apium strepitu (lines 112-3).

⁴⁰ “Or do you raise a ringing ode on tight strings

Perhaps you fill the hollow hemlock pipe with sonorous harmonies

Because you watch the wool bearing troop of sheep in smelly pastures” (lines 66-9). Herren notes that the middle line also resembles Lucr. 5, 1382, *agrestis docuere cauas inflare cicutas*.

⁴¹ Hofman, “Some New Facts Concerning the Knowledge of Vergil in Early Medieval Ireland”

⁴² entry 359

Eclogues and *Georgics*. Besides glossing these two works extensively, they introduced its specialized vocabulary into their own texts. They believed their own word for ivy was related to the Latin word encountered again and again in Vergil. *Eden[n] ab [h]edera*.⁴³ The Irish Virgil uses his Roman namesake to speak of creation, producing a variation that sounds like the beginning of Genesis and Vergil's Aeneid. *In principio celum terramque mare omniaque astra spiritus intus fovet*.⁴⁴ Vergil's words are worthy even of adorning Genesis.

Vergil adorns the pages of the saints' *vitae* as well. Tirechan shows a special fondness for the phrase *cacuminibus montis* in his *Collectanea*.⁴⁵ Likewise, several others of his phrases are reminiscent of the *Eclogues*. He introduces pastoral tree imagery repeatedly: *ulmo frondosso*.⁴⁶ The Old Irish gloss for *Eclogue V. 42 Tumulum .i. fert*⁴⁷ shows that the Irish were not very familiar with this particular vocabulary word, yet Tirechan employs it when referring to the (pagan) Irish grave mounds instead of the more usual *sepulcrum*. *Et exilit Patricius de curru suo et tenuit crucem et euellabat de gentili tumulo et posuit super faciem baptizati*.⁴⁸ Tirechan uses the word *sepulcrum* countless times in his *Collectanea*, but in this instance, he uses *tumulus* to make a distinction between the Christian tomb and the pagan one. *Amnis*, another word gleaned

⁴³ entry 372

⁴⁴ *Epitoma* 12:116-117 cf. Aeneid 6:724-726
*principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentis
 lucentemque globum lunae Titaniaque astra
 spiritus intus alit totamque infusa per artus*

⁴⁵ For instance *Collectanea* III, i, 1:3 & III, i, 38:3

⁴⁶ *Collectanea*, III, i, 34:1

⁴⁷ Stokes, *Old Irish Glosses on the Bucolics*, gloss 19. Only the obscure words are glossed in this text so presumably it was for the benefit of Irish readers who knew Latin thoroughly but did not have any experience with classical texts.

⁴⁸ "And Patrick leaped from his chariot and held the cross and was plucking it from the pagan mound and he placed it above the face of the baptized one" (*Collectanea* III, i, 41:3). The context here is a mistaken identity. An ignorant man had placed a cross commissioned by a Christian mother for her son's tomb on a neighboring pagan's tomb instead. Patrick speaks to the corpse of the pagan man asking him how he got the cross and, after the pagan man explains, he corrects the mistake. Earlier Patrick had spoken to another pagan man and had baptized him after raising him from the dead. The tomb for this pagan man is called a *sepulcrum* since he is a Christian-to-be.

from Virgil's eclogues, replaces the more usual *fluuius* on one of Patrick's journeys.⁴⁹ In their glosses on Virgilian lines in Priscian, Irish scholars show their concern with the actual context of the line although this is not strictly necessary for understanding the grammar. Thus, they were using Priscian not only as a source of grammar but as an aid to understanding a text (albeit a faulty and incomplete text as shown by a gloss on Aeneid XI, 499-500 *non inuenitur iste versus in virgilio ut dicunt*⁵⁰). Many of the glosses supply a speaker or a subject that is left out of Priscian's quotation: *fata, sibella* (gloss 1), *Iuno* (gloss 3), *Dido* (gloss 4, 6 & 8), *Aenea* (rare vocative form of Aeneas, gloss 5) *Aeneas* (gloss 7), *Carmentis* (gloss 9). Other glosses use the grammar as an aid to understanding what Vergil is saying (gloss 2 & 16).

Adamnan may have taken a line interpolated into Solinus' *De mirabilibus mundi* (its revision known as *Polyhistor*) describing an Irish sword and uses it to describe a sword being used by Columcille to ransom a captive: *macheram*⁵¹ *beluinis ornatam dolatis protulit dentibus*.⁵² However, some scholars have argued that the passage attributed to Solinus in the Middle Ages was inserted by an Irish copyist⁵³ to supply a perceived deficiency in Solinus' description of Ireland, thereby reversing the usual direction of Latin words. Instead of borrowing from the classical Latin world, this scribe would contribute to it!

⁴⁹ *Collectanea*, III, i, 47:1 cf IV, ii, 1:7

⁵⁰ Gloss 14 (pg. 201) in Hofman's "Some New Facts Concerning the Knowledge of Vergil in Early Medieval Ireland" *Etudes Celtiques* 25: 189-212 Hofman has isolated the glosses referring to Vergilian quotations and numbered them 1-16. I will follow his numeration here.

⁵¹ *Machaera* is not the typical word (*gladius*) used for a sword in Latin but rather is a loan word from the Greek μάχαιρα which is related to μάχη (battle). An Irish sword decorated in the old style was akin to the great swords of the *Iliad*.

⁵² *Vita Columbae* 88b-89a "He proffered a sword adorned with beaten teeth of a great (sea) animal."

⁵³ Sharpe, *Life of Saint Columba*, p. 339. This hypothesis seems entirely plausible to me as Solinus is very negative and misinformed about Irish habits and geography in the genuinely authentic passage. That an Irish scribe might wish to balance his negative (mis)information with some actual positive points is not unlikely.

Latin phrases occur not only in grammars and literature but also in legal texts.⁵⁴ Irish legal scholars dropped the occasional Latin note in the almost entirely Old Irish law texts that were first written down during the pre-Carolingian period. For example, when a text refers to an earlier ruling, the text uses the phrase, *ut supra diximus*. The law protecting women and children from the violence of war (promulgated and composed in the Christian era of Ireland unlike most of the other laws), *Cain Adomnan*, expands on this use of Latin in its own document. Of the two recensions that have come down to us, one of them incorporates an entire section in Latin:

Incipit sentential angeli Adomnani
Adomnanus post .xiiii. annos hanc legem Deo rogavit ⁊ causa. Angelus sanctus Domini in nocte pentecosten ad eum ⁊ post annum in altero pentecosten ⁊ poculum arripuit ⁊ percussit latus eius ⁊ dixit ei: Exi in Hiberniam ⁊ fac legem in ea ne mulieres ullo more ab homine occidentur iugulatione uel quacunque morte uel veneno uel in aqua uel in igne uel a quocunque peccode uel fouea uel canibus nisi in lectulo legitimo. Te oportet perficere legem in Hibernia Britaniaque propter matrem uniuscuiusque quod mater unumquemque portauerit ⁊ propter Mariam matrem Iesu Christi per quam totus est... Qui autem feminam ab ipso die mortificauerit penitentiam secundum legem non agens non solum Deo ⁊ Adomnani in aeternum peribit et maledictus erit sed maledicti erunt omnes qui audierint ⁊ non maledicent ⁊ non corripient eum secundum iudicium huius legis
*Ista est sentential angeli Adomnani.*⁵⁵

The ending phrase repeats the beginning phrase, giving the section a legal aura. The rest of the text is in Old Irish; only the speech of the angel summarizing the lengthy law and one other

⁵⁴ *Ancient Laws of Ireland* passim and *Cain Adomnan*

⁵⁵ Section 33 *Cain Adomnain* (pgs. 27-29 in Meyer's text)" After fourteen years Adamnan obtained this Law of God, and this is the cause. On Pentecost eve a holy angel of the Lord came to him, and again at Pentecost after a year, and seized a staff, and struck his side and said to him; 'Go forth into Ireland, and make a law in it that women be not in any manner killed by men, through slaughter or any other death, either by poison, or in water, or in fire, or by any other beast, or in a pit, or by dogs, but that they shall die in their lawful bed. Thou shalt establish a law in Ireland and Britain for the sake of the mother of each one, because a mother has borne each one, and for the sake of Mary mother of Jesus Christ, through whom all are... But he who from this day forward shall put a woman to death and does not do penance according to the Law, shall not only perish in eternity, and be cursed for God and Adamnan, but all shall be cursed that have heard it and do not curse him, and do not chastise him according to the judgement of this Law.' "The omitted section lays out the penalties for transgression which include cutting off the right hand and left foot before execution. The Angel tells Adomnan to go into Ireland because he was in Iona at the time.

sentence of the angel granting Adamnan's request that God send him this law⁵⁶ are in Latin.

Thus, although the Irish did not seem to respect Latin law enough to supplant their own native law, the legal texts used the Latin language to set a legal tone since the Romans were the lawgivers of the ancient world.

The Irish Virgil makes a distinction between what is allowed with Latin words as opposed to other languages. He describes a phenomenon he calls *scinderatio fonorum*, "the scrambling of sounds." Verses, words, syllables, and letters all participate in this *scinderatio*. In the midst of his numerous examples, Virgil issues a caveat:

*Sciat unusquisque scindentium peritorum, hoc inprimis curare se debere, ut quaecumque sic scindat solutio probet quomodo scindat. Non enim recte solui a quoquam potest quod non recte proponitur. Tum inde greca uel hebraea nomina uerbaue scindere debet praesumat quia hoc in neutra lingua habetur.*⁵⁷

Since scrambling is a trick of written letters (as opposed to numbers or speech), Latin is the *lingua* flexible in its word formations, not Greek. The Irish Virgil claims twelve different variations of *Latinitas* (some of them relate to classical Latin while others are more contemporary versions) while Greek is left to its uniformity:

Prima...est usitata, quae in usu Romanae eloquentiae habetur II Asena, hoc est notaria, quae una tantum littera pro toto fono contenta est, et haec quibusdam formulis picta III Semedia, hoc est nec tota inusitata nec tota usitata...IV Numeria, quae proprios numeros habet...V Metrofia, hoc est intellectualis...VI Lumbrosa, hoc est perlonga, cum pro uno usitato totus uersus scribitur...VII Sincolla, hoc est perbreuis, uersa uice cum totus uersus usitatus in uno continetur fono...VIII Belsauia, hoc est peruersa, cum casus nominum modosque uerborum transmutat...IX Presina, hoc est spatiosa, cum unum fonum multa usitata significant...X Militana, hoc est multimoda, cum pro uno fono usitato multa

⁵⁶ 'Omnia quae a Domino rogabis propter laborem tuum habebis' (section 15). This also has the flavor of a legal pronouncement from God.

⁵⁷ "Let each one of those skilled scramblers know that they ought to look after this first of all, that he may demonstrate whatever things he may scramble thus with a solution in the same way he may scramble. For whatever is not rightly proposed is not able to be solved rightly by anyone. So then, when he is responsible for scrambling Hebrew or Greek nouns or verbs, he presumes, because this is tolerated in neither language."

*ponuntur...XI Spela, hoc est humillima, quae semper res terrenes loquitur...XII Polema, hoc est superna, quae de superioribus tractat...hoc semper genere Virgilius loquebatur.*⁵⁸

The last kind of Latinity is the highest and is fittingly associated with Vergil. For the first kind, the Irish grammarian probably had in mind Cicero.

Loan words (whether genuine or folk) from Latin into Irish include numerous references to books and writing. [*Astal ab*] *Astilia .i. slisen.*⁵⁹ *Astal*, meaning chip or bookmark, was borrowed from Latin *hastula*, “little spear”. *Epistil* comes from *epistola*.⁶⁰ By way of contrast, Old Irish *epert* (*aith-ber-t* ‘to say’) is supposed to be derived from Greek *επέ*—oral communication rather than written.

⁵⁸ *Epitoma* 12: 31-79

⁵⁹ “O’Mulconry’s Glossary,” entry 63.

⁶⁰ (entry 406)

Greek Number: Great Deeds

Number theory was a subject of considerable interest in these centuries. In this theory, numbers and letters are closely allied.⁶¹ Virgilius Maro Grammaticus explains:

*quod nulla litera computo careat. Nam a sepe quingentos, sepe trienta, sepe decim, sepe unum significant. At b quinque milia uel duo tantum; c centum uel octuaginta; d et f et n et q quingentos semper et noncentos efficient, i et e uel quadricentos uel unum tantum faciunt, m, r, s, u, l, mille significant; t, x decim et decim milia, g omni numero usque ad X subiecta est; h ab undecim usque ad XXX; k centies centena milia supplet; o nulli numero negatur siue magnissimo, siue minutissimo.*⁶²

Aileran *sapiens*⁶³, in his work which laid out parallel sections of the Gospels *Canon Evangeliorum*, identifies the number of corresponding passages that are found in Matthew, Luke and John:

*Tum deinde tertio in ordine
homo et bos loquitur cum volucre
numero in quo consistunt antiquae
alphabeti Hebraeorum litterae*⁶⁴

The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet were also used to represent the twenty-two divisions of the Psalms:

*Amal it dalebur fichet it di litir fichet dano 7 indi litir fichet hisin. indrún 7 indetercert.
fil hisuidib isí bed (i)mmaircide frisannuiadnise .i. air an oen ar fichit it trisecht són .i.*

⁶¹ Whether or not this is another tribute to the Greeks by the Irish is a difficult question. The Alexandrians substituted the 24 Greek letters for the 24 books of the *Iliad*, thus showing an equivalency between numbers and letters (Smyth, *Greek Grammar*). Also, each letter came to represent different numbers. The Irish, however, may have developed their ideas about this independently of any Greek or Roman theories. The poem *Rubisca* may play on the Greek alphabet as a numbering system (Howlett, *Rubisca*).

⁶² “No letter lacks a number. For *a* signifies often 500, often 30, often 10, and often one. But *b* 5000 or only two, *c* a hundred or eighty, *d* and *f* and *n* and *q* always make 500 and 900, *i* et *e* make either 400 or only one, *m, r, s, u, l*, signify a thousand; *t, x*, ten and ten thousand, *g* is substituted for every number all the way to ten, *h* from eleven all the way to 30, *k* supplies a hundred times a hundred thousand, *o* is denied to no number, either the biggest or the smallest.” (*Les Epitomae*, pg.43-5 first line translated in Herren, “New Light on Virgilius Maro Grammaticus” p. 64) It seems from this that some letters were used to signify sets of numbers, namely *o, g,* and *h*.

⁶³ *Sapiens* was a title of honor with the Irish bestowed on only a few.

⁶⁴ Next, then, in the third rank, a man (Matthew) and bull (Luke) speak with a flying creature (John) with the number in which the ancient letters of the alphabet of the Hebrews consist. (Howlett, “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts” p. 13)

*secht nernadman s6n file isindsaltair uel septem dona spiritus sancti uel septem gradus ecclesiae inna trisecht tra dofoirndea s6n in treodata(id a)n6in immurgu dofoirndea s6n 6ointaid innatrindoti*⁶⁵

Irish poetry of this period paid elaborate attention to the number of letters and words in a line, in a stanza, in a poem. For example, several poems become calendars by incorporating the numbers 12, 30 and 365. *De figuris apostolorum*, a mnemonic text, has twelve lines, thirty words and 365 letters. Many poems divide at specific ratios of “symmetry (1:1), duple ratio (2:1), extreme and mean ratio, sesquialter ratio or hemiolus (1½:1 or 3:2), sesquitercian ratio or epitrite (1⅓:1 or 4:3), sesquioctave or epogdous (1⅛:1 or 9:8), and one-ninth and eight-ninths.”⁶⁶ These are the musical ratios by which God created the world.⁶⁷ The two divisions of human knowledge, the trivium and the quadrivium, express the division of language into letter and number. The trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) deals with the letter aspect, and the quadrivium (“arithmetic as static number, music as moving number, geometry as measurement of the static earth, astronomy as measurement of the moving heavens”⁶⁸) treats of number.

