IONA

The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery

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and
GILBERT MÁRKUS OP

In Memory of John Smith MP
13 September 1938 – 12 May 1994
buried on Iona

Let him preserve justice, it will preserve him.
Let him exalt mercy, it will exalt him.
Let him care for his people, they will care for him.
(*Audacht Morainn,* c. 700 AD)

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c.ROBERTO LoVALVA 1994

Preface

Few places in these islands have exercised an attraction on people's imaginations as profound and as long-lasting as Iona. For centuries it has drawn people – from the first ascetic monks to the modern pilgrim-tourist – in pursuit of whatever it is that they have hoped to find there. It has answered people's needs for peace and quiet, for a symbol of nationhood or of cultural or religious identity, for a patron saint, and much more. Yet though so many people are familiar with this small Hebridean island, few have more than a hazy picture of its history. Even fewer realise that this monastery was the home not just of monks, but of writers, theologians and poets, and that so much of their writing survives that we can form a clearer picture of Iona in the seventh and eighth centuries than of almost any other monastery of that time in this part of Europe.

The *Life of Columba*, written a hundred years after his death in 597, provides the clearest evidence about life on Iona. But our concern in this book is with the poetry written in Gaelic and in Latin by the men who lived and studied, wrote and died on the island. A number of their poems survive and can be reliably identified. They have been published before, but are scattered in professional journals and hidden in out-of-print books, not always with English translations. Not until now have they been published together in one volume.

The collection and translation of Iona's earliest poetry given here will remedy this lack. We offer the poems first of all for the enjoyment of the reader: they include fine works that deserve to be much better

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known. Students of medieval and later literature will also find new
resources for their understanding of the development of Latin and
Gaelic poetry. Historians will find insights into the thought-world of
early medieval Scotland and Ireland. Finally, those interested in the
story of Christianity and monasticism in these islands, especially those
with an interest in 'Celtic Christianity' – much of which has little to do
with what Celtic Christians have actually said, done and written – will
be able to go straight to the sources instead of having to invent a Celtic
identity.

We offer the poems in their original languages and with fairly literal
translations. We have also provided reasonably full notes on the poems
and their authors, and on the imagery and theological ideas they use,
drawing out themes from the eight poems to offer a picture of Christian
life, belief and experience in an early Irish monastery. An introductory
section provides a historical context, while the final chapters contain an
early work on the holy life written by a man who studied on Iona, and
a sort of alternative reading list – a description of the books which the
Iona monks were reading in the sixth and seventh centuries. But the
poetry is the core of the book, and everything else should be read as a
reflection on it, or a context for it.

Many people have offered generous support to this project, and we
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of our homes: in the case of one of us, a wife, Anne Scott Goldie; and
in the case of the other a priory full of Dominicans. To all these, heart-
felt thanks, in the hope that they think it was worth it.

Edinburgh, The Feast of St Columba,
9 June 1994

Part One
IONA

Iona's Early History

In 563 Columba, 'wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ', left his native Ireland and settled on the small island of Iona, or Í as it is called in Irish.[1] The monastery which he founded there would become a centre not only of prayer and devotion, but also of learning, art and – the subject of this book – poetry. This Introduction will, we hope, help the reader to understand and enjoy the poems in their historical and literary context. We cannot hope to do more here than to provide a historical sketch, but our notes will point the reader in the direction of some of the more useful studies of Iona's history during our period – up to the early eighth century. The *Life of Columba* by Adomnán (d. 704), ninth abbot of Iona, is the most important primary source.[2] Máire Herbert's *Iona, Kells and Derry* is also essential reading, and has informed much of what we say here.[3]

PRINCES AND P●WERS

The world of Columba and his successors was ruled by warlords and imbued with the values of family connection and status.[4] Indeed, such was the case among all the 'Insular' peoples (i.e. those of the British Isles), and in this respect a peasant's life must have been much the same whether in southern Ireland, Strathclyde or East Anglia. The *Life of Columba* offers glimpses of the violence and hardship of this world: a woman is slain with a spear before the eyes of the saint, a descendant

of kings plunders the house of a poor man, and another attacks the saint himself. As well as plague, drought and disease, brigandage is a constant threat. Of course, life was not all hardship. The nobility, while deriving their power primarily from the sword, held strong beliefs about generosity, hospitality and patronage. The seventh and eighth centuries saw a flowering of creativity in metalwork, sculpture and literature in most regions of the British Isles, at least partly financed by this élite. This was a cultured world and, in Ireland at least, a world highly sensitive to law and legal language.[5] The early Irish laws reveal a complex society, whose stability depended on the interlocking of family pressure, the preservation of honour and the mutual support of lords and clients.[6]

Despite a fairly universal legal system in Ireland, individuals were closely tied to where and who they were. Only free men of certain ranks had real status, and then only within their own *túath*, the 'people' or 'kingdom'. At any given time there were upwards of 150 such *túatha* in Ireland, each with a king at its head, and usually dominated by his family and associates. He might rule over neighbouring kings as well, and be himself in submission to a stronger king. Within the *túath*, the relation of a free man to his lord was one of clientship: he held land and stock from the lord and in return paid food-rent and hospitality. To the ruler he owed military service and the like. Outside his *túath* the individual lost most of his rights, and so the stranger was vulnerable, with no status, no protecting kin-group, and no patronage.[7]

More generally, Ireland was dominated in Columba's time by a number of very powerful dynasties, most of whom had only recently emerged during a period of upheaval and change. All over Europe the collapse of the Roman Empire had been accompanied by the movements of peoples, both raiding parties and larger colonising groups, and Ireland was no exception. Ambitious Irish kings and their cohorts established colonies on the west coast of Britain, leaving traces in place-names and memorial stones written in the Irish language in Cornwall, Dyfed, North Wales and the Isle of Man. In Ireland new dynasties came to power, partly on the gains of raiding parties in Britain.[8]

Columba's own family belonged to one of these dynasties, the Uí Néill. Though they had divided into various branches occupying parts of northern and central Ireland, all the Uí Néill traced their ancestry

to Níall Noígiallach, whom tradition paints as a freebooter, fighting battles in Britain and sea-battles in the English Channel. Níall's descendants pushed across the northern half of Ireland, beating into submission tribes and kings further east.[9] One of these kingdoms, the Dál Riata, perhaps as a result of the Uí Néill pressure from the west, expanded across the water into what is now western Scotland. Some of them had been settled there for some time when, around the year 500, the king of Dál Riata himself crossed to the colony. His descendants would continue to rule there and would eventually rule the united kingdom of the Picts and the Scots which formed the basis of modern Scotland.[10]

These dynasties were not monolithic entities with a strong centralised kingship passed on from father to son. Rather, the kingship of a dynasty as a whole was held by the head one of the various branches of the extended family who were in permanent competition for the overkingship of the whole Uí Néill. A king who achieved power over all the Uí Néill also thought of himself as king of Tara, an ancient cultic site in the Boyne valley, and indeed was sometimes thought of as 'king of Ireland'. Adomnán certainly thought in these terms, describing a king from the Southern Uí Néill who died in 565 as 'by God's will ordained ruler of all Ireland'. This splendid title, however, bore no relation to any political reality, for no one could actually achieve sufficient power to rule the whole of Ireland.[11]

Dál Riata also had several branches which competed for overkingship in much the same way,[12] and in Adomnán's *Life* we see Columba taking an interest in the success of particular candidates. Failed candidates for kingship, if they were not killed outright, could fight long-running wars against the winner, or were sometimes forced into exile. The movement of exiled near-kings among the peoples of the British Isles accounts for many political alliances and much cultural interaction.

So far we have been looking at Iona's world from an Irish point of view, but Britain was populated by other folk as well. The Picts occupied the territory north of the Firth of Forth, the British (ancestors of today's Welsh) inhabited the area to the south of it. These native inhabitants spoke languages probably closely related to each other, and more distantly related to the Irish tongue of their

neighbours. The British, especially in the south of the island, had been heavily influenced by the occupation of their land by the Romans for some four centuries, the Picts less so. After Roman withdrawal from Britain in the fifth century, Irish raiders and colonists occupied parts of western Britain, but other raiders from Scandinavia and northern Germany also occupied much of the east. By Columba's time, these newcomers from the east (Angles, Jutes, Saxons, Friesians and Geats, known today collectively as 'Anglo-Saxons') ruled much of what we now call England, while the British were pushed into pockets along the western seaboard, the areas we now know as Cumbria, Wales, Cornwall and Strathclyde, based at Dumbarton, the 'Rock of the Clyde'. Other Britons migrated to the northwest corner of the continent, establishing a colony which would become known as Brittany. However, in spite of these pressures some of the British maintained much of their culture and language down to the present.

The powerful Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria was one with which Columba's successors had a great deal of contact. Formed early in the seventh century by the fusion of two smaller kingdoms, it expanded rapidly, and by the mid-seventh century the Northumbrians seem to have ruled as 'overkings' in much of northern Britain. As in the Irish kingdoms, various branches of the ruling family competed for kingship, and exile was a feature for Northumbrian kings-in-waiting, a number of whom spent their time of exile in Ireland, Pictland, Dál Riata, and even on Iona itself.[13]

The Picts stand out among their contemporaries in a number of ways, the most noticeable, to their contemporaries at least, being that succession to Pictish kingship was matrilinear, descending through the children of a king's daughter or sister rather than through his sons.[14] There seem to have been various bases of Pictish power, some kings being based north of the Mounth, others in the fertile straths of the Tay and the Earn. On a cultural level, too, they stand out for the apparent continuance of at least some elements of a non-Indo-European language within the Pictish tongue, and for their highly developed and still enigmatic system of symbols carved on stones or engraved on metalwork.[15]

Iona, seemingly perched on the edge of the world, was in fact at the very heart of this multi-cultural northern Britain. The territory in

which it lay belonged to the Irish-speaking Dál Riata, though it had probably belonged to the Picts not long before and Iona was close to routes which led to centres of Pictish power. It was also not far from the British fortress on the Clyde, nor yet very far from Northumbria. In time Iona's influence, political and religious, would reach all these areas.

<center>THE SPREADING OF THE WORD</center>

The historian Bede (674–735) observed that there were in Britain four nations – English, British, Irish and Picts – and five languages, the fifth being Latin, the language of the Christian scriptures.[16] He thus identified one of the key elements in the cultural exchanges between these four peoples, with their four different languages. It was Christianity which helped to forge links between them.

   The progress of Christianity in the British Isles follows a rather circular route, spreading gradually into southern Britain at first, so that by the early fourth century the British church was large enough to support at least three bishops.[17] Ireland first received Christianity through its existing contacts with Britain: the slave trade, merchants, and the Irish colonists in southern Britain may all have played a part. By 431 Ireland had a large enough Christian population to warrant Pope Celestine sending them a bishop, a man called Palladius.[18] From Britain as a slave came Patrick, son of a deacon and grandson of a priest. Having escaped from Irish slavery, he later returned to Ireland as a bishop, apparently working mainly in the northern half of the island. He gives testimony in his own *Confession* to the conversion of many members of the aristocracy to Christianity.[19]

   Ireland also received from Britain some of its earliest teachers of the monastic life, the movement of withdrawal from family and society into a community devoted entirely to prayer and asceticism which would make a great impact on the Insular world as well. Patrick himself describes how many of his converts became 'monks and virgins of Christ',[20] while later Irish monks often looked to sixth-century British churchmen as their founding fathers, and for some of these there is evidence that they visited Ireland.[21]

In Britain, Christianity began to spread to the Picts as well, if only to the southernmost of them. Bede connects this with the figure of St Ninnian, bishop and founder of the church at Whithorn.[22] It was only after contact with Columba and his followers, however, that the Picts became firmly sewn into the Insular Christian world. The Anglo-Saxons, long shunned by the British as heathens, received Christianity from two directions. Beginning in Kent, missionaries arrived from the continent at the end of the sixth century and soon made headway there. Some decades later, Oswald, an exiled contender for the kingship of Northumbria, was living among the monks of Iona. When he came to power, says Bede, he brought Irish monks to Northumbria, introducing simple and holy men to the northernmost English kingdom. Other Irish monks came and worked elsewhere among the Anglo-Saxons, such as Fursa among the East Anglians, and soon Englishmen were flocking to Ireland to study: 'The Irish received them all freely, and gave them food daily without payment, and books for reading, and took care to offer them instruction free of charge.'[23]

This then is the trail of the Word through the British Isles, and when writers speak of 'Insular Christianity', they mean the product of this line of descent. What, then, of 'Celtic Christianity' or the 'Celtic Church'? In a sense, these are non-entities.[24] The speakers of Celtic languages – British, Irish and Picts – had no more contact with each other than with the Anglo-Saxons or people from the continent, except by force of geography, and they had no conception that they were related to each other, even distantly. There is little that marks the religious histories of Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Brittany which would suggest that they shared any particular traits, still less that they were part of a separate 'church'. The only thing that actually united all these peoples was the chain of Christian inheritance, from Britain through Ireland and back to northern Britain, but it linked them also to the continent and beyond.

This is not to say that the local cultures of the Celtic peoples did not influence the way they practised Christianity. It is only to deny that it was the same 'Celtic' way among all these peoples. Christianity had its local, particular aspects in early Ireland and Britain, but its aspects were many and varied from region to region, and from people to people. The ideals that united them, the study of scripture, the

imitation of Christ, the ascetic practices of monasteries – these were to be found all over Europe at the time. There was only one major issue on which some Christians in the Celtic countries and in Europe disagreed, and that was over how to calculate the date of Easter. There was nothing particularly 'Celtic' about any of the dating-systems on offer, and the debate had also gone on for centuries elsewhere in Europe.[25] Among the Irish and the Picts the disagreement did not last long – a matter of some generations only – and it was, in all events, a matter of practice, not of doctrine. The Irish monk and missionary Columbanus (d. 615) stoutly defended the Irish Easter calculation, but this is what he wrote to Pope Boniface:

> For we – all of us Irish – who live at the edge of the world, are pupils of Saints Peter and Paul and of all the disciples who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the divinely directed scriptures, and we accept nothing beyond the teaching of the Gospels and the Apostles ... Our possession of the catholic faith is unshaken: we hold it just as it was first handed to us by you, the successors of the holy apostles.[26]

Columbanus, at least, had no idea that he belonged to some distinctive 'Celtic' church.

IONA AND ITS FOUNDER

The one fairly certain date in Columba's life is its end: he died on Iona on 9 June 597, aged seventy-five, according to Adomnán's testimony.[27] He was born into the Cenél Conaill branch of the Uí Néill, but his kin did not rise to power over the Uí Néill until 566, when Columba's first cousin, Ainmere mac Sétnai began his three years of rule. Thereafter, for most of Columba's later life his near kinsmen were kings of Tara.[28]

Columba began training for a religious life quite early. He was fostered by a priest called Cruithnechán, studied as a deacon with Gemmán in Leinster, and later with 'bishop Vinniau'.[29] We know little of Columba's life in Ireland before his departure for Britain in 563. He may already have founded churches, especially some of those associated with him in his native land of Donegal. Certainly the

Amra, one of the poems in this volume, speaks of him as *cét cell custóit*, 'guardian of a hundred churches', though there is obviously hyperbole as well as alliteration at work there.[30]

There are two events about which we would like to know much more. Recording the battle of Cúl Drebene, which was fought and won in 561 by Columba's kin and their allies against the ruling Southern Uí Néill, the *Annals of Ulster* add tantalisingly: 'They prevailed through the prayers of Colum Cille.' Much has been made of his connection with the battle by both medieval and modern commentators, especially in the light of his departure for Britain two years later. Was Columba involved in some inappropriate way in the battle?[31]

Adding to the mystery is Adomnán's story of Columba being excommunicated by a synod at Tailtiu (Telltown, in the Boyne valley) 'on a charge of offences that were trivial and very pardonable ... improperly as afterwards became known.'[32] What these offences were we do not know. Is it an accident that the synod was held in the territory of the same Southern Uí Néill who had been defeated in the battle? The persistent feeling that one gets from these two events is that Columba was somehow caught up in accusations of collusion with violence, and partisanship – a suspicion that is not allayed by the partisanship he shows in Adomnán's *Life*.

Whatever the reason for his pilgrimage, Columba arrived in Britain in 563 and was given the island site of Iona by Conall son of Comgall, the king of Scottish Dál Riata.[33] There were other foundations besides Iona: Hinba (which we cannot identify) where anchorites lived a more solitary life, and Mag Luinge on Tiree where Columba sent people who came to him as penitents. There are also churches mentioned on an unidentified island called Elen and on the mainland at a place called Cella Diuni.[34]

Columba returned to Ireland on a number of occasions, on one of which he founded a monastery at Durrow, in the territory of the Southern Uí Néill.[35] He visited other prominent churchmen in Ireland, and such people are in turn frequently found visiting the saint on Iona or elsewhere. Adomnán's *Life* offers a vision of a community of saints, founding-monks with highly fraternal relations. While some of this may reflect Adomnán's own monastic ideal, it is probably true that Columba

was sought out by leading churchmen, such as Comgall of Bangor and Colmán mac Béognae whose 'Alphabet of Devotion' appears in a later section of this book to illustrate the thought that shaped early Irish monasticism.[36]

The affairs of kings also leave their mark on Adomnán's pages, and Columba's involvement in politics did not end when he left Ireland. He appears to have had an important role in a 'conference of kings' in 575, with Áed mac Ainmirech, king of Cenél Conaill and later of Tara, and Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Riata.[37]

By the end of his life, Columba's achievement was monumental: he had founded Iona and a number of connected monasteries in the west of Britain and in Ireland, and the influence of this network of churches extended into kingdoms as diverse as the Southern and Northern Uí Néill, the Scottish Dál Riata and the Picts. But he and his followers would have considered these achievements minor in comparison to what he was seeking to attain: wisdom, learning and holiness. Judging from the *Amra*'s picture of Columba, by the time of his death he already had an incomparable reputation for just these virtues.

CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION

One notable feature of Columba's community is that it was very much a family affair.[38] Some of the monks who first came to Iona with him were his relatives, and for centuries after the saint's death the abbots of Iona continued to be chosen mainly from among his kindred, the Cenél Conaill. The first was his cousin, Baíthéne, one of his original companions when he arrived on Iona. He lived only three years after Columba's death, and was succeeded in the abbacy by Laisrén, a second cousin of Columba, who lasted slightly longer in office, dying in 605; he had been Columba's companion on his journeys through Ardnamurchan. We may be able to discern some kind of abbatial 'apprenticeship' for these men: during Columba's abbacy Baíthéne had been in positions of authority in Iona, Hinba and Mag Luinge on Tiree,[39] while Laisrén had been in a position of authority in Durrow.[40] The fourth abbot, Virgno, was probably of British descent, though later

genealogies also connect him with a separate branch of the Cenél Conaill. Like his two predecessors, Virgno had been a monk with the saint himself.[41]

Ségéne became abbot on Virgno's death in 623. He was the nephew of Laisrén, and so of the main Cenél Conaill stock; and it is probably no accident that his abbacy (623–52), the most assertive since Columba's, coincided with the return of the Cenél Conaill kings to power over the Uí Néill. Three strong kings from Columba's kin reigned in succession from 628 to 658, and must have provided some of the patronage which fuelled Iona's new ebullience. Ségéne's abbacy is marked by three main features: the collection of hagiographical material about Columba, a conservative stance in the Easter dispute, and the physical expansion of the Columban *familia*.

Máire Herbert has shown how Ségéne was involved in collecting testimonies about Columba's virtues, and seems to have entrusted his nephew, Cumméne – later to be abbot himself – with the task of writing up these accounts.[42] The monk and poet Beccán mac Luigdech, who composed two of the poems on Columba printed below, may well have been a close associate of Ségéne early in his career, and his poems share this desire to express the devotion of Iona monks to their founder-saint.

This Beccán may be the hermit to whom a letter was addressed in the 630s, along with the abbot Ségéne, concerning the date of Easter. In southern Ireland clerics had met to discuss changing the way in which the date was fixed. After the return of an Irish fact-finding mission to Rome, most of the southern Irish churches fell in with the rest of the continent. A letter was sent to Iona by a cleric called Cummian, to persuade Iona to adopt the same method of calculation.[43] Ségéne must have refused, for in 640 the pope-elect wrote a similar letter of exhortation to the northern clerics, including Ségéne.[44] Iona remained unbending for many years, until 716 when the *Annals of Ulster* report, 'Easter is changed on the monastery of Í.'

But Iona was far from isolationist at this period. In 635 two new monasteries were founded from Iona. In Ireland, a monastery was founded on 'Rechru', either Rathlin Island or Lambay Island near Dublin.[45] More importantly, Iona founded a monastery on the tidal island of Lindisfarne in Northumbria.[46] Oswald, newly king of

Northumbria after years of exile on Iona, attributed his new-found success to the patronage of Columba in heaven. He was also deeply impressed by the simple and holy life of the Irish monks, among whom was Áedán (usually called Aidan) whom Iona sent as bishop to Lindisfarne. King Oswald, fluent in Gaelic from his exile, translated for him when he preached to the Northumbrians.[47] During Ségéne's abbacy, then, we see Iona's position greatly strengthened, with new friends in the resurgent Cenél Conaill and in the king of Northumbria.[48]

CONTROVERSY

Little is known of the abbacy of Suibne, from 652 to 657, but he was succeeded in 657 by Cumméne, under whom there was a certain decline in Iona's fortunes.[49] The power of Iona's Dál Riata friends was slipping and, to make matters worse, within a year of Cumméne's being made abbot the kingship of the Uí Néill passed to the southern branches again, so that Iona's Cenél Conaill kin became less powerful. Finally, the next episode in the chronic Easter controversy, this time in Northumbria, weakened Iona's links with English kings for some time.

The story of the Northumbrian dispute has been told many times, usually inaccurately described as a cataclysmic encounter between 'the Celtic church' and 'the Roman church', in which a futile last stand was made by 'Celtic Christianity' against encroaching Romanism. In fact, nothing of the sort happened. The southern Irish churches, and probably many of the northern ones as well, which were no more and no less 'Celtic' than Iona, had long since changed their way of dating Easter. Bede tells us that 'the most spirited defender of the true [i.e. continental or 'Roman'] Easter was an Irishman called Rónán' – a detail which is often left out of the legend as it has developed.[50]

Briefly the situation was this. Oswald's brother Oswiu, who had himself probably been exiled in Ireland and Iona for a time, was as much an adherent of the Columban *familia* as Oswald had been, and he celebrated Easter on the date calculated according to Iona's conservative method. But he had married Eanfleda, a royal woman from Kent who had been instructed by missionaries from the continent and who therefore celebrated Easter on the same date as the continental and

southern Irish churches. A situation in which a Christian married couple celebrated the major Christian feast on different dates could not last long, especially when Easter meant a return to full meals and a normal sex-life after the Lenten abstinence. Oswiu therefore summoned a synod at Whitby in 664. Bede gives a blow by blow account of the debate between the representatives of the two parties – Wilfrid for the 'Roman' party, and Colmán, bishop of Lindisfarne, for the Iona party. Finally, Bede states, the king accepted Wilfrid's argument, swayed by his appeal to the heavenly authority of Peter and his successors.[51] The defeated Colmán left Lindisfarne for Iona, taking with him some of Áedán's relics and about thirty monks, both Irish and English. Four years later he founded another island monastery on Inishbofin on the west coast of Ireland, from which in time a new English monastery was founded in Ireland at Mag Eó, 'Mayo of the Saxons'.[52]

The defeat of Colmán at Whitby probably weakened the influence of the Irish in Northumbria. How much it was felt on Iona itself is hard to say, and as far as we can see, Cumméne took no part in the affair at all. But perhaps when Adomnán wrote his *Life of Columba* thirty years later he did so partly to defend the memory of the saint, who had been slighted at Whitby.

ZENITH

It is during Adomnán's abbacy (679–704) that Iona's fortunes were restored, both in political and in religious influence, rising in conjunction with those of her friends. Now, as in the first half of the century, these friends included the royal house of Northumbria. There, King Ecgfrith's apparently violent reign had ended in 685 when he was killed at Nechtansmere (Dunnichen, near Forfar) while trying to expand his power into Pictland. The year before he had launched an attack on the district of Brega on Ireland's east coast, taking sixty people captive. This move brought him into ill favour with the church, since, according to Bede, 'he cruelly laid waste a harmless people, always most friendly to the English, and his hand spared neither churches nor monasteries'.[53] Bede even sees Ecgfrith's death as a kind of divine justice.

The two main beneficiaries of Ecgfrith's death were both Adomnán's associates. The victor at Nechtansmere was the Pictish king Bruide mac Bili, whom tradition depicts as well disposed towards Iona.[54] More importantly, Ecgfrith's successor in Northumbria was his half-brother Aldfrith, the grandson of an earlier Northern Uí Néill overking, who had probably lived among the Irish all his life and had perhaps even been educated on Iona. He was renowned as a scholar and a sage long after his death in 704.[55] Such a king, as a distant kinsman of Adomnán with a common language and a close kinship of interest in book-learning, was a likely friend and ally.

It is significant that the first two recorded actions of Adomnán are directed towards the Northumbrian court. In 687 he went there to free the Irish captives who had been taken in Ecgfrith's raid.[56] Two years later he was there again, this time, we are told, observing the practices of the Northumbrian church and also presenting his book *On the Holy Places* to his friend Aldfrith. He seems to have impressed the Northumbrian clergy, usually suspicious of the Irish at this stage, for they said 'he showed wonderful prudence, humility and devotion in his ways and in his speech.'[57]

Bede suggests that Adomnán changed his practice on the Easter-dating question quite early during his abbacy, and preached strenuously in Ireland and at Iona for change, but this is unlikely, for nowhere in his writings does Adomnán attempt to persuade the reader to accept any answer to the Easter question. Perhaps the Northumbrian clerics were more anxious about the question than he was. Nonetheless, it was not long after Adomnán's death that Iona finally did change her practice on Easter in 716, suggesting perhaps that Adomnán had laid the groundwork for the change.

Adomnán went to Ireland in 692 when, among other things, he may have intervened in a disputed succession in the important non-Columban monastery of Clonmacnoise. His candidate, an outsider, may have been of Pictish descent. That the abbot of Iona had the ability to interfere in affairs of this very important monastery testifies to his influence, and probably also to his diplomatic abilities.[58]

In 697, Adomnán returned to Ireland for the synod of Birr (Co. Offaly) where he promulgated his 'Law of the Innocents', the *Cáin Adomnáin*, a law protecting women, clerics and children from violence

and military service. This extraordinary law, binding several kingdoms, depended on church and secular rulers for its enforcement, attracting 'guarantors' – supporting signatories – from a huge area, from Pictland to Munster.[59]

The accession to Uí Néill kingship of Loingsech mac Oengusso in 696 is likely to have been crucial to the law's promulgation. He was a Cenél Conaill kinsman of Adomnán, and in his reign we see again the old pattern of king and abbot working in tandem. The Law, to which we will return later, was important to Iona in bringing both prestige and revenue, as well as embodying a certain moral vision of the defence of the weak.

THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES

Adomnán died in 704, leaving behind a revivified Iona, a prominent centre of learning, religious life and politics. Although Iona did not hold centre stage in the eighth century as it had in the seventh, it was still a major force in the church, as well as being an influential artistic and literary centre. During this period, an Iona monk called Cú Chuimne (d. 747) contributed to the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, a great compilation of canons made by himself and Rubin of Dair-inis.[60] Adomnán was already seen as a saint of some power, and his relics, embodying his authority and that of his successor, were taken on a circuit of Ireland to effect his Law's renewal there in 727.

The 740s and 750s saw the rise of another Southern Uí Néill dynasty, the Clann Cholmáin, in the person of their aggressive king Domnall Midi.[61] This king was probably an active patron of Columba's monastery at Durrow and is said to have been buried there. His connection with Iona is also shown by his enactment, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, of the 'Law of Colum Cille' in 753. This law's contents are unknown but its origin must surely be traced to Iona, and it was enforced again in 757 and 778. Collaboration between Southern Uí Néill kings and Iona abbots continued throughout the century, then, and culminated in the building of the new monastery at Kells in 807, on Southern Uí Néill territory. Under this patronage Kells was to become the new centre of the Columban *familia* in Ireland after the ravages of Viking raids had made Iona a dangerous place.

Iona's continuing influence in Ireland is also indicated by the involvement of two Iona monks with the *Céli Dé* or 'servants of God', the ascetic reform movement which began to affect Ireland in the later eighth century. Though the reform was generally more influential in the south of Ireland, Diarmait, abbot of Iona from 814, and Blathmac, an Iona monk who was martyred in 825, both seem to have played a role.[62]

So Iona continued to make her presence felt in Ireland, where her monks would eventually make their main base. What of Scotland? Such evidence as we have suggests a waning of influence for Iona around 717, when the Pictish king Nechtan mac Derile expelled the Columban *familia* from eastern Scotland at a time when his kingdom was forming closer links with Northumbria.[63] Not until the ninth century do we see much evidence of co-operation between Iona and eastern Scotland, and that resulted in the removal in 849 of some relics of Columba to the new seat of ecclesiastical authority in Scotland, the church at Dunkeld.[64] Although its role as administrative head of the Columban *familia* was on the wane, Iona influence on Scotland on a broader scale for many more centuries is evident; and it is likely to have been Columban monks who were responsible for the seemingly wholesale success of the *Céli Dé* reform in Scotland.

In the world at large, Iona can still be seen as a major contributor to the life of the church during this period. It is likely that Virgil of Salzburg (d. 784) had come from Iona.[65] This Virgil (his Irish name was probably Fergil) went to the continent in 742, and became abbot of the monastery at St Peter's, Salzburg, later being consecrated bishop there; he is probably also the author of a work of cosmography.[66] It has also been suggested that another cosmographer, Dicuil, came from Iona.[67] He was the author of a book of world geography called *On the Measurement of the Earth*, and is found working at the Carolingian court in 825.[68] Dicuil had probably left Iona at the same time as many others, during the ravages of the Viking attacks, to settle on the continent by 814.

It was a Viking raid on Iona in 825 which shortly afterwards inspired Walahfrid Strabo in the island monastery of Reichenau on Lake Constance to write a poem in honour of one of the monks who was killed – Blathmac mac Flainn. It makes chilling reading:

> See, the violent cursed host came rushing through the open build-
> ings, threatening cruel perils to the blessed men; and after slaying
> with mad savagery the rest of the associates, they approached the
> holy father [Blathmac] to compel him to give up the precious
> metals wherein lie the holy bones of St Columba ... [69]

It was partly to escape such Viking attacks that the Columban *familia*
moved its centre of operations in the ninth century to the new
monastery at Kells in the Irish midlands, the territory of the Southern
Uí Néill. Iona, Rechru and Tory had been sacked, and so were Skye
and mainland parts of Scotland. In the third attack on Iona in 806 'The
familia of Iona was slaughtered by heathens, that is sixty-eight of
them.'[70] It is no surprise that the building work proceeded apace at
Kells, begun in 807 and finished by 814. The monastery on Iona
remained active, and the heirs of Columba would remain for many
decades also abbots of Iona, but Kells was becoming the centre of
gravity of the Columban *familia* in Ireland. There they became increas-
ingly dependent for patronage on the Southern Uí Néill dynasties in
whose sphere of influence Kells lay, while Iona itself experienced a
decline from which it did not recover until the later middle ages.[71]
In Scotland, as we have seen, the shift of political power and ecclesias-
tical jurisdiction eastwards had much the same effect.[72] Much of Iona's
literary inheritance (including much of the poetry in this volume)
travelled with it to Ireland, and there the few works that still remain
were preserved in monastic libraries.

The Life and Work
of the Monastery

Turning from the Insular and European context of Iona's history,
let us now focus more closely on the daily life of the monastery
itself. A good deal can be learned of the early Iona community from the
archaeological evidence. On its own, it appears to be less than promis-
ing, but when examined in the context of contemporary literature a few
post-holes, bones and fragments of wood can reveal a good deal.[73]

BUILDINGS

The heavily restored – in fact, more or less totally reconstructed –
medieval building seen by the modern visitor to Iona is quite unlike
the cluster of buildings in which Columba's monks lived during our
period. That monastery was surrounded by a rampart or *vallum*, open
to the sea at the east side, and extending 300–400 metres from north to
south. Farming activities took place outside the *vallum*,[74] while within
it were Iona's dwellings, workshops and church, built of wood like those
of other Irish monasteries.[75]

The monastery's church seems to have been large enough to hold the
entire community at prayer. On the evidence available, not much more
than this can be said of it except that it had some sort of side-chapel
(*exedra*) which was entered through a door from the interior of the
church.[76] Monks would go to the church to pray together, and some-
times alone.[77]

Apart from the church, there was a large communal building or *magna domus*, where many of the community's day-time activities took place – teaching, study, reading and writing. Books were apparently kept in chests, probably in the *magna domus*. It may also have served as a kitchen and refectory.[78] Some monks had their own individual cells (*cellulae*) while others shared communal accommodation in a dormitory. Columba also had a small hut or *tegorium* where he would work during the day, possibly on *Tòrr an Aba*, a rocky outcrop in the western part of the enclosure.[79] Such farm buildings as there were seem to have been located outside the enclosure, which is where activities such as butchering and milking of cattle took place.[80]

On the western side of the island stood a building used for showing hospitality to pilgrims and other visitors. It is here that Columba tells one of his monks to care for a visiting crane from Ireland until it is strong. Columba refers to the bird as a 'pilgrim' and a 'guest', suggesting that this building was generally used for visitors to the island, perhaps in an attempt to preserve something of the prayerful tranquillity of the monastic enclosure by keeping guests at a distance. Columba himself is said to have been frustrated by 'intolerable crowds of people wishing to ask him about some thing,'[81] and the Irish rules for exclusion from monasteries seem to reflect the same concern:

> There ought to be two or three boundaries around a holy place: the first, into which we allow no one at all to enter except the saints, since laymen do not draw near to it, nor women, but only clergy; the second, into whose streets we allow crowds of rustic folk to enter who are not much given to wickedness; the third, into which we do not forbid lay homicides and adulterers to enter, by permission and custom.[82]

Cogitosus, the hagiographer of Brigit, took a different view around 650:

> Who can count the diverse crowds and innumerable people coming in from all provinces? – some for the abundance of feasts, others for healing of their infirmities, others for the spectacle of the crowds, others coming with great gifts for the solemnity of the birth [i.e. the birth into heaven, or death] of holy Brigid?[83]

Cogitosus was glad enough of the glory which such visitors brought to his patroness, but one can easily imagine the dismay of a monk trying to say his prayers in such circumstances. Such invasions help to explain why some monks sought ever more remote places for prayer, as in the case of an Iona monk 'who sought a desert place in the ocean no less than three times, but failed to find one.'[84]

Monastic enclosures and church boundaries were clearly marked and protected by the sign of the cross at significant points: 'Let the boundary of a holy place have signs around it. Wherever you find the sign of the cross of Christ, you will do no harm.'[85] A good many early Christian carved crosses remain on Iona, though very few of them are still where they were first placed, so it is difficult to know exactly what they were for: most were probably grave-markers, but some were probably boundary-crosses, while others may have been situated at key points within the monastery. Generally the crosses from our period are fairly simple carved slabs, and most are hard to date with any precision at all.[86]

The most impressive stones on Iona are surely the crosses of St Oran, St John and St Martin, and though they are probably slightly later in date than our poetry they give some idea of the very rapid development of artistic and technical culture on Iona in the eighth century.[87] St John's cross has the widest span of any such early Christian monument in these islands. Clearly, experimenting with such large dimensions, Iona was a leader in the development of Insular stone-carving techniques.

AGRICULTURE AND DIET

Remains found in a filled ditch from the early Christian period reveal something of the diet and hence the work of the community. Bone fragments, many of them showing marks of butchering, came from cattle, red deer, sheep, pigs, horses, otters, grey seal, whale and roe deer. If these were all food items, it is interesting to note the presence of horse remains. Adomnán evidently regarded the eating of horse-flesh as disgusting and in the eighth century it was forbidden by the Old Irish Penitential.[88]

The monks' use of many of these animals is confirmed in the *Life of*

Columba, enabling us to form some picture of the farming and hunting practices of the monastery. There are stories concerning hunting of seals, cultivation of barley, milking of dairy cattle, slaughter of beef cattle and fishing in the River Shiel. Horses were used as draught animals, and the fertility of the soil may have been enhanced in some parts of Iona by the introduction of rich soils from other places.[89]

All this agricultural work, fishing, seal and otter-hunting and timber-felling, obviously required barns for storage, carts and boats for transport, the making and maintenance of tools in smithies, and enclosures for holding flocks and herds. All these are mentioned explicitly by Adomnán in the *Life*. Other evidence indicates the existence of workshops for carpentry (where axes, knives, lathes and drills were used), leather-working and pottery.[90] The picture emerges of a self-sufficient, well-equipped and well organised farming community.

LITURGY

The life of the monastery was governed by the regular cycle of daily prayer.[91] The *Life of Columba* often depicts the monks at prayer in their church – sometimes singing the psalms and prayers of the Office, at other times celebrating Mass – called together by the ringing of their bell. Sometimes the bell was rung for prayer in emergencies, as when the brethren were summoned to pray for people who had died suddenly, or for someone who had committed a dreadful sin in a far-away place.[92]

Adomnán writes of the celebration of Mass on a number of occasions. It was celebrated on Sundays and on feast-days, usually at dawn. At least some part of it, if not the whole, was sung.[93]

The daily offices of prayer involved primarily the singing of psalms and canticles, and readings from scripture. These offices took place through the day, and monks also rose to pray during the night. Not only psalms and scripture readings were used, for Adomnán mentions a hymnbook for the days of the week (*ymnorum liber septimaniorum*) written by Columba's own hand, suggesting that non-biblical material was also being sung in the daily office of the monastery at an early date.[94] It is not unlikely that the hymns we have included in our collection include some that would be found in such a hymn-book.

PASTORAL AND MISSIONARY WORK

Columba is seen in two distinct roles in our sources. Bede portrays him as a missionary and pastor:

> There came from Ireland to Britain a priest and abbot, outstanding in the monastic way of life, to preach the word of God to the provinces of the northern Picts.[95]

In Adomnán's *Life*, however, he is seen both as a pastor and as a monk. In the role of pastor, as an ordained priest, he baptises pagans and the children of Christians, visits the sick, receives hospitality, and preaches. But Adomnán describes his motive for leaving Ireland as that of the *peregrinus* – a wanderer for Christ: 'he sailed away from Ireland to Britain, wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ.' The brief description of the man which follows is of a monk, not a pastor:

> He could not spend even a single hour without attending to prayer or reading or writing, or some other work. Also, he was ceaselessly occupied with the untiring labours of fasts and vigils, day and night, any one of which works would seem to be humanly impossible.[96]

There is a tension, then, in the portrayal of Columba, which suggests that there may have been such a tension in the life of his followers.

A monastery is not primarily a pastoral mission to the world, but a place of withdrawal for prayer and contemplation. The sixth-century *Penitential of Finnian* actually forbids monks to act as pastors: 'Monks ought not to baptise, nor to receive alms.'[97] Yet Irish monasteries did nevertheless become centres of missionary growth, not only in Columba's Britain but throughout Europe.[98] It is important to note, however, that Adomnán is very careful about the way he describes the missionary work of Columba. Every incident of non-monastic pastoral care described in the *Life* takes place away from Iona.[99] Those few quasi-pastoral dealings which the saint has with lay people on the island itself are such as any monk would have with a monastery's clients: receiving gifts, offering advice, receiving penitents and pilgrims, burying the dead and aiding the poor. These are not missionary activities, but the service that a monastery would offer *qua* monastery to an already Christian population.

Subsequent evidence confirms the essentially non-pastoral nature of the island monastery. There appears to have been no bishop normally resident on the island during Columba's time.[100] Indeed, there is no record of a bishop of Iona until Coeddi *episcopus Iae*, who died in 712 according to the *Annals of Ulster*;[101] though we know that bishops did occasionally spend time there.[102] Iona monks did become pastors – priests and bishops – during our period, but we hear of them being ordained to preach and minister in Columban churches elsewhere: Áedán and Finán, for example, were bishops of Lindisfarne,[103] and the *Amra* celebrates the impact of Columban Christianity on the Picts, 'the fierce ones who lived on the Tay,' where Iona had clergy at least until they were expelled – again according to the *Ulster Annals* – in 717.[104] The apparent absence of a resident bishop on Iona suggests that Iona did not see itself primarily as a pastoral centre.[105]

The pattern that seems to emerge, then, is that the monastery itself, and perhaps some of its island daughter-houses (such as Hinba and Tiree[106]), had no pastoral *raison d'être*.[107] Iona's churches elsewhere, however, served as bases for the daily pastoral and preaching tasks of those monks who had been ordained to serve the church as priests.

BOOK-PRODUCTION

Adomnán repeatedly describes Columba in his cell writing, and he is last recorded at work on a psalter. Such was the importance of writing that manuscripts believed to be written by Columba's own hand had their own miraculous powers; they acquired the status of relics and were used in prayers for the end of a drought or laid on the altar while prayers were said for favourable winds.[108] Unfortunately, no manuscript survives which can be regarded as the work of Columba with any certainty.

There are, however, a number of manuscripts which can be said with varying degrees of probability to have been produced on Iona in our period, or shortly after it. Few manuscripts have been without their share of controversy, however, and estimates of their age and place of origin vary wildly.[109] Rather than attempting to settle, or even describe, the ongoing disputes about places of origin – many of which have generated more patriotic heat than historical light – we will simply

mention those manuscripts which have some claim to have been written on Iona, and offer the reader a few references for further reading.

The *Cathach of St Columba* is much damaged by damp and wear, and only about half of the original manuscript survives.[110] It contains the psalms in the second or 'Gallican' translation by Jerome, in order from 30:10 to 105:13, and is dated to around AD 600 or shortly after, which would make it at least possible that Adomnán had this book in mind in one of his accounts of the miraculous manuscripts made by Columba.[111] The *Cathach* is among the oldest examples of Irish Latin script which we now possess. Its decoration is modest, limited to the large capital letters which begin each psalm, sometimes surrounded by red dots and ornamented with curved lines, and occasional animal or fish representations. Instead of standing entirely apart from the rest of the text, these enlarged letters are incorporated into the overall pattern, the letters immediately following them being drawn in gradually decreasing size, in the characteristic Insular form of 'diminuendo'.

Its name, *Cathach*, meaning 'battler', derives from its later medieval reputation as a relic guaranteeing safe victory in battle if carried three times around the army of Cenél Conaill by a clergyman. The psalter was enshrined, in the late eleventh century, in a silver casket which bears the names of the craftsman who made it, as well as of the northern king Cathbarr Úa Domnaill and Domnall mac Robartaig, sometime abbot of Kells, suggesting an ongoing relationship between Columba's royal kindred and his own monastic heirs.

The *Book of Durrow* is an illuminated manuscript containing a complete though occasionally flawed Vulgate text of the four Gospels, and prefatory matter.[112] Most scholars believe it was made in the second half of the seventh century,[113] and suggest a place of origin in one of Columba's monasteries – quite possibly Iona – with opinions ranging from Ireland to Iona and Northumbria. In the Durrow Gospels we find what is popularly regarded as 'Celtic' ornament: large illuminated initial letters employing the 'diminuendo' technique, carpet page designs of spiral and interlace patterns and animal figures around cruciform centres. Yet some elements also echo the Germanic style found in objects of the Sutton Hoo ship burial, as well as that of Pictish symbolstones in eastern Scotland.

Our earliest manuscript of Adomnán's *Life of Columba* – known as the 'Schaffhausen Adomnán' – identifies the scribe as Dorbéne, the

Iona monk whose death is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* in 713.[114] This is, therefore, the only manuscript which we can claim with anything like certainty as an Iona production, written by a man who was a contemporary of the author himself.[115] Dorbéne's manuscript, now in Switzerland, remains our best and earliest manuscript of the *Life*. One interesting feature of this manuscript is that the last folio contains the Lord's Prayer in Greek. This confirms an interest in Greek on Iona, hinted at by the *Amra* below (p. 113: 'He studied Greek grammar'), and confirmed by the presence of many Greek words in the *Altus prosator*. We should not infer that anyone on Iona was actually literate in Greek, but there is certainly an interest in Greek script and vocabulary. Adomnán also shows an interest in Greek orthography, explaining how to write the name of Mount Thabor in both Greek and Latin script.[116]

The *Book of Kells*, best-known of Insular manuscripts, was made at the end of the eighth or in the very early ninth century, and thus falls rather outside the time-frame of this book.[117] Yet such is its importance as an example of the full flowering of that artistic tradition which developed through the *Cathach* and the *Book of Durrow*, that we ought to mention it briefly and offer references for further reading. Only after the construction of the new Columban monastery there betwen 807 and 814 did Kells come to prominence. If the *Book of Kells* was produced on Iona, as seems likely – though it is still a disputed question – then it was probably taken to Kells sometime in the ninth century. Much more could usefully be said of this most splendid of Insular manuscripts than there is room for here, but one of the more fruitful lines of recent research should be mentioned. Strictly speaking, the large images in *Kells* are far more than mere 'illustrations'. Recent studies have shown the enormous wealth of theological insight that is contained in such images as the 'betrayal of Christ' scene (folio 114r) in which Christ is seen as priest (arms outstretched in prayer) and victim (seized by the hands of sinful men). He is Bread of Life (broken between two 'priests') and he is 'the Lord's anointed' (surrounded by the olives of the Mount of Olives). His body is 'handed over' to his enemies just as he had 'handed over' his own body in the sign of bread and wine. Through such subtle interlacing of countless scriptural and liturgical themes a wonderfully creative theological imagination is at play.[118]

Iona as a Literary Centre

The poetry in this volume was composed in a monastery where there was a deep and sustained interest in the written word. Other writings associated with Iona show that it was a centre of energetic literary activity through the seventh century and beyond. From these writings we can discern something of the literary soil in which our poems grew. In Part Four of this volume we will look at what the Iona monks were reading, but here we discuss some of the prose works which they wrote.

1. *De Locis Sanctis*[119]

Bede relates how the Gaulish bishop Arculf, while returning by sea from a visit to Jerusalem and other parts of the Mediterranean, was blown off course to the west coast of Britain.[120] Arriving on Iona, he spoke of his experiences in the Holy Land to Adomnán, who wrote them down. Adomnán also incorporated much of his own reading and biblical knowledge into the work he called *De Locis Sanctis,* 'On the Holy Places.'

Far from being a mere collection of arbitrary details to satisfy the reader's curiosity, however, Thomas O'Loughlin has shown that *De Locis Sanctis* was written to help explain some of the problems that arise out of a careful reading of scripture. What did Jesus mean when he said 'You are the salt of the earth'? Where was Rachel buried? (scripture gives two contradictory answers to this question), and how

can the three differing synoptic gospel accounts of Jesus' last days be reconciled?[121] It was to answer such questions as these that Adomnán sought to use the geographical data he obtained from Arculf, combining it with his findings from works in Iona's library. Though Adomnán is better known today for his *Life of Columba*, the medieval church was far more deeply impressed by *De Locis Sanctis*. Bede had a copy of it, and his own book of the same name was heavily dependent on Adomnán's work.[122]

2. *Vita Columbae*

The 'Life of Saint Columba' is one of the great works of the early medieval Irish church. Adomnán drew his inspiration from existing texts about Columba, from the oral tradition about him in the monastery and elsewhere, and from certain literary sources which he had evidently read – some of which will be identified and discussed in Part Four.

The *Life* is by far our richest source of information about the early monastic life on Iona. Whatever the reader's opinion of its miracle stories, its glimpses of monks at prayer, at work, dealing with outsiders and with each other, offer countless insights into daily life in early Irish monasteries.

Adomnán's motives for producing this work were many and complex. His own monks were intransigent in refusing to observe the so-called 'Roman' dating of Easter, which almost all the Insular churches had accepted by his time and which Adomnán accepted in the interests of unity. He must have felt a need to show his community that it was possible to remain faithful to the memory of their founder while abandoning the outdated (and divisive) calendar associated with his memory. Other churches, perceiving Iona's singularity on the Easter issue, had to be persuaded that, whatever calendar Columba had followed, he was a great saint worthy of devotion. This was particularly important with respect to Northumbrian and Irish kings whose support Adomnán wanted. They had to be persuaded that their rule could be legitimated by their devotion to Columba and their patronage of his monastery, and such persuasion is evident in the *Life*'s many accounts of Columba, both during and after his life, blessing the rule of one king or another.

Another interesting feature of the *Life* is the pattern it presents of relationships between Columba and other church-founders. Around 670, Tírechán wrote a memoir of Saint Patrick which showed his relationships with other Irish saints as, frankly, relations of domination and submission, Patrick having authority over the whole of Ireland. On the other hand, Columba is shown in the *Life* enjoying far more egalitarian and fraternal relations with other founder-saints, abbots and bishops. This difference is significant at a time when Patrick's Armagh was claiming jurisdiction over the whole of Ireland. Armagh claimed the right to adjudicate in all difficult cases, and if Armagh failed to resolve them they would turn to Rome.[123] Iona sought a more diffuse provincial structure in which appeals from the smaller provinces would by-pass Armagh and go straight to Rome, the 'apostolic see', giving no Irish church supremacy over the rest.[124]

Much more could be said of the *Life of Columba* than we have space for here, and our notes will indicate useful further reading. But among all the many motives which have been identified, one should not overlook that of Adomnán's simple personal devotion to his patron saint.

3. *Cáin Adomnáin*[125]

In 697, as we saw earlier, 'Adomnán went to Ireland and gave the Law of the Innocents to the peoples.' This *Cáin Adomnáin* protected all non-combatants (women, children and clergy) from injury, but later Irish discussion of the *Cáin* emphasises its protection of women. Indeed, in the text as we know it there is far more about women than about children and clergy.[126] The terms of the Law were such that, given Iona's protection of these 'innocents', anyone who injured them would be liable to pay punitive compensation to Iona, their protector.[127] We will return to the *Cáin* later to discuss its protection of women.

4. The 'Canons of Adomnán'[128]

These strange laws, the *Canones Adomnani,* mostly permit or forbid the eating of certain foods (cattle that have fallen from a rock, chickens

that have tasted the blood of a man, and so on). They are quite unlike
other works from Adomnán's hand, in content or in Latin style, and
scholars have therefore tended to doubt the ninth-century manuscript's
claim that they are by him.[129] Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the attri-
bution to Adomnán. One of his monks on Iona, Cú Chuimne, helped
to compile the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (see below) which in
one version actually cites part of the *Canones Adomnani* and attri-
butes it to Adomnán by name.[130] In addition to this, the *Hibernensis*
has a good deal to say about clean and unclean meat, which shows
that Iona monks were worried about such things, so it is not impossible
that Adomnán might also have written about them.

5. *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*[131]

We have already mentioned this work briefly on a couple of occasions.
It is a large compilation of biblical and patristic teaching, combined
with papal, conciliar and synodal decrees (including many from seventh-
century Irish synods), governing every conceivable aspect of church
life – beginning with the ordination and responsibilities of the seven
orders of clergy, and discussing at some length marriage, secular and
ecclesiastical government, burial practices, the swearing of oaths, fast-
ing, almsgiving, theft, casting lots and much more. It also contains other
passages, more abstract and less 'legal' in intent, such as Book 22, in
praise of truth.

   Two scribes were responsible for its compilation: Rubin of the south-
ern Irish monastery of Dair-Inis (d. 725) and Cú Chuimne of Iona
(d. 747).[132] The *Hibernensis* appeared in Gaul in the eighth century
and exercised considerable influence in Europe for some four hundred
years.

   One interesting feature of the *Hibernensis* is that it quite often cites
contradictory authorities. There is no attempt to set out a coherent set
of rules which simply has to be applied in any given situation. Instead
there is a complex pattern of principles, traditions and guidelines,
several of which are in tension with each other, which judges must
assimilate and apply to the best of their ability.

   The *Hibernensis* cites the canons of Irish synods of the two

opposing parties in the seventh-century dispute about Easter dating. By citing both parties the compilers appear to accept the authority of Christian leaders on both sides of the dispute. This need not surprise us, since all the 'Celtic' churches shared the same faith and quoted the same authorities in almost every respect, however they calculated Easter. But perhaps this even-handedness reflects a positive attempt in the early eighth century to put aside old animosities and build a new consensus.

6. *The Iona Chronicle*

It is the custom of most monasteries, even today, to keep a record of the events which impinge on them year by year. This was certainly the case on Iona during our period. The Iona Chronicle itself has not been preserved – indeed no Irish monastic chronicle of the period has been. But collections of annals made centuries later can be shown to depend on much earlier monastic chronicles. John Bannerman has demonstrated that the *Annals of Ulster* contain a significant body of material which was copied from an Iona Chronicle.[133]

From the early seventh century until around the year 740, the Iona Chronicle provided important information for the Irish annals: entries dealing with events on Iona (the death of all the abbots, for example), as well as a good deal of material about journeys between Ireland and Iona, and political events of the Scottish Dál Riata, the Picts, the English and some Britons.

The period of the Iona material in the *Annals* coincides with the same period of literary activity on Iona which our collection of poems covers. In the 670s the Iona Chronicle becomes more detailed and precise, but this need not mean any more than that the office of chronicler in the monastery had fallen to a more diligent monk.[134] As a result we have an important (albeit slightly Iona-centric) contemporary witness to events in Ireland and northern Britain for this period of its history.

7. *Hisperica Famina*

Some of the most bizarre Latin to have emerged from Irish sources is that known as 'Hisperic', the major example of this group of texts being

the *Hisperica Famina*.[135] A showy and deliberately obscure style, it was employed in the seventh(?) century among Irish writers with a penchant for using the strangest vocabulary they could find, often inventing new words from Greek and Latin roots. Kenney doubted whether they were of Christian origin,[136] but subsequent writers have reversed this judgement, and Dr Stevenson has suggested that 'Iona, or some other monastery of the Columban *paruchia*, is a likely point of origin for the *Hisperica Famina*, though not the only one possible.'[137] Adomnán's works show an interest in creating the occasional new word, and the influence of Hisperic Latin on Iona will be touched on again in our discussion of the *Altus prosator* below.

