

ALDHELM AND IRISH LEARNING

I. ALDHELM'S LETTER TO HEAHFRITH

Aldhelm, the first man among all Germanic peoples to become a Latin author, the earliest English Latin writer of both verse and prose, one of the finest English Latin and Old English poets, was the most distinguished alumnus of the school of Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury. His most widely diffused letter attempts to dissuade an Englishman named Heahfrith from studying in Ireland by extolling the virtues of Theodore Archbishop of Canterbury and Hadrian Abbot of Sts Peter and Paul Canterbury and displaying the sort of learning transmitted in their school.

The text of the letter which follows may be compared with Ehwald's,¹ from which it differs only in a few particulars. First, in the Salutation 1 for the recipient's name read not *Ehfrido* (Ehwald p. 488 l. 2) but etymologically correct *Heahfrido*, as in London, British Library MS Cotton Domitian IX f. 3, reported by Ehwald as *heafrido* (with which compare *Haehfrido* in BL MS Royal 6 A VI f. 5, reported by Ehwald as *hachfrido*). Second, in line 8 (Ehwald p. 489 l. 1) for *protopla(u)storum* read *protoplastorum*. Third, in line 64 the names *Tunning Tattfrið* (bracketed in Ehwald p. 490 l. 16) should be treated not as part of the original letter but as glosses. Fourth, in line 68 the words *bis ternasque* should be separated, not run together (as in Ehwald p. 490 ll. 17-8). Fifth, in line 124 for Ehwald's *cur* (p. 492 l. 9) retain the manuscript spelling *quur*, which alliterates with the preceding line 123 *quatiens* and the following line 125 *quo*. Sixth, at line 151 the words *beatae memoriae*

1. R. EHWALD ed. *Aldhelmi Opera, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctorum Antiquissimorum Tomus XV* (Berlin 1919), pp. 486-94; M. HERREN transl. *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge 1979), pp. 160-4.

(bracketed in Ehwald p. 493 ll. 3-4) should be omitted as a later addition, since the letter speaks of Theodore as alive and well. Seventh, at the end of paragraph A' (Ehwald p. 494 line 1) the word *digna* should be read as the last word of the prose, not the first word of the verses; the remaining words of Ehwald's unscannable line should be split into a heptasyllabic couplet. Eighth, an elegiac couplet relegated to the apparatus by Ehwald should be included at the end of the verses.

I have arranged the letter *per cola et commata* and marked the cursus rhythms. Capital letters and punctuation marks in boldface represent features of the Royal manuscript. Those in square brackets represent features of the Cotton manuscript not found in the Royal manuscript. Those in round brackets represent features of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 146 folios 95v-100 not found in the Royal or the Cotton manuscript. Underlinings suggest possible alliteration, and *italics* suggest possible rhyme.

DOMINO VENERABILI PRAECÓNIO ÈFFERÉNDO 1
ET SANCTORUM MERITIS MAGNÓPERE HÓNORÁNDÓ (.)
HÉAHFRIDO ÁLDHELMUS EXÍGUUS IN DÓMINO AETÉRNAM
 SALÚTEM ;

- A [P]rimitus pantorum prócerum praetórumque
 pio potissimum paternoque praesertim príuilegio [.]
 panagericum poemataque passim Prosatori sub pólo (.) promulgántes
 stridula uócum simphónia [.] 5
 et melodiae [.] cantilenaque carmine modulatúri ymnizémus ;
 Praecipue quia tandem almae editum puérperae sóbolem
 ob inextricabile sons protoplastórum piáculum
 priscorumque cirografum oblitteráturum
 terris tantundem destináre dignátus est : 10
Luridum qui linguis celýdrum trisúlcis [.]
 rancida uirulentaque uomentem per aeuum uenéna torréntia
 tetrae tortionis in fártara trúsit ;
 Et ubi pridem eiusdem nefandae natricis érmula céruulúsque
cruda fanis colebantur stoliditáte in profánis : 15
Versa uice discipulórum gurgústia [.]
 immo almae graminum aedes architecti ingenio fábre condúntur ;
 B Fateor sodalitátis fratèrnae cliens [.]
 altique municipátus múniceps .

- Postquam uestram repedantem [stuc ambrósiam 20
 ex Hiberniae brumosis circionis insulae climátibus .
 Ubi ter bino circiter annórum círculo [.]
 uber sofiae súgens metabátur .
 Territorii marginem Britannici sospitem applicuísse [.]
 rumigerulis referéntibus compérimus . 25
 Illico ut flammiger flagransque flagitabat amor [? l. amor flagitábat] [.]
 ineffabiles Altithrono grates pánsis in édito
 utrimque uolis tripudiántes obtúlimus .
 Potissimum quod te exulem Álmus Árbiter
 priscam paterni uisitantem clientelam ruris [? l. rúris clientélam] [.] 30
 caerula tráns ponti gláuca [.]
 inormesque dodrántium gláreas [.]
 atque spumiferas limphae óbstirpatiónes
 circili carina procellósum sulcánte sálum [.]
 reducere quante nauárco dignátus est . 35
 Ut ubi dudum incunabilis tirocinii éditus rúribus
 adúlto tenus . pubertatis aéuo adoléueras .
 Nunc uersa uice suprema opitulanti praerogatiua áffatim fúltus [.]
 ab incolatu externi rúris [.] repátrians [.]
 praeceptoris uocamine indepto sortitoque frétus fungáris ; 40
 C Illud aequae almitati beatitudinis uestrae ex penetrálibus praecórdii
 nequaquam promens dissimulo própálaré
 ad augmentum simmistis mistisque ut réor tripúdi .
 immo ad doxam onomatis cyrii magnopere inoleuísse [.]
 quod praeconio citra módum rumóris 45
 Scottico in sólo degéntium (.)
 quorum contubernio parúmper frétus es .
 (C)eu tonitruali quodam boatu fragore nimbóso emergénti
 auditus nóstri quatiúntur .
 Et per tot tantaque telluris stádia lèctiónis 50
 opinio pagis prouinciisque deuulgáta crebréscit .
 [S]iquidem tam créber meátus est .
 istinc illincque [.] istuc illúque [.]
 nauigero aequoreas fretantium cálle gúrgites .
 uelut quaedam contribula apium germanitas nectar fabre cónficiéntium . 55
- D Nam quemadmodum alternátim recíproca
 facessante nóctis nébula
 mellifluum exámen .
 Emergente axe tenus aequore Titáne
 glescentium culmina tiliárum per flóruénta [.] 60
 ad crates gráciles sarcinátum
 flaua baiolans gestámina ásportat :
 Eodem módo ni fállor
 lurconum conglobátio lectórum [.] [Tunning Tatfrið]

- ac residua sagax discipulorum catêrua 65
 florigeris agiógraphae ex áruis .
 Non solum artes grammaticas atque géométricas
 bis ternasque omissas fisicae ártis machínas .
 Quin immo allegóricae pòtióra
ac tropologicae disputationis bipertita bis orácula 70
aethralibus opacórum mèllita .
In aenigmátibus problématum
siticulóse sumèntes cárpunt .
et in alueáriis soffae
iugi méditatione (.) 75
 (L)etotenus seruánda condèntes ábdunt .
 E quórum catálogo
 tuam proficisci solertiam praéda onústam [.]
atque torrentis fluentis sacrosáncti propinátam
redundantemque excellens fâma percrébruit . 80
 E Quam ob rem tuam affabilem discipulatum [? l. discipulátum affábilem]
ceu cernuus singultatim arcuátis poplitibus
subnixisque précibus efflágito [.]
ut oblitterata nequaquam memória excédât .
quod Pacificus caelitus ambrósia praéditus 85
subrogatus genitore iure heréditário [.]
bis quaternis témporum lústris [.]
Israhelítici plebis impérii scèptro fúngens .
Almo auctus Spirámine pròmpsit dicens .
 F Bibe aquam de cisterna tua [.] et fluenta putei tui [.] 90
diriuentur fontes tui foras . et in plateis aquas diuide :
solus habeto eas [.] nec sint alieni participes tui ;
 E' Quapropter his sacris imbútus sagmínibus
iugi conamine orthodoxiae aperíto gúrgitem [.]
et sitientia rigato árua méntium ; 95
Quatinus germen aethrális extáseos
uiuis fecundisque in orthodoxorum satóris sudóre súlcis
satum nullo torridae obstaculo siccitatis obtinente púlulans gléscat .
Et ubertim spissa Dei suffragio seges démum maturéscat .
 D' Nam idcirco supplex tam obnixè . haec cernitur orámen suggestísse : 100
Quod nonnulli superna noscuntur sofia praédití .
et arcana luce inórmiter reférti .
 (A)ttamen quod gratuita caelitus múnificéntia .
Deique dapsili deditione receptántes
proprio facessante meritorum quaéstu adépti sunt . 105
Nequaquam gazofilacio scientiae reserato plène promulgántes .
sed particulatim lurcónibus lārgiéntes .
Nam cata euangelicae experiméntum auctóritátis .
nequaquam flágrans lichinus

- clancule fuscata tetrae occulitur látebra úrnae . 110
 qui candelabri summitate cunctis limpido lumine lucére décuit ;
 Necnon frustra talenti foenora subterraneis clanculantur obstrúcta sablóni-
 bus [.]
 quae trapezitarum numerosis monetae oportuissent nummismátibus próffi-
 gári .
 Ne forte ut iners adepto segnitia torpens mancipium talénto :
 suppressos ergastulorum in squalores trusus praecipitarétur : 115
Sed potius eúax eugéque .
ingressurus tripudium a prosatore pio prómereátur ;
 Unde psalmígrafus uátes
quod hoc propriae piaculi expians flagitium cónsciéntiae .
 sacro praeságio òrsus infit . 120
Iustitiam tuam non abscondi . Et reliqua ;
 C' Sed haec miséllus homúncio
 dictando uoluens scrupulo ancipiti extemplo quátiens angébar :
Quér inquam Hibernia (.)
quo cateruatim istinc leccitantes classibus áduecti cónfluent 125
ineffabili quodam priuilegio efferátur .
 (A)csi istinc fecundo Británniae in céspite
 dedasculi Argiui Romániue (;) Quirites
 reperiri mínime quéant .
 Qui caelestis tetrica enodantes bibliothécae problémata 130
sciolis reserare se scisctántibus uáleant ;
 Quamuis enim praedictum Hiberniae rus discentium òpulans uérnansque .
ut ita dixerim
pascuosa numerositáte lectórum .
 quemadmodum póli cárdines 135
astriferis micantium uibraminibus síderum ornétur :
Ast tamen clímatis Británnia
occidui in extremo ferme orbis márgine pósita .
 uérbi grátia . ceu sólis flammígeri [.]
 et luculento lunae specimine pótiátur : 140
id est Theodóro [.]
infula pontificátus fungéti .
ab ipso tirocinio rúdimentórum
in flore philosophicae ártis adúlto .
 [N]ecnon et eijsdem sodalitátis cliénte 145
 Hadriáno dúntaxat
 urbanitate (.) enucleata ineffábiliter praédito .
 B' Et audácter in propátulo
 contestans pellaci falsitatis fribulo neglécto :
aequa ueritatis censura trutinánte discérnam . 150
Etíamsi [beatae memoriae] Theodórus .
 summi sacerdotii gubernácula régens [.]
 Hibernensium glóbo discipulórum .

