MARK STANSBURY

Iona Scribes and the Rhetoric of Legibility

Edmund Crosby Quiggin (1875-1920) was the first teacher of Celtic in the University of Cambridge, as well as being a Germanist. His extraordinarily comprehensive vision of Celtic studies offered an integrated approach to the subject: his combination of philological, literary, and historical approaches paralleled those which his older contemporary, H. M. Chadwick, had already demonstrated in his studies of Anglo-Saxon England and which the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic continues to seek to emulate. The Department has wished to commemorate Dr Quiggin's contribution by establishing in his name, and with the support of his family, an annual lecture and a series of pamphlets. The focus initially was on the sources for Mediaeval Gaelic History. Since 2006 the Quiggin Memorial Lecture is on any aspect of Celtic and/or Germanic textual culture taught in the Department.

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E. C. QUIGGIN MEMORIAL LECTURES 16

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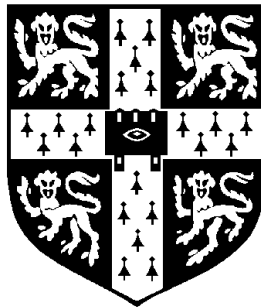
DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

ABBREVIATIONS

CGL	*Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, ed. G. Goetz, 7 vols. (Leipzig, 1888–1923)
ChLA 3	*Chartae Latinae Antiquiores: Facsimile Edition of the Latin Charters prior to the Ninth Century*, ed. A. Bruckner and R. Marichal, part 3 (Olten and Lausanne, 1963)
CLA	*Codices Latini Antiquiores*, ed. E. A. Lowe, 11 vols. and supplement (Oxford, 1934–71; 2nd edition of vol. 2, 1972)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout, 1953–)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866–)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
—SS	—Scriptores (in folio)
—SRGUS	—Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
L&S	M. Lapidge and R. Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985)
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64)
PRIA	*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*
VC	*Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, rev. M. O. Anderson, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1991)

Iona Scribes and the Rhetoric of Legibility

Mark Stansbury

1. Introduction

We can begin with a fairly simple and fairly uncontroversial proposition: our knowledge of Insular Latin in the Early Middle Ages comes almost exclusively from manuscripts.[1] There are important charters and inscriptions, of course, but for the most part, manuscripts are the sources for Insular Latin texts. And yet, this fairly simple and uncontroversial proposition is also entirely false for most of us. Most of our experience of Insular Latin comes not from reading manuscripts, or even their reproductions, but from reading printed editions. So, paradoxically, although manuscripts are the primary sources for our knowledge of Insular Latin, for most of us, they are hardly of primary importance at all.

Paradoxical as it may be, it also makes perfect sense for many reasons. First of all, anyone wanting to know what an author wrote does not want to locate, transcribe, and collate all of the manuscripts, decide how they are related, and construct a text. It is much easier to go to the shelf and consult an edition done by someone else who has spent years doing just that. Second, there is a social reason: if each of us has her or his own text, it makes discussing the work difficult, if not impossible, since scholarly discussion depends upon the parties talking about the same thing. Finally, transforming the text from its many manuscript forms into a single printed form (with variants) is done according to social conventions that both editor and reader understand. These conventions not only give us a single text to research, they also present that text in a way that is familiar and thus accessible to us. Many aspects of the edition ensure this: page layout, orthography, punctuation, divisions into paragraphs, sections, books, and so on.

Clearly there are very good reasons for making editions and using them, but this has in turn had two other effects. First, those accustomed to

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the conventions of printed texts often find manuscripts daunting: manuscripts of the same text differ from each other; the orthography found in manuscripts can be unfamiliar and inconsistent; the script may be difficult to read, to mention only a few such obstacles. Second, editors, and the scholars who use their editions, tend to view manuscripts through the lens of the printed text. What I mean by this is that they tend to regard as significant in a manuscript those features, and almost exclusively those features, that can or will be recorded in a printed edition. Thus they accord little importance to other aspects of a manuscript that are peculiar to it.

Again, this is entirely understandable. To take one example, what editor would willingly bring upon herself the inevitable castigation for larding the apparatus with orthographic variants? Thus, these become unimportant in the manuscript. Why is printing these variants criticized? Primarily because they are seen as irrelevant to the establishment of the text and the convention is that only those features that are should be noted. What is the reason for this convention? The objection is primarily visual: the mass of orthographic variants can swell the apparatus to such a degree that the text becomes difficult to read and these errors are difficult to distinguish visually from the errors that aid in the establishment of the text.

And of course these conventions extend to other areas as well. Does the manuscript use colour to emphasize some *litterae notabiliores*? That is lovely, but texts are black and white. While such use of colour is perhaps worth a note in the preface, it is not part of the text. Are there elaborate initial letters? Again, lovely, but those are decorations for the art historian, not part of the text for the editor. Manuscript punctuation? Totally irrational—often, indeed, found in several conflicting layers that are difficult if not impossible to sort out. But not to worry, the editor will provide the correct punctuation. Unless, of course, the editor is German, in which case the punctuation will be too strictly grammatical and lack the more flexible rationality of Anglophone Latin punctuation.[2] This attitude extends even to inscriptions.[3]

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[2] M. B. Parkes, 'Medieval punctuation and the modern editor', in *Filologia classica e filologia romanza: esperienze ecdotiche a confronto*, ed. A. Ferrari (Spoleto, 1998), pp. 337–49. B. Stenuit, 'La ponctuation d'Horace, depuis les éditions incunables', *Latomus* 67 (2008), 1017–27. For Byzantine texts, see the questions raised in *From Manuscripts to Books. Vom Codex zur Edition*, ed. A. Giannouli and E. Schiffer, Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung 29 (Vienna, 2011).

[3] E. Otha Wingo, *Latin Punctuation in the Classical Age* (Mouton, 1974), p. 133. 'An incidental result of this study has been the observation that the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, despite its reputation for phenomenal accuracy, cannot be relied upon implicitly so far as punctuation is concerned, since it sometimes fails to distinguish

As we have seen, one reason underlying these attitudes is due to the technological limitations of the printed page. There is another reason as well, however. The techniques of editing of Insular Latin texts (indeed Latin texts in general) grew out of the techniques pioneered by the editors of classical texts. This is not the place to explore that history, but one aspect of it is germane to our topic, namely how an earlier generation of editors thought about the relationship between the scribe and the text. For many of these editors, the monastic scribe was often seen as a Christian at best ignorant of his pagan text and at worst actively hostile to it. For example, the famously irascible Joseph Scaliger called Servius 'a most learned interpreter of Virgil', but of Servius's commentary, he wrote, 'today we have only the corpse polluted by the barbarity and filth of the monks.'[4] Because medieval scribes were for the most part seen as either ignorant or hostile, actually seeing or handling the corpses these scribes polluted was of little or no importance to the citizens of the republic of letters. Such menial work could safely be left in the hands of those hopeless drudges, the collators. This is an attitude consistent in editors of classical texts from Bentley as chronicled by Richard Jebb to Housman as chronicled by Michael Reeve.[5] Although we may find this attitude old-fashioned, again, it has a sort of sense: the manuscripts of classical texts were often written millennia after the texts were composed, so seeing the text did indeed mean looking through the manuscripts, as it were, rather than at them. By looking carefully for evidence that the manuscripts transmitted in spite of themselves, and then comparing the testimony of the various unreliable witnesses, the editor could extract the text from them like the gold from Virgil's famous dung heap.[6]

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between manifestly different marks of punctuation, and sometimes fails to report punctuation at all.'

[4] J. Scaliger, *Notae ad tertium librum M. Terentii Varronis de re rustica* in M. Terentii Varonis *opera omnia quae extant* (Dordrecht, 1619), p. 252: 'tantum hodie cadauer habemus, monachorum barbarie et spurcitia contaminatum…'

[5] 'Dust and fudge: manuscripts in Housman's generation', in *A. E. Housman Classical Scholar*, ed. D. J. Butterfield and C. Stray (London, 2009), pp. 139–52, reprinted in M. D. Reeve, *Manuscripts and Methods* (Rome, 2011), pp. 323–38.

[6] Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, 1.1.8 = Donatus auctus, *Vita Vergilii* (ed. E. Diehl, *Die Vitae vergilianae* (Bonn, 1911); Kleine Texte 72), p. 35 'Cum is Ennium in manu haberet rogitaretur(que) quidnam faceret, respondit, se aurum colligere de stercore Ennii.' cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 107.12 (ed. Hilberg, CSEL 55, p. 303): 'sciat non eorum esse, quorum titulis praenotantur, multaque his admixta uitiosa et grandis esse prudentiae aurum in luto quaerere'; Aponius *In Cant.* 9, (ed. B. de Vregille and L. Neyrand, CCSL 19): 'In quibus si quidpiam nostrae religioni aptum reperiatur, id ut aurum de luto collectum, uelut pretiosissima gemma de stercore, ad dominicum thesaurum reportatur.'

This distance between the time and place of the composition of a text and the writing of a manuscript begins to change in the seventh century (at least for Latin texts). From around the year 600 we begin to have texts composed and written in the same or similar circumstances. Among the earliest examples are the papyrus codex of works by Avitus of Vienne from the sixth century[7] and the famous manuscript of Gregory the Great's *Cura pastoralis*,[8] which was written in Rome around 600 and possibly contains corrections in Gregory's hand.[9] About a century later at the beginning of the eighth century in the Insular world we have, for example, the following manuscripts:

1. The authenticum of a letter from Wealdhere, Bishop of London, to Brihtwold, Archbishop of Canterbury, written between 704 and 705.[10]

2. Marginalia contemporary with St Boniface in the Victor Codex and the marginalia of the Douce Primasius.[11]

3. The manuscripts produced at Wearmouth-Jarrow around the time of Bede.[12]

4. And finally the manuscript I propose to examine in more detail, the Schaffhausen manuscript of Adomnán's Life of St Columba.

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[7] Paris, Bibliothèque National de France, MSS Lat 8913 + 8914 (*CLA* 5.573). For bibliography, see Avitus of Vienne, *Selected Letters and Prose*, tr. D. Shanzer and I. Wood, Translated Texts for Historians 38, (Liverpool, 2002).

[8] Troyes, Médiathèque de l'agglomération troyenne, 504 (*CLA* 6.838).

[9] See the facsimile with introduction: *Codex trecensis. La 'Regola pastorale' di Gregorio Magno in un codice del VI–VII secolo*, ed. Luigi G. G. Ricci, Archivum Gregorianum 5, 2 vols. (Florence, 2005).

[10] London, BL, MS Cotton Augustus II.18 (*ChLA* 3.185). See P. Chaplais, 'The letter from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury: the earliest original "letter close" extant in the West', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries. Essays presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes and A. G. Watson (London, 1978), pp. 3–24.

[11] These are Fulda, Hessischen Landesbibliothek, Bonifatianus 1 (*CLA* 8.1196) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 140 (*CLA* 2.237). See M. B. Parkes, 'The Handwriting of St Boniface: a Reassessment of the Problems', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 98 (1976), 161-79 revised in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers. Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London–Rio Grande, Ohio, 1991), pp. 121-42. See also H. Hoffman, 'Autographa des früheren Mittelalters', *Deutsches Archiv* 57 (2001), 1–62.

[12] See M. B. Parkes, *The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow*, The Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow, 1982). Reprinted in *Bede and his World. The Jarrow Lectures 1979–1993*, vol. 2 (Aldershot, 1994) and in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, pp. 121–42.