Despite this close link between Creation and number, the Irish had a sense that they had taken the study of number from the pagans. In fact the word *numerus* itself comes from the goddess Numeria *cuius sacerdotes retrouersis uultibus dona offerebant, et post oblata munera*

⁶⁵ “As there are twenty-two books, there are moreover twenty-two letters, and it is the mystery and the interpretation that is in those twenty-two letters that would be suited to the New Testament. The twenty-one make three sevens, i.e. the seven covenants that are in the Psalter, or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the seven orders of the Church. As to the three sevens then, that expresses the triplicity; the one, however, expresses the oneness of the Trinity.” (Milan glosses in *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus*)

⁶⁶ Howlett, “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts” pg. 10 For numerical analysis of numerous Irish poems, see all of Howlett’s articles.

⁶⁷ The account in Job linking music with the creation of the universe (38-39) heavily influenced the Irish view. God asks Job where he was at the moment of creation *cum me laudarent simul astra matutina et iubilarent omnes filii Dei* (v. 7) “when the morning stars praised me together and all the sons of God rejoiced.” The morning stars and the sons of God were taken to mean the angels since they would have been the only creatures in existence before the creation of the world. Their song was taken as a participation in the act of Creation.

⁶⁸ Howlett, *Insular Inscriptions*, pg. 4 cf. Boethius *De Institutione Arithmetica* I. 1

*retro pergebant et mille numerabant passus.*⁶⁹ Augustine has a reference to the goddess Numeria as a teacher of counting, but the rest of the explanation appears to be original.

The dating of Easter was a subject of much controversy insofar as the Irish felt their method of determining the date was superior to that adopted by the rest of the Christian world. However, this was not the only disagreement they had involving numbers. They also argued about the age of the earth with their fellow English scholars. The English work *Laterculus Malalianus* attacks the Irish for their stubborn insistence: *In sex milia autem annorum concordant omnes apparuisse Dominum; quamvis Scotti concordare nolunt, qui sapientiam se existimant habere, et scientiam perdiderunt*⁷⁰ They felt that their reckonings were more accurate since they had studied Greek.

For Irish monks in Iona and Ireland itself, creation, as described in Genesis and Job, was a mathematical event as well as a miraculous marvel. Both of these aspects had come to be associated with classical Greek culture during the pre-Carolingian flowering of learning in Ireland. The church fathers had pointed out that the four directions in Greek spelled the name of Adam and the Irish eagerly repeated and elaborated upon this. *De ordine creaturarum*⁷¹ lists the four directions in Greek and Latin. Almost every Irish computus includes some variation of this statement:

*Aliter hic annus contra quatuor partes celi regulatur, quae ita apud Grecos uocantur, id est Anatole, Dissis, Arctus, Missimbria.*⁷²

⁶⁹ “whose priests were offering gifts with averted faces and after the gifts were offered, they were continuing backwards and counting a thousand paces” (*De ratione computandi* edited in *Cummian’s Letter De controversia paschali* , pg. 117)

⁷⁰ “In six thousand years however all agree that the Lord appeared although the Irish do not wish to agree, who deem themselves to hold with wisdom, and they have destroyed knowledge.” This implied contrast between *sapientia* and *scientia* is interesting. Text in Stevenson, for discussion see Herren, “The Scholarly Contacts between the Irish and the Southern English in the Seventh Century” pg. 34

⁷¹ Howlett, “Hellenic Learning in Insular Latin” pg. 59

⁷² *De ratione computandi*, 46.

Thus Adam, the climax of the sixth day, contains within himself number (the four directions), creation (the parts of the sky) and Greek. This same work takes the liberty of renaming St. Augustine's work on Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram*) with a title that is both Greek and numerical, ἙΞΑΜΗΡΩΝ (Hexameron), as more suitable to a work on Creation.⁷³ The two contrasting terms Chaos and Cosmos, both present at the beginning of the world, appear in poetry and prose.

*“Greci de ornamento nomen mundo dederunt propter diuersitatem
elimentorum et pulchritudinem siderum.” Nam Greci “cosmos
ornamentum” dicunt.⁷⁴*

The preceding chaos is cosmos' antithesis. The Irish believed they had borrowed their word *cuae* from Greek χάος.⁷⁵

Following Isidore, the Irish believed that Enoch first discovered the science of number (*scientiam numeri inuenit*), followed by Zoroaster and Moses. All these people had supernatural assistance, however (*diuino spiramine, inspirante deo*), and, in the case of Zoroaster, possibly magic.⁷⁶ The Greeks, however, are allowed to discover it unaided. Pythagoras was the first among the Greeks to have written it down (*conscriptisse*, suggesting the discovery was actually earlier and by some other Greek)⁷⁷ while Nechomachus diffused the study of numbers more widely. The Latins, on the other hand merely translated (*trastulerunt*) these works. Then the Irish author of *De ratione computandi* outlines even more explicitly the three ways we receive the science of number: by authority *ut Adae a domino tradita est et aliis sanctis*, by nature *ut*

⁷³ *De ratione computandi*, 55 The confusion of the two Greek letters was probably the fault of a later copyist.

⁷⁴ *De ratione computandi*, 61, quoting Isidore.

⁷⁵ “O’Mulconry’s Glossary,” entry 253.

⁷⁶ Similarly, Moses first discovered the *embolesmus* but *domino sibi docente*. (*De ratione computandi*, 78)

⁷⁷ *De ratione computandi* 5: 6-10, quoting Isidore: *Numeri disciplinam apud Grecos primum Phitagoram nuncupant conscripsisse, ac deinde a Nechomacho defusius esse dispositam, quam apud Latinos Epulius, et deinde Boetius trastulerunt*. The reference to magic for Zoroaster is left out in the Irish text but is in the source text (see note 5 , pg. 119, Walsh and O Croinin) In the pre-Carolingian era, Boethius was one of the sources the Irish used to access the classical science of numbers.

philosophi, and by artifice (learning from others) *ut alii qui a philosophis dedicerunt* (paralleling the three stages of discoverers he has just mentioned). By implication, as regards to number, Enoch, Zoroaster, and Moses belong to the first group, the Greeks to the second, and the Latins to the third. Thus, without contradicting Isidore or tampering with history as he knew it, the Irish scribe gives the credit for discovering the study of number to the Greeks.

Although the Irish manuals of computation all list the names of the numbers in Latin, many of them go on to attribute Greek origin to the Latin names. There are four ways the Latins received their number names. The first way is from the Greeks, the second from geometry (*quattuor* gets its name from a square *quadratus*), by arbitrary will, and by combining elements of other numbers. Then, a fifth way is added, which seems the same as the first way and brings us back to the Greeks.⁷⁸

Alia nomina uero numeri ex ethimologia Greca formantur apud Latinos, ut est sex ab eza, decim a deca.

Furthermore, when the larger numbers are introduced, the computus adopts the Greek word for ten thousand, *urias* (μυριάς) for the list of numbers in Latin. Then, on top of all this, there is a separate list of Greek numbers (right after the Latin ones):

*Sciendum nobis quomodo nomina numeri apud Grecos uocantur. Ita, id est mia, dia, tria, tessaera, penta, ecza, ebda, ogda, nia, deca, ecossi, trienta, serenta, pendentia, eczenta, ebdenta, ogdenta, enienta, ecacon, cile.*⁷⁹

Numbers are used for several practical purposes—such as calculating time. The Irish scholars were particularly interested in the smallest unit of time *atomos*, although they acknowledged that not everyone agreed that this was a division of time:

⁷⁸ *Sciendum nobis quot modis nomina numeri uocabula acceperunt apud Latinos. Quattuor. Id est ex Greco et ex figura et ex uoluntate et ex re. Ex Greco, ut duo ex dia; ex figura, ut est IIII, id est ex quadrata figura, hoc est tali signo: □; ex uoluntate, ut est quinque. De ratione computandi, 9.*

⁷⁹ *De ratione computandi, 10.* This list is found in almost every Irish work dealing with number in any way, with variations in the transcriptions of the Greek numbers.

*Sciendum nobis quot sunt diuisiones temporis. Quattuordecim, que sic nominantur: atomos, momentum, minutum, punctum, hora, quadras, dies, ebdoma, mensis, uicissitudo triiformis, annus, aetas, seculum, mundus. Sed tredecim sunt secundum alios, quia atomos non numerant.*⁸⁰

The “atom” was incredibly small. In fact, while this tract does not even attempt to establish an equivalence between an atom and other divisions of time, another tract, *De diuisionibus temporum*,⁸¹ says that 564 atoms make a moment! (A moment is roughly 1½ of our minutes according to most Irish computists.⁸²) This works out to be less than a sixth of a second, a small enough portion of time to seem the smallest possible. Thus, the word retains its Greek meaning of indivisible with respect to time.⁸³ In fact, some Irish scholars claimed that an atom did not have a substance of time since it was too small to be perceived, just as our conception of a point in geometry involves neither width, nor length, nor depth.⁸⁴ The other, less philosophical, divisions of time also have Greek antecedents: hour (*hora*), half-day (*dodras*), day (*emera*), week (*ebdoma*), month (*mene*), and an age.⁸⁵ The combination of Greek, numbers and astronomy is illustrated in a story borrowed from Macrobius by the author of *De ratione computandi*:

*Sciendum nobis quid sint Kalendae. Id est, nomen diriuatiuum, a uerbo Greco quod est kalo, quod interpretatur uoco. Kalendae uocationes dicuntur, quia, mos erat apud gentiles, sedebat sacerdos minor in muris ut uideret accensionem nouae lunae. Si uero continuo uideret, uerbum kalo septies clamabat, ut populares in urbem septimo die post accensionem lunae uenirent. Si uero non continuo uideret, kalo quinquies clamabat, ne motaret diem festum Seruii Tullii, qui semper in semilunio fiebat.*⁸⁶

⁸⁰ *De ratione computandi*, 13.

⁸¹ *Patrologia Latina*, 90:653. *Si autem colligis simul quadraginta spetem duodecies, inuenies quingentos sexaginta quatuor atomos. Et tantus numerus atomorum facit unum momentum.*

⁸² The times differ depending on whether they are calculated for the solar year or the lunar year.

⁸³ *Sciendum nobis quid sit atomos. Id est nomen Grecum, et indiuisum interpretatur. (De ratione computandi, 16)*

⁸⁴ *Sciendum nobis an habet atomos substantiam specialem temporis. Non, nisi substantiam momenti, quia momentum minimum temporis est; quamuis alii dicunt quadragentissimam partem duodecimae partes momenti habere, quod non est uerum. (De ratione computandi, 16).*

⁸⁵ *Sciendum nobis quid sit aetas. Grecum nomen; “perpetuitas” interpretatur (De ratione computandi, 59).*

⁸⁶ 30: “It is known to us what the Kalends may be: that is a name derived from a Greek verb, which is *kalo*, that is interpreted ‘I call’. The Kalends are said to be summonings because--it was a custom with the gentiles—a minor priest used to sit on the walls so that he might see the rising of the new moon. But if he saw it right away, he would shout the verb *kalo* seven times, so that the people would come into the city on the seventh day after the rising of the

The priest says a Greek word five times or seven times to indicate an astronomical observation to the Roman people. The *De ratione temporum*, combines the concept of number and heroic deeds when it gives the Greek term for *lustrum*:

*Grece penteteresin uocatur, id est quinquennium, quia quinto anno tendebatur, propter Olympiades.*⁸⁷

The connection between the Greek alphabet and the Irish begins long before the period in question. Julius Caesar notes in *De Bello Gallico* that the druids of Gaul used a Greek script for profane purposes⁸⁸ and that they studied in Britain in the interests of undiluted transmission.⁸⁹ The Ogam alphabet was heavily numerical, consisting of four or five sets of letters with five letters in each set. The first letter in each set consisted of one slash, the second, two slashes, and so on up to the fifth and last letter in the set. In fact, it almost certainly originated with a tally system.⁹⁰ The location of the slash with respect to a central "writing" line (usually the edge of a stone) distinguished one set from another. Originally, the alphabet may have been used only as a sign language, with the thigh for the writing line and the fingers for the slashes.⁹¹ Thus, the reading of the Ogam was primarily a matter of counting, and each letter's name was associated with a number according to how many slashes (or fingers) were required to represent it. Although some would argue that Ogam is actually based on the Latin alphabet,⁹² the Irish

new moon. But if he did not see it right away, he used to shout *kalo* five times lest he should move the feast day of Servius Tullius, which always used to happen on the half-moon."

⁸⁷ 27. "It is called *penteteresin* in Greek, because it was being held in the fifth year, because of the Olympics."

⁸⁸ *Neque fas esse existimant ea litteris mandare, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis privatisque rationibus Graecis litteris utantur. Id mihi duabus de causis instituisse videntur, quod neque in vulgum disciplinam efferri velint neque eos, qui discunt, litteris confisos minus memoriae studere: quod fere plerisque accidit, ut praesidio litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo ac memoriam remittant.*(*De Bello Gallico* VI, xiv).

⁸⁹ *Disciplina in Britannia reperta atque inde in Galliam translata esse existimatur, et nunc, qui diligentius eam rem cognoscere volunt, plerumque illo discendi causa proficiscuntur.*(*De Bello Gallico* VI, xiii). Macalister mentions the possibility that, because of Roman unfamiliarity with Ireland, Britannia may include the region of Hibernia as well.

⁹⁰ "It emerges then that the outward form of the Ogam alphabet finds a natural explanation in row numerals"

McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*.