- ceu áper truculéntus
 molosorum catasta ringente uallátus stipétur 155
 limato perníciter grammático dénte
 iactura dispéndii cárens
 rebelles falánges díscutit .
Et utpote belliger in meditullio cámpi árcister
 legionum falangibus saeptus aemulorum spissis [? l. spíssis aemulórum] . 160
 Mox neruosis tenso lacertórum uolis árcu [.]
 spiculisque ex farétra exémp^tis .
 hoc est chronographiae opacis . acútisque syllogismis .
turma supercílⁱi týfo túrgens
amissa ancílⁱum testúdine térga dántes . 165
 latebras antrorum atras triumphánte uictóre [.]
 praeprópere pétunt .
 A' Neu tamen haéc philosophándo
 Scótticos scíolos [.]
 quorum gemmato tua sagacitas dógmatum fáuo . 170
aliquántisper abúsa est [.]
sugillare a quóquam autumer .
 Quippe cum satagerem praeconium cudens affabiliter téxere [.] nostrórum
 [N]on sugillationem ridiculose cachinnans rumigeráre uestrórum .
Sed potius iocistae scúrraeque rítu
dícacitate temerária loquéntium [.] 175
 fraternae hironia dílectionis obtentu cauillabátur .
Sí uero quippiam inscitia suppedítante [.] gárrula
 frontose conuincitur página prompsísse [.]
ut uersídicus áit : Dígna : 180
 Fiat fante Glingio
 gurgo fugax fambulo .
 Neu timeat scriptor terrentis iudicra línguae .
Sic semper cupiunt scriptorum carpere cartas .
Ut caper hirsutus rodet cum dente (.) racemos . 185
Nec tamen emendant títubantis gramma poetae .
Arbiter aeternus tibi iam miserescat in aeuum .
 Fulgens diuitis semper et ore clarus . 188

Aldhelm, meagre in the Lord, wishes eternal salvation to Master Heahfrith (who is) to be extolled for his venerable renown and greatly honoured according to the merits of the saints.

- A Principally, with particularly pious and paternal privilege, publicly preferring beneath the pole panegyric and poems promiscuously to the Procreator of all princes and praetors, let us raise a hymn in measured rhythms with a loud blending of voices and with song of melodious music, especially because He who thrust into Tartarus of terrible torture the ghastly three-tongued serpent who vomits torrents of rank and virulent poisons through the ages deigned in like measure to send to earth the offspring begotten of holy parturition in order to obliterate from the earth the criminal offence

of first matter and the record of the first men on account of their inextricable sin ; and (because), where once the crude pillars of the same foul snake and the stag were worshipped with coarse stupidity in profane shrines, in their place dwellings for students, not to mention holy houses of prayer, are constructed skilfully by the talents of the architect.

- B I confess, fellow of fraternal companionship and inhabitant of a noble community, that, after we learned from the reports of talebearers that your Ambrosia [*i.e.* your Wisdom], returning hither from the wintry regions of the north-west part of the island of Ireland — where it encamped for a course of thrice-two years sucking the teat of wisdom — embraced the shore of British territory safe and sound, straightway, as a flaming and burning love required, we offered our inexpressible thanks to the Highthroned in Heaven, exulting with palms extended on either side, especially because the Holy Judge deigned to lead you back — an exile visiting the venerable brotherhood of your paternal country — across the blue of the sea and the enormous rocks of the tides and the spuming eruptions of the water, with your ashen boat ploughing the billowy brine and the captain rejoicing, so that now, in turn, supported abundantly by succouring favour from on high, you may confidently pursue and achieve your destined vocation as a teacher, repatriating after your residence in a foreign country, where, nourished for a long time in the first cradles of learning, you grew up to the age of young manhood.
- C Likewise I do not hesitate in the least to disclose from the depths of my heart to your propitious Blessedness that this [*i.e.* your return] has come about especially for the increase of joy among deacons and priests, nay rather, for the glory of the name of the Lord, because — rumour aside — by the proclamation of those dwelling on Irish soil, on whose companionship you relied for a little while, was our hearing shaken, as if by a kind of bellow of thunder issuing from a clashing of clouds, and common opinion bruted it abroad through so many and such large measures of the land of learning and to the parishes and provinces that the wandering hither and thither and back and forth of those traversing the abysses of the sea on ship-path is as busy as a kind of kindred swarm of bees skilfully manufacturing (their) nectar.
- D For just as the honey-flowing swarm (of bees) — when the mist of night departs in its course and Titan [*i.e.* the sun] emerges from the sea up to the peak of heaven — clothed in yellow vestments carries its burden through the flowering tops of blooming lindens to the graceful honey-combs, in like fashion, if I am not mistaken, a mass of ravenous scholars and an avid throng of sagacious students, the residue from the rich fields of Holy Writ, thirstily seize and swallow not only the grammatical and geometrical arts — to say nothing of the thrice-three scaffolds of the art of physics — but also, the fourfold honeyed oracles of allegorical or rather tropological disputation of opaque problems in aetherial mysteries, conceal and store them away to be conserved until death with perpetual meditation in the beehives

of learning, from the catalogue of which an excellent report has bruited it that your Sagacity emerged burdened with booty and drenched and overflowing with floods of the sacred torrent.

- E Wherefore I entreat your kindly Discipleship, as one bowing and genuflecting with sobs and with earnest prayers, that a forgetful memory not pass over the fact that Pacificus [*i.e.* Solomon] endowed with ambrosia [*i.e.* wisdom] from heaven, having been chosen by his father according to the law of succession, exercising rule over the empire of the Israelite people for twice-four *lustra* of time [*i.e.* about forty years], being filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke, saying :
- F 'Drink water out of thy own cistern and the streams of thy own well ; let thy fountains be conveyed abroad, and in the streets divide thy waters ; keep them to thyself alone, neither let strangers be partakers with thee'.
- E' Wherefore, since you are imbued through persistent effort with this holy food of orthodox teaching, open your throat and moisten the thirsting fields of the mind, so that the seed of heavenly ecstasy, sown by the sweat of the Creator, may swell and blossom in the living and fertile furrows of the orthodox without hindrance of parching drought, and that the thickly sown crop at length come richly to fruition by the will of God.
- D' Therefore, such a resolutely suppliant prayer seems to have adduced these things, because some are known to be endowed with heavenly wisdom and unusually replete with hidden light ; nevertheless, what they have attained by receiving from the spontaneous generosity of heaven and the bountiful bequest of God, without benefit of their own merits, they in no wise publish fully by unlocking the treasury of knowledge, but dole out bit by bit to the ravenous ! For according to the example of evangelical authority, to no purpose is the burning wick secretly hidden in the dark recess of the loathsome urn which was supposed to shine to all from the end of a candlestick with limpid light ; and in vain are the profits of the talent barricaded and concealed in subterranean sands, which should have been spent for the plentiful pieces of the changers of money, lest perchance the slothful man, numb, so to speak, with sluggishness, after having received the talent of his masters, be thrust headlong into the utmost filth of prisons ; but rather — let us rejoice ! — let him merit from the Holy Creator to enter into joy. Whence for this reason, the prophetic psalmwriter expiating his guilty conscience of sin, commencing with sacred presage, declared : 'I have not hid thy justice,' etc.
- C' But I, wretched little man, meditating upon these matters as I wrote, was forthwith troubled and trembled with a twofold anxiety. Why, I ask, is Ireland, whither assemble the thronging students by the fleetload, exalted with a sort of ineffable privilege, as if here in the fertile soil of Britain, teachers who are citizens of Greece and Rome cannot be found, who are able to unlock and unravel the murky mysteries of the heavenly library to the scholars who are eager to study them ? Although the foresaid opulent and verdant country of Ireland is adorned, so to speak, with a browsing crowd of scholars, just as the hinges of heaven are decorated with stellar

flashings of twinkling stars, yet nonetheless, Britain, although situated in almost the outer limit of the western world, possesses, for example, the luculent likeness, as it were, of the flaming sun and the moon, that is, Theodore, who discharges the duties of the pontificate and was from the very beginnings of his apprenticeship mature in the flower of the arts of learning, and his colleague of the same sodality, Hadrian, equally endowed with ineffably pure urbanity.

B' And boldly fighting in the open against the worthless and despised seducer of falseness, with a balanced view of the truth, shall I pronounce judgement: although Theodore, who pilots the helm of the high priesthood, be hemmed in by a mass of Irish students, like a savage wild boar checked by a snarling pack of hounds, with the filed tooth of the grammarian — nimble and with no loss of time — he disbands the rebel phalanxes; and just as the warlike Bowman in the midst of battle is hemmed in by a dense formation of enemy legions, then, when his bow is tensed by his powerful hands and arms and arrows are drawn from the quiver, that is, from the obscure and acute syllogisms of chronography, the throng, swollen with the arrogance of pride, their shield-wall having been shattered, turn their backs and flee headlong to the dark recesses of their caves, while the victor exults.