Thus, beginning in the sixth century in Gaul and Italy, and in the Insular world at the beginning of the eighth century, we have manuscripts that are evidence for author and scribe sharing what we may call a textual culture. By this I mean the social and material processes involved in composing a text and writing it down in a manuscript. For example, in the Early Middle Ages, this could have involved the author dictating to a *notarius*, who made a fair copy to be reviewed by the author before being written down by a scribe or *librarius*.[13] When those composing the text and those writing it down have a common textual culture, the manuscripts thus produced can be used as evidence in ways that they cannot when scribe and author do not have a common textual culture. The reason for this is that the text is a performance encoded in the manuscript and the text has the same relationship to the manuscript as music does to printed notes: the notes are not music, and neither are the signs written in the manuscript a text. Instead, in both cases, they are meant to elicit a performance that produces music in the first case and text in the second. Being able to write and perform the written signs, in turn, depends upon knowing a set of conventions for encoding and decoding. Of course editors, in addition to reconstructing the text, also encode the text in a way that conforms to the performance practices familiar to readers of their days.

As we have seen, the scribe, who plays an important role in this textual culture, is an often-maligned figure. Indeed, we may well ask whether scribes are even capable of producing manuscripts that will bear the weight of inquiry to which we will subject them. To answer this question I would like to look first at the status of scribes in the Insular world and especially on Iona, and then turn to a closer look at the Schaffhausen manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*.

2. Scribes

Now the task of the scribe is clear: it is to reproduce what he or she finds in the exemplar.[14] This was not rocket science; in fact, it was not even medieval science. In an oft-quoted example, Ekkehard, head of the school at Sankt Gallen in the tenth century, sent the boys who were slow at *studia*

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[13] See, for example, the complaint by Bede that Acca's pressure to finish his commentary has forced Bede to be *dictator*, *notarius* and *scriba* (*In Lucae Euangelium expositio*, prol., ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 120).

[14] For a masterful survey of scribes and their ways, see the Lyell Lectures delivered in 1999 by M. B. Parkes and published as *Their Hands Before Our Eyes: A Closer Look at Scribes* (Aldershot, 2008).

literarum off to write manuscripts—though Ekkehard himself was a scribe and head of the school, so he certainly did not intend this characterization to apply to all scribes.[15] The word *scriba* is rarely if ever used for the person copying a book—except when referring to the *sopherim* of the Bible or Roman civil servants. Instead, *scriptor*, *librarius,* and *antiquarius* are the most common words for those who wrote books—that is, for those who wrote fair copies of manuscripts for distribution.

No matter what these men and women were called, the evidence from the Latin world of Antiquity and Late Antiquity is that scribes outside the Jewish tradition and the civil service were considered manual labourers. In Diocletian's price edict of 301, the price that *scriptores* could charge for their manuscripts is listed between those of polishers (*samiatores*) and tailors (*bracarii*). The price edict also lists *librarii* and *antiquarii* together among teachers, specifying how much they could charge per student.[16] Even though scribes were manual labourers, they were not all equal, and an important scribe could add importance to the manuscript, as *subscriptiones* by the owners of those manuscripts show.[17] One of the earliest, if not the earliest, extant subscriptions with the name of a scribe in the hand of the scribe is found in the Verona manuscript of Sulpicius Severus' *Life of Martin* and is by Ursicinus, *lector* of the church of Verona, in 517.[18] Most

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[15] Ekkehardi IV *Casus S. Galli*, cap 10 (ed. D. I. von Arx, MGH SS II,p. 122) citing the practice of Ekkehard II, 'Et quos ad literarum studia tardiores vidisset, ad scribendum occupaverat et lineandum.' Quoted in J. Brown, 'Latin Palaeography since Traube', in *A Palaeographer's View. The Selected Writings of Julian Brown*, ed. J. Bately, M. P. Brown and J. Roberts (London, 1993), p. 17. The sentence following the one usually quoted is: 'Quorum amborum ipse [viz. Ekkehard] erat potentissimus; maxime in capitularibus literis et auro…' Thus, Ekkehard himself, as an accomplished scribe and as master of the school ('Doctor prosper et asper' is the characterization), was hardly *tardior*.

[16] Diocletian, *Edictum de pretiis rerum venalium* (ed. T. Mommsen (Leipzig, 1851), p. 21, line 69), 'Librario sibe antiquario in singulis discipulis menstruos quinquaginta'.

[17] O. Jahn, 'Über die Subscriptionen in den Handschriften römischer Classiker', *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig*, philol. hist. Classe 3 (1851), 327–72 at 355–6, 'CONTRA CODICEM RENATI V[iri]· S[pectabilis]· CORREXI QVI CONFECTVS AD EO EST THEODORO ANTIQARIO [*sic*] QVI N[un]C PALATINVS'.

[18] Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare XXXVIII (36) (*CLA* 4.494). The subscription, as given by Lowe, is 'Perscribtus codix hec ᵘᵉʳᵒⁿᵃ de uita beati martini epi[scopi] et [confessoris] et beati pauli s[anctorum] sub die Kal. aug. agapito UC C ind. decimae per ursicinum lect[orem] ecclesiae ueronensis'; see H. Foerster and T. Frenz, *Abriß der lateinischen Paläographie* (Stuttgart, 2004), pp. 70 and 214 citing Wattenbach, *Schriftwesen*, p. 428, 'Das früheste mir bekannte Beispiel eines Weltgeistlichen als Bücherschreibers…'

subscriptiones from Late Antiquity, however, are by those who bought and corrected manuscripts, not those who wrote them.[19]

Yet in the Insular world, we encounter scribes such as Columba, whose manuscripts were famous not only for their beauty but also for their usefulness. The Book of Durrow is a Gospel book said to have been written by the hand of Saint Columba. And, we are told by Connell McGeoghan in his 1627 translation of the *Annals of Clonmacnois*, 'I have seen partly myself of that book of [the Gospels] which is at Dorow in the K[s] County [i.e. Offaly], for I saw the Ignorant man that had the same in his Custody, when sickness came upon cattle, for their Remedy putt water on the booke & suffered it to rest there a while & saw alsoe cattle returne thereby to their former or pristin state & the book to receave no loss.'[20]—Or practically none, as the water-stained state of the manuscript today will testify. We see this healing property, too, in a story related by Bede, 'And then I have seen when some people were bitten by snakes and the very scrapings from the erasures of books from Ireland were put into water and given them to drink, it immediately attacked the effect of the poison: it completely reduced the puffiness of the body and stopped the swelling.[21] Although the cattle and the snake-bite victims were surely more grateful for the healing properties, it is the other property—the ability of manuscripts written by Columba to emerge undamaged from water—that has the longer history, first attested in the life by Adomnán.[22] The connection between Columba and writing has not escaped the notice of recent scholars. Tim O'Neill, no mean scribe himself, has written on Columba's scribal activity in the context of Irish

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[19] For the classic account of the *subscriptiones*, see Jahn, 'Über die Subscriptionen'. For two refinements of Jahn's views, see J. Zetzel, 'The Subscriptions in the Manuscripts of Livy and Fronto and the Meaning of Emendatio', *Classical Philology* 75 (1980), 38–59, and A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 498–511 on emendations by the Symmachi. M. McDonnell, 'Writing, Copying, and Autograph Manuscripts in Ancient Rome', *Classical Quarterly* N.S. 46 (1996), 469–91 looks at instances when aristocratic Romans thought it correct to write with their own documents.

[20] *Annals of Clonmacnois* (ed. D. Murphy (Dublin, 1896)), p. 96, quoted in J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical*, Records of Civilization 11, (New York, 1929) p. 631.

[21] Bede, *HE* 1.1 (ed. Plummer) 'Denique uidimus, quibusdam a serpente percussis, rasa folia codicum, qui de Hibernia fuerant, et ipsam rasuram aquae inmissam ac potui datam, talibus protinus totam uim ueneni grassantis, totum inflati corporis absumsisse ac sedasse tumorem.'

[22] For books written by Columba, see M. P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe*, Vol. 1 (London, 2003), p. 407.

manuscript production[23] and Jennifer O'Reilly has eloquently situated this scribal activity within the spiritual life of the monastery.[24] Finally, Elva Johnston has discussed this scribal activity, especially in the context of literacy.[25]

The portrayal of writing in the *Vita Columbae* starts in the second preface, where Adomnán tells us of Columba's industry in praying, reading, and writing. In this passage, Adomnán added 'writing' to the list he borrowed from Sulpicius Severus.[26] The saint himself as abbot is four times depicted in the act of writing[27] and is the scribe of four manuscripts about which miracles are told.[28] Three of his miracles of foreknowledge concern manuscripts.[29] As he was dying, Columba transferred the abbacy of Iona to Baithéne, in an act of writing: the saint finished one page of a Psalter and Baithéne picked up the manuscript and resumed writing at the next verse.[30] Adomnán even remarks how fitting it is that Columba's successor should follow him not only in teaching but also in writing, by which he means scribal work, not composition,[31] since Baithéne appears in the *vita* as Columba's amanuensis[32] and the scribe of a Psalter.[33] From the *Vita* we also know that the saint's prophecies were being written down during his lifetime.[34] This record of the saint's *virtutes* continued to be kept, and this activity is associated with successive abbots of Iona: the Schaffhausen manuscript of the life is based upon and contains inserted material from the collection of Columba's *virtutes* by Cumméne *albus*, the seventh abbot. The *Vita* was composed by the ninth abbot, and the

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[23] T. O'Neill, 'Columba the Scribe', in *Studies in the Cult of St Columba,* ed. Cormac Burke (Dublin, 1997), pp. 69–79.

[24] J. O'Reilly, 'The wisdom of the scribe and the fear of the Lord in the Life of Columba', in *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots: Saint Columba Iona and Scotland*, ed. D. Broun and T. O. Clancy (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 159–211.

[25] E. Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2013).

[26] *VC*, Praef. 2 (2.24.4 in the appendix), p. 7 n. 8. I am grateful to Maura Lafferty for this observation.

[27] *VC* 2.16, 2.29, 3.15, and 3.23.

[28] *VC* 2.8, 2.9, 2.44, and 2.45.

[29] They form a group at *VC* 1.23, 1.24, 1.25.

[30] *VC* 3.23, 'Et ad illum xxx. tertii psalmi uersiculum perueniens ubi scribitur, "Inquirentes autem dominum non" deficient "omni bono": ''Hic'' ait, ''in fine cessandum est paginae. Quae uero sequuntur Baitheneus scribat''.'

[31] *VC* 3.23, 'congruenter conuenit, qui sicut decessor commendauit non solum ei docendo sed etiam scribendo successit.'

[32] We are also told that when Columba had visions while on the island of Hinba, he regretted that Baithéne could not be there to write them down: *VC* 3.18.

[33] *VC* 1.23.

[34] *VC* 1.35, where Colcu writes down the date and time of Columba's prophecy.

Schaffhausen manuscript itself ends with a subscription by the scribe, Dorbbéne, who can plausibly be identified as bishop and abbot of Iona in 713. Thus over the course of a century and a half, from the saint's time to the early eighth century, we have evidence of the intense involvement of generations of abbots not only with collecting and organising stories about the founder, but also emulating him in producing manuscripts.

In doing so, the abbots of Iona were continuing a practice that had a long history. Writing had been part of monastic life at least from the late-fourth century when Saint Martin founded the monastery of Marmoutier near Tours, where, as Sulpicius tells us, 'no *ars* was practiced other than writing, though this work was given to the younger, the older spending time in prayer.'[35] Thus the scribes on Iona were already working in a centuries-old monastic tradition. We also have evidence of abbots who were scribes, though this seems to have been rare. Such men include Wicterbus, the abbot and bishop of St Martin's mentioned as writing books *propria manu* until his death in 756 when he was more than 80 years old[36] or Waldo, the abbot of St Gall from 782–4, who had previously been a scribe of charters.[37] All these are individual cases in the history of a monastery, while on Iona we see a founder-abbot who is a scribe producing miraculous manuscripts and emulated by generations of scribes who are also abbots. To see why this is unusual, we first need to examine the status of scribes elsewhere.

Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*, written and revised from the mid- to late-sixth century, shows us that the distinction between the scribe's manual labour and the corrector's more learned work moved into the monastery. The chapter of advice for those correcting biblical manuscripts is the longest chapter in Book 1.[38] In it Cassiodorus described the work of correction as a task that must be undertaken by 'the few and learned' to prepare material for the instruction of their simple and less-educated

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[35] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* (ed. C. Halm, CSEL 1), 10.6. 'ars ibi exceptis scriptoribus nulla habebatur, cui tamen operi minor aetas deputabatur: maiores orationi uacabant.' P. Evaristo Arns, *La technique du livre d'après saint Jérôme* (Paris, 1953), p. 65 attributes the earliest mention of writing in monasteries to the fifth century. Using the term *ars* for writing is unusual and seems a classicising usage from τέχνη.

[36] Annales Petaviani s.a. 790 (ed. G.H. Pertz, MGH SS 3.170). Cited in W. Wattenbach, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*, 4th edition, Leipzig 1896 (repr. Graz 1958), p. 287.

[37] Ratpert, *Casus sancti Galli* 5 [10], MGH SRGUS 75, p. 168 and the literature cited there p. 169 n. 125.

[38] Chapter 15.

brothers,[39] adding that the work of emendation is by far the most beautiful and glorious affair for very learned men.[40] In his address to scribes at the end of the book, however, Cassiodorus described the work of *antiquarii* as among the most pleasing physical labour (*corporeus labor*) that monks could perform—at least when it is done correctly, as he pointedly added.[41] The remainder of the chapter recommends helpful books on orthography and includes information on bookbinding, as well as equipment that gives us a vivid picture of the scribes' working conditions. The room in which the scribes worked at Vivarium was equipped with self-fuelling lamps and both sun and water clocks to ensure that short days and irregular time-keeping would not adversely affect the pace of writing.[42] It is interesting that some of the earliest evidence for clocks in a monastery has nothing to do with liturgy and everything to do with ensuring that scribes did not slack in their work. Since the sun sets around 4.30 p.m. on the shortest day of the year at Vivarium after a nine-hour day, the self-fueling lamps meant that the monks could look forward to long shifts.[43]

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[39] Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.15, ed. R. Mynors (Oxford, 1961), p. 41, 'a paucis enim doctisque faciendum est, quod simplici et minus eruditae congregationi noscitur esse praeparandum.'

[40] Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.15 (ed. Mynors, p. 42), 'istud enim genus emendationis, ut arbitror, ualde pulcherrimum est et doctissimorum hominum negotium gloriosum.'

[41] Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.30 (ed. Mynors, p. 75), 'Ego tamen fateor uotum meum, quod inter uos quaecumque possunt corporeo labore compleri, antiquariorum mihi studia, si tamen ueraciter scribant, non immerito forsitan plus placere…'

[42] Cassiodorus, *Inst.*, 1.30 (ed. Mynors, p. 77), 'Parauimus etiam nocturnis uigiliis mechanicas lucernas conseruatrices illuminantium flammarum, ipsas sibi nutrientes incendium, quae humano ministerio cessante prolixe custodiant uberrimi luminis abundantissimam claritatem; ubi olei pinguedo non deficit, quamuis flammis ardentibus iugiter torreatur. Sed nec horarum modulos passi sumus uos ullatenus ignorare, qui ad magnas utilitates humani generis noscuntur inuenti. Quapropter horologium uobis unum, quod solis claritas indicet, praeparasse cognoscor; alterum uero aquatile, quod dic noctuque horarum iugiter indicat quantitatem, quia frequenter nonnullis diebus solis claritas abesse cognoscitur, miroque modo in terris aqua peragit, quod solis flammeus uigor desuper modulatus excurrit. Ita quae natura diuisa sunt, ars hominum fecit ire concorditer; in quibus fides rerum tanta ueritate consistit, ut quod ab utrisque geritur per internuntios aestime s constitutum. Haec ergo procurata sunt, ut milites Christi certissimis signis ammoniti ad opus exercendum diuinum quasi tubis clangentibus euocentur.'

[43] These figures were calculated by the NOAA Solar Calculator (http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/grad/solcalc/). They are:

	Sunrise	Sunset	Length of day
21 June 550	4.25	19.19	14 hours 54 minutes
21 December 550	7.13	16.38	9 hours 25 minutes

There was no *otium* for scribes: they contributed to the fight against the devil's attempt to corrupt holy texts with their accurate and productive copying; reflection on what they were writing was neither expected nor encouraged. That a scribe's labour was hard work is clear from the numerous phrases scribes wrote into their manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages. Many of these are collected in Wilhelm Wattenbach's treasure trove, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*,[44] and most are in this vein: 'The very last line is to a writer what a nearby harbour is to sailors. Three fingers write and the entire body labours. Pray for me, the writer: thus shall you have God as protector.'[45] We should not take this as simply a conventional complaint, but rather acknowledge that the concentration on exemplar and script for hours on end (a period made independent of weather and season at Vivarium) was tiring, uncomfortable work. As another scribe reminds us: 'He who does not know how to write letters thinks it no work.'[46]

Christian authors, from the Apostle Paul to the Venerable Bede took over this view of scribes: these authors composed, but they did not do the manual labour of writing. Instead, they dictated while others took down their words.[47] Paul, for example, dictated his letters to notaries and at the end of the first letter to the Corinthians, the letter to the Galatians, and the second letter to the Thessalonians drew attention to the fact that he had written his signature or a short passage in his own hand.[48] We see these distinctions, too, in Bede's Commentary on Luke, which he finished under great pressure from Acca, Bishop of Hexham. Bede wrote in the dedicatory letter to the bishop that, in order to complete the commentary, he had been simultaneously *dictator* (the person who composed by dictating), *notarius*

The figures are for the town of Squillace, 38.781390° N Latitude and 16.520161° E Longitude, which is near the location of Cassiodorus' monastery.

[44] Wattenbach, *Schriftwesen*, pp. 278–89.

[45] Wattenbach, *Schriftwesen*, p. 279, from 'a seventh-century Würzburg Gospel book', (the Euangelia S. Burchardi Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Mp. th. f. 68, *CLA* 9.1423b), 'Sicut navigantibus proximus est portus, sic et scriptori novissimus versus. Tris digiti scribunt et totum corpus laborat. Hora pro me scribtore, sic deum habeas protectorem.'

[46] Verona, Biblioteca capitolare, X (8) fol. 158v *Colophons de manuscrits* vol. 6 No. 22,831 (s. 7–8; *CLA* 4.483), 'Qui nescit litteras scribere, nullum putat esse laborem, quia quod tris digiti scribunt, totos corpus laborant.'

[47] See H. C. Teitler, *Notarii and exceptores* (Amsterdam, 1985), especially for the social status of shorthand writers.

[48] The references are 1 Corinthians 16.21, Galatians 6.11, and 2 Thessalonians 3.17–18. The Würzburg Irish glosses on the Thessalonians passage explained the phrase 'Salutatio mea manu Pauli' as (27d16) *combad notire rodscribad cosse* 'so that it would have been a notary who would have written it hitherto.' (Thes. Suppl. p. 59[678].)

(the person who transcribed the dictation in shorthand), and *librarius* (the person who wrote the manuscript).[49] The fact that Bede mentioned taking on these three roles in addition to his other monastic duties shows us that this was unusual, but also that he must have had at least some training as a scribe. He then went on to mention that he developed a series of marginal indications of his sources to lighten his work as *librarius*. The picture of scribes, then, is as skilled labourers whose virtue was copying accurately rather than reflecting on what they are writing. Their work had to be freed of faults by those capable of it. Columba the scribe does not fit neatly into this picture: although he wrote manuscripts, he was a powerful abbot and holy man; in addition, he miraculously emended Baithéne's Psalter, knowing that its only mistake was an omitted letter **i**.

Irish sources, however, offer us evidence of just such men as Columba, a group which the annals and penitentials do call *scribae*. From the first *scriba* named in the annals (Banbán of Kildare, who died in 686 according to the *Annals of the Four Masters*) until the year 900, eighty-six men are called *scribae* in the annals. Of those, fifty-six (or two-thirds) are also identified as bishops, abbots, or anchorites (sometimes all three) as well as *sapientes*.[50] *Scribae* do not appear in secular law texts, but the penitentials prescribe punishments for wronging them equal to those for wronging bishops, abbots, anchorites, and even kings.[51] Because of their

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[49] Bede, *In Lucae euangelium expositio*, Ep. ad Accam, 'Unde et ego mox lectis tuae dulcissimae sanctitatis paginulis injuncti me operis labori supposui, in quo (ut innumera monasticae servitutis retinacula praeteream) ipse mihi dictator simul notarius et librarius existerem' (ed. Hurst, CCSL 120, p.7).

[50] For further analysis of these figures see Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, Appendix, pp. 177–202.

[51] *De disputatione Hibernensis synodi* (L&S B602) p. 162, 'Si post hanchoritam uel episcopum uel scribam uel principem magnum uel post regem iustum, XV dies in pane et aqua.' *Sinodus Hibernensis* (L&S B605) p. 170, 'Sanguis episcopi uel excelsi principis uel scribae qui ad terram effunditur, si colirio indiguerit, eum qui effuderit sapientes crucifigi iudicant uel VII ancellas reddat.' *ibid.*, p. 170, 'Omnis qui ausus fuerit ea que sunt regis uel episcopi aut scribae furari aut rapere aut aliquod in eos committere paruipendens dispicere, VII ancillarum praetium reddat aut VII annis peniteat cum episcopo uel scriba.' *De iectione eclesie graduum* (L&S B606), p. 174, 'Quicumque excelsum principem aut scribam aut anchoritam aut iudicem non susciperit, quantum iudices iudicauerint qui iudicabunt in illo tempore debitum occissionis eius, hoc est septima pars in iectione eius accipietur.' *Paenitentiale Bigotianum* (L&S B614), p. 230, 'Penitentia bardicationis glandellae post obitum laici uel laicae L dies et noctes in pane et aqua; si post glandellam morientem in partu uel cohabitatorem uel cohabitatricem fidem habentem, XL dies in pane et aqua; si post clerici plebilis obitum XX dies in pane et aqua; si post anchoritae uel scribae uel episcopi uel principis magni uel regis magni obitum, XV dies in pane et aqua; si sanctimonialis quendam huiusmodi uocibus turbata clamauerit, duplici penitentia emendetur predicta.'

status, these *scribae* would seem unsuited for the role of scribe we have just sketched. We could simply accept that they had nothing to do with writing, were it not for the fact that there are manuscript subscriptions by scribes whose names are identical to those named as *scribae* in the annals. Indeed, these manuscripts have been dated by matching the names in the subscriptions to the dated entries in the annals. So were these *scribae* scribes?

In classical usage, *scribae* clearly had something to do with writing: they were official writers or clerks, some private and some civil servants assigned to public officials.[52] Still, it is certainly odd that the word *scriba* should have been adopted in an ecclesiastical context considering that scribes represent a group so thoroughly reviled by Jesus, the *sopherim* of the Old and New Testaments. This has been observed, but never satisfactorily been explained.[53] One suggestion would be that the *scribae* of Ireland looked to Ezra in the Old Testament for a model. Ezra, the *scriba* (*sopher*) and priest, was sent by Artaxerxes to restore the law in Jerusalem by re-copying the text and then reading it to the people, as Ó Corráin has argued.[54] The best-known portrait of Ezra is from the Codex Amiatinus, which is often held to be a Northumbrian copy of the portrait of Cassiodorus. If so, it seems especially odd that Cassiodorus of all people should be putting himself in the position of an *antiquarius*. But he is not because you will notice that the jewelled breastplate and *tefillin* identify him (along with the couplet) as the *scriba* who renewed the laws.[55]

Although the *Vita Columbae* shows us that the saint and his successors performed the work of scribes, and that this work was highly esteemed, the word *scriba* is never used in the *Vita*, even though Columba seems to fit perfectly the profile of *scriba* and *abbas* presented in the

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[52] On the position of *scribae* see A.H.M. Jones, 'The Roman Civil Service (Clerical and Sub-Clerical Grades)', *Journal of Roman Studies* 39 (1949), 38–55. Jones uses epigraphic and literary evidence, which can be supplemented by the glosses, most of which give either the Greek equivalent (γραμματεύς), the biblical meaning 'legis peritus, legis doctor,' or the clerical meaning from Festus 'librarius qui pertinet ad libros et chartas puplicas.' See *CGL* 7 s.v. *scriba*.