⁹¹ Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland*

⁹² Alquist, pg.8

themselves were convinced otherwise. In fact, in the *Auraicept ne nEces*, parts of which are dated to the seventh century, the three alphabets listed are Irish, Latin and Hebrew instead of the more usual list of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. This implies equivalence between Irish and the language it replaces, Greek.⁹³ The preface to “O’Mulconry’s Glossary” states emphatically: *Scoti de Graecis originem duxerunt sic et lingam*. Furthermore, the Irish language came from a blend of the best elements in every language after the confusion of tongues after the Tower of Babel. A Greek who studied in Egypt was the compiler of this language:

*Is and-sin do-reped a mbelra asna ilberlaib 7 do-aiselbad do oen dib,
conid a ainm-side for-ta a mbelra-sa conid Goidelc de-sin o Goidiul mac
Angin mic Glunfind mic Laimfind mic Agnumain do Grecaib.*⁹⁴

In the *Collectanea* of St. Patrick written by Tirechan, the saint writes an *abgitorium* (alphabet) for many of his converts. The first three letters, *a, b, g*, signal the Greek alphabet rather than the Latin.⁹⁵

God, as a unity and multiplicity, is the center of Irish theories on number. Thus, the Trinity is often the focal point of Greek word clusters. One of the earliest traces of Greek is an inscription on a cross (dated to the seventh century) in Donegal of the Doxology, ΔΟΕΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΙΜΕ ΠΑΤΡΙ ΚΑΙ ΥΙΩ ΚΑΙ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ ΑΓΩ⁹⁶; the threeness and oneness of God is a favorite theme in Irish art and literature. The very early *Lorica* of St. Patrick (probably not written by him) stresses this aspect of God repeatedly:

*Atomriug indiu
Niurt trén togairm trindóit*

⁹³ Poppe "The Latin Quotations in *Auraicept ne nEces*: Microtexts and Their Transmission" in *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, pg. 297

⁹⁴ "It is there [the tower of Babel] that the language was cut out of the many languages and it was assigned to one of them, so that it is his name by which the language is called, so that Goidelc [Irish] is hence from Goedel son of Angin son of Glunfind son of Laimfind son of Agnumain of the Greeks." (*Auraicept na nEces*, 1,10-1,11 in Alquist's *The Early Irish Linguist*)

⁹⁵ The Old Irish word for alphabet is adapted from this word. *Abgiter .i. graece ondi as abgitorium, quasi a. b. c. d. reliqua* (first entry in O’Mulconry’s Glossary)

⁹⁶ For 3D images of the cross see www.foundationsirishculture.ie

*Cretim treodatad
Fóisitin oendatad
In dúleman dáil*⁹⁷

The whole lorica begins and ends with this invocation. Likewise, the *Book of Cerne* contains prayers with the same theme:

*Sine fine sancte trine
Deus unus et non solus
Unitas triplex deprecor merita*⁹⁸

In other places, this Triune Unity is accompanied by Greek words. The beginning of the Gospel of John in the Book of Durrow uses Greek letters for the name of God *erat apud ΔΜ et ΔΣ erat verbum*.⁹⁹ In Prayer 32 from the Book of Cerne *Christum peto Christum preco*, the poet inserts the Greek word for Son *Gignans Huio Patri pio*¹⁰⁰ The Holy Spirit is macaronic in the hymn *Celebra Iuda*:¹⁰¹

*Gloria Patri atque Unigenito
Simul regnant Spiritu cum Hagio*

The *Rubisca* includes all three persons in the Greek language in the only two entirely Greek stanzas of the poem:

ΧΡΙΣΤΟΝ ΤΟΝ ΙΗΧΟΥΝ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΥ ΥΙΟΝ
ΠΑΤΕΡΟΝ ΕΜΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΝ ΤΟΝ
ΠΙΣΥΧΗ ΚΑΙ ΟΛΗΚ ΚΑΡΚΟΚ ΚΩΤΗΡΟΝ
ΠΝΕΥΜΑ ΑΓΙΟΝ ΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡΟΝ

ΥΜΝΙΣΤΕ ΠΑΝΤΕΚ ΤΡΙΝΟΝ ΤΩΝ ΕΘΝΩΝ
ΓΕΩΝ ΘΑΛΑΚΚΩΝ ΜΟΝΟΝ ΟΥΡΑΝΩΝ

⁹⁷ I arise today through a mighty strength
Through a belief in the Threeness
Through a confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of Creation

⁹⁸ Without end, Holy Triune One
God one and not alone

Triple Unity, I beg for merits (Howlett, “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts” pg. 22)

⁹⁹ Howlett, “Hellenic Learning in Insular Latin” pg. 60. Both words for God are abbreviated as is usual with Irish scribes.

¹⁰⁰ Howlett, “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts” pg.28

¹⁰¹ Howlett, “Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts” pg. 42

ΚΤΙCΤΗΝ ΤΑΓΜΑΤΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΙΝΦΕΡΩΝ
ΥΜΝΙCΤΕ ΙΩΝΑC ΙC ΤΑC ΙΩΝΩΝ

Two sets of trinities inform the two stanzas, the Holy Trinity and the three nations of the land, the sea, and the sky (which possibly represent the Church triumphant, militant and suffering.) Adamnan gives the Greek word for dove *peristera* (περιστερά) at the beginning of his *Vita S. Columbae* and then notes that the dove represents the Holy Spirit.¹⁰² The Antiphonary of Bangor repeatedly uses the first and last Greek letters to describe Christ *Alpha et O ipse Christus dominus*.¹⁰³ In the poem *Adelphus adelpha meter* the poet addresses both Christ and God in Greek:

*Qurius anomias ou
apolit agion autou
soston me o theus mou.*¹⁰⁴

Later the poet tells his audience to live in the law of Christ, using the same Greek word, namely κύριος.

*Habita in Qurii nomo.*¹⁰⁵

The Greek word for sun was associated with God ever since the reference to it in St. Patrick's *Confessio*. During the course of a terrible struggle against the powers of the devil during the night, St. Patrick is inspired to shout out *Helios* whereupon the sun rises and God immediately removes his difficulties. Adamnan continues the association by using the name *Helia* for Jerusalem four times in his book about the Holy Land.¹⁰⁶ Jerusalem is the city of the sun and the center of the world because Christ died and rose from the dead there:

¹⁰² *Vita Columbae* 2a-2b. He is explaining the name of his saint in the three sacred languages as is customary with Irish authors.

¹⁰³ "Sancti Venite" in Curran's *The Antiphonary of Bangor*, pg. 49

¹⁰⁴ Lines 46-48 ; Quirius=κύριος and theus=θεός

¹⁰⁵ Line 23

¹⁰⁶ *De locis sanctis* I.11 :4 ; I.20 :1&2 ; II. 7 :2. Some manuscripts have *Elia* which reflects the original name Aelia Capitolina given by Hadrian to the city when he rebuilt it in Greco-Roman fashion in honor of his *gens* and Capitoline Jupiter. (The Irish Annals of Inisfallen record the fact that Hadrian named it Heleas) This was

*Haec itaque columna, quam solis claritas in estiuo solistitio meridianis horis stantis in centro caeli e regione desuper circumfulgens ex omni parte circumfusa perlustrat, Hierusolimam orbis in medio terrae sitam esse protestatur; unde et psalmigrafus propter sancta passionis et resurrectionis loca quae intra ipsam Heliam continentur uaticinans canit.*¹⁰⁷

Thus the old pagan name proves itself worthy of the great city.

Just as numbers are mystically represented in the Deity, they are intimately bound up in the worship of this Deity. The question of the date of Easter vexed and divided the Christians of Ireland in a manner disproportionate to the importance of the issue. The scholar Cummiánus spent a year devoting himself to researching the correct method of computing the date.¹⁰⁸ His *De controversia paschal* uses Greek words to name different cycles for computing Easter.

*Decimo trecentorum decem et octo episcoporum decennouennalem cyclum, qui Grece enneacedeceterida dicitur, in quo Kalendae Ianuarii lunaeque eiusdem diei et initia primi mensis ipsiusque .xiiii.mae lunae recto iure, ac si quodam clarissimo tramite, ignorantiae relictis tenebris.*¹⁰⁹

accompanied by an expulsion of the Jews after their uprising and the building of pagan monuments over the major holy sites, including a Temple of Venus on the site of the Holy Sepulcher. Because of the expulsion of the Jews and other factors, the city greatly shrunk and Aelia covered only a part of the original Jerusalem. (See Gray's "The Founding of Aelia Capitolina and the Chronology of the Jewish War under Hadrian.") Constantine changed the name back to Jerusalem when he began monumentalizing the city. The reason Adamnan is willing to use this name in spite of its context is that he believed it had to do with the Greek word for sun which he would have considered highly appropriate.

¹⁰⁷ I. 11:20-25 "And thus this column [in the center of the city] having been surrounded on every side, which the brightness of the sun standing in the summer solstice in the midday hours from the region in the center of heaven illuminates, shining around from above, proves Jerusalem to be situated in the center of the circle of the earth. From whence also the psalm writer, because of the holy places of the passion and resurrection which are contained within Helia itself, prophesying sings." Notice the Greek epithet given to King David (*psalmigrafus*), who sings (*uaticinans canit*) inspired by God instead of the Muse. A great figure like David would be associated with the epic age of Greece in the Irish mind.

¹⁰⁸ *Hinc per annum secretus sanctuarium Dei ingressus, hoc est scripturam sanctam, ut ualui inuolui, deinde historias, postremo cyclos quos inuenire potui.* (Cummiánus, *De controversia Paschali*, par. 2; from CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts, Documents of Ireland, by University College Cork)

¹⁰⁹ "tenth the nineteen-year cycle of the 318 bishops 'which is called enneacedeceterida in Greek' in which the Kalends of January and the moons of that same day, the beginnings of the first month and the fourteenth moons of that month have been correctly noted, as if by a most clear path, 'leaving aside the shadows of ignorance'" Walsh and Ó Cróinín's *Cummián's Letter De Controversia Paschali*, pgs. 86-7.

Later, he mentions the Jews and heretics who celebrate Easter on the fourteenth moon as *thesseresceddecadite*.¹¹⁰ A preface to another computus gives the details of its transmission:

*Mo Sinu maccu Min scriba et àbbas Bénncuir
primus Hibernensium computum a Graeco quodam sapiente memoráliter didicit..
Deinde Mo Cuoroc máccu Net Sémon.
quem Romani . doctorem totius múndi nominábant
alumnúsque praefáti scribae—
in insula quae dicitur Crannach Duin Lethglaisse hanc scientiam líteris fixit
ne memória làberétur*¹¹¹

The preface is followed by a very short (two line) computus discussing the numbers six “episinon”, ninety “cophe/cosse”, and nine hundred “enacosse.” Although the Greek mentioned is not, of course, from classical Greece, the wisdom of the Greeks (*sapiente*) comes from their ancient age in the world. As an Irish commentary on the Gospel of John says the Greeks were bearing the light *id, propter sapientiam; Latini, id, propter regnum*.¹¹² Likewise, O’Mulconry’s Glossary, an early Irish etymological tract, claims *Eol ab Eoliss .i. Graecis .i. propria hereditas eorum. Unde eol et aneol dicitur, eola aneola*.¹¹³

In the preceding computus, the first Irishman learns the material orally as the druids (and the Greeks) had done in the past. It is left to the *doctor* admired by the Romans, the representatives of the written word, to put the computus on paper. A colophon by a scribe trained in Ireland shows a transition between an oral Greek prayer and a written Latin text. The Our Father is transcribed in Latin letters the way a Byzantine Greek speaker would pronounce it.

¹¹⁰ Walsh and Ó Cróinín’s *Cummian’s Letter De Controversia Paschali*, pp. 88-9

¹¹¹ “Mo Sinu son of Min, scribe and abbot of Bangor, first learned the Irish computus from a certain wise Greek by memory. Then Mo Cuoroc son of Net Semon, whom the Romans call the professor of the whole world, and a former student of the aforesaid scribe, fixed this wisdom in letters on the island which is called Crannach Duin Lethglaisse lest its memory should fade” *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* pg. 285 Discussion in Howlett, “Five Experiments in Textual Reconstruction and Analysis” pgs. 1-3.

¹¹² *Commentarium in Iohannem in Scriptores Hiberniae Minores*, pg. 125.

¹¹³ *O’Mulconry’s Glossary*, pg.253 translated in “Literary and Glossarial Evidence for the Study of Classical Mythology in Ireland A. D. 600-800” in *Text and Gloss*, pg 66. “Eol ‘knowledge’, comes from *eoliss* [=Aeolians], that is, from the Greeks, that is their proper bequest. Whence one says “knowledge, ignorance, knowing, ignorant”.

<i>pater immon</i>	<i>dos imin sim</i>
<i>o in tus oranis</i>	<i>eron cai afis im</i>
<i>aiustito tonom</i>	<i>min ta ofilim</i>
<i>a sso eltato i bas</i>	<i>mata immon</i>
<i>illia su genetito to th</i>	[<i>cai mi isenegkis</i>
<i>elima sso.os en or</i>	<i>imas] his pirasmon</i>
<i>inis cai tis gis to</i>	<i>ala rus</i>
<i>n arton immon</i>	<i>sai imas apu to</i>
<i>ton epeusion</i>	<i>puniro [amin]</i> ¹¹⁴

The pronunciation of Greek—and the related issue of transliteration into Latin letters—fluctuated between Byzantine and classical norms in the Irish tradition. Later on in the Middle Ages, when the Irish begin to write adaptations of Greek tales, they incorporated elements of oral composition that are not present in the texts they were translating.¹¹⁵

One of the most common Greek words scattered about various poems and other texts is the word πᾶς in its different forms. The *Ymnum mediae noctis* in the Antiphony of Bangor¹¹⁶ begins: *Audite pantes ta erga*. The *Hisperica Famina* employs it frequently: *Nam pantia ruptis astant septa termopolis*.¹¹⁷ Other texts introduce Greek words related to number, such as *chronicon*.¹¹⁸ Irish scholars adopted a Greek term (originally used to describe the Alexandrian grammarian Didymus and then applied to Origen by Jerome) *Chalcenterus* (χαλκέντερος) “bronze-bellied” to mean a computist.¹¹⁹ *De computo dialogus* asks the teacher the names of the numbers in Hebrew, Chaldean, Syrian and Macedonian (Greek), but the answer is disproportionately weighted to the Greeks:

¹¹⁴ Howlett, *Insular Inscriptions*, pg. 142.

¹¹⁵ See Harris’ *Adaptations of Roman Epic in Medieval Ireland: Three Studies in the Interplay of Erudition and Oral Tradition*.

¹¹⁶ “Everyone, listen to these deeds.” Quoted by Howlett in “Hellenic Learning in Insular Latin”

¹¹⁷ “For all the folds stand with burst gates” (line 79, cf. lines 86, 178, 423, 438, 450).

¹¹⁸ In the Pseudo-Bedan *Collectanea*, a pre-Carolingian text, which most scholars attribute to Ireland, there is a work entitled *De luminaribus ecclesiae* that lists some titles of Eusebius of Caesarea’s works, among which is the *Chronicon* translated by the Irish author as *temporum breviarium*. In one of its recensions the word is written in Greek characters, in the other in Latin (*Patrologia Latina* 94, 539-60 and 23, 723-6; *De luminaribus ecclesiae* is discussed in Loughlin’s “The List of Illustrious Writers in the Pseudo-Bedan *Collectanae*” in *Text and Gloss*)

¹¹⁹ Walsh and Ó Cróinín’s *Cummian’s Letter De Controversia Paschali*, note 52, p. 62-3, and “Hiberno-Latin *calcenterus*.”

*Vocatur Nonnan apud Hebraeos, Chaldaeos, et Syros. Apud Macedones calculus. Calculator nomen accepit a calculis, id est lapillis minutis, quos antiquo in manu tenentes componebant numerum. Apud alios Graecos cyclus, vel rhythmus; apud Aegyptios latercus, inde laterculus diminutive dicitur, et rima, unde rimarii appellantur.*¹²⁰

Greek is not only employed for religious purposes but also for other mathematically based disciplines related to creation. Virgilius Grammaticus, as soon as he mentions the part of philosophy called astronomy, immediately introduces the Greeks:

*Est et alia philosophiae ars, quae astronomia nuncupatur, quam mathesin Graeci uocant, quae astrorum omnium cursus liniasque ostendit, in qua arte temporum signa et operum oportunitates intelleguntur. Ex qua XII signa principalia supputantur, quae Graeci mazaron vocant.*¹²¹

Virgilius had not introduced the Greeks with the other divisions of philosophy dealing with words. Astronomy was a mathematical study and thus appropriate to the Greeks. Many astronomical tracts deal with the discrepancies between the lunar and solar year cycles. Twelve lunar cycles only made 354 days (12 times 29½) while a solar cycle contains 365 and a quarter. The name for the extra lunar cycle that was added to these 354 days (in order to finish out the solar year) was *embolesmus* because this added too many days to the solar year instead of too few. Influenced by Isidore, the Irish attributed this name to the Greeks:

*Embolima enim Grece superhabundantia interpretatur, et embolesmus Grece supraaugmentum interpretatur, eo quod triginta, id est .xiii. lunaris mensis, ad finem anni communis adduntur.*¹²²

Both the numerical aspect and the excessive aspect of the *embolesmus* represent the Greek character. The problem of this excess of days was solved by introducing another Greek word.

¹²⁰ *Patrologia Latina* 90, 650 “It is called Nonnan with the Hebrews, Chaldeans and Syrians. With the Macedonians ‘calculus.’ A calculator receives its name from *calculis*, that is little pebbles, which the ancients, holding in their hands, were adding a number. With the other Greeks, [it is called] *cyclus* or *rhythmus*. With the Egyptians *latercus*, from which a little tile is named diminutively, and *rima*, from which examiners are named.”