Several medieval Irish works, in prose and in verse, have traditionally been associated with Iona, but we can find no convincing reasons for including any of them in this collection. We would not be prepared to go to the stake even for some of the works that we have included, but on balance we think that the poems in this volume are more likely to be Iona's than not.

THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE IONA LITERATURE

In the texts described above, and the poems in the following section, certain themes crop up repeatedly. Some of the concerns of the Iona monks become apparent, and we catch a glimpse of the world as it appeared to a monk looking, as it were, over the *vallum* of a seventh-century Gaelic monastery.

The chief theme is perhaps, for obvious reasons, devotion to Columba, the founding saint and now the protector of the monastery. Several of the Old Irish hymns view Columba as primarily a protector, both from temporal misfortune and from the eternal misfortune of hell. The Latin hymns do not mention Columba at all, preferring to focus on God and Christ, and in one case Mary, though their later Irish prefaces have a Columban 'slant'. But the Old Irish hymns, and the *Life of Columba* show the saint himself as one who answers prayers for help and protection, and often these prayers are associated with the threat of fire and with bad weather.

The theme of kingship also appears repeatedly in Iona texts, and was a central concern of Adomnán. The *Life of Columba*, as we have seen, makes propaganda for Columba (and hence any abbot of Iona) as king-maker among several peoples, attempting to forge strong links between Iona and secular rulers and to offer a new form of Christian legitimation of kingship.[136] Perhaps a measure of the success of this propaganda is the large number of kings who are said to have been buried in Iona's soil.

As well as focusing on Columba as a heavenly patron and protector of those who pray to him, Iona developed more practical means of protection, especially for women. The *Cáin Adomnáin* really was, all mythological accretions aside, a practical legal measure to protect vulnerable women in Irish society. We sometimes encounter romantic depictions of an Ireland where women were treated as equals, honoured and revered by men, empowered and free in society. Such an Ireland did not exist. The laws which deprived a woman of the right to own or alienate property, which prohibited her giving evidence and placed her first under the authority of her father, then of her husband, and finally of her sons, were not calculated to promote her equal place in society.[139] Adomnán clearly sought to offer some protection to women through his law, and he shows the same concern in his *Life of Columba*, where the saint's actions offer a kind of manifesto for the social programme of his monastery: a cruel man spears a girl who has fled to Columba for protection, and is himself slain by the saint's prayer.[140] A magician who kept a woman captive is forced by the saint to free her.[141] Such stories set an agenda for the monastery of Iona which would earn Adomnán the reputation in the *Martyrology of Oengus*:

> To Adomnán of Iona,
> whose troop is radiant,
> Jesus has granted the lasting liberation
> of the women of the Gaels.[142]

We may also see a connection between Iona's protection of women and its cult of the Blessed Virgin. Later additions to the *Cáin Adomnáin* suggest that it was she who urged Adomnán to promote the Law (§ 9), and that he did it 'for the sake of Mary mother of Jesus Christ', as if because of her solidarity with all other mothers (§ 33). Iona's devotion

to the Mother of God is manifest in the images of herself with her child on two of the eighth-century crosses of Iona. These are among the oldest icons of Mary known in these islands, just as Cú Chuimne's hymn, *Cantemus*, is one of the oldest evidences of Marian liturgy, and they bear a resemblance to the image of the Virgin and Child in the Book of Kells. Adomnán tells a story about an ikon of the Virgin in *De Locis Sanctis*.[143] Devotion to Mary in the western churches had been enhanced by Pope Sergius I (d. 701) who formally established her four great feasts in the calendar of the church,[144] and Iona's Marian creativity may indicate that Sergius' innovations had struck a chord in the island monastery.

A Note on the Poetry

Readers will notice marked differences in style between the translations of these poems. This is largely because of the differences between the originals. In our period, Gaelic poetry tended to be composed in short phrases, each phrase appearing as a complete 'sense unit', juxtaposed with others in the same line and stanza without explicit grammatical conjunction. Latin composition, on the other hand, tended to be composed in sentences. Yet already, in the poetry in this volume, we can see patterns of mutual influence. The Irish 'Prayer of Adomnán' is composed entirely of one long sentence, for example, while we shall see that the *Cantemus* seems to employ Irish 'binding' techniques between lines.

As well as differences in poetic style, the Gaelic poetry and the Latin poetry differ in the sources on which they draw. The Latin poetry, as one might expect, echoes the kind of Latin with which Irishmen were familiar: Latin biblical and patristic literature. Some of these sources will be looked at in more detail in the final section, but for the present the reader will notice that our comments on Latin poetry contain many references to such sources, while the Gaelic poetry does not produce quite so many.

We produce the originals here for readers with either Latin or Gaelic to see what we are translating, and for those without to get at least a sense of the look, feel, and hopefully the sound of the language of the

poetry. These are, of course, not intended as full academic editions, and references to such editions are given in the notes.

For a number of Gaelic texts, comparatively little work has been done so far, and we found it necessary to justify our interpretations. Hence, the notes on these poems, mainly the *Amra*, are somewhat denser than in other chapters. In the Latin texts, and in two of the Gaelic poems, variant manuscript spellings are so numerous that they have generally been corrected silently, except where the variants strike us as interesting.

We have done our best to make sure that the poetry itself remains the centre of gravity of this book, and that commentary and footnotes do not become too intrusive, but rather help to make the poetry more enjoyable and intelligible.

Part Two

THE POEMS

Altus prosator

T he first of our poems, the Hiberno–Latin hymn *Altus prosator*, enjoyed considerable popularity in the medieval church. It is found, wholly or in part, in three Irish manuscripts, as well as in four early manuscripts in continental libraries and one in London.[1] The great theologian, poet and teacher, Hraban Maur, who was abbot of Fulda and archbishop of Mainz until his death in 856, incorporated large parts of *Altus* into a poem of his own, *Aeterne rerum conditor*.[2]

AUTHORSHIP AND ORIGIN

There is an early tradition which ascribes *Altus* to Saint Columba himself, as claimed in its preface in the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*,[3] and though early Latin hymns were often given extra authority or importance by being falsely ascribed to one of the great saints, modern scholars have in fact tended to accept the attribution of this hymn to Columba. Kenney suggests that we may, 'with reasonable probability, regard the *Altus* as a genuine production of the saint of Iona,'[4] and subsequent authors have tended to accept Columba's 'probable' authorship.[5]

Columba's authorship of *Altus* has been challenged by Jane Stevenson in a forthcoming article.[6] However, much of her argument rests on the suggestion that *Altus*' description of wind, rain and sea (stanzas I, K and L) depends on the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (d. 636). If this were true then we would have to accept her dating of

the text to the seventh century, and abandon the notion of Columban authorship – Columba died in 597. But she demonstrates no verbal connection between the *Altus* and Isidore's work, and though the poet's image of sea-water evaporating to form clouds, which are then blown by wind to produce rain over the land, can be found in Isidore, the same imagery is also implicit in a number of earlier writings, as we shall see later on. Isidore was a great collector of other people's ideas, and the meteorology of our poem may have been drawn from the same biblical and patristic sources that Isidore used, especially if it was seasoned by a little observation by the poet of the typical weather conditions of an island like Iona. The fact that Isidore and the author of *Altus* had similar ideas about rainfall – and the similarity is a little vague – is not conclusive evidence that one is dependent on the other.

There is another poem which we might regard as evidence that Columba was seen in the seventh century as a poet in his own right, and thus possibly the author of *Altus*. There is a line in the *Amra* (below, p. 111), which we have translated: 'He went with two songs to heaven after his cross.' This suggests that Columba was not only being recognised as a poet within two or three years of his death, but that two poems in particular were associated with him, even at that early stage. We will touch on this verse again in the context of *Adiutor laborantium*.[7]

Concerning the origins of the poem, then, the evidence that it was written by Columba himself is slight. Yet even if Jane Stevenson is correct about its seventh-century composition, it is still most likely to be the work of an Iona monk as she herself accepts, and so it is properly included in this collection.

LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

The whole hymn has an alphabetical or 'abecedarian' shape, the first stanza beginning with *A*, the second with *B*, and so on. There are many other Irish works which adopt this abecedarian system,[8] but the feature is not a uniquely Irish one. Augustine had long since written an 'abecedarian psalm'[9] and the model is ultimately biblical and recognised as such in the *Liber Hymnorum*, where the preface to the *Altus*

notes the alphabetical order as *more Hebraeorum*, 'in the fashion of the Hebrews.'[10]

Each stanza of the *Altus* is six lines long, with the exception of the first which has seven lines. Each line falls into two halves of eight syllables, the end of each half-line rhyming with the end of the whole line. The rhyme-scheme is variable, and sometimes we find fairly full trisyllabic rhymes:

stanza A   *origine, crepidine*
stanza B   *angelos, archangelos*

At other times the rhyme is quite weak:

stanza A   *magnopere, fatimine*
stanza D   *luminis, praecipites*
stanza E   *regere, praesagmine*

There is little evidence that the author has sought to employ the alliteration which marks so much Irish poetry. Where it does occur in the *Altus* it may well be accidental, as it seems to follow no pattern and appears quite out of the blue, as in stanza R: *regis regum rectissime*.

<center>BIBLICAL INFLUENCES</center>

Another feature of the *Altus* that we should note is that its author depends very heavily on biblical sources for his inspiration. This is true not only of the vision of Creation and Judgement, the Fall of the angels and so on, but also of the descriptions of the earth, the heavens, the stars and the underworld, and how it all works. There is no sign of the reasoned efforts to understand the observed workings of nature that we see in other early Irish texts such as the *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae* of the 'Irish Augustine'.[11] Instead there is much dependence on the picture of the cosmos presented in the Bible and later developed by commentators like Augustine and Philip the Presbyter, as will become apparent below.

The contemplative study of the Bible, *lectio divina*, has always been a central part of the monastic life. All other study and writing was undertaken in order to deepen one's understanding of the Bible, to explain its teaching and to show its truth. Monastic founders and

teachers, such as Augustine, Cassian, Benedict and Caesarius, incorporated *lectio divina* into their rules and guidance for monks. They were to read, prayerfully and with humility, and to learn passages by heart on which they might later reflect. 'The whole series of the Holy Scripture should be diligently committed to memory and ceaselessly repeated' and thus God's word would be internalised so that, even as they sleep, God would speak continually in their hearts.[12]

The author of the *Altus* is clearly steeped in this tradition of 'holy reading', and scriptural references and echoes jostle with each other in practically every stanza. Often references from different parts of the Bible are imaginatively brought together to provide rich patterns of interpretation and meaning, as we will see in discussion of stanza P below.

The question arises as to what version of the Bible Columba used. It was not until the fifth century that Christians in the West began to read the Old Testament in a Latin version translated directly from the Hebrew original, the 'Vulgate' of St Jerome. Before that they had relied on rather haphazard Latin translations of variable quality from the Greek version, now known as the 'Vetus Latina' – VL for short. At least some parts of Jerome's new translation were available to our poet, as the *Altus* contains quotations from both VL and the Vulgate versions.[13] This poem is therefore one of the earliest indicators of the use of the Vulgate in what is now called Scotland.

Columba delights in the use of exotic and foreign vocabulary. We find echoes of Greek mythology in words like *scylla* and *charybdis* in stanza K, and other words of Greek origin include *barathrum* ('abyss'), *Thetis* ('sea', from the Greek ocean-goddess) and *polyandria* ('cemetery'). We cannot infer from this that our author read Greek, for all these words had been used previously by Latin writers – though note what we say above (p. 26) about interest in Greek on Iona. The poet also invents strange new words, by forming nouns from existing verbs, such as *fatimen* (stanza B) from *fari*, and *praesagmen* (stanza E) from *praesagire*. Strangest of all, perhaps, is the use of the noun *iduma* in stanza M. It is ultimately derived from the Hebrew *yadayim*, meaning 'hands', but how did Columba come to use this Hebrew word? There are rare instances of Irish monks of the time using Hebrew words but no evidence at all of even rudimentary Hebrew literacy.[14] Aidan Breen

has suggested that the word *iduma* was found in a Greek onomasticon (an interpretation of names) whose association of the word *iduma* with 'hand' was transmitted to Ireland in a text which is now lost.[15]

The poet's use of foreign and exotic vocabulary may merely reflect his delight in the exotic for its own sake. In the seventh century other Irish Latin writers began to indulge this whim to an extraordinary degree. Their so-called 'Hisperic Latin', as seen in the *Hisperica Famina*, the *Rubisca* and the *Lorica Gildae*, indulges in 'a pedantic jargon which aims at the meaningless proliferation of synonyms'[16] meant only to impress and stupefy the reader with its bizarre vocabulary and outrageous complexity. The difficulties encountered in studying such texts led Michael Herren to lament that 'the whole history of Hisperic scholarship seems to vacillate between lunacy and despair.'[17]

The Hisperic writers did in fact quarry the *Altus* for some of their vocabulary, including the word *iduma* which appears in the *Hisperica Famina* and the *Lorica Gildae*.[18] But Jane Stevenson has suggested that the author's intention may not have been simply to baffle or impress his readers. The word *iduma* is used in this poem to express the power of God upholding all of creation. By this time, furthermore, Christian authors had begun to refer to Christ himself, 'through whom all things were made,'[19] as the 'hand of God'; or to Christ and the Spirit as 'the hands of God'.[20] So the use of *iduma* for such an exalted purpose may suggest the poet's awe in the face of God's mysterious power. The use of this special word reflects a primitive sense of the power of the strange and the foreign – a power which would be lost by translating them into everyday speech.[21] Perhaps a similar sense of the power of a foreign word lies behind the use of Aramaic words which suddenly intrude into the Greek of Mark's Gospel, such as *talitha cumi* (Mark 5:41) and *Ephphatha* (Mark 7:34), both of which occur when Christ's healing power is exercised. Though the Hisperic authors did use foreign words to demonstrate their own cleverness, the *Altus* communicates a more humble sense of awe in the face of God, whose majesty and splendour is a central theme of the whole poem.

ALTUS PROSATOR[22]

A Altus prosator vetustus dierum et ingenitus
erat absque origine primordii et crepidine
est et erit in saecula saeculorum infinita
cui est unigenitus Christus et sanctus spiritus
coaeternus in gloria deitatis perpetua
non tres deos depromimus sed unum Deum dicimus
salva fidei in personis tribus gloriosissimis.

B Bonos creavit angelos ordines et archangelos
principatum ac sedium potestatum virtutium
uti non esset bonitas otiosa ac majestas
trinitatis in omnibus largitatis muneribus
sed haberet caelestia in quibus privilegia
ostenderet magnopere possibili fatimine.

C Caeli de regni apice stationis angelicae
claritate praefulgoris venustate speciminis
superbiendo ruerat Lucifer quem formaverat
apostataeque angeli eodem lapsu lugubri
auctoris cenodoxiae pervicacis invidiae
ceteris remanentibus in suis principatibus.

D Draco magnus taeterrimus terribilis et antiquus
qui fuit serpens lubricus sapientior omnibus
bestiis et animantibus terrae ferocioribus
tertiam partem siderum traxit secum in barathrum
locorum infernalium diversorumque carcerum
refugas veri luminis parasito praecipites.

E Excelsus mundi machinam praevidens et harmoniam
caelum et terram fecerat mare aquas condiderat
herbarum quoque germina virgultorum arbuscula
solem lunam ac sidera ignem ac necessaria
aves pisces et pecora bestias animalia
hominem demum regere protoplaustum praesagmine.

The High Creator, the Unbegotten Ancient of Days,
was without origin of beginning, limitless.
He is and He will be for endless ages of ages,
with whom is the only-begotten Christ, and the Holy Spirit,
co-eternal in the everlasting glory of divinity.
We do not confess three gods, but say one God,
saving our faith in three most glorious Persons.

He created good angels and archangels, the orders
of Principalities and Thrones, of Powers and of Virtues,
so that the goodness and majesty of the Trinity
might not be unproductive in all works of bounty,
but might have heavenly beings in which He might greatly
show forth his favours by a word of power.

From the summit of the Kingdom of Heaven, where angels stand,
from his radiant brightness, from the loveliness of his own form,
through being proud Lucifer had fallen, whom He had formed,
and the apostate angels also, by the same sad fall
of the author of vainglory and obstinate envy,
the rest continuing in their dominions.

The great Dragon, most loathsome, terrible and ancient,
which was the slippery serpent, more cunning than all the beasts
and than all the fiercer living things of the earth,
dragged down with him a third of the stars into the pit
of infernal places and sundry prisons,
fugitives from the true light, hurled down by the Parasite.

The Most High, planning the frame and harmony of the world,
had made heaven and earth, had fashioned the sea and the waters,
and also shoots of grass, the little trees of the woods,
the sun, the moon and the stars, fire and necessary things,
birds, fish and cattle, beasts and living creatures,
and finally the first-formed man, to rule with prophecy.

F   Factis simul sideribus aetheris luminaribus
        conlaudaverunt angeli factura pro mirabili
        immensae molis Dominum opificem caelestium
        praeconio laudabili debito et immobili
        concentuque egregio grates egerunt Domino
        amore et arbitrio non naturae donario.

G   Grassatis primis duobus seductisque parentibus
        secundo ruit diabolus cum suis satellitibus
        quorum horrore vultuum sonoque volitantium
        consternarentur homines metu territi fragiles
        non valentes carnalibus haec intueri visibus
        qui nunc ligantur fascibus ergastulorum nexibus.

H   Hic sublatus e medio deiectus est a Domino
        cuius aeris spatium constipatur satellitum
        globo invisibilium turbido perduellium
        ne malis exemplaribus imbuti ac sceleribus
        nullis unquam tegentibus saeptis ac parietibus
        fornicarentur homines palam omnium oculis.

I   Invehunt nubes pontias ex fontibus brumalias
        tribus profundioribus oceani dodrantibus
        maris caeli climatibus caeruleis turbinibus
        profuturas segitibus vineis et germinibus
        agitatae flaminibus thesauris emergentibus
        quique paludes marinas evacuant reciprocas.

K   Kaduca ac tyrannica mundique momentanea
        regum praesentis gloria nutu Dei deposita
        ecce gigantes gemere sub aquis magno ulcere
        comprobantur incendio aduri ac supplicio
        Cocytique Charybdibus strangulati turgentibus
        Scyllis obtecti fluctibus eliduntur et scrupibus.

At once, when the stars were made, lights of the firmament,
the angels praised for His wonderful creating
the Lord of this immense mass, the Craftsman of the Heavens.
With a praiseworthy proclamation, fitting and unchanging,
in an excellent symphony they gave thanks to the Lord,
not by any endowment of nature, but out of love and choice.

Our first two parents having been assailed and led astray,
the devil falls a second time, together with his retinue,
by the horror of whose faces and the sound of whose flying
frail men might be dismayed, stricken with fear,
unable to gaze with their bodily eyes on those
who are now bound in bundles in the bonds of their prisons.

Driven out from the midst, he was thrust down by the Lord;
the space of air is choked by a wild mass
of his treacherous attendants, invisible
lest, tainted by their wicked examples and their crimes
– no fences or walls ever concealing them –
folk should sin openly, before the eyes of all.

Clouds bear wintry floods from the fountains of the Ocean,
from the three deeper floods of the sea,
to the expanses of the sky, in azure whirlwinds,
to do good to the cornfields, the vines and the shoots;
driven by the winds emerging from their treasuries
which dry up the corresponding sea-marshes.

The momentary glory of the kings of the present world,
fleeting and tyrannical, is cast down at God's whim.
See, giants are shown to groan in great affliction beneath the waters,
to be scorched by fire and in torment,
and stifled by the swelling whirlpools of Cocytus,
covered with rocks, they are destroyed by billows and sharp stones.

L   Ligatas aquas nubibus frequenter cribrat Dominus
     ut ne erumpant protinus simul ruptis obicibus
     quarum uberioribus venis velut uberibus
     pedetentim natantibus telli per tractus istius
     gelidis ac ferventibus diversis in temporibus
     usquam influunt flumina nunquam deficientia.

M   Magni Dei virtutibus appenditur dialibus
     globus terrae et circulus abyssi magnae inditus
     suffultu Dei iduma omnipotentis valida
     columnis velut vectibus eundem sustenantibus
     promontoriis et rupibus solidis fundaminibus
     velut quibusdam basibus firmatus immobilibus.

N   Nulli videtur dubium in imis esse infernum
     ubi habentur tenebrae vermes et dirae bestiae
     ubi ignis sulphureus ardens flammis edacibus
     ubi rugitus hominum fletus et stridor dentium
     ubi Gehennae gemitus terribilis et antiquus
     ubi ardor flammaticus sitis famisque horridus.

O   Orbem infra ut legimus incolas esse novimus
     quorum genu precario frequenter flectit Domino
     quibusque impossibile librum scriptum revolvere
     obsignatum signaculis septem de Christi monitis
     quem idem resignaverat postquam victor exstiterat
     explens sui praesagmina adventus prophetalia.

P   Plantatum a prooemio paradisum a Domino
     legimus in primordio Genesis nobilissimo
     cuius ex fonte flumina quattuor sunt manantia
     cuius etiam florido lignum vitae in medio
     cuius non cadunt folia gentibus salutifera
     cuius inenarrabiles deliciae ac fertiles.

The Lord often sifts down the waters bound in the clouds,
lest they should all at once break out, their barriers broken,
from whose most plentiful streams, as if from breasts,
slowly flowing across the tracts of this earth,
freezing and warming at different times,
the rivers flow everywhere, never failing.

By the divine powers of the great God is hung
the globe of the earth, and the circle of the great deep placed about it,
held up by the strong hand of almighty God,
with columns like bars supporting it,
promontories and rocks as their solid foundations,
fixed firm, as if on certain immovable bases.

It seems doubtful to no one that there is a hell down below
where there are held to be darkness, worms and dreadful animals;
where there is sulphurous fire burning with voracious flames;
where there is the screaming of men, weeping and gnashing of teeth;
where there is the groaning of Gehenna, terrible and ancient;
where there is the horrible fiery burning of thirst and hunger.

Under the earth, as we read, we know there are inhabitants
whose knee bends often in prayer to the Lord,
but for whom it was impossible to open the written book
sealed with seven seals according to the warnings of Christ,
which he himself had unsealed after he had risen as victor,
fulfilling the prophets' foreseeing of his Coming.

Paradise was planted from the beginning by the Lord,
as we read in the most noble opening of Genesis,
from whose fountain-spring four rivers flow,
in whose flowery midst is also the Tree of Life
whose leaves, bearing healing for the nations, do not fall;
whose delights are indescribable and abundant.

Q   Quis ad condictum Domini montem ascendit Sinai?
         quis audivit tonitrua ultra modum sonantia
         quis clangorem perstrepere inormitatis buccinae?
         quis quoque vidit fulgura in gyro coruscantia
         quis lampades et iacula saxaque collidentia
         praeter Israhelitici Moysen iudicem populi?

R   Regis regum rectissimi prope est dies Domini
         dies irae et vindictae tenebrarum et nebulae
         diesque mirabilium tonitruorum fortium
         dies quoque angustiae maeroris ac tristitiae
         in quo cessabit mulierum amor ac desiderium
         hominumque contentio mundi huius et cupido.

S   Stantes erimus pavidi ante tribunal Domini
         reddemusque de omnibus rationem affectibus
         videntes quoque posita ante obtutus crimina
         librosque conscientiae patefactos in facie
         in fletus amarissimos ac singultus erumpemus
         subtracta necessaria operandi materia.

T   Tuba primi archangeli strepente admirabili
         erumpent munitissima claustra ac poliandria
         mundi praesentis frigora hominum liquescentia
         undique conglobantibus ad compagines ossibus
         animabus aethralibus eisdem obviantibus
         rursumque redeuntibus debitis mansionibus.

U   Vagatur ex climactere Orion caeli cardine
         derelicto Virgilio astrorum splendidissimo
         per metas Thetis ignoti orientalis circuli
         girans certis ambagibus redit priscis reditibus
         oriens post biennium Vesperugo in vesperum
         sumpta in proplesmatibus tropicis intellectibus.

Who has climbed Sinai, the appointed mountain of the Lord?
Who has heard the immeasurable thunders sounding?
Who has heard the clamour of the mighty war-trumpet echoing?
Who has also seen the lightning flashing all around?
Who has seen the flashes and thunderbolts and crashing rocks,
except Moses, the judge of the people of Israel?

The day of the Lord, most righteous King of Kings, is at hand:
a day of anger and vindication, of darkness and of cloud,
a day of wonderful mighty thunders,
a day also of distress, of sorrow and sadness,
in which the love and desire of women will cease
and the striving of men and the desire of this world.

We shall stand trembling before the Lord's judgement seat,
and we shall render an account of all our deeds,
seeing also our crimes placed before our gaze,
and the books of conscience thrown open before us.
We will break out into most bitter weeping and sobbing,
the possibility of repentance being taken away.

At the blast of the First Archangels's wonderful trumpet,
the strongest vaults and tombs shall break open,
the chill of the men of the present world melting away,
the bones gathering to their joints from every place,
their ethereal souls meeting them,
returning once more to their own dwelling places.

Orion wanders from his turning point at the hinge of heaven –
the Pleiades being left behind, most splendid of the stars –
across the boundaries of the sea, of its unknown eastern rim.
Vesper, wheeling in its fixed circuits, returns by its former paths,
rising after two years in the evening.
These things employed as types are understood figuratively.

X   Xristo de caelis Domino descendente celsissimo
         praefulgebit clarissimum signum crucis et vexillum
         tectisque luminaribus duobus principalibus
         cadent in terram sidera ut fructus de ficulnea
         eritque mundi spatium ut fornacis incendium
         tunc in montium specubus abscondent se exercitus.

Y   Ymnorum cantionibus sedulo tinnientibus
         tripudiis sanctis milibus angelorum vernantibus
         quattuorque plenissimis animalibus oculis
         cum viginti felicibus quattuor senioribus
         coronas admittentibus agni Dei sub pedibus
         laudatur tribus vicibus Trinitas aeternalibus.

Z   Zelus ignis furibundus consumet adversarios
         nolentes Christum credere Deo a Patre venisse
         nos vero evolabimus obviam ei protinus
         et sic cum ipso erimus in diversis ordinibus
         dignitatum pro meritis praemiorum perpetuis
         permansuri in gloria a saeculis in saecula.

[responsio]
               Quis potest Deo placere novissimo in tempore,
               variatis insignibus veritatis ordinibus,
               exceptis contemptoribus mundi praesentis istius?

When Christ, the most high Lord, comes down from the heavens,
the brightest sign and standard of the Cross will shine forth.
The two principal lights being obscured,
the stars will fall to earth like the fruit of a fig-tree,
and the face of the world will be like the fire of a furnace.
Then armies will hide in the caves of the mountains.

By the singing of hymns eagerly ringing out,
by thousands of angels rejoicing in holy dances,
and by the four living creatures full of eyes,
with the twenty-four joyful elders
casting their crowns under the feet of the Lamb of God,
the Trinity is praised in eternal three-fold exchanges.

The raging anger of fire will devour the adversaries
who will not believe that Christ came from God the Father.
But we shall surely fly off to meet him straight away,
and thus we shall be with him in several ranks of dignities
according to the eternal merits of our rewards,
to abide in glory from age to age.

[Response]
    Who can please God in the last time,
    the noble ordinances of truth being changed,
    except the despisers of this present world?

COMMENTARY

Given the size of the *Altus prosator* and the richness of its language and imagery, our commentary on it must necessarily be selective, for it could easily become a book in its own right. We will therefore comment briefly on each stanza in turn, offering suggestions for further reading, before turning to view the poem as a whole.

A

The poem opens with a confession of faith in the Holy Trinity which resembles part of the 'Athanasian Creed', a formula of Trinitarian faith composed probably in the early fifth century (therefore not by Athanasius, who died in 373): *et tamen non tres dii, sed unus Deus*, 'not three gods but one God'. The Creed asserts that this is the Catholic faith and that whoever does not hold it in its entirety 'will without doubt perish in eternity.' The *Altus* opens with a similarly dogmatic stanza proclaiming the importance of orthodox Trinitarian faith, and the whole poem closes with a confession of the Incarnation of Christ, as does the second part of the Athanasian Creed, and does so in equally uncompromising tones, warning that the 'adversaries' who deny that Christ came from God the Father will burn in hell's raging fire. The first and last stanzas then bracket the whole poem with the two core doctrines of Christian faith: the mystery and transcendence of the Triune God on the one hand, and on the other hand the immanence of that same God through the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh and dwelling among us. We saw above (p. 9) how important orthodox belief was to the mind of Columbanus, and here again orthodoxy is insisted upon. The doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are to be believed, on pain of Hell. Creation and Fall, Redemption and Judgement are insisted on throughout the poem, and they are matters of central importance.

B

The list of angels given here is not the usual one found in the Western church. Gregory the Great envisaged nine ranks of angels which he drew from various scriptural citations: angels, archangels, virtues, powers, principalities, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim.[23] Columba's angelic scheme is ambiguous: does he think there are six,

kinds of angelic being, or does he think that there are both angels and archangels of the four different orders (principalities, thrones, powers and virtues), making a total of eight? Whatever he means, he differs here from Gregory's account. It is possible that the influence of John Cassian (d. c.435) is apparent here – as we shall see it is elsewhere in the poem. Cassian produced a list of six angelic orders: angels, archangels, thrones, dominations, principalities and powers,[24] which corresponds closely to the first interpretation of Columba's list.

Cassian's influence in this stanza is also apparent in the account of God's motive for creating the angels – that his goodness might not be unproductive. Cassian states exactly this just before his classification of angels – that God created the angels to show forth his goodness which was not unproductive (*otiosus*), and so that they might thank and praise him.[25]

C and D

The poet both describes and explains the fall of Satan (here 'Lucifer') from his original splendour. Isaiah asks 'How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer?' and answers his own question: it is through pride, for 'You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high' (Isaiah 14:12). In stanza C Columba also attributes Satan's fall to pride, as do many of the Latin fathers, including John Cassian in the *Collatio* already quoted, and Augustine.[26]

This emphasis on pride as the cause of Satan's fall echoes the understanding of the sinful state of humanity in Ecclesiasticus 10:15, which reads, 'The beginning of every sin is pride.'[27] This view left its stamp on medieval moral theology, from Augustine onwards, in the emphasis on pride as the root and paradigm of all human sinfulness.[28] And so among the seven deadly sins, which were the main tool of moral theology in the Middle Ages, pride was the worst of all since it was a sin of 'aversion' which involved turning away from other people. Sin, it was held, was whatever broke the bonds of charity between a person and other people, and between that person and God, and pride was the most radical form of aversion. Lust, on the other hand, though still sinful, at least involved turning towards someone, albeit in a disordered way, and so was held to be far less serious than pride.[29]

In the New Testament we read, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from

heaven' (Luke 10:18) and 'I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth' (Revelation 9:1). Thus stanza D of the *Altus* describes the fall of Lucifer from heaven. This is his first fall, and he does not fall alone, but 'dragged with him a third of the stars' (see Revelation 12:4, 'His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to earth'). These stars are the other fallen angels (Revelation 12:9), an identification also made by Cassian whose language is a source for the *Altus*: Lucifer falls, for example, from the same *stationis apice*.[30] In later stanzas these angels will be dealt with as demons.

E and F

From the disaster of the Fall the poet quickly reverts to the 'original blessing' of creation. Stanza E deals with the material order of creation, the world of nature, with humankind able to 'rule by prophecy'. This may be inferred from Genesis 1:26, where man is made in the image of God and given power to rule over all other creatures, and 2:19–20 in which God brings the animals to Adam 'to see what he would call them', so that Adam is effectively made a co-operator in God's creative and ordering activity. Thus the description of the natural world in which all things act according to their nature culminates in human activity, the 'prophetic' activity of the first-formed man who alone of all creatures acts freely and with understanding.

Stanza F moves from the material creation to the spiritual realm of the angelic orders. And once again the stanza culminates in the free activity of God's rational creatures, this time the angels. They are said to act 'from love and free will', as opposed to merely functioning willy-nilly as a consequence of their created nature. Like humankind they are free, and they act according to their own free choices.[31]

In these two stanzas, then, the whole creation is seen once more in the ordered harmony and goodness which the Creator had intended from the beginning as recounted in the book of Genesis, the heavens and the earth, the corporeal and spiritual realms. The fall of Satan, up to this point, has only harmed the fallen angels, and evil has not yet entered the world of men and women or the natural world. The Bible sets the precedent for this kind of praise of the meaningful order and harmony of creation: 'Thou hast arranged all things by measure and number and weight' (Wisdom 11:20), and the Irish who read Augustine

and Gregory received encouragement in their interest in nature's workings. Augustine's writings[32] show a delight in 'scientific' enquiry in support of biblical theology with such accounts as that of Mount Olympus, on whose peak there is no wind or rain, and people who climb there have to press wet sponges to their nostrils in order to breathe in the dry atmosphere.[33]

G and H

From this picture of a harmonious creation, stanza G returns again to the cosmic catastrophe, and this time to the fall of Adam and Eve brought about by the devil. 'The devil fell a second time' asserts Columba. The first fall of Satan through pride was described in stanza C. In the thought of Cassian, whose influence in these two stanzas is clear, the fallen Satan is now filled with envy of men and women who are still called to share in the glory of God, a glory which he himself has forfeited through his pride. His envy now causes him to lead Adam and Eve into sin, to destroy their happiness and to bring even more dreadful punishments on himself.[34]

Echoes of Cassian's thought appear in several stanzas, but it is in stanza H that his influence is most obvious. He writes:

> This air, between heaven and earth, is filled with a dense crowd of spirits who fly around, not quietly or idly. Fortunately Divine Providence has hidden and withdrawn them from human sight. For through fear of their tumult, or horror of the shapes into which they transform and change themselves at will, men would be dismayed by unbearable dread and would faint, unable to gaze on them with their bodily eyes, or else would become worse every day, corrupted by their constant example and by imitating them ... Those outrages which are already committed among men are hidden by walls and enclosures, or by sheer distance, or by confusion and shame. But if men could look on them openly, they would be incited to a madness of fury.[35]

For Columba, as for Cassian, the world created by God is good, and humanity is loved by God, but Satan's seduction of Adam and Eve has resulted in a permanent weakness and dislocation. Now we are surrounded by demons, Satan's retinue, who fill the air and would lead us

all to sin and so to fall with them. It is he whom St Paul calls 'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience' (Ephesians 2:2). It is only by God's having concealed these demons and their wickedness from our sight that we can be preserved from falling with them, who are now filling the air around us with their 'airy' bodies. As the apostle Paul wrote, 'We are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12).

There is no sign in the terrifying vision of the *Altus* of the oft-repeated myth of some supposed Celtic optimism about the world and humanity's place in it. The very air we breathe is filled with demons. It is a place of danger, physical and spiritual, a danger brought on us by the fall of Satan and the sin of Adam, a danger from which we can only be saved by God. Columba's language is drawn directly from Cassian here, but he shares the view of other Latin Fathers such as Augustine, who says: 'Demons are living beings who live in the air, since they are endowed with airy bodies.'[36] Augustine's discussion of the airiness of demons leads him on to talk of the movements of air and water, wind and rain, and this is just what happens in our poem. The wonders of God's creation are seen in the workings of the elements in the next stanza, as the poet returns once again to the original harmony and order of Creation.

I

Altus' vision of the movement of the waters, the clouds, the wind and the rain around the earth could have been pieced together largely from biblical sources.[37] The fifth line clearly echoes Psalm 135:7: 'From his treasuries he sends forth the wind.' The notion of there being a mighty fountain or fountains in the midst of the ocean is also biblical,[38] as is the theme of God bringing rain to ensure life and fertility.[39] Isidore is not the first writer to speak of the role of the wind in moving water from the sea to the rain-clouds, and so on to the land. Augustine has fascinating passages in which he says that it is obvious that air or wind moves water around and he describes how fresh water-vapour is invisibly extracted from the sea and rises up to form the clouds which water the earth and fill its rivers.[40] A strange passage in the 'Third

Apocalypse of Baruch', composed in the second or third century, also reveals a popular belief that clouds take water from the sea to form rain.[41]

K

Pride is once more subject to divine punishment. As Satan fell through pride, now it is the proud men of the earth, tyrants and kings, who are cast down by God. It is not immediately obvious why Columba should then associate these fallen tyrants with the weeping giants of Job 26:5, but it is possible that he does so under the influence of the commentary on this passage by Philip: '"Giants" is what divine scripture calls proud men, rebellious and stubborn. The devil and his angels, on account of their pride, are also called by the name "giants".'[42]

We also see in this stanza that Christian authors had no hesitation in using the language of 'pagan' mythologies as part of their repertoire. We find *Cocytus* (the name of a mythic river in the underworld) in the Vulgate version of Job (21:33), and Gregory the Great,[43] who says it is used to refer to the sorrow of women or of the sick. Augustine uses the words *charybdi* and *scylla* quite happily to refer to two possibilities of doctrinal error,[44] and Ambrose describes heresy as a 'dread and monstrous *Scylla*, divided into many shapes of unbelief.'[45] A 'pagan' character is seen as a perfectly natural metaphor for a Christian writer to adopt, especially when he is describing evil, misery or doctrinal disaster!

Another 'pagan' element, this time a native Irish one, may be echoed in the description of the giants being burned with fire, drowned in whirlpools and crushed by rocks, all at once. This looks suspiciously like an echo of a common feature of Irish myths and sagas, in which someone dies a 'triple death'. Adomnán himself employs the motif in *Vita Columbae*, where he describes the triple death of Áed Dub who dies by piercing, falling and drowning.[46]

L

In stanza I we saw the waters as a blessing on the earth, bringing life and fertility, then in stanza K we saw them as instruments of divine wrath, an element of appalling destructive power unleashed against the wicked. Now in stanza L they reappear as a feature of God's blessing.

Though their potential danger is mentioned, as if they were constantly threatening to break out at once in a flood, the emphasis is now on God's gentle gift of water as rain. All this is part of God's design, and he is the Creator of water in all its forms. There is a strong sense here that whatever happens, it is God that makes it happen. The ordinary movements of nature or extraordinary events – all these are the immediate result of God's activity, the life-threatening as much as the life-giving. And so the hand of God may be discerned in every part of the universe, in every event of human life, for good or ill, as Job himself remarked: 'If we take happiness from the Lord's hand, must we not take sorrow too?'

M

From the constantly moving waters, the poet turns to the solidity of the earth which is also immediately dependent on God. The bulk of this imagery is drawn from Biblical sources – much of it can be found in the book of Job. Job 26:7 describes God as 'hanging the earth over nothing', for example. Other terms of physical geography found both in the Vulgate of Job and in this stanza are *vectem* (38:10, the bars God set against the sea); *columnis* (9:6, the columns on which the earth is set); and *bases* (38:6), but there may also be a dependence on Jerome.[47] Also biblical is the relationship between the solid earth and the 'circle of the great deep' set about it, and God's continuing separation of the two elements, reflecting the Israelite cosmology of the earth poised precariously between the waters above the firmament and the waters of the 'great deep' below.[48]

N and O

Having discussed the heavens, the earth and the waters surrounding it, the poet's cosmological tour continues with a description of the underworld or hell and its inhabitants. Marina Smyth suggests that these might be 'a reference to the antipodeans of some classical cosmologies', but thinks it unlikely. She therefore concludes that the claim 'is better explained by the traditional Irish belief in the inhabitants of the *síde*, or fairy mounds, which dot the countryside and were held to give access to a netherworld by all accounts very similar to our own'.[49]

But the poet is not depending on classical or native Irish world-views

in these stanzas, for there are two very clear scriptural references in the description. Paul's letter to the Philippians has everyone bending the knee at the name of Jesus, 'in heaven and on earth and under the earth' (2:10). Columba's *ut legimus* ('as we read') in stanza O, where he describes the subterranean folk 'whose knee bends often in prayer to the Lord', is certainly a reference to Paul's vision of these devout genuflections. Revelation 5:3 also mentions subterranean folk, and the poet clearly has this passage in mind as well, for they are among those who are unable to open a scroll 'sealed with seven seals.'[50]

In these two stanzas, the underworld is a place of some ambiguity. In stanza N it is a place of punishment, a hell of unextinguishable fire and the worm which never dies (Mark 9:43), of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:51), and of 'serpents, beasts and worms' (Ecclesiasticus 10:13).

But stanza O, still discussing the underworld, employs quite different imagery. It borrows heavily from that of the book of Revelation in which the occupants of the underworld are not seen as undergoing punishment, but as waiting for the salvation brought by Christ. Only he can open the scroll, and no one else 'in heaven, on earth or under the earth' (Revelation 5:3). But their inability to open the scroll need not be understood as a sign of their eternal damnation, for here they are still bending their knees to Jesus, and the thrust of the stanza is not the damnation of the wicked but the salvation brought by Christ, before whom 'every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth' (Philippians 2:10). This ambiguous picture of 'hell' as a place in which some people will suffer for ever but from which some souls will be rescued by Christ is an ancient one, and the motif of rescuing people from hell is a common occurrence in Irish Christian literature, corresponding closely to the idea of Purgatory – a place where sinners are 'punished', but not for ever.[51]

P

Though practically every stanza in the *Altus* contains biblical references, stanza P is the only one which mentions its source by name: the 'most noble opening of Genesis' is cited for the four rivers flowing from the river of the garden of Eden. The source is Genesis 2:10–14.[52]

This stanza also offers a good illustration of that typically medieval

way of reading the Bible which seeks to exploit the interplay of images and vocabulary, and which is known as 'typological'. Since the nineteenth-century development of biblical historical criticism, scholars have tended to pour scorn on this 'mistaken' or 'primitive' way of reading the Bible. But it does in fact provide a powerful framework for the imaginative and creative exploration of all kinds of resonances in disparate biblical texts, and deserves more serious consideration than it is generally given. In this stanza, the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8–10) is linked to the tree of the Heavenly City, whose leaves 'bear healing for the nations' (Revelation 22:2). Thus the beginning of history is linked to its end, the first paradise with the last, and the first and last books of the Bible are joined together as if to suggest the connection between mankind's first innocence and the final righteousness of the saints in heaven. At the same time the tree's never-falling leaves are probably a reference to Psalm 1:3, where the tree 'whose leaves never fall'[53] is a metaphor for the just man who delights in God's law. Then, by the time of the composition of the *Altus*, a Christian reading about the 'tree of life' would immediately think of Christ's cross, the new 'tree of life', in contrast to the tree whose fruit brought death to Adam and Eve.[54] In this way, by drawing together diverse biblical texts around a central motif, the poet offers a rich multilayered pattern for meditation on the mysteries of the Fall, the Kingdom of God, the search for righteousness, and the salvation brought by Christ's death and resurrection.

Q

'Who has climbed the mountain of the Lord?' asks the poet. His question is couched in the language of Psalm 24:3, 'Who *shall* [future tense] climb the mountain of the Lord?' but the psalm is actually about Mount Zion, the place of God's Temple in Jerusalem, and the answer which the Psalmist gives to the question is 'the man of clean hands and pure heart, who desires not worthless things' (24:4). But in stanza Q, the mountain of Psalm 24 has been conflated with Mount Sinai by the poet, since the answer he gives to his own question, who *has* [past tense] climbed the mountain of the Lord? is Moses. Moses, of course, never climbed the Temple mount, but he did ascend Sinai to receive the Law from God, and the vocabulary of this stanza is very close to that of the account in Exodus of his ascent of Mount Sinai.[55]

R

From the giving of the Law in the past, the poem moves to the future judgement of the world by the 'King of Kings', a title given to Christ in the New Testament.[56] The dreadful vision of the Last Judgement in this stanza begins with language borrowed from the description of 'the great day of the Lord' (Zephaniah 1:15–16), a day of appalling destruction. In the thirteenth century this same vision would inspire the opening of the magnificent sequence for the Mass for the Dead, the *Dies Irae*. But divine judgement is not only a cosmic event in which history is brought to its conclusion. It is also a personal event for each and every individual, as the following stanza describes.

S

The images here are again largely biblical. 'We will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ' (Romans 14:10),[57] and 'each of us shall render an account of himself to God' (14:12) according to the record of our deeds inscribed in 'the book'.[58]

The finality of this moment of judgement is made quite clear since *subtracta necessaria operandi materia*, 'the things necessary for action have been taken away'. There is now no chance of repentance, no chance to turn over a new leaf or to be redeemed by good works. The poet is possibly thinking of John 9:4, 'I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day, for the night comes, *when no one can work.*' This motif of finality occurs elsewhere, a useful means of concentrating the minds of the faithful on the urgency of the call to repentance, as in Ephrem Syrus for example:

> The day of judgement is at hand
> and all faults shall be disclosed;
> who then can be pure in thy sight
> in the hour when the books are opened?
> For there are no penitents,
> nor offerers of supplications;
> for that is the day of doom
> in which no word nor speech is uttered.[59]

This theme of finality also appears in the Book of Enoch (63:8), where the governors and kings of the earth who are now languishing in hell fall and worship the Lord of glory and beg for some respite from

their sufferings. But they lament, 'Now on the day of our hardship and our tribulation he is not saving us, and we have no chance to become believers.'[60]

T

The opening image of this stanza is from 1 Thessalonians 4:16: 'For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.' The more detailed descriptions of souls returning to their bodies as they are being reassembled probably depends upon Ezekiel 37:7–10, which describes the gathering of the bones of the dead, their being gathered together at their joints, and the spirit or breath of life entering them.

We have in this stanza a strong affirmation of the resurrection of the body in orthodox Christian vein, as opposed to some mere 'survival of the soul'. Later in the middle ages, western artists would draw on the older Byzantine iconography of the resurrection of the dead, in which the fragmented body-parts of the just are reassembled by angels. Sometimes the angels were assisted by obliging fish, lions and other carnivorous creatures, which brought dismembered limbs to the angels for reassembly.[61] Tertullian provides a possible source for the image: 'But lest you suppose that the resurrection is preached only of those bodies which are entrusted to tombs, you have it written: "And I will command the fishes of the sea and they shall throw up the bones which they have eaten, and I will connect joint to joint [*compaginem ad compaginem*] and bone to bone."'[62] Such imagery, in poetry and in art, represents insistent orthodox belief in the resurrection of the whole person, body and soul.

U

The early Fathers were ambivalent about astronomy. Augustine noted that there was 'much subtle and laborious reasoning' about whether or not the heavens really did move, but he did not think it a question of great importance. 'I don't have time to go into these things or to deal with them; nor should those people whom we long to see instructed for their own salvation.'[63] His criticism was of those who substituted scientific curiosity for the genuine love of God, but our poet in this

stanza is not being merely 'curious'. The key to the understanding of the whole stanza is the last line: 'These things, employed as types, are undersood figuratively.' The poet is not interested in the movements of the stars and planets for their own sake. He is inviting the reader to see in them signs of the truths of the Gospel, concerning the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

The most important source for stanza U is probably Philip on Job 38:31–2. The poem even reproduces Philip's inaccurate claim that Vesper has a two-yearly cycle. Having described the rising of Lucifer (the Day-star)[64] in his time, and the rising of Vesper (the Evening-star) over the sons of the earth, Philip interprets the rising of Lucifer as follows:

> The coming of the Lord in the flesh is signified here, and his res-urrection from the dead is prefigured ... Thus in his time he was brought forth from God the Father that he might visit the earth, which is why he is called Lucifer; coming from on high as if after two years [*post biennium*] – that is, he is born after the Law and the Prophets – and he shed the light of faith and mature knowledge on us, who are placed in darkness and in the shadow of death.
>
> The same Son of Man is also called Vesper, who 'set' on the cross at the time of his passion ... Who at the time of his death, when he said to the Father, 'Into your hands I commend my spirit,' brought darkness, and there was darkness in the hearts of unbelieving Jews. Therefore God the Father raised him up as the great Shepherd of the sheep. So I call him Vesper, who offered the evening sacrifice in the evening of the ages ... [65]

Along such lines as these Columba also invites the reader to see the movements of the heavenly bodies as signs of the saving mysteries of the Christian faith. Columba was remembered as a star-gazer by his contemporary Dallán Forgaill (see the *Amra*, p. 109 below) but like Philip mentioned above, 'He separated the elements according to figures.' That is to say, what he observed – stars, sun and moon and the rest – he would read as a sign, written in the sky, of the truths on the pages of his Bible.

X

The description of the Second Coming of Christ begins with imagery taken from Matthew 24:30, 'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.' Several of the Fathers thought that the sign of the Son of Man would be a shining cross in the sky.[66] The ancient liturgy of the Roman church for the feasts of the Finding of the Holy Cross (May 3) and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14) share this expectation in one verse: 'This sign of the Cross will stand in heaven, when the Lord comes to judge.'[67]

The third and fourth lines echo Revelation 6:12–13, 'The sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig-tree sheds its winter fruit ...', and Matthew 24:29, 'the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven.' The fire that covers the face of the earth is described in 1 Peter 3:10, 'the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up,' and the last line of the stanza comes from Revelation 6:15, 'Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.'

Y

The four living creatures full of eyes, the twenty-four joyful elders casting down their crowns before the lamb, all come from Revelation 4:4–10. The three-fold exchange is the hymn they sing, the *Trisagion* or 'thrice holy': 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty' (4:8).

Z

Hebrews 10:27 describes 'a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries'. However, in the letter to the Hebrews the adversaries who will be burned are those who continue to sin, in spite of belief in Christ. In the last stanza of the *Altus*, on the other hand, it is not sinners who are burned, but those who reject the doctrine of the Incarnation, that 'Christ came from God the Father'. This central belief of Christian faith, found in various forms throughout the New Testament, is perhaps emphasised by Johannine writings more than most: 'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.'[68]

The strange image of the elect 'flying away' is from 1 Thessalonians 4:17, 'We who are alive ... shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord,' and in the last lines, where the elect are with Christ 'in several ranks of dignities according to ... our rewards', the poet may be thinking of 1 Corinthians 15:41–2, where the differences among the saved are compared to the differences between the stars: 'For star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection.'

THE SUM OF THE PARTS

The Prefaces added to this poem by later scribes suggest a certain unease which some of those who read or recited it may have felt about it. The legends claim that the *Altus* was recited in Rome before Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) who took exception to the fact that it made so little reference to the Trinity.[69] However little truth there may be in the legend itself, its theological instinct is sound. Apart from the first verse, in which the Trinity appears, the imagination of the poet has dwelt almost entirely with God as Creator and Judge with little differentiation of the persons of the Trinity. There has been very little mention of Christ (only in stanzas O, X and Z) and these have reflected more of Christ's authority and divine power in union with the Father rather than, for example, his teaching ministry, his healing, his gentleness with sinners, his suffering and death – all that is represented by the phrase 'he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' (Philippians 2:7). Even the Cross has become (stanza X) a sky-high symbol of cosmic triumph, rather than the instrument on which the Incarnate Word became obedient unto death.

The Holy Spirit, after a brief appearance in the first verse in a statement of orthodox Trinitarian belief, is not mentioned at all. Yet the role of the Spirit in the story of the world's Creation, and in the begetting of the church and of Christians in the New Creation, is of central importance. The church teaches that Christians can already begin to share the life of God, here and now, through the gift of the Spirit. Rather than simply obeying in the present world in order to receive their eternal reward in the next, they are, so to speak, already citizens

of the kingdom of God, members of the Body of Christ, by virtue of this Holy Spirit which is poured into their hearts.

Much of the rich Trinitarian texture of Christian theology is lacking in the *Altus*. That is not say that there is anything heterodox about it – the poem remains doctrinally correct, albeit in a one-dimensional way. It is powerful literature, and its intent to fill the Christian heart with godly fear is undoubtedly achieved, but perhaps the people who told the legend about Gregory's misgivings were right to feel that there was something lacking in a long poem where mercy and tenderness, the humility and patience of God with sinful humanity, are not mentioned once.

Adiutor laborantium

The *Altus prosator* of the previous chapter appears in some manuscripts with a preface which tells a story about its composition by St Columba as he was grinding corn at the mill in order to make bread for some visitors to his monastery. The story also says that, as he was on his way to the mill, he composed another hymn: 'his burden felt heavy to him, so he composed a hymn in alphabetical order, from there up to the mill, viz. *Adiutor laborantium* etc.'[1] The prefaces of the *Liber Hymnorum* were written long after the poems themselves and obviously should not be treated as accurate reports of monastic compositional techniques, but this story does reflect an early tradition which ascribes two poems to Columba – a tradition which may be supported by Dallán Forgaill's *Amra* (p. 111 below): 'He went with two songs to heaven after his cross.'

Until recently, however, the *Adiutor laborantium* referred to in the prefaces was quite unknown. Scholars assumed either that it was lost or that it was to be identified with another poem, such as the one whose refrain began *Deus in adiutorium intende laborantium.*[2] It was not until Bernard J. Muir worked on an eleventh-century manuscript of devotional and liturgical material from Winchester that the text of this poem was brought to public notice and its association with St Columba made explicit.[3] In this manuscript, badly damaged by fire in 1731, the *Adiutor laborantium* appears in the pages immediately following the *Altus prosator*, which suggests either that the exemplar from which they were copied had contained them together or that the Winchester

scribe had placed the two works together, having found them separately, because he knew of a tradition ascribing them both to Columba.[4] In either case, we have grounds for a tentative identification of the second of these poems with the *Adiutor laborantium* of the saint of Iona.[5]

The appearance of this poem in an Anglo-Saxon prayer book was commented on by Edmund Bishop, who described it as a 'relic of the ancient Celtic piety' but failed to identify it with the poem ascribed to Columba.[6] Like the *Altus* and other Irish poems, it follows an abecedarian pattern except for the strange duplication of the initial *C* (in place of *K*, a letter not normally used in Irish writing) in lines 10 and 11, and the beginning of the final line with *P*. The use of letter *X* to begin *Christus* in line 22 reflects, of course, the Greek letter *chi*, which is formed like a large *X*. This use of 'X' was common in medieval Latin, and is familiar today in the writing of 'Christmas' as 'Xmas'.[7]

The lines are all of eight syllables, and all end in -*(i)um*.[8] The final two-line prayer formula – *per te Christe* – is a formula of closure common in prayer to the Father which is made 'through the Son'. It is a little disruptive from the literary point of view, firstly because the rest of the poem is addressed to God the Father and speaks of Christ in the third person, while this couplet is addressed to Christ directly; secondly because the couplet does not fit the alphabetical sequence of the poem; and thirdly because it does not rhyme with the previous twenty-five lines.