A' Nor by asserting such things, should I be accused by someone of insulting Irish savants — whose bejewelled honeycomb of doctrine your Wisdom has somewhat over-employed — especially as I meant to busy myself with building and forging in good humour the reputation of our own (scholars), not with heaping derisive and scornful abuse on yours! But rather, after the fashion of jesters and buffoons, who speak with rash wit (and) mockery, and with the excuse of fraternal affection, was my raillery put forward. If indeed, with the support of prating ignorance, a text can be shamelessly proved to have prompted it, as the versifier said:

In the words of Glengus, a fleeing rhetor is worthy of enslavement.²
 Let not the writer fear the sport of abusive tongues.
 Thus they always hope to pluck the pages of poets,
 As the hairy goat chews the grapes with his teeth.
 Nonetheless, they don't emend a letter of the reeling bard.³

Arrangement of the text *per cola et commata* draws attention to several features of Aldhelm's composition. First, his prose is relentlessly rhythmical. Only four of the lines, 2% of the total, do not exhibit one of six cursus rhythms: *planus*, *aeternam*

2. One might translate better, 'As the verse-utterer says worthy things: "Let a fugitive chatterer," says Glingius, "become as a slave."'

3. One should add the concluding elegiac couplet: 'May the Eternal Judge now have mercy on you for ever, shining in riches and always bright in speech.'

salutem; *tardus*, *Héahfrido Aldhelmus*; *uelox*, *praecónio èfferéndo*; *medius*, *municipátus múniceps*; *trispondiacus*, *pólo promulgántes*; and *dispondeus dactylicus*, *exiguus in Dómino*. By reversing the order of the last two words one might make all four of the unrhythmical lines conform, but there are other explanations for the order retained here.

Second, Aldhelm's prose is spectacularly alliterative. In the very first sentence, of the first sixteen words fifteen alliterate on *p*. Line 4 alliterates symmetrically *s-u-s*. Line 5 alliterates chiastically vowel-*m-c-c-m*-vowel. In lines 6-7 note *praecipue* — *puerperae* — *sobolem* — *qb* — *inextricabile* — *sons* — *protoplastorum* — *piaculum*. Often the last word of a line alliterates with the next, as 7-8 *piaculum* — *priscorum*, or 12-3 *torrentia* — *tetrae tortionis in tartara trusit*. Sometimes a single line has two alliterating pairs, as 10 *terris tantundem destinare dignatus*. Only ten lines do not exhibit these forms of alliteration.

Third, many lines rhyme, variously from only one or two letters, as 7-8-9 *sobolem* — *piaculum* — *oblitteraturum*; to three letters, as 1 *efferendo* — *honorando* or 40-5 *fungaris* — *praecordii* — *propalare* — *tripudii* — *inoleuisse* — *rumoris*; to four or five letters, as 98-9 *glescat* — *maturescat* or 105-6 *promulgantes* — *largientes*; or even seven letters, as 173-4 *nostrorum* — *uestrorum*.

Aldhelm has fixed the order of statement and restatement of words and ideas in a series of parallel and chiasmic patterns. Beginning with the first word of the letter proper a first parallelism connects paragraphs A-B.

2	primitus	20	postquam
3	potissimum	29	potissimum
3	paternoque	30	paterni
10	terris	31	caerula trans ponti glauca
10	dignatus est	35	dignatus est
16	uersa uice	38	uersa uice

In the first line after the initial alliteration on *p* a first chiasmus begins, also connecting paragraphs A-B.

5	uocum
12	aeuum
14	et ubi pridem
17	almae
19	altique
20-1	repedantem ... ex Hiberniae circionis insulae climatibus
24	territorii marginem Britannici sospitem applicuisse
27	Altithrono
29	Almus
36	ut ubi dudum
37	aeuo
40	uocamine

Immediately after *uersa uice* 16 a second parallelism more comprehensively connects paragraphs A-D!

16	discipulorum	65	discipulorum
17	oraminum	70	oracula
20	ambrosiam	85	ambrosia
22	ter bino annorum circulo	87	bis quaternis temporum lustris
29	Almus Arbiter	89	Almo Spiramine
33	limphae	90	aquam
44	doxam	94	orthodoxiae
64	lurconum	107	lurconibus

In the same line in which the first chiasmus ends a second begins, more comprehensively connecting paragraphs B-E.

40	fungaris
42	nequaquam
51	crebrescit
55	quaedam contribula apium germanitas nectar fabre conficientium
58	mellifluum
60	florulenta
64	conglobatio
64	lectorum
65	ac
65	discipulorum
65	caterua
66	florigeris
71	mellita
74-6	in alueariis ... seruanda ... abdunt
80	percrebruit
84	nequaquam
88	fungens

Another chiasmus connects the entire first half of the letter, paragraphs A-E.

9	oblitteratum
12	torrentia
17	conduntur
23	sofae
29	potissimum
48	emergenti
50	telluris
51	crebrescit
52	creber
54	aequoreas gurgites
59	emergente
69	potiora
74	sofae
76	condentes
79	torrentis
84	oblitterata

Another chiasmus connects the second half of the letter, paragraphs D²-A¹.

116	sed potius
131	sciolis
144	philosophicae
154-5	aper truculentus molosorum catasta ringente uallatus
159-60	belliger in meditullio campi arcister legionum falangibus saeptus aemulorum spissis
168	philosophando
169	sciolos
175	sed potius

Yet another chiasmus connects the second half of the letter, paragraphs D¹-A¹.

120	infit (followed by a quotation from Psalm XXXIX 11)
124	Hibernia
127-8	Britanniae ... Argui Romaniue Quirites
132	Hiberniae
137-51	Britannia ... Theodoro ... Hadriano ... Theodorus
153	Hibernensium
180	ait digna (followed by verses)

Finally a grand chiasmus connects the entire letter.

1	aeternam
4	poemataque
18	fraternae
21	Hiberniae
27	ineffabiles
30	clientelam
37	adulto
38	superna
56	nam
60	glescentium
71	aethralibus
73	siticulose
75	iugi
79	sacrosancti
81	quam ob rem
90	bibe aquam de cisterna tua et fluenta putei tui
91	diriuentur
91	fontes tui
91	foras
91	et
91	in plateis
91	aquas
91	diuide
92	solus habeto eas nec sint alieni participes tui
93	quapropter
93	sacris
94	iugi
95	sitientia
96	aethralis
98	glescat
100	nam
101	superna
144	adulto
145	cliente
147	ineffabiliter
153	Hibernensium
177	fraternae
180	uersidicus
187	aeternus

In the following analysis a reader should bear in mind a tradition of composition, well attested in the Masoretic text of the Old Testament and the Greek text of the New Testament and perfectly reproduced in Jerome's Vulgate, in which authors

dispose lines, words, syllables, and letters by symmetry and by extreme and mean ratio.⁴ In the former case a passage in part A will exhibit exactly as many units as its parallel in part A'. In the latter case material is so arranged that the number of units in the shorter part relates to the number of units in the longer part as the number of units in the longer part relates to the whole. Minor (m) divided by major (M) equals major divided by whole (m+M): $m/M = M/(m+M)$.⁵ To calculate the major part multiply a number by 0.61803. To calculate the minor part multiply a number by 0.38197. A reader should also bear in mind the account which Boethius gives in *De Institutione Musica* I X of the myth of discovery by Pythagoras of the musical ratios *duplus* (2:1), *sesquialter* (3:2), *sesquitercius* (4:3), and *sesquioctauus* (9:8):

4. D. R. HOWLETT ed. and transl. *Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi: The Book of Letters of Saint Patrick the Bishop* (Dublin 1994). *Idem*, *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style* (forthcoming Dublin 1995), and *British Books in Biblical Style* (forthcoming 1995). For Biblical allusions to Creation as a mathematical act see Job XXXVIII 4-7, Isaiah XL 12, Proverbs VIII 22-31, and Sapientia XI 21. For explicit discussion of the counting of verses, words, and letters see H. FREEDMAN transl. *Kiddushin* ch. I 30a-30b in I. EPSTEIN ed. *The Babylonian Talmud* (London 1936), vol. VIII pp. 144-6. For a Classical account of Creation as a mathematical act see PLATO *Timaeus* 31b-32c, 35b-36c, discussed by F. M. CORNFORD *Plato's Cosmology* (London 1937), p. 45, and T. L. HEATH transl. *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's 'Elements'* ed. 2 (Cambridge 1956), vol. I p. 137. For Classical discussion and illustration of composition by symmetry and by extreme and mean ratio see the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* IV XX 27-8, CICERO *De Oratore* III 44, and BOETHIUS *De Consolatione Philosophiae* book III metre IX.

5. For discussion of division by extreme and mean ratio in Antiquity see EUCLID *Elements* II XI and VI XXX and BOETHIUS *De Institutione Arithmetica* II LII. H. L. BUSARD ed. *The First Latin Translation of Euclid's 'Elements' Commonly Ascribed to Adelard of Bath*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts LXIV (Toronto 1983), p. 20: 'There is a persistent belief that some rendering of Euclid's *Elements* existed in England before the celebrated versions of Adelard of Bath. If by this is meant some truncated Latin version such as that attributed to Boethius, or fragments such as those in the encyclopedic works of Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Cassiodorus, St. Isidore, and Bede, then the belief has some justification, since all of these works circulated in England.' For modern discussion of extreme and mean ratio see F. LASSERRE *The Birth of Mathematics in the Age of Plato* (Larchmont, NY 1964), H. E. HUNTLEY *The Divine Proportion, A Study in Mathematical Beauty* (New York 1970), R. HERZ-FISCHLER *A Mathematical History of Division in Extreme and Mean Ratio* (Waterloo, Ontario 1987).