¹²¹ *Les Epitomae de Virgile de Toulouse*, pg. 57

¹²² “For *embolima* is interpreted superabundance in Greek, and *embolesmus* is interpreted overly-increasing in Greek, for the reason that thirty days—that is a thirteenth lunar month—are added to the end of the common year” *De ratione computandi*, 77.

The two cycles, lunar and solar match in an eight year cycle called an *ogduas*.¹²³ Together with an eleven year cycle *endicas*, the Irish calculated a total cycle of 19 years,¹²⁴ *qui enniacaideciterida Greco uocabulo nuncupatur*.¹²⁵

Just as for the measurement of time and the heavens, the measurement of the earth involved Greek terminology. The Irish traced their word *anna/anda* (cubit) to the word *andon* (a corruption of ἄγκών) since their measurement of a cubit was the length of a forearm.¹²⁶ A step or pace came from βῆμα. *Beim graece bemandro .i. pasus*.¹²⁷ The word geometry means the measure of the earth in Greek.¹²⁸

The connection of Greek and numerals continues during the Carolingian age and long after. After laboriously writing a Greek alphabet, a scribe scribbles in the margin, “there’s an end to that...and my seven curses go with it.”¹²⁹ It is interesting to note that he mentions the number seven, the perfect number, in connection with the Greek alphabet, while at the same time cursing it.¹³⁰

¹²³ *De ratione computandi*, 79 (citing Dionysius Exiguus). The eight year cycle contained five of the twelve-month years and three of the embolismic, thirteen-month years. At the end of the eight years the moon and the sun would start a new year almost together—only a day and a half apart since an embolismic month was 30 days and not 29½. This includes the extra fourth of a year for the solar cycle. 365 and one fourth times eight years = 2922 days and 29½ times 99 months (5 years of 12 + 3 years of 13=60+39) = 2920½ days.

¹²⁴ *Sciendum nobis quod Greca sunt ogduas et endicas. Ogduas enim Grece octo interpretatur. Enna enim Grece unum Latine; deca uero Grece decim Latine (De ratione computandi, 81)*

¹²⁵ *De ratione computandi*, 104.

¹²⁶ *Anna andon graece cubi[t]us latine .i. righ* (“O’Mulconry’s Glossary”, entry 112)

¹²⁷ entry 140

¹²⁸ *Ge graece terra latine unde dicitur geometrica .g. t. Mensura* (entry 478)

¹²⁹ “Colophons and Marginalia of Irish Scribes,” pg. 31.

¹³⁰ The druids employed mysterious alphabets and codes for their curses, presumably for the reason that the less understandable a curse was, the more frightening.

Classical History

In keeping with the theme of smaller units, the Irish scholars looked back to the days of individualism in heroic Greece more than to the classical era with its broader themes of democracy, the polis, and the Delian League, to name a few. The theme of greatness and nobility harks back to the time of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the playful alphabetical poem *Rubisca*, Greek words are scattered about, but only a few of them occur more than once. Νηδούλος, Latinized as *nedulos* and *nedulam*, adorns the last line of the third quatrain and a place of honor at the beginning of the fourteenth quatrain, representing the letter N. “Not servile” applies to the bird addressed in the poem, but it equally applies to the Greeks as seen by the writer. A revealing compound Irish word, *mórGréc*, great Greece, reinforces this idea of Hellas.¹³¹ O’Mulconry’s Glossary,¹³² which explains the etymology of archaic Old Irish terms, lists several words (supposedly) derived from Greek.

*Adae graece .i. gloriosus. No adae ad dee .i. conuenit Deo Gloria. Ni adae .i. ni ad dee. Non conuenit Deo.*¹³³

Words derived from Greek sources often relate to abstract concepts of lofty ideals: *Alainn ab yalin* (‘υάλινος) *graece enim yalin latine*.¹³⁴ Crystal or glass, because of its transparency and reflecting properties, represents the glory of Greece to the Irish. Relying on Isidore, the Irish glossed *antropus* (ἄνθρωπος) as *suas-deicsid* (looking up).¹³⁵ The Old Irish word for food comes

¹³¹ Found in the *Tain* and glosses to Priscian

¹³² Mac Neill has shown that the stratum of the glossary that deals with etymologies under the A-L words can be dated at least as far back as the middle of the eighth century.

¹³³ *Adae* in Greek .i. glorious. *No adae* to God .i. It befits God in glory. *Ni adae* .i. not to God. It does not befit God (entry 17) *Adae* in Old Irish means “legally due”

¹³⁴ *Alainn*=Old Irish beautiful (O’Mulconry’s Glossary, entry 35)

¹³⁵ “O’Mulconry’s Glossary”, entry 86.

from βία according to Irish glossographers. [*Biad*] *Bia graece uis nert*.¹³⁶ *Nert* means strength/might in both a physical and moral sense and the Irish may have assigned both meanings to the Greek word as well. The Greek word for a fort was given a folk etymology from another word for power δύναμις. *Dun graece dun amnis .i. uires interpretatur*.¹³⁷ *Cain* (good, fair, beautiful) comes from *cai .i. coma*,¹³⁸ *dech* (best) from δίκαιος, and *dian* (swift) from a Greek word for goose. The Irish word for science is broken down into two Greek words.

Ecnae .i. eo-gnoa. Graece eu .i. bonum, gnosis .i. scientia. Ecna didiu .i. fis cain sainemail.¹³⁹

Similarly, *etargna* (cognition/knowledge) has its root *gna* from from γνωσις.¹⁴⁰ The Irish word for a good voice (*effainn*) comes from ευφωνία.¹⁴¹

Aldhelm, in his letter to Wihtfrith, attacks this Irish idea of the mythological/historical Greek era by using especially severe degrading terms for certain Greek figures. It is dangerous to study in Ireland where these people are elevated:

*Quidnam, rogicans quaeso, orthodoxae fidei sacramento commodi affert circa temeratum spurcae Proserpinae incestum—quod abhorret fari—enucleate legendo scrutandoque sudescere aut Hermionam, petulantem Menelai et Helenae sobolem, quae, ut prisca produnt opuscula, despondebatur pridem iure dotis Oresti demumque sententia immutata Neoptolemo nupsit, lectionis praeconio venerari aut Lupercorum bacchantum antistites ritu litantium Priapo parasitorum heroico stilo historiae caraxare*¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Entry 152

¹³⁷ Entry 320

¹³⁸ entry 201 *cai*=χαίτη and *coma*=κόμη; entry 303 *deceos* (δίκαιος) is glossed as “just”; entry 314 it is unclear what word is supposed to be goose that resembles *dian*. Χήν, the Greek word for goose, seems nothing like *dian*, unless there was some sort of confusion from Socrates’ oath replacing Ζηνα with χηνα (‘by the goose’ instead of ‘by Zeus’). I offer this suggestion in the absence of any other although I suspect most scholars would say this is an impossibly sophisticated mistake for the Irish to make, not having read any of the Greek texts themselves but only secondary literature.

¹³⁹ “*Ecnae* that is eo-gnoia in Greek eu is good, gnosis is science. *Ecna* from thence ascertaining the fine excellence” (entry 361)

¹⁴⁰ Entry 465

¹⁴¹ Entry 374

¹⁴² “ I beseech asking you, what advantage does it bear to the mystery of the orthodox faith to begin to sweat by reading precisely and scrutinizing over the violated incest of the filthy Persephone—which is abhorrent to speak of—or to venerate with the distinction of reading Hermione, the brash offspring of Menelaus and Helen, who, as the

Instead of *nedulus*, Aldhelm calls them *temeratum*, *spurcae*, and *petulantem*, and makes no distinction between the fairly innocent victim Persephone and Hermione who takes after her mother in leaving with another man (although according to Aldhelm she was not yet married when she had a change of heart, only betrothed.¹⁴³) He also speaks slightly of the ancient texts, using a diminutive (*opuscula*) and refers to followers of the gods as parasites.

The Irish, on the other hand, associated the Greeks with greatness. The *Amra Choluimb Cille*, a poem in praise of the recently dead Columcille, lists his great deeds:

*oc Deo deissestar.
Ar adbud, ar áne, at-ronnai,
ar-gart glán húa i cathir Conúail.
hlc udbud caín-sruith,
sceo magister muntere,
fri angel n-acallastar;
at-gaill grammataig Greic¹⁴⁴*

Along with the other indications of greatness, such as talking with angels and sitting in the halls of God, Columcille is a Greek scholar.

The mere presence of Greek letters in Irish texts lends solemnity and glory to the words they adorn. Adamnan in his *De Locis Sanctis*¹⁴⁵ describes Mt. Thabor and the monastery on top of it. At the conclusion of this short section, he emphasizes that the word ought to be written in

ancient little works relate, was being pledged at first to Orestes by the law of the dowry, and finally, with her opinion having changed, she married Neoptolemus, or to inscribe in the heroic style of epic the high priests of the *Luperci* reveling in the rite of the parasites propitiating Priapus.” This passage is discussed by Herren in “Scholarly Contact” pp. 35-6 and in “Literary and Glossarial Evidence for the Study of Classical Mythology in Ireland A.D. 600-800” *Text and Gloss*, pp. 49.

¹⁴³ Notice the reference to law (*iure*) in the mention of the betrothal. Law was held in the highest reverence by the Irish and applied to even the most insignificant matters.

¹⁴⁴ *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, pg. 112-113.

“He sat down with God.

In a place of pomp, in a place of splendor, he bestowed,

The pure descendant of Conall ruled in his monastery.

A fair sage at his death,

And master of a community,

He spoke with an angel;

He studied Greek grammar.”

¹⁴⁵ II, 27:6.

Greek letters *per Θ et Ω longum ΘΑΒΩΡ*. The two letters that are unique in shape are stressed.

He goes on to say that the orthography was found in Greek books.¹⁴⁶ Of all the things that could have been looked up in Greek books, he chose to look at letters. He then explains how to transliterate these Greek letters into Latin. Thabor, where Christ was transfigured and showed his glory to the apostles so that they could not bear to look at him, seems to be taken for a Greek word by the Irish scholar Adamnan: the only Greek letters in his *De Locis Sanctis* are used to write this mountain's name.¹⁴⁷ The power of God was shown at Mt. Thabor just as it was at creation so both events are connected with the Greeks. At a later point, he breaks down the name Constantinople into its constituent parts: the last letters are from the Greek word for city.¹⁴⁸ As the head of the Roman Empire, Constantinople is the most important secular city of its time. The author of the Irish Preface of the Gospel according to Mark similarly stresses the letters of Jesus' name in Greek: *Nomen enim, quod dicitur Iesus, ita ut alii dicunt, apud Grecos scribitur per Iota et He et C: IHC*. And a little later he describes how to write Christ in Greek letters: *Ita etiam notatur per Xchi et Pro et Csuma*¹⁴⁹

Turning to classical models, the Irish include references to the heroes' feats in almost every type of text. In fact, the Greek gods themselves are portrayed more as ancient historical figures or powerful natural phenomena than as gods of a Greek religion. One computus, in the midst of a discussion of the zodiac, mentions an event gleaned from Isidore. *Leonem in Grecia*

¹⁴⁶ *Huius ortagrafia uocabuli in libris Grecitatis est reperta*. The use of the passive could imply that he did not find the information himself and therefore may not have had these Greek books himself. However, he still took the trouble to glean this information from someone else, included it in his book, and stressed the two letters.

¹⁴⁷ See above; *De Locis Sanctis*, II, 27.

¹⁴⁸ *Quae conposito nomine ex proprio eius uocabulo et appellatiua civitatis Greca nominatione Constantinopolis vocitatur* (III, 2:8). He does not give the Greek letters in this case. However, in the section before he uses the Greek genitive –os for the end of the word.

¹⁴⁹ *Scriptores Hiberniae Minores*, pgs. 223-224

*ingentem Hercules occidit, et propter uirtutem suam hunc inter doudecim signa constituit.*¹⁵⁰

Some of the other constellations' myths center upon Jupiter, who is treated as if he were another of the characters in the constellation stories. There is no hint of his status as the supreme god. Instead he mingles with Castor and Pollex and Hercules. Capricorn represents his goat nurse, and Taurus represents him carrying off Europa.¹⁵¹ Elsewhere, holding his traditional staff, Bacchus is introduced as the discoverer of the vine but not as a deity. *Bacc a baculo. Baculus a Ba[c]cho (.i. o Liber pater) repertore uitis.*¹⁵² The glossary introduces two more of his attributes later. *Haec sunt cognomina Bachi νυκτέλιος quia noctu celebrantur sacra eius. Electius a loco iachis hoc est a clamore.*¹⁵³ The reference to *cognomina* places Bacchus in a distinctly ungodlike context. Hecate rules the underworld as a queen but not a goddess. *Ec .i. eclipsis graece, mors interpretatur, ab Hecate regina inferni.*¹⁵⁴ Phoebus (Apollo) and Phoebe (Artemis/Diana) are the sun and the moon.¹⁵⁵

Irish scholars did not hesitate to apply classical terms to their own world. Indeed, God is put on Olympus in the *Hisperica Famina*. The sacred mountain of the Greek gods becomes the fitting throne of the noblest one of all: *Angelicas olimpius suffulcit cateruas thronus.*¹⁵⁶ The line combines the image of Atlas holding up the world with Zeus ruling from the heights. There are even references to the pre-Olympian order:¹⁵⁷ *Titaneus olimphium inflammat arotus tabulatum.*¹⁵⁸

The Old Irish word for feastday is given a Greek ancestor in "O'Mulconry's Glossary:" *Aurtag*

¹⁵⁰ *De ratione computandi*, 54.

¹⁵¹ *De ratione computandi*, 54; *Sed et Taurum inter sidera conlocant, et ipsud in honorem Iouis, eo quod in bouem sit fabulose conuersus, quando Europam transuexit...Capricorni figuram ideo inter sidera finxerunt propter capriam Iouis nutricem.*

¹⁵² "O'Mulconry's Glossary", entry 115. Bacc=Old Irish crozier

¹⁵³ Entry 368. *iachis*=ἰακχος "the cry of Bacchus"

¹⁵⁴ Entry 353

¹⁵⁵ Entry 497

¹⁵⁶ "The Olympian throne supports angelic clusters" (line 396, A-text)

¹⁵⁷ See elsewhere for the Cyclops.

¹⁵⁸ "The Titianian star (Hyperion) inflames the Olympian floor/ceiling" (line 133, A-text).

*artiloi graeco feriae interpretatur.*¹⁵⁹ Greek history and mythology could only enhance the glory of the Christian cosmos. The Old Irish word for church gains extra reverence through being related to the ancient Greek warrior kings: *Baslic .i. rigdae, basilion graece, rex latine unde basilci.*¹⁶⁰ The Irish grammarian Vergil refers to the ‘histories of the Greeks’¹⁶¹ when he tells a story of a prophet living among the Persians who foretold the Christian era in a beautifully poetic speech. The *vatis* writes down all his prophecies but is unwilling to show anyone this particular prophecy because it had not yet come true by the time he lay dying. He is compelled finally to tell his students the vision orally.¹⁶²

*Vidi ait uatis immensum flumen de cello fluens alto, et hoc flumen uinum erat. Alium quoque riuulum uidi e terrae manantem petris et hic riuulus aque erat; tum orto iabari solis raptus est ille riuulus obuiam flumini ab alto labenti, et collecti duo in unum fluuii uinum effecti sunt. Et unum erat flumen aetrium implens ac tellurem in quo innumeri agni et uituli ludebant bibentesque ex eo inebriati ephithalamium canebant, et eorum audita uoce caelum ac terra partier laetata sunt.*¹⁶³

The whole episode is dignified with the reference to the Greek histories at the beginning. Roman mythology is associated with more humble themes. For instance, Neptune rules the tides in another section of the *Hisperica Famina. Gemellum neptunius collocat ritum fluctus.*¹⁶⁴ Both

¹⁵⁹ “*Aurtag* from Greek newly-washed (?) is interpreted festival day” (entry 60). I am not certain about my conjecture for the Irish meaning of Greek *artiloi* and have not been able to find any outside enlightenment. However, this does not affect the point I am making here.