Some expressions in *Adiutor laborantium* are clearly quotations from biblical sources, and the notes for the lines in which they appear will indicate the sources. More often, however, the notes for each line will simply indicate similar expressions and imagery in other sources, both biblical and patristic. This is not to claim that Columba is directly dependent on any of these sources, but simply to invite reflection on the extent to which Iona shared a literary culture with the wider Latin church.

Adiutor laborantium

ADIUTOR LABORANTIUM[9]

Adiutor laborantium,
Bonorum rector omnium,
Custos ad propugnaculum,
Defensorque credentium,
5   Exaltator humilium,
Fractor superbientium,
Gubernator fidelium,
Hostis inpoenitentium,
Iudex cunctorum iudicum,
10   Castigator errantium,
Casta vita viventium,
Lumen et pater luminum,
Magna luce lucentium,
Nulli negans sperantium
15   Opem atque auxilium,
Precor ut me homunculum
Quassatum ac miserrimum
Remigantem per tumultum
Saeculi istius infinitum
20   Trahat post se ad supernum
Vitae portum pulcherrimum
Xristus; … infinitum
Ymnum sanctum in seculum
Zelo subtrahas hostium
25   Paradisi in gaudium.
      Per te, Christe Ihesu,
      qui vivis et regnas.

O helper of workers,
ruler of all the good,
guard on the ramparts
and defender of the faithful,
who lift up the lowly
and crush the proud,
ruler of the faithful,
enemy of the impenitent,
judge of all judges,
who punish those who err,
pure life of the living,
light and Father of lights
shining with great light,
denying to none of the hopeful
your strength and help,
I beg that me, a little man
trembling and most wretched,
rowing through the infinite storm
of this age,
Christ may draw after Him to the lofty
most beautiful haven of life
… an unending
holy hymn forever.
From the envy of enemies you lead me
into the joy of paradise.
 Through you, Christ Jesus,
 who live and reign …

PRAISE AND PETITION

With its short lines, the first fifteen of which are simply a list of titles or forms of address for God, the entire poem has something of the feel of a litany. God is addressed in the kind of language with which a client might praise or flatter a powerful patron. The divine majesty is approached with a mixture of trust and awe, for he is both 'defender of the faithful' and 'crusher of the proud'. As is common in litanies, the honorific titles given to God are followed by the petitioner's request, in this case a prayer for eternal salvation.

Compared to the structured grammatical composition of the *Altus*, the effect here is more impressionistic, more dependent on imagery and rhythm, and less on descriptive or narrative forms. In its sequence of titles it resembles not only the litanic prayers of the medieval church, but also perhaps the native Irish tradition of praise poetry. Compare the list of titles in the first fifteen lines of *Adiutor laborantium*, for example, with stanza 14 of the poem *To-fed andes* below:

> Leafy oak-tree, soul's protection, rock of safety,
> the sun of monks, mighty ruler, Colum Cille.

Or again, compare them to the more secular praises offered to Cet the warrior, sung by Conall in *Scéla Mucce meic Dathó*, the 'Tale of Mac Dathó's Pig':

> Welcome Cet, Cet mac Magach,
> dwelling place of a hero,
> heart of ice,
> tail plumage of a swan,
> brave charioteer of combat,
> warlike stormy sea,
> beautiful fierce bull,
> Cet mac Magach.[10]

In the *Adiutor laborantium* we see the same rolling multiplication of titles and symbols applied to God, just as it has been in Christian poetry from the very earliest period, in spite of Jesus' warning against 'heaping up empty phrases as the gentiles do' (Matthew 6:7). The roots of some such prayers 'in the language of love and worship' have been traced to pre-Christian prayers of the near-eastern Sumerian and

Assyrian liturgies,[11] but the similarity of the litanic style of *Adiutor laborantium* to secular Irish praise poetry might suggest that we should look for influences a little closer to home. Perhaps these long lists of glorious titles are a universal feature of language in the long struggle of men and women in every place to find a name for what they love.

HEAVENLY RESCUERS: GOD AND COLUMBA

The Lord is portrayed in the final lines of the poem as the rescuer of the storm-tossed pilgrim at sea. The image seems to be inspired by the Gospel story in which Jesus comes to protect his disciples, *laborantes in remigando*, from the stormy sea.[12] The story of the disciples being saved by Christ from the storm was used from earliest times as an image for the salvation of the storm-tossed church in a hostile world. The story was also applied to the faithful individual who was threatened by storms of temptation, and could only be saved from sinking into sin by Christ.

Such images of God's salvation may also have helped to form the picture of the saint found in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*. There Columba is often portrayed as exercising a God-given power of intervening to ward off catastrophe from sailors and voyagers, leading them safely to the quiet waters of their port. The vulnerability of a sailor in a frail boat on the open sea is an eloquent symbol of the Christian life and Irish writers made full use of it. But the sea-voyage was clearly far more than a literary device. Countless Irish Christians, seeking to follow Christ more closely through asceticism and abandonment of earthly security, were to seek him as wanderers and exiles. Such exile, for the people of these islands, would often mean a quite literal entrusting of one's life to the waves and to the mercy of God. The riskiness of such voyages is powerfully expressed in the poem of Beccán mac Luigdech:

> in scores of curraghs with an army of wretches he crossed the
>   long-haired sea.
> …
> He crossed the wave-strewn wild region, foam-flecked, seal-filled,
> savage, bounding, seething, white-tipped, pleasing, doleful.
>   (p. 147 below)

The sense of risk is plain, and there is no doubt that Iona monks, sailing to and from their island as they did, needed protection. The *Annals of Ulster* record the drowning of numbers of such sailors in the seventh and eighth centuries, including many Iona monks.[13] Terrified though the pilgrim may have been, however, Adomnán presents the meaning of such risky voyages as part of the growth of the pilgrim in faith and trust in the providence of God:

> The Lord terrifies him in this way, not so that the boat in which he is sitting may be sunk by the waves, but rather so that he might be roused to more fervent prayer, so that after the danger is past he might come to us with God's help.[14]

Here, to borrow a metaphor from Augustine, fear is the needle which draws after it the thread of love, of faith in God and trust in his mercy.

Throughout Adomnán's *Life of Columba* we find the saint rescuing sailors in distress, helping those who are faced with contrary winds, calming storms and so on. So the image of God in Columba's poem has become, for later generations of Iona monks, the image of God's servant, Columba himself.

In similar vein, the image of God as 'helper of workers' (line 1) is used by Adomnán to describe Columba when, for example, the abbot of Durrow was overworking already exhausted monks in a building project. Through Columba's influence, the abbot relented and gave the monks rest and refreshment from their labours.[15] At another time, exhausted monks returning from the harvest at the opposite end of the island were, at the saint's prayer, filled with a 'fragrant smell of marvellous sweetness' and a sudden joyfulness of heart.[16]

The description of God as 'enemy of the impenitent' could also be applied to Adomnán's portrait of Columba. There are stories in the *Vita* in which the saint imposes dreadful penalties on wicked men who refuse to repent when confronted by him. A magician is smitten with fatal illness until he releases a female slave.[17] A wicked man of the Cenél nGabráin, 'a persecutor of good men', is cursed by Columba and perishes at sea – a dramatic reversal of the sea-rescue image! Not one of his crew survived to tell the tale.[18]

IRISH 'PELAGIANISM'

The tone of this poem, its emphasis on the weakness of the 'little man' who recites it, and his dependence on the power of God to bring him to eternal salvation, as if such a thing were beyond his own wretched powers – all this raises a question about the nature of early Irish belief and theology which, in the context of this poem, could be usefully addressed: the question of Pelagianism.

A number of authors have, in recent years, suggested that Pelagianism, condemned as a heresy in the early fifth century, was an important aspect of Irish or 'Celtic' Christian belief.[19] Pelagius, a British lawyer who made a name for himself in Rome as an ascetic and teacher, claimed that human nature was able to bring about its own salvation without the help of God's grace. Anyone, Pelagius taught, could recognise the commandments of God, decide to obey them, and simply carry out that decision to the end, thus earning eternal life through perfect obedience – all without God's grace. This obedience is all that was required by Pelagius, but the obedience must be perfect, for to break any one of the commandments was to break the whole law: 'If you wish to come to life, keep the commandments. Therefore no one has that life unless he has kept all the commandments of the law.'[20] Thus, though he had abandoned his legal profession in Rome, Pelagius never abandoned a legalistic concept of human life and salvation, as Peter Brown observes: 'His God was, above all, a God who command-ed unquestioning obedience. He had made men to fulfill his commands and would condemn to hell-fire anyone who failed to perform a single one of them.'[21]

The Pelagian view of the church was correspondingly severe: since a Christian must be perfectly obedient, the church had no place in it for sinners but was a collection of moral achievers, for 'God does not love the evil, he does not love sinners, and whoever does evil is God's enemy.'[22] So 'good' Christians were forbidden to associate at all with sinners – 'we must not even break bread with sinners'[23] – but were to separate themselves from them as if to form a true church over against the pseudo-christian church of sinners: 'Let us pay no attention to the chaff ... let there be a separation between the righteous and the unright-eous, between the one who serves God and the one who does not.'[24]

It was the stark moralistic simplicity of Pelagius' view that led him to oppose Augustine. For Pelagius the perfectly obedient would be saved, but sinners would be damned. Augustine, on the other hand, saw that all men and women were sinners, constantly struggling with temptation, falling and rising again. They longed for God and tried hard to be faithful Christians, but they continued to fail, and so continued to need and ask for mercy, remaining sinners until the day they died.

Augustine also taught his flock to pray to God for help – and this is the point at which Pelagius first challenged him. For Augustine prayed in his *Confessions*, 'Grant what you command, and command what you will.' That is to say, I am longing to obey what you command. I want to obey it, but I still fail, so help me. Give me grace to do your will. 'Grant what you command!' It was this prayer that caused Pelagius to fly into a rage, Augustine informs us:

> I said to our God, and said it often, 'Grant what you command, and command what you will.' Which words of mine Pelagius of Rome could not stand when they were recalled in his presence by a certain brother and fellow-bishop of mine; and contradicting them rather excitedly, nearly sued him who had mentioned them.[25]

The foregoing historical-theological sketch provides a key to the question about Irish Pelagianism raised by the *Adiutor laborantium*. If we were to seek evidence of Pelagianism in early Irish theological writings, we would look for signs of a belief that no sinner could ever go to heaven. We would also look for claims that men and women could be saved solely by their own efforts with no help from God, nor from the prayers of fellow Christians, nor from the prayers of the saints. Conversely, prayers for God's help in doing God's will, prayers to the saints for their help in doing so, and any sign of belief that Christians who continue to sin might still be saved through the mercy of God and the intercession of his saints – all these must count against any claim that the Irish church held Pelagian beliefs, and they are themes that abound in the prayer and poetry of medieval Irish Christians.

The theological tone of the *Adiutor laborantium* is remarkably un-Pelagian in character. The very first line, 'helper of those who labour', reflects a deeply Augustinian view of life: the sense of the inadequacy of the Christian's own moral strength, balanced by his confidence

in the power of God to come to his aid in the labour of discipleship. God's grace as a necessary support for the Christian is also invoked by expressions like 'ruler of all the good', 'denying to none of the hopeful your strength and help'. Human weakness, unaided by God, cannot effect its own salvation from the storms of this life, so the poet prays for himself, 'trembling and most wretched', that Christ may rescue him, drawing him to heaven in spite of his own weakness.

There is no evidence here, then, of the self-confident Pelagian outlook, and in the poetry of our following chapters we will find much more to show how unfounded is the claim of Irish Pelagianism. The last stanza of the poem *Noli Pater* speaks in highly Augustinian terms of grace in terms of the love of God, poured into the heart of the believer by God himself 'as a jewel of gold is put into a silver dish'. The eleventh stanza of Cú Chuimne's *Cantemus* exhorts the faithful to 'put on the armour of light, the breastplate and helmet, that we might be perfected by God, lifted up by Mary.' Again, the work of perfection is not achieved by strenuous human effort unaided by God as Pelagius would have it, for Christians are 'perfected by God', and Mary is also given a role in lifting up the believer to God. Thus it is first and foremost God who effects the salvation of believers, giving them grace to do his will as Augustine begged him in prayer. Through God's providence, Mary also assists the Christian in his pilgrimage.

The assistance of Mary is paralleled, in Irish writing, by that of other saints. In the Iona poetry, St Columba naturally stands out as the saintly patron, as in *To-fed andes* (p. 149): 'I pray a great prayer to Eithne's son – better than treasure – my soul to his right hand, to heaven, before the world's people.'

And in *Fo réir Choluimb* (p. 141):

> May he save me from fire – common fight –
> Colum Cille, noble candle,
> his tryst well-famed – he was bright –
> may he bear me to the King who ends evil.
> …
> may he bear me past the king of fire,
> then my protection is his.
> …
> his bards' prayer perhaps may save us.

Far from the Pelagian view of each man and woman as a self-sufficient, self-contained, autonomous individual capable of working out his or her own salvation by carefully observing God's law and following Christ's example, Irish Christians, like Christians throughout the medieval world, saw themselves as dependent on God's mercy for their salvation, on God's grace for the performance of their good deeds, and on the continuing prayerful support of their fellow-Christians, living and dead. There is no support in Irish monastic literature for the claim that there is a uniquely 'Celtic' theology of grace which is unlike that of the rest of Latin Christendom.

Noli Pater

This short seven-stanza hymn is evidently a composite work of two or more elements.[1] The clearest indication of this is the change in rhyme-scheme halfway through. The first three stanzas are couplets of eight feet to each line, each half-line ending in a trisyllable rhyming with the final trisyllable of the same line:

1. *indulgere, fulgore; formidine, uridine*
2. *terribilem, similem; carmina, agmina*
3. *culmina, fulmina; amantissime, rectissime*

Note how closely rhymed each line is for the first three stanzas, the assonance of the accented syllables, and the alliteration which appears irregularly:

1. *frangamur formidine*
2. *timemus terribilem*
   cuncta canunt carmina
3. *rex regum rectissime*

In the rest of the text the rhymes are less developed: *saecula* and *regimina*, *domino* and *utero*, *gratia* and *sicera*. The last stanza contains no rhyme at all. There is only one instance of alliteration – *recta regens regimina* – and that in a single line which, though probably of Irish origin, does not belong to the stanza which follows. Concluding that the work is composite, we must deal with the first three stanzas independently of the rest.

However, having noted this, the remainder (lines 7–13) is also reproduced here even though there are no grounds for attributing it to any

Iona author. The fact that these texts have been conjoined by someone is of sufficient interest to justify reproducing the whole hymn as it appears in the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, as we will shortly see.

Of the first section (lines 1–6) Kenney notes 'the first part may be as old as the time of Colum-cille and, perhaps, his composition.'[2] The rhyme-scheme is a characteristically early Irish one of rich trisyllabic rhymes with the accent on the first of the three, the antepenultimate syllable.[3] The first three stanzas employ this scheme to perfection.

Apart from such indicators of age and Irish provenance, there is little internal evidence in the hymn to connect the first section with Columba, or even with Iona. However, 'the tradition that connects the hymn with St Columba and Iona is pretty constant' as Bernard and Atkinson point out,[4] and the style does bear comparison with the Columban *Altus prosator* which is also said to be by the saint. None of this amounts to a very strong case for Columban authorship, or even for Iona as the place of origin, but it would be unnecessarily cynical to exclude the *Noli Pater* from this collection on the grounds that the evidence for its composition on Iona is thin, and we have no evidence to the contrary. However, we will return to the question of authorship when we have looked at the text of the poem.

Noli Pater

NOLI PATER [5]

Noli Pater indulgere tonitrua cum fulgore
ne frangamur formidine huius atque uridine.

Te timemus terribilem nullum credentes similem
te cuncta canunt carmina angelorum per agmina.

5   Teque exaltent culmina caeli vaga per fulmina
O Iesu amantissime, O rex regum rectissime.

Benedictus in saecula recta regens regimina
Iohannes coram Domino adhuc matris in utero
repletus Dei gratia pro vino atque sicera.

10   Elizabeth Zachariae virum magnum genuit
Iohannem baptistam precursorem Domini.

Manet in meo corde Dei amoris flamma
ut in argenti vase auri ponitur gemma.

Father, do not allow thunder and lightning,
lest we be shattered by its fear and its fire.

We fear you, the terrible one, believing there is none like you.
All songs praise you throughout the host of angels.

Let the summits of heaven, too, praise you with roaming lightning,
O most loving Jesus, O righteous King of Kings.

Blessed for ever, ruling in right government,
is John before the Lord, till now in his mother's womb,
filled with the grace of God in place of wine or strong drink.

Elizabeth of Zechariah begot a great man:
John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord.

The flame of God's love dwells in my heart
as a jewel of gold is placed in a silver dish.

THE LATER ADDITIONS

Even if we accept that the first six lines of *Noli Pater* are possibly
Columban in origin, the remainder is evidently later in date. Lines 7–11
are attested elsewhere in the Irish church, not necessarily in connec-
tion with lines 1–6 of *Noli Pater*, and with no apparent relation to the
final couplet.[6] Lines 10 and 11 are actually an old Roman responsory
for the Feast of the birthday of John the Baptist.[7] Why, then, were
these various Johannine fragments added to the original text of the
Noli Pater?

The first section is a prayer for protection against some elemental
calamity. It opens by seeking God's protection against thunder, light-
ning and fire, and the third couplet optimistically recalls that even the
lightnings of heaven serve to praise God and are therefore, one would
expect, under his control. It is, then, both a plea for protection and an
expression of confidence in God's power to protect.

It is hard to see, solely from a reading of the text as it stands, what
this prayer for protection has to do with the Johannine contents of the
remaining lines. But an examination of the Irish prefaces to the *Noli
Pater* reveals what may have been in the mind of the editor who joined
the material together in its present form. The prefaces to the hymns in
the Irish *Liber Hymnorum* generally purport to give an account of the
occasion of each hymn's composition, where and when and why it was
written, as well as the identity of its composer. The preface to the *Noli
Pater* in one manuscript[8] attributes it to Columba, who is said to have
written it at the door of the hermitage of Daire Calcaig (Derry) in a
story which links Columba's memory to that of another Irish saint,
Mo-Bí.[9] The culmination of this tale involves Columba's recitation of
the prayer against a raging fire: 'So great was the fire and flame that it
almost burned a grove of trees that was in the place, and Colum Cille
made this hymn to protect the grove.'[10] Another manuscript, while
rephrasing the above account, also offers alternative explanations of
Columba's reasons for composing it: 'It is the Day of Judgement that
he had in mind. Or the fire of John's Feast.'[11]

There is nothing in our hymn to suggest that the author is thinking
of the Day of Judgement. The notion of the 'fire of John's Feast',
however, does have resonances with other Old Irish literature and

may provide a connection between the two sections. The Feast of the Beheading of John the Baptist was celebrated on 29 August, and there is some evidence to connect this feast with the dangers of fire. The *Martyrology of Óengus*, among its notes for 29 August, speaks of the vengeance that will be taken for the murder of John. Presumably because his death was brought about by the dancing of a woman, we are told that 'the world's women, save a few of them, burn in the fire of Doom.' Already there is the threat of fire, albeit the eschatological fire, but the notes continue:

> In vengeance for the killing of John comes the Besom [Broom] out of Fanait to expurgate Ireland at the end of the world, as Aileran of the Wisdom foretold, and Colum cille; i.e. at Terce precisely will come the Besom out of Fanait, as Colum cille said: 'Like the grazing of two horses in a yoke will be the diligence with which it will cleanse Erin.'[12]

The 'Broom' of this great destruction is first associated with the plague:

> Two alehouses shall be in one garth side by side. He who shall go out of one house into the other will find no one before him alive in the house he will enter, and no one alive in the house from which he shall go.[13]

But the notes continue, linking this 'Besom' of plague to the threat of fire, in a prophecy attributed to Saint Moling (d. 696):

> On John's festival will come the onslaught,
> which will search Ireland from the south-east,
> a fierce dragon that will burn everyone it can,
> without communion, without sacrifice, etc.[14]

The association of fire and plague is confirmed in one manuscript of the Irish *Liber Hymnorum*, by a gloss on the word *uridine* in the first stanza: 'i.e. by Fire, or by Yellow Plague.'[15] Evidently a connection was made between the Feast of the death of John the Baptist, the plague and the threat of burning, and all these were linked to the memory of Columba.

The same linking of the Feast of John the Baptist with some expected calamity is repeated in several other texts, some of them

recounting the legend that an Irish druid, Mog Ruith, had personally decapitated John the Baptist in Jerusalem when no one else could be found to perform the wicked deed.[16] The whole of Ireland would be made to suffer for his sin, and the expectation of catastrophe on John's feast was connected to this legend.[17] The *Annals of Ulster*, for the year 1096, report: 'Great fear seized the men of Ireland before the feast of John in this year, and God protected them through the fasts of the successor of Patrick and the other clerics of Ireland.'[18] The *Annals of the Four Masters*, for the same year, record this 'great fear' in more detail: 'The Festival of John fell on Friday this year; the men of Ireland were seized with great fear …' The clergy recommended nationwide prayer, fasting and almsgiving 'to save them from the mortality which had been predicted to them from a remote period.'[19] Their efforts met with success: 'and so the men of Ireland were saved for that time from the *fire of vengeance*.'[20]

The year prior to this 'great fear', 1095, is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* as one of 'great sickness in Ireland that killed many people,' and the *Annals of Inisfallen* in that year note 'a great mortality of the men of Ireland, so that it is impossible to enumerate all the people that died.' The pestilence of 1095, coupled with the old belief that Mog Ruith's sin had called down the wrath of God, the fiery vengeance of John, on the whole of Ireland, must have lent a certain urgency to the prayers of the Irish in 1096.

What emerges from these later sources is a loose pattern of associations between John the Baptist, the threat of fire, and the great saint of Iona. These associations may help to explain why the compiler of the *Noli Pater* in the Irish *Liber Hymnorum* joined together the first three stanzas for warding off lightning-fire (which have nothing to do with John the Baptist) to the remaining stanzas which are liturgical fragments mostly relating to John (which have nothing to do with fire) to create the composite work as a protection prayer or *lorica*, as its Preface explains: 'Whoever recites it at lying down and at rising up is freed from all danger by fire, or lightning flash, as also are the nine persons dearest to him of his folk.'[21]

There remains the unexplained last couplet: 'The flame of God's love dwells in my heart as a jewel of gold is placed in a silver dish.' This is a separate entity, not part of the added section of lines 7–11. Why has

the editor appended it to the whole, since it has no obvious connection with John the Baptist?

One explanation may be that the metaphor of a golden jewel in a silver dish, as well as expressing a more general theological and doctrinal position about God's indwelling grace, suggested to the editor the image of the head of John the Baptist lying on a platter. The *Martyrology of Oengus* says of John, 'his like – pleasant the jewel – will never be seen on Banba's shore.'[22] The image of John the Baptist as a jewel is also suggested by Irish apocryphal writings which describe what happened to his head after his death. After being hidden by Herodias and miraculously discovered, the head was taken to the city of Inshena: 'Thereafter the craftsman fashioned a golden shrine around the head. This could be shut and opened, and it had a lock on it.'[23] Such imagery associated with John's head may have suggested to the editor that a golden jewel in a silver dish might be a suitable metaphor for John's death. This could only have been reinforced by apocryphal tales in which John's head is brought to Herod 'on a dish of white silver'.[24]

IRISH NATURE POETRY

One of the features of early Irish literature which modern readers find particularly attractive is its approach to the natural world. Love of nature and of all God's creatures is perhaps the first thing that springs to mind when 'Celtic spirituality' is mentioned. Thus Kuno Meyer can write that 'to seek out and watch and love nature, in its tiniest phenomena as in its grandest, was given to no people so early and so fully as to the Celt'.[25] Thomas Finan praises 'the Celtic sense of the beauty of nature, so prominent in indigenous Irish literature'.[26] In a world whose beauty, not to mention its ability to support the human race, looks increasingly fragile in the face of our technical capacity to exploit its resources, one can understand why people seek alternative visions and alternative cultures which might help us to imagine gentler ways of living with each other and with nature.

However, if we are to allow the early Irish monks to speak to us in their own voices, rather than simply projecting our needs onto them, we must go back to the texts and attend more closely to such evidence

as we have. Donnchadh Ó Corráin has shown that the modern image of nature-loving hermits dwelling quietly and peacefully in intimacy with their surroundings is constructed largely on the basis of only fourteen poems written between the ninth and eleventh centuries.[27] They may be poems of some literary merit, and are certainly attractive to the modern reader in their treatment of nature, but Ó Corráin demonstrates that their attraction resides not in the fact that Celtic monks were unlike us in their intimate union with nature, but that these poets were just like us: they were 'literary men whose lives were lived out, as teachers and administrators, in the great monastic towns … cultivated and scholarly men writing to meet the needs and taste of a cultural élite.'[28] Like the urban nature-lovers of the late twentieth century, these poets experience nature at a distance and are able to write of it as an ideal. For them it is an alternative to the routine concerns and frustrations of life in a noisy and busy monastery. A real hermit, living in a damp stone or wooden cell, fasting in hot and cold weather to subdue the flesh, terrified of thunder and lightning, as the author of the *Noli Pater* evidently was, is not the author of these 'nature poems'.

Certainly there are plenty of Irish poems in which nature is a theme, even if they were not written by ecologically sound hermits. But the view of nature which they reflect is ambivalent. Sometimes, of course, nature is enjoyed and celebrated for its own sake: Irish poetry is remarkable for its treatment of nature as interesting in its own right rather than as a scenic backdrop for the poet's psychological state or a metaphor for the human condition. But at other times nature's dangers and discomforts are equally apparent. The *Noli Pater* is one of many *loricae* which takes this view. The ninth-century hymn attributed to Saint Sanctán prays:

> May Christ save us from every bloody death,
> from fire, from raging sea …
> may the Lord each hour come to me
> against wind, against swift waters.[29]

Another prayer, attributed to Saint Brendán, but probably of the eighth century, prays:

> Deliver me, almighty Lord God, from every danger of sea and
> land, and from waters and from the phantasm of all beasts and

flying creatures and serpents. Defend me, O God, from fire, from lightning, from thunder, from hail, from snow, from rain, from wind, from dangers of the earth, from whirlwind, from earthquake, from all evils …[30]

The 'negative' aspects of nature are evident in other kinds of writing too. In one of the poems in the later *Buile Suibne,* when Suibne (Sweeney) of Dál Araide slays one of Saint Ronán's psalmists he is cursed by the saint so that he spends the rest of his life living as a wild man. Here 'closeness to nature' is presented as a curse:

It was hard for him to endure that bed, for at every twist and turn he would give, a shower of thorns off the hawthorn would stick into him, so that they were piercing and rending his side and wounding his skin.[31]

In this context, the life of man exposed to nature is one of suffering and hardship. It is precisely because nature is so cruel to the unprotected body that Suibne is finally reconciled to God through his fierce penitential madness among the trees. It is as if nature itself were an instrument of God, carrying out his painful salvation:

> Grey branches have wounded me,
> they have torn my hands;
> the briars have not left
> the making of a girdle for my feet.[32]

The celebration of nature in early medieval Europe is not restricted to Celtic literature. The much-maligned Augustine of Hippo is often used as an illustration of those negative 'Roman' and therefore un-Celtic attitudes to nature which are held to underlie many of today's ills.[33] Yet he is himself one of the great celebrators of nature. His popular *Confessions* reveal a man who is moved to the point of ecstasy by sensual delights. These delights may sometimes threaten to lead him astray, yet the mere sight of a lizard catching flies, or a spider, 'leads me on to praise you, the marvellous Creator and Orderer of all things.'[34] Like our Irish 'nature poets', Augustine is an urban monk living in comfortable if simple surroundings, occupied with the pastoral care of his flock and the duties of study. Like the Irish poets, he is only too pleased

to enjoy a few moments of quiet distraction from the burdens of office, delighting in the beauty of God's creatures:

> This fabric of creation, this most carefully ordered beauty, rising from the lowest to the highest, descending from the highest to the lowest, never broken, but all kinds of different things tempered together, all praises God. Why does the whole earth praise God? Because when you look at it and see its beauty, you praise God in it. The beauty of the earth is, as it were, the voice of the dumb earth. Look, and you will see its beauty.[35]

If such 'love of nature' is common to the Irish poet and the Roman-African theologian, to the educated urban mind in the fifth century as in the twentieth, our *Noli Pater* reflects a very different response to nature. Here the natural elements are a threat to life, to humanity itself which will be 'broken by its fear and its fire'. The lightnings of heaven are splendid, but they are destructive, and only by God's protection can we be saved. The same sense of danger is apparent in many of the 'nature miracles' of the Irish saints' lives, in which the most obviously recurring theme is not some innocent communion with nature (though this is also present), but rather the saints' manifestation of God-given power over nature's dangers and threats to human well-being and safety. Celtic literature has as much evidence of the fear of nature as of its innocent delights. Lisa Bitel explains why:

> Small boys in monastic communities slipped and drowned … monsters lived in rivers, lakes and seas … The denizens of the wilderness were animals and demons … [who] inhabited the wild for one purpose only: to prey upon those foolish enough to leave the safety of home.[36]

The modern reader of the *Noli Pater* is permitted to enter imaginatively into the thought-world of people whose sense of God's Creation is rich and ambiguous enough to encompass both delight and terror. The delight is not uniquely Celtic. Indeed some of the characteristically Irish *loricae*, which show great sensitivity to the splendour of nature, are shown to be dependent on the Latin *Benedicite*, the song of the three young men in the fire in the Book of Daniel which was one of the most popular biblical prayers in the early Irish church.[37] The

sheer delight in nature, and the way in which such delight elicits praise of God, is no more Celtic than Hebrew or Roman-African.

Similarly, the fear of nature manifested in the *Noli Pater* is surely a universal human experience – the fragility of the body in the face of cold, hunger, rain and heat; the knowledge that 'unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare forked animal'[38] whose comfort and whose very life depends on the constant struggle of strength and wit against a natural world which bears only a partial resemblance to the Garden of Eden. In such an ambiguous world, to pray can only mean to bless the Creator for the beauty of the world, its fecundity and habitability, and to beg him for protection from its cruelty and danger.

COLUMBA AND THE ELEMENTS

Finally, let us return to the place of Columba in the tradition of the *Noli Pater*, or at least of its first three stanzas. Kenney, as we saw above, thought the composition might perhaps have been Columba's own work, and its age and likely provenance are compatible with such a claim. But there is little positive evidence for it other than the attributions in the Irish *Liber Hymnorum* and other such legends. It was common practice in the period of its composition to attribute hymns of unknown authorship to a well-known saint, perhaps the patron of one's own monastery. Such attribution gave the hymn a certain authority, as well as boosting the popularity and influence of the patron saint and therefore the influence of the monastery itself.

Yet we have Adomnán's word that Columba himself had made a book of hymns with his own hand, as he recalls 'a book of hymns for the week, written in the hand of Saint Columba, fell from the shoulders of a boy.'[39] This tells us first of all that Iona monks were given to singing hymns every day in a weekly *cursus* or cycle,[40] and secondly that Columba wrote down hymns, even if we cannot conclude that he actually composed them. Hymn-singing was, then, a central part of the monastic life on Iona.[41]

We should also note Columba's association with weather-miracles, an association which the *Amra* (p. 111) had made very soon after his death:

> You find his grave good in its virtue,
> appointed for every trouble of weather.

Adomnán confirms this association in the *Vita Columbae*, which has several accounts of storms and winds which are quelled by the saint, or turned to serve his purposes, and it may be that this poem which is so clearly concerned with dangerous weather-conditions would be more easily attributed to a saint who was already known to be both concerned with the weather, and powerful enough to control it. On the other hand, if Columba had written this hymn himself, it would hardly be a matter for surprise that his later cult, whether in hagiography or in the pious folk-tales of hymn-books and martyrologies, should continue to associate him with weather-control miracles.

Similarly, the association of a 'Columban' hymn with protection against plague may reflect the tradition attested by Adomnán that Columba protected his devotees from plague:

> Ireland and Britain were twice devastated by a dire plague, with the exception of two peoples: that is the Pictish people and the Irish in Britain, between whom the mountains of the 'spine of Britain' form the boundary. And although neither of these peoples is without great sins, by which the eternal judge is generally provoked to anger, yet till now he has patiently spared them both. To whom can this grace granted by God be attributed, except to the holy Columba whose monasteries are established within the boundaries of both peoples and are held in great honour by both of them, down to the present time?[42]

Such patterns of association between popular legends, hymnody and hagiographical writing provide a good deal of insight into the Irish cult of saints in the early middle ages. They reveal the kinds of concern which a saint was expected to address: weather, plague, and so on. They embody that complex of human relations based on patronage and loyalty which was not only enshrined in traditional society, but was transposed into the realm of the sacred, so that patronage of a saint and one's own loyalty became a primary expression of religious life.

In spite of these connecting patterns, however, the evidence as

to Columba's authorship remains inconclusive. In the end we can probably go no further than Kenney, noting both the long-standing and constant tradition which ascribes the hymn to Columba, and the lack of evidence to the contrary.

Amra Choluimb Chille

The poem called *Amra Choluimb Chille*, or 'The Elegy of Colum Cille', is one of the most important poems we have from the early medieval Gaelic world. Its language suggests that it is indeed a product of the years following Columba's death, and its contents seem to confirm this view.[1] Not only is it in that case one of the earliest dateable Gaelic poems, but it also shows a thorough mixing of native poetic techniques and the vocabulary and subject matter of the Christian church. On top of this, it is a poem about one of the church's most important figures in its early centuries in Ireland and Britain: Columba himself. Churchmen and literati of the middle ages treated the poem with respect and reverence, as well as curiosity: it was treated almost as a piece of scripture, or a relic, copied carefully and glossed, and hence it preserved a great deal of archaic language, despite the barrier of understanding which centuries of language change presented for later readers and interpreters. It was also considered to have salvific qualities: a poem contained in the prefatory matter to the *Amra* states,

> Whoever recites every day the *Amra*, whose meaning is difficult,
> will have from Columba the kingdom of heaven mightily.
> Whoever recites every day Columba's *Amra* with its sense
> will have prosperity on earth, will save his soul past pain.[2]

Despite the importance of the poem, it has been comparatively little studied. There have been editions and translations of the three earliest and most important manuscript versions of the text, *Lebor na*

hUidre,[3] the *Liber Hymnorum*,[4] and Rawlinson B.502.[5] The edition and translation of the last of these, by Whitley Stokes in 1899, is by far the most satisfactory.[6] It was the first real attempt to grapple with the linguistic difficulties of the poem, and the last comprehensive work on the subject. Since then, a number of studies of individual words or problems in the text have appeared,[7] and a Modern Irish translation with notes has been made, by P. L. Henry, which itself makes many new suggestions and emendations.[8] Most importantly, like the translation by Thomas Kinsella,[9] it extracts the poem from the morass of the medieval glosses which had accrued around it, and lets the reader experience the poem as a continuous, fluid work. There has yet to be an adequate modern edition of the poem, however, and a translation which, in the words of Vernam Hull, 'is a scholarly attempt to interpret [the *Amra*] without having recourse to the glosses.'[10]

While the text and translation given below does not represent a full scientific treatment, what we have provided is an interim edition which should give a sense of the current understanding of the poem, as well as contributing our own suggested readings and interpretations. We believe that the literary qualities and historical importance of the poem merit it greater public attention than it has hitherto received. There is a long way to go yet before the poem can be understood properly, and we hope at least that our presentation of it here may re-motivate scholars to work on its many problems. In addition to these considerations, the juxtaposition of this most important of poems on Columba with the other poetry, Gaelic and Latin, in this volume, helps greatly to contextualise it, and we hope to have drawn out some of its many religious allusions, both in the commentary and in the notes. Above all, we hope our presentation will allow readers to appreciate the power, beauty and significance of the poem.

THE AUTHOR

The poem is attributed to a poet named Dallán Forgaill, whose reputation is so singularly built on his alleged authorship of the *Amra* that it seems foolish to deny his connection with it. Little is known with certainty about him, beyond his name, and his nickname.[11] He is generally known as Dallán Forgaill (sometimes Dallán mac Forgaill),

an acquired name which may mean, 'the dear Blind one of (or son of)
the Testimony/Witness'. It is likely that he was indeed blind; we have
a great many instances from the later middle ages in Ireland and
Scotland of blind poets.[12] His real name was Eochu mac Colla meic
Eircc meic Feradaig, and according to one tradition he was from a tribe
called the Masraige, from Mag Slécht in Bréifne in Connacht, now Co.
Cavan.[13] A gloss to the *Martyrology of Óengus* calls him Dallán 'from
Maigen', now Moynehall in Co. Cavan, and there is a Kildallan in the
same area. But there are also alternative traditions about him.[14]

Obviously then, there was little certain knowledge about who Dallán
was, and within the gap in people's knowledge a legend arose, a legend
which is incorporated in the preface to the *Amra*. There it tells us that
Dallán was chief poet of Ireland, and that he began to compose the
poem at the time when Columba had come for the council of Druim
Cett in 575, but was stopped by the saint, saying it should not be
finished until after he had died. Columba gave Dallán certain tokens by
which he would know when this occurred, and promised him his sight
while he was composing the poem. Some of the legendary material
seems to come from the later Columban monastery of Kells. In it we
find legends assigning the composition of the poem to local places in
Meath. Though these have little historical value, they do show an
attempt to relocalise and reclaim the poem by later members of the
Columban *familia*.[15]

Dallán is also credited with two other poems, only one of which is
still extant, and this is almost certainly not his.[16] Tradition calls Dallán
a 'chief-poet', but there is no firm evidence, either for this as an actual
institution, or for Dallán having held such a post. Certainly, though, he
must have been held in some esteem if, indeed, he was commissioned
to compose the poem. He was also venerated as a saint, with his
feast on 29 January, although he does not appear in the earliest
martyrologies.[17]

So the evidence from tradition is not always very informative, and
indeed is often misleading. Slightly more reliable is the information on
the poet and the poem which we can extract from the *Amra* itself. It is
the *Amra* which tells us that it was commissioned by Áed, and this is
almost certainly Áed mac Ainmirech, Columba's cousin and the king of
the Cenél Conaill, and later of Tara (586–98). We have seen already

how Columba was involved with his royal cousin, diplomatically and otherwise, and how Áed's patronage may well have contributed to the success of Columba's monasteries.[18] The strong emphasis on Columba's Uí Néill ancestry in the *Amra* may well have to do with the source of the commission as well.

The legends which call Dallán a chief-poet and emphasise his membership of a secular, native literary class have distracted scholars from the clear evidence of the poem itself, which shows that Dallán was extremely well acquainted with church learning and with Latin. He displays a secure knowledge of biblical matters, both in name and in content; he mentions patristic sources (Cassian and Basil) and in the case of Cassian he clearly knows the contents of these sources; he shows an awareness of the problems of the ascetic call as well as its heroism in his stress on Columba's balanced life; he uses Latin words, as well as a panoply of Irish borrowings from Latin. In all this we must say that Dallán seems to have been trained in a monastery, if indeed he was not actually a cleric. Certainly he is a Christian, and a careful one at that, prefacing his elegy of his saint with a prayer to God. For all that, he shows a different attitude towards the dead saint than do his successors as poets of Columba, having little sense of Columba as a continuing patron in this life, though he notes miracles at his grave and expects help from him in the next life.

He also demonstrates little of the intimate affection and hero-worship we find in the poetry of Beccán, the next of the Iona poets. Dallán's praise is primarily the praise of Columba as scholar, and the places where he speaks of Columba's skill at interpreting the Bible or understanding law are the places where he seems most impassioned. In section I it is as a teacher, explainer and messenger that Columba is mourned. Dallán seems then to have had some acqaintance with Columba beyond a mere reputation.

There is little which would suggest that the poem was composed on Iona itself, yet it certainly belongs to the dossier of Iona poems. The poem seems to have been known by Adomnán, who imitates it in his 'Prayer' (see p. 164), and perhaps by Beccán, who uses some similar, and rare, items of vocabulary. More to the point, Dallán must have received much of his information about Columba from the Iona monastery, from the elders and from Columba's successor, if not from

personal knowledge. He shows a close acquaintance with Columba's scholarly work in particular, though this may be due to his own interests. He also seems to know of miracles which had occurred at Columba's grave, information which must ultimately have come from Iona. He clearly knows of Columba's work in Pictland as well, and seems to tell us of a pact between the saint and the king of Dál Riata who gave Columba Iona, but there is nothing even to suggest that Dallán himself had ever come to Britain or crossed the sea; there is none of Beccán's heroic sailing and oceanic language.

So Dallán was an Irish poet, well versed in church matters and in Latin, and knowledgeable about Columba's intellectual accomplishments. He is also, of course, skilled at the techniques of native poetic composition. His language is an extremely heightened and rhetorical one; he employs alliteration as his main binding element, but the poem is peppered with invented word-forms, with *tmesis* (the splitting of compound verbs by other elements in the sentence, see below), and with a seemingly somewhat anarchic word-order. All these elements are kept in play, and varied, to produce a highly wrought, almost baroque effect. The poem was treasured in later times, even when not fully understood, though one wonders whether later poets thought it a good poem, or were troubled by its bravado and obscurity.

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

The medieval commentators on the *Amra* divided it into ten sections, with a Preface, and we have followed their division. The Preface is an invocation for God's protection, and is in a different verse form from the rest of the poem: it consists of two stanzas, each stanza having two rhymed sections of three lines each, connected mainly by alliteration. Tradition suggested that this part was composed earlier by Dallán, though more modern scholarship has tended to see it as perhaps later, on account of its use of rhyme. Neither view is really necessary, since it seems as it stands a satisfactory introduction to the main poem.[19] The last word of the Preface alliterates with the first of the main poem (*nél: Ní*) though the end of the poem only echoes back to the beginning of section I (*nimda huain: ní díscéoil*). The other ten sections consist, at least partially, of the following (in Stokes' summary, based on the Latin chapter headings in R):

I. the news of Columba's death and the exceeding sorrow of the
Gaels, II. his ascent to heaven, III. his place in heaven, IV. his
sufferings on earth and the Devil's hatred of him, V. his wisdom
and gentleness, VI. his charity and abstinence, VII. his knowledge
and foresight, VIII. king Áed's commission to the author, IX. the
special grief of the Uí Néill …, and X. the virtues of the Amra.[20]

These sections vary in length. There is much work to be done on the
metrical system of the poem, but some features can be mentioned as a
preliminary. The verse form used employs alliteration as its main fea-
ture. It is found both internally and across lines, though it is not con-
sistent. The last word of each section alliterates with the first word of
the next. Many lines conclude with a three-syllable word or group of
words containing a strong stress (or sometimes two). To illustrate, here
is a part of section IV, with alliteration in italics and stressed syllables
underlined. The final three syllables of each line are marked off with a
break or pause, a *caesura*, represented by a space and a bar.

> Ro-cés gair | co m*bu*ïch.
> *B*aí [*f*]úath | *f*ri *d*emal
> *d*ía mba goiste | *c*elebrad.
> Assa *c*heird | *c*umachtaig
> *c*on-róiter | *r*echt *r*obust.

This is followed by one of a number of passsages in the poem which
consists of three phrases, two short and one long, linked by reiteration
of words, or similar parts of speech, usually verbs. In this part it is

> *R*o-fess *R*uam, *r*o-fess *s*éiss,
>   *r*o– *s*uíthe *d*ó -*dam*tha | *d*ëachtae.

A similar example of this three-fold phrase is found in VI. 23–4:

> *B*a *b*ind, *b*a h*óe*n,
>   *a* cherd | *c*léirchechta.

The incremental repetition in these examples can be seen in use in
much longer passages, such as those at II. 3–6 and VI. 13–19, where
the verb *boí*, 'he was', strings the various elements together. But
sometimes it is not evident what the thread binding two or more lines
together is, and in this the *Amra* seems somewhat looser than most

poems in alliterative verse, and much looser than the poetry of Beccán, which is a tour-de-force of alliterative harmony. The lines which begin Section V are a case in point. Each line is perfectly alliterative, but does not visibly seem joined to the others. Here we have separated the first line into two:

> Raith rith rethes
>> dar cais caín-denum.
> Faig feirb fithir.
> Gáis gluassa glé.

In a passage of this sort, it may be that the parallelism of the pattern of three sharp stressed words in each line itself binds the lines together. Parallelism of verb-forms sometimes acts in this way also, as in IV. 10–11:

> Ar-bert Bassil | bráthu,
> ar-gair gnímu de adbsib airbrib | aidblib.

Dallán delights in difficulty. He uses Latin words, Latin borrowings, and obscure words; he obscures nouns by changing their declensions, obscures verbs by giving them false endings. Word order is very fluid in his poetry, as it is in much of archaic Irish verse. Tmesis is common. Here are a number of examples of all these phenomena. First, from V. 16, we see both tmesis and changed word order:

> ro– Colunb ó Chille | -cúalammar.

This would normally be written in prose

> *ro-cúalammar ó Cholumb Chille*
> 'which we have heard from Colum Cille'.

An extraordinary example, as interpreted by P. L. Henry,[21] whom we follow in our translation, is VI. 3:

> Ad– Fet co Nú, nech | nad goí –geóin.

Here the second element of the verb has two preverbs belonging to, but separated from it, *ad-* and *nad*. In normal prose word order, the sentence would be

> *Ad-geóin Fet co Nú, nech nad (geóin) goí*
> 'He was acquainted with the Old and New Laws,
> he who knew no lie'.

In our translation we have not tried to reproduce the sound or sense patterns of the original; to do so would give something like an Ezra Pound canto, or Gerard Manley Hopkins. A snatch of his 'Henry Purcell' will show the same sort of style in English:

> Have fair fallen, O fair, fair have fallen, so dear
> To me, so arch-especial a spirit as heaves in Henry Purcell,
> An age is now since passed, since parted; with the reversal
> Of the outward sentence low lays him, listed to a heresy, here.

If we attempted this 'darkening' of English, we could not hope to reproduce the content of the poetry at the same time. We hope that the rhetoric of the poem will itself carry some of the force and majesty of the original.

TEXTUAL NOTE

The text and translation is based primarily on Stokes' edition from Rawlinson B.502. The other two early manuscripts, however, ILH and LU, represent with it substantially the same textual tradition, and we have felt free to include minor, but occasionally significant variations represented in these two manuscripts. We have indicated emendations, by a set of square brackets, where they differ from the witness of these three manuscripts. We have not followed the medieval line-divisions, but have taken a rather flexible approach to them where the meaning seemed to merit it. It should also be noted that we have indicated tmesis by pairs of long dashes attached to either part of the divided compound. We have tried to retain for the most part the orthography of the manuscripts, even when this seems later or indeed obscure, since at this stage in our understanding of the text it does not seem either feasible or wise to attempt to 'restore' the language.

Our translation cannot hope to be definitive. There are so many obscurities in the poem, and so many alternative readings, that the translation we give below must stand only as another contribution to the process of unravelling the poem's meaning. We hope, at least, to have made some steps forward, particularly in understanding the poem's many religious references, and that our presentation of it will allow its great literary qualities to come to the fore.

AMRA CHOLUIMB CHILLE[22]

Día, Día do-rrogus
ré tías ina gnúis
    culu tre néit.
Día nime, nim-reilge
5   i llurgu i n-égthïar
      ar múichthe[o] méit.

Día már mo anacol
de múr teintide,
    diudercc dér.
10   Día fírien fírfocus,
c[h]luines mo donúaill
      do nimíath nél.

I   Ní díscéoil duë Néill.
Ní uchtat óenmaige,
mór mairg, mór n-deilm.
Dífulaing riss ré as[-indet]:
5   Columb cen beith, cen chill.
Co india duí dó, sceo Nere:
in faith Dé de dess Sion suidiath.
Is nú nad mair, ní marthar lenn,
    ní less anma ar suí.
10 Ar-don– cond íath con-róeter bïu –bath,
ar-don-bath ba ar n-airchend adlicen,
ar-don-bath ba ar fíadat foídiam;
ar ní-n fissid fris-bered onınu húain,
ar nín-tathrith to-sluinned foccul fír,
15 ar ní-n forcetlaid for-canad túatha
    Toí.
hUile bith, ba háe hé:
Is crot cen chéis,
is cell cen abbaid.

God, God, may I beg of Him
before I go to face Him
  through the chariots of battle.
God of heaven, may He not leave me
in the path where there's screaming
  from the weight of oppression.

Great God, protect me
from the fiery wall,
  the long trench of tears.
Just God, truly near,
who hears my wailing
  from cloudy heaven.

I Not newsless is Níall's land.
No slight sigh from one plain,
but great woe, great outcry.
Unbearable the tale this verse tells:
Colum, lifeless, churchless.
How will a fool tell him – even Neire –
the prophet has settled at God's right hand in Sion.
Now he is not, nothing is left to us,
  no relief for a soul, our sage.
For he has died to us, the leader of nations who guarded the living,
he has died to us, who was our chief of the needy,
he has died to us, who was our messenger of the Lord;
for we do not have the seer who used to keep fears from us,
for he does not return to us, he who would explain the true Word,
for we do not have the teacher who would teach the tribes of the
  Tay.
The whole world, it was his:
It is a harp without a key,
it is a church without an abbot.

II   At-ruic ro-ard rath Dé do Cholum[b] cuitechta;
            find-fethal frestal, figlis fut baí.
            Boí saegul snéid,
            boí séim sáth.
  5   Boí sab suíthe cech dind,
            boí dind oc libur léig-docht.
            Lassais tír túath,
            Lais túath *occidens*,
            cot-ro-lass *oriens*
10   ó chlérchib crí-dochtaib.
            Fó díbath Dé aingeil
            i rré as-id-rocaib.

III   Ro-anic axalu la airbriu archangliu;
            ro-anic íath i nnad adaig –aiccestar,
            ro-anic tír [t]o– Moise –muinemmar,
            ro-anic maige mós [i] n-ad-génatar cíuil,
  5   [i n]nad éitset ecnaide.
            As-rala rí sacart saethu.

IV   Ro-cés gair co mbuïch.
            Baí [f]úath fri demal,
            día mba goiste celebrad.
            Assa cheird cumachtaig
  5   con-róiter recht robust.
            Ro-fess Ruam, ro-fess séiss,
                ro– suíthe dó –damtha dëachtae.
            Derb dag i mba,
            ba éola axal n-angel.
10   Ar-bert Bassil bráthu,
            ar-gair gnímu de adbsib airbrib aidblib.

V   Raith rith rethes dar cais caín-denum.
            Faig feirb fithir.
            Gáis gluassa glé.
            Glinnsius salmu,
  5   sluinnsius léig libru,

II   By the grace of God Colum rose to exalted companionship;
       awaiting bright signs, he kept watch while he lived.
       His lifetime was short,
       scant portions filled him.
       He was learning's pillar in every stronghold,
       he was foremost at the book of complex Law.
       The northern land shone,
       the western people blazed,
       he lit up the east
       with chaste clerics.
       Good the legacy of God's angel
       when he glorified him.

III   He reached the apostles, with hosts, with archangels;
       he reached the land where night is not seen,
       he reached the land where we expect Moses,
       he reached the plain where they know the custom of music,
       where sages do not die.
       The King has cast off His priests' troubles.

IV   He suffered briefly until he triumphed:
       He was a terror to the devil,
       to whom Mass was a noose.
       By his mighty skill,
       he kept the law firm.
       Rome was known, order was known,
          knowledge of the Godhead was granted to him.
       Truly blessed when he died,
       he was wise about apostles, about angels.
       He applied the judgements of Basil,
       who forbids acts of boasting by great hosts.

V   He ran the course which runs past hatred to right action.
       The teacher wove the word.
       By his wisdom he made glosses clear.
       He fixed the Psalms,
       he made known the books of Law,

libuir ut car Cassion.
Catha gulae gaelais.
Libru Solman sexus.
Sína sceo imm– ríma –raith.
10   Rannais raind co figuir eter libru
              léig.
Legais rúna, ro-ch –uaid eter scolaib
              screptra,
sceo ellacht imm-uaim n-ésci im
              rith,
raith rith la gréin ngescaig,
sceo réin rith.
15   Rímfed rind nime, nech in-choí cech
              ndiruais
ro– Columb ó Chille --cúalammar.

VI   Coich boí, coich bía béo bad-id n-amradair
ar íathaib airdocht íarthúaith?
Ad– Fet co Nú, nech nad goí –geóin.
Grés ro-fer fechtnachu
5   fri arthu ar chath[ir].
Co domun dringthïar
ar *Deo* dóenachta.
Ar [r]assaib rigthïer,
rir accobur a súla.
10   Suí slán cress Crist:
ceó ní coirm, ceó ní sercoll –
sáith sechrais beóil.
Boí cath, boí cast,
              boí cartóit, cloth-ond oc búaid.
15   Boí lés lán.
Boí leor less oeged.
Boí obeid, boí úasal,
              boí húas a bás.
Boí lien, boí li[ai]g,
20   la cride cach ecnada.
Ar mind n-axal n-acallad.

those books Cassian loved.
He won battles with gluttony.
The books of Solomon, he followed them.
Seasons and calculations he set in motion.
He separated the elements according to figures among the books
    of the Law.
He read mysteries and distributed the Scriptures among the
    schools,
and he put together the harmony concerning the course of the
    moon,
the course which it ran with the rayed sun,
and the course of the sea.
He could number the stars of heaven, the one who could tell all
    the rest
which we have heard from Colum Cille.

VI Who was, who will be alive who might be as wonderful as he,
the very restrained one in the northwestern lands?
He knew the Laws from Old to New, he who knew no falsehood.
His work poured out saints
towards ladders for the City.
He climbs to the depth
for the sake of the God of humanity.
By longings he is stretched,
he sold his eye's desire.
A sound, austere sage of Christ:
no fog of drink nor fog of delights --
he avoided the fill of his mouth.
He was holy, he was chaste,
    he was charitable, a famous stone in victory.
He was a full light.
He was an ample fort for the stranger.
He was obedient, he was noble,
    his death was dignified.
he was pleasant, he was a physician
    in every sage's heart.
Our hero used to speak with the apostle.