One need not labour the point that much of the diction cited above is, to say the least, unusual, and that much of it occurs only in the adduced patterns. Aldhelm has provided the clearest indications that these patterns are deliberate. In the first parallelism the first part begins *primitus* 2 and the second *postquam* 20. After the last words of the first part, *uersa uice* 16, the very next word, *discipulorum* 16, is the first of the second parallelism. The last word of the first part of the second parallelism, *lurconum* 64, and the first word of the second part of this parallelism, *discipulorum* 65, are woven into the crux of the second chiasmus, *lurconum conglobatio lectorum ac residua sagax discipulorum caterua*. That second chiasmus begins in the same line 40 in which the first chiasmus ends, in the fourth word after the end of the first chiasmus. In the chiasmus that connects the first half of the letter the first word, *oblitteraturum* 9, is the fortieth word from the beginning of the letter proper. After the last word, *oblitterata* 84, there are forty words to the centre of the letter. Of the two chiastic patterns in the second half of the letter, the former begins in line 116, four lines before the beginning of the following chiasmus, and it ends in line 175, between which and the end of the following chiasmus in 180 there are four lines.

The entire letter is composed in multiples of the number 8. Aldhelm's Salutation occupies sixteen words (8×2), fifty-one syllables, and 118 letters. The sixteen words divide by duple ratio (2:1) at 11 and 5, at the name of the author, *Aldhelmus*, the eleventh word. The fifty-one syllables divide by duple ratio at 34 and 17, the first syllable of *Aldhelmus* being seventeenth from the end. The 118 letters divide by duple ratio at 79 and 39, the *A* of *Aldhelmus* being the thirty-ninth letter from the end.

In part A, of the first sixteen words (8×2) fifteen alliterate on *p*, the fifteenth letter of the alphabet. The first sentence of part A contains eighty-eight words (8×11). From the beginning of part A to the crux of the letter in part F there are eighty-eight cola. From the crux of the letter to the end of part A' there are also eighty-eight cola. The last word of prose, *digna*, at the end of part A' is the 888th word of the letter (8×111).

Part C is filled with words and phrases derived from Greek :

simmistis mistisque 43, *doxam onomatis cyrii* 44, *modum* 45, *telluris stadia* 50, *nectar* 55. Part C' is similarly filled with words derived from Greek: *angebarr* 123, *dedasculi Argiui* 128, *bibliothecae problemata* 130, *discentium* 132, *poli cardines* 135, *climatis* 137, *Theodoro* 141, *philosophicae* 144, and it names the teachers of Greek, Theodore and Hadrian. Part D begins *Nam*. Part D' also begins *Nam*. Part E begins *Quam ob rem* and contains forty-two words. Part E' begins *Quapropter* and also contains forty-two words. The crux of the letter in part F is a chiasmic quotation from the Book of Proverbs V 15-7. It comprises twenty-six words, thirteen in each half; fifty-eight syllables, twenty-nine in each half; 125 letters, sixty-three in the first half and sixty-two in the second. The central *et* at the crux of the chiasmus is the 444th word of the 888-word letter.

Aldhelm plays with numbers other than 888 and 444. The 777th word is the first of *grammatico dente* 156. The 333rd word is the first of *artes grammaticas* 67. The 666th word is *tetrica* 130. The 555th word directly follows *tetrae* 110. The 222nd word is *tripudii* 43. 222 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 137 and 85. The 137th word is the first of *utrimque uolis tripudiantes obtulimus* 28.

The first line of verse in Ehwald's edition, *Digna fiat fante Glingio : gurgo fugax fambulo*, cannot be scanned or construed. By reading *digna* as the last word of prose and scanning the remaining words as two lines of syllabic verse one finds both metre and sense. Aldhelm is quoting the end of the first paragraph of *Epistola II De Pronomine* by Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, the most prolific and imaginative of all Irish grammarians :⁶

Verumtamen ne in illud Glengi incedam, quod cuidam conflictum fugienti dicere fidenter ausus est : gurgo inquit fugax fambulo dignus est, pauca tibi tui negotii necessaria de pronomine profabor.

6. G. POLARA and L. CARUSO ed. and transl. *Virgilius Marone grammatico Epitomi ed Epistole* (Naples 1979), p. 206. See also M. HERREN 'Some New Light on the Life of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* LXXIX C 2 (1979), pp. 27-71, and D. Ó CRÓINÍN 'The date, provenance, and earliest use of the works of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus' in G. BERNT et al. ed. *Tradition und Wertung* (Sigmaringen 1989), pp. 13-22.

He is also parodying the syllabic verse composed by Irish Latin poets of the seventh century.⁷ He makes two lines of jingling heptasyllables in which his six words rhyme on *-o* and alliterate on *f-f-g-g-f-f*. He concludes with dactylic hexameters and an elegiac couplet, presumably in the approved Canterbury style. The verses which follow the end of the letter thus occupy eight lines (8×1), forty-four words ($88 \times .5$), one hundred syllables, and 256 letters (8×32).

The sixteen words of address in the Salutation and the eighty-eight words of part A comprise 104 words (8×13). The sixty words of part A' and the forty-four words of concluding verses also comprise 104 words.

In the second half of the letter, commending study with Theodore and Hadrian, the 444 words divide by extreme and mean ratio at 274 and 170. The 170th word before *digna* is *Theodoro*. From *Theodoro* to *Theodorus* inclusive there are forty words. In the centre of these Aldhelm names Hadrian; between *Hadriano* and *Theodorus* there are twenty words.

Aldhelm states his message most clearly at the crux and at the end of the letter. The symmetrical quotation from Proverbs tells Heahfrith to stay at home. The concluding verses dissuade him from becoming a *gurgo fugax* by going to Ireland. They also contrast the bogus learning represented by Ireland, Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, and heptasyllables with the sound scholarship represented by England, Theodore and Hadrian, and Classical metres.

Because Virgilius discusses bogus Hebrew words Aldhelm shows that he understands correctly the meaning of the Hebrew name of the alleged author of the Book of Proverbs, Solomon, that is, *Pacificus* 85. Because Virgilius discusses bogus Greek words Aldhelm fills his letter with words

7. For an example recently discovered see M. LAPIDGE 'A New Hiberno-Latin Hymn on St Martin' *Celtica* XXI (1990) pp. 240-51, corrected in *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style* chapter IV.VI 'Anonymi Hymnus Deus Domine Meus'. See also M. HERREN 'The Stress Systems in Insular Latin Octosyllabic Verse' *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* XV (1988) pp. 63-84, 'The Stress System of the Hiberno-Latin Hendecasyllable' *Celtica* XXI (1990) pp. 223-30, 'Hibernolateinische und Irische Verskunst mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Siebensilbers' in H.L.C. TRISTRAM ed. *Metrik und Medienwechsel* (Tübingen 1991) pp. 173-88.

correctly derived from properly understood Greek words. Because Virgilius cites bogus authorities named Galbungus and Glengus Aldhelm names reputable grammarians Theodore and Hadrian. Because Virgilius discusses twelve Latinities Aldhelm exhibits the one correct Latinity which *Argiuus Theodorus* and *Romanus Hadrianus* have taught him. The learning transmitted in the school at Canterbury represents for Aldhelm perfection. That is why he composed his letter on multiples of the number 8.

The name of the recipient shares with the name of Solomon the idea 'peace', Hebrew שלום *Shlomo* deriving from שלום *shalom*, and *Heahfrið* meaning 'high peace', containing eight letters and beginning with the eighth letter of the alphabet. The Salutation contains 8×2 words. The first sentence begins with 8×2 words, of which fifteen alliterate on the fifteenth letter of the alphabet, with which Solomon's title *Pacificus* also begins. The first sentence comprises 8×11 words. There are 8×11 cola from the beginning to the quotation from *Prouerbia Pacifici* and 8×11 cola from the end of the quotation to the end of the prose. The last word of prose is the 888th word of the letter, 8×111 . The Salutation and the first paragraph of prose total 8×13 words. The last paragraph of prose and the concluding verses total 8×13 words. There are eight lines of verse at the end. There are eight parallel and chiasmic patterns woven into the fabric of the letter. The entire composition occupies 188 lines.

The number 8 represents perfection. History began after the first Sabbath rest, on the eighth day of Creation. Abraham circumcised Isaac on the eighth day.⁸ Jesus rose on the eighth day.⁹ There are eight Beatitudes in Matthew V 3-10. In the account of precious stones in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem in Apocalypse XXI 20:¹⁰

8. C. W. JONES ed. *Bedae Venerabilis Opera Pars II Opera Exegetica I Libri Quatuor in Principium Genesis usque ad Nativitatem Isaac et Eiectionem Ismahelis Adnotationum, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina CXVIII* (Turnhout 1967) p. 236.

9. *Ibid.* p. 237.

10. J. A. GILES ed. *Venerabilis Bedae Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* (London 1844) vol. XII pp. 441-2 [= PL XCIII col. 201A-B].

fundamenta muri civitatis omni lapide pretioso ornata ... octavum beryllus Significat autem homines ingenio quidem sagaces, sed amplius supernae gratiae lumine refulgentes. Nam senario saepe numero perfectio designatur actionis, maxime cum in hoc numero [sc. VIII] mundi hujus sit opus consummatum.

In Greek notation the numerical value of the name of Jesus, ΙΗΣΟΥΣ, is $10 + 8 + 200 + 70 + 400 + 200 = 888$.

There is another form of art in this letter. Consider the cosmic and musical imagery of Aldhelm's language in lines 4-6 of the first paragraph :

panagericum poemataque passim Prosatori sub polo promulgantes
stridula uocum simphonia
et melodiae cantilenaque carmine modulaturi ymnizemus

proferring panegyric and poems to the Creator in every place under the pole with a high-pitched concord [lit. 'sounding together'] of voices and a song of melody and canticle, bound to make measured music, let us sing hymns.

This is not empty bombast. Here and in line 117 Aldhelm is alluding to the famous Irish Latin abecedarian hymn which begins

Altus Prosator Vetustus
Dierum et Ingenitus
erat absque origine
primordii et crepidine

with a triple allusion to the *Pro-Sator*, Unbegotten Fore-Sower, the Begetter of every *prosapia*, Who created the universe with His Word, by uttering His *Prosa*. On that occasion, according to Job XXXVIII 4-7, arithmetic and music and geometry and astronomy figured prominently.