[53] M. Richter, 'The personnel of learning in early medieval Ireland', in *Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Bildung und Literatur / Ireland and Europa in the Early Middle Ages: Learning and Literature*, ed. M. Richter and P. Ní Chatháin (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 275–308 and Johnston, *Literacy and Identity*, pp. 122–4.

[54] D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach, A. Breen, 'The Laws of the Irish', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 382–438 at 398–9.

[55] 'Codicibus sacris hostili clade perustis / Esdra deo fervens hoc reparauit opus.' After the sacred books were burned up by the hostile disaster, Ezra zealous with God repaired this work.

annals, as do Baithéne and Dorbbéne. Nowhere is any of the men called a *scriba*, however, and before 900 only one *scriba* from Iona is recorded in the Annals.[56] So the annals and penitentials show us *scribae* who also held high offices and who can plausibly be linked—through manuscript subscriptions—to those who wrote manuscripts, while Columba and the Iona community show us generations of abbots who were producing manuscripts. Thus Columba's status and his function as a scribe are consistent with Irish *scribae*, but this seems to be unusual outside Ireland; moreover, the annals, our main source for *scribae*, are peculiarly silent on *scribae* from Iona. I would suggest, then, that *scriba* as a title is a later usage that was then applied to earlier annal entries, though the history of Iona shows us that the idea of scribes with high status had a long history.

The manuscripts written by Columba are not mentioned as particularly beautiful, but, as we have seen, they did have one salient property, namely the ability to resist damage from water, and it is to this property that I would like to turn. Two stories appearing consecutively in the second book of the *Vita* tell of manuscripts written by Columba falling into rivers and emerging untouched by water. The first (*VC* 2.8) takes place many years after the saint's death when a young man carrying a bag of books fell from his horse into the river Boyne, sank, and died. His body remained 20 days under water and was pulled out still clutching the satchel of books between his arm and side. All the leaves of the books had rotted, except for the single leaf that Columba had written, which emerged as though it had been kept in a *scriniolum*.[57] The second story (*VC* 2.9) tells of a book of hymns copied by the saint and again contained in a satchel. The satchel fell from the shoulder of a boy as he slipped crossing a bridge over the river Lagin and landed in the river. The bag remained in the river from Christmas till after Easter and was found on the riverbank by a group of women who brought it to the Pictish priest to whom it belonged. Although the satchel was wet and rotting, when the priest opened it, he found the book dry as though it had been kept in a *scrinium*. Later in Book Two, manuscripts written by Columba were used along with his tunic after his death to bring rain during a drought (*VC* 2.44) and to turn contrary winds fair (*VC* 2.45).

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[56] Condachtach named *scriba* and *abbas* only in the *Annals of the Four Masters* s.a. 797.4 (*scribhneoir tocchaidhe*).

[57] Adomnán goes out of his way to show that Columba's activity as scribe is meant by resolving the ambiguity of *scriptum* with *sanctis degitulis*, writing '*folium sancti Columbae sanctis scriptum degitulis*'.

All of these stories are told to show Columba's power over the elements and represent two sorts of power: the first pair of stories shows that the power of the saint has changed the manuscript into something miraculous, while the second pair shows the power of the manuscript he wrote to invoke the saint's help after his death. The first pair of stories is placed after a story about a blessed piece of rock salt surviving a fire (one of the saint's lesser miracles) to show Columba's command over contrary elements. Following these two stories are two further stories about Columba's power over water: in one (2.10) Columba produces water from a rock to baptise a child[58] and *VC* 2.11 in which the saint drives demons from a well turning it into a holy well.

These two stories are the earliest evidence for the belief that manuscripts written by Columba had the ability to resist damage from water and the unusual aspect of these stories is that it is Columba's scribal activity, not the text or any other association with him, that endowed the manuscripts with their *virtus*. A brief comparison with other examples can help clarify this. The closest analogy with the Columba stories may come from the seventh- or eighth-century life of Eusebius, the first bishop of Vercelli who died in 371. The *Vita* provides the earliest evidence that Eusebius was the scribe of the Codex Vercellensis,[59] a fourth-century uncial manuscript of the Old Latin version of the Gospels on purple vellum with silver letters.[60] The anonymous author of the *Vita* tells us that the manuscript 'shone with great *virtus* not only from the words of Christ but also of Eusebius' and it was thus able to inflict a variety of punishments on those who swore false oaths on it, including *ariditas membrorum*.[61] The *Vita* does not offer compelling evidence for Eusebius' actually having been a scribe, since it was written so long after his death. In fact, it seems to represent another tendency, namely attributing old and revered manuscripts

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[58] Quite similar to one found in the anonymous Life of Cuthbert. Anon. *Vit. Cuth.*, 3.3 (ed. B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (reprinted Cambridge, 1985)).

[59] Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, Cod. A, *CLA* 4.467. See also Parkes, *Their hands before our eyes*, p. 129 and n. 12.

[60] P. Levine, 'Historical Evidence for Calligraphic Activity in Vercelli from Eusebius to Atto', *Speculum* 30 (1955), 561-81.

[61] F. Ughelli, *Italia Sacra*, second edition, 4.754, quoted in Levine, 'Historical Evidence', at 565 n. 23 'EVANGELIUM Christi propria manu SCRIPSIT, cujus miraculum in eodem codice quatuor Evangeliorum non solum verbis Christi, sed et ejusdem Patris tanta *virtus* coruscat, ut, si aliquis seductus a diabolo falsum super eum Sacramentum fecerit, citius super eum plaga corporis ostendatur: ita ut, aut morte mulctetur, aut perditis oculis spirituale et corporale lumen amittat, aut ariditate membrorum, mancus vel claudus efficiatur, aut invasione daemonum pene usque ad exitum dilanietur.'

to people who are famous and dead.[62] But it does show us that the author of the *Vita* was willing to attribute the manuscript's *virtus* equally to the holy words of Christ and the written words of Eusebius, thus elevating the supposed scribal activity of the bishop to a very high level indeed. Even here, however, it is text and scribe together that give the manuscript its *virtus*, not scribe alone, as in Columba's case. In addition, we are told of no change in the properties of the manuscript comparable to the incorruptibility of Columba's manuscripts.

Sulpicius Severus' *Life of Martin* offers another similar episode. Here, the gravely ill daughter of the ex-prefect Arborius is restored to health when a letter from Martin is placed on her chest at the height of a fever.[63] The written document clearly has *virtus*, but no mention is made that Martin actually copied rather than composed the letter. In fact, as we saw above, the more common procedure would have been for Martin to have dictated the letter and signed a fair copy. The fact that the manuscript was a letter draws on one of the properties often attributed to letters, namely their ability to make the absent sender present to the recipient.[64] Sulpicius alludes to this, saying that the girl was 'the present evidence for Martin's miracles (*virtutum*) although she had been cured in his absence'.[65]

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[62] Jerome, *De viris inlustribus*, 75, ed. E. Richardson (Leipzig,1896), p. 41: 'Sed in duodecim prophetas XXV ἐξηγήσεων Origenis manu eius [Pamphilii] exarate repperi, quae tanto amplexor et servo gaudio, ut Croesi opes habere me credam. Si enim laetitia est unam epistulam habere martyris, quanto magis tot milia versuum, quae mihi videtur signasse sui sanguinis vestigiis!'

[63] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, (ed. Halm, CSEL 1) 19.1–2 'Arborius autem, vir praefectorius, sancti admodum et fidelis ingenii, cum filia eius grauissimis quartanae febribus ureretur, epistulam Martini, quae casu ad eum delata fuerat, pectori puellae in ipso accessu [Halm: accentu] ardoris inseruit, statimque fugata febris est. quae res apud Arborium in tantum ualuit, ut statim puellam Deo uouerit et perpetuae uirginitati dicarit: profectusque ad Martinum puellam ei, praesens uirtutum eius testimonium, quae per absentem licet curata esset, obtulit, neque ab alio eam quam a Martino habitu uirginitatis imposito passus est consecrari.' (Arborius the ex-prefect was a man of holy character and very faithful. When his daughter was burning up with a malarial fever, he put a letter from Martin, which by chance had been delivered to him, onto the chest of his daughter during an attack of fever and quickly the heat fled. Arborius attached such importance to this that he quickly vowed the girl to God and consecrated her to perpetual virginity. He then went to Martin and presented the girl to him, the present evidence for his *uirtus* who had been cured although absent, and would not suffer her to be consecrated by putting on the habit of virginity by any other than Martin.)

[64] G. Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 17 (Turnhout, 1976), pp. 13–16 as well as Jerome, Ep. 8 Ad Niceam Hyppodiaconum Aquileiae (ed. Hilberg, CSEL 54), pp. 31–3).

[65] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, (ed. Halm, CSEL 1), 19.1–2 'praesens uirtutum eius testimonium, quae per absentem licet curata esset'.

In this case, then, the girl was cured by the letter standing in for the absent saint. It is the object's association with Martin as *auctor* not scribe that gives the letter its *auctoritas* and *virtus*. And again the letter seems to have no qualities comparable to the incorruptible manuscripts written by Columba.

We also find this epistolary gap bridged in another well-known genre of writing with *virtus*, namely curse tablets or *tabellae defixionum*. Although there are variations on the theme, most *tabellae* consist of a formulaic curse inscribed by a person on a piece of lead. The inscribed tablet was then rolled or folded and thrown into a ditch, river, or well inhabited by the spirits that would bring about the curse.[66] Cursing wells were in use at least until the nineteenth century in Scotland and Wales.[67] In this case, the ability to bring evil upon someone else does not come from any special power in the scribe—on the contrary, it seems an action anyone could perform. Rather it is due to the wishes of the person, correctly formulated, being taken like a letter to the divinities with the power to act upon them. In addition, the tablet seems to become a surrogate for the person or thing cursed, a classic example of which occurs in Chapter 51 of the book of Jeremiah. In this passage, the prophet wrote all the evil that was destined to befall Babylon in a book and told Saraias to tie the book up, weight it down with a stone, and throw it into the Euphrates as he says the curse 'thus will Babylon sink and not rise from the affliction that I put upon her'.[68] Three of the water miracle stories in the *Vita Columbae* seem to allude to parts of this practice—written documents that end up in rivers, a well possessed by demons. But they also represent a Christianisation of it. Columba's writing is blessed rather than cursed; though it is written on perishable parchment, still it is as resistant to water as lead. Likewise, not only is the saint able to drive demons from the well, making it unsuitable for receiving curses, he also converts the water from producing illness to providing cures.

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[66] See A. Kropp, 'How does Magical Language Work? The Spells and Formulae of the Latin *defixionum tabellae*', in *Magical practice in the Latin West*, ed. R. L. Gordon and F. M. Simón (Leiden, 2010), pp. 357–80. For the script of the tablets, see G. Bartoletti, 'La scrittura romana nelle *Tabellae defixionum* (secc. I a.c. – IV d.c.); note paleografiche', *Scrittura e civiltà* 14 (1990), 7–47.

