

Smith, J. M. H. (2013) Writing in Britain and Ireland, c. 400 - c. 800. In:
Lees, C. A. (ed.) The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English
Literature. Series: The new Cambridge history of English literature.
Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, pp. 19-49. ISBN 9780521190589

Copyright © 2013 Cambridge University Press

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study,
without prior permission or charge

Content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format
or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/64335/>

Deposited on: 18 May 2015

Writing in Britain and Ireland, c. 400 - c. 800

Julia M H Smith

This is the first chapter of *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare Lees (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, in press). It was commissioned to frame the volume and make clear that, *pace* its title, *CHEMEL* addresses literature in all the different languages of the British Isles to c.1150. Publication expected 2012/13.

Haec in praesenti iuxta numerum librorum quibus lex diuina scripta est, quinque gentium linguis unam eandemque summae ueritatis et uera sublimitatis scientiam scrutatur et confitetur, Anglorum uidelicet Brettonum Scottorum Pictorum et Latinorum, quae meditatione scripturarum ceteris omnibus est facta communis.

At the present time, there are five languages in Britain, just as the divine law is written in five books, all devoted to seeking out and setting forth one and the same kind of wisdom, namely the knowledge of sublime truth and of true sublimity. These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish as well as Latin languages; through the study of the scriptures, Latin is in general use among them all.¹

When Bede published his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731, he included in his preface this famous comment on the languages in use in his own day. In dovetailing Britain's linguistic complexity into the biblical patterning of the story he was about to relate, he betrayed his firm belief in the superiority of Latin as the language of Roman Christianity and of literate education. Implicit within Bede's conspectus is a narrative of fundamental significance—the demise of Latin as the signal of Britain's place within the Roman empire, and its transformation into an elite schoolroom language necessary for a 'religion of the book', Christianity. In the course of this seismic linguistic shift, the universalising features inherent within Christianity interacted with local particularities of language, politics and

¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, I.i. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 16.

identity in exceptionally creative ways which transformed the cultural landscape. As will rapidly become clear, Ireland is deeply implicated in that British story: the purpose of this survey is to sketch the framework for these interconnected literary histories.

We should acknowledge at the outset that throughout the centuries covered by this volume, writing was a separate activity from reading, and that writing in the sense of composing meaningful text was often distinct from writing in the sense of crafting the shapes of characters. The vast majority of the population was illiterate, and, of those who could read, even fewer could write. Instead, oral and symbolic communication bound most people to each other, their deities and even their ancestors. Nevertheless, literate modes of communication co-existed with non-written ones: early medieval men and women encountered writing by seeing it around them, marked on the landscape, in Christian books, or in the hands of royal or ecclesiastical officials. They would also have heard it read aloud by priests, bailiffs and sometimes even by kings, yet, unless the writing was in their local language, it would not have been comprehensible without a translator to hand. The written word was thus an elite mode of interaction, not an everyday one. It carried heavy symbolic value as an instrument of secular or ecclesiastical ideology, a feature of liturgical ritual, or a material remnant of the Roman era; its physical presence can rarely have been accompanied by direct comprehension of its verbal content. Nevertheless, writing has a privileged place in the study of the past. This reflects both its ability to convey meaning across both distance and time and the ease with which it simultaneously constitutes and reflects social relationships, cultural capital, political hierarchies and aesthetic qualities. In seeking out the history of early medieval literature, we must constantly strive to restore it to its rightful position as a tenuous web of textual contact spun to powerful effect against a backdrop of spoken and symbolic communication.

Writing is the representation of human speech in a system of agreed symbols which integrates cognition, technology and language, and thus demands multiple forms of analysis. The first section of this chapter rejects the different national narratives which have conventionally framed the literature of Britain and Ireland in the early Middle Ages. The second part substitutes commonalities and cross-currents by treating writing as a form of material culture. The final section reassesses the regional cultures of writing, books and literature in early medieval Britain and Ireland and concludes by emphasising the multi-

lingual environment of the transitional centuries between the Roman era and the Middle Ages.

Foundations and Narratives

Bede's preface to his *Ecclesiastical History* lacks a term for the cluster of islands stretching from the Shetlands to the Scillies of which Britain and Ireland are the two largest. His vocabulary followed that of classical Latin geographers who were familiar with both *Britannia* and *Hibernia* (Ireland) but did not regard what is sometimes styled the 'Atlantic Archipelago' as a single entity. Indeed, these islands have never shared an agreed collective nomenclature.² Rather, centuries of domination first by the medieval English empire and then by its British successor have left both a residue of disputed histories and a profound imprint on linguistic and literary culture. Bede's description of *Britannia* immediately necessitated mention of the adjacent island of *Hibernia*: the islands' geographical proximity had generated intertwined histories but distinct identities long before the Roman conquest of Britain. As Bede recognised, the history of the one cannot be written without reference to the other. And, because nowhere in the early Middle Ages did 'natural' frontiers or political borders determine cultural and linguistic differentiation, narratives shaped by post-medieval political and philological criteria severely distort the complex situation which existed in Britain and Ireland in our period.

The chapter commences as Roman rule in Britain ceased. However, imperial control of the province of *Britannia* had never been coterminous with the island of that name.