Ubi eras quando ponebam fundamenta terrae ?
indica mihi si habes intellegentiam
quis
posuit
mensuras eius
si nosti
uel quis
tetendit
super eam lineam

super quo bases illius
 solidatae sunt
 aut quis
 dimisit
 lapidem angularem eius
 cum me laudarent simul astra matutina
 et iubilarent omnes filii Dei.

As Aldhelm believed that all the quadrivial arts, but especially music, figured in the Creation one may expect his composition to exhibit, in addition to the symmetry and extreme and mean ratio we have already noted, the musical ratios by which he supposed God had created the world : duple (2:1), sesquialter (3:2), sesquitercian (4:3), and sesquioctave (9:8).

In the second part of the first parallelism Aldhelm writes 20-23 :

Postquam uestram repedantem istuc | ambrosiam
 ex Hiberniae brumosis circionis insulae climatibus
 ubi ter bino circiter annorum circulo
 uber sofiae sugens metabatur ...

after we ascertained your ambrosia [*i.e.* wisdom], returning hither
 from the wintry climes of the northwest of the island of Ireland
 where for a cycle of about twice three years
 sucking the teat of wisdom it marked time

Again in paragraph D 56-59 :

Nam quemadmodum alternatim reciproca
 facessante noctis nebula
 mellifluum examen |
 emergente axe tenus aequare Titane ...

for just as by turns moving in and out
 the cloud of night coming to an end
 a honey-flowing swarm
 Titan [*i.e.* the sun] emerging from the sea

Still in paragraph D 67-73 :

Non solum artes grammaticas atque geometricas
 bis ternasque omissas | fisicae artis machinas
 quin immo allegoricae potiora
 ac tropologicae disputationis bipertita bis oracula
 aethralibus opacorum mellita |

in aenigmatibus problematum
 siticulose sumentes carpunt

not only the grammatical and geometrical arts
 and leaving out of account the twice triple structures of the art of physics
 but moreover of allegorical
 and tropological disputation the twice bipartite oracles
 honeyed with aetherial mysteries of dark problems
 they seize taking them up thirstily.

At the end of paragraph D 77-80 :

E quorum catalogo
 tuam proficisci solertiam praeda onustam
 atque torrentis | fluentis sacrosancti propinatam
 redundantemque excellens fama percrebruit

from the catalogue of which,
 that your resourcefulness proceeded laden
 and drenched with booty of the sacrosanct flowing torrent
 and overflowing, an excellent report has become widespread.

Finally in paragraph E 87 :

bis quaternis | temporum lustris
 twice four five-year-periods of time.

These passages all involve the arts, the passage of time, and distributive numerals, or combinations of these. The upright bar in the first passage marks the epogdous, one-ninth of the text ($888 = 99 + 789$). That in the second passage marks the duple ratio ($888 = 296 + 592$). The upright bars in the third passage mark the golden section ($888 = 339 + 549$) and the sesquialter ratio of the letter ($888 = 355 + 533$). The upright bar in the fourth passage marks the sesquitercian ratio ($888 = 381 + 507$). The upright bar in the fifth passage marks the sesquioctave ratio ($888 = 418 + 470$). Aldhelm has so arranged his words that the ratio 9:8 is illustrated exactly at the words *bis quaternis* 'twice four', that is 'eight'.

It would be idle to suppose that the foregoing analysis considers all or even most of the art of this wonderfully dense composition, in which the first English Latin author claims not only equality with but superiority over an Irish Latin tradition

already more than a century old. In the firmament of Insular Latin writers Aldhelm burst like a supernova. From the very beginning there has been no doubt about the magnitude of this star.

II. ALDHELM'S LETTER TO WIHTFRITH

The Letter to Heahfrith is not Aldhelm's only statement about English students and Irish learning. In the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* William of Malmesbury preserves a copy of a letter¹¹ written less elegantly, but no less forcefully, to another Anglo-Saxon student named Wihtfrith, who was about to depart to Ireland. Here is the Salutation and first paragraph. Capital letters and punctuation marks in boldface represent features of William's autograph, Oxford, Magdalen College MS 172 folio 84v. Underlinings suggest alliteration, and *italics* suggest rhyme. I have marked the rhythms of the cursus.

DOMINO VENERABILITER DILIGENDO. ET DELECTABILITER
VENERANDO. WIHTFRIDO.
ALDHELMUS VERNACULUS SUPPLEX IN XPISTO PERHENNEM
SALUTEM .

Perlatum est mihi rumigerulis réferéntibus .	a
de uestrae caritátis indústria .	b
quod transmarinum íter gubernante Dómino cárpere .	c
sagacitate legendi succénsa decréuerit .	d
Et iccirco uita comite optatum Hiberníae pòrtum ténens .	e
sacrosancta potíssimum praeságmina .	b
refutatis philosophorum commenticiis légitio .	f
Absúrdum enim árbitror .	g
spreta rudis ac ueteris instrumenti inextricábili nórna .	b
per lubrica dumosi ruris díuertícula .	b
ímno per discolos philosophorum anfractus íter cárpere .	c

11. N.E.S.A. HAMILTON ed. *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis de Gestis Pontificum Anglorum* Rolls Series (London 1870) § 214 pp. 358-9. EHWALD ed. pp. 479-80. HERREN transl. pp. 154-5.

seu certe aporiatis uitreorum fontium limpidis laticibus .	a
palustres . pontias . lutulentasque limphas siticulose potare .	c
in quis atra bufonum turba ceteruatim scater .	d
atque garrulitas ranarum crepitans coaxat .	d

To Master Wihtfrith, who is to be cherished venerably and to be venerated pleasurably,
Aldhelm, humble servant in Christ, (sends his wishes for) eternal salvation.

It has come to my attention from the reports of newsmongers regarding the intentions of your Charity, that you have decided to undertake, with the Lord as your pilot, a journey across the sea, since you have been inflamed by a keenness for study. And therefore, as you sail towards the hoped-for port of Ireland, while life is your companion, read (these) most sacrosanct admonitions, having rejected the fabrications of the (worldly) philosophers. I think it absurd to spurn the inextricable rule of the New and the Ancient Document [*i.e.* the New and the Old Testament] and undertake a journey through the slippery paths of a country full of brambles, that is to say, through the troublesome meanderings of the (worldly) philosophers; or surely, (it is absurd) to drink thirstily from briny and muddy waters, in which a dark throng of toads swarms in abundance and where croaks the strident chatter of frogs, when there are clear waters flowing from glassy pools.

The style is unmistakably Aldhelm's. The rhythms are clear throughout. Every line alliterates either within itself or with the following line or both, though the rhymes are uncertain and not systematically arranged.

In the Salutation there are fourteen words, which divide by symmetry at 7 and 7, at the names of the recipient and the author. There are forty-five syllables, which divide by sesquialter ratio at 27 and 18, at the names of the recipient and the author.

In the first paragraph of the letter Aldhelm uses the phrase *iter carpere* twice. Half the words of the paragraph, forty of eighty-one, fall between *carpere* and *carpere*. From the beginning to the first *carpere* inclusive there are fifteen words, and from the second *carpere* inclusive to the end there are twenty-six words, together forty-one, which divide by extreme and mean ratio at 25.3 and 15.7. Aldhelm uses *philosophorum* twice, the thirty-second and the fifty-third words. The eighty-one words of the paragraph divide by extreme and mean ratio at 50 and 31. There are thirty-one words before the former

philosophorum. The number of the second *philosophorum*, 53, divides by extreme and mean ratio at 33 and 20. Between the two occurrences of *philosophorum* there are twenty words.

Aldhelm implies that the spurning of Biblical study in favour of secular philosophy, and the amphibian imagery, and (in the following paragraphs) the corrupting influence of pagan literature and the sexual licence of the Irish show Ireland to be a dangerous and seductive place for young Englishmen, who might better study, as Aldhelm had done, at home in Canterbury.

What did the Irish make of this ?

III. COLMÁN'S LETTER TO FERADACH

Dr Richard Sharpe edited recently from Brussels, Bibliothèque royale MS 5649-67 folios 186r-187v Colmán's Letter to Feradach,¹² of which the first paragraph follows.

Dilectissimo et eruditissimo filio Feradacho^a Colmanus.^b Multa quidem ad nos a Romanis^c scripta librorum exemplaria peruenerunt in quibus nonnulla quae^d in nostris ante codicibus librariorum^e neglegentia deprauata sunt emendatiora repperimus. Denique, ut de ceteris taceam, in libris Isidori quos ipse de aeclesiasticis scripsit officiis sub duobus tantum titulis tres ferme paginas a librariis in(ueni)mus praetermissas; multa praeterea in chronicis, multa in Sedulii paschali carmine corrupta, quod nunc apud nos^f duplici legitur editione conscriptum. Quattuor siquidem quos ante uersibus condidit libellos, rursus eosdem imperante Macedonio, in theoricum sermonem stilo liberiore transtulit. Cuius operis primam partem in codicibus uestris habetis corruptam, secundam penitus ignoratis; ex quibus pauca tibi cognoscendi gratia quantum epistolaris angustia potuit transmittere curauit.

a MS *Feraclaclo* b MS *Calmanus* c MS *ad Romanis* d MS *qui* e MS *librorum* f MS *uos*

12. R. SHARPE 'An Irish Textual Critic and the *Carmen paschale* of Sedulius: Colmán's Letter to Feradach' *The Journal of Medieval Latin* II (1992) pp. 44-54.

In the following arrangement of this text *per cola et commata* capital letters and punctuation marks in boldface represent features of the manuscript. ¹³ I have marked the cursus rhythms.

Dilectissimo et eruditissimo filio . Féradacho . Cólmanus .

[*or* Feradácho . Colmánus .]