¹⁶⁰ “Church that is king-house, in Greek, palace (βασιλειον), king in Latin, whence *basilci*” (entry 128). Similarly the Irish word for bishop comes from the Greek (entry 405)

¹⁶¹ *In Graecorum legimus historiis* (Vergil Maro Grammaticus, *Epistolae*, Preface, lines 1-2) Adamnan uses this same method of exalting his theme, referring to the histories of the Greeks and the barbarians (*De Locis Sanctis*,).

¹⁶² See chapter 2 for the association of the Greeks with oral rather than written works.

¹⁶³ “‘I saw’ the prophet says, ‘an immense river flowing from high heaven and this river was wine, I saw also another rivulet flowing from the rocks of the earth and this rivulet was of water. Then with the radiance of the sun having risen, that rivulet is caught up towards the river falling from on high, and the two having been collected into one, the rivers are made wine. And there was one river filling the hall and the earth in which countless lambs and calves were playing, and inebriated drinking from it they were singing a wedding song, and with their voice having been heard, heaven and earth rejoiced equally.’” (*Epistolae*, Preface, lines 15-23) This is all a figure for the marriage of Christ and the Church although, of course, the pagan seer does not know it. Notice the bucolic tone and terminology of this passage.

¹⁶⁴ “Neptune’s wave arranges a twin rite” (line 396, A-text).

collocat and *ritum* emphasize the Roman preeminence in law and rule.¹⁶⁵ Place names from Italy retain their classical associations but are linked to less desirable places than Olympus. Avernus, for instance, a lake located near Cumae, a city famed for its Sybil mentioned by Vergil in his messianic eclogue,¹⁶⁶ traditionally was the entrance to the underworld. A text written in Ireland around the turn of the eighth century prays *uerba nam tua ualida imis me tollunt auerni*.¹⁶⁷ As the Irish Virgil explains, the classical word *tartarus* can be used metaphorically and literally.

*Sic etiam cum dicitur 'tartarus' omnis locus generaliter fragosus ac
dificilis aditu... 'tartarum' autem neutrale, quod solius inferni est...*¹⁶⁸

Virgil the grammarian attempted to make sense of the changes that had occurred to classical Latin and to minimize the scope of the more modern Latin by making such distinctions as the one above.

In the seventh century poem¹⁶⁹ *Versus de annis a principio*, secular history is tied to the Biblical six ages of the earth. The first Greek event deemed worthy of mention is the reign of Cecrops in Attica.¹⁷⁰ The Irish associated Cecrops with the building of Athens just as Romulus built Rome. An Old Irish gloss on Priscian notes: *cicrops dorósat incathraig 7 dichlaind thessei dóib .i. digrecaib dóib huili*.¹⁷¹ In the poem Cecrops is linked to Moses, the Law giver. The Irish probably saw Cecrops as the lawgiver of Athens.

¹⁶⁵ See chapter 4.

¹⁶⁶ The Irish had scholia (to which they made their own contributions), and possibly, texts of Vergil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* and, almost certainly, texts of the *Aeneid*.

¹⁶⁷ "For your strong words raise me from the lowest parts of Avernus." Howlett, *Insular Inscriptions*, p. 68.

¹⁶⁸ (*Epistolae*, I, lines 364-368) "Thus also, since Tartarus is said to be every place generally rough and difficult to approach...the neuter Tartarum, however, that is more singly of Hell."

¹⁶⁹ Howlett, "Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts", 1-4

¹⁷⁰ He was said to be half man and half snake. The Irish were particularly fond of such monster-like characters. Ninus, who is introduced earlier in the poem, is often depicted as a centaur in the classical tradition. Later, the introduction of extra monsters becomes an outstanding feature of Middle Irish adaptations of classical texts. See Ó hAodha, "The Irish Version of Statius' *Achilleid*" pg. 86.

¹⁷¹ "Cecrops has built the city and they were of the children of Theseus i.e. they were all from the Greeks" (*Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, p. 83)

The next Greek event is the fall of Troy, which is set 329 years later than Cecrops. The Irish epic *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, (The Cattle Raid of Cualnge) presents a series of individual combats between Cuchulainn and warriors from the army of Connaught. Cuchulainn says to his dying friend (with whom he has been forced to battle): "Had I but seen you die amidst the warriors of great Greece, I should not have survived you." (line 3535)¹⁷² The association of Greece, in all her greatness, with warriors undoubtedly arose from the tradition of the fall of Troy.¹⁷³ Indeed, the Irish mention this event from classical history more than any other. Virgil the grammarian illustrates his grammatical points with lines about Troy.

*Ille Aeneas qui decies uictor Troea fugit incense ce Indiam pergens
quinque contenuis proelians annis uitam bellando feliciter finiuit.*¹⁷⁴

*Vtinam excelsa Troeae moenia a uertice ne disperdi, caute timuere*¹⁷⁵

O' Mulconry's Glossary derives the Old Irish word for the champion of the fian [a small independent warrior band] from Greek: *Arg fiann...ab Argis .i. o Grecaib ar febus a n-occ.*¹⁷⁶ *Febus*, which this etymologist believed came from Phoebus, means glory or excellence in Old Irish. *Arg* may derive from ἀργός or from ἀργός (either the city or the adjective meaning shining/bright): as the author of this entry of the glossary does not specify. Another Greek etymology alludes to the destruction wreaked on Troy by the Greek heroes: *Apolis .i. perdis unde*

¹⁷² *Dámbad and atcheind-sea th'éc
eter míledaib mórGréc,
ní beind-se i mbethaid dar th'éis,
gombad aróen atbailméis*

¹⁷³ The *Banshenchas*, although it lies outside of the pre-Carolingian era, provides an interesting sequel. It contains names of famous women from the Bible and the Apocrypha as well as Greek names—which are mostly from the *Iliad*.

¹⁷⁴ "That Aeneas, who, though the ten time victor, fled with Troy having been burned continuing to India, battling for five straight years, finished life happily in war" (*Epistola*, II, 210-213). The reference to 'India' may be the result of a common confusion of terms between Ethiopia and India, possibly based on a passage in Vergil's *Georgics* IV, 290-300. Jerome says that the Ethiopians came from the Indus valley to settle in Africa (*Understanding the Universe in Seventh Century Ireland*, pg. 284).

¹⁷⁵ "The feared timidly lest the high walls of Troy would be destroyed from the top" (*Epistola*, III, 514-515).

¹⁷⁶ "Arg fiann from the Argives that is from the Greeks from the excellence of the warrior" (entry 57).

*aplt.*¹⁷⁷ The rage of Greek warriors parallels that of Irish warriors. Of their numerous words for fury, some can be traced to Greek mythology: *Bag a bacho .i. on dassacht*.¹⁷⁸ Battle terms also echo the world of the *Iliad*. The Old Irish word for blow seems to the Irish glossographers similar to βολή: *Buile graece bole iaculum*.¹⁷⁹ The Irish word for a champion (*eir*) comes from the Greek word ἥρωζ.

Eir graece ondi as heros. Eros aliquando vel dominus, aliquando sacerdos, aliquando uir fortis et sapiens. Cum adspiratione 'dominum' dicimus, per e solam sacerdotem, cum diptongo uirum fortem.¹⁸⁰

The epithet 'wise' given to the hero along with his attribute of strength shows the Irish inclination to associate wisdom with the Greeks. That they used the same word for a lord, a priest and a hero reveals their intermingling of the great deeds of the heroic past with the great deeds of the Christian present.

The poem about the ages of the world then moves from Troy to the establishment of the Olympiad in Hellas 406 years after Troy. However, the poem does not refer to it as the Olympiad but as the *agon quadrennalis*, the competition held every four years. Once again the connection between the Greeks and numerical quantities is stressed. The heroes of the Olympic games, like the heroes of the battlefield, earned glory in a way that appealed to the early Irish writers. The last bit of Greek history is the reign of Darius. Although the Persian War is not explicitly mentioned, his name evokes the Battle of Marathon and the great warriors of Greece.¹⁸¹ The Annals of Inisfallen mention the episode in a comparatively lengthy manner.

^{177c} *Apolis* (ἀπολλύεις) that is 'you destroy' from whence death" (entry 90).

¹⁷⁸ "*Bag* from Bacchus that is blind madness" (entry 117)

¹⁷⁹ Entry 172; cf. entry 419 Vel *eres* (heresy) *ab erison* (ἐρίζειν) .i. *certamen*

¹⁸⁰ "*Eir* in Greek is from hero. Sometimes it is hero or lord, sometimes priest, sometimes a man strong and wise. With aspiration we say lord, with e alone, priest, and with a diphthong a strong man" (entry 409).

¹⁸¹ He, of course, has Biblical associations as well. But his placement in the secular part of the poem, at the end of the Greek events and before Rome, suggests that his connections with Greece were uppermost in the mind of the poet.

Xerxes filius Darii annis .xx. Hic Aegiptum, quae a Dario discesserat, cepit, & aduersus Graeciam pugnaturus .dcc. (millia) armatorum de regno, & ccc. millia de auxiliis, rostratas etiam naues mille (.cc.), honerarias autem .iii. millia habuisse narra(tur). Attamen uictus ad patriam refugit.

After a series of one line entries, the annalist thought this important enough to merit a paragraph. After Darius, the poem moves to Rome, skipping over the great days of fourth and fifth century Athens. As only one event from Roman history finds a place in this poem, Greece plays the most prominent part in the six secular ages of the world, accounting for four of the six ages. Not surprisingly, the poem is also weighed down heavily with numerical references: 57 out of a total of 234 words are numbers (cardinal and ordinal), and one of them is Greek, *exatetracosia*. This adorns the center of the seven lines devoted to Greece, between the fall of Troy and the Olympics.

The only event of Roman history included in this poem is the reign of Tiberius—and this because of the baptism of Christ during his reign. While classical Greek history fades away long before its great days are over, the Irish interaction with Roman history usually begins much after its founding by Romulus. Christ is the beginning of Roman history. In the short note, *Pauca de libris catholicorum scriptorum in evangelia excerpta*, probably written at the Irish center Bobbio, three other Roman emperors are mentioned in connection with the evangelists: *Matheus in anno quarto Gaii, Marcus in xiiii anno Claudii, Lucas in tempore Pauli vel Claudii, Iohannes in anno ii Nerue*.¹⁸² Mark writes during the reign of Nero in *Praefacio secundum Marcum*.¹⁸³

Even the hagiographers slip in references to Greece's ancient past in order to connect their new epic heroes with the old. In Muirchu's life of St. Patrick, Ireland's patron saint meets a

¹⁸² *Scriptores Hiberniae Minores*, pgs.213-4.

¹⁸³ *Scriptores Hiberniae Minores*, pgs.220-221

figure resembling the Cyclops, Macc Cuill moccu Grecae:¹⁸⁴ *et erat hic homo ualde inpius saeuus tyrannus ut Cyclops nominaretur.*¹⁸⁵ This man kills guests just as his prototype does. Furthermore, Macc Cuill characterizes Patrick to his friends in a way that links Patrick to Odysseus: *mos facere praestigias ut decipiat homines multosque seducat.* Patrick from the perspective of Macc Cuill does *praestigias*, “sleights of hand” or “tricks”, and deceives men.¹⁸⁶ The story has many reversals of its classical counterpart as the story progresses. Instead of Patrick tricking Macc Cuill, Patrick uncovers the trick Macc Cuill tried to play on him, and instead of harming the Cyclops himself, Patrick slays Macc Cuill’s friend, who is feigning death according to the scheme of the Cyclops.¹⁸⁷ Macc Cuill, impressed by Patrick’s power and perspicacity, is baptized and rejoins the world of men instead of being left on his lonely mountain (*in montoso aspero altoque*). It is he, not Patrick, who sails away after the encounter, eventually becoming a bishop on the Isle of Man. Patrick, as the epic hero of Ireland, encounters the epic tradition of Greece and reverses it. Muirchu places another reference to the *Odyssey* strategically in the Great Prologue. In the middle line, almost the middle word is *carubdes* alluding to Cocytus and Carybdus.¹⁸⁸ Although these ideas are coming out of the Greek tradition, no Greek words or letters decorate the text, and the story itself is remarkably flexible and free of any written, classical prototype.

¹⁸⁴ Moccu Grecae=son of the Greek

¹⁸⁵ Howlett, *Muirchu Moccu Maitheni’s ‘Life of Saint Patrick’* pg. 90-1. The word “Cyclops” was turned into a common noun in Irish texts to mean a foe of strength and cunning. Cf. *Hisperica Famina* (A text) line 27 *fortioresque prostrauit in acie cyclopes.*

¹⁸⁶ The reference to *homines* may imply that Macc Cuill thinks Patrick will not be able to fool him since he is not a man at this point but a Cyclops. Of course, Macc Cuill is actually the one trying to trick Patrick, and the Cyclops is defeated in the end by Patrick.

¹⁸⁷ Even here, the damage is not permanent—Patrick raises Macc Cuill’s friend from the dead after Macc Cuill’s conversion.

¹⁸⁸ Howlett, *Muirchu Moccu Maitheni’s Life of Saint Patrick*, pg. 40.

Similarly, in Adamnan's *Vita Columbae*, the single incident connecting St. Columcille with the classical world is a Greek one: his horse weeps at his approaching death.¹⁸⁹ The Latin term he uses for the horse *cavallus/caballus* (“work-horse” used primarily by writers of satire¹⁹⁰ as a “common” word) seems to start off unheroically but he is given the epithet *albus*—perhaps an oblique reference to Xanthos, Achilles’ horse. The horse puts his head down just as Achilles’ horses do upon the death of Patrocles, but Columcille’s horse puts his head into his master’s lap to shed tears. Diormit unsuccessfully tries to drive the horse away just as his counterpart Automedon, valiant son of Diore, vainly attempts to spur Achilles’ horses back into battle. Replacing Zeus in the original story, St. Columcille, who unlike Patrocles is close to death but not yet dead, speaks in pity for the horse. The saint’s ordinary prose becomes poetical at this point *Sine hunc, sine nostri amatorem*,¹⁹¹ perhaps reflecting his consciousness of the epic qualities of his situation. At the end, the horse receives a blessing, instead of Zeus’ breath of might, enabling the horse (now termed *equus*) to depart. As in the story with St. Patrick, the Irish episode twists and reverses the original. During this scene, Columcille draws a contrast between the ignorance of men, who do not know that Columcille is about to die, although having rational souls and the divinely inspired knowledge of the animals (*inspirante deo*). In the *Iliad*, the contrast is between the ignorance of Achilles¹⁹² who waits by the ships, not knowing that Patrocles is dead, and the horses who are already mourning his death. The characters and spirit of the Greek story inform the passage, but there are no allusions to a text. Dorbbene, who copied Adamnan’s *Vita Columbae* in the eighth century, concluded his work with Latin words written in

¹⁸⁹ 127b-128a. Cf. *Iliad* 17:425-450

¹⁹⁰(Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary *caballus*, I)Juvenal uses it humorously for Pegasus (*Juv.* 3, 118) but it cannot be assumed that Columcille had this in mind.

¹⁹¹ Notice the repetition, the tmesis between *hunc* and *amatorem*, and the exaggeration involved in calling a horse a lover.

¹⁹² *Iliad* 17:400-412

Greek letters, placing the numeral in the center, φινιτυρ σηκυνδς λιβερ,¹⁹³ showing the attraction of Greek script to numbers and strengthening Adamnan's portrayal of Columcille as an epic hero.