Romanisation had been far more intensive in the south-east lowlands than in the uplands of its western and northern fringes. Here, civic organisation shaded off into a militarised zone which extended beyond the landmark 'frontier' of Hadrian's Wall that separated Roman province from the peoples of 'free' Britain. Nevertheless, by c.400, Rome's influence had leached beyond the province's boundaries, extending into the south of what is now known

² For a succinct statement of the problem (and a defence of the terminology adopted for the series' title) see Paul Langford, 'General Editor's Preface', in T. M. Charles-Edwards (ed.), *After Rome* (The Short Oxford History of the British Isles; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), v-vi.

as 'Scotland' and across the Irish Sea into eastern parts of Ireland. Within the province of Britain, the termination of imperial rule did not bring an abrupt end to its literate Christian Latin culture at either the elite intellectual level or in less elevated contexts. In the most Romanised part of the province, its south-eastern quadrant, Roman literate culture seems to have foundered during the first half of the fifth century and had to be reintroduced by Christian missionaries from 597 as an exotic foreign import. Elsewhere the reverse happened, as the loosening of political control along the frontiers coincided with (and may well have facilitated) enhanced seepage of Roman cultural influence not only north of the frontier but also across the sea to Ireland. Indeed, the Romanisation of Ireland has recently been described as "a remarkable and unique post-Roman achievement"; something similar might be said of southern Scotland.³ As we shall see, the history of writing provides a sensitive index of these all-encompassing changes.

Whereas the end of political rule from Rome provides the starting point for this chapter, its terminus is the onset of Scandinavian attacks in the closing years of the eighth century. Whether viewed from a political, linguistic, economic or cultural perspective, the Viking age marks a watershed whose literary implications are explored in Chapters 00 below. Although historians are now sceptical that the Viking invasions marked the 'passing of the old order' in Ireland, it is nevertheless the case that the Norse colony at Dublin (founded in 841) developed into a powerful kingdom which continued to contribute to Irish inter-kingdom rivalries long after losing control of a large swathe of central Britain in 954. To the north of the Hiberno-Norse kingdom of Dublin/York, an emerging dynastic power forged a new and enduring polity whose name, Alba, had, centuries earlier, been the Gaelic term for the entire island of Britain. Its dominant Gaelic identity nevertheless derived from a much more complex linguistic and ethnic past.⁴ Alba, or the kingdom of the Scots (Latinised as *Scotia* or *Albania*), was one of two newly formed kingdoms on the British side of the Irish Sea whose

³ Howard B. Clarke, 'Economy', in Pauline Stafford (ed.), *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c.500-c.1100* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 57-75 at 64. For Scotland, see James E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) at 54-67, 83-93, 116-117.

⁴ Dauvit Broun, 'The origin of Scottish identity', in Claus Bjørn, Alexander Grant, and Keith J. Stringer (eds.), *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Copenhagen: Academic Press, 1994), 35-67; Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba 789-1070* (New Edinburgh History of Scotland, 2; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

expansionist tendencies contributed to the long-term reconfiguration of these older identities in the tenth century. The other emerged in the south-east, where the ascendancy of the West Saxon dynasty fostered the formation of a new political vocabulary of englishness and 'England' (*englisc*, *Englaland*) during and after the reign of Alfred of Wessex (871-899), and then, in the tenth century, exploited the rhetoric of 'Britannia' and 'Albion' for its own imperial pretensions.⁵ Briefly stated, then, this chapter is after Rome but before Dublin, Alba and England.

The most notable feature of this political landscape is the absence of any stable hegemonic political power anywhere in either Britain or Ireland after the end of Roman rule and prior to 800. Although huge problems with the evidence (both written and archaeological) do not permit a firm outline of political developments to be sketched, it is clear that their hallmarks were fluidity and localism. In Britain, new forms of political organisation followed the end of formalised ties to the Roman state apparatus of army, fiscal system and bureaucracy. Almost everywhere, political power devolved to an extremely local level. Warlords, whose militias were held together by ties of patronage and kinship, exacted tribute and filled the vacuum left by educated officials running an imperial administration based upon writing. Both within and beyond the boundaries of the former province, these local (or at most regional) chieftaincies came to identify themselves in ethnic terms, although in practice most—probably all—of them incorporated individuals of differing genetic backgrounds. Early medieval ethnicity commonly used genealogy and shared history as the organising principles for group identity and cohesion, but however politically persuasive, the fiction masked far more complex and interesting social realities. Furthermore, some tribute-seeking warlords managed to pass control from one generation to the next, and the emergence of dynastic kingship is clearly discernable in outline, though impossible to chart in detail. As Romanised ways of life faltered in the south-east but diffused further north,

⁵ Sarah Foot, 'The making of *Angelcynn*: English identity before the Norman conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 6 (1996), 25-49; Michael Wood, 'The making of King Aethelstan's empire: an English Charlemagne?', in Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 250-272; Patrick Wormald, 'Engla lond: the making of an allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1-24; Julia Crick, 'Edgar, Albion and insular dominion', in Donald Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English 959-975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 158-170.

and warlordism developed into kingship, so the former sharp contrast between the complex structures of the imperial state within the province and much simpler chieftaincies beyond it yielded to a much less differentiated network of emerging small kingdoms competing with each other for prestige and resources.⁶ By 600, therefore, the political landscape of south Britain more closely resembled that of the northern half of the island than at any time since the pre-Roman era. The trend towards convergence continued until interrupted by the Vikings: until c.800 the differences in political power and organisation between the north and south of Britain were more the result of topography, natural resources and access to continental Europe than of fundamentally different forms of polity.

For the same reason, the gulf in political organisation between the two islands had been substantially reduced. In Ireland, the impact of Rome had only ever been indirect, mediated by merchants and slave raiders and readily absorbed into local culture. Roman cultural influence made itself felt in an island which, in c.400, was home to hundreds of small, competing kingdoms, some of which managed to assert temporary superiority over their neighbours. Successful dynasties anchored their sacral power in the landscape and cultivated close relationships with elite specialists expert in a large corpus of orally transmitted custom, law and mythology. By c.400, Christianity was spreading here—no doubt another sign of the secondary role of merchants and slavers as cultural brokers—and was introducing both its distinctive books written in the language of the distant Roman state and new forms of contact with the world beyond Britain. The shaft of light which this sheds on the socio-political life of the island facilitates the historian's task, but its contribution to the structural changes in the political landscape cannot be easily assessed. The general nature of that change is nevertheless clear: a gradual drift towards the emergence of fewer, larger kingdoms controlled by dynasties which were able to maintain their power over many generations.⁷

⁶ Robin Fleming, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400-1070* (The Penguin History of Britain; London: Allen Lane, 2010); Edward James, *Britain in the First Millennium* (London: Arnold, 2001).