Ba anmne ara mbeba.
Ba bind, ba hóen,
 a cherd cléirchechta.
25 Do doínib díscrútain,
ba dín do nochtaib,
ba did do bochtaib.
Ba núe no-chéssad cach trom di othaig.
● Cholumb, cosc túath.
30 Míad már munemmar mand.
Nod-ngéilsigfe Crist eter dligthichu
tresna cíana con-ta-slai.

VII Érgnaid suí siacht sliucht cethruir.
Cot-luid la dó chétul do nim-íath íarna chroich.
Cét cell custóit, tonn fo-ó[i]gi
 oiffrind.
Oll nía, ní hídal,
5 ní ellastar clóenchléir
do-ellar f● inmuilg.
Ní foet na fuacht nad heris.
Ní óened ní na bu recht ríg,
nad etsa bás bith.
10 Béo a ainm, béo a anuaim,
  ar imbud f●d-ruair f● recht noíb.
Fris-bert tinu a thoíb.
Toil a chuirp cuillsius.
Cuill a neóit:
15 Náde in macc macc huí Chuind.
Cuil[l] deim de eót,
cuil[l] deim de f●rmut.
Fó lib lige a aí,
ar cach saeth sretha sína.
20 Tre thúaith n-ídlaig,
do-rumeoin rétu;
ar chredlu, cairptiu.
Cath sír so-ch –fir fiched fri coluain

It was restraint for which he died.
It was sweet, it was unique,
    his skill at priestly matters.
To people, inscrutable:
he was a shelter to the naked,
he was a teat to the poor.
Fresh was each bitter blast he suffered.
From Colum, the restraint of nations.
A great honour we reckon his heavenly food.
Christ will take him to serve among the just,
through the long days he has gone with them.

VII Discerning the sage who reached the path of the four.
    He went with two songs to heaven after his cross.
    The guardian of a hundred churches, a wave which accomplishes
      the sacrifice.
    A mighty hero, no idolator,
    he did not assemble a crooked company
    who scattered under instruction.
    He accepted neither indifference nor heresy.
    He would do no fast which was not the Lord's law,
    that he might not die an eternal death.
    Living his name, living his soul,
      from the crowds he prepared under the holy Law.
    He averted his side's softness.
    His body's desire, he destroyed it.
    He destroyed his meanness:
    truly the boy is a son of Conn's offspring.
    He destroyed the darkness of envy,
    he destroyed the darkness of jealousy.
    You find his grave good in its virtue
    appointed for every trouble of weather.
    From among an idolatrous people,
    he abandoned possessions,
    for clerics, chariots.
    He fought a long and noble battle against flesh

cona rega rígmac for déde
   Dé
25   i n-athguth, i n-athfers.
       Adranacht ria n-áes, ria n-amniurt
       ar iffurn i n-Albu omun.

VIII   Áed at-noe huile oll doíne
       dronchétal fechta for nía nem.
       Ní handil, ní súail, ní s[o-]áig,
       ní nía nad núa fri cotach Conuail.
5   Cluidsius borb béolu bendacht
       batar ic Toí toil Ríg.
       Ó doene deimthechta
       oc *Deo* deissestar.
       Ar adbud, ar áne, at-ronnai,
10   ar-gart glán húa i cathir Conúaill.
       hIc udbud caín-sruith,
       sceo *magister* muntere,
       fri angel n-acallastar;
       at-gaill grammataig Greic.
15   Sóer sech túaith, sin inedim,
       macc Fedelmthe, fich túaith, fín *nouit*.
       Ní toches don bith:
       ba sír do cruichi cuimne.
       Con-fig figlestar
20   ó gním glinnistar.
       Con-gein de gein án húa Airt
       – nís Néill co nert –
       nad fuich fecht día mbaathar.

IX   Buich bron cer[t] Cuind dul do druib méte
       maith.
       Macc ainm cruiche:
       cuce a i[u]s – *ecce* aear – *certo* indias.
       All-íath leo bind in nechta
       nú-dál.

so that he will not go to the King's son under God's dual
   judgement
in the second saying, the second verse.
He was buried before age, before weakness
in Britain for fear of Hell.

VIII   Great Áed pledged it for all people:
a solid song when the hero went to heaven.
Not worthless, not slight, not contentious
not a hero unvigorous towards Conall's covenant.
His blessing turned them, the mouths of the fierce ones
who lived on the Tay, to the will of the King.
From the dark journeys of man
he sat down with God.
In place of pomp, in place of splendour, 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.
A freeman outwith the tribe, thus I declare,
the son of Fedelmid, he fought the tribe, he knew his end.
He did not suffer for the world:
he was constant to the memory of the cross.
What he conceived keeping vigil,
by action he ascertained.
A splendid birth was born of Art's offspring
– they have not Níall's strength –
one who commits no wrong from which he dies.

IX   Grief broke Conn's Region for the going to rest of such a
   good one.
The son of the Cross his name:
to him his due – behold, heaven – I will truly tell.
In the otherworld, they find it sweet to meet the pure one
   anew.

5   Co éc, co ecuas
    intech hi coluain co ether?
    A rogu ro-fer subai sámsid,
    ro[s]-luí sochla súithi.
    Derb dó,
10   ní ong óentige,
    ní ong óentéte.
    trom túa[i]th focul fo-theind.
    Ar-dlecht Dé locharn Ríg do-radbad,
      [ath-ro-]las.

X   Amrad inso ind ríg ro-dom-rig.
    For-don-snáidfe Sïone.
    Ro-dom-sibsea sech riaga.
    Rop réid menda duba dím.
5   Dom-chich cen anmne
    húa huí Choirp Cathrach con húasle.
    Oll rodiall, oll natha nime nemgrían,
    nímda húain.

Until death, how may I describe
in flesh his path to heaven?
His choice poured out joy, quiet peace;
he attained them, the famous man of wisdom.
Surely for him,
not the wail of one house,
not the wail of one string;
heavily does the word wound the people.
He deserved the Lord God's light, which was quenched, which
　　has blazed again.

X　This is the elegy of the king who rules me.
He will protect us in Sion.
He will urge me past torments.
May it be easily dark defects go from me.
He will come to me without delay,
the descendant of Cathair's offspring, Coirpre, with dignity.
Vast the variations of the poem, vast the splendid sun of heaven,
I have no time.

COMMENTARY

It is of vital importance, if we want to understand the early medieval world, to come to terms with saints. It is the belief in saints which separates, more than anything else, the medieval world from the classical world which preceded it, and the modern world which followed it.[23] The saint in medieval Christianity has a nearness, an intimacy, with both the ordinary, praying sinner who calls on him, and with God, on whom he calls. For all one may wish to say about continuity between reverence for ancestors and reverence for saints, or about the saint as a thinly transformed heroic warrior, or indeed about the supernatural power of the saint as a carry-over from an earlier pagan thought-world, what we cannot escape from is the humanity, the bodiliness of the saints, however transformed by the subjugation and later, sometimes, the glorification of their flesh. They are like the ancestors, in that they are related to us, they are human; yet they are unlike them in their constancy, their persistent care for all who call on them; they cease to look like old gods transformed when we focus on their historicity, on the reality of their bodies.

It is also of the utmost importance, in understanding the literary world of Iona, to come to terms with its founder saint, Columba or Colum Cille. All the poetry in Old Irish which we have printed here reflects the devotion of his followers and others to this one holy man. The four poems join Cummíne Find's lost 'Book of the Miracles of Columba' and Adomnán's *Life of Columba* in allowing us to trace through the seventh century the development of the cult of Iona's founder, of attitudes of poets and hagiographers towards him, and of the continuing, perhaps even deepening, relationship between Columba and his monks after his death.

The *Amra* is the first text which allows us to see Columba as the 'holy man'. Although not technically a work of hagiography, it must certainly take its place as the first witness to Columba's sanctity in his hagiographical portfolio. Like all such works, prose and verse alike, it has an audience and an agenda; it is not a neutral, historical document. It is necessary, then, to look at the *Amra* from a number of angles. First, what does the poem tell us about the actual man, Columba? Does it contradict or complement what

we know about him from other sources? Second, what is Dallán's purpose in writing the work, what is his audience, and how does he mould the image of the saint? And third, what authority does this image have, and how does it affect the way in which Iona's monks continued to think about sanctity?

Dallan's Columba

It is necessary to approach the information that Dallán gives us about the saint with some caution, and indeed on a factual level he does not tell us very much.[24] Yet his perspective is quite different from that of, say, Adomnán, writing as abbot of Columba's monastery a century after his death. Dallán belongs to Columba's own time, and yet belongs as much to the secular aristocratic world as to the ecclesiastical one. In a way, then, we should perhaps make our way out from that secular world of the warrior aristocracy, and gradually approach Columba's world of withdrawal, learning and visionary powers.

Going on Dallán's witness, the poem was commissioned by Áed mac Ainmirech who died in 598, a year after Columba himself. It may well be that the poem should be dated to that year, for the reference to Áed might make more sense if it had been written before he died.[25] As we saw above (p. 11) Áed and his father Ainmere had close links with Columba, which suggest that Áed might well have wanted a special poem to commemorate his cousin. In the light of the commission, then, it is unsurprising that Dallán emphasises the saint's family connections, from his father to the ancestors of the major political groups of the time, of which Columba was a member. He mentions that he is the 'son of Fedelmid' (VIII. 16), 'descendant of Conall' (VIII. 10), a descendant of Niall (VIII. 22), and 'son of Conn's offspring' (VII. 15). All these comply with Columba's genealogy as it is known to us (the names italicised are those included in the *Amra*): Colum Cille son of *Fedelmid*, son of Fergus Cendfota, son of *Conall* Gulban son of *Niall* Noígiallach, who, going back five generations, was the descendant of Cormac son of *Art*, son of *Conn* Cétchathach.[26]

The constant refrain of family epithets also emphasises the way in which Columba was, in Máire Herbert's words, 'a significant figure in

the *rapprochement* between the secular aristocracy and Christian leadership'.[27] It is this secular aristocracy which grieves for him; not just the Uí Néill, but the whole northern half of Ireland, all of those descended from Conn, 'Conn's Region' (that is, the Connachta, the Uí Néill, and in popular thought, the Airgialla also). These references to family would also appeal to Columba's successors in Iona: his disciple and immediate successor Baíthéne, who like Áed was Columba's cousin and died three years after him, and the next abbot, Laisrén, another cousin.[28] Many others of his initial companions and later monks were likewise related to him.

The poem fixes Columba historically in a number of other ways. It mentions a pact or friendship with Conall, almost certainly Conall son of Comgell, the king of Dál Ríata who died in 574. The *Annals of Ulster* for that year, probably not written at the time, tell us that Conall granted Iona to Columba. It may be this that Dallán refers to as a *cotach*, 'covenant', 'pact'. Our later authority for Columba, Adomnán, shows him staying with Conall 'at the time when [he] first sailed away from Ireland', at which time he gave the king a sort of blow by blow broadcast of an important battle which he saw in a vision.[29] Dallán would appear to be reminding a Dál Riata audience, too, of the friendship Iona's founder had had with their kings.[30]

In the same section of the poem, which seems to be explicitly orienting Columba in a web of worldly connections, we are told, 'His blessing turned them, the mouths of the fierce ones who lived on the Tay, to the will of the King' (VIII. 5–6). These people are referred to earlier, in the first section of the poem: 'we do not have the teacher who would teach the tribes of the Tay' (I. 15). Clearly, Dallán means the Picts here, whose kingship in the later seventh century and after, certainly, was heavily based around the Tay and its tributaries. Once again, the *Amra* does not have the same emphasis as Adomnán, a century later, who consistently writes of Columba's dealings with the Pictish king as having been at the northern end of Loch Ness. Bede also goes out of his way to specify 'the northern Picts' as Columba's area of preaching. Scholars have attempted to explain this discrepancy, noting that Bruide mac Maelchon, the king in Adomnán's acounts, may have ruled over the more southerly Picts as well. Kenneth Jackson suggested that Dallán 'could easily have been using "the tribes of Tay" in

a very broad sense.'[31] Another alternative is simply to assume that Dallán did not know what he was talking about, or was unsure of his geography.

But the references are only a problem if we are so intent on Adomnán's narratives that we forget that he omits as much as he tells us. Bruide mac Maelchon died in 584, and Columba lived for another thirteen years. There is no reason, though Adomnán does not mention it, to assume that Columba did not maintain contact with the successors of Bruide and their peoples as well. There is some evidence that one, if not both, of Bruide's successors were based on the Tay. Ambiguous evidence describes the founding of a monastery at Abernethy by either Gartnait son of Domelch (d. 601/2) or Nechtan son of Irb/Uerb (d. 621).[32] These Tay-dwelling kings of the Picts were likely to be Christians, then. Adomnán has his own agenda, his own reasons for concentrating his narratives on the kings and the areas he does. So does Bede, or his informers, who may have been 'southern Picts' hostile by his time to the Columban monasteries. Dallán, we should accept, is merely engaging in the same tactical name-dropping, so what he says about Columba's relations with the Picts is important too. Adomnán is coy on the conversion of Bruide mac Maelchon, which may suggest that that king did not, in fact, accept Christianity. This has led to some speculation about Columba's success and influence among the Picts and doubt about the extent to which he worked as an evangeliser. The *Amra* leaves us in no doubt. He 'used to teach the tribes of the Tay', it says, and more importantly, if our interpretation of VIII. 5–6 is accepted, 'his blessing turned them … to the will of the King.'[33]

So, though allusive, the *Amra* does both confirm and complement our view of the historical Columba. What of the religious Columba? For although the poem ties him into the world of his political and family connections, it also makes it clear that he came out of that world: 'From among an idolatrous people, he abandoned possessions – for clerics, chariots' (VII. 20–22). The *Amra* is intent above all on creating a picture of Columba as an ascetic and visionary, a spiritual man. It dwells on his fasts, his detachment, his vigils. But it is a careful vision as well, suggesting an awareness by the poet of the problems of balance involved in achieving perfection. This can be seen in VII. 7–9, where

balance is the key: 'he accepted neither indifference nor heresy. He would do no fast which was not the Lord's law.'

So too, the poem avoids showing him only as a detached contemplative. Like Beccán later, Dallán depicts Columba combining action with contemplation (VIII. 19–20). As well as his own restraint, his outreach to others is depicted, by describing him as 'an ample fort for the stranger … a shelter to the naked, a teat to the poor' (VI. 16, 26–7). In keeping with the more historical comments mentioned above, it also shows Columba involved in preaching and teaching, calling him 'leader of nations', and 'restraint of nations' (I. 10, VI. 29). It mentions his role as a priest, an important testimony to Columba's pastoral activities, although the emphasis of the poem clearly supports the image of Iona as primarily monastic and withdrawn.[34] It also gives evidence that even at the time of his death, Columba had a reputation for visionary powers, especially for converse with angels. This emphasis makes Adomnán's interest in the angelic visions more easy to comprehend, and it can be noted too that many of the angelic stories seem to have been circulating in the years around Columba's death, according to Adomnán. If all this is an idealised portrait, it is nonetheless likely to paint a picture of what an ascetic ought to have been like around 600, and some of its details are very close to the world of stringency and moderation envisaged by Colmán mac Béognae, a disciple of Columba, whose *Alphabet of Devotion* we translate in the third section of this book.

More important as historical evidence is the poem's emphasis on Columba's book-learning. Here Dallán differs greatly from Adomnán, who emphasises Columba's love of books and his scribal abilities, but certainly does not create a picture of an active, intelligent theologian. Dallán gives us important information on what Columba's contemporaries thought of his intellectual attainments, emphasising his role as teacher and interpreter of the scriptures, indeed as one involved in establishing and distributing texts: 'He fixed the Psalms, he made known the books of Law' (V. 5–6). We are told of the books which Columba studied in particular: the Psalms, the books of Wisdom, Basil, and Cassian. We are told of his study of 'Greek grammar', and importantly we are told of exegetical activities: 'He separated the elements according to figures among the books of the Law' (V. 10). Although

this seems to imply some work of allegorical study of the Scriptures by Columba, it may be only as a teacher that he did this. Adomnán rather pointedly tells us of him not writing down such interpretations, which had come to him in a vision:

> Moreover, as he afterwards admitted in the presence of a very few men, he saw, openly revealed, many of the secret things that have been hidden since the world began. Also everything that in the sacred scriptures is dark and most difficult became plain, and was shown more clearly than the day to the eyes of his purest heart.

He laments that Baíthéne was not there, who 'would have written down from the mouth of the blessed man very many mysteries … and also a number of interpretations of the sacred books.'[35]

Finally, the *Amra* tells us of Columba's interest in what can only be called computistic skills: the astronomical calculations of sun, moon and tide necessary for establishing the dates for the Easter festival, among other things. Indeed, it is doubtful whether we should not translate *imm-uaim* in V. 12, as '*computus*'. We know that by the 630s Iona was in possesson of a computistical tract which they ascribed to Anatolius, but which has been analysed as the product of a sixth-century Insular churchman.[36] Perhaps it is Columba's study of such matters which gave the tract such importance for the Iona monks then and later in the century. Perhaps Columba himself worked on or recommended the document.

It should be said that if the *Altus prosator* is indeed by Columba we have confirmation of some of the very points that the *Amra* makes. The vocabulary of the *Altus* displays knowledge of Greek words, if not 'grammar'. There are clear sections of the Latin poem dependent on Cassian's works, said here to have been used by Columba. The *Altus* poet shows an interest in the workings of sun, moon and sea. In stanza U he demonstrates an ability or inclination to employ figures in interpreting the natural world, which the *Amra* says he used for interpretation of the scriptures. One might just mention our translation of line VII. 2: 'he went with two songs to heaven'. It may be that Columba's work or reputation as a poet was known to Dallán.

Dallán's testimony is the fullest we have of Columba's learning and scriptural study. It is unlikely that it is based on vague reputation, for it

is far too specific for that. It accords, moreover, with Columba as we meet him in the poem most soundly attributed to his authorship. The emphasis in this earliest specimen from Columba's dossier, then, emphasises not his miraculous powers, other than his communication with heavenly presences, but his earthly, ascetic life, and his learning. Dallán's Columba is above all a scholar's saint. The *Amra*, though an ideal, heroic portrait, is still an important, and the most contemporary, source for Columba.

The Image of the Holy Man

Dallán's poem is a work of literature, and it has an agenda of its own; perhaps most importantly, it has an audience, or perhaps two audiences. The communities for whom he wrote, whose views on the world he sought either to bolster or subvert, have their part in deter-mining the content of the poem. To some extent they determine its form as well. He alerts us to this dual audience in the first section of the poem: 'Not newsless is Niall's land', he tells us, signalling that this is a work of panegyric, praise of an aristocrat from the descendants of Niall. But he then draws us into a community of believers, one which encompasses both monastic followers and the recipients of his preach-ing, in the sequence 'he has died to us … we do not have …' (I. 10–15). The descriptions of him there include monastic titles, 'our chief of the needy … he who would explain the true Word', as well as more general ones like 'the leader of nations', 'the teacher who would teach the tribes of the Tay'. Both communities are brought into the mourn-ing for Columba at the end of this first section: 'The whole world, it was his: it is a harp without a key, it is a church without an abbot' (I. 16–18).

It has been stressed above that Dallán emphasises Columba's family connections, an emphasis which would appeal to both audi-ences: his Uí Néill relatives among the warrior aristicracy and those who had renounced worldly power for the monastic life. The poem is perhaps more subversive and subtle than this, however, stating at the same time Columba's own rejection of his past, of his family connec-tions. Section VIII is where the poet dwells on his worldly connections, but having done so he turns these connections inside out: 'From the dark journeys of man he sat down with God'. He rejects 'pomp' and

'splendour' for his monastery. He is, in a striking image *sóer sech túaith*, 'a freeman outwith the tribe' (VIII. 15). His nobility, or freedom, comes not from the privileges of his rank and pedigree, but from his abandonment of that life. 'The son of Fedelmid, he fought the tribe … He did not suffer for the world …' (VIII. 16–17). More than this, though, Dallán suggests that it is his asceticism and his virtuous life which make Columba a paradigm for all the Uí Néill and the Connachta: 'His body's desire, he destroyed it, he destroyed his meanness: truly the boy is a son of Conn's offspring' (VII. 13–15).

One of the ways in which his aristocratic audience have determined the form of his work is in his use of the vernacular, and of native terms of praise, to describe his Christian hero. By employing the familiar noble genre of the elegy, the lament for the dead man of royal stock, Dallán smuggles in an alternative hero. The noble audience he addresses would have been used to such laments, combined with praise of the military valour of dead kings and wariors. Here is a Leinster poem, probably from a pre-Christian poem on a warrior-king. We give the original here to show the similar verse form:

> *Moín oín / óba noíd / ní ba ás/ ardríg*
> *ort ríga / rout án/ aue Luircc/ Labraid*
>
> . .
>
> *Ór ós gréin/ gelmair / gabais for doíne / domnaib*
> *sceo dee / dia oín / as Moín mac Áine / oínrí.*

> Moín, the lone, since he was a child – a thing that belonged to the
>   growth of a great king –
> he slew kings with a renowned shot, Labraid, the grandson of Lorc.
> …
> Gold, more shining than the great bright sun, there seized the lands
>   of humans
> and of gods the singular god who is Moín, son of Áine, the singular
>   king.[37]

More sense of lament can be gained from this, perhaps near contemporary, poem lamenting the death of Colmán Rimid, a northern Uí Néill king who died in 604:

> Of what value kingship, of what value law,
> of what value power over princes,
> since it is the king Colmán Rimid
> whom Lochan Dithnada has slain. [38]

The *Amra* draws on the language of such poetry, calling Columba a hero (*nía, mind*) and using appelations like pillar, fort, eminence (*sab, dín, dind*), and even, like Moín above, the sun (*grían*). His hero, his warrior, however, is a Christian one: this is a poet drawing on the original inversions of Paul's 'fight the good fight', and 'the armour of the Lord'. He may be 'a mighty hero' (*oll nía*) but he is 'no idolator' (VII. 4). He is a pillar (*sab*) 'of learning in every stronghold'. He is an eminence (*dind*) 'at the book of complex Law' (II. 5–6). He may be a splendid sun, but he is heaven's sun. Beccán will do very similar things with these terms of secular praise, and his poetry is perhaps more effective; he is more daring in his creation of a Christian hero, possibly because he is not as intent as Dallán seems to be on a careful contrast between his audiences' callings. In the *Amra*, Columba is a hero, but his heroism is of a fairly stark ascetic kind.

This asceticism is one of the prime images the poet employs in the text: of sleepless nights, scant portions, of 'a long and noble battle with the flesh'. For all that has been said about a 'Celtic theology' that is entirely optimistic and self-content, Dallán knows nothing about a Columba of this sort. His Columba is one who suffers, one who 'sold his eye's desire' (VI. 9). His attributes are the classic ones of the monasticism developed in the deserts of Egypt and expounded by the likes of Basil and Cassian, both of whom Dallán mentions as influencing Columba. Indeed much of his description of these qualities relies on Latin loan words; Columba was *cast* (chaste), *cartóit* (charitable), *obeid* (obedient). Restraint and discernment are two of the chief characteristics he was endowed with, we hear – two of Cassian's prime virtues. As mentioned above, Dallán also points to the effects of this discernment: the balance between indifference and over-zealousness, not fasting outwith God's law, again qualities which Cassian expounds:

> For very often we have seen people who have been most zealous in their fasts and vigils, who have lived wondrously solitary lives, who have endured such total privation of everything … who have

> hastened to do all that is required in charity – and who have suddenly fallen prey to illusion with the result that not only could they not give a fitting end to the work they had undertaken but they brought to an abominable conclusion that high zeal of theirs and that praiseworthy mode of life.[39]

We should also be attentive to the motivation of fear, as well as love, which is part of Columba's character here, as it clearly motivates the poet in the Preface. Fear of damnation is the basis for Columba's exile and asceticism: in VII. 20–7 his abandonment of possessions and chariots, his battles with the flesh are to avoid being told, 'Depart from me, you cursed' (Matthew 25:41). He is buried in Britain 'for fear of Hell'. He desires to avoid 'an eternal death' (VII. 9). The methods for avoiding this eternal death are clearly focused on the body, on fasting, on testing the body's endurance, on destroying passion, on achieving a sort of *apatheia*, a state of fredom from worldly desire. If we seek to ignore this aspect of the spirituality of Iona, we will be ignoring a major part of their world view.

The *Amra* also creates a picture of a holy man endowed with authority. The saint has, in a sense, exchanged privilege in one elite for privilege in another, for Columba still, by the grace of God, 'rose … to exalted companionship' (II. 1). Dallán draws constantly on the authority of Columba's spiritual awareness to demonstrate the origins of his holiness. His arcane knowledge is referred to: 'Rome was known, order was known, knowledge of the Godhead was granted to him' (IV. 6–7). 'He was wise about apostles, about angels' (IV. 9) we are told, and not only that, but 'our hero used to speak with the apostle' (VI. 21) and 'he spoke with an angel' (VIII. 13). One can only assume that these refer to visons and conversations Columba was reputed to have had with angels and with one or another of the apostles. But their effect is to endow Columba with the approval of the higher-ranking members of the church's past and the celestial hierarchy. This is no doubt partially directed at the aristocratic portion of his audience, who would be swayed by the idea that within a different sort of society one would still find the world-rejecting saint 'noble'.

Within this same scheme is Columba's attainment of heaven, described vividly in section III. The poet's choice of words in section

IX is probably not accidental either, where the saint's journey to heaven is described as pouring out 'joy', 'quiet peace', in language which echoes that of political literature, where the just king is described as providing 'peace, tranquility, joy, ease, [and] comfort.'[40] The result of the just man's actions – his asceticism, his teaching, his service – is an otherworld which would be familiar to both of the poet's audiences, on the one hand through biblical teaching, and on the other through the otherworldly manifestations of the ideal reign of a just king as set out in political literature.

Authority is manifested not only in the content of the poetry, but in its style as well. It is hard to account for the air of bravado, the reckless use of language which pervades the poem without considering Dallán as appealing to the authority of his own obscurity, his own 'darkening' of language. This darkening extends both into the secular, aristocratic world with its use of words in Latin and heavily Latinised vocabulary, and into the religious world, by his use of techniques of language-heightening and language-disguise – as well as some technical vocabu-lary – which would be more familiar, no doubt, to professional poets and their audiences. It is hard to avoid a sense that Dallán's extremes of obscurity and intentional difficulty are a method of establishing his authority to declare the matters contained in the poem. Moreover, the defamiliarisation of language forces listeners or readers to struggle for understanding, catches them off guard.

Finally, two other levels of the poem should be taken into account. It is striking that Dallán's view is so pessimistic, at least at the start of the poem. Certainly in this respect he contrasts with the later poets in this book, Beccán and Adomnán. We will discuss the development of the relation between the dead saint, as patron, and his monks in a later chapter, but we must start here by acknowledging that this elegy seems 'secular' in this more than in anything else: it has little or no view of the continuing, posthumous efficacy of the saint, outside his status in the kingdom of heaven. This is probably not an example of a secular viewpoint, though. It is more likely that we are seeing an evolution of ideas about the dead, an evolution we can trace through the poetry about Columba, which at this juncture of the sixth and seventh century extends only to glimpses, of the firm, intimate relationship between living and dead it was to become.

On the other hand there is balance and movement, both thematic and verbal, between the beginning of section I and the end of section IX, which mourn the loss of Columba, and between the Preface and section X, which both pray for help after death. In the comparison and contrast of these two sections we can see the progress of the poem's ideas. At the start of the poem, which as we have seen draws its two audiences into a process of mourning for their teacher and relative, there is a mood almost of despair, a sense that death has completely separated the saint from his followers: 'Now he is not, nothing is left to us, no relief for a soul, our sage' (I. 8–9). At the close of IX, however, a section which describes the saint's attainment of heaven, despite the repetition of the themes of section I ('not the wail of one house, not the wail of one string' IX. 10–11) we are given a transformed hope: 'He deserved the Lord God's light, which was quenched, which has blazed again.' This feeds into the final section. Where the Preface appeals to God for help after death, by the end of the poem, as a result of the poet's appeals, the saint has become his protector. As we will see to greater effect in the poetry of Beccán, the standing of the holy man in the new kingdom allows him to grant his protection in that world: 'He will protect us in Sion' (X. 2).

We might even suggest that the overall structure of the poem is inspired by a biblical passage with a very similar movement from mourning to conviction, Wisdom 3:1–9, part of which Adomnán was to draw on later in his own prayer to Columba. We quote it extensively here, and suggest that the *Amra* be re-read alongside it.

> But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
> and no torment will ever touch them.
> In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
> and their departure was thought to be an affliction,
> and their going from us to be their destruction;
> but they are at peace.
> For though in the sight of men they were punished,
> their hope is full of immortality.
> Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good,
> because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;
> like gold in the furnace he tried them,

and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.
In the time of their visitation they will shine forth,
and will run like sparks through the stubble.
They will govern nations and rule over peoples,
and the Lord will reign over them for ever.
Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his elect,
and he watches over his holy ones.

The Poems of
Beccán mac Luigdech

Some fifty years, perhaps, after Dallán Forgaill composed his lament on the death of Columba, another poet was active within the Columban *familia*, again turning his talents to praise of the community's patron. In the two poems we have from this poet, a man called Beccán mac Luigdech,[1] we can see a development of the cult of Columba, and a strengthening of the bond between the founder-saint and his monks. We see some of the same themes as we found in the *Amra* – Columba's asceticism, his noble upbringing, and his rejection of the secular world – but there is also change, particularly in the depiction of the saint as a powerful protector in all dangers of those who call on him. And there is also a visible change in style: Beccán writes a completely different sort of poetry, in its form and its tone, from the 'darkening' language of Dallán.

We know little about Beccán, apart from his ancestry and the fact that two poems in praise of Columba are attributed to him. Fergus Kelly, who has edited both these poems, has made a very convincing case for accepting him as the author of both.[2] One of the poems, *To-fed andes*, is explicitly attributed to him in the manuscript heading, while the other, *Fo réir Choluimb*, is attributed to him in a gloss on one of the lines in the text.[3] The poems are similar in language, style, vocabulary, imagery and perspective, and it is fairly certain, at the very least, that they are by the same author. The date of the poems, judging from their language, would appear to be the seventh century, which matches the time when their suggested author, Beccán, must have

lived: he belongs to the second generation after Columba, of whom he was a distant relative. Beccán was a member of the Uí Néill, though he was a member of the Cenél nEógain, rather than Columba's branch, the Cenél Conaill.[4] In both of the poems below, the poet makes frequent and laudatory references to Columba's Uí Néill ancestry, reinforcing the idea that the poet was a member of the Uí Néill, as, for instance, was Beccán.

<p style="text-align:center">BECCÁN THE POET</p>

In the absence of any strong negative evidence, therefore, we can safely accept that these two seventh-century poems were written by Beccán mac Luigdech. But who was he? Various sources refer to him as *Beccan Tigi Conaill*, Beccán of Tech Conaill, a monastery in Co. Wicklow (now Churchtown, near Powerscourt), about which we know next to nothing.[5] By birth, as we have said, he belongs to a northern branch of the Uí Néill, being the great-great-great-grandson of Eógan mac Néill. The poems he wrote give us some further clues. He was a devotee of Columba, and almost certainly a monk of his *familia*, judging by the tone in which he praises Columba, his monks, and the monastic life. The geographical perspective of both poems, especially of *To-fed andes*, suggest that he belonged to Iona, rather than any of Columba's other monasteries. The very first line of *To-fed andes* speaks of Columba bringing churches 'from the south' into God's presence. It thus seem to situate him somewhere in the north with reference to Columba's other monasteries. The only way this makes sense is if we picture the poet in a northern location like Iona, rather than in an Irish foundation like Derry or Durrow, since from either of these places Iona (as well as Tiree, Hinba, Cella Diuni, etc.) would then be excluded from the 'bright crowd of chancels' which Columba brings from the south to God.

In a number of places Beccán speaks of Columba's connections with *Alba*, 'Britain', and in v. 11 of *To-fed andes* he speaks of Columba piercing the 'midnight of Erc's region'. This last is a kenning, or metaphorical name, for the Scottish Dál Riata, but it is unusual, and it might perhaps be more expected from a resident of the west of

Scotland. Hebridean residence is also suggested by some of the imagery employed, particularly his descriptions of the sea, and his two stunningly vivid depictions of Columba the pilgrim, boldly crossing the sea from Ireland (*T* 4–5, 8–9; *F* 12–16). Beccán the poet has the air of a man acquainted with sea journeys.

He also displays the marks of a professionally trained poet, both in the complexity of the metres he employs and in his deft handling of them. The language he uses is simpler and clearer, on the whole, than that of the author of the *Amra*, and in general free from the erudite and obscure use of Latin words which is a hallmark of that work. On the other hand, he shows an acqaintance with the vocabulary of native poetic art: he speaks of *aí*, 'poetic inspiration, metrical composition' (*F* 3?, *T* 12); and of *imbas*, 'poetic knowledge' (*T* 21). While appearing to be a poet trained professionally in his craft, he is also clearly a religious man, and the hero he idolises is a Christian hero, both in the life he has chosen and in his rejection of secular society.

BECCÁN THE HERMIT

In two other places in the records of the seventh century we meet with a monk called Beccán linked with Iona, and it is likely that one or both of these are Beccán mac Luigdech, the author of the poems. The first we find in a famous and important letter written in 632 or 633 from a cleric in southern Ireland called Cummian, to Ségéne, fifth abbot of Iona (623–52) and to one *Beccanus solitarius*, Beccán the hermit.[6] The letter is one of the landmark documents in the Easter controversy which haunted Ireland and Britain in the seventh century (p. 13 above). Cummian, who was one of the southern Irish churchmen who had recently changed their method of dating Easter to accord with practice on the continent, reasons and pleads with Ségéne and Beccán, for the sake of unity, to change their practices in the dating of Easter too. Beccán was quite a common name, and it cannot be said for certain that the hermit addressed is Beccán mac Luigdech, but the connection with Iona does strongly suggest the identity of the two.[7]

What precisely would the solitary life of a hermit have involved at this period? The sources are not very precise, but it is clear that both

the 'eremitic' or solitary urge and the 'coenobitic' or communal ideal had influenced the monasticism of Iona.[8] In particular we hear of a number of monks in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* who, while still in some sense beholden to Columba, attempt to move on to a stricter and more isolated life-style. In these instances, the individuals also change, or try to change, location. The famously unsuccessful Cormac Úa Liathain attempted three times to find a desert in the ocean (*herimum in ociano*) and failed each time.[9] The importance of his attempts lies in the fact that he seems to be searching for a place separate from the main monastery, a deserted place in which to practise severe and solitary asceticism.

The other model for the eremitic lifestyle given to us by Adomnán is the 'place of the anchorites' (*locus anchoritarum*) in Muirbolc Már ('the great sea-bay'), on the unidentified island of Hinba. What Adomnán says about it suggests that it was a place in which a number of hermits would dwell, but also that they would retire there after a long stretch in the main monastery, in other words after achieving some sort of perfection in the communal religious life.[10] Here is what Adomnán says of the life of one such anchorite:

> In those same days Virgno rowed over from Ireland, and he remained for the rest of his life in the island of Hinba … After completing irreproachably many years in subjection among the brothers, this Virgno completed another twelve years as a victorious soldier of Christ, leading the life of an anchorite, in the place of the anchorites, in Muirbolc Már.[11]

One could engage in this upping of the ascetic stakes, then, either by voluntary exile from one's community or, after a long community life, by retirement to a separate location possibly near the main monastery but apart from it. We should mention that there is a site on Iona called Cladh an Dìsirt ('the cemetery of the hermitage') which contains early Christian remains. Whether the *desertum* presumably located here was in existence during Beccán's time, or whether it originates later on in Iona's history, is difficult to say.[12] It is equally difficult to say what the relationship between Beccán the hermit and Iona was, or where his hermitage was located. There is one possibility, however, which could shed light on the situation.

BECCÁN OF RUM

It is unlikely that we should find two monks of the name Beccán associated with Iona in the early- to mid-seventh century. It seems reasonable, then, to identify the third Beccán linked to Iona with Beccán mac Luigdech. This is Beccán of Rum (*Beccan Ruimm*), whose feast, according to the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, was 17 March, and who died in 677 according to the *Annals of Ulster*.[13] There is an Iona connection here, in that Beccán of Rum's obituary must belong to that strand of the *Annals of Ulster* which was compiled in Iona.[14]

Here, again, is another Hebridean saint called Beccán, and one associated with an island which seems only to have had at most a small community, if it was not indeed a hermitage.[15] This is also a saint whose death was noted by the annalists in Iona. It is extremely tempting to associate this Beccán with the author of our poems. This would further help to explain, for one thing, the first line of *To-fed andes*: all of Columba's monasteries would be, from the perspective of a monk living on Rum, in the south. If none of this is conclusive, it is all very suggestive. Fergus Kelly, the editor of both Beccán's poems, was favourable to the poet's identification with Beccán the hermit of the Easter letter, while Maura Walsh and Daibhi Ó Croinín, editors of the Easter letter, expressed the possibility of identifying Beccán the hermit with Beccán of Rum.[16] Rum would be as likely a place as any, at this period, for finding a 'desert in the ocean'. All in all it is extremely plausible to see all three as the same person: a poet, hermit and saint consistently, if not exclusively, associated with the Hebrides.

If we accept this, we can construct a speculative model for the life of Beccán. A member of the Cenél nEógain branch of the Uí Néill, he was for a time a monk in Tech Conaill, in Leinster. There or elsewhere he received training as a poet. At some time before 632/3 he became a monk, and then a hermit, of the monastery of Iona, possibly residing on Rum. In 632/3 he was a respected and influential member of the Columban community, and a leading conservative on the dating of Easter. He died in 677, perhaps on Rum or Iona. The poem, *To-fed andes* is described in the manuscript which contains it as 'the last

verses of Beccán mac Luigdech to Colum Cille'. Towards the end of
that poem he speaks of serving Columba as a poet:

> Colum, we sing, until death's tryst, after, before,
> by poetry's rules, which gives welcome to him we serve. (*T* 21)

Using all the strict skills of his *imbas*, his poetic knowledge, Beccán
will praise and salute Columba, even after death. He requests from
Columba in return that his soul may go 'to his right hand, to heaven,
before the world's people' (*T* 22). To the last then, perhaps, Beccán
relied on Columba to be not just the subject of his praise poetry but
also his patron, blessing him not with material rewards, but with the
generosity of a saintly patron: a place in heaven after his death.

FO RÉIR CHOLUIMB

This poem is found complete only in a seventeenth-century manuscript
in the National Library of Ireland (G 50).[17] This extremely important
manuscript contains two of our other poems as well, *Amra Choluimb
Chille* and Adomnán's Prayer.[18] Like these other poems, *Fo réir
Choluimb* is treated in the manuscript in the same way that scripture
or law is treated: the poem itself is highlighted, with glosses on the
poems added in smaller letters. This suggests that like the *Amra* and
other poems, this one was accorded the sort of respect which goes
with a piece of work considered ancient and somewhat venerable,
although the glosses which help us to understand the text are no doubt
included partly because of the difficulty of the poem's language.

   The poem is arranged in quatrains, with lines of seven syllables each
rhyming *a-b-a-b*. In most verses there is a caesura between the fourth
and fifth syllable of the line, across which alliteration is employed.
Alliteration sews the entire poem together. In addition to alliteration
across the caesura, the last word of each line usually alliterates with the
first word of the next line, and the last word of each verse with the first
word of the next. Where the poet does not use alliteration, he com-
pensates with other types of ornament.[19] Here is the first stanza, with
alliteration in italics and rhymes underlined, and caesurae marked
with a bar:

> Fo réir *Ch*oluimb | *c*éin ad-*fí*as,
> *f*ind for nimib | *s*náidsium *s*echt;
> *s*ét fri h*ú*atho | *ú*air no-t*í*as,
> *n*í cen *t*oísech: | *t*áthum nert.

Like *To-fed andes*, then, this poem is alarmingly complicated in its pattern of metre and sound, and its composition is something of a tour de force. Unlike Beccán's other poem, however, it produces an effect much less like a litany, with each stanza telling a discrete story. Like the other poem, however, it tends to be very allusive, drawing on references which cannot always be explained, such as the mention of the birds of Connacht in v. 1●.

The final verse given here is unlikely to be original to the poem, but rather an added coda. The metre is different from the rest of the poem, and it contains at least one form which suggests a later stage of the language. It shows a more elaborate form of *dúnad*, the technique of closing a poem with a word which echoes the first word of the poem. In this added verse it is the whole first line which is repeated, whereas in the original the closure was obtained with *don-* foir echoing the fo *réir* of the first line. We have included this added verse for completeness' sake.

TEXTUAL NOTE

The texts and translations of both this poem and *To-fed andes* are heavily indebted to the editions of Fergus Kelly noted above. We have offered a number of refinements and alternative readings, especially in places where the manuscript transmission seems to have been faulty, and these are fully described in the notes. In our translations we have tried to convey something of Beccán's metrical artistry, while giving a reasonably literal rendering of the Gaelic. It is of course impossible to imitate in full his range of rhyme and alliteration, but we hope readers will get at least a taste of it here.

FO RÉIR CHOLUIMB[20]

1   Fo réir Choluimb céin ad-fías,
      find for nimib snáidsium secht;
      sét fri húatho úair no-tías,
      ní cen toísech: táthum nert.

2   Níbu fri coilcthi tincha
      tindscan ernaigdi cassa,
      crochais – níbu hi cinta –
      a chorp for tonna glassa.

3   Gabais a n-adamrae n-aí
      [i scuir] Mo Chummae in hÍ,
      is mó imbrádud cach aí,
      a ndo-rigni airi in rí.

4   Ro-fess i n-ocus, i céin,
      Columb coich boí, acht ba oín,
      tindis a ainm amail gréin,
      ba lés i comair cach oín.

5   A n-óen as dech di rétaib:
      ro-sóer a manchu moínib;
      már thendál íarna éccaib,
      a n-ainm as úaisliu doínib.

6   Is dín úathaid, is dín slúaig,
      slán cach eslán asa dún;
      is dún n-inill, is caín mbúaid
      buith íar Coluimb Chille cúl.

7   Ní séim n-atach íar ndílaib,
      do neoch nad chóel cenn a scéoil,
      scarais co mbríathraib fíraib,
      findaib rissib rígaib béoil.

Bound to Colum, while I speak,
may the bright one guard me in the seven heavens;
when I go to the road of fear,
I'm not lordless: I have strength.

It was not on cushioned beds
he bent to his complex prayers:
he crucified – not for crimes –
his body on the grey waves.

He staked the marvellous claim
when Mo Chummae set down in Iona.
It's more than anyone can grasp,
what the King did for his sake.

Though it was known near and far
who Colum was, he was unique.
His name glistened like the sun;
he was a light before all.

The one best thing of all things:
he has freed his monks from wealth;
a great bonfire, after his death,
the name that's nobler than men's.

The shield of a few, a crowd's shield,
a fort where all unsafe are safe;
he is a tight fort – fair prize,
to be in Colum Cille's care.

No slight refuge after penance,
for one who'd not thin down his tale:
he parted with true sayings,
with fair news in his mouth for kings.

8   Ba óen-búadach boí for tuil,
túargab tendáil túath in cblé,
mad-cloth, mad-breth, céin-os-mair,
máthair idon íachtas de.

9   Do ríg ríchid ro-fess fair,
do cach tomaith tindis céill,
fri cach ngúasacht céin-ot-mair,
[molfas Columb n-auë Néill.]

10   Ní terc buide berdae ind éoin,
is íar sétaib Connacht clú,
a chloth findae, fírián béoil,
ba hé roüt, goítae gáu.

11   Gabais deseirc, deil a nert,
níbu hingnath fecht i fía,
foirciunn a dál, deüd bert,
ba hé in cresen caras Día.

12   Do-ell Érinn, ind-ell cor,
cechaing noïb nemed mbled,
brisis tola, tindis for,
fairrge al druim dánae fer.

13   Fích fri colainn catha íuil,
légais la sin suíthe n-óg,
úagais, brígais benna síuil,
sruith tar fairrgi, flaith a lóg.

14   Lessach, línmar, sláin co céill,
curchaib tar sál sephtus cló,
Columb Cille, caindel Néill,
ní fríth i corp cummae dó.

Singly triumphant over lust,
the northern folk raised a flame.
Well-known, well-born, greatly blessed
the pure mother who screamed for him.

To heaven's King he was known,
towards each threat He lit his mind;
greatly blessed in every plight
he who'll praise Colum úa Néill.

Not scant the thanks the birds give,
acclaim along Connacht's roads.
His brilliant fame – just in speech –
he was the spearcast, lies were slain.

Godly love – a post its strength –
he took to, often travelling:
after his time, when all was done,
he was the Christian God loved.

He left Ireland, entered a pact,
he crossed in ships the whales' shrine.
He shattered lusts – it shone on him –
a bold man over the sea's ridge.

He fought wise battles with the flesh,
indeed, he read pure learning.
He stitched, he hoisted sail tops,
a sage across seas, his prize a kingdom.

Prosperous, numerous, safely,
a storm blew them in boats over brine.
Colum Cille, Níall's candle:
not found in a body his like.

15   Dánae arbar asa chrúas,
            clér co n-imlúad aingel cert,
            cemtis buidir, boíthus clúas,
            cemtis lobuir, boíthus nert.

16   Ninaig ar glinn gabsait foss,
            foirenn Choluimb, clothach dám,
            dánae buiden, boíthus coss,
            Columb i mboí, boíthus lám.

17   Lethan indbas i cach dú,
            Columb Cille, cáich di Níall,
            ní cen toísech, táthus sóer,
            sét fri temel, táthus cíall.

18   Columb i taig for cach ngin,
            Columb i maig, medar cáich,
            Columb Cille, cóelais tin,
            toingtit ingnaith, moltait gnáith.

19   Gabais mílti muintir noíb,
            níbu hingnath aidchib téoil,
            toë la sin, séime toíb,
            tendál Alban ecnae a béoil.

20   Bendacht Choluimb cháith fil form,
            corop mo lorg laithib mís,
            bendacht ruirech biäs form,
            arna gáibthi na ríag rís.

21   Rom-ain ar thein, tress cach oín,
            Columb Cille, caindel sóer,
            mad-cloth a dál, dath ram-boí,
            berthum co ríg credbas clóen.

Brave the host which has his hardness,
an order with true angels' acts:
though they were deaf, they had hearing;
though they were lame, they had strength.

At the waves' glen they took rest,
Colum's crew, a famous band.
Bold number, they had a foot
with Colum, they had a hand.

Great treasure in every place,
Colum Cille, of all Níall's folk:
not chiefless, they have a lord,
on darkness' path, they have sense.

Colum within on each mouth,
Colum outside, common speech,
Colum Cille, he sloughed softness,
strangers swear by him, friends cheer.

He served with a blessed band,
he often spent nights withdrawn;
silence, too, thinness of side;
Britain's beacon, his mouth's wisdom.

Holy Colum's blessing on me,
that he may be my daily trail;
the High-king's blessing be on me,
that I be spared perils and pain.

May he save me from fire – common fight –
Colum Cille, noble candle,
his tryst well-famed – he was bright –
may he bear me to the King who ends evil.

22   Columb Cille, céine mbéo,
        bid mo dúchonn, dáil co feirt,
        fri cach ngúasacht géra dó
        dath [n]a mol[f]a méit mo neirt.

23   Ní gairm fri fás fil form gein,
        gigsea dom Día dúais mo bláith,
        berthum sech ríg trebas tein,
        íar sin is fair fil mo ráith.

24   Rígdae bráthair búadach ríg,
        rathmar fíado, feib ron-ain,
        gétait goiste ndemnae dím,
        dúbart a bard, bés don-foir.

[25   Do-m-air trócaire ría mbás,
        ropo aithrige no-thías.
        Ro-béo com chond is com chéill,
        fo réir Choluimb céin ad-fías.]

Colum Cille, while I live,
will be my chant, till the grave's tryst;
in every risk I'll call him,
when I'll praise him with my full strength.

No 'cry to wastelands' what's on my lips,
I'll beg of my God my hero's prize;
may he bear me past the king of fire,
then my protection is his.

Royal kin of triumphant kings,
lord full of grace, thus may he guard us.
I'll take off the devils' noose:
his bards' prayer perhaps may save us.

[May mercy come to me before death,
may it be penance that I seek.
May I be in my mind and my sense,
bound to Colum while I speak.]

TO-FED ANDES

This poem is found in one manuscript only, Laud Misc. 615 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. This is a large collection of poetry attributed to or relating to Columba, and probably dates from the sixteenth century.[21] Much of the poetry in it is earlier, and some of it much earlier. It includes a copy of the *Amra*, as well as early poems on Brigit and on the Day of Judgment. In the manuscript this poem is called *Tiughraind Bhécáin mac Luigdech do Colum Cille*, 'the last verses of Beccán to Columba', which suggests not only that it was composed towards the end of his life, but also that he had a reputation for creating other poetry in praise of Columba, founded no doubt on *Fo réir Choluimb* and perhaps other poems.

The metre he employs is a very demanding one. The stanzas comprise a couplet with disyllabic end-rime, each line of the couplet having twelve syllables, usually divided into three groups of four syllables, separated by a caesura. Alliteration binds the whole poem together: generally across the caesura, between the end of one line and beginning of the next, and between the ends and beginnings of verses. There is also a simple closure to the poem, with alliteration between the last word of the poem and the first (*tengae*: *To-fed*). Here is stanza 10, to demonstrate the metre, with alliteration in italics, rhyme underlined, and caesurae marked with a bar.

> Búachail *m*anach, | *m*edam *c*léirech, | *c*aissiu *r*étaib,
> *r*ígdaib *s*ondaib, | *s*onaib *t*edmann, | *t*ríchtaib cétaib.

This metre, which creates an effect similar to a litany in places, with its discrete, four-syllable statements (e.g. v. 14), is varied with the introduction of parallel statements, and other rhetorical devices. The whole is a remarkable crafted synthesis of sound, imagery and meaning.

Tiugraind Beccáin

TIUGRAIND BECCÁIN[22]
(The Last Verses of Beccán)

1 To-fed andes   i ndáil fíadat   findáil caingel;
   Columb Cille –   cétaib landa   lethan caindel.

2 Caíni rissi: ríge la Día   i ndeüd retho,
   ríge n-úasal   ó ro-cinni   céim mo betho.

3 Brississ tóla,   to-bert co crú   [cruü]glinne,
   gabaiss foraib   findaib coraib   Columb Cille.

4 Caindel Connacht,   caindel Alban,   amrae fíadat,
   fichtib curach   cechaing tríchait   troich[-ch]ét
      cíabat.

5 Cechaing tonnaig,   tresaig magain,   mongaig, rónaig,
   roluind, mbedcaig,   mbruichrich, mbarrfind,   faílid, mbrónaig.

6 Birt búaid n-eccnai   hi cúairt Éirenn   combo hardu,
   amrae n-anmae,   ailtir Lethae,   líntair Albu.

7 Amrae tuire,   [teöir lemnacht,]   lethnaib coraib,
   Columb Cille,   [comland gnátho   gnóü foraib.]

8 For muir gáirech,   gairt in ruirich   follnar mílib,
   follnar mag ós mruigib réidib,   rígaib, tírib.

9 Trínóit hi seilb   siächt cobluth –   caín con-úalath –
   úasal la Día,   díambo forderc   fesccur mbúarach.

10 Búachail manach,   medam cléirech,   caissiu rétaib,
    rígdaib sondaib,   sonaib tedmann,   tríchtaib cétaib.

11 Columb Cille,   caindel toídes   teöir rechtae,
    rith hi ráith tuir   to-réd midnocht   migne Ercae.

He brings northward   to meet the Lord   a bright crowd of chancels –
Colum Cille,   kirks for hundreds,   widespread candle.

Wonderful news: a realm with God   after the race,
a grand kingdom,   since He's set out   my life's progress.

He broke passions,   brought to ruin   secure prisons;
Colum Cille   overcame them   with bright actions.

Connacht's candle,   Britain's candle,   splendid ruler;
in scores of curraghs   with an army of wretches   he crossed the
    long-haired sea.

He crossed the wave-strewn wild region,   foam-flecked, seal-filled,
savage, bounding,   seething, white-tipped,   pleasing, doleful.

Wisdom's champion   all round Ireland,   he was exalted;
excellent name: Brittany's nursed,   Britain's sated.

Stout post, milk of meditation,   with broad actions,
Colum Cille,   perfect customs,   fairer than trappings.

On the loud sea   he cried to the King   who rules thousands,
who rules the plain   above cleared fields,   kings and countries.

In the Trinity's care   he sought a ship –   good his leaving –
on high with God,   who always watched him,   morning, evening.

Shepherd of monks,   judge of clerics,   finer than things,
than kingly gates,   than sounds of plagues,   than battalions.

Colum Cille,   candle brightening   legal theory;
the race the hero ran   pierced the midnight   of Erc's region.

12   Aiéir tinach, tingair níulu nime dogair,
        dín mo anmae, dún mo uäd, hauë Conail.

13   Cloth co mbúadaib, ba caín bethu. Ba bárc moíne,
        ba muir n-eccnai, hauë Conail, cotsid doíne.

14   Ba dair nduillech, ba dín anmae, ba hall nglinne,
        ba grían manach, ba már coimdiu, Columb Cille.

15   Ba cóem [la Día], díambo hadbae ail fri roluind,
        ropo dorair, dú forriä imdae Coluimb.

16   Colainn crochsus, scuirsius for foill finda tóeba,
        to-gó dánu, dénis lecca, lécciss cróeba.

17   Lécciss coilcthi, lécciss cotlud – caíniu bertaib –
        brisiss bairnea, ba forfaílid feisib tercaib.

18   Techtaiss liubru, léicciss la slán selba aithri,
        ar seirc léigind, lécciss coicthiu, lécciss caithri.

19   Lécciss cairptiu, carais noä, námae guë,
        gríandae loingsech, lécciss la séol [seimann cluë.]

20   Columb Cille, Columb boïë, Columb biäss,
        Columb bithbéo – ní hé sin in snádud ciäss.

21   Columb canmae, co dáil n-ecco, íarum, riäm,
        ríaraib imbaiss, ima-comairc cách fo-n-gniäm.

22   Guidiu márguidi macc do Eithne – is ferr moínib –
        m'anam día deis dochum ríchid re ndomuin doínib.

23   Día fo-ruigni, rígdae écndairc, hi land lessaib,
        la toil n-aingel, hauë treibe Conail cressaib.

The skies' kind one,   he tends the clouds   of harsh heaven;
my soul's shelter,   my muse's fort,   Conal's descendant.