- A Multa quidem ad nos a Romanis scripta librorum exemplária pèruenérunt .
 B in quibus nonnulla
 C quae in nostris ante codicibus librariorum neglegentia déprauáta sunt
 D emendatióra reppérimus .
 E **Dénique** . út de céteris táceam
 F1 in libris Isidóri
 2 quos ipse de aecclesiasticis scrípsit offíciis . sub duobus tántum titulis
 G tres ferme paginas a librariis inuénimus praetermissas .
 G' Multa praeterea in chrónicis .
 F'1 multa in Sedulii Paschali Cármine corrúpta .
 2 quod nunc apud nos duplici legitur editióne conscríptum .
 E' **Quattuor** siquidem quos ante uersibus cóndidit libéllos .
Rursus eosdem imperante Mácedónio .
 D' in theoricum sermonem stilo liberióre transtúlit .
 C' cuius operis primam partem in codicibus uestris habétis corrúptam .
 secundam pénitus Ignorátis .
 B' ex quibus pauca
 A' tibi cognoscendi gratia quantum epistolaris angustia potuit transmittere curáui .

To the most beloved and most erudite son Feradach Colmán [sends greeting].

- A Many exemplars of books written by Romans have indeed come through to us,
 B among which some,
 C which in our codices were deformed by the negligence of scribes,
 D we have discovered more correct.
 E To sum up, as I shall be silent about the others,
 F1 in the books of Isidore,
 2 which himself wrote about ecclesiastical offices under at any rate two titles,
 G we have found almost three pages omitted by scribes.
 G' Many things besides in the chronicles,
 F'1 many things corrupted in the Paschal Song of Sedulius,
 2 which now is read among us written out in a double edition,
 E' inasmuch as the four little books which he composed before in verses the same again at the command of Macedonius
 D' he translated in freer style into contemplative speech [*i.e.* prose]

13. I owe thanks to Dr Sharpe for his transcript of the manuscript and for helpful criticism.

- C' of which work you have the first part corrupt in your codices ;
the second part you are altogether ignorant of ;
- B' from which few matters
- A' I have taken care to transmit to you for the sake of understanding as much
as the narrow compass of a letter allowed.

Colmán shows at the very beginning of his letter that he knows how to write well, ending every clause with a correct *cursus* rhythm — *dispondeus dactylicus* twice : *Féradacho Colmanus, praeterea in chrónicis ; planus* three times : *editiõne conscriptum, liberiõre transtúlit, habétis corrúptam ; uelox* three times : *exemplária pèruenérunt, inuénimus praetermissas, pénitus ignorátis ; medius* three times : *déprauáta sunt, tantum titulis, Mácedónio ; tardus* four times : *eruditíssimo filio, emendatiõra reppérimus, céteris táceam, scripsit officii ;* and *trispōndiacus* four times : *libris Isidóri, cármine corrúpta, cõndidit libéllos, transmittere curáui.*

He reveals his mastery of Biblical style, arranging his words and ideas by chiasmus and parallelism, as one observes by comparing *ad nos, scripta librorum exemplaria,* and *peruenerunt* in A with *tibi, epistolaris,* and *transmittere* in A', *in quibus nonnulla* in B with *in quibus pauca* in B', *quae, in nostris codicibus,* and *deprauata* in C with *cuius, in codicibus uestris,* and *corrúptam* in C', the comparative *emendatiõra* in D with the comparative *liberiõre* in D', *denique* in E with *rursus* in E', *in libris Isidori* in F1 with *in Sedulii Paschali Carmine* in F' 1, *quos, scripsit,* and *sub duobus titulis* in F2 with *quod, legitur conscriptum,* and *duplici editiõne* in F' 2, *tres* and *praetermissas* in G with *multa* and *praeterea* in G'. The first clause begins with the word *multa* ; the last phrase of the crux begins with the word *multa* ; and the first clause after the crux begins with the word *multa*.

Colmán has guaranteed the authenticity and integrity of his text by disposing his repeated diction at mathematically determined intervals. After the Salutation there are 108 words in this paragraph, which divide by symmetry at 54 and 54. The first word is *multa*, and the fifty-fourth word is *multa*, so that both parts of the paragraph begin with the same word. Colmán uses the number 54 again less conspicuously : after *ante* the fifty-

fourth word is *ante* ; again after *duobus* the fifty-fourth word is *secundam*. Colmán links other words by symmetrical intervals : after *scripta* the thirtieth word is *scripsit*, after which the thirtieth word is *conscriptum*. The twenty-fourth word is *repperimus*, after which the twenty-fourth word is *inuenimus*. Similarly from *librorum* to *libris* inclusive there are twenty-four words, while from *librorum* to *librarium* inclusive there are twelve words.

The 108 words divide by duple ratio at 72 and 36. Colmán links parallel words by intervals of seventy-two words : from *quae* to *cuius* inclusive there are seventy-two words ; after *codicibus* the seventy-second word is *codicibus*.

The 108 words divide by extreme and mean ratio at 67 and 41 ; after *quidem* the sixty-seventh word is *siquidem*. Colmán links several other words in the same way. The forty-seventh word is *librariis* ; 47 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 29 and 18 ; from *librarium* to *librariis* inclusive there are twenty-nine words. Those twenty-nine words divide by extreme and mean ratio at 18 and 11 ; between *librarium* and *libris* there are eleven words. From *libris* to *libellos* inclusive there are forty-four words ; 44 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 27 and 17 ; from *libris* to *librariis* inclusive there are seventeen words. From *carmine* to *uersibus* inclusive there are fifteen words ; 15 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 9 and 6 ; the sixth word after *carmine* is the beginning of the phrase *duplici legitur editione*, and the sixth word before *uersibus* is the end of the phrase *duplici legitur editione*. From *carmine* to *editione* inclusive there are nine words, and from *duplici* to *uersibus* inclusive there are nine words. Between *uersibus* and *partem* there are fifteen words, and the ninth word after *uersibus* is *sermonem*. The ninety-third word is *corruptam* ; 93 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 57.5 and 35.5 ; from *corrupta* to *corruptam* inclusive there are thirty-five words. From *primam* inclusive to the end of the paragraph there are twenty-two words ; 22 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 14 and 8 ; from *primam* to *secundam* inclusive there are eight words. The 103rd word is *quantum* ; 103 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 63.66 and 39.34 ; from *tantum* to *quantum* inclusive there are sixty-three words. From *praetermissas* to *transmittere* inclusive

there are fifty-nine words ; 59 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 36 and 23 ; from *praetermissas* to *transtulit* inclusive there are thirty-six words.

In another form of numerical play Colmán has arranged his text so that after *duobus* the third word is *tres*, and after *duplici* the fourth word is *quattuor*.

Colmán's competence in this game needs no further demonstration. But his true subject is the serious business of textual criticism, the choosing of correct readings among variants transmitted in the available texts. The names Feradach and Colmán belong to an Irish milieu, in which *a Romanis scripta librorum exemplaria peruenerunt ... emendatiora*. By the time Cummian wrote his Letter in 633 delegates sent from an Irish synod to learn about Roman traditions of calculating Easter had returned from Rome to Ireland.¹⁴ The need for Colmán to instruct Feradach in scansion of elegiac couplets may reflect the state of Irish knowledge about metres in the seventh century, or indeed the eighth, for though there are several original Latin compositions extant from Ireland in heptasyllabic, octosyllabic, decasyllabic, hendecasyllabic, dodecasyllabic, and pentadecasyllabic metres,¹⁵ and Irish compositions in disyllabic, trisyllabic, tetrasyllabic, pentasyllabic, and hexasyllabic metres,¹⁶ there is nothing in Classical quantitative metres. This may suggest a reason for Aldhelm's composition of the prodigious *Epistola ad Acircium* with its treatises *De Metris* and *De Pedum Regulis* surrounding one hundred verse *aenigmata* in quantitative metres.¹⁷ He may have intended, as in the Letter to Heahfrith, to exhibit the superiority of English learning for the benefit of

14. M. WALSH and D. Ó CRÓINÍN ed. and transl. *Cummian's Letter 'De Controversia Paschali'* Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts LXXXVI (Toronto 1988), reviewed by R. SHARPE *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. XLI (April 1990) pp. 271-4.

15. L. BIELER ed. 'The Hymn of St. Secundinus' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* LV C 6 (1953) pp. 117-27. M. W. HERREN ed. and transl. *The Hisperica Famina: II Related Poems*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts LXXXV (Toronto 1987). See also *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style* chapter IV 'Poems and Prayers'.

16. For syllabic analysis of Irish metres see G. MURPHY *Early Irish Metrics* (Dublin 1961) pp. 74-6.

17. EHWALD ed. pp. 59-204.

those tempted to attend schools in Ireland. Such an exercise would have polemic value if the Irish were known to be preeminent practitioners of a wide range of syllabic poetic forms, but not of quantitative forms.

One might suppose tentatively that Colmán wrote to Feradach after establishment of contacts between Ireland and Rome in the second quarter of the seventh century, perhaps during the following thirty or forty years, not distant from the time in which Aldhelm parodied a characteristic Irish verse form and addressed a subject not yet considered among Irish scholars. One might even suppose that Colmán had read Aldhelm's Letters to Acircius and Heahfrith. If so, one might infer from the Letter to Feradach that Colmán responded to Aldhelm by absorbing his learning but ignoring his polemic.

IV. A STUDENT'S LETTER TO ALDHELM

Here follows a letter illustrating a different response to Aldhelm.¹⁸

DOMINO SANCTO SAPIENTÍSSIMO
IN XPISTO QUIDEM CARÍSSIMO ÁLDHELMO
[SCOTTUS IGNOTI NOMINIS] IN DEO AETÉRNO SALÚTEM .