[67] R. S. O. Tomlin, *Tabellae Sulis: Roman inscribed tablets of tin and lead from the Sacred Spring at Bath* (Oxford, 1988). For Scotland, see W. Sherwood Fox, 'Submerged *Tabellae Defixionum*', *American Journal of Philology* 33 (1912), 301–10; for Wales, F. Jones, *The Holy Wells of Wales* (University of Wales Press, 1993), pp. 119-23 and B. R. Parry, 'Ffynnon Elian', *Transactions of the Denbigh Historical Society* 14 (1965), 185–96.

[68] Jeremiah 51.59–64.

Writing is also used to invoke supernatural powers in the dedication ceremonies for churches. At the beginning of the ceremony, according to many texts, the bishop was required to write two alphabets with his staff on the ground at right angles to each other. The meaning is unclear, but may go back to the practice of Roman surveyors and would thus reflect the ceremonial laying out of the grid upon which the church would be constructed.[69] For Remigius of Auxerre in the last half of the ninth century, this practice reminded him of elementary instruction for children learning the alphabet and represented the words of the Gospels going out to the four corners of the world.[70] Here the *virtus* comes from the office of the scribe and the ceremony rather than the personal *virtus* that we see in the case of Columba. This would seem to have more in common with curse tablets in that the effectiveness of the writing grows out of a ritual, but unlike the *tabellae*, a holy man is required.

Finally, the activity of the scribe could also be an expression of *virtus*. In the ninth century, the Anglo-Saxon writer Ædilwulf composed a poem about the history of his monastery. In the poem he included a passage on one of the monastery's early-eighth-century brothers, the Irish scribe Ultán, who is praised as unparalleled in his ability to write both tironian notes and beautiful script.[71] After Ultán's death, one of the monks at the monastery fell ill and requested that the bones of Ultán's writing arm be brought to cure him, which they duly did. In this case, the *virtus* of the

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[69] See P. de Puniet, *s.v.* Dédicace des églises, in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris, 1920), vol. 4, coll. 374–405 and F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ 7 (Leipzig, 1925), pp. 74–5. See also, D. Barbet-Massin, 'Le rituel irlandais de consécration des églises au Moyen Âge: le témoignage des sources irlandaises et bretonnes', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 118 (2011), 7–39.

[70] Remigius of Auxerre, *Tractatus de dedicatione ecclesiae* (*PL* 131.850–1): 'Quid significet quod sacerdos alphabetum in pavimento scribit'.

[71] Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus*, ed. A. Campbell (Oxford, 1967).
Presbyter iste fuit Scottorum gente beatus,
Comptis qui potuit notis ornare libellos,
Atque apicum speciem vitam sic reddit amoenam.
Hac arte huic nullus potuit se aequare modernus
Scriptorum: nec mirum Domini si talia possit
Cultor, ei digitos sanctus cum Spiritus auctor
Rexit, et accendit sacratam ad sidera mentem.
On Ultán, see G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells: Insular Gospel-books 650–800* (London, 1987) p. 126, R. Bruce-Mitford, 'The Durham-Echternach Calligrapher' in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to A.D. 1200* ed. G. Bonner, C. Stancliffe, S. Rollason (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 175–88 at 187–88 and n. 48 and L. Nees, 'Ultán the scribe', *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993), 127-46.

scribe was made manifest in his script and effected the cure as a relic of his sanctity.[72]

But, at long last, to return to our subject, we are now in a better position to understand the properties attributed to manuscripts written by Columba the scribe. The unusual aspect, indeed unique, as far as I can tell, is that the high-status scribe transferred his *virtus* to the manuscript independent of the text and thus changed the physical properties of the page. This incorruptibility seems to be related to three ideas.

First, Adomnán's point that the books written by Columba cannot be corrupted by being submerged in water also alludes to corruption in the text of the manuscript. Cassiodorus, for example, warns his emenders not to corrupt the text of the Bible by 'correcting' biblical idioms[73] and Columba has the ability to emend Baithéne's Psalter, foretelling the only corrupt place in the text. Thus Columba's *virtus* guards texts against both physical and textual corruption.

Next, on a practical level, falling into water must have been a common way that manuscripts were damaged—and the stories are certainly told as everyday accidents, which makes the immediacy of the story and the value of the miracle greater. But notice that the manuscripts fall only into rivers, never into the sea. Combined with the proximity to the story of the diabolical well, this recalls the *tabellae defixionum*. But the episodes in the *Vita Columbae* represent a sort of anti-curse tablet at work: the perishable material becomes imperishable; rather than being curses, the texts are blessed; and finally the *virtus* of the writer is transmitted to the inscribed object without the need for ritual.

Finally, like Ultan's bones, the manuscripts produced by Columba served as relics, as we saw when they were used along with his clothes to invoke the saint's help after his death.[74] The ability to survive under water, then, also represents a demonstration of God's judgment both that they are true relics and of Columba's sanctity. These water stories are also

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[72] Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus*, ed. Campbell, ll. 210-15.

[73] Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 1.15.5 (ed. Mynors, p. 44), 'Nec illa uerba tangenda sunt, quae interdum contra artem quidem humanam posita reperiuntur, sed auctoritate multorum codicum uindicantur. Corrumpi siquidem nequeunt, quae inspirante domino dicta noscuntur…'

[74] For discussions of the relics associated with Columba, see R. Ó Floinn, 'Insignia Columbae I', *Studies in the Cult*, pp. 136-61 and C. Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae II', *Studies in the Cult*, pp. 162-83.

juxtaposed to one about fire[75] and one must only reverse the process—burning and submerging objects to test whether they are genuine relics—to have the beginning of the trial of relics by ordeal of fire and water used in the later Middle Ages.[76]

The manuscripts Columba wrote became relics of his sanctity and signs of God's favour. They show him not as *auctor* but *scriba*. For many, scribal activity was humble work and thus suited to humility expected in the monastery, but this explanation is never offered to us. Instead, Columba is pictured as an industrious scribe and scribal activity as an expression of both his authority and sanctity. Writing could serve to make the absent saint Martin present to perform a cure; Ultan the scribe could even become a relic; but it is Columba and the Iona community that show us the remarkable conjunction of status and *virtus*.

3. The Schaffhausen manuscript

The Schaffhausen manuscript of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* represents the scribal and monastic heritage of Iona, and I would now like to turn to a closer look at it. Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, Generalia 1 (*CLA* 7.998) is a manuscript of 138 pages, each approximately 225 millimetres wide and 290 millimetres tall—about the size of an A4 sheet—and written throughout in two columns of (usually) 28 lines. The script might almost be said to defy description: it has been called, in roughly chronological order, Irish majuscule,[77] Irish minuscule,[78] 'Moderately sized script…not on the path to minuscule,[79] Irish half-uncial,[80] and Insular set minuscule.[81]

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[75] *VC* 2.9, 'Haec duo quamlibet in rebus paruis peracta et per contraria ostensa elimenta, ignem scilicet et aquam, beati testantur honorem uiri et quanti et qualis meriti apud habeatur Deum.'

[76] For the trial by water mentioned in the Durham inventory of 1367, see M. P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels* p. 407. For ordeals in general, see T. Head, 'Saints, Heretics, and Fire: Finding Meaning through the Ordeal', in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts. Essays in honor of Richard K. Little*, ed. S. Farmer and B. Rosenwein (Ithaca, NY, 2000), pp. 220–38, where the earliest example is from the late-10th century.

[77] W. M. Lindsay, *Early Irish Minuscule Script* (Oxford, 1910), p. 3.

[78] E. A. Lowe, *CLA* vol. 7, No. 998.

[79] Bischoff, *Paläographie*, p. 116 'In…[Schaffhausen Gen. 1] ist die mittelgroße Schrift etwas schmäler und lockerer geschrieben…. Zwei Beobachtungen legen nahe, daß diese (veränderten) Schriften nicht in der Entwicklung zur Minuskel stehen, sondern vielmehr von deren bereits ausgebildeter Eigenart beeinflußt sind.'

[80] R. Gamper and S. Marti, *Katalog der mittelalterlichen Handschriften der Stadtbibliothek Schaffhausen* (Dietikon-Zürich, 1998), pp. 67-8.

However classified, the script is especially important in the study of Insular palaeography because it can be dated and localized: a colophon on p. 136 tells us that the scribe of the manuscript was Dorbbéne, bishop and perhaps abbot of Iona whose death is recorded in the Annals under the year 713.[82] We know of the further history of the manuscript from the notice 'Liber Augie maioris' on p. 1, which tells us that it was at Reichenau, and from its entry in the 1772 catalogue of the Schaffhausen Stadtbibliothek.[83] The text consists of stories concerning the miraculous deeds performed by St Columba and it was composed by Adomnán, Columba's successor as abbot of Iona, who died in 704. In composing the text, Adomnán tells us, he used written and oral information from members of the monastic community on the island. As both Albrecht Diem and Ian Wood have argued persuasively, founders' *vitae* are more than just records of miracles. They are meant, along with other documents such as *regulae*, to serve as guides to the *conversatio* of the monks.[84] Many scholars of Adomnán's text have acknowledged the importance of the Schaffhausen manuscript, few have explored both text and manuscript more thoroughly than William Reeves,[85] Alan and Marjorie Anderson,[86] Richard Sharpe,[87] and Jean-Michel Picard.[88]

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[81] The Carolingian Libraries of Reichenau and St Gall. http://www.stgallplan.org/stgallmss/viewItem.do?ark=p21198-zz002b3k0s. Perhaps quoting J. Brown, 'The Irish Element in the Insular System of Scripts to ca. A.D. 850', in *A Palaeographer's View*, p. 210.

[82] For the identification of Dorbbéne, see *VC*, p. lxi.

[83] The catalogue (J. G. Müller, *Catalogus manuscriptorum*), which is itself a manuscript, is in the archives of the Schaffhausen Stadtbibliothek without shelfmark. The reference to our manuscript is No. 16 on fol. 218r. On the manuscript's journey to Switzerland, see R. Specht, 'Wie kam Dorbénes Abschrift von Adamnáns "Vita Sancti Columbae" in die Stadtbibliothek Schaffhausen?', *Schaffhauser Beiträge zur Geschichte* 65 (1988), 103–9 and J.-M. Picard, 'Schaffhausen Generalia 1 and the textual transmission of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* on the continent', in *Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter. Texte und Überlieferung / Ireland and Europe in the early Middle Ages: Texts and transmission*, ed. P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (Dublin, 2002), pp. 95–102.

[84] A. Diem, 'The rule of an "Iro-Egyptian" monk in Gaul: Jonas' *Vita Iohannis* and the construction of a monastic identity', *Revue Mabillon* 19 (2008), 5–50. I. Wood, 'A Prelude to Columbanus: the monastic achievement in the Burgundian territories', in *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, ed. H. B. Clarke and M. Brennan (Oxford, 1981), pp. 3–32, at p. 4.

[85] *Vita Sancti Columbae Auctore Adamnano*, ed. W. Reeves (Dublin, 1857), justifiably called monumental by Sharpe.

[86] A. O. and M. O. Anderson's first edition and translation was published in Edinburgh in 1961 and the second, revised by M. O. Anderson in Oxford in 1991. References here are to the later edition.

Other manuscripts also transmit the text. There are three related manuscripts, known collectively as the B manuscripts, now all in the British Library.[89] In addition, there are several versions of the text derived from the full text, the oldest manuscript of which is Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 555, which Bischoff dates to the second quarter or the middle of the ninth century.[90] These 'derived' texts were studied and edited by Gertrud Brüning in what remains an important article, especially for the sources used by Adomnán.[91] Perhaps the least-studied and most interesting early manuscript is Metz, Grand Seminaire non-coté (formerly 1),[92] a ninth-century manuscript that combines the lives of Columba and Columbanus.[93] Although it is usually held to be a copy of the Schaffhausen manuscript, there are aspects of the text that call this into doubt.[94] In any case, were you

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[87] In addition to the translation with very helpful introduction and notes, *Adomnán of Iona. Life of St Columba*, Penguin Classics (London, 1995) see R. Sharpe, 'Saint Mauchteus, discipulus Patricii ', in *Britain, 400–600: Language and History*, ed. A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann, Anglistische Forschungen 205 (Heidelberg, 1990), pp. 85–93; 'Maghnus Ó Domhnaill's source for Adomnán's *Vita S. Columbae* and other *uitae*', in *Essays in Honour of Brian Ó Cuív*, *Celtica* 21 (1990), 604–7; 'The Life of St Columba in Latin verse by Roderick MacLean (1549)', *Innes Review* 42 (1991), 111–32; 'Books from Ireland, Fifth to Ninth Centuries', *Peritia* 21 (2010), 1–55.