Fame with virtues,   a good life, his: barque of treasure,
sea of knowledge,   Conal's offspring,   people's counsellor.

Leafy oak-tree,   soul's protection,   rock of safety,
the sun of monks,   mighty ruler,   Colum Cille.

Beloved of God,   he lived against   a stringent rock,
a rough struggle,   the place one could find Colum's bed.

He crucified   his body, left behind sleek sides;
he chose learning,   embraced stone slabs,   gave up bedding.

He gave up beds,   abandoned sleep –   finest actions –
conquered angers,   was ecstatic,   sleeping little.

He possessed books,   renounced fully   claims of kinship:
for love of learning   he gave up wars,   gave up strongholds.

He left chariots,   he loved ships,   foe to falsehood;
sun-like exile,   sailing, he left   fame's steel bindings.

Colum Cille,   Colum who was,   Colum who will be,
constant Colum,   not he the protection   to be lamented.

Colum, we sing,   until death's tryst,   after, before,
by poetry's rules,   which gives welcome   to him we serve.

I pray a great prayer   to Eithne's son –   better than treasure –
my soul to his right hand, to heaven,   before the world's people.

He worked for God,   kingly prayer,   within church ramparts,
with angels' will,   Conal's household's child, in vestments.

24 Cernach dúbart   Día do adrad,   aidchib, laithib,
    lámaib fáenaib,   findaib gartaib,   gnímaib maithib.

25 Maith boí hi corp,   Columb Cille –   cléirech nemdae –
    imbed fedbach,   fírían mbélmach,   búadach tengae.

Triumphant plea: adoring God,   nightly, daily,
with hands outstretched,   with splendid alms,   with right actions.

Fine his body,   Colum Cille,   heaven's cleric –
a widowed crowd –   well-spoken just one,   tongue triumphant.

POET AND PATRON

What emerges from both of Beccán's poems is a picture of the intimate relationship of the poet with the saint he praised. It is similar to the relationship one can see in secular praise-poetry, created for kings and nobles, and indeed Beccán plays with and subverts the imagery of secular praise-poetry in numerous ways. Columba is more than merely a dead religious aristocrat to Beccán. He is his guide, his protector, the path he follows. He is bound to Columba, will do his will (*F* 1). Columba, Colum, is his chant, his cry in distress (*F* 22); Colum is what he will sing to the end (*T* 21). The objective of this is a deeply personal one: confidence that Columba, the holy man, will protect the poet after death, and indeed in danger on earth: it is great profit to be in his care (*F* 6), he who would praise him is greatly blessed in every plight (*F* 9). The beginning and end of *Fo réir Choluimb* in particular evoke the image of Beccán taken by Columba past the torments of hell into heaven. This is effected in return for the poet's praise.

Beccán's poems were written in a climate of energetic activity in the cult of Columba. We have seen how, during the abbacy of Ségéne, the testimony of various monks and lay people was being gathered concerning Columba's power and holiness.[23] Ségéne's nephew and later successor, Cummíne Find, compiled an account of the virtues and miracles of Iona's founder.[24] Decades before, the *Amra* had been composed, extolling the Christian heroism of the saint, and calling on him for help after death, asking Columba to conduct the poet to Sion. Towards the end of the century, Adomnán, in his *Life of Columba*, is at pains to stress Columba's continuing efficacy after death, describing how prayer through him, or the invocation of his name, can help in times of distress. He sets out a number of posthumous miracle-stories, in specially delineated sections of the *Life*. One of these stories concerns the recitation of poetry in praise of Columba:

> This also seems to be a thing that should not be passed unnoticed: that certain lay people of the same blessed man, though they were guilty men and blood-stained, were through certain songs of his praises in the Irish tongue, and the commemoration of his name, delivered, on the night in which they had chanted those songs, from the hands of their enemies who had surrounded the house

of the singers; and they escaped unhurt, through flames and swords and spears.[25]

This is a common miracle, Adomnán tells us, and there are reliable witnesses in many places to testify to it. The poems in Columba's praise, chanted by the people in this episode, must have been very like Beccán's, if indeed it is not these poems themselves to which Adomnán refers. Even the imagery of the miracle, with sinners escaping from the flames and barbs of the enemy by the singing of a hymn replicates the intention and imagery of the poems, especially *Fo réir Choluimb*: 'that I may be spared perils and pain' (*F* 20); 'May he save me from fire' (*F* 21); 'Colum Cille, while I live, / will be my chant … / in every risk I'll call him, / I'll praise him with my full strength' (*F* 22); 'may he bear me past the king of fire' (*F* 23).

These poems, then, are not compositions in the abstract. They belong to a context of fervent devotion to Columba among both monks and lay people on Iona and elsewhere, and they are part of a thought-world which extended the relationships of clientship, protection and patronage across the boundaries of death. Indeed, that is the point, Beccán tells us: since Columba is 'everliving', his protection need never be lost and lamented (*T* 20). Columba's posthumous power extends from his position in the hierarchy of heaven: he was *uasal la Día* 'highly-placed / noble with God'. As a result of the divine love he practised, 'he was the Christian God loved' (*F* 11). Columba himself is a 'mighty ruler', a lord, a chief to his followers, in a hierarchy with the King of Kings at the head. Some of the imagery employed describes Columba in the terms of secular praise, as of a king or chieftain: he is a shield, a fort, a stout post, an oak, although this is balanced by very unsecular imagery elsewhere.

It is his place in the hierarchy which allows Columba to grant his protection, his *snádud*. This fundamental concept of early Irish law allowed free persons to conduct others of lesser rank to the borders of a territory with immunity, or to grant them safe passage. There were stiff penalties for violation of a person's protection, and this becomes a theme in a number of early Irish tales. In the first verse of *Fo réir Choluimb*, Beccán asks for Columba to conduct or protect him in the seven heavens, when he travels 'to the road of fear'. Elsewhere, he

wishes for Columba to carry him past the king of fire: after praying this, his surety, his guarantee (*ráth*) rests on Columba (*F* 23).

Beccán is careful, however, to stress the criteria on which Columba's exalted rank is based. It is an inversion of the secular world: it is through rejection of chariots, wars and strongholds, that Columba has himself become a voyager (*T* 19), and 'a crowd's shield, a fort where all unsafe are safe' (*F* 6). The heroic actions Beccán revels in are those of the sailor, stitching sail-tops, crying to God on the sea; the scholar, reading pure learning, illuminating legal theory; and the ascetic, giving up beds, destroying his passions, sleeping against the rough rock. Indeed, in a series of comparisons in both poems, Beccán sets Columba and his way of life against the values of the world: he is 'better than treasure', 'fairer than trappings', 'finer than things' (*T* 22, 7, 10), and his name is 'nobler than men's' (*F* 5). It is very clearly the rejection of worldly power which has given Columba his heavenly status.

Beccán is not entirely free from the lure of worldly connections himself, though. If Columba has 'renounced fully claims of kinship' (*T* 18), Beccán has not. He stresses again and again, as did Dallán, the nobility of Columba's kin, and reminds us who they were. One reason for this, no doubt, is his own relation to Columba, although distant. Another may be the climate of Uí Néill patronage that Iona enjoyed during this period, especially before 665 when the Cenél Conaill were the dominant branch of the Uí Néill. The last (or perhaps, next to last) verse of *Fo réir Choluimb* in particular illustrates the appeal to this kind of patronage, when the poet calls Columba 'royal kin of triumphant kings', and then asks for his guardianship. So too, the 'fair news in his mouth for kings' (*F* 7) may refer to the saint's own kin, although Adomnán gives anecdotes of other kings to whom Columba gave good tidings: to Rhydderch of Strathclyde, news of a peaceful death; post-humously, to Oswald of Northumbria, news of victory in an imminent battle.[26] At the same time, Beccán, like the author of the *Amra*, reinforces the idea that the religious life, or at least a Christian orientation, is the proper way of life for a descendant of Níall or Conall, seeking to ally all his kindred not just with Columba's fame, but with his vocation, and with his blessings.

LIGHT AND FLAME

The dominant images in both of Beccán's poems are those which deal with light, brightness and fire. In the main these images describe the hero, Columba. He is a candle, sun of monks, a light, a bonfire, a flame; he is bright, splendid, shining, sun-like; his alms and his actions are bright, splendid. Many of these images can be found elsewhere, as the currency of panegyric, both secular and religious. Take as an instance of secular praise poetry an archaic poem in praise of a fifth-century king of Leinster, Bressal Bélach:

> Shining sun, emberlike, that warms the living, is Bressal –
> the strong-one of Ireland, descendant of Lorcc, who rules the
>   world – Bélach.[27]

Or, in a contemporary religious poem, Brigit of Kildare is described as 'golden sparkling flame … the dazzling resplendent sun.'[28] In Beccán's hands, these images are part of an integrated whole which explores, among many other things, the image of Columba's brightness. The depth of resonance in the imagery can be seen in one example, that of the candle, certainly the most frequent epithet for Columba (*F* 14, 21; *T* 1, 4, 11). It has its obvious attributes as a bearer of light, and has ecclesiastical associations as well. Secular associations include the idea of the royal candle, referred to in a number of texts, a large candle which would be in the king's house, burning through the night near the king.[29] This in turn became a kenning for a spear,[30] and it is worth noting that Beccán refers to Columba also as a 'spear-cast'. In addition, witnesses in trials are often referred to as candles.

The imagery of light and fire is also common to other works in the dossier of Columba. The *Amra* speaks of the lands, north, east and west, blazing as a result of his labours.[31] In a series of anecdotes, some drawn from witnesses still alive at the time of Columba's death, Adomnán paints a picture of Columba as a man filled with the light of the Holy Spirit. These narratives, which make very concrete the metaphor of the poetry, occur both while Columba is alive and after his death when two witnesses, named and verified by Adomnán, have visions, one of the sky towards Iona being completely lit up with angelic light, and the other of a pillar of fire shooting up into the firmament at the time of Columba's death.[32]

Beccán carries his light imagery further, however. Columba becomes not only a light in himself, as in the concretised metaphors of the *Life of Columba*, but this light is used to accomplish God's will and spread his Word. The saint is a 'candle brightening legal theory' (*T* 11), explaining obscure parts of the law. This image, too, it must be noted, can be found in narrative form in the *Life of Columba*, where in an ecstasy of prayer he is filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the house in which he stays is

> filled with heavenly light … From that house beams of immea-
> surable brightness were visible in the night, escaping through
> chinks of the door-leaves and through the key-holes … Moreover,
> as he afterwards admitted in the presence of a very few men, he
> saw, openly revealed, many of the secret things that have been
> hidden since the world began. Also everything that in the sacred
> scriptures is dark and most difficult became plain, and was shown
> more clearly than day to the eyes of his purest heart.[33]

Mostly, though, the image is used to demonstrate Columba's role as a carrier of the word. This is why he is 'Connacht's candle, Britain's candle', and 'his mouth's wisdom' is 'Britain's beacon'. In verse 11 of *To-fed andes* 'the race the hero ran pierced the midnight of Erc's region.' In these passages, the candle and the beacon belong to one who illuminates the ignorant, an image found in scripture: 'he will give light to those in darkness' (Luke 1:79); 'the people who walked in dark-ness have seen a marvellous light' (Isaiah 9:1). Thus too we should understand the first verse of *To-fed andes*: Columba is a 'widespread candle' in enlightening, informing, converting the peoples he has worked among, and he comes to meet the Lord like a candle at the head of a procession of a 'bright crowd of chancels' streaming from the south.

As in the anecdotes of Adomnán, it is made explicit where this inner light comes from. In *Fo réir Choluimb*, we are told 'To heaven's King he was known, / towards each threat He lit his mind' (*F* 9). In verse 12 it is his achievement of *apatheia*, his shattering of his passions, which 'shone on him', enlightened him. This outward display of light as indi-cating inner sanctity should, of course, also be compared with the accounts of the Transfiguration in the Gospels.[34]

In *Fo réir Choluimb* this imagery of fire and light is set in opposition

to a different fire, that which lies on the 'road of fear'. Here it is
Columba, the 'noble candle', who will save the poet from fire: the fire
which all must go through (hence it is a 'common fight', *F* 21). This no
doubt is the fire alluded to in 1 Corinthians 3:13 and elsewhere which
each person will have to undergo after death. Columba's surety will,
he prays, 'bear me past the king of fire'. This journey, the journey
to judgement, Beccán describes also as 'darkness' path', but with
Columba those who walk it have 'sense', can descry the way (*F* 17). The
opposition of the fire of hell and the light of heaven is also common to
contemporary otherworld visions, which will be discussed below.

THE SEA-BOUND EXILE

The figure of the *peregrinus*, the lifelong pilgrim or voluntary exile, has
become a familiar one to students of 'Celtic Christianity' as a distinc-
tive Irish contribution to the ethos of pilgrimage and asceticism.
Although this way of living out the ascetic ideal is met elsewhere, there
is much to be said for it being characteristic of Christianity as found in
the Insular world, especially since the particular impulse we meet in,
say, Columba or Columbanus seems to spring from the specific social
circumstances of early medieval Ireland. A land in which family ties,
landed wealth, local patriotism, and legal bars to free travel were the
norm was exactly the place in which this particular sort of rejection
of the world could arise. As Thomas Charles-Edwards, author of an
important study on the background of Irish *peregrinatio* has put it,

> This tradition was always explicitly founded on key scriptural pas-
> sages, but derived much of its power from the organization of Irish
> society. Because of the ideas which expressed that organization,
> *peregrinatio* was the most intelligible form of ascetic renunciation
> available to Irishmen.[35]

If this is so, it also remains the case that it is mostly through modern
exploration of both narrative and homiletic texts about pilgrimage and
legal texts about society that we have come to understand the particu-
lar reference points of *peregrinatio* for the early Irish. There is no one
theoretical text to which we might turn. Adomnán's tales about Cormac

Úa Liathain, mentioned above, give us a sense that the desire to get away, to remain unsettled, to leave one's homeland, and then even one's monastery, was a common one. Certainly Adomnán seems to be trying to tell monks, through the story of Cormac's failures, that this life could not be lived by everyone. He gives us, however, little idea of what this lifestyle was like. The other early, classical portrait of *peregrinatio* is in the *Cambrai Homily*, which dates from around 700. It describes the separation from the known and comfortable as a type of cross, a type of martyrdom:

> This is our taking-up of our cross upon us, if we receive loss and martyrdom and fellow-suffering for Christ's sake ... Now there are three kinds of martyrdom which are counted as a cross to man, that is to say, white martyrdom, and green martyrdom and red martyrdom. This is the white martyrdom to man, when he separates for the sake of God from everything he loves, although he [does not?] suffer fasting or labour thereat. This is the green martyrdom to him, when by means of them [fasting and labour] he separates from his desires, or suffers toil in penance and repentance. This is the red martyrdom to him, endurance of a cross or destruction for Christ's sake, as happened to the apostles in the persecution of the wicked and in teaching the law of God.[36]

Beccán, however, gives us a unique and valuable portrait of the exiled hero on the sea, explaining by means of opposed images exactly what the exile was denying, what he was losing. He gives us material from the seventh century to add to the stock of references we usually use, and provides something of a synthetic portrait of the heroic, exiled pilgrim across the sea. In a sense, he is the first to mould this type of sanctity into a definable and praiseworthy shape.

Fo réir Choluimb gives us the most heroic picture of this exile. The identity of the *peregrinus* with Christ is made explicit with the transposition of the image of the cross: 'he crucified ... his body on the grey waves' (*F* 2). In *F* 12, his crossing of the strait from Ireland is equated with a sort of *apatheia*, a breaking of desires, an image which combines marvellously with the picture of Columba in his boat cutting through the waves: 'a bold man over the sea's ridge.' This crossing of the waters

is in the next verse equated with learning, he is a 'sage across seas', at the same time as he acquaints himself with sails and rigging.

Boats and the sea seem to have been of little account in the early centuries of Christian Ireland, despite what we know about raiding parties from Ireland descending on late Roman Britain. One exception to this is a poem describing the kingship of a fifth-century Leinster chieftain: 'after taking ship, a lightning flash of warrior bands, he seized the lordship of the Goídil'.[37] But it is only really in church sources that we get descriptions of the sea, and we tend to find them in association with penance, exile, and God. In this respect, the sources draw on a weight of biblical imagery. The opening prayer of the Mass in the Irish *Stowe Missal*, which dates from around 800, begins:

> We have sinned Lord, we have sinned. Spare us sinners and save us: You who guided Noah across the waters of the flood, hear us; and who by a word rescued Jonah from the deep, free us; You who stretched out your hand to the sinking Peter, help us.[38]

The sea is associated, then, with danger, renunciation, and mercy. This sense is reinforced in *To-fed andes*, where we are given a picture of the oppositions involved in this renunciation of the mainland: a rejection of noble forms of transport for, perhaps, less exalted ones: 'He left chariots, he loved ships', and indeed as a 'sun-like exile, sailing, he left fame's steel bindings' (*T* 19). He abandons the rivets of the secular, aristocratic world when he enters the arena of ropes and winds. Once again, as in the earlier poem, the idea of taking ship is closely juxtaposed with ideas of learning, and again with the espousal of the book as a rejection of ordinary secular values:

> He possessed books,   renounced fully   claims of kinship:
> for love of learning   he gave up wars,   gave up strongholds. (*T* 18)

These images are embedded in a discussion of Columba's extreme asceticism, his long vigils, his sleeping against hard rocks. This is part and parcel of the portrait Beccán is giving us: a complete picture of an ascetic, but one which begins with the long descriptive break in which he paints the sea, 'the wave-strewn wild region' (*T* 5). The sea journey is part of Columba's reliance on God: it is on the sea 'he cried to the King', an echo, perhaps, of Jonah crying to God on the deep. It is in

the Trinity's care that Columba seeks a ship (*T* 8, 9). In *Fo réir* Columba embraced divine love ('Godly love … he took to'), and in the same passage we find him frequently on a good journey (*F* 11). Restlessness and meditation, movement and maintenance in God's care are interwoven here.

But it is not just this separation and exile which lie at the heart of Columba's holiness. Beccán is constantly stressing a combination of contemplation and action, of learning and practice, of thought, word and deed, in which Columba attains his perfection. He is the 'milk of meditation, with broad actions' in *To-fed andes* (v. 7). His prayers, 'adoring God nightly, daily, with hands outstretched' are combined 'with splendid alms, with right actions' (*T* 24). It is with actions, deeds, that Columba overcomes his desires. This is consonant with the cautions of Cassian, in Book 14 of his *Conferences*, who stresses that to master contemplation, one must also practice the Christian life. Again in *Fo réir Choluimb* his monks have 'true angels' acts' (*F* 15). Combined with these images of practice and thought are images of Columba as speaker of the word: 'his mouth's wisdom' is 'Britain's beacon' (*F* 19); 'he parted with true sayings' (*F* 7); he was 'just in speech' and as a result 'he was the spearcast' by which 'lies were slain' (*F* 10). He is a 'well-spoken just one', a 'tongue triumphant' (*T* 25).

Beccán, then, is painting a portrait for us of his hero, and also creating a hymn, a prayer, in which the reiteration of the ideals of the saint will hopefully produce an identification and emulation in the hearer or reciter. This is not, however, what he relies on. Instead, he relies entirely on Columba's blessings, rather than any chance of his own perfection, to rescue him at the tryst with death.

BECCÁN'S OTHERWORLD VISION

As we have seen, Beccán views the composition of his poems as a salvific act. In exchange for praise of Columba, he hopes for his soul to go to heaven, and indeed hopes for protection: 'greatly blessed in every plight / he who'll praise Colum úa Néill.' Although this desire is partly for protection in the physical world, his real concern is not so much with the marauders of Adomnán's anecdotes, as with the journey on

'the road of fear', 'the path of darkness', and with avoiding 'the king of fire', with removing the 'noose', or snares of the devils.

Remember that this was the prayer of Dallán too, in the opening of the *Amra*, although there directed towards God:

> God of heaven, may He not leave me
> in the path where there's screaming
> from the weight of oppression.
> Great God, protect me
> from the fiery wall,
> the long trench of tears.

At the end of that same poem, however, Dallán envisioned Columba's help after death: 'He will protect us in Sion. / He will urge me past torments.'

All this partakes of a world-view, or perhaps an 'otherworld view', which was certainly common at this period.[39] Adomnán's third book of the *Life of Columba* is much taken up with Columba's visions of souls departing from their bodies, either guided by angels and light in the case of saints, or beset by demons and helped, ultimately, by Columba's prayers to evade them. In this vertical ascent, a sort of dogfight for the soul between demons and angels takes place. A contemporary poem to Brigit prays that she might take the poet 'past throngs of devils'. But though Beccán mentions the devils' snares, his picture of the otherworld seems somewhat different from that of Adomnán and the author of the Brigit poem.

Beccán seems to have a view of the soul's fate which has more in common with that of contemporary visionaries in Ireland and Scotland. We have their testimony in which the soul, before going on to heaven, had first to be taken through the fires of Hell. Usually we find angels accompanying the soul, as in the vision of Beccán's contemporary and countryman, Fursa, who experienced an otherworld vision while he was still in Ireland. In Bede's account of the vision, the angel tells Fursa of the fires:

> 'It will not burn you, for you did not kindle it; for although it appears as a great and terrible fire, it tests everyone according to his deserts, and will burn away his sinful desires. For as every

man's body is set on fire by unlawful desire, so when death frees
him from the body, he must make due atonement for his sins by
fire.' Then he saw one of the three angels who had been his guides
in both his visions go forward and divide the flames, while
the other two flew on each side of him to protect him from
harm.[40]

Fursa later himself became the sort of *peregrinus* Beccán writes
about, first withdrawing as a hermit and later leaving Ireland for
England.

In another vision, from somewhat later in the century, a Northum-
brian called Dryhthelm, living in Cunningham in Ayrshire, had a vision,
the geography of which sounds very similar to that of Beccán's.

A handsome man in a shining robe was my guide, and we walked
in silence in what appeared to be a north-easterly direction. As
we travelled onwards, we came to a very broad and deep valley of
infinite length. The side to our left was dreadful with burning
flames, while the opposite side was equally horrible with raging
hail and bitter snow blowing and driving in all directions. Both
sides were filled with men's souls …When he had led me gradu-
ally to the further end, much alarmed by the terrible scene, I saw
the place suddenly begin to grow dim, and darkness concealed
everything. As we entered it, this darkness gradually grew so dense
that I could see nothing except it and the outline and robes of my
guide. And as we went on 'through the nocturnal, solitary gloom',
frequent masses of dusky flame appeared before us, rising as
though from a great pit and falling back into it again … I saw that,
as the tongues of flame rose, they were filled with the souls of men.

Afterwards, another guide comes and takes him to a place of light,
flowers and space, and after that he gets a glimpse of greater light
beyond. All this occurs walking along a road. The guide explains what
he saw to him:

The valley that you saw, with its horrible burning flames and icy
cold, is the place where souls are tried and punished who have
delayed to confess and amend their wicked ways, and who at last
had recourse to penitence at the hour of death, and so depart this
life.

These he says will all eventually get to heaven. The pit is the mouth of hell: from there the souls do not return. And the bright meadow is where those who have been good but not perfect go to await the judgement. Beyond that is Heaven, where 'whoever are perfect in word, deed and thought, enter the Kingdom of Heaven as soon as they leave the body.'[41]

This vision, in narrative prose as it is, rather than fleeting images, still manages to convey some of what Beccán appears to believe will happen to his soul. In particular, the horizontal images of walking on the road of fear, the 'path to shadows / path of darkness', and the flames and fire, do seem to accord with his view of the after-life. He also mentions the seven heavens, and a much later text from the Columban community, the eleventh-century *Vision of Adomnán*, includes a section describing the ascent of the soul through the seven heavens.[42] The lower of these heavens are places of torture, like Dryhthelm's valley and pit, in which sinful but penitent souls are cleansed. As the soul continues on its way, it comes into heavens of greater light and glory. It is through this that Beccán hopes to go, to come, in the end, to 'the king who wrecks evil', to 'a realm with God, after the race, a grand kingdom.' In Beccán's prayers, however, Columba serves as his leader and protector, his psychopomp, guiding and guarding his soul, Virgil or Beatrice to his own Dante.

Beccán the poet, then, shows us something of the attitudes of the next generation of Iona monks after those who had been with Columba themselves. Intimate affection and idolising praise combine here, together with a heroic vision of the sort of life he felt Columba espoused, a life of learning, of asceticism on rock and sea, of rejection of wealth, kin, fame and power. And yet this comes with a clear sense of the way in which Columba the saint now possesses, in a different way, those very things: fame, power, status, and how this gives to his followers good profit, care, shelter, protection. Columba is not a distant figure to him, but is as close as the living noble patrons of the later period were in Ireland, who would share their beds with their poets. Closer still, perhaps, in some ways, if we see Beccán mac Luigdech as indeed having been both Beccán the hermit and Beccán of Rum, withdrawn, ascetic, living sea-girt on a rocky island, starved, sleepless and ecstatic, his tongue triumphant in Columba's praise.

Colum Cille co
Día domm eráil

There is a short poem or 'prayer' which is found immediately after the *Amra* in many of the manuscripts which contain it. The poem addresses Columba, asking for his assistance in heaven when the poet dies, and describing the heavenly city. The poem is, with one exception, always attributed to Adomnán, who was certainly the most prolific and influential Latin writer on Iona in the seventh century. In most manuscripts this is called a hymn or prayer, but in two it is called the *Cathbarr* or 'Battle-helmet'.[1] This suggests that the prayer aquired a reputation as a poem of protection, almost a charm, like the *loricae* or 'breastplate' poems. of which 'St Patrick's Breastplate' is no doubt the most famous. As mentioned earlier, Adomnán himself tells us that ordinary people, even criminals, were using prayers and songs to Columba to protect them in times of dire danger, and he had collected hundreds of examples, he says, of testimonies to their effectiveness.[2]

There has been little or no discussion of the likelihood of Adomnán being the author of this poem, though there seems nothing linguistically or thematically which would go against the idea. Two pieces of evidence can be called up in his favour. First, the poem clearly borrows from, and is based on, the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, and must be later than its time. The opening section imitates the opening of the Preface to the *Amra*. There is a strong overlap in imagery and even vocabulary between it and the *Amra*.[3] It also continues the idea of *snádud*, protection, in the otherworld, a theme we have met in both Beccán and

the *Amra*. At the same time, the work displays the hand of someone acquainted with the Bible and willing more or less to transfer passages from it, a literary habit we have seen in the Latin poems in this collection, but rarely in the Irish ones. It seems to echo two sections of the Bible in particular: Wisdom 3:1 (line 13), a text which we suggested above supplies the thematic framework for the *Amra*, and Revelation 4 (lines 9–12).[4] At any rate, whoever wrote this work was well acquainted with biblical texts and the *Amra*. While this does not preference Adomnán as the author above anyone else, it certainly adds to the attraction of the identification.

One other feature of the poem should be mentioned: it does not seem to be a very skilful composition, by early Irish poetic standards. It shows little of the artistry of either Dallán or Beccán: though good enough at alliteration, the poet seems oblivious of any of the stress patternings Dallán employs, or anything which might be called metre. This might suggest the hand of a non-professional poet at work, striving to imitate the work of Dallán. The way we understand the composition, as well, seems to demand that the meaning snakes among a series of parenthetical statements to form one sentence, in what seems to us (though we wouldn't press the point) a highly Latinate fashion. Certainly it is not usual in a poem in the vernacular.

ADOMNÁN THE POET

Adomnán by now needs almost no introduction. Alongside the religious and diplomatic successes of his abbacy, his main literary claim to fame has been as a Latin writer, the biographer of Columba and the author of a book on the Holy Places of the Bible. In both these he shows extraordinary intelligence, curiosity, awareness of the world about him, and wide literary learning. In the life of Columba, in particular, he also displays his own deep personal devotion to his predecessor and patron. It would be no surprise if he too, like Dallán and Beccán before him, invoked Columba's name for protection in the city of God. Adomnán had a deep conviction that Columba was a citizen of that kingdom, held in high esteem. He describes Columba after his death:

Being, in the language of the scriptures, added to the fathers as

> a sharer in eternal triumphs, united to apostles and prophets,
> and joined to the number of white-robed saints who have washed
> their robes in the blood of the Lamb, he attends the Lamb his
> leader.[5]

Most attention has focused on the verifiable prose works of
Adomnán, and a few other works attributed to him.[6] There has been
little or no serious discussion of Adomnán as a possible poet. This is
probably because, of the many poems attributed to him, few have any
likelihood of being his work. Most of them belong both linguistically
and thematically to a later period in the Irish church. James Carney
has argued that one poem which describes the contents of a satchel
holding a multitude of relics, such as Brigit's hair-shirt and Donnán
of Eigg's knee-cap, is a genuine product of the abbot's hand, but the
brand of piety and the development of the relic-cult in that poem both
make it too late for the seventh century.[7]

More promising candidates are the verses in Adomnán's voice
contained in the tenth-century *Life of Adomnán*.[8] The most recent
editors of the text note that this poetry probably came from Iona to
Kells, where the *Life* was written.[9] While 'not particularly archaic', the
view has been expressed from time to time that these verses are
the work of Adomnán himself.[10] If they are not his, it is most likely that
they come from stories about Adomnán circulating in Iona in the
centuries after his death. With the exception of one item of vocabulary,
there is nothing stylistically or thematically held in common among
these verses and the 'Prayer'.

Since it is at least vaguely possible that Adomnán composed these
verses, it seems best to include them briefly here, with a short dis-
cussion. The first set deals with the death of Bruide mac Bili, the king
of the Picts who defeated the Northumbrians at the battle of Necht-
ansmere (Dunnichen in Forfarshire) in 685, and he died in 693. The
legend told in the *Life of Adomnán* describes how the abbot brought
the king's corpse, which had been taken to Iona for burial, back to
life, but being rebuked by 'an unsympathetic member of the faithful',
uttered a blessing over the body, which then died again, Bruide's soul
going to heaven. The verses attributed to Adomnán follow this. We
give them below in a restored form in which one might argue for their
attribution to Adomnán (consult the notes for the manuscript version).

Mór do ingantu do-[g]ní,	Great the wonders He performs,
in Rí génair ó M[a]ir[i]:	the King who is born of Mary:
[écc do Bruide mac Bili,	death for Bruide mac Bile,
betha scuabán i mM[a]ili.]	the life of little sheaves in Mull.
Is annam,	It is strange,
íar mbeith i rríge thuaithe:	after ruling a kingdom:
ceppán cauë crín dara	a small ruined hollow of oak
im mac ríg Ala Cluaith[e].[11]	about the son of Dumbarton's king.

Translating the first verse in this way makes some sense of the cryptic mention of *scuabán*, taken here as 'little sheaves (of grain)'. It is the contrast between ever-renewable nature, represented by the burgeoning harvest on Mull, and the finality of human death. Both are encompassed within the will and operation of Christ the King. It seems an appropriate reflection from a monastic community on the life of a king who was probably an associate of the Iona monks. The verses have historical significance, too: only from them do we know that Bruide's father Bile was the same as the Beli who ruled the kingdom of Strathclyde in the early seventh century. The implication of the story in which the poem is set is that Bruide was at least thought to have been buried in Iona.

The other verse in Adomnán's voice in the *Life* is a pleasing quatrain on being buried in Iona. There is again nothing particularly ancient about it, and it could easily be by any Iona monk attached to the place. It might be worth mentioning, though, that Adomnán frequently does use a Latin equivalent of the Irish *fótán*, 'little sod/spot', found in this verse. It is *terrula*, in the *Life of Columba*.[12] In one place, indeed, he uses it to describe Iona, where his prayers, angels, and God's favour drive demons away from 'the region of this little land' (*de huius terrulae … regione*).[13] It is one of the marks of Adomnán's style that he has a fondness for diminutives. The first set of verses also have two diminutives: *scuabán* and *ceppán*. For good measure, here is the other verse, in the translation of its most recent editors:

Má ro-m-thoiccthi écc i n(dh)Í,	If I be destined to die in Iona,
ba gabál di thrócari.	it were a merciful leavetaking.
Nícon fettar fo nim glas	I know not under the blue sky
fóttán bad ferr fri tiugbás.	a better little spot for death.[14]

In the prayer we edit below, Adomnán also uses the idea of destiny, or good fortune, *tocud*. The idea of an appointed place to die, a place for one's resurrection in Christian thinking, or in native Irish tradition one's *fót báis*, 'sod of death', is also an idea which crops up in Adomnán's Latin work. In the *Life of Columba*, the saint converts an old man on the isle of Skye, and predicts:

> My children, strange to tell, today on this bit of ground of this place [*alicuius loci terrulam*] a certain pagan old man, who has preserved natural goodness throughout his whole life, will be baptised, and will die, and will be buried.[15]

Other similar predictions are made in VC i, 20 and i, 45. This motif was to enjoy a long life in Irish folk-lore, both secular and ecclesiastical.[16] Much later, Adomnán was further associated with the motif in being credited with a poem on 'the three little sods one cannot avoid … the sod of birth, the sod of death, and the sod of burial.'[17]

For both poems, then, a case can be made for Adomnán's authorship, even if it is a slender one. These rhymed, syllabic poems are, of course, quite different from the alliterative style of *Colum Cille co Día domm eráil*. There is no reason, though, why the inventive, intelligent abbot of Iona could not have turned his hand to different types of metre, especially when one considers how imitative of the *Amra* the 'Prayer' is. It is at least pleasant to think of the little verse above being Adomnán's, wishing for a death on his island, and the poem below, imploring his patron Columba for guidance into heaven.

Colum Cille co
Día domm eráil

COLUM CILLE CO DÍA DOMM ERÁIL[18]
(The Prayer of Adomnán)

Columb Cille
co Día domm eráil
hi tías – ní mos-tías –
(tocud íar már,
5   muí, mo chélmaine)
buidne co aingel airm
(ainm huí násadaig Néil,
ní súail snádud)
Sïone co harchangliu hÉil,
10   i ndingnaib Dé Athar,
etir comslechtaib cethri sen find fichet fírién,
fo-chanat ríched ríg rúinig ruithnigthi;
núal nád ránic, nád rocma –
recht muí, mo Chríst,
15   cumachtach col.

May Colum Cille
commend me to God
when I go – may I not go soon –
(after great good fortune,
it is mine, my prophecy)
to the place of the angel host
(the name of Níall's famous descendant,
not small its protection)
to the archangels of God in Sion,
in the strongholds of God the Father,
among the ranks of the twenty-four fair justified elders
who praise the heaven of the mysterious, splendid King;
lamentation has not reached them, does not touch them –
it is mine by right, my Christ,
of my powerful sins.

COMMENTARY

We have been following throughout the Irish poems in this collection the development of the relationship between Columba and his monks, from his contemporary admirer Dallán through to Beccán's belief in him as a constant protector. With Adomnán we have the opportunity to explore this theme in a different way. In Adomnán we have a scholar, a writer who has always seemed attractive to his readers, though many have found themselves puzzled by aspects of his portrait of his subject, full as it is of tall tales and miracles. Whatever else we say about Adomnán and his motives in writing a life of Columba, it must be remembered above all that his feelings about his subject, far from being detached, were strong and personal. He gives us some extraordinary glimpses of what he felt about his patron, about the relationship between them, and about his experiments with that relationship.

Already around 600, as we have seen, Dallán was giving testimony to the powers of Columba's grave:

> You find his grave good in its virtue
> appointed for every trouble of weather. (*Amra* VII. 18–19)

At the end of that poem, Dallán also pleads for the intervention of Columba after his death. Beccán likewise testifies to a belief in both worldly and otherworldly help from his patron. Adomnán was deeply interested in Columba's powers after death, and he displays this interest in a number of stories which he wove into his range of narratives about the saint's virtues. In this, he was unusual among Irish hagiographers of the time, most of whom show little or no interest in stories about miracles performed by the saint after death, or in the power of the saint's relics.[19]

That is not to say that Christian Ireland had not begun to make that radical shift in belief to a world sewn to heaven by the bodies of the blessed dead, so powerfully described by Peter Brown.[20] That this belief was part of the common language of Christians is illustrated by the letter on the dating of Easter, already referred to, sent by Cummian to the Iona clerics, the abbot Ségéne and the hermit Beccán. In trying to persuade them to change to the Roman dating, he tells them that some Irish churchmen had gone to Rome and seen how all other

nations shared a dating for Easter different from that of the Irish. The power of relics is then invoked:

> And so they testified to us before the holy relics, saying: 'As far as we know, this Easter is celebrated throughout the whole world.' And we have tested that the power of God is in the relics of the holy martyrs and in the writings which they brought back. We saw with our own eyes a totally blind girl opening her eyes at these relics, and a paralytic walking and many demons cast out.[21]

But it really seems to be Adomnán whom we first see developing a taste for, and a discourse about, the power of the blessed dead in this world. He does it particularly in two sections of his *Life of Columba*, specially set off from the rest of the work. The first is in a second preface to the whole text, in which he describes Columba's miraculous powers. Having done so, he begins to tell of two instances of the intervention of the saint in the world of violence and blood-shed, after his death. The two miracles are a good pair: the one illustrates what Columba would do for a Christian king; the other, what he would do for murderous brigands who would call on his name. At both ends of the spectrum, Columba's assistance could be obtained.

Adomnán shows signs that he is aware of doing something different. He is very careful to give for these posthumous miracles good pedigrees, clear witnesses. Oswald's vision has a particularly sound basis: 'This was confidently narrated to me, Adomnán, by my predecessor, our abbot Faílbe. He asserted that he had heard the vision from the mouth of king Oswald himself, relating it to abbot Ségéne.' The other miracle is even better provided, for even were it not true, Adomnán seems to suggest, the same sort of thing was going on all over the place. He seems to have heard the story so many times, from so many different people, that he need not even detail the sources.

Adomnán shows the same concern for proof in his other section of posthumous miracles, in Book II of the *Life of Columba*.[22] This time, though, he is more personal, for most of these miracles were witnessed by the author himself, and show the very intimate way in which he viewed the relationship between himself and his predecessor and patron. The earlier miracles showed Columba's protection of kings and

criminals; this set shows his concern for his own flock, for the churches under his care. They come at the end of the book on miracles of power, and Adomnán tells us that his purpose in describing them is at least partially to demonstrate that the sort of miracles the book recounts – of protection from plague and the elements, and especially of changes of wind – belong not just to the past, but to the verifiable present.

Adomnán is involved in all these miracles. Indeed, in the first of them he seems to play a part in the experiment which sees the elders of Iona, in a time of drought, using the belongings of Columba to invoke his aid.

> We formed a plan, and decided upon this course: that some of our elders should go round the plain that had lately been ploughed and sown, taking with them the white tunic of Saint Columba, and books in his own handwriting; and should three times raise and shake in the air that tunic, which he wore in the hour of his departure from the flesh; and should open his books and read from them, on the hill of the angels, where at one time the citizens of the heavenly country were seen descending to confer with the holy man.[23]

This ceremony links the Iona monks quite clearly to the inheritance of early medieval Europe in their belief in the presence and patronage of the dead man. The practice they decide to adopt is not pure invention; they had found that it was used in Italy in times of drought in the influential *Dialogues* of St Gregory the Great.[24] But they did not engage in pure imitation. It was important to them, not just to wave the saint's tunic about, as the *Dialogues* depict people in Lombardy doing with the tunic of St Euthychius, but also to use possessions close to the saint's own lifestyle, his books, and to ground the ceremony in a place which was special to Columba, a place already noted as one where the division between heaven and earth had been thinned.

The same practice of using the saint's relics, his clothes and books, and of invoking his name, is used in one of the wind miracles, to guarantee good weather for an important and difficult journey. But on two other occasions it is only the saint's name which is invoked, though

here, curiously, the saint comes near to being satirised. Stranded by wind, the travellers begin to insult Columba:

> Is this hindrance that opposes us pleasing to you, holy one? Till now, we have expected some consolation of help in our labours to be given by you, with God's favour, since we imagined that you were in somewhat high honour with God.[25]

This sort of familiarity is repeated by the elders of Iona in the third miracle, speeding them home to celebrate the saint's feast day. In this case, the saint's care for his monks becomes bound into their very identity as a community, since they are trying to return to the base of that community, Iona, on its most special day, 9 June, the Feast of St Columba. The continuance of God's favour for that saint in that place is described at the very end of the *Life*:

> And even after the departure of his most gentle soul from the tabernacle of the body, this same heavenly brightness, as well as the frequent visits of holy angels, does not cease, down to the present day, to appear at the place in which his holy bones repose; as is established through being revealed to certain elect persons.[26]

The final posthumous miracle Adomnán describes in Book II is at once the most general and the most personal. It deals with the plague, and Columba's protection of his monasteries and his monks from it. Only by means of this protection, according to Adomnán, can it be explained that the Gaels in Northern Britain and the Picts are the only people in Europe not to have been stricken with the plague, since Columba's monasteries are so highly honoured in these places .But it is not just a blanket protection, for Adomnán has felt its security: travelling with companions in the plague-struck lands of the English, they were preserved from harm.

Plague was an affliction which devastated seventh-century Europe, as Adomnán noted, speaking of 'the plague that twice in our times ravaged the greater part of the surface of the earth.' The first time, presumably, was in the 660s, when large numbers of churchmen died from the disease. The other occasion was in the 680s, a time in which children and young people were dying in Ireland. For Columba to

protect his people from such a fate was a great thing, a protection, ultimately, from death and fear.

Adomnán's belief in the saints did not stop at invoking their aid in time of personal or communal need. Their assistance appears to be sewn into the fabric of his Law of the Innocents (p. 33 above). Alongside the guarantors both clerical and royal whose names are listed in the text of the law we now have – a list which has been shown to be genuine – is a list of the saints whose guarantee is invoked for the Law. All these saints are to be invoked along with twenty maledictive psalms (psalms which contain fierce language about the defeat of the wicked, for instance). This too has the mark of Adomnán; remember how, in a more positive vein, wanting a favourable wind, he and his fellow travellers had 'adopted the plan of laying garments and books of the blessed man upon the altar, with psalms and fasting, and invocation of his name'.[27] Adomnán, then, a practical man as well as a thinker, attempted in his Law to officialise the protecting relationship between the dead and the living.

All these instances of Adomnán's belief in a continuing friendship and familiarity between the saints and living, struggling sinners shed an important light on his 'Prayer'. That poem is the final stitch in a seam that links law, the life of the community, the health of the nations, and the benificence of the elements to the patronage and favour of Columba, since in it he calls on the saint to help him after his death. Beccán and Dallán had both called on Columba to this end as well, and it is no surprise to find echoes of theme and language from Adomnán's predecessors in his poetry. But there is something in Adomnán's confident tone which sets it apart. His conviction of Columba's power, of his nearness, of his friendship, means that not even his own 'powerful sins' can keep him from joining the ranks of the just, in the place where 'lamentation has not reached them, does not touch them.'

Cantemus in omni die

A round AD 700 a scholarly monk of Iona by the name of Cú Chuimne, 'Hound of Memory', wrote a hymn to Our Lady.[1] A preface in Old Irish and Latin added subsequently says that it was written 'in the time of Loingsech mac Óengusso and of Adomnán'.[2] This hymn is not the only work we have from Cú Chuimne's pen, for together with Rubin of Dair-Inis he composed the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (see above, p. 31).

As authors of the *Hibernensis*, Cú Chuimne and Rubin shared a concern for the ongoing reform of the church. Their work was especially appreciated by reforming bishops and monks in Europe because of its insistence on such principles as the freedom of the church from the secular authority, the rights of the papacy, the indissolubility of marriage, the prohibition of simony, the duties of the clergy and so on.

It is possible that this reforming zeal was only manifested later in Cú Chuimne's life. The preface to his hymn in the Irish *Liber Hymnorum* suggests that he had abandoned his studies as a young man to live a life of vice, only becoming an ascetic monk later in life, having repented. Indeed, the cause of the composition of the hymn is said to have been 'to free him from the evil life in which he lived, for he had a wife and lived a bad life with her.'[3] This might be confirmed by the verse in *AU* 747, 'All [the distraction] Cú Chuimne had has left him, so that he became a sage.' The concluding stanzas of *Cantemus* certainly manifest a sense of sin and its consequences, and therefore of our need of grace and mercy for salvation.

Cú Chuimne may also have written poetry in Irish, for there is a quatrain attributed to him in the *Glossary* compiled by the bishop-king of Cashel, Cormac mac Cuilennain (d. 908).[4] It may be a later addition to the original *Glossary*, but the poem with its obscure vocabulary may well date from Cú Chuimne's time.[5] Here is the poem, with the translation by Whitley Stokes:

Manibad airmitiu níe,	Unless there is honour of evil,
níp indemain fochlach fóe:	not unsafe is a seated chieftain:
beith dam for crocann ngamnáin	for me to be on a yearling calf's skin
i tig Garbáin bid gnóe.	in Garbán's house is delightful.[6]

It appears to be a poem about a cleric's acceptance of royal hospitality. As long as a cleric or monk is not honouring or condoning evil, the company of a 'seated chieftain' is not a threat to his sanctity, and he can enjoy his hospitality without anxiety. However, such a poem would only make sense if there were some question in the poet's mind about whether it was a good thing for a monk to be sitting around on royal rugs. If it is true that Cú Chuimne later repented of 'the evil life in which he lived', as the preface to *Cantemus* says, then perhaps it is exactly this life-style which he had to repent of, and this quatrain is to be seen as a temporary and ultimately unsuccesful attempt at self-justification.

Kenney considers *Cantemus* to be 'the finest example of extant Hiberno-Latin versification'.[7] The Latin of Cú Chuimne is innocent of the deliberate obscurity of the Latin which we found in the *Altus prosator*. The metre is a popular one with Irish poets, and shows careful attention to accent, alliteration and rhyme.[8] Thus the last words of the second and fourth lines of each stanza have trisyllabic rhyme:

1 *varie*, M*arie*
2 M*ariam*, vic*ariam*
3 D*omini*, h*omini*, and so on.

There are also regular rhymes and assonances which bind the end of the third line of a stanza to the beginning or the interior of the fourth, thus:

1 conclamantes deo *dignum*
   ymnum sanctae Mariae

2   ut vox pulset omnem *aurem*
    per *laudem* vicariam
7   per mulieris virt*utem*
    ad sal*utem* rediit
11 ut simus deo perf*ecti*
    susc*epti* per Mariam

This form of 'binding' rhyme, which is a peculiarly Irish develop-ment, only begins to appear in Irish poetry in the eighth century as far as we can tell from surviving sources, so this is an early example of the technique. The medieval Irish metrists, or poetic theoreticians, called this form *aicill*.[9]

In our poem we also find a regular use of rhyme within lines, such as in the following stanzas:

3   oport*unam* dedit c*uram*
4   quod con*ceptum* et sus*ceptum*
9   pro qua s*ani* Christi*ani*
13 ut fru*amur* et scrip*amur*

Most of these rhymes within lines are in the third line of the stanza, but there are exceptions such as (stanza 11) 'loric*am* et galli*am*', but they are infrequent and rhyme less fully.

The author also makes extensive use of alliteration, a form of orna-ment characteristic of vernacular Irish poetry now being introduced into Latin verse:

1   deo dignum
4   prius paterno
8   Maria mater miranda
10 Tunicam per totum textam

Finally, the work itself tells us how it was to be used: not as a private prayer of devotion but as a hymn for the whole monastic community to sing. As in monastic liturgies even today, the community at prayer was divided in two halves which probably sat or stood facing each other and sang *chorus contra chorum*, one side against the other in alternating couplets or verses, as indicated by stanza 2: *bis per chorum hinc et inde*, and a later gloss on the previous stanza confirms this manner of singing: 'i.e. between two choirs.' So these verses would flow back and forth, like the rise and fall of waves, from one side of the church to the other, in the long monastic hours of prayer.

From these details emerges the outline of Cú Chuimne as a scholar, a repentant sinner, a reformer and an accomplished poet. The warm devotion to the Virgin which is apparent in this prayer is typical not only of the Celtic churches but of the whole Christian world at that time, from Ireland to Syria. The language and imagery, as we shall see, are part of the tradition of the Fathers that was universally both familiar and popular.

Cantemus in omni die

CANTEMUS IN OMNI DIE

1   Cantemus in omni die
concinentes varie
conclamantes deo dignum
ymnum sanctae Mariae

2   Bis per chorum hinc et inde
collaudemus Mariam
ut vox pulset omnem aurem
per laudem vicariam

3   Maria de tribu Iudae
summi mater Domini
oportunam dedit curam
egrotanti homini

4   Gabriel aduexit verbum
sinu prius paterno
quod conceptum et susceptum
in utero materno

5   Haec est summa haec est sancta
virgo venerabilis
quae ex fide non recessit
sed exstetit stabilis

6   Huic matri nec inventa
ante nec post similis
nec de prole fuit plane
humanae originis

7   Per mulierem et lignum
mundus prius periit
per mulieris virtutem
ad salutem rediit

Let us sing every day,
harmonising in turns,
together proclaiming to God
a hymn worthy of holy Mary.

In two-fold chorus, from side to side,
let us praise Mary,
so that the voice strikes every ear
with alternating praise.

Mary of the Tribe of Judah,
Mother of the Most High Lord,
gave fitting care
to languishing mankind.

Gabriel first brought the Word
from the Father's bosom
which was conceived and received
in the Mother's womb.

She is the most high, she the holy
venerable Virgin
who by faith did not draw back,
but stood forth firmly.

None has been found, before or since,
like this mother –
not out of all the descendants
of the human race.

By a woman and a tree
the world first perished;
by the power of a woman
it has returned to salvation.

8   Maria mater miranda
patrem suum edidit
per quem aqua late lotus
totus mundus credidit

9   Haec concepit margaretam
non sunt vana somnia
pro qua sani Christiani
vendunt sua omnia

10   Tunicam per totum textam
Christi mater fecerat
quae peracta Christi morte
sorte statim steterat

11   Induamus arma lucis
loricam et galiam
ut simus deo perfecti
suscepti per Mariam

12   Amen Amen adiuramus
merita puerperae
ut non possit flamma pirae
nos dirae decepere

13   Christi nomen invocemus
angelis sub testibus
ut fruamur et scripamur
litteris celestibus

Mary, amazing mother,
gave birth to her Father,
through whom the whole wide world,
washed by water, has believed.

She conceived the pearl
– they are not empty dreams –
for which sensible Christians
have sold all they have.

The mother of Christ had made
a tunic of a seamless weave;
Christ's death accomplished,
it remained thus by casting of lots.

Let us put on the armour of light,
the breastplate and helmet,
that we might be perfected by God,
taken up by Mary.

Truly, truly, we implore,
by the merits of the Child-bearer,
that the flame of the dread fire
be not able to ensnare us.

Let us call on the name of Christ,
below the angel witnesses,
that we may delight and be inscribed
in letters in the heavens.

THE THIRD PERSON

The whole hymn, it will be noticed, is addressed not by the solitary praying soul to Mary, but by a chorus of singers to one another in a tone of mutual exhortation – 'Let us sing!' 'Let us praise Mary!' and then in a narration of the wonderful things that she has done and that have been done by God through her – 'she did not draw back', 'she gave birth to her Father', 'she conceived the pearl', and so on. Not once is Mary actually addressed in the second person. The language of the singers reflects the manner of the hymn's usual utterance: by a body of monks singing together in choir. They pray, as it were, by exhortation and narration to each other. So we have a sense of communion with Mary and with God, the result of prayer, achieved by this communion with one another in choral recitation. The medieval monk did not need to feel that he could only attend to God by ceasing to attend to his fellows: on the contrary, here we see that his communion with God in prayer is enhanced precisely by the way he attends to his brethren, in communion with them.

It is not possible, in orthodox Christian theology, to drive a wedge between the 'vertical' and the 'horizontal', between one's union with God and one's union with other men and women. The mainstream tradition, among ascetics and hermits and among ordinary Christians, has always sought the integration of the two. Even among the early Desert Fathers who valued solitude and were called to 'flee women and bishops', there are countless tales told of the futility of a monk seeking mystical union with God if he is not merciful and attentive to his brother. 'When two or three are gathered in my name,' Jesus told his disciples, he would be there in their midst. So the hymn of Cú Chuimne, written as a conversation-in-song between brethren, expresses a confidence in the presence of God in the presence of people to each other.

Thus the monk did not seek to enter heaven on his own. To be a Christian was to be a member of a body, or a citizen of the heavenly city, and not simply to enjoy some personal state of mind or inner conviction. In this communion of the living and the dead, people administered God's grace and mercy to each other. Thus one's salvation depended on other people, not just on the self-possessed, self-sufficient individual in his or her response to God's law.

MARY AND SALVATION

What is the role of Mary in human salvation envisaged by this hymn? Later medieval hymnody and devotional writing tended to concentrate the attention of the faithful on the place of Mary stricken by grief at the foot of the cross or at the tomb. This was 'the hour when the son of Man was glorified' (John 13:31), when salvation was finally accomplished. To pray to Mary in this context was to enter imaginatively and compassionately into her sorrow at the moment of salvation, which was itself *compassio*, suffering with the Son. So Mary was a locus of salvation for those who sought to 'die with Christ' by contemplating the Five Wounds of Christ, or the Seven Sorrows of Mary, or even the instruments of the Passion – pliers, hammer, spear and so on.[10]

But such focusing on Mary's place – and the believer's place – in the crucifixion and death of Christ is not characteristic of the devotional imagery of western Christianity in our period, the seventh and early eighth centuries. It is significant, for example, that early medieval Irish depictions of the crucified Christ, when other figures are involved at all, do not portray Mary or John weeping and witnessing at the foot of the cross as later medieval images did. Instead they depict Longinus, who pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and Stephaton, who offered him a sponge of vinegar on the end of a reed.[11] In Old Irish literature there is an exception to this rule: a poem by Blathmac, dated around 750–70, in which this theme of compassion is central. For Blathmac the believer will find salvation from the judgement of God by weeping, or *keening*, with Mary, thereby entering into the saving power of Christ's Passion:

> Come to me, loving Mary,
> that I may keen with you your very dear one.
> Alas that your son should go to the cross,
> he who was a great diadem, a beautiful hero.[12]

But this poem is, we believe, unique in what survives from our period. The great bulk of early medieval devotion to Mary in western literature and art sees her not as the co-sufferer at the crucifixion, but as the God-bearer, the *Theotokos*, at the centre of the mystery of the Incarnation. It is partly for this reason that mariology was so important

an issue in the early centuries of the church. The claim that Mary was the Mother of God was a stumbling-block to those who could not accept the church's teaching that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Mariology was closely linked to Christology.