St. Brigid, as the third great Irish saint, also has her classical moment when she cures a man from eating for twelve men.¹⁹⁴ This man Lugidus has great strength but also a great appetite which he prays St. Brigid to remove from him without removing his great strength. This scene is reminiscent of the story of Erysichthon, who was cursed with a great hunger for chopping down the sacred tree of Demeter.¹⁹⁵ Once again, the Irish version reverses the myth by having St. Brigid cure him of his gluttony (*ingluviem*) instead of curse him with it as Demeter does. In the following anecdote, St. Brigid herself removes the great tree (*arbor quaedam grandis & maxima*) that no one could move either with men or oxen or mechanical devices.

By way of contrast, Adamnan, in another of his works *De Locis Sanctis*, mentions several events from Roman history but all from after the time of Christ. In book 2, chapter 11, he refers to the reign of Constantine and later, he asserts that Jericho was destroyed *propter ciuium perfidiam* at the time of the siege of Jerusalem. Adamnan attaches no blame to the Romans for leveling the cities of Jerusalem and Jericho but instead suggests that the citizens of Jericho were at fault. The Irish theory that it was the property of the Romans to rule (just as it was the property of the Greeks to be wise) motivates his statement.

The *Annals of Inisfallen*¹⁹⁶ contain many references to classical history both Greek and Latin. Not surprisingly, the Greeks enter the scene very early. Inachos begins the rule of Argos

¹⁹³ Howlett, "Hellenic Learning" p. 60

¹⁹⁴ Cogitosus' *Vita Brigidae* pp. 138-9 in *Acta Sanctorum* Feb. 1 ed. Bollandistes, pp. 135-141

¹⁹⁵ This story is told by Callimachus (*Hymn 6 to Demeter* 65 ff) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 8. 739 ff)

¹⁹⁶ The non-Irish material of the pre-Patrician Annals of Inisfallen has recently been proven to be of early date unlike the Irish material which is certainly post-Carolingian.

while his daughter Io wanders off to Egypt.¹⁹⁷ Sparta is founded in the time of Jacob but Lacedemonia in the time of Moses.¹⁹⁸ Cadmus gave letters to the Greeks not long after. Apollo invents the art of medicine and the lyre while Europa is seized by the people of Crete and Dedalus makes the wings to fly. It is interesting to note that there is no hint of skepticism¹⁹⁹ in these records about the fabulous things recorded there, as if the Greeks are assumed to be able to accomplish anything. Apollo enters with no mention of his status as a god but with all his traditional accompaniments. In a poem on the alphabet, the poet calls him Phoebus and connects him to the sun. The letter S, speaking in its proper turn says: *Et me Phoebus amat posuitque in origine lucis.*²⁰⁰ The trustworthiness of the Greek record is never called into question. Furthermore, the annals include each city of Greece in their records much as Homer²⁰¹ goes through the catalogue of each ship at Troy. To the Irish, the Greeks are distinct individuals rather than a unified whole.

The allusions to more recent Greek history are really indirect links with the heroic past. Vergil the grammarian mentions Alexander the Great as he reproaches a Macedonian singing his praises. Alexander was a “modern” version of the great men of Homer’s times, modeling himself on Achilles. In another text, Alexandria is described as a grand city: *quae ab Alexandro rege Macedone eiusdem conditore famoso Alaxandria noto per uniuersas gentes nominatur uocabulo,*

¹⁹⁷ *Argiuorum regnum inchoat Inacho rége regnante annis .l., cuius filia Io quam mutato nomine Aegyptii, Isidem colunt. (Annals of Insifallen, pg. 3, Corpus of Electronic Texts)*

¹⁹⁸ Presumably, this means that Sparta’s rule is consolidated over the whole area at this time since the Irish seem to have known that Sparta was a city in Lacedemonia.

¹⁹⁹ This is in contrast with the attitude of copyists writing the epics of native Irish heroes. Often, they attach notes or insert their own comments expressing reservations about their material.

²⁰⁰ “And Phoebus loves me and placed me in the beginning of the light [source i.e. the sun]”. Although he uses a Greek epithet, the poet is obviously thinking of Latin (*sol*) since sun in Greek does not begin with S. *Versus cuiusdam Scoti de alphabet* in Baehrens’ *Poetae Latini Minores*, pg. 375-378. He dates it to the seventh century.

²⁰¹ Homer is one of the few non-heroic Greek figures included in the *Annals of Inisfallen*. Perhaps, he was thought to participate in the heroic world of which he sang. Nonetheless, he is barely mentioned and only tentatively. The other non heroic figures are Socrates, Plato and Demosthenes. Each has only their names and the word *nascitur* or *moritur* and nothing more, with the exception of Demosthenes who has *orator* after his name. As the Irish associated the Greeks with orality rather than the written word, Demosthenes would have fit in with their scheme better than the other figures.

*et magnitudinem urbis et nomen accipiens ab eodem reedificatore.*²⁰² A little later, this encomium is shortened to *Alexandro Magno*. The pre-Patrician section of the *Annals of Inisfallen* includes a poem on Alexander.

*(biir fann) fer immaric
 Alaxander (macc) Pilipp;
 dorat fo cheistcáin (Assia)
 (ó)t(há) Espáin co India.
 Othá Ethioip (roba) ri
 co s-Slébe réle Ríphi
 re (.u.) m-bliadan iar n-díth Dáir
 ro gial(lad ó) sil Adaim.
 Ba macc .xx. m-bliadan m-bil
 (in tan) ros triall in saigid,
 ba gaes a gui(de ar)a gart,
 a aes h-uile a dó trichat.
 (Tai)r (i)s(in) Babilóin m-bil
 oc ág fhledoil dia (muin)tir
 atbath de neim, níth cen tas,
 (roba dí)th ar airechas.²⁰³*

All the themes associated with the Greeks by the Irish are represented here: wisdom, nobility, contests and number. The numbers are organized from least to greatest: five years, twenty years, thirty-two years. Even allusions to Creation are not missing since Adam enters exactly in the center of the poem; moreover, the four directions of the world (another creation trope) form a

²⁰² “Which is named Alexandria by Alexander the Macedonian king, it famous founder, a word known among all nations, and receiving its name and the greatness of the city from the same rebuilder.” *De Locis Sanctis* II. 30:1

²⁰³ Alexander son of Philip;
 He brought Asia under a vexatious tribute (?)
 From Spain to India
 man of contest (?)
 From Ethiopia he was king
 To the bright Rhiphaean Mountains;
 For five years after the death of Darius
 Submission was made by Adam's seed.
 He was a lad of twenty good years
 When he proposed an expedition (?);
 It was wisdom to solicit him for his bounty (?),
 His whole age was thirty-two.
 In pleasant Babylon in the East
 At a feasting contest by his people
 He died of poison—ceaseless conflict—
 'Twas a loss for nobility.

compass in the shape of a cross: Spain (the west), India (the east), Ethiopia (the south) and the Rhiphaean Mountains (the north).

Law and Rome

The Irish had a highly complex system of native law. Their law covered the minutest particulars as well as the broadest categories: the law of sick maintainance, the law of fosterage, to name a few.²⁰⁴ The *Hisperica Famina* calls the day's schedule *lex diei*.²⁰⁵ When Christianity arrived, the laws began to be written down along with certain new laws based on the new religion. These new laws were usually attributed to a certain saint. For instance the laws protecting women, children and the clergy from war came from Adamnain; the first great collection of all the laws, the *Senchus Mor*, was attributed to St. Patrick. Scholars have often remarked on how little these laws changed with the introduction of Christianity. For instance, Irish law recognized multiple wives and their varying status long after the coming of St. Patrick. Old Testament law had a recognizable influence, but Roman and canon law seem to have had no effect. The law was arbitrated not by the king but by special judges trained to memorize the law, just as the poets memorized their literature. These judges were held in high reverence, reflecting the reverence accorded to the law itself.

God is seen as a lawgiver both because of the law he gave to Moses and because of the Law he gave to the Church. Prayer 31 from the Book of Cerne begins its address to God *legum lator largus dator*, Generous Giver, Proposer of Laws.²⁰⁶ Indeed, the law of God is equated with the law of Latinity by one author. *Multiplex enim ut lex Dei etiam Latinitas in suis prolationibus*.²⁰⁷ Breaking the rules of Latin is compared to sacrilege in the *Hisperica Famina*:

Caeter notantur piacula

²⁰⁴ *The Ancient Laws of Ireland* and Bryant's *Liberty, Order and Law*.

²⁰⁵ Title before line 133

²⁰⁶ Howlett, "Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts" pg. 25

²⁰⁷ "For as manifold as the law of God is Latinity in its own extensions." Text in Howlett, "Seven Studies in Seventh Century Texts" pg 47

*Quae italicum lecti faminis sauciant obrizum.*²⁰⁸

The Irish identified the Romans as the legislators of the classical world.²⁰⁹ O’Mulconry’s Glossary mentions the Roman *fascis* which is the symbol of Roman authority.²¹⁰ That this symbol loomed large in their imagination is shown by one of the entries in the Annals of Inisfallen. *Romanorum tertius Tuillius Hostilius regnavit annis .xxx.ii. qui primus regum Romanorum purpura & fascibus usus est.*²¹¹ Along with births and deaths of important figures and other world changing events (plagues, wars, persecutions), the first use of the symbols of Roman *imperium* seems trifling. Nevertheless, precisely because the purple and the *fasces* represent Roman rule—which in the eyes of the Irish is the essence of ancient Rome—they are worthy of being recorded for posterity.

Despite being pagan, they were competent and just rulers.

*Reges antiquitus secundum mores sibi solitos legitimis populos deorum statutes regebant; quos si nunc quoque istius temporis reges imitati fuerint, bene et competenter regnare.*²¹²

This fact seems to justify their taking away of the rule from both the Hebrews and the Greeks, even though these civilizations are older and more sacred. The Annals of Inisfallen note the passing of Alexander’s empire after it was divided into twenty-four parts under four rulers.

*Cethri fichit bliadan & .ii. bliadna & da cet bliadan batar Greic i n-ardfhlathius. Da ríg déc leo & oenrigan, .i. Cleopatra, & is h-ídi dedenach boi isind fhlathius coros athríg Iúil Cèssair.*²¹³

²⁰⁸ “Other sacriliges are noted

which wound the pure Italic gold of choice diction” (lines 130-131).

²⁰⁹ The Irish did not adopt Roman law but rather Old Testament Jewish law, since this was divinely inspired. But the Romans, without the advantage of divine inspiration, were the great lawgivers of the classical world.

²¹⁰ Entry 496

²¹¹ “Tuillius Hostilius reigned third of the Romans for 32 years, who first of the Roman kings used the purple and the *fasces*.”

²¹² “The kings of old according to the usual customs among themselves were ruling the peoples by the legitimate statutes of the gods; if also the kings of our time now would have imitated them, they would rule well and competently.” (*Epistola*, III, 493-497)

²¹³ “Greeks were chief sovereigns for two hundred and eighty-six years. They had twelve kings, and a queen, viz. Cleopatra, and she reigned last until Julius Caesar deposed her.”

The confusion between Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus here is matched by a similar confusion in the Irish Virgil's account of the Mithridatic War. Nevertheless, the gist of both passages is the same.

*Ex quibus est illud Aeneae Mitridatici belli historiam, immo tragoediam lacrimabiliter enarrantis: In illo inquit (id enim proponimus, qui Mitridaticum, quod maximum scimus, gestum est bellum) in illo, inquam... tempore Blastus quidam genere Phregius Iulius (quod ideo uocabulum Blasti a poetis accipit, quia pene homines pro nimia inmanitate mandere, quod Blasti dicuntur facere, uidebatur); hic ergo a septentrione... Romam Germanorum sibi... satellitibus adiunctis ueniens, ingente urbi populo plebique perditione per eundem facta (in septem siquidem contra sese dimicaturas ciuitatem diuisit partes) ei intolerabilem incussit plagam, ut pene tota ciuitas internicioni se daret.*²¹⁴

The sympathy is all on the side of the Romans and the aggressors are the Phrygians and Germans who fight back in a barbaric manner against Roman rule. We have seen how Adamnan unsympathetically refers to the sacking of a Jewish city because this city was not obedient to Roman law.²¹⁵ The first entry relating to the Romans in the Annals of Insfallen is a regnal date: *Primus Lati(nis Picus) regnauit.*²¹⁶ Indeed most of the entries relating to the Romans are the reigns of kings.²¹⁷

Ordinarily, the Irish do not engage with Roman history before the time of Christ; however, they do mention events dealing with government and rule from earlier periods.

²¹⁴ “From these is that [passage] of Aeneas tearfully telling the history—rather the tragedy—of the Mithridatic War. In that time, he said (for we propose to tell how the Mithridatic War was waged, which we know the greatest) in that time, I say, there was a certain Blastus Julius a Phrygian by race (which word of Blastus he received from the poets because he seemed often to eat people for his excessive inhumanity, which the Blasti are said to do); this one, therefore, coming from the north to Rome with the auxiliaries of the Germans having been joined to himself, he struck an intolerable blow since through himself a huge destruction was made for the city, the populace and the people (indeed, he divided the city into seven parts to fight among themselves) so that nearly the whole city gave itself to slaughter (*Epitoma X*, 195-211). Some scholars believe that this is actually a description of a more recent war under the guise of a classical one.

²¹⁵ *De Locis Sanctis* II, 13:2

²¹⁶ See Appendix 1 (eighth record)

²¹⁷ See Appendix 1

*Romae post expulsos reges ab urbe primum consules a Bruto esse ceperunt, deinde tribuini plebis ac dictatores; & rursus consules tempus obtinuerunt per annos fere .cccc. .lx.iiii. usque ad Iulium Cesarem, qui primus singularem arrip(uit) imperium olimpiade, .clxxx.iii.*²¹⁸

The Irish annalist shows his interest in this aspect of the Roman world by the length of this entry—much longer than the usual one line. This entry also shows the Irish had some knowledge of the complexity of the Romans' evolving government, a knowledge that contrasts with their simplistic view of the Greek situation. The Roman rule of governing is linked to the Roman rule of words. Just as Augustus was a patron of literary figures at the beginning of the principate, Romulus, as the founder of Rome, becomes in *Epitoma XII (De catalogo grammaticorum)* the patron of a remarkably long-lived Donatus, one of the most revered grammarians of the pre-Carolingian period.

*Primus igitur fuit quidam senex Donatus apud Troeam, quem ferunt mille uixisse annos. Hic cum ad Romulum, a quo condita est Roma urbs, uenisset, gratulantissime ab eodem susceptus IIII continuos ibi annos, scolam construens et innumerabilia opuscula relinquens.*²¹⁹

Donatus by virtue of his authority is assumed to have a great age, beginning from the time of Aeneas and lasting at least until Romulus. Thus, the two aspects of classical Rome identified by Irish scholars, word and law, are actually a unified whole.

Roman law extends even into the area of time, which is the provenance of the Greeks, as we have seen. The *De ratione computandi* recounts the whole process of calendar development. Romulus first decreed that the year would have ten months (March to December) and 304 days with 61 days, belonging to no month, added between the end of one year and the beginning of

²¹⁸ “After the kings have been expelled from the city of Rome, the consuls first began to be from Brutus, then the tribunes of the people and the dictators; and the consuls obtained again [the rule] for a time through nearly 464 years all the way to Julius Caesar, who first snatched the single rule in the 183rd olympiad.”

²¹⁹ “First there was a certain old man, Donatus, at Troy, whom they say to have lived a thousand years. This one, when he had come to Romulus, by whom Rome was founded, having been received by that same one most pleasingly, lived there four years continuously, constructing a school and leaving countless little works” (lines 1-8).

the next: *Et haec ordinatio Romuli mansit usque ad Numam Pampilium.*²²⁰ Numa divided these extra days between two new months and added every eight years, in imitation of the Greeks, extra days to February. These rulings are not necessarily the results of wisdom; in fact, some of Numa's decisions are called *stultum*.²²¹ Gaius is the last to tinker with the calendar, ordaining a system fairly recognizable. *Et haec ordinatio manebit apud Latinos usque ad diem iudicii, et est qua nos utimur.*²²² The author is careful to keep the "Latins" distinct from "us." The Romans put their own names by decree on names of the month, changing them from their ancient numerical appellations.