[88] Jean-Michel Picard, 'Une prefigurations du latin carolingien: la syntaxe de la *Vita Columbae* d'Adomnán, auteur irlandais du VIIᵉ siecle', *Romanobarbarica* 6 (1981–82), 236–89; 'The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae', Peritia* 1 (1982), 160–77; 'The Schaffhausen Adomnán—unique witness to Hiberno-Latin', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 216–49; 'The metrical prose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae;* an unusual system', in *Ireland and Europe: the Early Church*, ed. P. Ní Chathain and M. Richter (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 258–71; 'Bede, Adomnán and the writing of history', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 50–70; 'The Bible used by Adomnán', in *Ireland and Christendom: the Bible and the Missions*, ed. P. Ní Chathain and M. Richter (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 246–57; '*Eloquentiae exuberantia*: words and forms in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae', Peritia* 6–7 (1987–88), 141–57; 'Les celticismes des hagiographes irlandais du VIIᵉ siècle', *Etudes celtiques* 29 (1992), 355–73; 'Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and the cult of Colum Cille in continental Europe', *PRIA* (C) 98 (1998), 1–23.

[89] See *VC* Introduction, pp. liv–lx.

[90] Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden, 2014), no. 5770, 'Möglicherweise St. Gallen, IX. Jh., 2. Viertel (/Mitte) (?)'.

[91] Gertrud Brüning, 'Adamnans Vita Columbae und ihre Ableitungen', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 11 (1917), 210–304.

[92] Bischoff, *Katalog* vol. 2, no. 2788. In the entry Bischoff revises his opinion quoted by Leclercq in *Analecta Bollandiana* 73 (1955), 194 n. 4. Bischoff's original view was that the manuscript was produced at Reims during the time of Hincmar, while the *Katalog* entry reads, 'Umkreis von Reims (?), IX. Jh., ca. 3./4. Viertel.' I am grateful to Prof. Alain Dubreucq for information concerning the Metz manuscript.

[93] See *VC* Introduction, p. lv and the literature cited there.

[94] For example, Insular material was originally omitted from the second preface in two places: the name of Maucteus in 10.1 from fol. 2ʳ and the phrase telling the name of

to examine the Schaffhausen manuscript closely, you would soon begin to see that, for all the evident care involved in its production, there are also inconsistencies. For example, the chapter headings for Book 1 given in red on pp. 5–6 do not match the chapter headings in the text. There are no chapter lists at all for books two and three, though there seems to be space for one at the end of Book 1. There is an addition made in the first column of p. 108 with an excerpt from one of the written sources Adomnán must have used, in this case a text from the abbot of Iona, Cumméne Albus. I have examined several of these features and elsewhere maintained that taken together they mean that Adomnán's text was not completely revised at his death and that the Schaffhausen manuscript was copied from a collection of texts in various stages of revision. Thus the manuscript represents an odd combination of care and seeming carelessness, due, I argued, to the state in which Adomnán left his work.[95] Because both text and manuscript represent work by a succession of abbots and scribes at Iona, studying details of their scribal practices can be informative.

3.1 Larger divisions of the text

Now if we start with the largest elements we see that the manuscript begins with two *praefationes* (Figures 1–5). Each *praefatio* is labelled with a *titulus* written in red. The first letter of each preface is approximately three lines high and is followed by letters of diminishing size until the text script is reached. The bodies of the initial letters are filled with yellow dots, and red dots are used in the interior space of the **b**, but not the **u**. The interior spaces of the **e** following **b** are filled with yellow and red wash. The first preface leaves two lines blank, presumably in order to begin the second preface on a new column or page.

Following the prefaces come the *kapitulationes* of the first book. The word *kapitulatio* seems to be used as equivalent to *recapitulatio*, a summing up according to headings. If we adopt this interpretation it is perhaps less surprising that the entries here do not match the chapter headings, since the point is not to provide a reference tool (they are not numbered), but to give an overview of the book's structure and contents.

Columba's maternal grandfather in 20.2–3 from fol. 2ᵛ. These were later added by a corrector. This suggests that the exemplar for Metz may not have been Schaffhausen, but a manuscript with Irish material deleted, a characteristic of the abbreviated versions. See, for example, the erasure in Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, 555 p. 10, where the phrase concerning Columba's grandfather has been erased (leaving the marginal gloss 'mac · filius' in the margin).

[95] M. Stansbury, 'The Composition of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*', *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–4), 154–82.

Adomnán tells us that the work is divided into three books according to subject and thus 'out of order' because it is not chronological: Book 1 deals with prophecies revealed to Columba, Book 2 with miracles performed by him, and Book 3 with the appearance of angels to him and heavenly light around him. Book 1 begins (p. 6)[96] with an Incipit of four lines all in red. The text opens with a four-line initial and diminuendo. The initial has yellow dots in the body of the letter and the negative space of the u is filled with an encircled cross formed of red dots. The book ends (p. 52) with an explicit and the next book opens (p. 53) with an incipit, both written in black with *litterae notabiliores*. The last syllable of the last chapter of Book 1 and the last word of the explicit are centred. Book 2 begins with an incipit, then the first chapter has a chapter heading all in red with *littera notabilior*. The text begins with a five-line-high initial **a**, outlined in red dots and a red wash filling in the negative space, followed by diminuendo. The book ends (p. 104) with a long colophon, the last line of which is flush left. This is followed by the phrase *finitur secundus liber* written in Greek characters. This is followed by the incipit of Book 3 on the same page in black, with *littera notabilior* with red in-fill. The text of Book 3 begins (p. 104) with a four-line initial letter with no dots and a carelessly-applied yellow wash. There is no *titulus* for part of the book, which is an unlabelled preface. When the first chapter does begin, it is also missing its *titulus*. The text of Book 3 ends at the top of p. 136 and is followed by two colophons: the first by the author, Adomnán, and the second by the scribe, Dorbbéne. The remainder of p. 136 is left blank and the entire manuscript is, as it were, closed by the Pater Noster (or, more accurately, the Πάτερ ἡμῶν) written in Greek characters by the same scribe on the facing recto (p. 137).[97]

Now clearly composing the *vita* in three books was Adomnán's plan and although their subjects are different, we think of them as equivalent to each other in a hierarchical sense—and a good case could be made for Adomnán's thinking of them in that way as well. We thus might expect the layout of each book opening and closing to be identical in order to express this hierarchical equivalence. And yet, as we have seen, they are not. What are we to make of this? One explanation, as I suggested previously, may be the state of the exemplar from which the scribe was working. In this case, these features of the Schaffhausen manuscript could represent an act of

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[96] References are to the pages of the Schaffhausen manuscript, reproductions of which are available online at http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/sbs/0001.
[97] For the prayer used in a similar way, see the colophon to Matthew in the Durham Gospels, Durham, Cathedral Library, A. II. 10, fol. 3v (*CLA* 2.147), where the language is Greek, but the script is Latin.

pietas on the part of the scribe faithfully transmitting the disordered state of a prestigious exemplar associated with the author. This assumes that, had Adomnán had time, he would have made the layout consistent, in the same way as, for example, the books of *De locis sanctis* are.[98] In turn, one could also argue that the inconsistency is intentional and intended to reflect the differences in the books; in other words, the structural arguments for uniformity may be only one way of interpreting the evidence.

3.2 Smaller divisions: the grammar and rhetoric of legibility

Within the prefaces and chapters, we find that the layout of the manuscript is quite consistent. The late Malcolm Parkes, whose insights remain fundamental for a study of both scribes and manuscripts, has given a happy name to this aspect of this textual culture, namely the grammar of legibility, which he argued began in the seventh-century Insular world. Here is Parkes's description:

> A written text presupposes an indeterminate audience disseminated over distance or time, or both. A scribe had no immediate respondent to interact with, therefore he had to observe a kind of decorum in his copy in order to ensure that the message of the text was easily understood. This decorum—the rules governing the relationships between this complex of graphic conventions and the message of a text conveyed in the written medium—may be described as 'the grammar of legibility.'[99]

Litterae notabiliores, colour, layout are all used to make the text help the reader, hence legibility, while they are used systematically, hence grammar. The 'grammar' in Parkes's phrase has another meaning as well: not only does it function according to a regular system, several of its terms are defined in many of the *artes* written by *grammatici*.[100] For Parkes,

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[98] Note the use of *capitulationes* for the chapter lists. The early ninth-century manuscript Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, Rh. 73 (Bischoff, *Katalog* 3.7622 and *Mittelalterliche Studien* 2, p. 49) certainly has consistent layout, though one could argue this is a later innovation.

[99] 'The Contribution of Insular Scribes in the seventh and eighth centuries to the "Grammar of Legibility" ' in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers* (London, 1991), pp. 1–18. Expanded in M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, 1992), p. 23. See also Parkes, *Their Hands Before Our Eyes*, pp. 57–9.

[100] For periods and their divisions, see for example, Donatus, *Ars maior* 1.6 *De posituris*.

indeed, Insular scribes' encounter with the *artes* written by late-antique *grammatici* was decisive in this development.[101] And of course he is correct that the *artes* contain sections on *positurae* and *distinctiones* from which a reader (or scribe) can learn principles. Isidore, for example, takes *positurae* and *notae sententiarum* as parts of grammar[102] and writes, 'A *positura* is a mark for distinguishing meaning through colons, commas, and periods, which, when arranged in order, show us the meaning (*sensus*) of what is read. *Positurae* are so named either because they are noted by points put down (*positis*) or because the voice is lowered (*deponitur*) to pause for the punctuation.'[103] But, as we shall see, the scribes who wrote texts in this way did not mark every *comma* and *colon*, so, although *grammatici* may have taught what the *distinctiones* meant, they did not teach when they ought to be used or how to represent them graphically.

For less-advanced readers, these problems were addressed by copying manuscripts *per cola et commata*, i.e. in sense units, as explained by Jerome in the prologue to Isaiah and Cassiodorus in the *Institutiones* (see also Appendix below). In laying out texts per *cola et commata*, however, every unit is marked rather than allowing the more flexible combinations we see in Schaffhausen.

For a model for actively using *distinctiones*, that is applying the principles given by *grammatici*, we must look rather to rhetoric and the rhetorical analysis of language that we see, for example, in St Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. In Augustine, the primary concern in Book 3 is to avoid ambiguities that lead to misunderstandings of the Bible. Augustine describes two sources of ambiguity in connected discourse: *distinctiones* (i.e. the divisions of the text) and *pronuntiatio* (i.e. ambiguities created by intonation—this is a question?—and vowel length). Indeed, this is the same sort of analysis that we see in the *Interpretationes Vergilianae* of Tiberius Claudius Donatus, who wrote in the preface addressed to his son that it is *rhetores* rather than *grammatici* who ought to explain Virgil. The result is basically a prose paraphrase of the poem.[104]   But, as with Augustine,

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[101] Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, p. 23.

[102] *Etymologiae* 1.5.4 (ed. W. M. Lindsay, Oxford, 1911).

[103] *Etymologiae* 1.20.1 (ed. Lindsay), 'Positura est figura ad distinguendos sensus per cola et commata et periodos, quae dum ordine suo adponitur, sensum nobis lectionis ostendit. Dictae autem positurae vel quia punctis positis adnotantur, vel quia ibi vox pro intervallo distinctionis deponitur.'