⁷ T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Ireland, 400-800', in idem (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 182-234.

By c.800, then, Britain and Ireland alike were divided into a multiplicity of regional, competing dynastic kingships. None of these kingdoms, however, replicated the Roman state's reliance on writing as an instrument of intensive power and durable cohesion. Not until the reign of Alfred did writing begin to make a significant contribution to the formation of stable polities, as Chapter 00 discusses. Prior to then, royal writing was ideology unsupported by administration.

As Bede indicated, Britain and Ireland were also multi-lingual. Nevertheless, the interactions between languages, as also between language and writing, were in reality far more complex than Bede's neat schema implies. Two out of his four ethnic languages, Old Irish and Old English, had made the transition into written form by Bede's own day. Manuscript evidence confirms that the third, Old Welsh, had certainly done so by the early ninth century, but in actuality it may not have lagged as far behind as the exiguous Welsh manuscript tradition suggests. For all three, the earliest extant specimens are glosses in Latin manuscripts, with syntactically continuous written texts from a generation or so later, and in all three cases we see stages in the evolution of languages spoken to this day. The situation regarding Bede's fourth vernacular language, Pictish, is rather different, for it died out around 900. We know that kings' names had achieved written form in a regnal list before the collapse of the Pictish kingdom in 843; any discussion of whether the transition to alphabetic writing proceeded further than this statement of regal power founders on lack of evidence.⁸

Bede had adumbrated his linguistic teleology to support his vision of a Christian community sharing "the catholic peace and truth of the Church universal".⁹ Centuries later, polemicists transformed his account into the cornerstone of England's national history. From the twelfth century onwards, Scottish, Irish and Welsh chronicles also found ways to explain the kingdoms of their own day by reference to the early medieval past of convert kings and local

⁸ Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980), 77-88.

⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, V.23, Colgrave and Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 560-561.

Christianities. Their myth-making drew strength from late medieval political conflict and, from the sixteenth century, was enhanced by the consequences of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Then, Enlightenment- and Romantic-era historical and philological scholarship helped these stereotypes to solidify into discrete national stories and parallel literary canons. In this way, myth, legend, and genuine detail extracted from chronicles, laws and poetry fused into tenacious historical perspectives which disinterested academic scholarship cannot easily demolish.

When we turn to the manuscript evidence, however, we discover that 'national' histories of the literatures of early medieval Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland cannot be sustained. The fact is that no early vernacular chronicle or legal text survives in a manuscript datable prior to 800. This applies to all the earliest Old English law codes, for those of the seventh-century Kentish kings Æthelberht, Hlothere and Eadric, then Wihtred, are extant only in the twelfth-century *Textus Roffensis*, while the oldest manuscript of the laws of Ine of Wessex (688-725) is tenth-century.¹⁰ Similarly, the oldest manuscript of early Irish law is twelfth century.¹¹ As for vernacular annals, the oldest extant witness is the famous Parker Chronicle in Old English from the end of the reign of Alfred of Wessex (871-899). For Gaelic-speaking regions, scholars posit an annalistic tradition which began in Latin on Iona in the sixth or seventh century and spawned variants in Ireland. From the ninth century, these increasingly used the vernacular alongside Latin, yet no manuscript of Scottish or Irish annals in either language survives from before the late eleventh century.¹² The situation for Wales is similar, with manuscripts surviving from c.1100 and a Latin annal tradition arguably maintained from the late eighth century onwards, although, unlike Ireland, vernacular

¹⁰ Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), at 93-106, 163-172, 244-253, 277-280.

¹¹ Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Early Irish law series; Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), at 225-231.

¹² M. B Parkes, 'The palaeography of the Parker manuscript of the *Chronicle*, laws and *Sedulius*, and the historiography of Winchester in the late ninth and tenth centuries', *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), 149-171 at 153-154.; Nicholas Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), at 210 for a summary of views about the date of the oldest stratum.

chronicles only began in the late Middle Ages.¹³ Strictly speaking then, vernacular laws and annals afford only a retrospective representation of these early centuries: without exception, they reach us through the interventions of generations of scribes and redactors, not as first penned.

The fate of poetry is similarly complex. With the exception of Cædmon's Hymn and the runic verses on the Ruthwell Cross, the great majority of Old English poetry is transmitted in four manuscripts dating to the decades 975-1025, thus providing ample scope for discussion of the extent of the interval between composition and transmission for each poem.¹⁴

Although Old Welsh and Old Irish verse is discussed in Chapters 00, 00 and 00 below, it should be noted that, for almost all of it, the gap between putative date of composition and extant manuscript witnesses is even greater than for Old English poetry. *Y Gododdin* is a case in point: sometimes described as the "oldest Scottish poem", this collection of Old Welsh verse concerning the 'heroic society' of north Britain survives in a single manuscript from the second half of the thirteenth century, *Llyfr Aneirin* (the Book of Aneirin). It reflects half a millennium of performance and transmission, making any attempt to extrapolate its 'original' language an exercise in hypothetical construction of a text, not the reconstruction of a lost one.¹⁵

Of surviving manuscripts from before c.1100, a small proportion predates c. 800. Within them, the Latin tradition takes priority, and is surveyed in Chapter 00. This corpus of manuscripts shows how the written vernaculars slowly emerged in counterpoint with inherited classical and patristic learning, often within the same manuscript. Two examples, both from the cusp of the ninth century, demonstrate these intertwined linguistic traditions. The first is the Book of Armagh (Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 52; [CLA II.270]), completed by the scribe Ferdomnach in 807. It comprises a complete New Testament

¹³ Kathleen Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and related texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973), 3-28.