*Iulius ab Iulio Cesare nominatus est. Augustus autem ab Augusto Cesare nominatus est quia in isto mense tres triumphos in urbem contraxit id est de Antonio, uel de Parthis, Egyptiis, Macedonibus*²²³

The Roman gods, of course, also played their part in labeling the calendar. Mars, as the father of Romulus, and Maia, as the mother of Mercury, gave their names to two of the months.²²⁴ Venus was born from foam, *quam Graeci aphron uocant*, which became April with the loss of aspiration. Thus, we see that although the Greeks set the numerical quantities of the months, the Romans supplied the names.

While the Romans may not have been preeminent in wisdom, they did possess other virtues, less glamorous than those of the Greeks but suited to their role as rulers. O'Mulconry's Glossary tries to trace the etymologies of many of its Irish words back to the Greek language, but

²²⁰ *De ratione computandi*, 28.

²²¹ The Irish computist quotes Macrobius at another point saying that Romulus' native wit (*ingenium*) was sharp but rustic. (*De ratione computandi*, 49) O'Mulconry's Glossary derives the Old Irish word for a half-wit from Latin. *Baeth .i. faoth quasi fatu[u]s* (entry 118)

²²² "And this ordering will remain with the Latins all the way to the day of judgment and is what we use."

²²³ *De ratione computandi*, 29. "Julius is named by Julius Caesar. August, however, is named by Caesar Augustus because in that month he led three triumphs into the city, that is, over Anthony, or over the Parthians, Egyptians and Macedonians."

²²⁴ *De ratione computandi*, 29.

some have Latin derivations: *Apstinit latine ab apstinintia est.*²²⁵ Self-control is the foundation for controlling the world as the Romans did. Similarly, *Aine .i. a ieiunia.*²²⁶ Modesty (*fele*) is from the Latin word for covering, *uelum.*²²⁷ The Irish would not have dreamed of associating such virtues with the ancient Greeks. Instead of modesty and coverings, Greek body parts sprinkle their poems, glossaries and *computi*. Especially common is the word for flesh (σάρξ).

*Sarx nostra alitur
kales postea agitur
malis luibus moritur.*²²⁸

Other anatomical references include Greek words for hand, cheek, blood and heart.²²⁹

Words derived from Latin in O’Mulconry’s Glossary often deal with dominating and ruling nature: *Alla .i. ab alligatione equorum.*²³⁰ *Alla* is the Old Irish word for reins, the means of controlling a horse while the master of the horse *aire/area* also is a Latin borrowing: *Aire 7 arae .i. ab auriga...quia scindit auras.*²³¹ In the plant world, the Old Irish word for tillage, the arranging and ordering of the field, is derived from Latin: *Ar ab aro uel ab aruo.*²³² Similarly, *aruss quia in arvis fit*, and *burre buris est pars aratri a quo bure.*²³³ By way of contrast, the word for land lying fallow in Greek is the source of the Old Irish word for herd: *Arge* [αργός] *graece indolis interpretatur.*²³⁴ *Spade (fec)* comes from *figere* because it is fastened in the

²²⁵ Entry 8

²²⁶ *Aine*= Old Irish “fasting” (entry 80)

²²⁷ Entry 508 cf. 462 *toga enim dicta quia tegit*

²²⁸ *Adelphus adelpha mater*, 52-54

“Our flesh is nourished

Afterwards it is led to beautiful things

It dies with sorrowful evils”

²²⁹ *Culae* (χεύλα) *enim graece labia* (entry 507); *ciris* (χειρες) *graece amnus interpretatur* (entry 434); *ema* (αμα) *graece ema sanguis* (entry 390); *deissi graece dexia* (δεξιá) .i. *dextera* (307)

²³⁰ “*Alla* from the binding of horses” (entry 39)

²³¹ “*Aire* [nobleman] and *area* [charioteer] is from charioteer...because he divides the breezes.”

²³² (entry 52)

²³³ (entry 58) *aruss*=land and (entry 169) *bure*=ploughbeam

²³⁴ (entry 53) Also, it may be that the Irish associated this word with the Argo of Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece.

earth.²³⁵ Distaff (*fertas snimae*), axle (*fertais carpuit*) and sandbank (*fertas mara*) all come from the Latin word *uerto*.²³⁶

In a similar manner, the Irish often refer to the amazing craft of the ancient Romans.²³⁷ Their word *faebur* ‘(straight)edge’ comes from the Latin *faber* ‘craftsman’.²³⁸ Weaving (*fige*) derives from being fixed in the weavers beam: *fige .i. quia figitur i ngarmnaib*.²³⁹ When Cuchulainn’s charioteer is arming himself for battle, he wears a cloak that came from ancient Rome to Ireland, crafted by Simon Magus himself.²⁴⁰

The Irish allusions to the sea illustrate the contrast between Roman law and Greek mighty strength. When referring to the tides, the sea is called Neptune’s wave (*neptunius fluctus*).²⁴¹ However, when the violence and power of the sea are the topic, Greek gods such as Tethys and Nereus are the rulers.

*Tithica aetherium irrigant stillicidia girum
Calastrea glaucicomus uerberat competa Pontus
Periclitantes mactat naufragio puppes
Alias serenum compaginat tithis situm
Nec horrid tempestiui murmuris proflat susperia.*²⁴²

²³⁵ Entry 506

²³⁶ Entry 524

²³⁷ The *Vita Sancti Cuthberti* by an anonymous monk at Lindisfarne (possibly Irish) has a passage which speaks of a tour guide in the city of Carlisle showing off the old walls and fountain constructed long ago by the Romans. *Sabbato ergo die sicut presbyteri et diaconi ex quibus multi adhuc supersunt adfirmauerunt hora nona considerantibus illis murum ciuitatis et fontem in ea a Romanis mire olim constructum secundum id quod Paga ciuitatis praepositus ducens eos reuelauit* (IV, 8)

²³⁸ Entry 482

²³⁹ Entry 536

²⁴⁰ “He put on his outer mantle black as raven’s feathers. Simon Magus had made it for the King of the Romans, and Darius gave it to Conchobar and Conchobar gave it to Cuchulainn” *Tain Bo Cuailnge* p. 87

²⁴¹ *Gemellum neptunius collocare ritum fluctus:*

Protinus spumaticam pollet in littoral adsisam

Refluamque prisco plicat recessam utero

Geminum solita flectit in orgium discurrimina:

afrionosa luteum uelicat mallina teminum

marginosas tranat pullulamime metas

uastaque tumente dodrante inundat freta (*Hisperica Famina*, lines 396-402).

²⁴² “The Tethican droplets moisten the airy circuit

The blue-gray sea beats the beautiful starry crossroads

It destroys the adventurous sterns in a shipwreck.

At other times, Tethys borders on a serene situation

Likewise, Tethys is the sea's name with an *adunaton*: *tithicum tellato uixerit seminarium in temino*.²⁴³

Just as the Irish had drawn their saints into the heroic world of the Greeks, so these hagiographers placed their Christian heroes in the Roman world of order and rule. Tirechan emphasizes the fact that Patrick (as the Romans had done all over Europe²⁴⁴) left behind him many artifacts in various places in Ireland, thus establishing his right and the right of his successors to rule spiritually all of Ireland.

*Et perrexit ad tramitem Gregirgi et fundavit aeclessiam in Drummai et fontem fodiuit et non habet flumen in se et de se sed plenus semper. Patini eius et calix sunt in Cella Adrochtae filiae Talain.*²⁴⁵

This is so important to Tirechan that he begins his whole account of Patrick with a sentence representing the sheer magnitude of carefully crafted work, including books of law, that Patrick placed all over Ireland.

*Portauit Patricius per Sininn secum quinquaginta clocos, quinquaginta patinos, quiquaginta calices, altaria, libros legis, aeuanguelii libros, et reliquit illos in locis nouis.*²⁴⁶

By bringing these sacred items, Patrick brought also the sacred law to all these new places.

In Irish philosophy, letters, (whether Irish, Latin, or Greek) represent man in a tripartite division of mind, soul, and body. The letter's body is its shape and form on paper, while its soul

Nor blows forth the shuddering sighs of its stormy murmur" (*Hisperica Famina*, lines 390-4).

²⁴³ "[when] the sea population will have lived on the earthen boundary" (*Hisperica Famina*, line 107)

²⁴⁴ Tirechan does not make the connection between the Romans and Patrick but the linking of rule and craft is the same in both cases.

²⁴⁵ "And he proceeded on the path of Gregirge and founded a church in Drummae, and dug a fountain and it does not have a river into or out of itself but is always full. His patins and chalice are in the church of Adrocht the daughter of Talan" (*Collectanea*, 31: 1-2)

²⁴⁶ "Patrick carried across the Shannon with himself fifty bells, fifty patens, fifty chalices, altars, books of the law, books of the Gospels, and he left them in new places" (II,1)

is its literal meaning and its mind is its higher meaning.²⁴⁷ Thus, it was fitting that Rome should rule both the one and the other, mankind and grammar. Numbers, on the other hand, because they are infinite, represent God and the eternal kingdom. To Irish Christians, the Romans of antiquity often seemed the enemies of God and his church. The annals are filled with references to persecutions. Often an entry will note the name of a king, the length of his rule, the fact that he persecuted the church, and nothing further about him: *(Diocle)tianus annis .xx., id est persecutor.*²⁴⁸ Even Constantine, often characterized as a hero for the Christians, is troubling to the Irish. *Constantinus ab (Euse)bio Nicomedense aepiscopo in fine (in) Arrianum dogma conuertitur. Heu pro (dol)or! Bono usus principio & malo fine.*²⁴⁹ As the Greeks had not been problematic in this way, they are assigned the role of experts in *scientia numeri*. In fact, Alexander the Great is portrayed as honoring the God of the Jews with sacrifices after having seen a vision.

*Hoc tempore Iudeorum pontifex Max(imus) Iodas clarus habetur, qui Alaxandr(em Ma)gnum alloqutus est, & qui prius in uissione apparuit Alaxandro, & ideo magnum honorem dedit rex Iudeis, & ideo uictimas Deo obtulit.*²⁵⁰

Like wise Ptolomeus Philadelphus collected the sacred books of the Jews into the great library and donated many items to the temple in Jerusalem:

Ptolomeus Philodelpus annis .xx.iii. regnauit. Iudeos qui erant in Aegipto liberos eos esse permisit, & Eliazaro pontifici ad Hierusolimam & in templum multa donaria & uassa transmittens, .lxx. Interpretes petit, qui scripturam sacram in Graecum uerterent eloquium. Non solum enim

²⁴⁷ *Et ut aliquid intimatius asperiam, litera mihi uidetur humanae condicionis esse similis: sicut enim homo plasto et affla et quodam caelesti igne consistit, ita et litera suo corpora hoc est figura, arte ac dicatione, uelut quisdam conpaginibus arctubusque suffiunta est, animam habens in sensu, spiridonem in superior contemplatione (Epitomae II,21-27)*

²⁴⁸ Annals of Inisfallen, Appendix 1, number 137

²⁴⁹ “Constantine is converted to the Arian dogma in the end by Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia. Alas for sorrow! He made a good beginning and a bad end.” (Annals of Inisfallen, Appendix 1, number 141)

²⁵⁰ “In this time, Judas, high priest of the Jews, was held to be famous, who spoke with Alexander the Great, and first appeared in a vision to Alexander; to such an extent this king gave great honor to the Jews that he obtained victims for God” (Appendix 1, number 66).

*gentium scripturas, sed diuinas litteras in bibliothicam suam tulit.
Nam .xxx. millia librorum undique collocauit.*²⁵¹

The contrast could not be clearer. The Romans ruled and established law everywhere, but in the divine realm, they stumbled and lost their way.

²⁵¹ “Ptolomeus Philadelphus reigned for twenty-seven years. He permitted the Jews who were in Egypt to be free, and, transferring many gifts and vases into the temple for the high priest Eliazar at Jerusalem, he sought seventy translators who might turn the sacred scriptures into Greek eloquence; for he brought not only the writing of the gentiles, but also divine letters into his library. He collected thirty thousands of books from all sides” (Appendix 1, number 76).

Conclusion: Erga vs. Verba

The Carolingian renaissance brought the classical Roman and Greek world to the Irish on a grand and exciting scale. Irish scholar on the continent took full advantage of their new opportunities and outshined their contemporary colleagues in this field. Their most brilliant light, John Scottus Eriugena, astonished a cleric in Rome who had read his Greek poetry and translations and wondered how he had accomplished such things living on the edges of the earth. However, John Scottus Eriugena did not spring fully grown from the head of the Carolingian world. This paper explores the background to the classical humanism of this great scholar (and some of his lesser fellow Irishmen) in preparation for a further study on the exact relationship between him and his Irish predecessors in the field of classical studies.

This background includes a conception of the classical world as divided into two complementary sections. The Greeks were the wise heroes, skilled in the science of number. The Romans were the lawgivers and rulers, skilled in the use of writing. Great deeds belonged to ancient Greece, a great kingdom, to the Romans. As the Greek civilization was older, it was more worthy of respect in Irish thought, and thus the language of ancient Greece, both through its association with the nobility of its famous figures and through its suitability to numerical *scientia*, was the most suited to exalted topics and heavenly things.

*Nam qui veram sapientiam cupit ad aeternum regnum ubi nulla est ignorantia festinare contendat
(De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae, I, 7)*

Appendix 1

Classical Timeline in the Annals of Inisfallen

(Selections relating to classical history from CELT, Prepatrician Annals of Insifallen)

I have inserted my own numberings for ease of reference.

- 1) Argiuorum regnum inchoat Inacho rége regnante annis .l., cuius filia Io quam mutato nomine Aegiptii, Isidem colunt.
- 2) In tempore Iacobi Memphis ciuitas in Aegipto conditur ab Appe rege Argiuorum. Sparta quoque a Sparto filio Faronis regis Argiuorum conditur in tempore Iacobi.
- 3) *Kalendas*. Sp[*gap: extent: rest of line*] regnauit regnum Atheniensum[*gap: extent: rest of line*].
- 4) Cicrops primus regnauit *Atticam*. [*gap: extent: rest of line*]
- 5) (*Kalendas*). [*gap: extent: illegible for rest of line*] condita est Lacedemonia
- 6) *Kalendas*. Cathmus litteras dedit Graecís.
- 7) (K). Amphion musicus claruit.
- 8) *Kalendas*. Primus Lati(nis Picus) regnauit.
- 9) *Kalendas*. (Hoc tempore) Apollo medicinae artem in(ueni)t (&) citharam.
- 10) *Kalendas*. Hoc tempore Europa a Cretensibus rapta (est) naue, cui insigne fuit fabula ficta et taurus de fabro Dedalo & huius filio Iacario, quod aptatis sibi pennis uolauerint.
- 11) Orphius Linusque musíci claruerunt.
- 12) *Kalendas*. Hóc tempore laborinthus perplexis parietibus apud Cretam a Dedaló factus est, ubi fuit Minúterus inclusus, in quo sí quis introíret sine glomere líní, exitum inueníre non ualeret.
- 13) Hóc tempore Hercules Ilium uastauit.
- 14) In Troia post Lamidónem Priamus regnauit.
- 15) (Herc)oles agonem constituit O(lim)piacum, a quo usque ad Olimpiadem (supput)antur anni .cccxxx.
- 16) Latinas litterás Carm(entis) nimpha inuenit.