[104] The effect of this on the only modern editor, Heinrich Georgii, in his Teubner edition of 1905 was unambiguous: 'Tiberii Claudii Donati interpretationes Vergilianas edendas suscepi, non quod in deliciis haberem scriptorem taedii plenissimum, sed quia ad

Donatus is analyzing the poem in sense units, not lines of verse and, for him, this was the function of a *rhetor* rather than a *grammaticus*.[105] Indeed, as we have seen above (note 18), the subscription by Ursicinus tells us that he was both scribe and *lector* in Verona.

As we shall see in the Schaffhausen Adomnán, the graphic devices used by the scribe do not simply identify grammatical structures, they also encourage certain interpretations. Thus, I would argue, they are also an example of the rhetoric of legibility. By this I do not mean that Parkes's grammar of legibility is inaccurate, rather to point out that there is an equally important complementary function.[106] Parkes emphasized the role of the scribe in finding new ways to represent old texts, that is, making texts conform to the written culture of the scribes. He further argued that this came from a reading of the *artes*. And yet on Iona, we have not only scribes but authors sharing this culture, and can presume that the authors of the texts may have influenced their presentation. When we can argue that author and scribe share a written culture, then I believe we may speak of the selective use of graphic devices as a rhetoric of legibility. While Parkes's grammar of legibility emphasizes the systematic nature of expressing a hierarchy, the rhetoric of legibility emphasizes a regular graphic schema to choose which parts of the hierarchy to express. In the Schaffhausen Adomnán prefaces, for example, not every *comma* is marked and there seem to be hierarchical levels indicated that do not correspond to the *comma-colon-periodus* schema. Further evidence for this is the fact that later readers have added punctuation in order to make the punctuation more systematic—more grammatical, we might say—but in doing so have overlooked the rhetorical emphasis that, we can argue, was intended.

In order to investigate this further, I would like to look more closely at the two prefaces because they are free compositions by Adomnán, that is,

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complendum et antiquorum Vergilii interpretum numerum…hoc solum deesse videbatur.'

[105] Tiberius Claudius Donatus, *Interpretationes Vergilianae* (ed. Georgii), praefatio, p. 4, 'si Maronis carmina conpetenter attenderis et eorum mentem congrue conprehenderis, invenies in poeta rhetorem summum atque inde intelleges Vergilium non grammaticos, sed oratores praecipuos tradere debuisse.' See M. S. Saccone, *Le* Interpretationes Vergilianae *di Tiberio Claudio Donato* (Naples, 1985), R. Starr, 'Aeneas the Rhetorician: *Aeneid* IV, 279–295', *Latomus* 62 (2003), 36–46, and R. Starr, 'The Flexibility of Literary Meaning and the Role of the Reader in Roman Antiquity', *Latomus* 60 (2001), 433-45.

[106] Indeed Parkes discusses punctuation and rhetoric in 'Punctuation and the Medieval History of Texts' *La Filologia Testuale e le Scienze Umane, Convegno Internazionale, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma, 19–22 aprile 1993*, Atti dei Convegni Lincei 111 (Rome, 1994), pp. 265–77.

they do not rework material by others. A transcription of the text and reproductions of the manuscript pages will be found in the Appendix. The divisions of discourse from the *grammatici* are: *comma*, *colon*, and *periodus* and all three are indicated in the text, as well as others not identified in this schema. The *comma* is marked by a medial point (i.e. one midway between the headline and baseline) followed by *littera notabilior*, the *colon* a medial point followed by *littera notabilior* with colour, and the *periodus* marked by a letter two- to three-lines tall with colour. The first preface is one *periodus* composed of nine *cola*, three of which are further divided into three *commata*. The second preface is divided into three periods. The first period is composed of thirteen *cola*, but two passages concerning Maucteus and his prophecy (the last five cola) are set off as a separate section by two-line *litterae notabiliores* and colour. Indeed, the *sententia* 'Melius est nomen bonum' seems to end the colon, the second of six *cola*, and the third of seven *cola*.

The entire first preface is one period divided into nine cola. *Cola* 2–5 are unusually short, and 3 and 5 are clearly *commata*, not *cola*. We might be tempted to say that the author, the scribe, or both have erred in presenting the text in this way. But it is interesting to note that these are allusions to the preface of Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*,[107] though the allusion to another passage from the *Vita Martini* in the previous *comma* ('ut fidem dictis adhibeant conpertis') is not set off in this way. Thus the layout here does not clarify the grammatical structure of the passage—indeed, it seems to obscure it. Instead its purpose is rhetorical: the effect is to mark the phrases as emphatic and require the the reader to slow down in order to ponder them.

At thirty-six words colon 6 is the longest undivided colon in the prefaces and the interlocking structure bracketed by 'Et nec … dispiciant … pronuntiationem' makes it clear why. Such constructions also show one limitation of the system of *distinctiones*, since the reader is not helped much. Instead, Insular scribes especially used other methods such as construe marks and letters to identify the order and arrangement of the

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[107] *Vita Martini*, Pref. 3–4 (ed. Halm, CSEL 1): 'quod si acciderit et ab aliquibus eum legi uideris, bona uenia id a lectoribus postulabis, ut res potius quam uerba perpendant, et aequo animo ferant, si aures eorum uitiosus forsitan sermo perculerit, quia regnum Dei non in eloquentia, sed in fide constat. meminerint etiam, salutem saeculo non ab oratoribus, cum utique, si utile fuisset….' See Brüning, 'Adamnans Vita Columbae', p. 245, and J.-M. Picard, 'Les réseaux martiniens en Irlande médiévale', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 119 (2012), 41–53 at 45.

colon.[108] It is surely no accident that the complex Latin syntax concerns the inadequacy of the Irish language composed by an Irish author and written by an Irish scribe.

The *litterae notabiliores* of both cola 7 and 9 may appear not to have colour, but in both there is a faint dot of yellow. *Igitur* is used four times in the *vita* (three of those are in the prefaces) and each time marks a major transition.

The three major divisions of the second preface clearly correspond to periods. The first period, however, seems further divided into two sections, the first of which introduces the prophecy of Maucteus, while the second quotes it. But these sections come after the *sententia* that seems to mark the end the first period (*Melius est nomen bonum quam diuitiae multae*), an impression confirmed by the transition in the next colon.[109] The subject of the two sections on Maucteus do indeed seem to occupy a no-man's land between the first period, which concerns the name Columba, and the second, which is concerned with the saint's life and character. Thus the layout seems to imply a kind of text division between the period and the colon—a division of the text that, rather than simply following the rules set out by the *artes*, seems invented to express the status of the Maucteus episode.

Often *cola* and *commata* are used to separate items being enumerated, such as 2.1–4, 15–17, and 24.1–5. In addition, compare the *commata* in colon 24 with the lack of division in colon 18.

4. Conclusion

The opprobrium heaped on scribes for their ignorance and inattention is often well earned. As I have tried to show, however, sometimes it is not—especially when scribes are working in the same textual culture as the authors of the texts they are copying. When that is the case, the work these

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[108] See the literature cited at J. Ziolkowski, 'Text and Music: The Reception of Virgilian Speeches in Early Medieval Manuscripts', in *Re-Presenting Virgil: Special Issue in Honor of Michael C. J. Putnam*, ed. G. W. Most and S. Spence. *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 52 (2004), 107-26 at 111–12. See also the introduction in R. I. Best, *The Commentary on the Psalms with glosses in Old-Irish preserved in the Ambrosian Library* (MS. C 301 inf.). Collotype facsimile, with Introduction (Dublin, 1936).

[109] See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 8.5 on the use and abuse of *sententiae* as a way to mark the end of a period.

scribes produced can be especially valuable. I have tried to point out some ways we might use the evidence such manuscripts offer—especially with respect to visual rhetoric. By this I mean the use of graphic devices not simply to express and clarify grammatical relationships, but to guide the reader toward an interpretation. This visual rhetoric, common in manuscripts but difficult to represent in print, can very often be interpreted as disorganization and one common response is to say that the scribes are hopeless and simply to take things in hand and set them right. This can be a sensible approach. Yet in some cases, as I have tried to show, this puts the corrector in the uncomfortable position of knowing better than the author's contemporaries how the author's Latin ought to be represented. In using the term rhetoric of legibility I have tried to point out that what, from one point of view, seem to be inconsistencies can be seen from another point of view as intentional, not simply the product of carelessness or ignorance. By problematizing the differences between manuscript and print culture, as well as asking how we can better understand evidence left to us in manuscripts, I hope also to indicate directions for future work. Many of the restrictions we impose on ourselves when dealing with manuscripts result from restrictions imposed by the printed text. Thanks to technological changes, we are now in a position to see that the printed text is only one way to represent a text, and often not the best one. Because it is difficult to deal with the vast quantity of evidence that manuscripts offer using print, potentially valuable studies such as a systematic collection of orthographic variants or of punctuation practices have not been done. The solution, however, is not to limit what we study in manuscripts, but to start looking for better tools and most of all to become better readers.

Appendix

The Prefaces of the Vita Columbae

Introduction

As explained above, the goal of the text below is to represent aspects of the text in Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, Generalia 1 that are normally omitted from printed editions. I have done this not as a general principle but because, as I argued above, there is a close connection between the composition of the text and the writing of the manuscript. I have chosen the two prefaces because they were composed by Adomnán and thus represent the closest connection between composition and manuscript.

It might at first seem that the most practical way to represent the divisions of the text would be to use conventional marks of punctuation. I have not done this, however, since using conventional stops in unconventional ways simply looks like a Latin text badly punctuated. Instead, I have chosen to print the text *per cola et commata*. This will surely seem unfamiliar to many readers as well, and this is intentional. Because the manuscript divides the text in ways that we are not used to encountering, it seemed best to represent them in an unusual way. Representing a text *per cola et commata* in manuscripts goes back at least to the time of Jerome, who used this technique to clarify difficult passages of the Bible.[110] By the sixth century Cassiodorus calls it an aid for elementary readers who have not mastered punctuation[111] and is the most common form of presenting the text in early manuscripts of the Vulgate.[112] Printed editions of the Vulgate also adopted this layout, beginning with the edition of the New Testament by Wordsworth and White and continuing in

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[110] See Jerome's prologues to Ezechiel and Isaiah and E. Arms, *La technique du livre d'après St Jérôme* (Paris, 1953), pp. 114–15. Parkes, *Pause and Effect* p. 17.

[111] Cassiodorus, *Institutiones* (ed. Mynors) Pref. 9, 1.12.4, 1.15.12.

[112] Twenty-two of the thirty-five oldest manuscripts of the Vulgate are written *per cola et commata*. P. Petitmengin, 'Les plus anciens manuscrits de la Bible latine' in *Le monde latin antique et la Bible*, ed. J. Fontaine and C. Pietri, Bible de tous les temps 2 (Beauchesne, 1985) pp. 104–5.

the editions of both testaments by Quentin and Weber-Gryson.[113] Most recently, a similar technique has been employed in analysing Bede's style.[114] Thus it is a way of presenting a text that has both historical and modern precedents and, as Cassiodorus said, is suited to those who have little familiarity with the system of *distinctiones* employed by the manuscript.

Photographs of the manuscript pages containing the two prefaces have been reproduced following this appendix. In these I have added circular shapes whose colours and sizes correspond to the divisions in the transcription. Excellent reproductions of the entire manuscript are also avialable on the e-codices website.[115]

Conventions

As we have seen, the largest division of our text is into two prefaces. These are marked by *tituli* and the text begins with large letters with colour and diminuendo. I have represented the *tituli* as centred lines in bold and the beginning of the prefaces with a larger capital followed by small capitals.