Such is the imagery of the *Cantemus*. Mary is celebrated as 'Mother of the most high Lord'. Her place in the story of salvation is not primarily at the crucifixion when Christ conquers death, but in the Incarnation when Divine nature and human nature are conjoined in one person. So the hymn tells of Gabriel's role in her conception of Jesus, and some of the extraordinarily fertile imagery of early medieval mariology is employed. The bosom of God the Father, for example, is paralleled with the womb of Mary (stanza 4), for both the Father and Mary have borne him, one eternally and one in time. Mary is portrayed (stanza 7) as the New Eve who, by her obedience to the will of God, undoes the harm wrought by the disobedience of the first Eve. So the world perished by a woman, and is now restored through a woman. Thus also Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386): 'Since through the virgin Eve came death, it is fitting that through a Virgin, or rather from a Virgin, should life appear. That as a serpent had deceived the one, so Gabriel might bring good tidings to the other.'[13]

If the connection of Mary with Eve is a common one in the early Fathers, so is that between the Tree of forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, by which death came to the world, and the Tree of the Cross, by which death was conquered. In our hymn this connection is hinted at in stanza 7 where the fall comes 'By a woman and by a tree'. Salvation by a woman's power is made explicit in the second line, but the salvific role of the Tree in salvation is only implied, though it would have been quite familiar to the Iona monks.

Mary is also, in effect, an oyster: in stanza 9 'she conceived the pearl for which sensible Christians have sold all they have.' This is unusual, as most discussion of pearls in connection with her describes Mary herself as the pearl, not Jesus. Ephrem says to her: 'Thou dost not hide thyself in thy barrenness, Pearl! With love of thee is the merchant ravished',[14] and Methodius of Olympus (d. 311) calls her 'the most precious pearl of the kingdom'.[15] But there are also precedents, such as Hesychius, for the image of Mary as an oyster, a 'mother of pearl', who bears Jesus, the true pearl.[16]

However, the Gospel passage about the pearl of great price, which Cú Chuimne refers to in stanza 9, is actually not about the person of Jesus. It is about the Kingdom of Heaven: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it' (Matthew 13:45).

Cú Chuimne implies, then, that Mary has not only brought forth Jesus, but the very Kingdom of God which is personified in him. For the sake of this kingdom, this pearl, the Christian must be prepared to lose everything. In particular such a theology of dispossession lay behind the Irish attraction to *peregrinatio,* in which the ascetic would leave home, lands, family and wealth, and seek salvation on a distant island. Such a verse must have warmed the hearts of Iona monks who thought of themselves precisely as people who had abandoned all they had to follow Christ.

The sense of Mary's importance for man's salvation is clearly focused in this hymn. Mary's *'fiat'* uttered to Gabriel at the beginning of Luke's Gospel is not treated merely as a sign of her own docility or personal holiness: it is seen as the consent which enabled the Incarnation to take place, and therefore made possible the salvation of all mankind. In this sense she can be spoken of, in a perfectly orthodox way, as the *Mediatrix*, as a co-redeemer, and so on. 'By the power of a woman the world has returned to salvation' (stanza 7).

The hymn, like most of the Marian devotion of its time, places great confidence in the powers of Mary to save. But her role in mankind's salvation is not an alternative to salvation by Christ. She does not operate outside the dispensation of God's grace made manifest in Christ, but is rather part of that dispensation. So all her attributes in this hymn show her not as an independent *salvatrix*, but as God's chosen instrument by whom he offers salvation to the world: his salvation, by the Word which took flesh in her womb. So the hymn concludes in Christocentric mode, calling on the name of Christ (stanza 13). Mary's role is not one of superseding Christ, but of drawing the believer to him or, as the eleventh stanza says, the believer is 'perfected by God, taken up by Mary'. All salvation is ultimately a matter of God's grace. As Julian of Norwich was to express it centuries later, 'all the help we have of her

is of his Goodness.' Medieval hymnody and devotional writing about the Blessed Virgin does not imagine Mary as an alternative to the grace and mercy of God. The assumption was always that whatever she had to offer was part of that gracious gift that God offers continually. She was necessary for salvation, just as were the Gospel, the sacraments, sound preaching and so on, as one of God's gifts.

Some of the most unusual imagery concerning Mary which gained popularity at this period is rooted in that central Christian doctrine of the Word made Flesh. Dramatic images reflect the inversion of the order of Creator and Creation: the eternal enters into time and space, the creator becomes a creature, the Father of all becomes a child at his mother's breast, and the Almighty becomes weak and helpless – such imagery is central to the Gospel and to attempts in subsequent Christian literature to express astonished belief in the Incarnation. This is the theme dramatically expressed in stanza 8: 'Mary, amazing mother, gave birth to her Father!'[17] She is the Mother of God, yet God is the Father of all. This is a strange but common theme in medieval devotion, perhaps echoing Augustine, who writes of Christ: 'He is created of her, whom He created.'[18] The eleventh council of Toledo (675) expressed the mystery in equally dramatic and concise form, declaring that Christ was both Father and Son of the Blessed Virgin.[19] The theme reappears in an eleventh-century poem in Irish ascribed to Colum Cille: 'Pray with me to powerful Christ, who is thy Father and thy Son.'[20]

Other influences on Cú Chuimne's hymn include the biblical apocrypha. In stanza 10 we find a reference to the story that Mary herself had woven Jesus' seamless garment for which the soldiers had cast lots under the cross. The casting of lots for a seamless garment is biblical,[21] but that it was a purple garment woven seamlessly by Christ's mother is told in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* which was read in Ireland:

> And when they came to the place of execution, Jesus was deprived of his garment, a purple tunic that Mary made for him, and it is not known of what stuff it was … then the Jews divided his garments by casting lots. To Pilate fell the tunic which Mary had made for Christ.[22]

Apocryphal Gospels, Passion narratives and other materials were popular reading in medieval Ireland, as they were elsewhere in Europe. Some of the stories they told were not particularly edifying, such as the story of the young Jesus cursing a child who had annoyed him, in the Irish *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*: 'the boy fell over and died straight away.'[23] Sometimes the tales also reflected unorthodox theological beliefs,[24] but they also provided a good deal of imaginative padding to the Gospels – what happened to Pilate and Longinus after the crucifixion, where Jesus' seamless robe came from, what happened when Christ descended into hell, and so on. Thus the devout were offered a series of stories and teachings to enrich their reflections on the life and death of Jesus.

Such non-canonical writings were widely used, probably in Ireland more than anywhere else in Europe, especially after the fixing of the New Testament canon in the fourth century.[25] Once the canon was fixed, the apocrypha were treated with less suspicion, as they were no longer seen as contenders for canonicity or as a threat to the faith. Apocryphal texts were quoted by many of the great theologians: Hugo of Saint-Cher, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas and many others.[26] There is no evidence that there was any attempt to raise them to the level of sacred scripture, nor that they necessarily inspired heretical or deviant beliefs. The Irish, like everyone else, were evidently able to use and enjoy such fanciful tales without fear of being led astray.

The image in stanza 10 of Mary as the weaver of Christ's seamless robe is, no doubt, basically a form of the imaginative 'padding' that we have described. But perhaps it is also, in the usual Christocentric vein, an echo of one of the images of the Incarnation that we find in the writings of the early Fathers: that Mary 'wove' the flesh of Jesus in her womb.

PROTECTING POWER

It is sometimes suggested that Celtic Christians lacked that sense of the fallenness of the world which is apparent in the writings of other Christians. But this hymn describes the world as having 'perished' (stanza 7) and humanity as 'languishing' (stanza 3). The writer's main

concern is that he should be saved 'from the flame of the dread fire' (stanza 12) and taken to heaven. There is no indication at all of any eschatological optimism, easy confidence in the future and in one's salvation. When the wishful thinking of modern writers asks rhetorically of Celtic Christianity, 'Where was original sin and the alleged corruption of nature? Where the need for a redeemer?'[27] the Iona monks themselves answer, 'Here!'

This hymn, like the great majority of the texts we have from the early centuries of Irish Christianity, speaks not in optimism but in hope; not out of some bland assurance that everything is alright, really, but out of confidence in the grace of God and in his power to save a fallen world. Cú Chuimne senses that he lives in a world of danger, both material and spiritual, from which he needs protection: hence the armour and breastplate and helmet of stanza 11. These three pieces of military hardware all appear in Paul's epistles as necessary equipment for the Christian,[28] and the second, the breastplate or *lorica*, became a common term in medieval Ireland for certain kinds of prayer which were recited for protection from dangers.[29] But no one needs a *lorica* who is safe, surrounded by friends or benevolent forces. What this hymn, like countless others, indicates is a belief in the Fall, the brokenness of the world, and the need of the believer to have confidence not in himself, nor in the world, but in the love and mercy of God.

Part Three

'THE ALPHABET OF DEVOTION'

.

'The Alphabet of Devotion'

In this part, separate from the poems which seem to have a firm connection with early Iona, we include a short work on the religious life by a contemporary of Columba. Colmán mac Béognae[1] is famous primarily as the founder of the monastery of Lann Elo, now Lynally in Co. Offaly in the midlands of Ireland. From his association with that monastery he acquired his traditional name, Colmán Elo. He was the first abbot of Lann Elo, but he was also a priest and a bishop. He had studied for a time on Iona, for Adomnán tells two stories about him.[2] Indeed, we know from one of these stories that he left the island in the year of Columba's death, in 597. He may have made further travels in Scotland, for there are two places which bear his name, Kilcalmonell in Knapdale in Argyll, and Colmonell in Ayrshire, though perhaps these places were named by later monks from Lann Elo.[3] He died in 611, at the age of fifty-six.

As a younger contemporary and pupil of Columba, Colmán's religious thinking is likely to bear some resemblance to Columba's own. In the absence of a rule, or any theological or spiritual tract from the founder of Iona's hand, Colmán's text, *Apgitir Chrábaid*, 'The Alphabet of Devotion', gains a special importance as perhaps a second-hand version of Columba's philosophy. It has not always been accepted as the work of Colmán mac Béognae, but recently its ascription to the founder of Lann Elo has gained good support.[4] Pádraig P. Ó Néill has shown that the work contains no references later than 600, and seems in a few passages to describe an Ireland still

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partly pagan.[5] Indeed, he has also shown that many of the works which we know influenced Columba also influenced the author of the *Alphabet*. In particular, it draws on the works of Cassian, though it also draws on books of the Bible such as Wisdom and Proverbs for its style.

Added support for an early date could be sought also in the influence the text had on later monastic writers. The *Alphabet* is a purely spiritual work, interested only in the building of the soul of the religious man, and it does not dwell on procedural or practical matters. But later works influenced by the *Alphabet* do so, such as the eighth-century *Rule of Comgall*, which is in many ways a metrical version of much of the content of the *Alphabet*.[6] That *Rule*, and many others like it, are caught up in the problems and corruptions of the church some two hundred years after Colmán's time. These, and other reasons, especially the early language of the text, act together to give us some confidence in believing the text we translate below to be the work of Colmán mac Béognae.

But what is it, and why is it called *The Alphabet of Devotion*? The title could actually be otherwise translated, as 'The Primer of Religious Life' or 'The Fundamentals of the Monastic Life'. The title, which may well be original, sheds some light on the text's purpose: it describes the basics of living as a monk in a community. It has a particular concern with the development of the new monk's soul, with his acquisition of the virtue of discernment. In all this, it is probably inspired by Cassian. In a passage describing what happens to novice monks, the author says:

> By these practices, then, they hasten to impress and instruct those whom they are training with the alphabet [*elementis*], as it were, and first syllables in the direction of perfection, as they can clearly see by these whether they are grounded in a false and imaginary or a true humility.[7]

This sort of alphabet, then, contains the basic things a monk will need to know so that he will not be caught in the pitfalls of pride, of mistaking for virtue dressed-up vice, of self-satisfaction and sluggishness. In a seventh-century text concerning Patrick, by the bishop Tírechan, that saint is described distributing *abgitoria* and *elementa* to various of his disciples. In the past these have been translated as 'alphabet tables',

but surely Patrick was leaving them with 'the alphabet … and first syllables in the direction of perfection', rather than a basic spelling book.[8]

Ó Néill has noted a number of other ways in which Colmán's work draws on Cassian, including its emphasis on temporal rewards for the holy monk, which may be found in the *Conferences*, xxiv:26.[9] Aside from the specific points that Ó Néill notes, we might suggest our general impression that the work collates and transfers into its own idiom much of the import of what Cassian has to say in both the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*.[10] One keeps catching half-echoes, but the very different style almost prohibits finding precise quotations. For instance, certain parts of the first sections of the *Alphabet* seem to echo closely the close of book IV of the *Institutes*, the same book from which the title of the work might be taken. As mentioned, Ó Néill has suggested other sources, based on what the near-contemporary elegy for St Columba, the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, has to say about Columba's influences.[11] That poem cites Cassian, Basil and the books of wisdom and law in the Old Testament. Certainly the wisdom books are a potent influence on the *Alphabet*, in tone as well as in structure; note especially the use of triads and tetrads. St Basil is more difficult to be certain about, though certainly the opening sections of the *Alphabet*, on love of God and fear of God, have echoes of the opening chapters of Basil's longer rule, and the question and answer style of that work is certainly a feature of the *Alphabet*.

This approach, however, is necessarily inexact, because the style of the *Alphabet of Devotion* is intimately bound up in native techniques of composition as well. Herein lies part of its importance: it represents one of the first surviving texts to express Christian ideas in Irish, at any length. If it is a first attempt (which seems unlikely) it is magnificent. First of all in its vocabulary, which combines loan words with the exciting and vibrant use of native words for technical Christian terminology. Second, in its combination of the influences of Cassian and the Old Testament with the techniques of native secular political advice and legal literature. We can see this in the use of alliterative strings in its lists of vices and virtues, something echoed by advice texts like *Tecosca Cormaic*, 'The Teaching of Cormac', in which a young king, about to be inaugurated, asks advice of an older, wiser man.[12] Here is

an example from *Tecosca Cormaic*, followed by a section from *Apgitir Chrábaid*. Notice the alliteration in the originals (underlined):

> '*cid as dech do less túathe?*' '*Ní hansa,*' *ol Cormac.* '*Terchomrac dagdoíne, dála menci, menma athchomairc, fochomrac di gáethaib … sechem senchusa, senad rechtaide, rechtge la flaith …*'

>> … 'what is best for the benefit of a tribe?' 'Not difficult,' said Cormac. 'A meeting of nobles, frequent assemblies, an enquiring mind, questioning the wise … following ancient lore, a lawful synod, legality with the lord …'[13]

> *Ced as fogailsi do duiniu? Ní anse. Foss oc etlai, anbatae mbriathar, brathirse n-ailgen, ascaid la rédi, ríagol do chomalnad cen érchoíltiu, érge la cét-rair …*

>> What should be followed by people? Not difficult. Constancy at holiness, brevity of talk, tender brotherliness, requesting with calmness, fulfilling the rule without arguments, arising at first summons …

Even the use of triads and tetrads in the *Alphabet* may well originate in native techniques of organising and categorising knowledge, rather than an adaptation of biblical models. Here again are two passages, the first from a kingship advice text, *Audacht Morainn*, and the second from the *Apgitir Chrábaid*:

> … *ni fil inge cethri flathemna and: fírflaith 7 cíallflaith, flaith congbále co slogaib 7 tarbflaith.*

>> … there are only four rulers: the true ruler and the wily ruler, the ruler of occupation and the bull ruler.[14]

> *A cethair for-thugatar in fírinni .i. serc 7 omun, condarcle 7 adilcne …*

>> The four things which obscure the truth: love and fear, partiality and necessity…

There is of course a thorny problem here. We have no secular wisdom texts earlier than the *Apgitir Chrábaid*, so we cannot be sure that the style of such literature is not influenced by the *Apgitir*. After all, most wisdom texts on kingship and the like do show Christian influence.[15]

However, it seems highly unlikely that the mnemonic alliterative chains, strings of like verb forms, and other linking techniques, all employed in the advancement of patently secular ethics and known from early verse, despite the odd dash of Christian morals, is not the product of a long and pre-Christian development.

That said, overall, both in structure and in style the *Alphabet* most resembles this secular political literature, and seems to be an attempt to assert Christian ethics through the use of the same genre. This choice of genre was no doubt reinforced by the coincidental use of like techniques in the Fathers and the scriptures, but even the idea of the *Alphabet*, the elements to be given as instruction early on in the monk's career, seems very similar to the putative use of *tecosca*, 'teachings', and kingship advice texts at inaugurations and initiations. This suggests that Colmán had received some training in native versecraft.

So, the importance of the *Alphabet of Devotion* lies in a number of factors: its use of Gaelic to express Christian ethics, its combination of native and classical influences, its later use as a source for reformers. Most importantly for our purposes, it is a source for the thought-world of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, written by an important monastic founder who had connections with Iona. If we seek a sense of the monastic ethos of Columba and his early successors, it is in the *Alphabet of Devotion* that we are most likely to find it.

But the main reason to read the *Alphabet* is for the content. It is a wonderful spiritual work in its own right, showing insight and subtlety. Its emphasis on moderation is its most prominent feature, and its careful subversion of easy piety by laying similar virtues and vices side by side. It also has a special concern with justice, and with the unfailing pursuit and exposure of truth. In its honesty and its vision, it is an excellent documentation of the early Irish monastery's view of those things necessary for the progress of the human soul.

'THE ALPHABET OF DEVOTION'[16]

Faith with action, desire with constancy, calmness with devotion, chastity with humility, fasting with moderation, poverty with generosity, silence with discussion, distribution with equality, endurance without grievance, abstinence with exposure, zeal without severity, gentleness with justice, confidence without neglect, fear without despair, poverty without pride, confession without excuse, teaching with practice, progress without slipping, lowliness towards the haughty, smoothness towards the rough, work without grumbling, simpleness with wisdom, humility without partiality, the Christian life without pretence – all these are contained in holiness.

It is then that a person is holy, when he is full of divine love. He goes around with divine love. Every evil person fears him. Every good person loves him. There is respect for him on earth. There is glory in Heaven. Love God, everyone will love you. Fear God, everyone will fear you.

This, then, is the practice of the clerical life, and this is measured devotion. The one who will learn it and will fulfil it, he will have a hundredfold on earth and he will have the kingdom of Heaven.

The Lord of Heaven and earth is to be invoked and prayed to by every person to arouse fear of Him and love of Him in his heart, for a person tends to be in a state of indifference until the fear of God comes into his heart. As long as the fear will be lifeless, the repentance will be lifeless. As long as the repentance will be lifeless, the Christian life will be lifeless. For he who will not have fear of God, will not have love of God. He who will not have love of Him, will not have fulfilment of His commandment. He who will not have fulfilment of His commandment, will not have eternal life in Heaven. For fear underlies love. Love underlies holy work. Holy work underlies eternal life in Heaven.

Love of the living God cleanses the soul. It satisfies the mind. It increases rewards. It drives out vices. It despises the world. It cleanses, it concentrates thoughts.

What does the love of God do to a person? It kills his desires. It purifies his heart. It protects him. It banishes vices. It incurs rewards. It lengthens life. It cleanses the soul.

The four redemptions of the soul: fear and repentance, love and hope. Two of them protect it on earth, the other two waft it to Heaven. Fear shuts out the sins that lie ahead. Repentance wipes out the sins which come before. Love of the Creator and hope of His kingdom: that is what wafts it to Heaven. Any person, then, who will fear God and love Him, and will fulfil His desire and His commandment, will have respect in the sight of people in this world, and will be blessed with God in the next.

Of those things which a person ought to learn

What should be learned by people? Not difficult: constancy at holiness, brevity of talk, tender brotherliness, requesting with equanimity, fulfilling a rule without discussions, rising at first summons, stepping in obedience to God, merciful forgiveness, tending the sick, devotion in prayer, fasting with serenity, compassion to a neighbour, lowering of pride, simplicity from the heart, destruction of desire, overcoming nature, patience towards sufferings.

What does that do to you? Not difficult: a calling to seniority, a seat made ready, a gift from someone which you would not expect to get without struggle, many hundredfolds, friendship with brethren, eternal life in Heaven.

What should be avoided by a holy person? Not difficult: frequent anger, arrogance without talent, without substance, discourtesy towards a superior, laziness at the bell, fellowship with criminals, excess restlessness, ridiculing brethren, unclean words, roughness of reply, resistance to a prior, inaction towards a reprimand, rivalry with the monks, frequency of questioning.

What does all that do to you? Not difficult: cutting off from seniority, toil without help, lack of respect, the suspicion of people, worthless fasting, rising to the darkness, the displeasure of the patron, rejection from Heaven.

It is fitting for us if the vices should not deceive next to the virtues: for it may be that laxness deceives beside mercy; severity beside justice; lack of humility beside directness; unholy fear without defending

justice, without denouncing evil, beside humilty; stinginess and mean-
ness beside moderation; pride beside purity; vanity beside abstinence;
wastefulness and lavishness beside generosity; immoderate anger
beside spiritual zeal; great timidity and womanishness beside peace-
fulness; inflexibility and shrewdness beside stability; fretting and
restlessness beside alacrity; excess neglect and impatience beside
breadth of knowledge; laziness and idleness beside detachment; and
excess delay beside taking counsel.

The one who will be in the unity of the catholic church and in the
tranquility of the hope of Heaven, and will fulfil the commandments
as they are commanded, shall have hundredfolds on earth and will have
eternal life in Heaven.

On the desire for truth

If there is anyone who desires the truth, it is fitting that he have
proper knowledge of what conceals it and what reveals it. The truth
conceals itself from everyone who slights it. It reveals itself to everyone
who fulfils it.

The four things which obscure the truth: love and fear, partiality and
necessity. As long as a person is unjust, he cannot make truth known in
its proper form.

The three things which overtake him while he is pursuing it: pride
and arrogance and anger. If anyone can be converted by him, it
awakens pride in him; if anyone goes against him, it awakens anger and
arrogance in him. For there are many who are eager for the truth, but
they are fierce and angry while they pursue it, except for a few devout
persons.

The two things which are to be guarded against in eagerness for the
truth: anger and sluggishness, for it is a hindrance to the truth which-
ever of them happen to it. For eagerness of the truth, it is fitting that
its proper nature should be reckoned: zeal without anger, humility
without neglect.

Truth, in what form is it made known? With humility, without par-
tiality. For the truth is not partial. As to the humble one: he is not just
who is not truly humble. He is not truly wise who is not just. For true

wisdom cannot find room with injustice in a person, for the veil is thick-between them. For his justice is nearer to meeting with wisdom than is his wisdom with justice, for it is then that a person is truly wise, when he is just.

How does one speak the truth? Without bitterness, without partiality, with patience, with gentleness. Moderation and wisdom and true holiness, it is together that a person attains them. When does a person attain them? When his justice is pure. When is his justice pure? When his heart is in its proper state. It is then that truth is there as if he had not been born of a human.

Of the virtues of the soul, the beginning

The fifteen strengths of the soul: the strength of faith, the strength of gentleness, the strength of humility, the strength of patience, the strength of mortification, the strength of obedience, the strength of charity, the strength of justice, the strength of mercy, the strength of generosity, the strength of forgiveness, the strength of serenity, the strength of moderation, the strength of holiness, the strength of divine love. Any strength of those which a person may practise alongside another will reduce his probation in fire, will increase his patronage in Heaven.

When is a person able to testify to the souls of others? When he can testify to his own soul first. When is he capable of correcting others? When he can correct himself first.

A person who converts his own soul to Life, how many souls might he convert? The people of the whole world, as long as they were teachable, he could convert them to Life so that they might belong to the kingdom of Heaven. Their own stubborness and their wickedness and their restlessness drive them past the kingdom of Heaven.

The body preserves the soul, the soul preserves the mind, the mind preserves the heart, the heart preserves faith, faith preserves God, God preserves the person.

As a lantern raises its light in a dark house, so truth rises in the midst of faith in a person's heart. Four darknesses it expels when it rises there:

the darkness of paganism, the darkness of ignorance, the darkness of doubt, the darkness of sin, so that none of them can find room there.

Three persons come to the Christian life. One of them is in it, another is beside it, another is far away from it. They are not alike, moreover. It is better for the one who is in it than for the one who is beside it. It is better for the one who is beside it than for the one who is far away from it.

   The one who is in it, it is he who repays every single day the three things for which he obtains the life of his soul: the good which he heard and the good which he saw, he has loved it and has believed it and has fulfilled it.

   This is the one who is near it: the one who denies the world with his lips and professes it in his heart. He is overkeen at fasting and prayer. He has not declared war against greed and meanness. One of his hands is towards Heaven, the other towards earth.

   This is the one who is far away from it: the one who fosters the Christians but does not practise their habits on account of his status, all his life. He reckons it will be easier to practise them some other season.

Three enemies of the soul: the world, and the devil and an unholy teacher.

Three things which drive out a restless spirit and create a stable mind: vigil and prayer and labour.

The four foundations of devotion: restraint towards every desire, forgiveness towards every wrong, asking forgiveness of every deceit, pardon of every transgression.

The four sayings we should have recourse to, if we shall not have fulfilled them: devotion towards God, calmness towards people, goodwill to every single person, expectation of death every single day.

Four things which do not happen to one who loves God: he is not mocked, he is not made uneasy, slander does not affect him, he is

not thought ill of by anyone. He is thought well of by all, he thinks well of everybody.

The four securities of the sons of Life: the wearing away of the passions, fear of the pains, love of the sufferings, belief in the rewards. If the passions were not worn away, they would not be left behind. If the pains were not feared, they would not be guarded against. If the sufferings were not loved, they would not be endured. If the rewards were not believed in, they would not be attained.

The four fetters of the sinners: the shutting of their eyes to the world; the closing of the earth on their bodies; the shutting of the kingdom of Heaven to their souls; the shutting of Hell over them.

The four oppressions of the sinners: it is hard for them that they do not leave their passions; it is hard that their pains will not go; it is hard that they are without repentance until too late; hard that they are without residence of the kingdom of Heaven.

The four things which the life of violence brings about for people: it shrinks borders; it increases enmity; it destroys life; it prolongs pains.

Four things by which the kingdom of Heaven may be pursued: stability and detachment from the world, devotion and constancy.

The four heavens of a person in this world: youth and success, health and friendship. The four hells of a person in this world: sickness and old age, poverty and friendlessness.

The three things through which the devil is apparent through a person: through appearance, through manner, through speech. *And through these three God is recognised through a person.*

The three waves which go over a person in baptism, he renounces three renunciations in them: he renounces the world with its vanities, he renounces the devil with his snares, he renounces the passions of the flesh. It is this which changes a person from being a son of Death to

being a son of Life, from being a son of Darkness to being a son of Light. When he breaks those three renunciations in the three waves which go over him, unless he should go again through the three waters he cannot go into the kingdom of God: a pool of tears of repentance, a pool wrung out of blood in penance, a pool of sweat in labour.

What is best for the Christian life? Simplicity and single-mindedness. A careless Christianity which resists great bother, its trial in fire will be great, its reward in Heaven will be small. An active Christianity which resists great comfort, its trial in fire will be small, its reward in Heaven will be great.

What is best for the mind? Breadth and humility, for every good thing finds room in a broad, humble mind. What is worst for the mind? Narrowness and closedness, and constrictedness, for nothing good finds room in a narrow, closed, restricted mind.

Passion and youth, death and old age, it is better to guard against them far in advance.

Do not beg. Do not refuse. Preserve. Bestow.

He collaborates, who does not denounce. He who does not forbid, ordains. He who stays silent conceals. He who co-operates, will be likewise punished.

On the three principal commandments

If there is anyone who desires the commandments, let him take the road on which they all go: let him take divine love and humility and restraint into his heart, for thus the commandments will not escape, but they will all be with him completely.

On the most prudent person

Who is most prudent? The one who will welcome before death that which he fears after death.

It is good to correct. It is not good to reproach. The mind revolts against reproach. It is humble towards correction.

Wisdom without learning is better than learning without wisdom.

> Who is nearest God? The one who contemplates Him.
> Whom does Christ assist? The one who does good.
> In whom does the Holy Spirit dwell? In the one who is pure without sin.

It is then that a person is a vessel of the Holy Spirit, when the virtues have come in place of the vices. It is then that desire for God grows in a person, when worldly desire withers.

It is better that we prepare for the five trysts which we shall meet: a tryst with sighs, a tryst with death, a tryst with God's people, a tryst with devils, a tryst with resurrection on Judgement Day.

The End. Amen.

Part Four

IONA'S LIBRARY

Iona's Library

From a modern geographical point of view, Iona looks like an island 'remote' from Europe, but to her monks Iona's situation looked rather different. Medieval islands were not 'cut off' by the sea, but were connected to other places by it, since the sea was not so much a boundary as a means of communication. It was far easier to travel and to transport goods along sea-routes than on dry land, and so Iona was connected to a wider world by sea-travel. Iona's connectedness is reflected in her involvement in the wider world of literary culture.

As we have seen, the Iona poems and prose texts frequently quote other authors. From Iona's writings, therefore, we know what the Iona monks were reading in our period, and this final section will provide a partial catalogue of Iona's library at the beginning of the eighth century. What works were lying in the book-chests, the *scrinia* of which Adomnán writes? And how did they shape the Christian and monastic culture of the monks who read them? Gertrud Brüning's study of the *Vita Columbae* revealed many such influences,[1] and a forthcoming article by Thomas O'Loughlin has identified many sources in *De Locis Sanctis*.[2] Our own notes to the poems in this volume have identified other works which the Iona poets quoted.[3] Overall, then, this section will give a good idea of the reading matter of the monks.

THE BIBLE AND APOCRYPHA

The Bible

Naturally, the most important single work in the entire library of Iona was the Bible. The devotion of the monks to the 'Word of God' is

witnessed by the two lovingly and lavishly decorated Gospel books of Kells and Durrow, either of which may have been made on Iona (see pp. 25–6 above).

The version, or versions, of the Latin Bible first used in the western church were the *Vetus Latina* or ●ld Latin. These rather haphazard and variegated translations were for the most part replaced by a new translation made by St Jerome, later known as the Vulgate. Jerome's work was commissioned by Pope Damasus, completed about 4●4/5, and became the standard version of the Bible for centuries to come. The Vulgate seems to have arrived in Ireland in the sixth century, but it took some time for it to replace the ●ld Latin versions. Wealthier monasteries probably received more of it, and quicker, than others. For a long time many churches, including Iona, quite happily used a mixture of the two.

Gospel of Nicodemus[4]

This apocryphon seems to have been a source for the motif of the 'tunic of Christ' in *Cantemus*. It was known in some form in the time of Epiphanius (375 or 376) and exists in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac and Armenian translations, as well as in Irish.

The Book of Enoch[5]

The author of *Altus prosator* was familiar with the Book of Enoch, a Jewish composition of the last two centuries BC. The work had been quoted in the New Testament Epistle of Jude, and a few fragments of it are quoted in Greek and Latin in early Christian writings such as the Epistle of Barnabas, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and ●rigen. Augustine knew it, but did not think it was reliable.[6] The *Apostolic Constitutions* (probably a fourth century Syrian document) also knew of it and disapproved of it. Such disapproval explains its disappearance for a millennium and a half, until the Scottish explorer James Bruce discovered the lost Book of Enoch in the Bible of the ancient Ethiopian church. Its strange animal symbolism, the visions of

death, judgement, heaven and hell, the cosmic catastrophes of the last days – all these offered useful materials for visionary writings like *Altus prosator*.

Athanasius: Life of Antony [7]

During a time of exile in the desert in the mid-fourth century, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria wrote a *Life* of Antony the hermit. Athansius had known Antony personally and greatly admired the strict ascetic life which he had embraced and taught others to follow. He tells the story of Antony's life, his vocation and his progress as an ascetic until he himself became a father and teacher of monks. Much is made of Antony's battles with demons, and there is also an emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy (especially anti-Arianism, which was a topic close to the heart of Athanasius). Athanasius described the rigours of the monastic life in terms of martyrdom:

> After the storm of persecution had died down, and the blessed bishop Peter was already crowned with the glory of martyrdom, Antony returned to his old monastery, where he underwent a daily martyrdom of faith and conscience, performing more severe fasts and vigils.[8]

This conception of monastic life as a form of 'martryrdom' found strong resonances among Irish monks in the early Middle Ages.

The version of the *Life of Antony* known in the West was a rough Latin translation – almost a paraphrase at times – made by Evagrius of Antioch a few years after Athanasius had composed the work.

Actus Sylvestri[9]

This fifth-century work about the life and deeds of St Sylvester is quoted in the second preface of Adomnán's *Life*. The historical Sylvester was bishop of Rome from 314 to 335, and therefore during the reign of the Emperor Constantine. Their coinciding as emperor and pope gave rise to the legendary account of Constantine's conversion at the hands

of Sylvester, and the bestowing of wide powers on the pope by the emperor.

The *Actus Sylvestri* would have important implications for a monastery in Iona's position. Its relations with secular rulers could usefully be guided by a story which showed the church as enjoying autonomy and powers of the sort given in these legendary tales.

Jerome: Biblical Works[10]

Jerome's contribution to biblical scholarship was not confined to his new translations from original languages. He was also the author of a great many commentaries on the Bible, and his works were seen as authoritative interpretations for centuries to come. Many of his biblical works were known on Iona, and Adomnán quotes from them freely. Thomas O'Loughlin has identified the following works of Jerome as certainly used by Adomnnán: commentaries on Matthew, Nahum, Hosea and Ezekiel, a work on Hebrew places and place-names, and a book of 'Hebrew Questions' – discussing some problems in the interpretation of Genesis – which is particularly interesting because of Jerome's use of rabbinic exegesis or 'Hebrew traditions'. Other works of Jerome are identified with less certainty, but may have been present. Stanza M of *Altus prosator* may also echo Jerome's commentary on Jonah.[11]

Jerome's commentaries led the field in the early church. They manifest not only his familiarity with other earlier Christian commentators such as Origen, but also with contemporary rabbinic scholarship and, importantly, with the biblical languages and topography. Augustine had insisted on the importance of an understanding of history, topography, natural science and the Hebrew language as keys to the proper understanding of scripture, and we see in Jerome's writings an example of how such knowledge could be so used.[12]

Philip the Presbyter: Commentary on Job[13]

Stevenson has demonstrated the dependence of *Altus prosator* on a commentary on the Book of Job which was attributed in the past to Jerome, but is probably the work of his pupil Philip who died in 455 or

456.[14] It was especially useful for *Altus prosator* in its discussion of angels, giants, devils and the heavenly bodies. The work is highly allegorical, dealing with the whole tale of Job in Christocentric vein. Thus, for example, Job's final begetting of seven sons and three daughters signifies the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit, and the three stages of God's salvation – the law, the prophets and the grace of Christ.

Augustine's City of God[15]

When Alaric and the Goths sacked Rome in 410, many people blamed it on the city's abandonment of the old deities who had always protected her, in favour of the One God of the Christians. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) wrote his great work *De Civitate Dei* between 413 and 426, to deal with just this charge. He began by rejecting pagan accusations against the church, and by showing how the old gods were impotent to protect the city, could not bring about worldly prosperity, and could not offer eternal happiness.

But the second part of the work, books XI to XXII, is less defensive. It is Augustine's positive vision of how God acts in the world of men and women, in history. The Earthly City (*civitas terrena*) is the human race estranged from God, living in sin and injustice, worshipping impotent gods and serving man-made goods (Empire, pleasure, wealth) instead of God. The City of God (*civitas Dei*) is that communion of people who, touched by the grace of God, respond by living in Christian love.[16]

In history, these two 'cities' or societies are inseparable, appearing together at every moment, yet they are distinct. Only at the Last Judgement will they be finally and eternally separated. What Augustine offered in this work was a 'theology of history' – a vision in which past, present and future were all under the graceful providence of God.

Sulpicius Severus: Life of Saint Martin[17]

Martin (d. 397) was a key figure in the growth of the ascetic movement in Gaul, as well as being bishop of Tours. His fame was spread by his close friend Sulpicius Severus (d. 420/5), who wrote the *Life of Saint Martin* while the saint was still alive. In addition to encouraging devotion to St Martin, Sulpicius probably also wanted to defend the

appointment of monks to episcopal office, at a time when such appointments were controversial. In the ninth chapter of the *Life*, Martin is depicted as an ascetic monk whose ordination some people tried to prevent on the grounds that as a monk he was 'despicable in countenance, his clothing was mean, and his hair disgusting'. He was ordained bishop nevertheless and so, in spite of Pope Celestine's discouragement of such appointments, the precedent of St Martin would legitimate the future appointment of ascetics to the episcopate.

Devotion to St Martin in Iona is evidenced at an early date. His name was probably sung first in Iona's liturgical commemoration of saintly bishops, as it was in the Stowe Missal *c.* 800.[18] As well as quoting from the *Vita Martini* in his own *Vita Columbae*, Adomnán may have imitated its literary technique of portraying the saint as an Old Testament character: Sulpicius portrays Martin as Elijah, the desert-dwelling prophet in a river-bed, while Adomnán portrays Columba as Samuel the King-maker.

Sulpicius Severus: Letters[19]

Adomnán had read at least one of Sulpicius' letters. He describes Columba's entry to heaven in terms borrowed from Sulpicius' letter to the deacon Aurelius, in which Sulpicius describes how Martin appeared to him in a dream, intimating his own death, and how the dream-message was confirmed by two monks arriving from Tours. Sulpicius' sorrow at the death of his beloved friend and teacher is only equalled by his admiration of Martin's asceticism which he describes as a kind of bloodless martyrdom, *sine cruore matryrium*, much as Athanasius had described the rigours of Antony.

Sulpicius Severus: Chronicon[20]

The *Chronicon* purports to be a setting down of important events in history in chronological order, from the creation of the world 'nearly six thousand years ago' up to the date of its composition around AD 403, concluding with a defence of St Martin and his allies in a contemporary ecclesiastical controversy. It is quoted by Adomnán in *De Locis Sanctis*, once at some length, but it seems to have been little known at that time outside Ireland.

John Cassian: Conferences[21]

If the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, written around 600, is correct, then Columba himself knew at least some of the works of John Cassian (d. 435), for Dallán writes there:

> He fixed the Psalms,
> he made known the books of Law,
> those books Cassian loved.

The poet does not indicate which of Cassian's works he has in mind, but we can be certain that parts of the 'Conferences' or *Collationes* were available to the author of *Altus prosator* who as we saw above (p. 40) may well have been Columba himself.

The *Conferences* are Cassian's accounts of the teachings and practices of the ascetic monks and hermits of Scete, the desert area to the west of the Nile where he himself had spent some time as a monk before coming to the west around 415.

Though a great promoter of asceticism, Cassian was not an extremist. One thing he had learned from his desert teachers was that self-denial could bring with it its own spiritual dangers. The monk who by fasting had completely freed himself from the vice of gluttony was the monk most in danger of falling into pride, the worst of all sins. Thus the ascetic was also called to show patience and gentleness, humility to others, forgiveness and mercy to weaker brethren, and a sense of irony about his own achievements.

For this reason, although Cassian suggested that the life of anchorites (solitary monks living in the desert) was in principle a higher calling than that of cenobites (monks living in community), in practice he suggested that the community life might lead more people to Christ. The solitude of the desert might offer heightened experiences of communion with God, but it also offered temptations of pride, impatience with those who came seeking advice, laxity, and material worries about food, all of which could be reduced by living with other monks.[22] We know that this pattern of mixed anchoritic and cenobitic life was observed in the Iona community, and probably for much the same reasons.[23]

Constantius' Life of Germanus[24]

Constantius wrote his *Vita Germani* roughly forty years after Germanus' death in 448. It is an example of that popular hagiographical formula: a wealthy, well-educated nobleman abandons the 'world' to embrace a life of poverty and simplicity – much as Adomnán's Columba did. The *Life* is an account of his conversion, his ascetic life, his miracles and his importance to the people of his own region, especially as an intercessor for the Armoricans when their rebelliousness had brought on them the wrath of the emperor.

Constantius' *Vita* is full of interesting details about life in fifth-century Gaul, but his descriptions of Germanus' two visits to Britain, supposedly to combat an outbreak of Pelagianism, show an almost total ignorance of the circumstances in these islands. The story of a confrontation with Pelagianism in Britain has been shown to be extremely unlikely, but it does reveal something of the theological concerns of the Gaulish church at the end of the fifth century.[25]

Pseudo-Anatolius: Canon paschalis[26]

Cummian's letter of 632/3 concerning the date of Easter to Ségéne of Iona and Beccán was written in reply to a letter from Iona in which a method of calculation favoured by the Iona monks was proposed. It was said to be the work of Anatolius (bishop of Laodicea, d. 282). The work was not in fact Anatolius', however, but has been attributed to an Irish (or possibly British) writer of the sixth century. Bede also (*HE* iii:3) mentions the Scots and Picts 'thinking that in this observance they were following the teaching of the holy and praiseworthy father Anatolius'.

Cassiodorus: Exposition of the Psalms[27]

Written in Constantinople between 540 and 548, Cassiodorus' *Expositio Psalmorum* is the only surviving commentary on the whole Psalter from among the Latin Fathers – if we except Augustine's *Ennarationes* which are for the most part sermons and reflections gathered together in the form of a commentary. Much influenced as he was by Augustine's work (completed in 417), Cassiodorus also drew on

the work of Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Prosper, Cyprian, Dionysius Exiguus, Primasius, Leo the Great and even Augustine's old enemy Pelagius.

The interpretations are highly allegorical and Christocentric, where even the title of a psalm can be said to refer to Christ,[28] and the work exercised huge influence on scholars throughout the Middle Ages in their interpretation of the psalms.

His modern editor lists writers who used Cassiodorus from the eighth century onwards, beginning with Bede, but he leaves open the question of seventh-century readers of the *Expositio* with a footnote suggesting that Isidore may possibly have used it for his *Etymologies*. Its use by Adomnán confirms its far-flung circulation as early as the seventh century.[29]

Gregory the Great: Dialogues[30]

Gregory the Great (d. 604) the first Pope of that name composed an edifying work in four books in the form of a series of dialogues which are for the most part concerned with the miraculous deeds of saintly men – and one or two women. It is written, Gregory suggests, for those simple folk who are more easily moved by miracle-stories than by sermons. The great majority of the saints whose stories he tells are either bishops or ascetic monks, reflecting his own dual concerns: the organisation of pastoral care in the church and the individual's quest for personal sanctity. Gregory himself was a monk turned bishop, and his own life reflected the tension between these two vocations. Indeed, in the preface of the *Dialogues* a depressed Gregory laments his departure from the monastic life for the worldly and burdensome concerns of a bishop.

The first book describes a number of miracles performed by various saints, manifesting the inner holiness of these 'friends of God' by visible signs. The second describes the virtuous life and miraculous deeds of St Benedict, the 'father of monasticism', and the third book recounts the miracles of earlier saints of the church, almost all of them bishops or monks. The fourth and final book deals less with miracles as signs of sanctity than with the more speculative question of the nature of the soul, its relationship to the body, and its status after death.

Cumméne Find: Book of the Powers of Saint Columba

Some sort of 'Life' of Columba existed in writing on Iona before
Adomnán wrote his. He says that he has used written as well as oral
sources for his own *Vita Columbae*.[31] These may include a *Liber de
virtutibus sancti Columbae*, no longer extant, which is cited briefly by
Adomnán.[32] Cumméne Find ('the white') was abbot of Iona from 657
to 669, though he may well have written the *Liber* before the period
of his abbacy. If Máire Herbert's identification of a 'Cumméne
stratum' in the *Vita Columbae* is correct, he was more given to offering
miraculous interpretations of natural or ordinary events than to
recounting spectacular and obvious miracles.[33]

Cogitosus: Vita Brigitae[34]

The 'Life of Brigit' by Cogitosus reveals an early claim by the Leinster
church of Kildare to a high level of authority in the Irish church.
Cogitosus calls it 'the head of almost all the Irish churches, with
supremacy over all the monasteries of the Irish.' Written in the seventh
century, at a time when Kildare and Armagh were engaged in a
struggle for ecclesiastical power, it uses the saint's life to make claims
for Kildare over other churches – a form of ecclesiastical-political
storytelling which Adomnán himself used (p. 29). Cogitosus also
offers fascinating glimpses of church organisation and society at large:
a double community at Kildare, monks headed by a bishop and nuns
headed by the abbess Brigit, church-building, road-making, the work-
ings of the law, the use of vestments and a life governed by some form
of 'Rule'.

Isidore: Etymologies[35]

Isidore (d. 636) came from a noble family of Cartagena, but entered a
monastery in 589. A gifted student and writer known for his generous
almsgiving, on being made bishop of Seville he also proved himself an
able administrator, presiding over several Spanish church councils. His
numerous writings were seized on with delight by Irish writers, and
exercised an immediate and lasting influence. Indeed the oldest known

manuscript of the *Etymologies* was probably written in Ireland before 650.[36] It is a collection of twenty books, each dealing with distinct topics: Grammar in book I, Rhetoric and Dialectic in book II, Mathematics in book III, Medicine in book IV and so on. An encyclopaedic collection of the knowledge embedded in late Roman writings, clearly classified and made accessible in simple language, the work was especially popular with readers unfamiliar with the Roman world.

Isidore: De Natura Rerum[37]

Isidore's work 'On the Nature of Things', like the *Etymologies*, is not a book of great originality but a synthesis in forty-eight chapters of the wisdom of his age about time (days, night, weeks, months and years), cosmology (earth, sky, planets, water, sun, moon and stars), climate, plague and one or two other natural phenomena. The Irish were fascinated by Isidore's works on nature, and by the seventh century an anonymous Irish author had produced a book 'On the Order of Creatures' which depended heavily on Isidore, but also differed from it in interesting ways.[38]

'Hegesippus': Historia[39]

The Five Books of History of the so-called 'Hegesippus' are a fourth-century Latin adaptation of Josephus' *Jewish Wars*, to which was added additional material from other sources. It was a much-used source for Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis*. He seems to have taken some liberties with the text to suit his own purposes and style.

Conciliar Acts, Canon Law etc.

Iona's involvement in the life of the wider church must have brought her copies of the texts of the 'acts' of church councils, synods and such like documents, as well as related letters such as that of Cummian to Ségéne and Beccán on the Paschal controversy. The *Altus*, as we saw, quoted the 'Athanasian Creed'. The *Acta* of the eleventh-council of Toledo may have been used by Cú Chuimne for the *Cantemus*' 'Mary gave birth to her father' (p. 185 above), and if his work in the

Hibernensis was done on Iona, a great many more such documents must have been available to him.[40]

Liturgical Books

Every monastery regarded the worthy celebration of the liturgy as a central part of its work, the *Opus Dei*. The celebration of the liturgy required books – hymnbooks (we have already seen that Iona had a book of hymns for the week, p. 93) – Psalters, possibly such as the *Cathach* (p. 25) – and texts of prayers, antiphons, the Mass and so on. The poetry in our volume offers one example of a liturgical fragment: *Elizabeth Zachariae virum magnum genuit*, which was used on feasts of John the Baptist. Other liturgical materials on Iona must be guessed from what we know other monasteries had – the Stowe Missal, the Antiphonary of Bangor, and such like.

Greek texts[41]

The use of Greek words and lettering in Iona are hardly evidence that Iona monks were reading Greek literature, but there is evidence to suggest the existence of a 'low-grade glossary' containing Greek words and their meanings.

The above-mentioned works comprise a (by no means complete) list of the works which were probably owned and read by Iona's monks. Here we find a monastery not out on a limb, doing its own 'Celtic' thing, but steeped in the culture of Latin Christianity, participating fully in the literary expression of the faith of the church, the 'People of the Book'.

Notes

IONA

1. 'Iona' arises from a misreading of the Latin *Ioua insula*, 'the Í-ish island', *vc* Pref. 2.

2. Editions by A. O. & M. O. Anderson (1961 and 1991, with Latin text and translation) have useful introductions, and the 1991 edition has an up-to-date bibliography. Richard Sharpe's translation in the Penguin Classics series is a good deal cheaper (London, 1994) and excellent value for those who don't need a Latin text.

3. Herbert (1988). Useful, though more speculative is Smyth (1984), especially chs 3 and 4.

4. Ó Corráin (1972) ch. 2; Byrne (1973) chs 1–3.

5. The best introduction to early Irish law is Kelly (1988). Its first chapter is also an excellent introduction to early medieval Irish society.

6. *vc* ii, 39 offers a good illustration of this pattern.

7. Kelly (1988) 4–28; Byrne (1973) 7.

8. de Paor (1993) 29–37.

9. de Paor (1993) 29–33; Byrne (1973) 70–86.

10. Bannerman (1974) 157–70. Scottish Dál Riata's links with their Irish kin was a live question, even in Columba's time.

11. Byrne (1973) 40–69; *vc* i, 36.

12. The descendants of Gabrán (the Cenél nGabráin, based mainly in Kintyre), the descendants of his brother Comgell (who gave their name to the modern Cowal peninsula, but who do not seem to emerge as a separate group until around 700), and the Cenél Loairn who gave their name to Lorn. The other Dál Riata family was the Islay-based Cenél nÓengusso, who never seem to have been contenders for overkingship.

13. Northumbrian kings Oswald and Oswiu, who both knew Irish, *HE* iii, 3; iii, 25. Another exiled royal son, Eanfrith, lived among the Picts and married one of their royal women. Their son, Talorgen, became a king of the Picts in 653/4.

14. Smyth (1984) rejected this view, arguing that matriliny is merely a legend, but he has been soundly refuted by Sellar (1985).

15. On the language, Jackson (1955); for a dispassionate study of the symbol stones, Henderson (1967) 104–60; Ritchie (1989) 17–21.

16. *HE* i, 1.
17. They attended the council of Arles in 314.
18. de Paor (1993) 19–22 discusses the Palladian mission.
19. Patrick's *Confessio* appears in Hood (1978) with translation, and de Paor (1993) offers a translation alone.
20. *Confessio* § 41.
21. For example, Gildas, David and Samson. Others, possibly including the bishop Finnio or Vinniau who was Columba's teacher, were British churchmen living and working in Ireland. Dumville (1984) 207–14.
22. *HE* iii, 4. Bede has his own reasons for making this claim in the eighth century: the claim that Ninnian, a 'Roman' bishop, was the first apostle of the Picts, and that his church at Whithorn (now under Anglian control) was therefore in some sense their 'mother-church', could help to woo the Picts away from Iona's influence and support Northumbrian designs in Pictland. On Ninnian see MacQueen (1990).
23. *HE* iii, 27.
24. See, for example, W. Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', in N. Edwards & A. Lane (eds), *The Early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford, 1992) 12–24.
25. The council of Arles in 314 had already tried to deal with it, as had a council of Toledo in 633. Bishop Braulio of Saragossa was still sorely exercised by the question in 640. See Ó Cróinín (1985) 509.
26. Columbanus, *Ep.* v, 3, Walker (1970) 38.
27. Bede says he was seventy-seven, and had come to Britain in 565. It seems wiser to believe Adomnán here, though the two testimonies could be reconciled by assuming that Bede's date is based on when Columba actually arrived on Iona and that for two years he was elsewhere – perhaps establishing the monasteries on Tiree and Hinba. At the very least he was with the king of Dál Riata, Conall son of Comgall in the year he arrived (*VC* i, 7).
28. Ainmere mac Sétnai (566–9); Báetán mac Ninnedo (572–86); Áed mac Ainmirech (586–98).
29. This Vinniau must be either Finnian of Clonard (d. 549) or Finnian of Moville (d. 579): the former seems more likely (*VC* i, 1; ii, 1; ii, 25; iii, 4).
30. *Amra*, vii, 3.
31. See Byrne (1973) 95–6; Herbert (1988) 27–8.
32. *VC* iii, 3.
33. We do not know when he actually etablished the Iona monastery, and there are numerous other churches in Dál Riata with which he was connected. Bede says Iona was given by the Pictish king Bruide, but this is a less reliable report, probably based on Bede's Pictish sources.
34. Hinba has generally been identified in recent years with Jura, but this is uncertain. The most likely location for Cella Diuni (Gaelic: Cell Diúin) is Annat, just west of the point where the river Awe enters Loch Awe. The name derives from *andóit*, a term for a mother-church. See W. J. Watson, *The Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926) 170, 250f.; A. D. S. MacDonald, '"Annat" in Scotland: a provisional review', *Scottish Studies* 17 (1973) 135–46.
35. *VC* i, 3. Herbert (1988) 32; Smyth (1984) 90.
36. *VC* iii, 17; i, 5; ii, 15.
37. *VC* i, 49. It has been suggested that this conference mainly discussed the relationship between the territories of Dál Riata in Ireland and Scotland. See Bannerman (1974) 157–70; Byrne (1973) 110–11; for a contrary view, Herbert (1989) 67–75.