- 17) Huius (tem)poris Hercoles moritur anno (quinqua)gissimó secundó aetatis eius.
- 18) Ag(am)emnón imperat in Mecenis annis .x(xxv.), cuius anno .xu Troia capitur.
- 19) *Kalendas*. Hoc tempore Alaxander Helenam rapuit.
- 20) *Kalendas*. Primitus alea inuenta est a quodam m(ilite) cui nomen est Alea in otio Troia(ni) belli.
- 21) *Kalendas*. Hechtor moritur.
- 22) Huius anno tertio Troia capta est, completís a primo anno Cicropis qui primus apud Aticam regnauit, .ccc.lxxxu.; a .xl. autem tertio Nin(i(Assiriorum regis anni .dccccxxu.))
- 23) Post tertium captiuitatis Troiae annum, siue ut {folio 3a}quidam uolunt octauum, regnau(it Aen)eas annís tribus. Ante Aeneam (Ianus, S)aturnus, Picus, Faunus, Latinus in Italia (re)gnauerunt annis circiter .cl.
- 24) *Kalendas*. A(s)canius Aeniae filius Albam condidit (ur)bem qui regnauit .xxxix.
- 25) Tertius Siluius Aeneae filius regnauit annis .xxix.
- 26) *Kalendas*. Latinorum quartus rex Aeneas Siluius regnauit annis .xxx.
- 27) *Kalendas*. In Lacedemonia regnauit primus Euristeus annis .xlu.
- 28) Corinthéis primus Aletes annis .xxxu.
- 29) Homerus fuisse putatur.
- 30) Latinorum quintus Latinus Siluius annis (l.).
- 31) *Kalendas*. Cartágo condita est ut quidam uolunt a Carcadone Tirio : ut alii uero a Didóne filia eius annís .cxxx. post Troianum excidium.
- 32) {folio 9c}*Kalendas*. (Latinorum sextus Alba) Siluius Silui Aeniae filius, (regnauit annis .xxxix).
- 33) Sibil(la Erythraea) profetiza i(n)lustris habetur.
- 34) *Kalendas*. Latinorum septimus Aegiptus Siluius, (Al)bae superioris *regis* filius, regnauit annis .xx.iiii.
- 35) *Kalendas*. Latinorum octauus Capis Siluius, Aegipti superioris *regis* filius, regnauit annis .xx.iiii.

- 36) Latinorum nonus Carpentinus Siluius, superioris *regis Capis* filius, annis .xiii. regnavit.
- 37) Latinorum decimus Carpentinus Tiberius Siluius annis .iiii. regnavit, a quo & flumen Romae appellatus est Tibr(is), qui prius Albula dicebatur.
- 38) Latinorum undecimus Agrippa Siluius Tiberinus annis .x(i).
- 39) Latinorum duodecimus Aremalus Siluius, Agrippae superioris regis f(ilius), regnavit annis .ix.
- 40) Latinorum .xiiii. Auentinus Siluius, Aremuli filius maior superioris regis, regnavit annis .xxxviii.
- 41) Latinorum .xiiii. Prochas Siluius, regis superioris Auentini filius, annis .xlvi.
- 42) M(acedonum pri)mum r(eg)num incipit, primum ha(bens regem) Caranum annis xxviii.
- 43) Lat(inorum quin)decimus Amulius Siluius annis (.xlviii).
- 44) *Kalendas*. Olim(pias prima) incipit post annos captiu(itatis Tro)ianae .cccii.
- 45) Róma condita est in monte Palatino .xi. Kalendas Maias a geminis Romulo & Remo filiis Reae Silviae, quae erat filia Numitoris fratris Amuli.
- 46) Romulus .xxxviii. annis.
- 47) *Kalendas*. Remus occisus annis ab Urbe condita tertio.
- 48) Hóc t(empore) Romulus milites ex populo sump(sit).
- 49) Mortuo Romulo qui .xxxviii. annis regnavit, Numa Pompilius annis .xl. regnavit.
- 50) *Kalendas*. Sibylla Samia claruit.
- 51) Romanorum tertius Tuilius Hostilius regnavit annis .xxxii., qui primus regum Romanorum purpura & fascibus usus est.
- 52) Kl. Romanorum Ancus Marcius, Numae ex filia nepos, regnavit annis .xxx.iii.
- 53) Romanorum quintus Tarquinius Priscus annis .xxx.viii,
- 54) Romanorum sextus Servius annis .xxx.viii.
- 55) Latinorum .viii. Tarcinius Superbus annis .xxx.v.
- 56) Pulsus ab Urbe regibus, qui imperauerunt annis .cc.xl.v. uix usque ad .xv. lapidem Roma tenebat imperium.

57) Romae post expulsos reges ab urbe primum consules a Bruto esse ceperunt, deinde tribúiní plebis ac dictatores; & rursus consules tempus obtinuerunt per annos fere .cccc. .lx.iii. usque ad Iulium Cesarem, qui primus singularem arrip(uit) imperium olimpiade, .clxxx.iii.

58) Xerxes filius Darii annis .xx. Hic Aegiptum, quae a Dario discesserat, cepit, & aduersus Graeciam pugnaturus .dcc. (millia) armatorum de regno, & ccc. millia de auxiliis, rostratas etiam naues mille (.cc.), honerarias autem .iii. millia habuisse narra(tur). Attamen uictus ad patriam refugit.

59) Socrates nascit(ur).

60){folio 6a}Kalendas. Hoc anno Plato nascitur.

61) Hipocrates nascitur.

62) Galli Senones duce Br(enno) Romam inuasserunt.

63) Roma(ni Gal)lós tenent.

64) Demostenes ór(at)o(r) omnium rumore celebrat(ur).

65) P(lat)o moritur. Post quem Achachathe(miam Speusippus) tenuit.

66) Hoc tempore Iudeorum pontifex Max(imus) Iudas clarus habetur, qui Alaxandr(em Ma)gnum alloquutus est, & qui prius in uissione apparuit Alaxandro, & ideo magnum honorem dedit rex Iudeis, & ideo uictimas Deo obtulit.

67) Kalendas. Quarto anno Ochi, Alaxander Pilipi & Olimpiadis filius, uigissimum aetatis annum gerens, Macidonibus regnare incipit.

1. Batar Greic ó shein immach,
rucsat éit na n-imárach,
ar lín a treorach cen trés
cech eolach oca aiséis.

68) Nunc incipit regnum Graecorum

69) Kl. Alaxander Iudeam inuádit, a quá exceptus familiariter uictimas Deo immolat.

70) Kalendas. Alaxander .iii. anno regni sui Alaxandriam condedit in Egipto. Nec mora Babiloniam obtenuit interfecto Dario.

{folio 6c}

71) Is iar sein ro leth nert na n-Grec (fo chethri ai)rd(e) in domuin ut dixit in file:

1. [gap: extent: 1-2 words]
(bíir fann) fer immaric
Alaxander (macc) Pilipp;
dorat fo cheistcáin (Assia)
(ó)t(há) Espáin co India.
2. Othá Ethioip (roba) ri
co s-Slébe réle Ríphi
re (.u.) m-bliadan iar n-díth Dáir
ro gial(lad ó) sil Adaim.
3. Ba macc .xx. m-bliadan m-bil
(in tan) ros triall in saigid,
ba gaes a gui(de ar)a gart,
a aes h-uile a dó trichat.
4. (Tai)r (i)s(in) Babilóin m-bil
oc ág *fh*ledoil dia (muin)tir
atbath de neim, níth cen tas,
(roba dí)th ar airechas.

72) Ro fodlad (in flat)hius dara h-ési h-i cethri ranna (.xx.& ro) tescad dorithise in flathius & (ro rann)ad eter cethrar, .i. Ptolomeus (m.) Largi i n-Egept, Pilipp brathair ind rí, .i. Alaxander, i m-Macídóin, Antigon isind Assia Bic, Niccanór Seliucus isint Siria & isin Babilóin.

73) Cethri fichit bliadan & .ui. bliadna & da cet bliadan batar Greic i n-ardfhlathius. Da rí, déc leo & oenrigan, .i. Cleopatra, & is h-ídi dedenach boi isind fhlathius coros athríg Iúil Césair.

74) Latini Romaní perdomití sunt.

75) *Kalendas*. Tertio decimo anno Ptolomei Siriae & Babilón & superioribus locis regnare incipit Siliucus Nicanor, a quo tempore Machabeorum historia Ebraea, id est primus Machabeorum, Graecorum supputat

76) *Kalendas*. Ptolomeus Philodelpus annis .xx.iii. regnavit. Iudeos qui erant in Aegypto liberos eos esse permisit, & Eliazaro pontifici ad Hierusolimam & in templum multa donaria & uassa transmittens, .lxx. Interpretes petit, qui scripturam sacram in Graecum uerterent eloquium. Non solum enim gentium scripturas, sed *diuinas* litteras in bibliothicam suam tulit. Nam .xxx. millia librorum undique collocavit

77) Tantaem fuisse potentiam narratur Ptolomeus iste Philadelphus, ut Ptolomeum *patrem* prouinciret. Narrant enim historiae eum habuisse peditum .cc. millia, equitum .xx. millia, currum .ii. millia, elifantós, quos primus adduxit ex Ethiopia, quadringentos, naues longúas quás

78) Ptolomeus Euergites annis .xx.ui.

79) Uirgilius moritur.

80) Kl. Ab initio mundi .u millia cxc. anno iuxta .lxx. Interpretes. Secundum uero Ebreicam ueritatem .iii. *millia* dcccli. Ab Urbe uero condita anno .dccli. Anno quoque imperii Cessarisi Augusti.xl.ii. Anno secundo decinouenulis, & .uii. feria Iesus Christus filius Dei sextam mundi aetatem suo aduentu consecrauit.

81) .X. autem anno ab Incarnatione Octauianus moritur.

82) Tiberius, .i. lesmacc Augusti, regnat mundum annis .xxiii.

83) Ab Incarnatione .xx. anni.

84) *Kalendas*. Tiberius moritur.

85) *Kalendas*. *Gaius Calligula* regnauit annis .iii. & Agripa Iudeos.

86) *Kalendas*. Gaius mortuus est.

87) *Kalendas*. Claudius regnauit annis.xiii.

88) *Kalendas*. Claudius moritur.

89) *Kalendas*. Nero regnauit annis .xu. Primus etiam Christianos persequitur.

90) *Kalendas*. Nero moritur.

91) (Uespessianus) regnauit .ix.annis.

92) *Kalendas*. (Hoc) anno uindicta crucis a Uespessiano (& Tito) filio eius (& templum solo strauit, & regnum (Iu)deorum *subuertit*.

93) *Kalendas*. Uespissianus moritur.

94) *Kalendas*. Titus filius Uespessiani annis duobus regnauit.

95) *Kalendas*. Titus moritur.

96) *Kalendas*. Domitianus frater Titi annis .xu. Hic secundus post Neronem Christianos persequitur

97) *Kalendas*. Domitianus moritur.

98) Nerua anno .i., sub quo Iohannis apostolus liberatus Effessum rediit & euangelium scripsit in Assia.

99) *Kalendas*. Traianus .xix. annis.

100) {folio 7d}*Kalendas*. Helias Adrianus imperat annis .xxi. Hic est Adrianus apud quem Hierussalem restauratur sub nomineque suo Heleam uocat.

101) *Kalendas*. Adrianus moritur.

102) *Kalendas*. Antoninus cognomento Pius regnauit annis .xxii.

103) *Kalendas*. Antoninus moritur.

104) *Kalendas*. Marcus Antoninus imperat annis .xix.

105) *Kalendas*. Marcus Antoninus moritur.

106) *Kalendas*. Lucius Antoninus Commodus post mortem patris regnauit annis .xiii.

107) *Kalendas*. Lucius moritur.

108) *Kalendas*. Helius Pertinax mensibus .u.

109) *Kalendas*. Seuerus Pertinax annis .xuiii.

110) *Kalendas*. Hóc tempore fecit Séuerus pontem in Brittannia a mari usque ad mare per cxxx millia passuum.

111) *Kalendas*. Moritur Seuerus. Anni Domini .ccx.

112) *Kalendas*. Antoninus cognomento *Caracalla*, Seueri filius, annis .uii.

113) *Kalendas*. Antóninus moritur.

114) {folio 8a}*Kalendas*. Macrínus anno uno.

115) *Kalendas*. Marcellus Aurílius Antoninus annis .iiii.

116) *Kalendas*. Marcellus moritur.

117) *Kalendas*. Aurilius Alaxander annis .xiii.

118) *Kalendas*. Maximinus imperator annis .iii. Hic persecútus est aeclesiam Dei.

119) *Kalendas*. Maximinus moritur.

- 120) *Kalendas*. Gordianus imperat anno .ui.
- 121) *Kalendas*. Gordianus moritur.
- 122) *Kalendas*. Pilippus imperator annis .uii. Hic primus imperatorum omnium fuit Christianus.
- 123) *Kalendas*. Post tertium annum imperii Pilippi millissimus annus constitutione Romae *expletus est*.
- 124) *Kalendas*. Pilippus moritur.
- 125) *Kalendas*. Decius imperat anno uno, id est persecutor aeclesiae apud quem Cornilius martirizat.
- 126) *Kalendas*. Gallus imperat annis *ii*. id est persecutor aeclesiae.
- 127) *Kalendas*. Gallus moritur.
- 128) *Kalendas*. Ualerianus annis *xu*. Hic persecutus est aeclesiam, {folio 8b} sub quo Ciprianus martirizat.
- 129) *Kalendas*. Ualerianus, perse(cutione com)motata in Christianos, a Sapore r(ege) Persarum capitur, ibique luminibus orbat(us est &) seruitute miserabile consenescit.
- 130) *Kalendas*. Ualerian(us moritur).
- 131) *Kalendas*. Claudius regnauit anno uno.
- 132) *Kalendas*. Aureli(anus) persecutor imperat annis .u.[*gap: extent: few letters until end of line*]
- 133) *Kalendas*. Aurel(ianus moritur).
- 134) *Kalendas*. Tacitus imperator anno uno.
- 135) *Kalendas*. P(robus) annis .ui.
- 136) *Kalendas*. Casius imperat anno uno.
- 137) *Kalendas*. (Diocle)tianus annis .xx., id est persecutor
- 138) *Kalendas*. Galerius & Constantius & Maximianus Cesaes assumuntur in regnum.
- 139) Constantius, summae mansuetudinis & ciuilitatis uir, in Britania diem obiit Eboroici.
- 140) *Kalendas*. Constantinus filius Constantii & Helenae concubinae in Britania creatus imperator, regnauit annis .xxx. Hic elifantino arreptus est morbo. Magi consilium dederunt ei ut

in *therma* sanguine infantium .iii. c. innocentium plen(a) *calide* lauaret. Cumque id factum decreuisset, matrum luctú rex misertus est et ait: Non faciam hoc licet sim leprosús perpetuo. Sequenti nocte Petrus & Paulus apparuerunt ei dicentes : Uoca sanctum Siluestrem papam & ostendet tibi *thermam* salutis. Quo facto post ieiunium bapuzatus manum de caelo uidit sibi misam in hora bapuzatú tangentem, ac subito sa(nus) {folio 8c}abiacta lepra factus est rex. *Post* hoc *dedit* licentiam Christianis *congregatis* in toto orbe terrarum. Igitur de persecutore Christianus (e)fficitur. Et hic congregauit .ccc.x. & octo episcoporum in *Neceano* urbe ad damnationem Arria(n)ae heresis & ad probandam fidem aeclesiae (&) fecit duas capsas de aere puro (cir)ca corpora apostolorum Petri & Pauli.

141) *Kalendas*. Constantinus ab (Euse)bio Nicomedense aepiscopo in fine (in) Arrianum dogma conuertitur. Heu pro (dol)or! Bono usus principio & malo fine.

142) Constantinus moritur.

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