¹⁴ Donald G. Scragg, 'The nature of Old English verse', in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55-70 at 56-58.

¹⁵ David Dumville, 'Palaeographical considerations in the dating of early Welsh verse', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1976-78), 246-251.

bookended with parallel dossiers of texts, one concerning St Patrick, the other St Martin of Tours (d. 397), the premier evangelising saint of the western, Latin, half of the Roman empire. The Patrician texts, some in Latin, others in Old Irish, include the earliest witness to the Latin Life of Patrick by the seventh-century author Muirchú, accompanied by a collection of local stories and memoranda about Patrick's mission in Ireland assembled by Tírechán (also in the seventh century). This assemblage crafts a grand statement of the property and jurisdictional claims of Patrick's church at Armagh out of a wide range of earlier written materials and oral traditions.¹⁶ The overall purpose of the Book of Armagh is to elevate Patrick to the same pre-eminent status as Martin as a preacher of the Gospel and to support early ninth-century Armagh's claims to Irish jurisdictional ascendancy within the Church of Rome. Important not only as a key witness to the Hiberno-Latin and Old Irish texts it contains, it reminds us that codicological context shapes the way in which written texts were understood by their early medieval scribes, readers and audiences.

A second manuscript whose carefully selected contents propose a meaning greater than the sum of its parts is London, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian B.vi, fols 104-9. Datable to c. 810, this booklet presents a different approach to selecting historical texts but nevertheless seems to have been similarly politically motivated, as an assertion of the rights and interests of the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury (Kent).¹⁷ It is well known for its Anglo-Saxon episcopal lists and its series of Old English genealogies which trace several Anglo-Saxon royal lines back to Woden but, importantly, these follow a compilation of useful information of widely disparate origin about the world, its inhabitants and their histories. Together, the episcopal lists and genealogies place Anglo-Saxon history and its pre-Christian origins firmly within the grand written narrative of Roman Christian time and space. Like the Book of Armagh, this small booklet witnesses both a sophisticated political consciousness and the pressures which the authoritative conventions of written Latin placed upon a traditionally

¹⁶ Ludwig Bieler, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae; Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979).

¹⁷ Simon Keynes, 'Between Bede and the *Chronicle*: London BL Cotton Vespasian B.vi, fols. 104-9', in Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard (eds.), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 1:47-67.

oral society. In these two manuscripts, the vernacular bridged the gap between Latinate arguments and oral evidence.

The Book of Armagh and BL Cotton Vespasian B.vi reveal how the writers, compilers and scribes of the early Middle Ages took a notably broad view of their place in the world, and used the vernacular to supplement and modify their Latin learning. Both manuscripts exemplify the themes which the remaining chapters develop: how patristic texts were transmitted, received and reinterpreted across space and time; how identities were constructed and reconstructed from a complex cultural heritage; how writing transformed oral tradition; and how the written vernaculars emerged from the shadow of Latin. Early medieval rulers and scholars alike moved easily between one language zone and another: as the chapters below demonstrate, their world was persistently multi-lingual and multi-referential. Additional confirmation that its written cultures were inextricably interwoven comes from the material evidence for the practice of writing, to which we now turn.

Writing as craft

Writing in the early Middle Ages involved many different technical skills. Letters may be incised into a surface such as a wax tablet, bone, ivory or slate using a hard sharp point, commonly a stylus, although the tip of a knife blade can also be pressed into service. Another means of making characters involves dragging a pen dipped in ink over the surface of a material such as papyrus, parchment, fabric or bark. These are the basic techniques required for textual literacy. They involve some level of formal instruction in reading as well as the manual dexterity needed to manipulate a stylus, reed- or quill-pen to produce characters of modest, even tiny size. At its most rudimentary, then, writing requires some basic education; at its most refined, prolonged training and disciplined practice. But words can also be transferred from a written exemplar onto other mediums in ways which require different expertise but need not presuppose any schooling in letters. For example, letters can be punched, gouged, engraved or polished into metal or carved into wood. They can be chiselled into granite or sandstone, perhaps following the outlines of outsize characters

drawn onto the stone with a piece of charcoal or a brush. They can be embroidered or woven on fabric.¹⁸

Although these are distinct skills, each with its specific expertise, they cannot be considered in isolation from each other. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, the shape and layout of the letters of the alphabet was transferable from one medium to another.¹⁹ In this respect, writing participated in the wider visual culture of early medieval Ireland and Britain, which was characterised by the interchange of motifs, forms of ornament and iconographies between manuscript illumination, stone sculpture, wood and metalwork. In the second place, the evolution of characteristic manuscript hands cannot be understood without reference to epigraphy. Inscriptions on stone, in other words, hold the key to unlocking the early history of writing in the two islands. Thirdly, by taking the evidence provided by archaeology and material culture into account, we can open up avenues unavailable to textual and literary approaches, and thereby ensure that the history of writing is a larger subject than the history of literature, literacy or books.

In this context, it is crucial to note that, although the Latin alphabet had spread into Britain in tandem with Roman rule and continued to be the dominant form of writing throughout our period, it was by no means the only one. Around all the margins of the empire, indigenous peoples appreciated and appropriated the power of the written word, but transformed it to meet their own cultural context in different ways.²⁰ Two are relevant here, runes and ogam. Both are alphabetic systems whose characters are made up of straight lines designed to be carved or scratched onto stone or wood, although they did occasionally make their way into manuscript contexts at a later date. Both were indigenous responses to the prestige and utility of Roman alphabetic writing and, unlike the new scribal

¹⁸ See Elizabeth Coatsworth, 'Text and textile', in Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (eds.), *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 187-207 at 199-200 for two Anglo-Saxon examples of c.800, both of which survive in church treasuries on the Continent.