38. Herbert (1988) 34–5.
39. *VC* i, 37 (work supervisor on Iona); i, 30 (prior of Mag Lunge); i, 21 (pastor of penitents on Hinba).
40. In *VC* i, 29, Laisrén is found tiring the monks on a building site at Durrow. Interestingly, Adomnán himself seems to have been responsible for construction work on Iona (*VC* ii, 45).
41. *VC* iii, 19.
42. Herbert (1988) 18, 24–5, 134–6. On Ségéne more generally, 40–3.
43. Walsh and Ó Cróinín (1988) 7–15. The letter itself is edited and translated, 56–97.
44. *HE* ii, 19.
45. Herbert (1988) 42.
46. According to *AU* this occurred in 632.
47. *HE* iii, 3, 5, 14–17.
48. These friends may have helped to replace the patronage of the Cenél nGabráin rulers of Dál Riata, whose star was dimming during the disastrous reign of Domnall Brecc, who antagonised the Uí Néill and lost a series of battles. Cumméne, the seventh abbot, wrote of the subjection of the Dál Riata to 'strangers', probably the Northumbrians under Oswald and his brother Oswiu. *VC* iii, 5, and see Anderson (1991) xxiv–xxvii.
49. Cumméne Find, or Cummeanus Albus, 'Cumméne the Fair'. On his name, often given as Cummíne Ailbe, see D. Dumville, 'Two Troublesome Abbots', *Celtica* 21 (1990) 146–9.
50. *HE* iii, 25.
51. ibid.
52. *HE* iii, 26; iv, 4. *AU* 668.
53. *HE* iv, 26.
54. See the verse attributed to Adomnán, p. 167.
55. *AU* 704 as *Aldfrith sapiens*, *AI* 705, as Flann Fína. *FA* 704, 'the famous wise man, pupil of Adomnán'. See Ireland (1991) 64–78.
56. Cf. *AU* 687. Bede and *AU* differ on their dates of these events. Raid on Brega: Bede 684; *AU* 685. Nechtansmere: Bede 685; *AU* 686. Bede gives no date for Adomnán's first visit. Second visit: *VC* ii, 46.
57. *HE* v, 21.
58. Gwynn and Purton (1911) § 85; Ryan (1973) 33; Etchingham (1993) 155. See also *VC* i, 3, in which Adomnán portrays Clonmacnois treating Columba with great honour.
59. Meyer (1905); Ní Dhonnchadha (1982).
60. Rubin probably died in 725 (*AU*), but Cú Chuimne's contribution may have been made after that date.
61. Herbert (1988) 64–6.
62. Gwynn and Purton (1911) §§ 47, 65, 80. O'Dwyer (1981) 52–3.
63. *AU* 717; cf. *HE* v, 21.
64. Anderson (1922) 288; Smyth (1984) 187–8; Bannerman (1993) 29.
65. See Kenney (1929) 523f. and Lapidge and Sharpe (1985) § 647, for sources. Enright (1985a) 94–106, discusses Virgil's connections with Iona.
66. In the late eighth century the abbots of Iona were being commemorated during the masses at St Peter's in Salzburg, and it is likely that Virgil was responsible for introducing the custom. He may also have introduced a copy of the *Hibernensis* to the continent.
67. Kenney (1929) 545–8; Smyth (1984) 67–9.
68. He writes knowledgeably about the islands of Scotland (where he says

he has lived) and the Faroes, and he tells us that he had as his master a man called Suihne – almost certainly the Suihne who was abbot of Iona from 766 to 772. See *Dicuil, Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, ed. J. J. Tierney (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, vi, Dublin, 1967).

69. Anderson (1922) 264.
70. AU 806.
71. Herbert (1988) 68f.
72. On the transfer of relics, jurisdiction and power from Iona to Kells and Dunkeld, see Bannerman (1993) 29–34.
73. John Barber's report of the excavations there in 1979 is a most useful study of the island and its monastery, Barber et al. (1981); also MacDonald (1984) 271–302; RCAHMS, *Inventory of monuments: Argyll*, volume 4: Iona, 1982.
74. VC ii, 29, for example.
75. Bede describes someone building a church 'in the manner of the Irish, not of stone, but of hewn oak, and he thatched it with reeds' (*HE* iii, 25). It was for such buildings as these that Adomnán supervised the felling of 'great timbers' which were floated and towed from the mainland to Iona (VC ii, 45), probably in the valley of the river Shiel, to the north of Ardnamurchan. At least one of these buildings may have been roofed in slate, as a heavily corroded iron nail with a piece of slate adhering to it was discovered in 1979 in a pre-medieval or early medieval stratum. Barber (1981) 309.
76. VC iii, 19.
77. VC ii, 13.
78. MacDonald (1984) 285, 291.
79. VC i, 25; i, 35; ii, 16; iii, 15. Fowler & Fowler (1988).
80. MacDonald (1984) 280.
81. VC iii, 7.
82. CCH XLIV, Wasserschleben, 175.
83. *Vita Brigidae*, [PL 72, 790].
84. VC i, 6.
85. CCH XLIV, 3 a–b.
86. See drawings and discussion in RCAHMS (1982) 179–218.
87. RCAHMS (1982) 18–19.
88. See VC i, 21. Old Irish Penitential, I, §2: 'Anyone who eats the flesh of a horse … does penance for three years and a half' (Bieler, 259). However, CCH (LIV, 13) gives authorities both for and against the eating of horse-meat.
89. MacDonald, 359–60.
90. Barber (1981) 328–35, 343.
91. A good and accessible introduction to the liturgical life of the early Irish church is to be found in Jane Stevenson's introduction to Warren (1987), and there is much useful matter in the text itself, though it is partly vitiated by Warren's tendentious writing.
92. VC i, 8; iii, 13 and i, 22.
93. VC iii, 11–12; Stevenson (1987) lx; Warren, 142. For singing, VC iii, 12. The words *decantaretur, cantatores* and *decantare* indicate a sung Mass. See also iii, 17: evidently under exceptional circumstances the Mass could be delayed.
94. VC ii, 9.
95. *HE* iv, 4.
96. VC Pref. 2.
97. Bieler (1975) 92.

98. For a useful introductory study of this development, see Ó Fiaich (1989).

99. *vc* i, 35, 50; ii, 5, 6, 10, 11, 20–1, 32, 33.

100. *vc* i, 44: the arrival of a bishop on the island leads Columba to change the usual form of Eucharistic celebration.

101. Coeddi may be the Bishop Ceti named in the guarantor list of Cáin Adomnáin of AD 697.

102. Bishop Colmán retired to Iona after the synod of Whitby, and remained there four years, leaving for Ireland in AU 668. Ceollach, the Irish bishop of the Middle Angles and Mercians, also seems to have retired to Iona (*HE* iii, 21) in the mid-seventh century, but there is no evidence of his having stayed there as a working bishop.

103. *HE* iii, 5; iii, 25.

104. See Adomnán's account of Columban monasteries in the territory of Picts (*vc* ii, 46) and the Pictish priest in Ireland, suggesting that Picts not only became Christians, but monks and clergy of the Iona community (*vc* ii, 9).

105. The bishop was the main agent of pastoral care, frequent statements to the effect that the Irish church in our period was 'monastic' notwithstanding, though it is true that in terms of land-ownership, political influence and wealth the monasteries were most important. For early laws in which the bishop and his clergy are the key to the whole system of pastoral care, see O'Keeffe (1904); *ccH*, *Libri I–VIII*; Charles-Edwards (1992); R. Sharpe (1984).

106. These were places of anchorites and penitents: *vc* i, 21, 45 (Hinba has not been identified) and ii, 39.

107. This seems to have been Bede's impression around 731, when he writes of Columba's successors that 'he left successors conspicuous for their great continence and divine love and monastic observance' (*HE* iii, 4).

108. *vc* ii, 8, 9, 44, 45.

109. This has rightly been called 'the Age of Migrating Ideas', and acknowledgement of the mingling of Irish, Germanic and Pictish influences in many works has led art historians to talk more generally of 'Insular art' – the work produced in these islands during our period. Spearman and Higgitt (1993). See Bischoff (1990) for studies of writing materials, manuscripts, lettering etc.

110. MS: Royal Irish Academy. Kenney (1929) 629; Lapidge and Sharpe (1985) 131; Henry (1965) 58–63; Henderson (1987) 25–7 (illustr.), 187–8; Anderson (1991) xxxvi.

111. Uta Roth (1987, 23) accepted a date as early as 560, which would certainly make Columba a contender for the honour of having written it, but this is a little earlier than most commentators propose.

112. MS: Dublin, Trinity College 57 (A.4.5). Facsimile: Luce et al. (1960). Kenney (1929) 630–1; Lapidge and Sharpe (1985) 133–4; Nordenfalk (1977); Henderson (1987) 19–55; Campbell and Lane (1993) 61–2.

113. Uta Roth has even suggested 'shortly after AD 600' (1987, 28) but few scholars would accept such an early date. The colophon to the manuscript, naming the scribe as Columba, is a later addition. The original scribe's name has been erased.

114. MS: Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Generalia 1. Henry (1965) 166; Anderson (1991) liv–lxii, lxxxi ff. (illustr.).

115. AU 713. The annal entry reads, 'Dorbéne obtained the *cathedra* of Iona, and after five months in the primacy he died,' leaving us wondering whether he was bishop or abbot of Iona. Sharpe (1991, 11) describes

him as 'bishop in Iona', which is possible, for the word *cathedra*
usually refers to a bishop's chair (and hence teaching authority), and the
previous bishop of Iona, Coeddi, is recorded as having died in AU 712.
However the translation of Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill reads 'Doirbéne
obtained the abbacy of I.' For discussion of Iona's abbatial succession
in the early eighth century, see Herbert (1988, 57–8); Picard (1982b,
216, n. 2).

116. *DLS* II, 27.6; Henderson (1987) 29; Henry (1965) 127, and illustr., plate
VII.

117. MS: Trinity College Dublin. Facsimiles: P. Fox, *The Book of Kells, MS
58, Trinity College Library, Dublin*, Luzern, 1990; Alton and Meyer,
Evangeliorum Quattuor Codex Cennanensis, 3 vols, 1950 (mono-
chrome). F. Henry (1974) offers many useful reproductions and a
general introduction to the book; P. Brown, *The Book of Kells*, London,
1980; Henderson (1987) 130–98; Kenney (1929) 640–1.

118. On this kind of analysis of text and image, see Farr (1989) and O'Reilly
(1993).

119. Text and translation: Meehan (1958).

120. *HE* v, 15.

121. O'Loughlin (1992).

122. O'Loughlin, forthcoming article 'Adomnán the Illustrious', *Innes
Review*, 1994.

123. See the seventh-century 'Book of the Angel', Bieler (1975) 184–90, for
an outspoken claim of this authority,

124. This more diffuse provincial structure is what appears in the
Hibernensis in the rules on jurisdiction (*CCH* XX, 4). See Charles-
Edwards (1993) 65–6.

125. Text (English translation): Meyer 1905. Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha is cur-
rently preparing a new edition of the text, to be published shortly in
Dublin.

126. The emphasis on its protection of women in later sources may reflect
the claim of Armagh's *Cáin Pátraic* of 737 to protect clergy, leaving only
women and children to Adomnán's protection.

127. This could only be made to work, of course, if secular rulers were pre-
pared to enforce the Law among their own people; this was rather a
novel idea in Irish law, but an early eighth-century law-tract mentions
the *Cáin Adomnáin* as an example of one of the three kinds of law to
which a king may pledge his *túath*. *Críth Gablach*, § 38, describes *Cáin
Adomnáin* as 'a law for the kindling of faith.'

128. Text and translation of *Canones Adomnani* in Bieler (1975) 176–81.

129. Bieler (1975) 9; Kenney (1929) 245.

130. The B-text of *CCH*, cited by Enright (1985a) 24: *De muliere meretrice.
Adumnanus interpretatus est.*

131. Text: *Die Irishche Kanonensammlung*, ed. Hermann Wasserschleben
(Leipzig, 1885).

132. Their authorship is claimed by a colophon in a manuscript in Brittany.

133. Bannerman (1974) 9–26.

134. Herbert (1988) 23. Hughes (1972. 18) thought this change meant that
it was only around 670 that the *Chronicle* was being kept by a contem-
porary, rather than by someone remembering the past or writing up old
notes.

135. Herren (1974).

136. Kenney (1929) 257.

137. Stevenson (1985) 47.

138. Enright (1985a) offers a good deal of insight into Iona's campaign to establish a new ideology of kingship. See also J. Bannerman, 'The King's Poet', *Scottish Historical Review* 68 (1989) 123ff.
139. Márkus (1992a) 375–88.
140. *VC* ii, 25.
141. *VC* ii, 33.
142. Stokes (1905) 196.
143. Meehan (1958) 118–19 (iii. 5).
144. The Annunciation, Dormition, Nativity and Presentation.

<div align="center">ALTUS PROSATOR</div>

1. MS: see Kenney (1929) 263; also British Library Cotton MS Galba A. xiv. The version of the text used here is that published by Clemens Blume, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 51 (1908) 275–83. A version based on later Irish manuscripts is in *ILH* i, 66 ff.
2. *Aeterne rerum conditor* [*PL* 112.1609–22].
3. *ILH* ii, 23.
4. Kenney (1929) 263.
5. Bolton (1967) 40; Herren (1974) 32; Muir (1983) 205–16; Curran (1984) 199.
6. Stevenson, *Altus Prosator*, to appear in *Celtica* 23. Our thanks are due to Jane Stevenson for making her work available to us before its publication.
7. There is another poem, *Fo réir Choluimb*, the meaning of whose third stanza (see p. 137) is a little obscure, and scholars have tried to make sense of it in various ways. Professor Carney's translation of the first two lines reads:

    > He recited the marvellous poem,
    > it is the choir-song of Mo Chummae in Iona.

    Mo Chummae is a hypocoristic form of Columba, a sort of pet-name or nickname. If Carney's translation is correct, we must conclude that seventh-century Irish scholars knew a 'marvellous poem', a choir-song, which they thought Columba had written, and which could very well be the *Altus*. Kelly (1973, 25) quotes Carney's translation. This is not the translation we have accepted, yet the suggestion should be noted.
8. There are several in *ILH* and the *Antiphonary of Bangor*, as well as the *Adiutor laborantium* reproduced in this volume.
9. *Psalmus contra partem Donati* [*PL* 32.617]. See also Commodianus' *Adam protoplaustus* (*CCSL* 128, 29–30).
10. *ILH* ii, 25.
11. Smyth (1986) 233; MacGinty (1987).
12. Cassian, *Collatio*, 14, 10.
13. This has not always been remarked by students of the poem. Bernard and Atkinson claimed that 'the author did not use the vulgar Latin, but the older text which was current before Jerome's revision came into use' (*ILH* ii, 144). Burkitt (*Journal of Theological Studies*, III [1905], 95) wrote, 'The Biblical allusions go back to Old Latin texts and not to the Vulgate.' But see Gilbert Márkus (1993) 181–5.
14. Columbanus, a contemporary of Columba, puns on his own name, calling himself *Bar-Iona*, 'son of Jonah' or 'son of the dove' in Hebrew (Ep. 1.1, Walker 2). *Columba* is the Latin word for 'dove'. There may also be

some question raised about papal authority in this pun. In the New Testament *Bar-Iona* was the patronymic of Simon Peter, the 'first pope', and Columbanus's letter is addressed to the pope, questioning his method of selecting the date of Easter. Is it also a jest, saying in effect, 'I also am a *Bar-Iona*, sharing the Petrine ministry'? Adomnán also called Columba *Iona* (2nd preface of *Vita Columbae*) and this pun may have served to promote the saint in the face of Anglo-Saxon attempts to belittle him in comparison to the pope. 'Iona' here has nothing to do with the modern name of the island, which arises from a misreading of its Latin name, Ioua insula, which is derived from the Irish *Í*.

15. Breen (1990) 49–50.
16. Stevenson (1992) 29.
17. Herren (1974) 3.
18. The *Lorica Gildae* is not by Gildas, but probably a seventh-century composition by the Clonfertmulloe monk Laidcenn Mac Baíth.
19. From the 'Nicene' Creed: *per quem omnia facta sunt.*
20. See, for example, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, xx, 1; V, vi, 1; V, xvi, 1. Augustine also says the the expression 'hand of God' refers to his power, and so to his Son and to the Holy Spirit: *Enarr. in Ps. CXVIII*, sermon 18, 1 (*CCSL* 40, 1723) and Sermon 32, 5 (*CCSL* 40, 1774–5). Philip also describes Jesus Christ as the hand of the Father in the context of his creating power [*PL* 26.731] and repeats the identification for both creation and redemption of the world through Christ: 'So God the Father stretches out his hand to the hard rock, that is his Son, by whom he created all things. He also calls him his right hand and his arm and sent him to take up humanity' [*PL* 26.740].
21. Stevenson (1985) 46.
22. Notes on the text, by verse and line number:

> A 1   *prosator* means 'sower of seed', and hence an ancestor or father, he who sowed the original seed of a line. So God is depicted here as 'fathering' creation. *vetustus dierum* is VL reading of Dan. 7:9. Vulgate has *antiquus dierum*.
>
> B 6   *Fatimen* is a neologism derived from *fari*, 'to speak'. Many new nouns were formed in Hisperic Latin by adding unusual suffixes such as *-men* to Latin verb-stems. Adomnán also invented a noun, *famen*, from *fari*, and used it in VC: iii, 3 and iii, 15.
>
> D 2   Gen. 3:3. *Sapientior* is a VL reading. Vulgate has *callidior*, more cunning' rather than 'wiser'.
>
> E 6   *Praesagmine*, a new word formed from *praesagio*, is more literally 'foreknowledge'.
>
> F 2   Job 38:7, probably using VL which has *sidera* for 'stars' where the Vulgate has *astra*. VL has *angeli* praising God, where the Vulgate has *filii dei*, 'the sons of God'.
>
> G 2   Most manuscripts have *zabulus* for *diabolus*. This spelling would also give the correct eight syllables to the half-line.
>
> G 6   *ergastulorum*: possibly a reference to Mt. 13:30, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned.'
>
> H 6   *fornicare* is often used by the Vulgate for 'sin' in a general sense. See Jer. 3:2; Ezek. 6:9 etc.
>
> I 2   This is a strange use of *dodrans*, which means 'three fourths'. For Insular use of this word with reference to floods of water, see Alan Brown, 'Bede, a Hisperic Etymology and Early Sea Poetry', *Medieval Studies* 37 (1975) 419–32, showing how

it arises from a misreading of Philip's *Commentary* on Joh 38:16 [*PL* 26.797].

K 4   Job 26:5 explains *comprobantur*, reading in the Vulgate: *ecce gigantes gemunt sub aquis, et qui habitant cum eis.* This stanza shows clearly that the poet had parts of the Vulgate bible. There are passages in the Old Testament about giants (*rephaim*) who held power before being dispossessed by Israel: Deut. 2:11, 20–2; Josh. 12:4; 13:12; 17:15; 2 Sam. 21:16–22. This explains their appearance here, immediately following the praise of a God who destroys the kings of the present world. Philip says that it is their pride in their power, not their size, which leads to their downfall.

K 6   cf 1 Enoch 10:4–5 where the giant Azaz'el is cast into a hole and covered with 'rugged and sharp rocks'.

L 1   MSS and Blume have *crebrat*. The line weaves together Joh 26:8, *qui ligat aquas in nubibus suis ut non erumpant* and 2 Sam. 22:12, *cribrans aquas de nubibus caelorum*. This combination of 'hinding' and 'sifting' appears in Philip on Job 26:8 [*PL* 26.729]. See also Joh 36:27. This stanza and stanzas I and M reflect a biblical cosmology, in which there are waters above the firmament while the waters of the great deep lie below the earth. The upper waters provided rain, while the great deep under the earth fed the seas and the rivers, governed the tides and so on. Smyth (1986) 226. Also see Gen. 1:6–10.

M 1   *Dialis* means literally 'pertaining to Jupiter', but here 'divine' – an example of Christianised pagan vocabulary, and a word which Adomnán uses in the same sense in VC.

M 4   Compare the vocabulary to that of Jerome's *Commentary* on Jonah: *venerit usque ad profunda terrarum, quibus quasi vectibus et columnis Dei voluntate terrae globus sustentatur.* [*CCSL* 76.399].

M 5   *fundaminibus*: Herren (1974, 119) notes that this word, which is unusual in early Christian literature and which occurs in *Hisperica Famina* at line 9, is found in Virgil and Ovid. But it is also to be found in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* XXII, 11 [*CCSL* 48.830], *fundaminis mundi.*

M 6   Job 38:4–6: *Ubi eras quando ponebam fundamenta terrae ... super quo bases illius soliditatae sunt.* Cited by Philip [*PL* 26.790].

O 3   *revolvere*: Rev. 5:3, Vulgate has *aperire*, where it is not only people under the earth who cannot open the book, but anyone in heaven, on earth or under the earth. *Revolvere* (to unroll) may be a VL usage visualising the book as a scroll.

O 4   Rev. 5:5–8:1, the 'Lion of Judah', the 'Lamb who was slain', opens the seven seals, one by one, ushering in the terrible events of the Apocalypse.

P 1   Genesis (VL) 2:8 has *prohemio*, 'the beginning'. Vulgate has *a principio*, but modern texts generally translate the Hebrew 'in the east'.

Q 1   In Iona *Condictum*, 'appointed' may also have had echoes of meetings between kings, such as in VC i, 49, where a summit-meeting of kings is called a *regum condictum.* Given this use of the word, this line might suggest that here the 'King of Heaven' is meeting with the 'king' (the leader) of Israel.

R 2   *vindictae*: the word can mean 'revenge' or 'liberation', as in manumission of slaves. 'Vindication' has a similar double-edged significance in English.

R 6   1 Jn 2:17, 'And the world passes away, and the lust of it.'

S 6   This line means literally, 'the necessary material for acting having been taken away'.

T 3   Blume has *frigola hominum lucescentia*, but variants offering *frigora hominum liquescentia* give better sense [*ILH* i, 79].

T 4   Ezek. 37:7. *VL* has *compaginem* for 'joint', Vulgate has *iuncturam*.

U 1   Job 22:14, *circa cardines caeli perambulat*, and Philip [*PL* 26.716].

U 2   *Virgilio*: *vergilliae*, a common name for the Pleiades, a bright cluster of seven large and some smaller stars.

U 3   *Thetis*: other mss. have *tithis*, which may be preferable – it is used by Columbanus (Walker, 22).

U 5   Vesper is the evening star, Venus, whose synodic period, the period of its phases, is 584 days (not two years). When seen in the western sky in the evenings she was known as Vesper (or Hesperus) and when seen in the eastern sky in the mornings she was known as Phosphorus or Lucifer, the Morning Star. Stevenson points out the contrast of the diabolic Lucifer in stanza C, and the Lucifer here, who is Christ.

Resp. If these three lines were originally part of the hymn, then they were probably a refrain recited after each stanza, as suggested by the British Library manuscript, which has *quis potest Deo placere? (ut supra)* after each stanza. This suggests a possible mode of performance for the whole hymn: a cantor or schola reciting the stanzas, each of which is followed by the *Quis potest Deo placere* sung by all participants in the liturgy, as claimed by its Preface [*ILH* ii, 26].

23. Gregory, *Homiliae XL in Evangelia*, XXXIV [*PL* 76.1249–50]. This is the list offered by Isidore as well. *Altus'* list differs from these, suggesting that the author might have been writing before these lists became known.

24. *Collatio* 8, 7 [*PL* 49:733].

25. *Collatio* 8, 7 [*PL* 49.730–1]. Compare *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*, a mid-seventh century Irish text, falsely attributed to Augustine: 'so that the immense goodness and power and benevolence which previously had been contained only within himself should also become apparent through creatures' (*DMS*, i, 1, quoted by Smyth (1986) 212).

26. Cassian, *Collatio* 8, 10 [*PL* 49.737]; *De Coenoborum Institutis*, XII, 5 [*PL* 49.430]; Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, cap. 18 [*PL* 40.333], *Enchiridion* cap. 28 [*PL* 40.246]; *De Gen. ad Litt.*, XI, 16 [*PL* 34.437].

27. The Vulgate reads, *Quoniam initium omnis peccati est superbia*, 'For the beginning of every sin is pride.' This reading is inverted in most modern English translations. *RSV*, for example, reads 'the beginning of pride is sin.'

28. Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, cap. 29 [*PL* 44.263], writes 'Not every sin is pride, but pride is the beginning of every sin.' This view is accepted by Cassian: 'Our eighth and last struggle is against the spirit of pride, which evil, although it is the last in our fight against the vices and is

placed last on our list, in origin and in the order of time it is the first' (*De Coenoborum Inst.* XII, 1 [*PL* 49.420–1]).

29. Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1987) 35.

30. *Collatio* 8, 8 [*PL* 49.735]. On the identification of stars with angels Cassian quotes Joh 38:7, 'When the stars were made together, all my angels praised me in a loud voice' (*Collatio* 8, 7 [*PL* 49.731]). Likewise Philip, 'Under the names of "moon" or "stars" we can understand "angels" and "celestial powers" ' [*PL* 26.727]. Or more to the point, 'Stars and Sons of God are understood to mean angels' [*PL* 26.791]. Gregory (*Moralia* 28, 14) also speaks of the angels as 'morning stars'. Augustine says he does not know if the stars are angels or not (*Enchiridion* 1, 58 [*PL* 40.259–60]), though he does say that angels are 'light' and were created when God said 'let there be light', *De Civ. Dei*, XI, 9 [*PL* 41.324].

31. Augustine makes this point at some length in *De Civ. Dei*, XII. 1 [*CCSL* 48.355]. But Philip has verbal echoes: *docet non solum per naturae dona, sed etiam per gratiae munera* [*PL* 26.776].

32. We know that by the seventh century the Irish were reading Augustine's *De Genesi ad Litteram*, since it is quoted in the *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* of the 'Irish Augustine', who also uses his *De Civitate Dei*, *De Genesi contra Manicheos*, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, and Philip on Joh (Smyth, 1986, 206).

33. [*PL* 34.184]. Gregory's *Moralia in Job* also encouraged investigation of the natural world, mainly because he thought that science, by allegorical interpretation, could offer 'signs' to lead people to knowledge of God.

34. *Collatio* 8, 10 [*PL* 49.737–8].

35. Cassian, *Collatio* 8, 12 [*PL* 49.740–1]. The verbal parallels are most striking here. Cassian's text includes the following words echoed in *Altus prosator: constipatus, aer, pervolitant, horrore vultuum, homines consternarentur, nequequam valentes haec carnalibus occulis intueri, exemplis, parietum saeptis.*

36. *De Gen. ad Litt.* III, 10 [*PL* 34.284]. Augustine also emphasises their danger: 'They are spirits longing to do us harm, completely estranged from all justice, swollen with pride, livid with envy, cunning in deceit.' *De Civ. Dei*, VIII, 22 [*PL* 41.246].

37. 1 Ki. 18:44, 'A little cloud, the size of a man's hand, is rising out of the sea.' 2 Ki. 3:17, 'You shall not see wind or rain, but that stream-bed shall be filled with water ' illustrating the expected connection of wind, rain and the flowing of rivers. Job 28:25–6, 'When he gave the wind its weight, and meted out the waters by measure; when he made a decree for the rain …' Joh 36:27, 'For he draws up the drops of water, he distils his mist in rain which skies pour down and drop upon men abundantly.' Amos 5:8, 'He calls the waters from the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth' (also Amos 9:6). Nahum 1:3–4, 'His way is in the storm and the whirlwind, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, he dries up all the rivers.'

38. Genesis 7:11; 8:2; Proverbs 8:28.

39. Ps. 104:11–15, 'From the heights you water the mountains, the earth is filled with the fruit of your works. You produce grass for the cattle, and plants for the use of men …'; also Ps. 147:8.

40. *De Genesi ad Litteram imperfectus Liber* IV, 14 [*PL* 34.225]; XIV, 47 [*PL* 34.239]. *De Civitate Dei*, XXII, 11 [*CCSL* 48.830].

41. Charlesworth (1985) I, 672–5. This is the weather-process which Jane Stevenson (1985, 174) saw as evidence of Isidorean influence on *Altus*.

42. *PL* 26.728.
43. *Moralia* 15, para. 60.
44. *Tract. in Ioannis Evang.* XXXVI, 9 [*PL* 35.1668].
45. *De Fide*, 1, 6 [*PL* 16.561].
46. *VC* i, 36. For discussion of this theme, Byrne (1973) 97–100.
47. Jerome, 'Commentary on Jonah': *venerit usque ad profunda terrarum, quibus quasi* vectibus et columnis Dei *voluntate* terrae globus sustentatur [*CCSL* 76, 399].
48. Job 26:7, *appendit terram super nihilum*. Other echoes can be found, for example, in the Vulgate of Prov. 8:27–9, 'When he established the heavens I was there; when by a certain law and a circle he surrounded the deep; when he fixed the aether on high, and when he balanced the springs of water; when he gave to the sea its round limitation, and gave a law to the waters not to cross their boundaries ...' Similar geography appears in *Hisperica Famina*, Herren (1984) 109. See also Smyth (1987) 84. Von Rad, *Genesis* (London, 1961) 52, 124, offers a useful explanation of Ancient Israelite cosmology.
49. Smyth (1986) 212.
50. See Carey (1989) for discussion of the underworld motif in Irish literature.
51. The *Leabhar Breac* version of the Preface to *Altus* is a good example of this 'permeable hell', promising that whoever recited the hymn 'will not be in hell after the day of judgement' (*ILH* ii, 25). For a good discussion of 'rescuing souls out of hell', see Brian Grogan (1976) 48–55.
52. The rivers are named as Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates.
53. Vulgate, *et folium eius non defluet*. The motif of unfalling leaves was used in the East to refer to those who had remained faithful to 'Christ the Olive Tree' in time of persecution. Thus Ephrem Syrus (Murray, 1975, 112):

> In persecution the faithless have fallen like leaves
>   which do not abide on their trees;
> but Christians, hanging on Christ,
>   are like olive-leaves in winter,
>   all of them planted wholly in him.

We cannot be sure that such fourth-century Syriac imagery was familiar in the sixth-century West, hut it certainly cannot be ruled out.
54. Philip makes this link between the two trees [*PL* 26.726].
55. The vocabulary of Ex. 19:16 (*VL*), where God and Moses meet on Mount Sinai, includes *audire, tonitrua, fulgura, montem, clangor, buccinae perstrepebat* ... and 20:18, *lampades, sonitum buccinae*. See also Rev. 16:18.
56. *Rex Regum* at 1 Tim. 6:15, Rev. 17:14; 19:16 – all of these when Christ is coming in judgement.
57. *Omnes enim stabimus ante tribunal Christi*. See also 2 Cor. 5:10.
58. See also Job 31:36; Dan. 7:10; 12:1-4 and Rev. 20:12–15. Also 1 Enoch 104:7, 'Now, you sinners ... all your sins are being written down every day.'
59. Henry Burgess, *Select Metrical Hymns and Homilies of Ephraem Syrus* (London, 1983) 57.
60. Charlesworth (1985) I, 44.
61. See for example the eleventh-century mosaic of the Last Judgement in the Cathedral of Torcello.
62. Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Mortuorum*, XXXII (*CCSL* 2. 961). Interest-

ingly, Tertullian cites biblical authorities for this vision: Gen. 9:5, 'For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it, and of man,' and Jonah 2:11, 'And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.' Enoch 61:5 goes further: 'those who have been destroyed in the desert, those who have been devoured by the wild beasts, and those who have been eaten by the fish of the sea ... will all return and find hope.' Charlesworth (1985) I, 42.

63. *De Gen. ad Litt.* II, x, 73 [*PL* 34.271].

64. Lucifer means 'light-bearer'. Although in the Middle Ages it began to be used of the devil, and is used in this way by *Altus* in stanza C, it was used in the early church to refer to Christ, the 'light of the world'. 2 Pet. 1:19 refers to Christ thus: *et lucifer oriatur in cordibus vestris*.

65. *In Job* 38:31–2 [*PL* 26.805–6].

66. This was held by, among others, John Chrysostom, Jerome and Cyril of Jerusalem (*ILH* ii, 167).

67. *Hoc signum crucis erit in coelo, cum Dominus ad judicandum venerit*, Thomasius (1749) 107, 139.

68. 1 Jn 4:15. See also Jn 20:31.

69. *ILH* ii, 25–7.

ADIUTOR LABORANTIUM

1. *ILH* ii, 23–4. A version of the story appears in three manuscripts.

2. The hymn is *In te Christe credentium*, found in *ILH* i, 84–5, where the Preface attributes it to Columba.

3. British Library Cotton Manuscript Galba A. xiv. Muir (1983) 205–16. The text was also published by the Henry Bradshaw Society in Bernard J. Muir (ed.), *A Pre-conquest English Prayer-Book* (Woodbridge. 1988) 40–1.

4. Muir (1983) 208.

5. The use of *homunculus*, 'little man', in l. 16 is worth noting in this context. It is not a very common word in early medieval Latin, having only twenty occurrences in the *CLCLT* up to the late eighth century. Five of these are in Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* (*DLS*, 112–6) and three times in the *Life of Columba* (*VC* i, 46; ii, 23, 27). Adomnán's regular use of the word may reflect a familiarity with it on Iona. If *Adiutor laborantium* was held by the Iona monks to be the work of their founder, one might expect just such familiarity with its vocabulary as these occurrences of *homunculus* suggest.

6. Bishop (1918) 386.

7. The reader will have noticed that stanza X of the *Altus prosator* began with *Xristo* in the same way.

8. This scheme, in which every line of a lengthy section of verse has the same end-rhyme, is found elsewhere in Hiberno-Latin verse. See, for example, the hymn *Audite pantes ta erga* in the *Antiphonary of Bangor*, ii, 16.

9. Notes on the text, by line number:

    1 Ambrose (d. 397), *De Abraham* 2, 10 [*PL* 14.514] calls God *adiutor laborantium*; Faustus of Riez (d. 490), *Epistulae* 6, l.4, *sed ille laborantum benignus adiutor*; Cassiodorus (d. 580), *Expositio psalmarum*, Ps. 113, *Adiutor, quia carne laborantes in hoc mundo, in quantum utile novit, adiuvat* [*CCSL* 98.1034].

2 Esther 15:5, God is *omnium rector*.

3 Jerome, *in Esaiam*, VII, xxi, translates the LXX of the passage,
   Custodite propugnacula [*CCSL* 73.294] and interprets it as a call
   to the apostles to guard the church. MS has *propugnabulum* here.

4 For God as *defensor* of Israel, Judith 5:25 (*Deus eorum defendet
   illos*); 6:2 (*gens Israel defendatur a Deo suo*); 6:13 (*Deus caeli
   defensor eorum est*).

5 Lk. 1:52, *exaltavit humiles*.

6 Lk. 1:51, *Dispersit superbos mente cordis sui*. Augustine, *Ser-
   mones* 342, describes the 'breaking' of the proud: *In oliva erant,
   superbiendo fracti sunt* [*PL* 39.1503]; *Adnotationes in Job* XVI,
   Deus fregit superbiam [*PL* 34.842]; Concilium Arausicanum (AD
   529), *Quando dicit: Nemo potest venire ad me, frangit super-
   bientem arbitrii libertatem* [*CCSL* 118A.75].

7 Isa. 48:17, *Ego Dominus Deus tuus … gubernans te in via qua
   ambulas*. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* LVI, 1, *Tota enim
   ecclesia constans ex omnibus fidelibus, quia fideles omnes mem-
   bra sunt Christi, habet illud caput positum in caelis quod
   gubernat corpus suum* [*CCSL* 39.694].

9 MS has *Iudex conctorum iudicium*, but this would give the line
   nine syllables, while the norm is eight, which the correct *iudicum*
   would give. Apponius, *Canticum Canticorum Expositio*, lib. 12,
   l. 647, calls God *iudex iudicum*, among other titles such as *Deus
   deorum, Dominus dominorum, rex regum, princeps principum*,
   etc. Though *iudex iudicum* is not found in the Bible, God is
   frequently called *iudex*, and parallel constructions are found
   (1 Tim. 6:15, where God is called *Rex regum et Dominus
   dominantium*) suggesting that *iudex iudicum* may have been
   constructed along such lines. The phrase is also found in the
   hymn *In te Christe credentium*, *ILH* i, 84.

10 For some reason the 'K' verse is doubled. K is replaced by C
   because there is no K in Latin (nor in Irish, for that matter).

11 Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, XXX, iv, *Deus enim sicut est causa
   causarum, sicut vita viventium* [*PL* 76.533]. See also the hymn *In
   te Christe credentium*, *ILH* i, 84, *deus vita viventium*.

12 Jas 1:17 calls God 'Father of Lights', *pater luminum*.

13 Jesus tells his disciples, 'Let your light shine before men, so that
   seeing your good works they may give glory to your Father who
   is in heaven' (Mt. 5:16). The suggestion here is that the light
   which shines forth in the good deeds of those who love God is
   itself the gift of God who is 'light and father of lights'. The image
   of Christians 'shining with great light' appears in the writings
   of Gregory: for example *Moralia in Job* IX, xi, *qui magna luce
   irradiant* [*PL* 75.869].

15 Prosper of Aquitaine (d. circa 463), *Liber sententiarum* cap. 232,
   *quia excitans fidem, et differens opem, non auxilium negat, sed
   desiderium movet* [*CCSL* 68A.311].

20 Song of Songs 1:3, *Trahe me post te*, 'Draw me after you,' the
   lover says to her beloved.

21 The metaphor of a harbour for the salvation of the faithful can
   be found for example in Psalm 106:28–30, 'They cried to the
   Lord when they were troubled, and he delivered them from all
   their distress … and he brought them to the haven (*in portum*)
   they had chosen.' Verecundus Iuncensis, *In Cant. Deborae*,

cap.16, l. 37, *Adpete potius portum quietis, ut post amaras et undosas vitae mortalis aquas requiem perfruaris.* [CCSL 93.191]; Caesarius, *Sermones* 234, cap 1, ... *ad portum beatae vitae Christo duce pervenire* [CCSL 104.933]. Augustine uses the expression *portum ... pulcherrimum* in *Epist ad Hieronymum (exc. epist. Augustini)* ep. 98 (CLCLT).

22   The manuscript has no gap in l. 22 between *Xristus* and *infinitum*, but there is evidently a two-syllable word missing here. The first word of the line is written *Xps*, embodying both the *chi* and the *ro* of the Greek alphabet commonly used together for Jesus' title.

26   Muir's original reading of *Christe Domine* was revised by him, after examination of the MS under ultra violet light, to *Christe Ihesu*. Muir (1988) 41.

10. R. Thurneysen (ed.), *Scéla Mucce Meic Dathó* (Dublin, 1935; repr. 1986).
11. Murray (1975) 159–60.
12. Mk 6:47–52; also Jn 6:19–21.
13. AU 641, 691, 749, for example.
14. VC i, 5.
15. VC i, 29.
16. VC i, 37.
17. VC ii, 33.
18. VC ii, 22.
19. Mackey (1989) 16; Forthomme Nicholson (1989) 386–413; Morris (1965) 57. On medieval Irish use of Pelagius' *Commentary* on the Pauline Epistles, see Kelly (1978), who makes it clear that this is not evidence of the presence of Pelagian theology. For a fuller discussion of Irish 'Pelagianism', see Márkus (1992b).
20. Pelagius, *On Virginity*, Rees (1991) 74.
21. Peter Brown (1967) 342.
22. *De Vita Christiana*, 10, 2 (Rees, 117).
23. *De Vita Christiana*, 9, 2 (Rees, 116).
24. *De Lege Divina*, 9, 1 (Rees, 102).
25. *De Dono Perseverantiae*, 20, 53 [PL 45.1026].

NOLI PATER

1. The text of the hymn here is that of Bernard and Atkinson, ILH i, 88; a version also in Blume, *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, vol. 51, 286.
2. Kenney (1929) 265.
3. ILH ii, xv.
4. ILH ii, 171.
5. Notes on the text, by line number:
    2   Trinity *ac*; Franciscan Convent *ne*.
    5   Ovid, *Met.*, i, 596 has *vaga fulmina*. *Vaga* makes better sense here than the *vagi* of MSS.
    8   Lk. 1:15, *erit enim magnus coram domino*.
    8–9   These lines are plainly dependent on Lk. 1:15. vinum et siceram *non bibet, et Spiritu sancto* replebitur adhuc ex utero matris suae. *Sicera* is an interesting word, a Latinised Hebrew noun.
    10   MSS offer variants, including *Elizabeth et Zacharias*, but *Elizabeth Zacahriae* is correct.

6. Lawlor (1897) 155–6.

7. Thomasius (1749) 118.

8. Trinity College, Dublin.

9. Mo-Bí appears in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, iii, 21 (under his other name of Berchán), so is evidently known to seventh-century Iona monks in connection with their patron. The continuation of his cult in some form in Scotland up to the early sixteenth century is attested by the Feast of St Mavianus in the *Arbroath Breviary* (1506) on 12 October. This was Mo-Bí's feast in Ireland, noted by the *Martyrologies of Óengus* and of *Donegal*. See Boyle and Dilworth (1984) 39.

10. *ILH* ii, 28.

11. *ILH* ii, 28. MS at Franciscan Convent, Dublin.

12. Stokes (1905) 191. Fánat is by Lough Swilly, Co. Donegal, not far from Columba's monastery at Derry.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. *ILH* ii, 171.

16. See, for example, Scarre (1910) 173–81.

17. See Kenney (1929) 751; Herbert & McNamara (1989) 58.

18. Kenney (1929, 750), for discussion of the significance of this particular year.

19. We have seen it predicted in the *Martyrology of Óengus* noted above. A similar prediction appears, for example, in the tenth-century Irish *Life of Adomnán*, in which Adomnán, in the last year of his life 'proclaimed that an affliction would come upon the men of Ireland around the feast of John' Herbert (1988b) 61.

20. *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1096, quoted by Kenney (1929) 750.

21. *ILH* ii, 28.

22. Stokes (1905) 191.

23. Herbert & McNamara (1989) 59.

24. *ar méis gil airgit*. Scarre (1910) 180.

25. Meyer (1911) xii–xiii.

26. Finan (1989) 70

27. Ó Corráin (1989) 254.

28. Ó Corráin (1989) 264.

29. *ILH* ii, 48.

30. *Oratio S. Brendani*, x [*CCSL* 47.19].

31. *Buile Shuibhne (The Frenzy of Suibhne)*, O'Keeffe (1913) 23.

32. O'Keeffe (1913) 31. Can we detect echoes here of Ps. 22:16, and hence of Christ's Passion?

33. A recent example of such prejudice can be found in Bradley (1993) 51–69.

34. *Confessiones*, x, 57 [*PL* 32.803].

35. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXLIV, 13 [*CCSL* 40, 2098].

36. Bitel (1990) 31–2.

37. See Mac Eoin (1962) 212–7. It was sung every day by the monks of Tallaght, for example.

38. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, III, 4.

39. *VC* ii, 9. It was a *hymnorum liber septimaniorum*, 'a book of hymns for the week'.

40. Such a claim is supported by the legend of the *ILH* Preface to the hymn *Altus prosator*, which tells how Gregory the Great (d. 604) sent Columba a cross and *immain na sechtmaine*, 'the hymns of the week' (*ILH* i, 63).

41. This is confirmed by Adomnán's story of Columba's death. The saint's body was taken from the church to the guest-house, 'when the morning hymns were ended' (*VC* iii, 23).

42. *VC* ii, 46.

AMRA CHOLÙIMB CHILLE

1. On the linguistic dating of the poem, see Herbert (1988) 10, and authorities there cited. As far as its contents go, if we contrast the *Amra*, in its themes and in its attitude toward the dead Columba, with the poetry of Beccán or with the works of Adomnán, it seems impossible that the *Amra* should be later than either of these authors. It seems to draw on little or no material from the mass of legend which we know to have accrued in Iona within a half century of Columba's death.

2. Stokes (1899) 135.

3. Diplomatic edition: R. I. Best and O. Bergin, eds, *Lebor na hUidre: The Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929) 11–41; there is an edition and translation of sorts in J. O'Beirne Crowe, *The Amra Choluim Chilli of Dallan Forgaill* (1871) with some rather surreal efforts at some of the lines. Stokes gives interesting specimens of his more problematic lines in *RC* 6, 359–60, and *RC* 20, 30. One favourite example will suffice: 'Colum Cille used to be boiled from charity' (Crowe, 49). We hope we have avoided similar absurdities in our own translation.

4. Bernard and Atkinson, *ILH* i, 162–83; ii, 53–80, 223–35. The second volume contains Atkinson's translation, which Stokes criticises in *RC* 20, 31. An edition of this version by Stokes can be found in *Goidelica* (1872) 156–73.

5. W. Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille', *RC* 20 (1899) 31–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–37; *RC* 21 (1900) 133–36. This contains the extensive preface from Rawl. B.502, as well as some appended tales related to the poem and its composition from later manuscripts.

6. He was not aware of the copy in the National Library of Ireland, MS G 50, 1–105.

7. Thurneysen (1933–6); Binchy (1958) 164, (1960) 76–94; Hull (1960); Watkins (1963).

8. P. L. Henry, *Saoithiúlacht na Sean-Ghaeilge* (Dublin, 1978) 191–212.

9. T. Kinsella, *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (Oxford, 1986) 3–9. The translation finds a welcome place in that anthology, though it takes some extreme poetic licences.

10. Hull (1978) 242.

11. For a concise summary of the traditions of Dallán, see D. Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, Legend and Romance: an encyclopedia of the Irish folk tradition* (London, 1990) 148–50.

12. Some examples are Tadhg Dall Ó hUigínn (d. 1591), Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta (d. 1733), in Ireland, and An Clarsair Dall (Ruairidh Moireasdain) (d. 1714), in Scotland.

13. Stokes (1899) 36. His first name may have been Eochaid, and his patronymic may have been mac Colla.

14. For instance, he is tied elsewhere to the descendants of Colla Uais, a sept of the Airgialla, a mixed group of peoples subject to the Uí Néill (Ó Riain, 1985, § 426). Another version assigns him to the Ulster tribe of the Dál Fiatach (*CGH*, 407). Both these are likely to be mistaken genealogies.

15. In the prefatory matter in the *Liber Hymnorum*, two scholars who died

in the early 11th century are cited for their opinions on the place where
the poem was begun, one of whom was the abbot of Kells and *comarba*
of Columba. See Herbert (1989) 68.

16. Both are elegies of sorts on saints. One is on the saint Conall Coel,
    and the other is on St Sénán of Scattery Island. The former poem is
    unknown, and the latter has been shown to be a product of the late
    9th or early 10th century, and to have been written by Cormac mac
    Cuilennáin, bishop-king of Cashel (d. 908). See L. Breatnach, 'An
    Edition of *Amra Senáin*', in Ó Corrain et al. (1989) 7–31.
17. M. Ó Cleirigh, *The Martyrology of Donegal* (ed. J. H. Todd & W.
    Reeves, Dublin, 1864) su. Jan. 29.
18. *vc* i, 10, 11, 49. See p. 11 above.
19. See Carney (1978–9) 423–4, on the structure and antiquity of the
    preface.
20. Stokes (1899) 32.
21. Henry (1978) 205.
22. Notes on text and translation, by section and line number:
    The manuscripts which contain the poem, and the abbreviations of
    those for which variants are occasionally cited in the notes, are: *Lebor
    na hUidre* (*LU*), ff. 5a–15a33 (partial); The Trinity College, Dublin copy
    of the *Liber Hymnorum* (*LH*), ff. 26a–28b (almost entire); Bodleian MS
    Rawlinson B.502 (*R*), ff. 54ra–59vb; TCD MS H.2.16, *The Yellow Book of
    Lecan* (*YBL*) cols. 680–99; Bodleian MS Laud 615 (Laud), pp. 42–5; RIA
    MS 23 P 16, the *Lebor Brecc* (*LB*) pp. 238c–248 (imperfect); Stowe C
    iii 2, ff. 1–10 (gaps); BL MS Egerton 1782 (Eg), ff. 1a–14b; National
    Library of Ireland, MS G 50, 1–105; and NLS MS 72.1.5, ff. 2b1–4a2
    (these last two not used by Stokes).

> 3   *culu*. The glosses themselves acknowledge the oddity of this
>   word. It looks like the a.p. of *cul*, 'chariot', and so we have
>   translated, but the glosses suggest a 'darkening' or obscuring
>   of the meaning by the poet, something which is evident in his
>   style elsewhere. See Stokes (1899) 148–53.
>
> 6   *múichtheo*. MSS: R *muichtea*, LH *muichthia*, Eg. *muichthea*,
>   Laud. *muichdia*. We have taken it as the g.s. of *múchad/
>   múichad* 'gloom, heaviness, oppression'.
>
> 9   We have differed from other translators in taking the *dercc*
>   in this compound to represent 'pit, trench', rather than 'eye,
>   glance'. This corresponds with various more or less contem-
>   porary pictures of the otherworld, for instance that in the
>   vision of Dryhthelm in Cunningham in Ayrshire of 'frequent
>   masses of dusky flame … rising as though from a great pit …'
>   in which souls are tortured (HE v.12). See next note for an
>   echo of Ps. 40.
>
> 10 These echo a number of Psalms and other biblical passages,
>   most especially Ps. 40:1–2: 'I waited patiently for the Lord;
>   he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the
>   desolate pit, out of the miry bog …' But perhaps we should
>   also note 'Thou art near, Lord God, and all thy commands are
>   true' (Ps.119:151) and 'What great nation is there that has a
>   god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we
>   call upon him?' (Deut. 4:7).
>
> 11 See Hull (1960) 243.
>
> I. 2   We have taken this as a diminutive of *uch* with the ending
>   *-tat*, cf. Thurneysen (1946) 175.

4 *ré*: We have taken this as a word describing a type of verse, or piece of poetry cf. *DIL* 5.*ré*. MS *aisneid* probably represents the earlier *as-indet* from which it comes.

6 Neire was the pupil, sometimes said to he the son, of Morann. a legendary prophet and lawyer. He is sometimes invoked in legal and mystical verse, as for instance in *Audacht Morainn*: 'Arise, set forth, O my Neire accustomed to proclaiming ...' (Kelly, 1976, 3, 24). It should be noted also that this use of *sceo*, usually 'and', but here 'even? or?' is unattested elsewhere, but it is difficult to understand the line otherwise. On *sceo,* see Thurneysen (1946) 549; Binchy (1960) 77.

7 We have followed previous translators here, but have misgivings about the prominence of the article here, in such archaic verse. One also would, in the absence of alliteration, expect some sort of equivalence or echo of the beginning of the previous line *Co india* ... Perhaps this is a verb–form, possibly from a compound with either 1.*fethid* 'watches, observes', or 2.*fethid* 'goes, makes one's way', in which case read *In-faith* ... and translate either 'he watched the servants (*deis*) of God who settled in Sion', or 'He made his way to God, he settled on the south/right hand of Sion.' Dallán consistently uses Sion to symbolise heaven, and Adomnán, in his 'Prayer' follows this. Columba himself, if he is the author of the *Altus prosator*, uses the imagery of Sion to inform his picture of the heaven of the just, though he there melds it with the image of Moses ascending Mt Sinai (*Altus*, § Q). Presumably the imagery of Columba sitting at God's right hand is an extension of the saved sheep (of whom Columha is one) being on Christ's right hand (Matt. 25), as Christ sits at the Father's right hand.

10 For the word order in this example of tmesis, see Watkins (1963) 243. For *Cond íath*, see Hull (1960) 244, who rejects it as a verb-form, and takes it as *cond-iath* 'land of chieftains' and Henry (1978) 201, who reads *cond iath* 'head of lands'.

12 Cf. Mal. 2:7, 'For the lips of the priest are to keep knowledge, and instruction is to be sought from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.'

17 This is a guess, for even the medieval commentators were a bit stumped by the word *céis* (Stokes, 1899, 164–7), despite the phrase continuing as a proverb. Perhaps 'sounding-board' is the proper translation? Whatever it is, it is something a harp has only one of, and hence we have chosen a harp-key.

II. 1 Somewhat conjectural. The MSS have *trath*, but the close alliteration of this line would suggest emendation to *rath*, 'grace'. We have followed others in taking *at-ruic* to be from *at-reig*, 'rises, advances', hut have taken the prose word order of this line to be something like: *At-ruic Columb rath Dé do chuitechta ro-ard. Rath* we have interpreted as an independent d.s. Another possible interpretation is 'By the grace of God exalted companies rose to Colum'.

7–9 Some problems with the verbs here. *Lais* in l. 8, may be *leis*

⟨R⟩ for 'with him, his' as Stokes (1899) 170–1, takes it, but we have followed Henry (1978) 201, noting the other MSS, in taking it as the 3 s. pret. of *lassaid*. One might note also *lés* 'light, radiance'. The interpretation of *cot-ro-lass* is conjectural. The whole three lines might alternatively be read: 'The light ⟨*lés*⟩of the western lands lit up the northern land, so that the east blazed with him/ it (*cot-ro-lass*)': i.e., Columba, from the west, lit up the north (Dál Riata) so that the east was converted (Pictland). On this sort of fire/light imagery, see VC iii, 17–21) and the discussion on the poems of Beccán, pp. 155–6.

11   See Hull (1960) 244.

12   We follow Hull (1960) 245 here in taking this as the 3 s. pret. of *in(d)-ocaib*, 'exalts, glorifies', with 3 s. infixed pn., but differ as to its subject and object. He interprets it as a reflexive, but we prefer to take 'God's angel' as the subject, and Columba as the object. Presumably this refers to an angel taking away Columba at his death, as Adomnán tells us of Columba witnessing the same sort of thing of others' souls (e.g., VC iii, 6–14). Indeed, Columba himself had witnessed angels coming for his own soul, four years before his death (VC iii, 22). His actual death is accompanied by similar visitations (VC iii, 23). Perhaps, though, it refers to some event in Columba's lifetime. For Columba and angels, see VC iii.

III. 1   See Binchy (1958) 164 for this interpretation of *axal*. For Columba after death in the company of the apostles, see VC ii, 32. The same twofold use of angels and apostles, this time in comparison, is used in an early hymn on Patrick: 'Hear ye … How for his good ways he is likened to the angels, / And because of his perfect life is deemed equal to the apostles' ILH, 7; trans. Bieler (1953) 61.

  2   We follow Hull (1960) 245, and expand the conjunction: MS *nad adaig*.

  3   MS: *do Moise*. See Watkins (1963) 244, for the emendation, to supply the alliteration.

  4   We have followed Stokes (1899) 175, in taking *mós* to be a borrowing of Latin *mos*, 'custom, habit', especially as a g.s. of *céol* makes more sense than a n.p. We have taken MS *nad genatar* to represent a relative clause, with the verb *ad-gnin*, 'knows, recognises', the 3 pl. pret. of which is *at-génatar*.