The *titulus* of the first preface is in red letters. The first preface contains no divisions larger than the *colon*. It is written in the first-person singular and in it the author writes that he has been asked to compose the *vita*, that the reader should look for substance rather than style, he apologizes for the use of Irish, and says that much has been omitted. Finally, there is a transition to the second preface.

The *titulus* of the second preface is written in black and red ink. The second preface is also written in the first-person singular and divided into three larger sections (periods) indicated by large letters with colour and diminuendo. I have represented these divisions with a blank line between them and the text beginning with a larger capital and small capitals. The divisions are:

1. *Vir erat* (1–13) on the name of the saint and prophecies about him.

2. *Huius igitur* (14–19) setting out the plan of the work.

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[113] *Novum Testamentum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Latine*, ed. J. Wordsworth and H. White (Oxford, 1889-98); *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. H. Quentin (Vatican City, 1926); *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, ed. R. Weber and R Gryson (Stuttgart, 2007).

[114] Bede, *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. and trans. C. Grocock and I.N. Wood, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 2013) pp. lxvii–xcv.

[115] http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/sbs/0001.

3. *Sanctus igitur* (20–26) the story of the saint's early life.

The first of these periods is in turn divided into three sections, the two internal divisions indicated by letters extending to the headline of the following line and colour. I have represented these with a paragraph sign (paraph) in the margin. See above for a discussion of these divisions, which are:

1.1 *Vir erat* (1–8) explains the meaning of the saint's name and ends with the quotation (Prv 22.1) about the importance of a good name.

1.2 *Hic igitur* (9–10) explains that Columba was also named a son of promise in a prophecy by Maucteus.

1.3 *In nouissimis* (11–13) gives the prophecy of Maucteus in a direct quotation.

The remaining divisions in both prefaces are *cola* and *commata*. In the manuscript, *cola* are indicated by a medial point followed by a *littera notabilior* with colour. *Commata* are indicated by a medial point and *littera notabilior* without colour. In transcribing these divisions I have begun the first line of each *colon* at the left margin and all subsequent lines are indented one level. The first line of each *comma* is indented a second level and all subsequent lines of the *comma* are indented a third level.

In addition, I have used the following conventions:

e-caudata is printed as ę. (see l. 15 below).

The relative size of letters in the manuscript is retained, e.g. **i**-longa is printed as I. (see l. 10 below). In addition, I have added capitals for proper nouns and *nomina sacra* that are abbreviated. (see l. 14 below).

Where the manuscript indicates that a word is in Irish by placing very fine horizontal lines over the word I have printed the word in in italics.

I have retained the apices used on the syllable –*ís*, and the monosyllable *sé* (see l. 13 below).

I have ignored doubled lines indicating abbreviation (see l. 14 below).

I have silently expanded abbreviations (see l. 14 below).

I have ignored later changes in punctuation and text.

I have not indicated quotations.

I have supplied letters from damaged passages in square brackets.

I have not differentiated between the two colours used in the manuscript (see l. 14 below).

Cola and *commata* within each preface are numbered in the left margin; pages and columns in the Schaffhausen manuscript are indicated in the right margin.

In the following example there are two *cola*, one of which is divided into two *commata*.
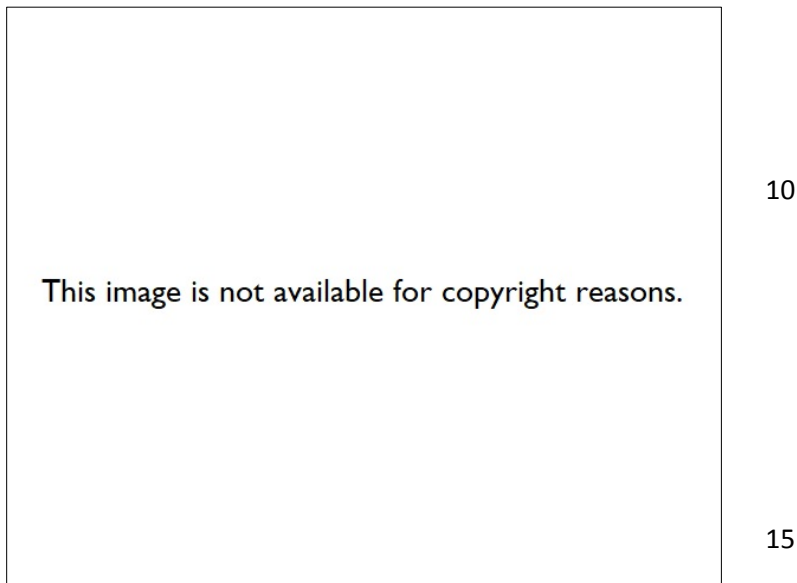
Schaffhausen, Generalia 1, p. 2b ll. 8–15 = 2.5–6

Columba etenim semplex et Innocens est auis
Hoc itaque uocamine et homo semplex Innocensque
    nuncupari debuit
        Qui In sé columbinís moribus Spiritui Sancto
           hospitium prębuit

1   **In nomine Iesu Christi orditur praefatio**   p. 1a

1.1   BEATI nostri patroni Christo sufragante uitam discripturus

.2   Fratrum flagitationibus obsecundare uolens

.3   In primís eandem lecturos quosque ammonere
                        procurabo ut fidem dictís adhibeant conpertís

2   Et res magis quam uerba perpendant

3   Quę ut estimo Inculta et uilia esse uidentur

4   Meminerintque regnum Dei non In eloquentię exuberantia

5   Sed In fidei florulentia constare

6   Et nec ob aliqua scoticę uilis uidelicet lingę aut humana
                onomata aut gentium obscura locorumue uocabula quę
                ut puto Inter alias exterarum gentium diuersas uilescunt
                linguas utilium et non sine diuina opitulatione gestarum   p. 1b
                dispiciant rerum pronuntiationem

7.1   Sed et hoc lectorem ammonendum putauimus quod de beatę
                memorię uiro plura studio breuitatis

.2   Etiam memoria digna a nobís sint prętermisa

.3   Et quasi pauca de plurimis ob euitandum fastidium
                        lecturorum sint craxata

8.1   Et hoc ut arbitror quisque haec lecturus forte annotabit

.2   Quod minima de maximís per populos fama de eodem
                        beato uiro deuulgata disperserit

.3   Ad horum etiam paucorum conparationem quę nunc
                        breuiter craxare disponimus

9   Hinc post hanc primam pręfatiunculam de nostri uocamine
                pręsulis In exordio secunde Deo auxiliante Intimare
                exordiar

2   **In nomine Iesu Christi secunda praefatio**   p. 2a

1.1   VIR erat uitę uenerabilis et beatę memorię monasteriorum
                pater et fundator

.2   Cum Iona profeta omonimon sortitus nomen

2.1   Nam licet diuerso trium diuersarum sono linguarum unam
                tamen eandemque rem significat hoc quod ebręice
                dicitur iona

.2   Grecitas uero ΠΕΡΙϹΤΗΡΑ uocitat

2.3   Et latina lingua columba nuncupatur

.4   Tale tantumque uocabulum homini Dei non sine
                    diuina Inditum prouidentia creditur

3   Nam et iuxta euangeliorum fidem Spiritus Sanctus super
      unigenitum aeterni patris discendisse monstratur In
      forma illius auiculę quę columba dicitur

4.1   Unde plerumque [in sa]crosanctis librís columba mistice   p. 2b
      Spiritum Sanctum significare dinoscitur proinde et
      saluator In euangelio suís pręcipit discipulís

.2   Ut columbarum In corde puro Insertam
                semplicitatem contenerent

5   Columba etenim semplex et Innocens est auis

6.1   Hoc itaque uocamine et homo semplex Innocensque
      nuncupari debuit

.2   Qui In sé columbinís moribus Spiritui Sancto
                hospitium prębuit

7.1   Cui nomini non Inconuenienter congruit illud

.2   Quod In prouerbiis scriptum est

8   Melius est nomen bonum quam diuitię mult

9.1 ¶ Hic igitur noster pręsul non Inmerito non solum a diebus
      Infantię hoc uocabulo Deo donante adornatus proprio
      ditatus est

.2   Sed etiam pręmisís multorum cyclís annorum ante
                suę natiuitatis diem cuidam Christi militi Spiritu   p. 3a
                reuelante Sancto quasi filius repromisionis
                mirabili profetatione nominatus est

10   Nam quidam proselytus Brito homo Sanctus Sancti Patricii
      episcopi discipulus Maucteus nomine Ita de nostro
      profetizauit patrono sicuti nobís ab antiquís traditum
      expertís conpertum habetur

11   ¶ In nouissimís ait sęculi temporibus filius nasciturus est
      cuius nomen Columba per omnes Insularum ociani
      prouincias deuulgabitur notum

12.1   nouissimaque orbis tempora clare Inlustrabit

.2   Mei et ipsius duorum monasteriolorum agelluli unius
                sepisculę Interuallo disterminabuntur

13   Homo ualde Deo carus et grandis coram ipso meriti

14.1   Huɪᴜs igitur nostri Columbae uitam et mores discribens In   p. 3b
        primís breui sermonis textu In quantum ualuero
        strictim conpręhendam et ante lectoris oculos sanctam
        eius conuersationem pariter exponam

   .2   Sed et de miraculís eius succincte quaedam quasi
             legentibus auide pręgustanda ponam

   .3   Quae tamen Inferius per tris diuisa libros plenius
             explicabuntur

15   Quorum primus profeticas reuelationes

16   Secundus uero diuinas per ipsum uirtutes effectas

17.1   Tertius Angelicas apparationes contenebit

   .2   Et quasdam super hominem Dei cęlestis claritudinis
             manifestationis

18   Nemo Itaque me de hoc tam prędicabili uiro aut mentitum
        estimet aut quasi quędam dubia uel Incerta scripturum

19.1   Sed ea quę maiorum fideliumque uirorum tradita
        expertorum cognoui relatione narraturum et sine ulla   p. 4a
        ambiguitate craxaturum sciat

   .2   Et uel ex hís quę ante nos Inserta paginís repperire
             potuimus

   .3   Uel ex hís quę auditu ab expertís quibusdam
             fidelibus antiquís sine ulla dubitatione
             narrantibus diligentius sciscitantes didicimus

20.1   Sᴀɴᴄᴛᴜs igitur Columba nobilibus fuerat oriundus
        genitalibus patrem habens *Fedilmithum* filium Ferguso
        matrem Ęthneam nomine

   .2   Cuius pater latine filius nauis dici potest

   .3   Scotica uero lingua mac naue

21.1   Hic anno secundo post *Culedrebinę* bellum

   .2   aEtatis uero suę xʟɪɪ de Scotia ad Brittanniam pro
             Christo perigrinari uolens enaui[ga]uit

22   Qui et a puero Christiano deditus tirocinio et sapientię   p. 4b
        studiis Integritatem corporis et animę puritatem Deo
        donante custodiens quamuis In terra positus

        cęlestibus sé aptum moribus ostendebat

23.1   Erat enim aspectu angelicus sermone nitidus opere

        Sanctus Ingenio optimus

  .2   Consilio magnus

24.1   Per annos XXXIIII Insulanus miles conuersatus nullum

        etiam unius horę Interuallum transire poterat

  .2   quo non aut orationi

  .3   aut lectioni

  .4   uel scriptioni

  .5   uel etiam alicui operationi Incumberet

25.1   Ieiunationum quoque et uigiliarum

  .2   Indefesís laborationibus sine ulla Intermisione die

        noctuque ita occupatus

  .3   ut supra humanam possibilitatem

  .4   uniuscuiusque pondus specialis uideretur operis

26   Et Inter haec omnibus carus hilarem semper faciem   p. 5a

        ostendens Sanctam Spiritus Sancti gaudio In Intimís

        lętificabatur pręcordiis

Figure 1

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Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

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Figure 5

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