¹⁹ John Higgitt, 'The stone-cutter and the scriptorium: Early medieval inscriptions in Britain and Ireland', in Walter Koch (ed.), *Epigraphik 1988* (Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Denkschriften; Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), 149-161.

²⁰ Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: a New Cultural History 500-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) Chapter 1, 'Speaking and Writing', for the wider imperial context.

systems invented in conjunction with the spread of Christianity along the eastern borders of the Roman empire, neither of them emerged in a missionary environment. Both were commonly used for personal names and familial identities, or for brief formulaic utterances. A crucial difference between them, however, is that whereas the overwhelming majority of ogam inscriptions occur on large stone slabs or carved into the virgin rock, the early British runes are incised on highly portable objects; only appropriation for Christian purposes triggered their subsequent transference onto immobile stone monuments. They thus represent fundamentally different relationships between patron, producer and observer.

An adaptation of a selection of Greek and Latin character forms, runes had developed along the German frontier of the imperium. From there, settlers brought their knowledge of them to south-eastern Britain after the end of Roman rule. Fifth-, sixth- and early seventh-century runic inscriptions were confined to one or two words on a weapon, brooch, bowl, comb or the like. They are usually short series of letters, or simply alphabetic sequences; of those that have a decipherable meaning, some supply the name of the maker or owner, while others express a protective power and suggest talismanic status. They certainly do not suggest that runic literacy was anything more than an occasional practice among the wealthy elite. But runes were subsequently adapted to Christian contexts, and the vast majority of all specimens from Britain occur either on monastic grave-markers and standing crosses from north of the Humber and Mersey or on portable objects from the post-conversion period. The parity of status accorded to Latin and runic alphabets for Christian inscripational purposes is clear from their use side by side on the coffin of St Cuthbert (d. 687), as well as on the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross (Plate 00). Furthermore, not only did the monastic use of runes enable a reform of the runic alphabet, but it also enabled the appropriation of runic symbols to indicate two Old English sounds which lacked a precise equivalent in the Latin alphabet, 'th' and 'w'.²¹

Ogam, on the other hand, developed during or before the fourth century, either in Ireland under the stimulus of contacts with Roman Britain or along the westernmost shores of Britain. It was born of close interchange between the Gaelic world and those who spoke

²¹ David Parsons, *Recasting the Runes: The Reform of the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc* (Institutionen för nordiska språk; Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1999).

and wrote Latin. It enabled short Gaelic phrases, which were usually commemorative formulae, to be carved onto small or large stones and, in this respect too, drew inspiration from the Roman epigraphical tradition. But unlike Latin, which arrayed words and characters in horizontal lines, ogam ran vertically: it did not defer to imperial inscriptional techniques, yet acknowledged and transformed their utility. Occasionally, like runes, ogam was also used to put an owner's name on an object. Although it persisted in Christian contexts for memorial inscriptions into the seventh century, by that date, Roman imperial presence in Britain had given way to a common Christian culture spanning the Irish Sea, so ogam lost out to the Latin alphabet for flexibility, functionality and prestige.²²

Scholarship on script in Ireland and Britain in the early Middle Ages relies upon a manuscript-based approach, but is constrained by the small number of manuscripts surviving from this period.²³ An emphasis on the material context of writing ameliorates this limited picture in various ways. When we take all manifestations of writing into account, from attempts to scratch out an alphabet of simple letter forms on a slate to sophisticated works of poetry or theology, we greatly extend not only the quantity but also the quality of the available evidence. Although new discoveries in libraries and archives are not unknown, they remain rare, and are usually small fragments. Recent examples include a mutilated bifolium from an eighth-century Irish manuscript of Rufinus's *Ecclesiastical History* which had been the wrapper of a sixteenth-century medical manuscript, and part of a leaf from an eighth-century Northumbrian manuscript of the sermons of Augustine of Hippo.²⁴ By contrast, the amount of evidence recovered from the ground increases year by year. Some discoveries are truly spectacular, such as the gospel book dating from c.800 recovered

²² Heather A. King, 'An ogham-inscribed antler handle from Clonmacnoise', *Peritia* 20 (2008), 315-322 at 318 in particular; Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1991); Jane Stevenson, 'The beginnings of literacy in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 89c (1989), 127-165.

²³ Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, 1: c. 600–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁴ Aidan Breen, 'A new Irish fragment of the *Continuatio* to Rufinus-Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Scriptorium* 41/2 (1987), 185-204.

from a peat bog at Faddan More (Co. Tipperary) in 2006, or the enigmatic gold alloy strip with an Old Testament verse engraved on it found in the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009.²⁵

Hundreds of far more modest finds significantly alter our knowledge of the geographical distribution, social contexts and cultural significance of writing with every new discovery. Finds of styli and portable inscriptions indicate that a common technology of writing existed throughout early medieval Britain and Ireland, as suitable for Latin as for runes or ogam. They also reveal evidence of writing at sites unrecorded in documentary evidence and to which no manuscripts have ever been attributed. Some of these, such as Tintagel (Cornwall) and Dunadd (Argyll), were certainly high-status secular sites; others, including Flixborough (Lincs) and Brandon (Suffolk) less definitely so.²⁶ Styli are generally used to write either on wooden tablets coated with wax or on soft stone, but fine ones also serve for making ink-free marks on parchment, so-called dry-point writing. Caches of early medieval inscribed slates indicate a hitherto unsuspected geography of writing in the west of Britain, including slates with Latin letter trials and casual doodles from both Tintagel and Dunadd.²⁷ Wooden tablets, on the other hand, survive from south-eastern Britain (Blythborough, Suffolk) and Ireland (Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim).²⁸ The former has undecipherable runes and Latinate