Dum te praestantem ingenio facundiaque Romana ac uario flóre litterárum	a
etiam Graecorum móre non nesciam	a
ex ore tuo fonte uidelicet scientiae purissimo discere málo	b
quam ex aliquo quolibet potare turbulénto magistro.	b
Praesertim hoc scito praenoscens quod idcirco te fiducialiter íta	
qbsecro	5 b
ut me suscipias doceasque	c
quoniam fulgor ceu dictum est sapientiae prae multis in te fulget lectóribus	d
ac peregrinorum mentes cupientium sapientiam discere cognóscis	d
quia tu Romae aduena fuisti insuper quod a quodam sancto uiro	
de nostro génere nutritus es.	d

18. EHWALD ed. p. 494. HERREN transl. p. 164.

Haec <u>compendii</u> <u>causa</u> significant quia si humiliter per <u>caritatem</u> uolueris attendere	10	c
non minus <u>per</u> <u>pauca</u> uerba quam <u>per</u> plurimas sermocinationes <u>perspicias</u> .		d
Haec tibi <u>quoque</u> sinceriter dissero		b
libellum <u>quendam</u> <u>quem</u> ego non habeo		b
<u>qui</u> non est maior acceptorio duarum septimanarum legere <u>cupio</u> .		b
Hoc autem breue tempus praedico non eo	15	b
quod mihi plus non opus sit		e
sed ne haec <u>petitio</u> fastidium in tua mente creet		e
ministerium quoque equosque <u>ut</u> opinor <u>adipiscar</u> .		f
In hoc autem tempore messis laetum a te responsum sperabo		b
orantem pro nobis beatitudinem tuam diuina gratia custodire dignetur.	20	f

To the holy and most wise Lord Aldhelm, very dear indeed in Christ,
[a person of unknown name] (wishes) salvation in God eternal.

As I am not unaware that you are distinguished in native ability and for your Roman eloquence, and for various flowers of letters, even those in the Greek fashion, I prefer to learn from your lips than to drink from some other turbid master. Know this especially in advance : that I beseech you confidently to receive and instruct me on this account, since the brightness of wisdom, as it has been said, flashes in you more than in many learned men, and (since) you are aware that the minds of foreign travellers are eager to learn wisdom (from you), because you were a visitor at Rome, and especially because you were nourished by a certain holy man of our race. Let these suffice for the sake of brevity, because, if you should attend to them humbly and with charity, you will understand no less through a few words than through many. I also candidly declare this to you : I desire to read a certain book which I do not have, and that is for a period no longer than two weeks ; moreover, I mention this brief period, not because I do not have more need of it, but so that this request may not cause annoyance to your mind. I shall obtain a messenger and horses, I imagine. Moreover, in this harvest time I shall hope for a favourable response from you. May Divine Grace deign to preserve your Blessedness who prays for us.

In the Letter to Heahfrith Aldhelm praises his teachers *Theodorus Arguius* and *Hadrianus Romanus*. In the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* William of Malmesbury states that Aldhelm received the monastic habit at Malmesbury :¹⁹ *id quidam Meldum qui alio nomine uocatur Meildulf natione Scottus eruditione philosophus professione monachus fecerat*. As it is difficult

19. HAMILTON ed. § 189, pp. 333-4.

to imagine that an Italian or a Greek would praise an Anglo-Saxon for journeying to Rome and prefer him to any other *turbulento magistro*, many have inferred that the writer of this letter was an Irish student who referred to Aldhelm's tuition by Maildubh.

The student suggests by using rhythm, alliteration, and rhyme that he understands something of Aldhelm's style. The central words of the letter stand at the golden section of the central tenth line, *Haec compendii causa significant | quia si humiliter per caritatem uolueris attendere non minus per pauca uerba quam per plurimas sermocinationes perspicias*. The twenty lines of the letter divide by extreme and mean ratio at 12 and 8, and the 168 words divide by extreme and mean ratio at 104 and 64, at line 8, *sapientiam discere cognoscis | quia tu Romae aduena fuisti*. Note the placement of *nesciam* 2, *praenosces* 5, *cognoscis* 8. From the first to the third inclusive there are fifty words, which divide by extreme and mean ratio at 31 and 19. Between *nesciam* and *praenosces* there are nineteen words. Note *discere* 3 and 8. From the first to the second inclusive there are forty-one words, of which the central are *obsecro ut | me | suscipias doceasque*. The 168 words divide by epogdous, one-ninth and eight-ninths, a ratio often used for authorial self-reference, at 19 and 149.²⁰ Between *ego* 13 and *mihi* 16 there are nineteen words. From *mihi* to *adipiscar* 18 inclusive there are nineteen words. After *adipiscar* there are nineteen words to the end of the letter.

The composition reads like a straightforward request from an Irish student, bright enough to recognize and imitate some of the features of Aldhelm's style, to be accepted as a pupil and to be taught more.

20. D. R. HOWLETT 'Some Criteria for Editing Abaelard' *ALMA LI* (1993) pp. 195-202. For further examples see *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style and British Books in Biblical Style*.

V. CELLÁN'S LETTER TO ALDHELM

In book V of his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* William of Malmesbury records a letter from an Irishman named Cellanus of Peronna Scottorum, Cellán of Péronne in Picardy, to Aldhelm as abbot of Malmesbury asking for copies of his works.²¹

Hic quicquid litterarie ártis elàborábat.

quod non a~~de~~o ex~~ile~~ érat.

Aldelmi committebat arbitrio : ut perfecti ingénii líma .

eraderetur scabrédó Scóttica .

Ex ipso Francorum sinu . ad eum causa doctrine ueniebatur : ut hec epístola pálam fátiét .

ai **DOMINO**

ii **LECTRICIBUS DITATO STÚDIIS .**

ii' **MELLIFLUIQUE ORNATO LUCUBRÁTIÚNCULIS .**

i' **ALDHELMO . ÁRCHIMANDRÍTAE :**

b **SAXONUM MIRIFICE REPERIÉNTI IN ÓRIS .**

b' **QUOD NONNULLI CUM LABORIBUS ET SUDORIBUS
IN ALIENO ÁERE VIX LUCRÁNTUR :**

a'i **CELLANUS**

ii **IN HIBERNENSI ÍNSULA NÁTUS .**

ii' **IN EXTREMO FRANCORUM LÍMITIS LATENS ÁNGULO . ÉXUL**

i' **FAMOSAE COLONIAE . XPISTI EXTREMUM ET VÍLE MAN-
CÍPIUM .**

c **IN TOTA ET TUTA TRINITÁTE SALÚTEM .**

Et post pauca .

Quasi pennigero uolatu ad nostrae paupertátis accessit aures .

uestrae Latinitatis panagéricus rúmor :

quem agílium lectorum non horréscunt audítus .

sine sanna aut amurcali impóstura nótus .

propter albumum díctricis Romániae decórem .

Etsi te praesentem non merúimus audíre :

tuos tamen bona lance constructos légimus fástos .

a

x

b

b

c

d

b

21. HAMILTON ed. § 191, p. 337. EHWALD ed. pp. 498-9. Capital letters and punctuation marks in boldface represent features of William of Malmesbury's autograph, Oxford, Magdalen College MS 172 f. 79v.

<i>diuersorum deliciis flórum depíctos .</i>	b
Sed si peregrini triste refic[ere u]jis córculum :	c
paucos transmittite sermunculos illius pulcherrimae lábiae túae .	d
de cuius fonte purissimo dulces diriuati riui . multorum possint	
refficere <u>m</u> éntes :	a
ad locum ubi dominus <u>FURSEUS</u> in sancto et integro paúsat córpore.	d

Huic epistole quam liberaliter responderit . átestatur *illa*
 cuius particula hic núper *appósita*
 dedit documéntum *Áldelmum*
 ex Saxonico *génere órtum*.

Here follows a recent translation of Cellán's letter into modern English prose.²²

To the Lord Abbot Aldhelm, enriched by learned pursuits and adorned by sweet lucubrations, admirably discovering on the shores of the Saxons what some scarcely obtain, through labour and sweat, in a foreign clime, Cellanus, born on the Isle of Ireland, an exile concealed in the farthest corner of the territory of the Franks, the lowest and (most) worthless servant of Christ in a famous settlement, (wishes) salvation in the whole and wholesome Trinity.

The encomiastic report of your Latinity has reached the ears of our Poverty as though by winged flight, nor does the hearing of able scholars reject it : and it is noted, without twisting of nostrils or the pretence of stink, for the brilliant beauty of its Roman eloquence. And although we have not had the privilege of hearing you in the flesh, nonetheless we have read your books, which are well constructed and balanced, and adorned with the charms of various flowers ; but if you would refresh the sad little heart of the pilgrim, send us a few little sermons from those most beautiful lips of yours from whose most pure source sweet rivulets, when dispersed, may restore the minds of many to the place where Master Furseus rests in holy and incorrupt body.

As William of Malmesbury's words *post pauca* imply that the text is an extract of a longer work, both Ehwald and Herren have assumed that it is a fragment.²³ But it makes complete sense, and there are indications that it is a complete text. Neither editor nor translator indicates that he has found any-

22. HERREN transl. p. 167.

23. Ehwald printed the text of the letter preceded and followed by omission dots. Herren states explicitly in his introduction, p. 149, 'This fascinating correspondence is preserved only in the fragments quoted by William'.

thing amusing in this little lucubration, but Cellán did not hide his wit.

Let us translate the letter again *membratim et particulatim*.

To the lord,
 enriched by studies appropriate to female readers
 and ornamented by honey-flowing little lucubrations,
 Aldhelm the archimandrite,
 wondrously discovering on the shores of the Saxons
 what some are scarcely acquiring with sweats and labour under a foreign
 air,
 Cellán,
 born in the Hibernian island,
 an exile lying in an extreme corner of the border of the Franks,
 the most utter and vile servant of a famous colony of Christ,
 in the whole and safe Trinity [wishes] salvation.

As if by feather-bearing flight there has approached to the ears of our
 poverty [*i.e.* to poor me]
 a panegyric rumour of your Latinity,
 at which the hearings of agile lectors do not become horrified,
 noted without a sneer or oilily impure imposture
 on account of the whitely gleaming beauty of its eloquently wordy Roman-
 ness [or 'of its Roman oratress'].
 And if we have not merited to hear you present,
 we have nonetheless read your books constructed with a good balance,
 adorned with the ornaments of diverse flowers [or 'painted up with the fop-
 peries of excerpts of diverse authors'];
 but if you wish to refresh the sad little heart of a pilgrim,
 send over a few little sermons of that most beautiful lip [or 'speech'] of
 yours
 from the purest fountain, of which sweet streams led off [or 'artificial con-
 duits diverted'] might refresh the minds of many
 at [or construed with *transmitte* 'to'] the place where the lord Fursey rests
 in holy and complete body.