  5   See Hull (1960) 245.

  6   Stokes, etc., take this as 'the King of priests', but it can as easily be the other way round.

IV. 1   Cf. Wisdom 3:5, 'Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed.'

  2   MS *uath*, but *fúath* supplies alliteration. On the other hand, *fúath* in this meaning is not known early: its usual meaning is 'shape, figure, semblance'.

  6   *Ruam*: Stokes (1899) 178–9, took this as 'fame', but there is little evidence for this. The secondary meanings 'cemetery, grave', and also 'monastery' (cf. Henry, 1978, 202) developed from a primary meaning, 'Rome'. It seems unlikely that it would already have developed the secondary meanings so early. Most sensible, we would argue, is to take this as meaning 'Rome'.

7   See Hull (1960) 245, though we take the English verb 'was granted' to contain the repetitive and completed sense he ascribes to the verb here.

9   See Binchy (1958) 164. Adomnán seems to imply a reliance on Paul by Columba for describing his visions, *vc* i, 43.

10–11   Problematic. This is the MS reading, though nothing of this sort is found in Basil. The usual translation, moreover, would be 'who forbids performances of recitations by great choirs/hosts'. Stokes took this meaning from it, but emended to *ar-gairt*, having Columba do the forbidding. There are some passages on the singing of office in Basil (see Wagner, 1962, 306–11), but we have preferred to take *aidbsiu* as having some of its later negative meaning here of 'boasting, pride'. Certainly it seems to be a text of this sort from Basil that the glossator in R thought of: 'St Baethín quoted a text from Basil to abate the pride' (Stokes, 1899, 181). What the poet has in mind is beyond us, but Basil consistently preaches humility. For an alternative translation, see Hull (1960) 246. Below we take *ar-gair* to mean 'regulate' instead of the usual 'forbid'. Perhaps this would give some sense, with Basil (or perhaps Columba) regulating the singing of choirs?

V. 1   We have taken *caín-denam* as being a d.s. 'to fair/right action', and emended accordingly. On the syntax, see Hull 246, though we have differed from him on the meaning of *dar cais cain-den[u]m*. This obviously echoes the numerous NT passages which use the metaphor of the race to describe the Christian life, e.g. 1 Cor. 9:24–6, Gal. 2:2, 5:7, 2 Tim. 4:7, and particularly Heb. 12:1: 'let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.' Beccán also uses the image of the race, in *To-fed andes* v. 2, 11.

2–3   On these lines, see Hull (1960) 246.

7–8   The references in both lines seem to be to Cassian's work. Pádraig Ó Néill writes: 'The battles of *gula* refer to the struggles against gluttony, the vice which Cassian placed at the head of his list of the "eight deadly sins" (*de octo principalis vitiis*). By referring to *gula* immediately after mentioning Cassian, the poet of the *Amra* indicated that he was familiar with Cassian's work, not merely his name' (Ó Néill, 1987, 208). Gluttony is discussed in Cassian, *Coll.* 5. 2,4 [*PL* 49.611–14], and *Inst.* v. 3f [*PL* 49.205f.]. The same is probably true of the next line, which refers not just to Columba's reading of the books of Solomon, but also his following them. This is explained in Cassian, *Coll.* 3. 6 [*PL* 49.566]: 'The three books of Solomon accord with these three renunciations. Corresponding to the first renunciation is Proverbs, in which the desire for the things of the flesh and for earthly sin are excoriated. Corresponding to the second renunciation is Ecclesiasticus, where the vanity of everything under the sun is proclaimed. And applicable to the third is the Song of Songs, in which the mind, rising beyond all things visible, contemplates all that is of heaven and is brought into union with the Word of God.' (translation, Luibheid,1985, 86).

9   See Hull (1960) 246, for the tmesis, and Henry (1978) 202–3, for this conjectural meaning of *imm-raith* (*<-reithid?*) An

alternative would be to take it as a pret. 3 s. of *imm-rádi* 'contemplated, considered' (emend to *imm-ráid*?). In the context of book-learning, we are surely talking about computistical skills here. We know the next generation or two of Irish scholars had interest in these things, as well as general natural science. See for instance the work of the Irish Augustine, *De Mirabilibus Sacrae Scripturae*, written in southern Ireland in 655 (Walsh and ● Cróinín 1988; Kenney, 275–7; MacGinty, 1987, 70–83).

10   This undoubtedly refers to allegorical interpretation of the OT books, by which characters and events are seen as 'figures' or types of Christ and the work of salvation accomplished in the NT and in the church. This passage suggests that Columba may have written an exegetical work on the books of Law.

11   We follow previous translators on *eter scolaib* here, though we are bothered by the dative with *eter*. For *ro-ch -uaid*, see Thurneysen (1933–6) 373, and Binchy (1960) 83.

12   It is tempting to translate *imm-uaim* here as 'computus'. If, as these passages imply, Columba himself had worked on the astronomical calculations necessary for determining, for instance, the date of Easter, it would help to explain the particular resistance of the Iona monks to changing their method of dating the feast.

15   *Rimfed*, see Hull (1960) 247. On *diruais*, see DIL 2.*diruais*, from ? *do-fuarat*, 'remains'. Others take it as a compound of *dír* and *úas.*, 'good and noble', cf. Henry (1978) 204–5.

VI. 3   This follows Henry (1978) 205.

4   For the interpretation of *grés* here, see Hull (1960) 247.

5   MSS *cathru*. It seems most sensible to supply here the a.s. of *cathair*, and we have emended accordingly. It may of course be that the poet has 'darkened' the declension here for the sake of sound, cf. *culu*, Pref. 3. The reference must be a conflation of the idea of the ladder of Jacob, and the heavenly City. For a discussion of a later Irish depiction of the Heavenly City, see John Carey, 'The heavenly City in *Saltair na Rann*', *Celtica* 15 (1986) 87–104.

6   This seems a very odd image. The only text that we have found to shed any light on it is Amhrose's discussion of Baptism, in *De Sacramentis* ii. 2 [PL 16.444]: '*Whosoever first descended, was made whole of every sickness* (Jn 5:4, interpolation) … If it means he who descended first in honour, that signifies he who had the fear of God, the love of righteousness, the grace of charity, and the desire of purity, he rather was made whole. Yet at that time one only was made whole; at that time, I say, by way of figure he who first descended was alone healed. How much greater is the grace of the Church, wherein all are saved, whosoever descend.' (Translation, T. Thompson, *St. Ambrose: ●n the Sacraments and On the Mysteries*, London, 1950, 60.)

8   MSS *Ar assaib rigthier*. There is no really suitable meaning for *ass(a)* in this context, with the possible exception of *as* 'milk'. Alliteration could suggest the addition of an *r-* here. For the rare word *ras*, 'longing', see DIL, 2.*ras*. We have taken

rigthïer to be a pret. pass. of rigid 'stretches, extends'. This is presumably, like the following line, a reference to Columha's asceticism. For discussion of both *dringthïar* and *rigthïer* see Cowgill (1983) 97–9.

10 Henry (1978) 206.

17 Stokes (1899) 264–5, translates 'he was an Ovid', but Henry (1978) 206, rightly differs.

21 Visitations by the apostles Peter and Paul happen to St Martin in Sulpicius Severus' *Dialogues*, ii.13.

24 The reference to 'his skill at priestly matters' is not as aesthetic as it seems. It was important for lay-folk that their clergy should have a basic competence in administering the sacraments, for the grace of the sacrament depends on its proper performance according to the rubric. So the 'Rule of Patrick' in the eighth century would lay heavy penance on a bishop who 'confers high orders on anyone who is unable to practise them, for that bishop is guilty of death to God and to men.' (See O'Keeffe, 1904, 221.)

28 MSS: *LH*, *diothaig*, R *diofothaig.*, *LU di ofothuch*. The next line seems to demand a vowel to alliterate with, and we have taken the *LH* reading and emended accordingly.

30 *Mand*, literally, 'manna'. This may refer to the eucharist, since in l. 24 the poem mentions Columba's priestcraft. But it may refer to his reward in Heaven, cf. Rev. 2:17, 'To him who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna …'

32 Conjectural interpretation of *con-ta-slai*. We have followed Henry (1978) 206 n. 35 in taking the verb to be *con-slá* (escapes, departs, goes away), with a Class B 3pl. infixed pn., although we have used the *LH* form (R: *contaisle*).

VII. 2 *Dó chétul*. Or perhaps *dochétal* 'a sad song, lament', cf. Hull (1960) 248. If it is 'two songs', however, it may well refer to the *Altus prosator* and the *Adiutor laborantium*.

3 MSS: R *fo ogi*, *LH fo ógi*, and translations in Stokes 'at completeness' and Hull, 'upon completion'. We would prefer to take it as a verb, °*fo-óigi* 'accomplishes, performs', cf. *óigid* 'completes', and *con-óigi* 'sews together, completes'.

7 Following Henry (1978) 207 on *fuacht*.

8–9 Excessive fasting was frowned on as conducive to pride. To fast over-much was a form of self-assertion, a strenuous insistence on your own strength of will rather than on your dependence on God's grace. The reference in l. 7 to heresy, however, also raises the fact that fasting improperly, on Sunday, for instance, was forbidden in the early church.

13 Beccán uses similar language, esp. *Fo réir*, 18. The word *tin* is very rare, though we find it both in the *Amra* and in Beccán's poetry.

15 MSS: R, *nade in meicc*, *LH*, *LU*, *nad in mc*. It seems best to take *meicc* as an incorrect expansion of *mc*. For *náde* meaning 'truly', see *DIL*.1.*náde*, and Wb.24d11.

18 This reference to Columba's grave suggests that belief in Columba's posthumous efficacy, his saintly cult, had begun to develop immediately after his death. It is also striking in its direct address to the audience, something not seen elsewhere in the poem. Adomnán mentions Columba's grave: 'And even

after the departure of his most gentle soul from the taber-
nacle of the body, this same heavenly brightness, as well as
the frequent visits of holy angels, does not cease, down to the
present day, to appear at the place in which his holy bones
repose; as is established through being revealed to certain
elect persons.' *VC* iii, 23.

19   Following Hull (1960) 249, on *sretha*.

21   We take *do-rumeoin* as 3 s. perf. of *do-ruimnethar* (the
prototonic form is *-dermen*) 'leave behind, forget'. Beccán
has some very similar passages, esp. *To-fed* 17–19.

23   On *so-ch -fir*, see Thurneysen (1933–6) 373. For a more
cautious view of the enclitic *-ch*, see Binchy (1960) 85–6.

24–5   Only following the gloss (Stokes, 1899, 280–1) makes sense
of these two lines. They must refer to Matt. 25:31–41, on the
Last Judgement. The 'second saying' refers to 'Then he will
say to those on his left: "Out of my sight, you accursed, into
that everlasting fire …"' We have taken *rígmac* as an inde-
pendent d.s., referring to Christ, the judge in Matt. 25. Note
also MSS *in rigmac*, but the article is unneccesary and not to
be expected in a work of this date.

26   This may not be meant entirely literally, since Columba was
77 when he died. It may be a reference to his exile, since his
abandonment of Ireland would be a metaphorical death, a
deliberate burying of himself in Britain. This is the sense of
'white martyrdom' as described in the *Cambrai Homily* (see
p. 158).

VIII. 1   This is most likely to be Áed mac Ainmuirech (d. 598, AU),
king of Tara, who was a cousin of Columba's, and ruler of the
northern Uí Néill. See p. 98.

3   MSS: *suaig*. We have taken this to represent the g.s. of *so-ág*
'easy-contention, quarrel'.

4   *Cotach*. This must refer to the covenant between himself
and the then king of Dál Riata, Conall son of Comgall (d. 574)
in which he received Iona (see AU 574: 'Conall … granted
Colum Cille the island of Iona').

6   MSS. *tolrig*, R. *LH*, *toil rig LU*. We take *toil* to be the d.s. of *tol*,
here 'will'. This refers, obviously, to the Picts, and if inter-
preted as here suggests that Columba was thought to have
converted at least some of them. Cf. I.15.

10   We take *ar-gart* as 3 s. pret. of *ar-gair*, with an unattested
meaning here of rule, control, rather than 'forbid'. Conall
here is Columba's great-grandfather, Conall Gulban.

11   *Udbud*. Perhaps for d.s. of *fodbad* 'destruction, despoiling,
death', or *ic a (f)udbud* 'at his death'.

17   We take this to be from a verb °*do-céss* (?) 'suffer, endure',
cf. Henry's translation, p. 198, l. 147.

IX.   1   'Conn's Region' is the northern half of Ireland.

3   In this heavily Latinised section of the work, it seemed an
emendation to Latin *ius* was not inappropriate, especially
as no secure meaning for *ias* is known. For *certo*, see Henry
(1978) 211.

4   MSS: R *innechtu nudal*; *LH innnectu nudá*; *LB hinecto nudal*.
Although Stokes has a rare lapse of sense here, Henry's intru-
sive emendation doesn't really clarify matters. We emend

to *nechta*, the g.s. of the substantive adjective *necht* 'clean, pure'.

7 See Kelly (1976) 6, l. 42, for these as characteristics of the just kingdom: *Is tre fír flaithemon fo- síd sái sube soad sádili -sláini*, 'It is through the justice of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquility, joy, ease, comfort.'

8 MSS: R *ro solui*; LH *ro salui*, Laud *rota sola*. We have emended to *ros-luí*, taking this as the 3 s. perf. of *luid*, with 3 pl. infix?

X. 5 See Henry (1978) 212.

6 This appears to refer to Columha's mother's kin. According to one version of her genealogy, she was of the Corbraige of Leinster, ultimately descended from Cathair Már (Ó Riain, 1985, § 691), and that must be what this verse refers to. The most frequently attested genealogy traces her to the Corbraige of Fanat, in Donegal (Ó Riain, 1985, §§ 397, 651, 722.23), hut if the *Amra* is correct, that must be a later, though popular, tradition.

7–8 See Henry (1978) 212, for the word-order here.

23. On the transformation from the classical world to the medieval world of saints, see Brown (1981); on the effect of the renaissance and humanism on belief in saints, see E. B. Vitz, 'From the Oral to the Written in Medieval and Renaissance Saints' Lives', in R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell, eds, *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Cornell, 1991) 97–114.

24. Herbert (1988) 9–12, for an assessment of the poem as hagiography.

25. One could make a case that the poet alluded to Áed to please his descendants and his relatives, for whom, in a sense, the poem would also have been written, but, since Áed's children did not really regain power until two decades later, this must remain uncertain.

26. There appears to be a reference to his mother's kin in X.6. (See note.)

27. Herbert (1988) 12.

28. For the relationships among the various abbots and kings at this time see Byrne (1973) 258.

29. VC i, 7. This was the battle of Móin Daire Lothair, in which the northern Uí Néill expanded their domain east of the Foyle.

30. It is strange that Dallán chooses Conall as the reference point for the Dál Riata kings, rather than Áedán mac Gabráin, about whom much was written by Adomnán. There may be explanations. There were probably good relations between Conall's family and Áedán's: Conall's son Dunchad died fighting alongside Áedán in a battle in Kintyre in 576. Áedán was probably still alive at the time the poem was written, hut his successor, despite the prophecies which Adomnán records Columha as having made, may not have heen so clearly a son of Áedán's. Conall, we know, had seven sons. (Bannerman, 1974, 41, ll. 14–15; 80.) Conall's friendship or pact could very easily represent the saint's relationship with his successors as well, whether those descended from Áedán or Conall.

31. Quoted in Hughes (1980) 50 n. 63.

32. See M. ●. Anderson (1973) 92–3; Bannerman, 93–4. According to Bannerman's analysis, Gartnait may have been the son of Áedán, and Nechtan the son of Gartnait's son Cano, Domelch and Uerb being their mothers' names.

33. Hughes (1980) 50, cautiously notes the importance of these passages: 'This is an Irish tradition independent of Adomnán or Bede and not inconsistent with either.'
34. See pp. 23-4 above.
35. *vc* iii, 19
36. See below, p. 218.
37. Carney (1989) 47.
38. *AU* 604. Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, may have been this Colmán's grandson.
39. *Coll.* 2. 2 [*PL* 49.526]; trans. Luibheid (1985) 62.
40. Kelly (1976) 7 § 14.

THE POEMS OF BECCÁN MAC LUIGDECH

1. There is some difficulty about the poet's first name. One late manuscript form suggests Bécán, which Kelly adopts.
2. Fergus Kelly, 'A Poem in Praise of Columb Cille', *Ériu* 24 (1973) 1–34; 'Tiughraind Bhécáin', *Ériu* 26 (1975) 66–98. In the main text, references to the two poems will be abbreviated *Fo réir Choluimb* (*F*), and *To-fed andes* (*T*). These will in each case be followed by the verse number.
3. Kelly (1973) 2. The gloss is on the first line of verse 24. It is alternatively attributed to Dallán Forgaill, the author of the *Amra*, but the style of that poem is markedly different.
4. The Cenél nEógain were based in modern Inishowen and the area around Derry, while the Cenél Conaill, Columba's line, were based in modern Donegal.
5. Ó Riain (1985) § 32, and cf. p. 190; Stokes (1905) 136n May 26, R¹. This last is a note on another Beccán, of Cluain-aird Mo-Beccóc in Co. Tipperary (d. 690), suggesting an alternative, but incorrect identification. This red herring is followed by Walsh and Ó Cróinín (1988) 8–9.
6. Walsh and Ó Cróinín (1988) 56.
7. Ibid., 9; and Kelly (1975) 74 n. 6.The identity of Beccán is important for determining the author of the Paschal letter itself, as Cummian appears to call Beccán his relative, addressing him as *caro carne et spiritu fratre,* 'beloved brother in body and in spirit'. On the identity of Cummian, see Walsh and Ó Cróinín, 7–15. They opt for a flexible and metaphorical interpretation of this phrase.
8. Influenced, no doubt, at least partially by Cassian, who has an extensive discussion of the two lifestyles in *Collatio* 18.
9. *vc* i, 6, ii, 42.
10. This is how Cassian describes it in *Collatio* 18. 4: 'The second type is that of the anchorites, men who are first trained in monasteries, have achieved perfection in their way of life and who have chosen the hidden life of solitude.'
11. *vc* iii, 23. For a discussion of Hinba and Muirbolc Már, see Anderson (1991) lxxiii. For further discussion of the eremitic life in the Columban *familia* see MacDonald (1984) 297–9.
12. See RCAHMS (1984) 242–3.
13. According to the *Annals of the Four Masters* he died in 675; in 673 according to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*.
14. See p. 31 above.
15. There are two early Christian crosses on Rum, both possibly seventh-

century. One is at Kilmory on the north of the island, the other at Bàgh na h-Uamha on the south-east coast, where there were also occupied caves. There is also Papadil on the south-west coast, the Norse name of which implies the presence of priests there. It is impossible to say which of these locations is likely to be the site of Beccán of Rum's hermitage. See J. A. Love, 'Rhum's Human History', in T. H. Clutton-Brock and M. E. Ball, *Rhum: The Natural History of an Island* (Edinburgh, 1987) 28–9; RCAHMS, *The Archaeological Sites and Monuments of Scotland, no. 20: Rhum* (Edinburgh, 1983) §§16–17, 7.

16. Walsh and Ó Cróinín, 8–9 n. 26.

17. At pp. 107–114. See Kelly (1973) 1–2 for a discussion of the manuscript, the poem and its appearance.

18. For further discussion of the manuscript, see Carney (1964) ix–xiii, and N. Ní Shéaghdha, *A Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland*, fasc. ii (Dublin, 1961) 66–8.

19. On the metre and rhyme, see Kelly (1973) 3–5.

20. *Fo réir Choluimb.* Notes on text and translation:
We have followed Fergus Kelly's edition closely, and commented on exceptions in the notes. The partial edition and translations of Greene and O'Connor (1967, 19–22) has also been used, and we have noted places where we have followed their readings. Where we have departed from literal sense in an important way, we have given a closer translation in the notes, along with discussion of obscure lines or terminology, and ambiguous passages. The notes are given according to verse number and line.

    1   *Fo réir*: 'bound to', more literally, 'under Colum's command'. The second line presents a legal image, with Columba providing *snádud*, protection and safe passage by means of his higher status. In the third line, *sét fri húatho*, we have translated according to Kelly's alternative suggestion as having inverted word order. It could also be translated 'when I travel the road to terrors' (Kelly, 1973, 24). On the seven heavens, through which Columba is to guide the poet, see McNamara (1975) 141–2; Jane Stevenson, 'Ascent through the Heavens, from Egypt to Ireland', CMCS 5 (1983) 21–35. There was a common belief, based on a number of apocryphal texts, that one progressed through a number of trials on one's way to heaven, each trial located in a different one of seven heavens.

    3ab Mo Chummae here is probably a term of endearment for Columba, but other suggestions have been put forward. Greene and O'Connor, for instance, suggest that it refers to Cummíne Find, abbot of Iona from 659–69, but this seems out of keeping with both Beccán's style and his intent. While we read with Kelly in the first line, we have taken the cue from the third gloss to this line in the manuscript, and read *i scuir* 'when he unyoked, set down' for the MS *is coir* 'it is right, proper'. On the whole, this reading seemed to give the most sense to the stanza, without invoking external information of which we cannot be sure, or breaking the pace of the opening. On the other hand, a reading following Carney's suggestion (cf. Kelly, 1973, 25) is tempting: *Gabais in n-adamrae n-aí / is cór Mo Chummae in hÍ*: 'He sang the marvellous poem / took the marvellous inspiration, it is Mo Chummae's choir-song

(cór < L. chorus) in Iona'. This could refer, perhaps, to the *Altus prosator* or another hymn. On the whole though, it seems a bit of bathos from Beccán if that is what is intended.

3c   The manuscript and Kelly read: *is mó imbradud la cách*. We have followed Greene & O' Connor in emending to give rhyme between *a* and *c* and alliteration between *c* and *d*, following the normal pattern in the poem. The emendation seems both simple and sensible: we take *cach aí* to be gs, going with *imbrádud*: 'it is greater than the comprehension/thinking of each of them/ each one'.

6b   Literally, 'safe is each unsafe one whose fort he is'.

7b   The line, which is difficult, may be more literally interpreted as 'for one who did not narrow the end of his tale'. This could refer to full confession, or 'the end of his tale' here could refer to one's life, which need not be cut short, or narrowed, if one takes refuge in Columba.

8b   The Irish here, too, contains the multiple meanings in the English translation: the northern folk lifted up/raised/reared/ lit a flame/beacon.

d   His mother screamed, i.e., in giving birth to him.

9a   Kelly: tentative translation, based on an unknown use of *ro-fess for* 'to know on'?

b   Here 'lit his mind' means, presumably, he enlightened him, gave him discernment with regard to the various dangers he would come upon.

d   This is based on the tentative reconstruction in Kelly, 1973, 28, which is in turn based on the gloss on the preceding line: *mⷱgenar molfas colum ua néill*, 'fortunate is he who will praise Colum, the descendant of Niall'.

10ab The meaning of this allusion is opaque. The glosses appear to equate this with the cranes which Columba rescued, cf. *VC* i, 48, but this seems doubtful.

11ab The translation here is rather free. More literally: 'He took to Godly-love – its strength a post/support – he was not unusually on a good (?) journey.'

12a   We follow Greene here in taking *ind-ell* as a preterite from an unattested verb °*ind-ella* 'enter, join', cf. Kelly, 1973, 28; Greene and O'Connor, 20–1.

c   We take this as meaning that the act of achieving *apatheia* illuminated him outwardly, an image prominent in *VC*.

16a   *Ninaig* is obcure. It is perhaps dat. sg. f. < *ninach*, 'wavey', cf. *nin* 'wave'. This word is used by Adomnán (*VC* ii, 12, *hi nin glas*). This is how we take it here, with the 'wavey glen' refer- ring to the port where they came to rest. *Ninaig* could be a place-name, or the phrase could be read *ninaig íar nglinn*, 'after the wavey valley', referring perhaps to the sea, cf. Kelly (1973) 30.

17c   *Sóer*, here, is literally a nobleman, or a freeman, but 'lord' gives more of the sense of such a one as also a leader.

18d   Literally, 'friends/his familiars praise him.'

19a   *milti*: It is not clear to me from Kelly's edition whether the MS has *milti* or *miltni*. We have read *mílti*, taken this to mean military service. *Miltni*, the a.s. of *míltne* 'military skill, valour' is also possible. For the imagery of Columba being recruited

into a holy communion, see *Amra*, VI. 31, where the verb
geilsigid, although not military, has some of the same sense.

20b   Literally, 'that he may be my path/trail on the days of the
month'.

22d   For variant glosses on this line, and the various possibilities,
cf. Kelly 1973, 32. We have taken *dath* here as a conjunction,
and emended according to sense and the witness of the later
glosses, which have *dath nó molfar, dath nonmolfa, dath no
molfa*.

23b   We have taken *bláth* as 'hero', a figurative use from the
original meaning 'flower, blossom', i.e., he claims from God
the prize his hero got.

   c   Lit. 'the king who dwells in the fire'.

25   This verse may be a later addition. The literal meaning of *b*. is
'may it be repentance to which I go'.

21. See M. Herbert and A. O'Sullivan, 'The Provenance of Laud Misc. 615',
Celtica 10 (1973) 174–192.

22. *To-fed andes.* Notes on text and translation:
This poem was edited sparingly by Kuno Meyer (*ZCP* 8, 1912, 197–8)
and, like *Fo réir Choluimb*, received a scientific and sensitive treat-
ment by Kelly (1975, 66–97). Our text and translation is based very
closely on Kelly's edition. We have occasionally offered alternative
solutions and readings, comment on which can be found in the notes,
which are given by verse number and line.

1a   *Andes*, 'northward'. Literally, 'hither, from the south', implying
a northern location for the speaker. 'Candle': a common image
in panegyric poetry, for heroes, kings; it is apt for Columba as
well, cf. the imagery of illumination throughout *VC*.

3a   The manuscript reads *cró nglinde*. Kelly suggests *'cró [ ]
nglinne'*, ? 'a pen of security', but the line still lacks a syllable.
We would suggest *cruü*, the a.pl. of *cró*. The second *u* may have
been read as an *n*, a common scribal error, and the word
'corrected' accordingly. The reading then, (*to-bert co crú*) *cruü
glinne*, 'he brought to ruin enclosures of safety'.

4b   Kelly gives *tríchait troichet cíabat*, and notes that this is likely
to contain the object of *cechaing*, 'he crossed', hut does not
suggest a translation. Here we propose to read *tríchait troich-
chét*, a compound of the d.s. of *trícho cét* 'battalion, army' (see
v.10b), and a form of *trú*, 'wretch, doomed one, poor one'.
Thus, Columba crosses 'with an army of wretches', i.e., penitent
men. (We owe this suggestion to Prof. William Gillies.) *Cíabat*
we interpret as a combination of *cíab* 'hair' and *fat* 'long', here
in a.s. Hair imagery is common in descriptions of the sea and
waves.

5b   'foam-flecked': the original refers to the sea as being like hair
or like a mane. The image does not translate well.

7a   MS: *teóra lemna*. Teöir, a loan-word from Latin *theoria*,
'meditation. contemplation' (itself a Greek borrowing), and
indeclinable in the early period, is later often written as *teóra*.
Lemna is unattested outside this text, and may be an adjective
related to *lem*, soft. On the other hand, a scribal error may
be involved, and we would suggest here the word is *lemnacht*,
or the earlier *lemlacht*. Thus Colum Cille is 'the new-milk of

contemplation' or perhaps, 'the gentle one of contemplation'. What follows this, 'with broad actions', helps to confirm this view. The pair of virtues are a necessity, acording to Cassian, *Collatio* 14.2 [*PL* 49.955]: 'Anyone wishing to master contemplation must, with all zeal and energy, acquire first the practical side.' In this discussion Cassian employs the related Greek borrowing *theoretica*.

7b   MS: *col- cilleant gnoo. gnótho foraibh.* Kelly points out that a syllable must be missing, and that we are probably looking for a disyllable beginning in *c* (for alliteration with *Cille*) and ending in *-and*. But the line may be further defective, as *gnoo* and *gnótho* as they stand are opaque. We would suggest some scribal confusion (though this is very much the exception in this text). There is no referent at present for the dative 3 plural of the preposition, and so we would suggest that it is instead the d.pl. of *fora*, 'buckle, latchet'. The word is used in descriptions of lavish clothing. This in turn suggests that the preceeding word could be a comparative, here *gnóü,* from *gnóe,* cf. v. 10, *caissiu rétaib*, and v. 22, *ferr moínib*. Perhaps then two words have been transposed, and the word before *gnóu* was what appears in the MS as *gnótho*: this could well be a simple mistake for *gnátho*, g.s. of *gnáth*, 'habit, custom'. The line can then be fleshed out with one of a number of suitable adjectives, such as the suggested one here, *comland*, 'complete, perfect' to give a fairly plausible reading: *comland gnátho, gnóu foraib*, 'perfect of custom, more beautiful than buckles/bangles.' This may be a somewhat drastic emendation, but some, we fear, is necessary. The comparison here is seen later in the poem: Columba and his lifestyle are better than the trappings of materialism.

11a 'Legal theory': literally, 'theory/contemplation of laws'. The former seems to suit the context better. Cf. *Amra*, II. 6; V. 5, 10, where his readings of law-texts (biblical) are praised.

11b 'Erc's region' is the Scottish Dál Riata, modern Argyll, Kintyre, Islay and Mull, ruled over by branches of a dynasty who claimed descent from Erc and his sons Fergus Mór, Loarn and Óengus.

12b *Aí*, translated here as 'muse' does mean something like 'poetic inspiration'. It is a term of native poetic learning like *imbas* (poetic inspiration) in 21. Conal in this line is Conall Gulban son of Níall, Columba's great-grandfather.

16b *Cróeba*: 'bedding', literally 'branches'. Twigs and sticks of various sorts were used in early Ireland as bedding.

19b MS: *sealmand cluaa*. Kelly was unable to suggest a word for *sealmand*. A minor emendation provides *seimann*, a.pl. of *seim,* 'rivet', an apt word for the ties the saint left behind.

20b *Bithbéo*: 'constant': lit. 'everliving'. The imagery of protection here is drawn from native law. Unlike normal men who act as protection (*snádud*), Columba's death does not affect his patronage, and its loss need not be lamented.

22a Eithne: Columba's mother.

23b *Cressaib*: 'vestments': very tentative. The word, *cressaib*, d.pl. of *criss*, could refer to boundaries/enclosures, belts/clothing/ religious garb, or the zones of heaven. It seems to be here the

equivalent of Latin *zona*, which is used in an early praise-poem to Patrick, in a verse not unlike this stanza of *To-fed andes*, which decribes the saint as: *Zona domini precinctus diebus et noctibus / sine intermissione deum orat dominum.* 'Girt with the Lord's girdle day and night, / He prays unceasingly to God the Lord' (*ILH*, I, 12; Bieler, 1953, 65).

25a   The manuscript reads *cléir– neamba,* but a word *neamba* is unknown. Meyer's suggestion of *nemdae,* 'heavenly', which makes sense but does not alliterate, was adopted by Kelly. Bergin's suggestion of an unattested spelling for the island of Hinba, '*Hembae*', seems highly unlikely. Ideally, one would take *cléirech* as g.pl., with following nasalisation, and a word, *embae*(?), as its subject, alliterating with *imbed* in the next line. No such word is known, however. One might suggest *imbe,* 'hedge, fence' (ie, 'hedge for clerics'), but this too fails to rime with *tengae.*

23. See p. 12 above; Herbert (1988) 18, 24.
24. On the relationship between Cumméne and Ségéne, see Herbert (1988) 134–6.
25. *VC* ii, 45
26. *VC* i, 15, 1.
27. Carney (1989) 51, and see *CGH,* 71. We have given Carney's translation in a slightly adapted form.
28. Stokes and Strachan (1903) ii, 325.
29. W. Meid, *Táin Bó Fraích* (Dublin, 1974) 19, n. 21; and T. F. O Rahilly, *Gadelica* 1 (1912–13) 275.
30. Meid (1974) 19 for references.
31. *Amra* II. 7–9.
32. *VC* iii, 17–21, 23.
33. *VC* iii, 18.
34. Matt. 17:1–8, and parallels.
35. Charles-Edwards (1976) 56.
36. Stokes and Strachan (1903) ii, 244–7; Ní Chatháin (1990).
37. Carney (1989) 47.
38. Warner (1905–6; repr. 1989) 3.
39. For an account of this 'otherworld view' from a seventh/eighth-century English perspective, see P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990) 243-72.
40. *HE* iii, 19.
41. *HE* v, 12.
42. See note to *F* 1, for further references on the seven heavens.

COLUM CILLE CO ▶ÍA DOMM ERÁIL

1. See Carney (1964) xiii.
2. *VC* i, 1. See below, p. 173 for a discussion of these miracles.
3. *hi tías* (*Amra: ré tías* Pref. 2); *ní suail snádud* (*Amra: ní suail* viii. 3); *nual* (*Amra: donúall* Pref. 11). Note also the use of *El* for God, a learned usage reminiscent of the *Amra.*
4. The imagery of l. 13 is perhaps also an echo of Rev. 21:4, and there may be references to Hebrews 12:22 in ll. 6, 9–10, and tentatively Heb.12:1–2 in ll. 14–15.

5. *VC* iii, 23.

6. See above, pp. 27–30.

7. Carney (1983) 31–8.

8. Herbert and Ó Riain (1988) §§14, 17.

9. Ibid., 32–3. They note (p. 32): 'Adamnán's part in the composition of the verse may be doubted. Almost certainly, however, the original author ... must have belonged to the community at Iona.'

10. Anderson and Anderson (1961) 97; Smyth, 135–6.

11. The *MS* version, as edited by its most recent editors, reads *Mór do ingantu do-[g]ní / in rí geenair ó Muire, / betha Scuabán i mMuili, / écc do Bruide mac Bile. Is annamh, / iar mbeith i rríghe thuaithe, / ceppán caue crínn dara / im mac rígh Ala Cluaithi* (p. 58). We have assumed a certain amount of confusion of the original. The editors note that in the first verse, perfect rhyme can be obtained if one reverses line c and d in the *MS*, and this is what we have done. We know as well, that Adomnán called Mull *Malea* in Latin, which suggests an Irish °*Male*, which we have taken as a *ia*-stem (cf. Anderson & Anderson, 1961, 152.) This leaves us free to restore the name of Mary to its form around 700, *Maire*. Neither of these changes is terribly radical, or inexplicable in terms of scribal modernisation. *Scuabán* has been a problem for critics of the poem. The Andersons took it as being a common noun, 'little sheaf', and assumed it to be in the singular (dat.?) The most recent editors differ, taking it as a personal name, with a mysterious tale lurking behind it, noting 'the lack of gen. inflection, usual only in personal names' (82). We take it as a common noun, a diminutive of *scuab* 'sheaf', but believe it to be a gen. pl. The reference then, is to the renewable life of nature seen in the harvest, as opposed to the king's death. This eliminates the enigmatic quality of the poem, and also frees it from being associated with some unrelated folk-tale. That said, if we are wrong, and it is a personal name, the presence of Loch Sguabain on Mull might be considered as being somehow related to the reference.

12. It appears eight times in *VC*. See Anderson and Anderson (1961) 590 for references.

13. *VC* iii, 80

14. Herbert and Ó Riain, 60–1.

15. *VC* i, 33.

16. See J. Carney, *Medieaval Irish Lyrics*, xxix; and for a survey of examples of the motif, M. Carney, 'Fót báis / banapúfa', *Arv* 13 (1957) 173–9.

17. K. Meyer, *Archiv für Celtische Lexicographie* ii, 137.

18. Notes on text and translations, by line number:
    The poem is found in a number of manuscripts, after the longer poem *Amra Choluimb Chille*. Our edition here is based on the text in the eleventh-century *Liber Hymnorum* (*ILH* i, 184) with some variant readings included. The poem is also found in Bodleian *MS* Rawlinson B.502 (f. 59vb), National Library of Ireland *MS* G.50, p. 105; and RIA *MS* C.iii.2, f.9r. We have been completely unable to obtain the edition by Paul Grosjean from Rawl. B.502, 'L'hymne d'Adamnán à Colum Cille', *Revue des Études Indo-Europaiennes* 1 (1938) 184–91.

    4   *tocad*. MSS: *tacud*, 'good fortune, destiny, wealth'. This was earlier *toceth*, and we take the MSS form to represent the dative. Here we see the same sort of word order found in the *Amra* and the Beccán poems, *tocud íar már* representing *íar tocud már*.

    5   *muí, mo chélmaine. célmaine* means 'prophecy, omen', but is

used by the eighth-century poet Blathmac mac Con Brettain to mean 'mystic utterance, proclamation'. Indeed, Blathmac seems to echo this very line, §150: *a mba moí mo chelmaine*. Here we could take the phrase as 'it is mine, what I prophesied', or 'it is mine, what was prophesied for me'. Or, indeed, we could take *célmaine* as meaning 'mystic utterance', cf. *recht* below.

6   *aingel*. Rawl. B.502: *aingel*. *LH*: *hangel*.

9   *Sïone*. Rawl. B.502: *Sióne*. *LH*: *Sion*. We should perhaps take this as a locative. It may however be a genitive belonging with either 'archangels' or 'God', cf. the word-order in l. 5, above. The description of Sion here may be partially based on Heb. 12:22-23: 'But you have come to Mount Sion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven …'

11-12   MSS: *comslechtaib na cethri … riched ind rig* . . We have left out the articles as going against sense, rhythm, and alliteration. This section echoes Rev. 4, but it is worth noting that the images are conflated in the *Altus prosator* as well: *Ymnorum cantionibus … cum viginti felicibus quattuor senioribus … laudatur … Trinitas.* Stanza Y. The lines are very long here, and it is not clear to us if, or how, they should be divided, other than by sense units as we have done. They do seem to break up into alliterating units of 2–3 stresses: *Etir comslechtaib / cethri sen find / fichet firién / fochanat ríched / ríg rúinig ruithnigthi.*

13   This line is a clear echo of Wisdom 3:1–2: 'But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.' It may also draw on Rev. 21:4, which in a description of the new Jerusalem, says, 'he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more …'

14   *recht muí*. The last two lines are problematic, and clearly were so even in the medieval period. *Recht* usually means 'law, right'. We might then take this first line as claiming the foundations of the poet's faith: 'The law is mine, my Christ …' But what then would the reference in the next line to his 'powerful sin' be? Should we then emend *col* to another word, like *columa*, or *colbae* , 'pillar, support', as being the other basis of his faith, the stout support of Colum Cille? It is better to try to make sense of *col*, though. Perhaps best is what we have translated above: taking *recht* as a dat.sg. 'by law, by right', and *cumachtach col* as a gen. pl. Thus, 'It is mine, my Christ, by right / law of (my) mighty sins.' 'It' here could well refer back to the *núal*, the 'lamentation' from which the just have been freed. What Adomnán is doing at the end of the poem, is backing away from any pride. If he attains heaven, it is in spite of what he deserves by law. (On this idea, see pp. 77–80 on *Adiutor laborantium*.) This fits into the mention of Columba's 'not small' *snádud*. *Snádud* was, among other things, 'the power to accord another person immunity from all legal processes … over a definite period of time which varies according to the rank of the "protector"' (Binchy, 1979, 106). Two other possibilities. We might want to take *recht* as meaning 'outburst, frenzy'. Another possibility along this line is to take *recht* as the pass.pret. s. of *rigid*, 'stretches, subdues', and translate: 'That which is mine was subdued/distended, my Christ: the powerful sin.'

19. There are some brief exceptions iu Cogitosus' *Life of Brigit* and in some of the Patrick material, but in general our knowledge of the development of the belief in the posthumous efficacy of saints in Ireland is dependant on material other than saints' lives. See Doherty (1984).

20. Brown (1981).

21. Walsh and Ó Cróinín (1988) 94–5.

22. *VC* ii, 44–46.

23. *VC* ii, 44.

24. *Dial.* iii, 15. See also Herbert (1988) 137–8.

25. *VC* ii, 45.

26. *VC* iii, 23.

27. *VC* ii, 45.

CANTEMUS IN OMNI DIE

1. The text printed here is that found in *ILH*, i, 33–4, with correct forms supplied silently from variant readings listed there. Cú Chuimne 'the wise' died in *AU* 747. Names of the form 'Cú N.' were an established pattern among the Irish upper-class.

2. *ILH* ii, 34. Adomnán died in *AU* 704, Loingsech in 703.

3. *ILH* i, 32.

4. J. O'Donovan, ed., *Cormac's Glossary*, with notes and indices by W. Stokes (Calcutta, 1868) 81. This translation is based on Leabar Brecc, with some additional matter.

5. It is in the additional sections in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. For an edition of the *YBL* text, see K. Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic', *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts* iv, Halle/Dublin (1912) 53.

6. If the quatrain is by Cú Chuimne, this Garbán is probably the king of Mide, Garbán of Clann Cholmáin (of Southern Uí Néill) who died in *AU* 702. His name appears on the Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*. In that case it seems that Cú Chuimne was in the midlands of Ireland sometime before 702, and on friendly terms with a side-lined branch of the Uí Néill.

7. Kenney (1929) 270.

8. *ILH* ii, xvi.

9. Murphy (1961) 17.

10. A good account of the development of such devotional practices appears in Eamon Duffy (1988) 210–27 and (1992) 234–65.

11. About Longinus, in particular, there is a certain amount of literature in Irish New Testament Apocrypha. In the Irish *Passion of Longinus* (Atkinson, 1987, 300) Longinus repents, quits the army and 'thereafter was charitable, merciful, abstinent and prayerful.' Also an interesting Irish version of the *Acts of Pilate* (Herbert & McNamara, 1969, 69) has Longinus cured of blindness by the flow of blood from Christ's side, a story retold by Blathmac:

> By the same blood (it was a fair occasion!)
> quickly did he cure the fully blind man
> who, openly with his two hands,
> was plying the lance.   Carney (1964) 21

12. Carney (1964) 3. In fact, even Blathmac, in one passage, reflects the contemporary convention of *apatheia*: 'Without grief he has strengthened you (excellent the grace!) at the time of his crucifixion.' But the

rest of the poem assumes that she does, in fact, suffer grief as she weeps and keens her Son.

13. T. Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London, 1893) 48. It is a very common motif. See Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses,* III, 22, 4.

14. Livius, 49.

15. Livius, 156.

16. Livius, 99.

17. A later gloss comments, expanding on this imagery: 'The fountain of life flows out of its own stream; the true Vine is grown from its own cutting or shoot.'

18. *Sermon* 189 [*PL* 38.1005].

19. Toledo XI, § 48: *ipse et pater Mariae matris et filius.* The Toledo documents containing this formula were being read in the late seventh century in Lismore. Cú Chuimne may have had links with Lismore through his colleague and co-author Rubin of Dair-Inis, which is only 14 miles away from Lismore. Such a connection could easily have given Cú Chuimne the opportunity to read the Acta of Toledo himself. Andrew Breeze (1990) 267 ff.

20. Murphy (1956) 49.

21. Jn 19:23–4, and synoptic parallels.

22. Atkinson (1887), 3678.

23. Herbert & McNamara (1989) 45.

24. Some of the most blatantly heretical apocrypha were probably lost. McNamara (1975) 3.

25. McNamara (1975) 1. A Council at Rome in AD 382 under Damasus published a list of OT and NT books to be regarded as canonical, which was republished by Gelasius in 495.

26. McNamara (1975) 4.

27. Mackey (1989) 16. See also Bradley (1993) 51; O'Donoghue (1987) 78.

28. Rom.13:12, 'let us put on the armour of light' (*induamur arma lucis*); Eph. 6:14: 'dressed with the breastplate (*loricam*) of justice'; Eph. 6:17: 'take up the helmet (*galeam*) of salvation.' Also see Ezek. 23:24; Isa. 59:17. There is a long tradition of application of the vocabulary of military hardware to Christian life and 'spiritual warfare'.

29. The best-known of these, 'Patrick's Breastplate', calls for protection from demons, evil enticements, the failings of nature, enemies, spells of women, blacksmiths and druids, and much more.

'THE ALPHABET OF DEVOTION'

1. Adomnán also calls him Colmán moccu Sailni, indicating that he was from the Ulster tribe of Dál Sailni.

2. *vc* i, 5; ii, 15.

3. Watson (1926) 187, 302.

4. Vernam Hull, the most recent editor of the text, changed his mind about its date. At first (1956, 88–90) he argued for a very early date, but in the introduction to the edition (1968, 52) he changed his mind, arguing instead that it was 'a composite text which was probably compiled sometime in the first half of the eighth century during the early period of the Culdee movement.' Other parties, however, have accepted its archaism on linguistic grounds: for full references see Ó Néill (1987) 203.

5. Ó Néill (1987) 203–15.

6. Strachan (1904) 191–208.
7. *Inst.* iv. 9 [*PL* 49.161].
8. Bieler (1979) B, § 6, 33, 37, 47.
9. Ó Néill (1987) 207.
10. On these works and on John Cassian generally, see Iona's Library, p. 217.
11. Ó Néill (1987) 208.
12. Meyer (1909). For a list of similar early political advice texts, see Kelly (1976) xiii.
13. Meyer (1909) 6–9.
14. Kelly (1976) § 58.
15. McCone (1990) 138–43.
16. The translation here is based closely on Vernam Hull's edition of the text (1968). Since the poetry is the focal point of the volume, and this text is given really as background reading, we thought it best to include only a translation, and to avoid discussion of the many problematic words and passages in the text, for very few of which we have had any interesting contribution to make. For some of the problems, consult Hull (1968) 78–89, and 57, and see listings in RIA *Dictionary*. The passages in italics are in Latin in the original text.

IONA'S LIBRARY

1. Brüning (1917) 213–304.
2. T. O'Loughlin (1994b).
3. Clearly, if we are not absolutely certain about the Iona origin of a poem, then we will be less than certain about its source-book having been in Iona's library. But we hope that we have made a good case for the poetry reproduced here being Iona's own work.
4. Text and Translation: Atkinson (1887) 113–24, 359–71. Other versions in Herbert & McNamara, (1989) 60–88; Hughes (1991). See McNamara (1975) 68–9.
5. Translation: J. H. Charlesworth (ed.) *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York and London, 1983). It is used as a source for imagery in *Altus prosator*, as noted by *ILH* ii, 154–69 and Stevenson (1985).
6. *De Civitate Dei*, xv, 23.
7. Texts: *PL* 73.126–70 (Evagrius' translation) The Athanasian original may be found in *PG* 26.836–975; translation in A. Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria* (New York, 1892), pp. 195–221. It is quoted in *VC* iii, 23 (Brüning, 1917, 224–7).
8. Cap. XXIII, *PL* 73.147.
9. Brüning, 248, 253. The passage of *Actus Sylvestri* quoted by Adomnán is also used by other hagiographers, for example in a Life of Cuthbert. It is possihle that by the seventh century the passage acquired a life of its own and was transmitted independently of the whole work. An outline of the story appears in the 'pre-Patrician' material at *AU* 4296 and *AI* § 307.
10. Texts in *PL*.
11. [*CCSL* 76.399] – *quibus quasi vectibus et columnis Dei voluntate terrae globus sustentatur.*
12. See O'Loughlin (1992) for the relationship of topography to theology in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*.

13. Text: *PL* 26.655–850.

14. Stevenson, 1985. *Altus* stanza U repeats Philip's erroneous claim that Venus has a two year cycle.

15. Texts: *CCSL* 47 & 48; *PL* 41. Translations: *City of God*, Henry Bettenson (trans.), London 1972, repr. with new introduction by John O'Meara, London (Penguin Classics), 1984. *De Civitate Dei* has *salacia* and *venilia* for ebb-tide and flood-tide, as has *VC* ii, 38. These unusual terms are mentioned by Augustine (VII, 22) as pagan gods, the result of 'whimsical lunacy which boils up into a vapour of numerous divinities.' O'Loughlin (1994b) also identifies it as a source for *DLS*.

16. He does not equate the City of God with the church, nor the Earthly City with the state, however.

17. Text: *PL* 20.159–76. Translation: *Works of Sulpitius Severus*, Alexander Roberts (ed.), New York, 1894, 3–17. It is cited by Adomnán's *Vita*, Brüning (1917) 247–8.

18. *Stowe Missal* (ii, 15). See *VC* iii, 12, where the death of the holy bishop Colmán merits his temporary insertion in the litany of saintly bishops in place of St Martin. Óengus places him together with St Antony at the centre of the heavenly throng of monks:

> The troop of monks round Antony,
> whose courses are mysterious:
> with Martin, a soldier of battle,
> a troop of the high saints of the world.   (Stokes, 1905, 276)

19. Text: *PL* 20.178–80. Translation: *Works of Sulpitius Severus* (see n. 17) 19–21. In *VC* iii, 23, much of the imagery is clearly drawn from Rev. 7:13, but the verbal agreements between Sulpicius and *VC* are stronger than dependence on the Bible would explain. [Brüning, 1917, 248]

20. Text: *PL* 20.95–160. Translation: *Works of Sulpitius Severus* (see n. 17) 71–222. Used in *DLS*, according to Meehan (1958) 16; O'Loughlin (1994b).

21. Text: *PL* 49.477–1328. Translation: *Works of John Cassian*, Edgar C. S. Gibson (New York, 1894), 295–545. Book VIII is used extensively in *Altus*.

22. *Collatio* 19.

23. Cummian's letter *De Controversia Paschali* (see p. 131) is addressed to Iona's abbot, Ségéne, and to one *Beccanus solitarius*, whom we believe to Beccán mac Luigdech, a hermit at some point on the island of Rum. Cassian's sense of the dangers of solitary life is reflected by Cú Chuimne of Iona and Ruben in their section *De Monachis*, and the cenobitic life is in general preferred. A grudging admiration is expressed for the hermit's incredible contempt for the world, but he must first be tested by living for thirty years in a community (*CCH* XXXIX, 3).

24. Text: Bruno Krusch and W. Levison (eds), *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi merovingici*, vol. VII (Hannover, 1919–20). Text and (French) Translation: R. Borius (ed.), *Vie de Saint Germain d'Auxerre* (Paris, 1965). Cited in *VC* ii, 34, Brüning, 252.

25. R. A. Markus, 'Pelagianism in Britain and the Continent', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37 (1986) 191–204.

26. Text: Aegidius Bucherius, *De Doctrina temporum commentarius in Victorium Aquitanum* (Antwerp, 1633) 439–49; Bruno Krusch, *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie* (1). *Der 84-jahrige Ostercyclus und seine Quellen* (Leipzig, 1880). For useful discussion of this text and its origins, see Walsh and O'Cróinín (1988) 32–5.

27. Text: *CCSL* 97–8 (1958). Discussion in J. J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus*, Berkeley, California, 1979, 131–76. Used in *DLS*, O'Loughlin (1994b).
28. In Ps. 17.
29. M. Adriaen, *CCSL* 97, v, n. 2.
30. Text: *PL* 77.149–430. Translations: H. J. Coleridge, London, 1874. It is quoted by Adomnán, *VC* i, 43; i, 1. Also the use of relics to end a drought (*VC* ii, 44. 173) are a clear echo of Gregory's *Dialogues*, iii, 15. The story of the healing of a broken leg in *VC* ii, 5 may echo a similar story in *Dialogues* i, 10. The *Dialogues* are quoted in *DLS* 110, O'Loughlin (1994b).
31. *VC* iii, 23. 'We found the above-mentioned vision not only written down in pages, but have learned it from some experienced elders ...'
32. *VC* iii, 5. This story may have been inserted in *VC* by Adomnán himself, or perhaps by a later hand, but in either case it must have been among the books on Iona consulted by Adomnán.
33. Herbert (1988) 139.
34. Text: *PL* 72.776–90 (with a passage about a miraculous abortion performed by the saint excised by the editor). Translation: S. Connolly & J.-M. Picard. 'Cogitosus: *Life of St Brigit*', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117 (1987) 11–27. It is probably cited by *VC*'s second Preface, Bullough (1964) 127; (1965) 21, and possibly in *DLS* 1, 2, Bullough (1964) 32.
35. Text: *PL* 82.74–727. Hillgarth (1984, 8) pointed out the correspondence between *DLS* ii, 30, 5 and *Etymologies* xv, 34. O'Loughlin (1994b).
36. Hillgarth, 1984, 10.
37. Text: *PL* 83.963–1018. Used in *DLS*, O'Louglin (1994b).
38. Smyth (1987).
39. Text: V. Ussani (ed.), *Hegesippi qui Dicitur Historiae Libri V*, *CCEL*, 66 (2 vols) 1932, 1960. Used in *DLS*, Meehan (1958) 16–18; O'Loughlin (1994b). Bullough also notes the use of Hegesippus in *Altus prosator* in stanza K.
40. Breeze (1990).
41. O'Loughlin (1994b).

Abbreviations

AI	*The Annals of Inifallen* (see Mac Airt, 1951).
AU	*The Annals of Ulster [to AD 1131]* (see Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, 1983).
CCH	*Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* (see Wasserschleben, 1885).
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.*
CGH	*Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (see O'Brien, 1976).
CLCLT	CETEDOC *Library of Christian Latin Texts* (Louvain, 1991).
CMCS	*Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* (from 1993, *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*).
Cogitosus	*Sanctae Brigidae Virginis Vita, a Cogitoso Adornata* [*PL* 72.775–90].
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticarum Latinorum.*
DIL	Royal Irish Academy, *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Compact Edition, Dublin, 1983).
DLS	*De Locis Sanctis* (see Meehan, 1958).
FA	*Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (see Radner, 1978).
HE	Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (see Plummer, 1896; Sherley-Price, 1955).
ILH	*The Irish Liber Hymnorum* (see Bernard & Atkinson, 1897).
LU	*Lebor na hUidre: The Book of the Dun Cow* (see Best & Bergin, 1929).
PL	*Patrologia Latina* (ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris 1841–64).
PRIA	*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy.*
PSAS	*Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.*
RC	*Revue Celtique.*
RCAHMS	Royal Commission for the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.
VC	Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* (see Anderson, 1961, 1991).
ZCP	*Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie.*

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