²⁵ Eamonn P. Kelly et al., 'The Faddan More Psalter', *Archaeology Ireland special supplement* 77 (2006), 1-16; David Ganz, 'The text of the inscription', *Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* <<http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/davidganz>>; Elisabeth Okasha, 'The Staffordshire Hoard inscription', *Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* <<http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/elisabethokasha>> [last accessed 24/07/2011]

²⁶ Ewan Campbell, 'The archaeology of writing in the time of Adomnán', in Jonathan M. Wooding et al. (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 139-144; D. H. Evans, Christopher Loveluck, and Marion Archibald, *Life and Economy at Early Medieval Flixborough, c. AD 600-1000: The Artefact Evidence* (Excavations at Flixborough; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009) at 125; for Brandon see Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Arts and Culture AD 600-900* (London: British Museum Press, 1991), at 81-88. John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) at 204-209 argues that Flixborough and Brandon were ecclesiastical rather than secular sites.

²⁷ Campbell, 'Archaeology of writing', 141 (Tintagel), 142 (Dunadd).

²⁸ E. C. R. Armstrong and R. A. S. Macalister, 'Wooden book with leaves indented and waxed found near Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 6th Ser., 10 (1920), 160-166; Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England*, 80-81.

letter sequences. The latter, in Latin, is a bound set of six tablets which offer unparalleled insights into the training of scribes around the year 600 (*CLA Supplement*, 1684). Of the two individuals whose hands are detectable on them, Hand I was the more experienced. He formed his letters in a manner which indicates that he was also trained in the advanced craft of writing with a pen on parchment, whereas Hand II had not yet made the transition from stylus to quill.²⁹ Supplementary evidence of schooling comes from the island of Inchmarnock in the Clyde estuary (Argyll and Bute), where a shaky foundational hand copies out a Latin exercise on one slate, while others have letter trials and alphabetic sequences in both Latin and ogam (Plate 00). Of the dozen slates with figurative scenes, one depicts a complex pictorial narrative which, it has been suggested, might have been used for schoolroom story-telling.³⁰ Primarily although not exclusively ephemeral in use (the Springmount Bog tablets are a fair copy of some Psalms), styli, slates and tablets are witnesses to a mode of education which preceded scribal training in penmanship. They may even hint at rudimentary pragmatic literacy in the service of elites.

Extant manuscript books and documents testify to a different set of artisanal skills, those needed to turn animal hides into the parchment from which they were prepared, and to manufacture the necessary ink, pigments and coverings. Although the same basic principles and techniques underlay the construction of all early medieval manuscript books, there was such great variety and flexibility in actual practice that the material specificities of book-making cannot be reduced to clear regional or chronological templates. Neither the methods of preparing and arranging the parchment leaves nor the recipes for making ink are susceptible to ethnic labelling in this period.³¹ Whereas the disparities testify to the ready adaptation of artisanal techniques to disparate local resources, the commonalities are

²⁹ Gifford Charles-Edwards, 'The Springmount Bog tablets: their implications for insular epigraphy and palaeography', *Studia Celtica* 36 (2002), 27-45 at 27-31.

³⁰ Christopher Lowe, *Inchmarnock: An Early Historic Island Monastery and its Archaeological Landscape* ([Society of Antiquaries of Scotland monograph series]; Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2008) at 128-149, 151-175.

³¹ Richard Gameson, 'The material fabric of early British books', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, 1: c. 600–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13-93.

a reminder that the universalising impetus of Christianity had a material dimension alongside its ideological one.

Here too, archaeology can significantly supplement information gleaned from the study of extant books themselves, in terms of both the materiality and the geography of writing. The traditional evidence for manuscript literacy in Pictland remained the indirect evidence of visual depictions of clerics carrying books, together with a handful of Latin inscriptions. The picture was transformed by the discovery in 2004 of the remains of an eighth-century parchment-making workshop at Portmahomack (Easter Ross), north of Inverness.³² By enlarging our understanding of the range of tools and methods which might be used in the manufacture of manuscripts, it has also prompted the reinterpretation of unusual clusters of finds from other sites which may also suggest the manufacture of parchment, including not only Lindisfarne but also Dunadd.³³

Consideration of writing within its material culture context also facilitates reflection on its social roles. Take, for example, the issue of portability. The Faddan More Psalter was found with its accompanying leather satchel and its strap.³⁴ It would presumably have been carried slung over the shoulder in a manner similar to the book-carrying clerics on Pictish symbol stones, or the book copied by Columba which a boy lost in a river when its satchel slipped off his shoulder as he crossed a bridge but was found undamaged, months later.³⁵ Indeed, any book was portable, and that was one reason why they feature as gifts, even one as exceptionally large as the Codex Amiatinus, intended as a present for the pope (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Amiatino I; [CLA III.299]). Ceolfriith, the elderly abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow, must have transported it to Italy in 716 by pack animal or cart, for its 1,030 large folios plus the original covers and a protective travelling case will have

³² M. O. H. Carver, *Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) at 60, 119-125.

³³ Campbell, 'Archaeology of writing', 142; Gameson, 'Material fabric', 00-00.

³⁴ Kelly et al., 'Faddan More Psalter'.