In the Salutation Cellán addresses Aldhelm by title and name in *ai* and *i'* and praises his study in *aii* and *ii'*. He contrasts wondrous discovery by Aldhelm on Saxon shores with the laborious need of others under a foreign sky in *b* and *b'*. He refers to himself by name and status in *a'i* and *i'*, by place of birth and place of exile in *b* and *b'*. He names Aldhelm eight-ninths of the way through part *a*, the eighth word of nine. He names himself at the centre, the twenty-sixth word of fifty.

This Salutation may appear at first to be outrageously over-

blown, but it is the first part of a comprehensive joke. The fifty words of salutation relate to the eighty-two words of text of the letter by extreme and mean ratio, the golden section of 132 falling at 82 and 50.

In the letter proper the recurrence of words at fixed intervals suggests that the text is intact. Note *ares*, *auditus*, *audire*, of which the third is the thirty-fifth word. Of thirty-five words half is eighteen, and the central eighteenth word is *auditus*. Of the eighteen words half is nine, and between *ares* and *auditus* there are nine words. Note *Latinitatis* and *Romaniae*, of which the latter is the twenty-eighth word. The number 28 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 17 and 11. Between *Latinitatis* and *Romaniae* there are seventeen words. Note *lectorum* and *legimus*, of which the latter is the central word of the letter, forty-first of eighty-two. The number 41 divides by extreme and mean ratio at 25 and 16. Between *lectorum* and *legimus* there are twenty-five words. Note *fastos* and *sermunculos*. The former is forty-first from the end. The number 41 divides by duple ratio at 27 and 14. After *fastos* the fourteenth word is *sermunculos*, which is the twenty-seventh word from the end of the letter. Note *reficere* and *reficere*. They mark the golden section, as the eighty-two words of the letter divide by extreme and mean ratio at 51 and 31, and after the former there are thirty-one words to the end. The last thirty-one words of the letter divide by extreme and mean ratio at 19 and 12. After *reficere* the nineteenth word is *reficere*, after which there are twelve words to the end of the letter.

Cellán plays with Aldhelm's diction. In the Salutation only five words do not derive from the works of Aldhelm. One of those is the name *Cellanus*. Two others designate Aldhelm's activities, *lucubratiunculæ*, and Aldhelm's title, *archimandrita*. Of the remaining two, although Aldhelm does not use *angulus* and *colonia*, he does use *angulosus* and *colonus*. In the text of the letter only the words *sanna*, *alburnus*, *dictrix*, and *reficere* do not derive from the extant works of Aldhelm. Although Aldhelm does not use *amurcalis*, *Romania* or *Romanus*, *decor*, *corculum*, *transmittere*, or *sermunculus*, he does use *amurca*, *Romanus*, *decorare* and *decorosus*, *cor*, *mittere*, and *sermo*. Cellán's phrase *agilium lectorum non horrescunt auditus* plays

on Aldhelm's *auditus nostri quatiuntur*, line 49 in the Letter to Heahfrith. By misprision derived probably from a glossary Aldhelm uses the word *fasti*, which in Classical Latin designates lists of festivals or lists of consuls, to mean 'books'. Cellán's use of *fastos* in its Aldhelmian application may be pointed, a deliberate note of a word misunderstood by the recipient of this letter. But regardless of that Cellán's diction is perceptibly Aldhelmian. Parallels cited by Ehwald make it clear that Cellán quotes Gildas *De Excidio Britanniae* and Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Acircium*, *Epistola ad Heahfridum*, and the prose version of *De Virginitate*.

A reader who perceives irony in the letters of Patrick and Columban and Cumman and Virgilius Maro Grammaticus is unlikely to miss it here.²⁴ Let us assume not that Cellán had read every word of Celtic Latin ever composed, but that he knew Romano-Britons had been able to read and write urbane Latin for at least 300 years and his fellow Irishmen for at least 250 years. Here he is addressing the first Englishman, indeed the first man among all Germanic nations, to become a Latin author. Is it likely that Cellán, whose grasp of Latinity is firm enough to parody another man's style, would praise the Roman-ness and Latinity of this English upstart without his tongue in his cheek? Observe that in the Salutation he writes of Aldhelm as 'enriched by studies appropriate to female readers'. The word for a masculine reader is *lector*, which Cellán applies to himself in the text of the letter, and the adjectives derived from it are *lectoralis* and *lectoreus*. The noun and adjective for a female reader is *lectrix*. As the noun *studium* is neuter, Cellán either refers here to Aldhelm's dedication of *De Virginitate* to women, or he implies that Aldhelm's studies are appropriate to women rather than to men. He addresses Aldhelm as *reperienti*, as if he were only just 'lighting upon', 'discovering the existence of', or 'getting to know' Latin, 'which some are scarcely acquiring with sweats and labour under a foreign air'. Cellán writes in the third person that *nonnulli ... uix lucrantur*, not that he is one of

24. See *Liber Epistolarum Sancti Patricii Episcopi* pp. 95-103 and *The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style* chapter III.I-IV.

them.²⁵ He implies clearly that he is one of the *agilium lectorum*, as he would otherwise not know of their response to the rumour of Aldhelm's Latinity. To write that these masculine 'agile lecturers' learned of Aldhelm's reputation *sine sanna aut amurcali impostura* is a form of feint praise. Construing *dictrix* as an adjective and *Romania* as a noun equivalent to *Romanitas*, to extol 'the whitely gleaming beauty of eloquently wordy Romanness' would be slightly odd. But construing *dictrix* as a noun and *Romania* as an adjective the phrase would be offensive, implying that Aldhelm writes in the effeminate style of a 'Roman oratress'. Cellán may well mean 'we have nonetheless read your books constructed with a good balance', for even someone who did not approve of their style would have to admire their structure, implying the while that he was a competent judge, which Cellán does. The phrase *diuersorum deliciis florum depictos* may mean 'adorned with the ornaments of diverse flowers'. It may without the least wrenching or special pleading mean also 'painted up with the fopperies of excerpts of diverse authors'. Cellán's diminutives *corculum*, referring to his own little heart, and *sermunculos*, referring to Aldhelm's desired works, little sermonettes, are probably playful and possibly ironic. His reference to 'that most beautiful lip [or 'speech'] of yours' is lippy, and his attraction of a normally neuter noun to the feminine gender may be consistent with other implications that Aldhelm's style is effeminate, issued *de cuius fonte purissimo*, as if the author were, in the language of later parodists, 'a particularly pure young man'. The words *dulces diriuati riui* may mean 'sweet streams led off' or again without strain 'artificial conduits diverted', implying that Cellán has read widely enough to recognise Aldhelm's work as mannered and derivative. If Cellán had read only Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Acircium* and *De Virginitate* one might infer from this letter that he was, in simple prose in which each word bears only one obvious and superficial meaning, begging for more. But as the

25. Herren observes, p. 149, that 'the phrase could just as well mean "discovering on the shores of the Saxons that some scarcely benefit", etc. If taken that way, might not Cellanus's remark be a reference to the letter to Heahfrith, which might already have begun to be circulated with Aldhelm's compositions? If so, Cellanus's phrase could be taken as a gibe.'

adjective *panagericus* implies that Cellán had read Aldhelm's most widely disseminated letter, the *Epistola ad Heahfridum*, with its aggressive claims for the soundness and superiority of English learning, and its parody, attacking the bogus nature of Irish learning, one infers that he responded with exactly the forms of wit, word-play, and irony practised by Irishmen writing Latin since at least the sixth century.

From Aldhelm's reply we may infer that he understood Cellán perfectly :²⁶

Quod autem Saxonici generis fuerit .
 ipse in epistola quam Cellano cuidam misit .
 his edocet uerbis .
Miror quod me tantillum homunculum
 de famoso et florigero Francorum rure
 uestrae frunitae fraternitatis industria interpellat .
 Saxonicae prolis prosapia genitum .
 et sub arctoo axe teneris infantiae confotum cunabulis .

But that he was of Saxon race
 he himself in a letter which he sent to a certain Cellán
 he teaches in these words :
 I am amazed that me, such a very little manlet,
 from the famous and flower-bearing countryside of the Franks
 the industry of your learned brotherhood should solicit,
 born from the lineage of the Saxon breed
 and nurtured from the cradles of tender infancy under the northern pole.

Aldhelm's self-deprecating diminutives answer Cellán in kind. The innuendo implicit in a verb like *interpellere*, which means 'interrupt', 'obstruct', 'accost' (in the sexual sense), and even 'institute legal proceedings against', suggests that Aldhelm could give Cellán the same sort of lip he had received from him.

This correspondence may have been a perfectly ordinary epistolary exchange between members of a literate culture whose forms of play are not often or easily recognized by modern scholars. It might be useful for us to learn to recognize the forms, in order not to misread as dull pedantry what is actually the record of a witty needle-match.

²⁶. HAMILTON ed. § 188, p. 333. EHWALD ed. p. 499. HERREN transl. p. 167.

VI. INFERENCES

We have seen in Aldhelm's Letters to Heahfrith and Wihthfrith a spectacular display of a form of learning inculcated at the Canterbury school of Theodore and Hadrian from about the year 670. These letters vigorously affirm the superiority of English learning and parodically attack the validity of Irish learning. Colmán's Letter to Feradach may illustrate a civil response to the attack, making use of Aldhelm's learning without answering his polemic. The Letter to Aldhelm from an unnamed (probably Irish) student may illustrate another response to it, requesting in a good imitation of Aldhelm's style to become his pupil. Cellán's Letter suggests a different response, apparently deferential, but really densely ironic and aggressive, insulting Aldhelm both with his own diction and his own misprision and by attraction of masculine and neuter words to feminine forms. The last response may be the most impressive, with extensive repercussions in Insular literary history. With characteristic insight Dr A. M. Orchard has suggested that Aldhelm does not quote the *Hisperica Famina* because when he wrote they did not yet exist. They may have issued from the circle of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, if not from Virgilius himself. Might the most famous and imaginative of all Irish grammarians, stung by the parody of his prose in Aldhelm's jingling heptasyllables, have responded by displaying in the *Hisperica Famina* what the Irish schools could teach best?

D. R. HOWLETT
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