³⁵ Adolmnán, *Life of Columba* II.9. Alan Orr Anderson and Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson (eds.), *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1961), at 342-345.

weighed about 90lb.³⁶ Yet in other mediums, writing is immobile in the landscape. The sixth-century Latin memorial inscription commemorating the grave of one Dervacus son of Iustus stands 2.8m tall, beside (or very close to) the Roman road where it was erected at a spot easily visible from lower down the valley, a landmark for travellers over many centuries.³⁷ By contrast, the ogham carved directly on the rocky outcrop of Dunadd went unrecognised until 1953, and (photographs apart) only those standing directly on the rock can see it.³⁸

It has already been noted that an important difference between runes and ogham is that the former was primarily a script for portable purposes and only secondarily for commemorative monuments. However, both systems were not readily visible unless immobilised on stone. Latin, by contrast, was much more varied in scale, occurring on a huge variety of mediums, and as readily adapted for decorative effect as for communicating verbal meaning. Along the western coast of Britain from Cornwall to south-western Scotland, its inscriptional use in the early Middle Ages perpetuated and developed Romano-British epigraphic habits, which had, by the eighth century, been adopted in Ireland too. In south-eastern Britain, however, like all forms of Latin writing, it had to be revived—or reintroduced—as part of the process of Christianisation. It is portable metal objects, however, that best demonstrate the ease with which Latin could be accommodated into different rhetorics of display. Contrast a seventh-century necklace from Kent with an eighth-century helmet from Yorkshire. The former makes tremendous decorative play with imported sixth-century Mediterranean gold coins, but their legends are irrelevant to the jewellery's message of prestige and Romanness. The latter has an inscription on brass bands surmounting the crown of the head which invokes the protection of the Christian God

³⁶ Rupert Leo Scott Bruce-Mitford, *The Art of the Codex Amiatinus* (Jarrow lectures; [Oxford]: Archaeological Association, 1969), at 2.

³⁷ Mark Redknap and John Masters Lewis, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales. Vol. 1, Breconshire, Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Radnorshire and geographically contiguous areas of Herefordshire and Shropshire* (A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales; Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007) at 251-253 (B255) with comments on 135.

³⁸ Katherine Forsyth, 'The Ogham inscription at Dunadd', in Alan Lane and Ewan Campbell (eds.), *Dunadd: an Early Dalriadic Capital* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000), 264-272.

for the warrior who wore it into battle. Despite the high decorative quality of the repoussé lettering, the text and its message take priority over the visual effect.³⁹

Characters and words need not have much, if any, semantic context; instead they carry much associative meaning. There are many examples of this. Personal names, whether penned in books, inscribed on a brooch, sword hilt, gaming board or spindle whorl easily convey claims to ownership.⁴⁰ Pen-trials and doodles in manuscripts and on writing slates may indicate effortful practice or lack of concentration, perhaps even boredom with the task in hand. Whether on the display pages of insular gospel books such as the Lindisfarne Gospels (Plate 00) or on coins made into a necklace, writing may have an overwhelmingly decorative function. It may have an invocatory, protective or prophylactic meaning, summoning up spiritual help or warding off attack from evil spirits, disease or human enemies. Although literature exists essentially through the medium of writing, this is far from the sole purpose of committing words to stone, parchment, metal or wax tablet. The chapters which follow all address texts which participate in much wider cultures of writing: this hinterland explains some of the distinctive features of the early medieval literary landscape.

Transforming the Roman Legacy

The early sixth-century Byzantine historian Zosimus reports that in the summer of 410, Emperor Honorius sent letters to the cities of '*Brettania*' ordering them to defend themselves.⁴¹ Another sixth-century account of the end of Roman rule in Britain, that of the British moralist Gildas, also emphasises the role of writing, this time from the diametrically opposite perspective, that of the British who felt abandoned by the emperor. The Britons,

³⁹ Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England*, 48-50, 60-62. nos. 31(b) and 47.

⁴⁰ Spindle whorl: Campbell, 'Archaeology of writing', 143 at note 27; gaming board: Lowe, *Inchmarnock*, 122 and 130. Both examples are in ogam.

⁴¹ However, there are grounds for suspecting that Zosimus may have misinterpreted his fifth-century source, and that Honorius wrote to *Brettia* (the Italian city of Bruttium), not to *Britannia*, (the province of Britain): see A. S. Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1989) at 137-138.

he says, sent envoys to Rome with a letter requesting military aid; a legion was sent but returned home when it had accomplished its task. Subsequent written appeals conveying the 'groans of the British' went unheeded, and they fell into the grip of vice, barbarians and famine.⁴² Thus, as told with the hindsight of a century or more, Roman rule in Britain either ended with a written imperial instruction, or with letters from subjects to their ruler that remained unanswered. In all likelihood, the end of Roman rule was more protracted than either of these accounts proposes.⁴³ They nevertheless highlight a commonplace of the Roman world: that the state expressed its will through writing as well as by force of arms, while subjects relied on the written word for a wide range of purposes, including communication with distant masters. However Britain became detached from Rome, it signalled the end of the official promotion of a literate polity. Writing devolved to individuals and Christian churches, where they existed, and no longer spoke for a distant imperial regime. We now turn to the profound implications for the cultures of writing in Britain and Ireland.

Appreciation of this must take into account the fact that, in common with other western provinces of the empire, the end of Roman rule in Britain was accompanied by demographic fluidity around its borders. Extensive raiding and plundering from all directions had certainly destabilised the province from the 360s onwards. Although unreliable in chronology and historical detail, Gildas testifies to the sense of shock and outrage felt by British communities subjected to attacks by Irish and Pictish raiders, as well as by sea-borne warriors originating in north-western continental Europe. The circumstances in which raiders may have become settlers remain contested, as does the chronology of any such transformation; by the same token, it is still a vexed question whether Roman or post-Roman authorities employed 'barbarian' troops under treaty arrangements and, if so, whether they subsequently lost control of them. Despite the absence of consensus—and the unlikelihood of ever reaching one, given the impossibility of reconciling the mass of

⁴² Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae* 15, 18, 20. Michael Winterbottom (ed.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1978), at 21- 23, 93- 95.

⁴³ Ian Wood, 'The final phase', in Malcolm Todd (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2004), 428-442.

archaeological evidence with the problematic and meagre textual record—the effects are clear in language and literature.

In brief, whether groups migrated peacefully or aggressively (as kin-groups, peoples or warbands), whether individuals deliberately sought out opportunities for their own advantage (as merchants, mercenaries or missionaries) or were constrained to move by intimidation or force (as exiles or slaves), they took with them their own language, religion and modes of writing.⁴⁴ This contributed greatly to the reconfiguration of the cultural map of Britain in the course of the fifth century. By the sixth century, three distinct but overlapping zones are discernable, distinguished by archaeological and linguistic criteria.⁴⁵ (Map 00) The first was western, facing Ireland: it extended as far east as a line drawn, very approximately, from Edinburgh to Exeter. Western Britain was, in effect, the eastern littoral of an Irish Sea cultural province; it provides exceptional evidence for an unbroken tradition of inscriptional writing in a multi-lingual environment and also for the perpetuation into the sixth century of a high level of Latin erudition, as achieved by Gildas.⁴⁶ Its eastern counterpart was the south-eastern quadrant of the island, south of a line from Newcastle-upon-Tyne to Bournemouth. The material evidence for early, intensive Germanic influence is concentrated here, and is accompanied by extensive place-name evidence for the early adoption of Germanic speech in the form of Old English: we may regard it as the eastern seaboard zone, extending from the North Sea through the southern reaches of the English Channel. In between these two maritime-facing regions lay the third belt, stretching from

⁴⁴ For overviews, see T. M. Charles-Edwards (ed.), *After Rome* (Short Oxford History of the British Isles, 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Fleming, *Britain after Rome*.

⁴⁵ I follow Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 10-34, with map on 14. For the same zoning based on philological arguments, see Alex Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', in Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (The Transformation of the Roman World; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 345-380.

⁴⁶ Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the insular Celts AD 400-1000', in Miranda J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge, 1995) 703-736 at 715-720; Michael Lapidge, 'Gildas's education and the Latin culture of sub-Roman Britain', in Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984) 27-50; Charles Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London: Batsford, 1981).

the beaches of Northumbria and Lothian to the coasts of Somerset and Dorset. In a piecemeal fashion, it gradually passed under Anglo-Saxon political control between the mid-sixth and later-seventh centuries, but prior to that seems to have remained home to British communities organised into modest kingdoms which are all-but invisible archaeologically. In due course, this region too adopted Old English, but retained a significant heritage of Brittonic toponyms. This tripartite division, along two roughly north-south axes, guides the discussion which follows.

There is no better demonstration of the ways in which writing reveals the cultural currents which ebbed and flowed across all three areas than to start around the Irish Sea. Here, in places which had been formerly either the militarised frontiers of the empire, or had lain entirely beyond Roman rule, we encounter fascinating evidence of the ways in which Roman habits of writing continued in use in a slow process of cultural adaptation and transformation which spanned both sides of the Irish Sea. The frontier regions of Roman Britain had a particular penchant for resorting to writing, and always did so in Latin, not the local British language or the many other languages spoken by troops, merchants and officials who originated elsewhere in this polyglot empire. This is especially true along Hadrian's Wall. As a consequence of the huge number of writing tablets and inscribed, often sculpted, monuments from the Wall's vicinity, the formal and informal scripts, regional orthography and local British dialect of Latin are all well known.⁴⁷ Deriving directly from these Roman practices was the epigraphic habit of the western littoral zone of Britain in the fifth to seventh centuries, one of whose diagnostic features is numerous commemorative Latin inscriptions that perpetuate the rough-hewn form and non-calligraphic script common among the late Roman inscriptions of the militarised frontier regions of the province.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ David Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC-AD 409* (The Penguin History of Britain; London: Allen Lane, 2006) at 154-165, 199-224; John Pearce, 'Archaeology, writing tablets and literacy in Roman Britain', *Gallia* 61 (2004), 43-51.

⁴⁸ Overview of the corpus in Patrick Sims-Williams, *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain: Phonology and Chronology c.400-1200* (Publications of the Philological Society, 37; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) at 1-3. For palaeographical and historical interpretation, see Mark A. Handley, 'The origins of Christian commemoration in late antique Britain', *Early Medieval Europe* 10/2 (2001), 177-199; Carlo Tedeschi, 'Osservazioni sulla palaeografia delle iscrizioni

A distinctive subgroup of these inscribed stones cluster in Devon-Cornwall and south Wales, with outliers in north Wales, the Isle of Man and Scotland. They are bilingual Latin/ogam stones, with a small number in ogam alone.⁴⁹ Some may mark the burial places of Gaelic speakers who had settled along the western coast of Britain and then slowly assimilated into the local population, but not before having established a kingdom with a Gaelic dynasty in Dyfed (southwestern Wales).⁵⁰ Further north, across the North Channel, Gaelic dynasties also established control of much of the western seaboard of Scotland. Although it has been argued that most or all of the reported accompanying migration and settlement in Argyll was retrospective mythmaking rather than historical reality, the Gaelic contribution to the changing linguistic and cultural map of Britain is clear.⁵¹

Importantly, however, script did not coincide with language. Ogam stones are rare among the otherwise plentiful traces of Irish presence in western Scotland. By contrast, the Picts appropriated ogam for monumental commemorative inscriptions and small domestic labels in their own language (a form of Brittonic), and continued to use it long after its monumental use had been abandoned in Ireland and Wales. Although they did occasionally resort to the Latin alphabet, they usually avoided it, thereby rejecting its imperial connotations.⁵² Thus monumental commemoration, the Latin alphabet and ogam followed differing regional trajectories, indicating the selective appropriation of elements of the

britanniche paleocristiane V-VII sec. Contributo allo studio dell'origine delle scritture insulari', *Scrittura e Civiltà* 19 (1995), 67-121 with an English summary in Carlo Tedeschi, 'Some observations on the palaeography of early Christian inscriptions in Britain', in John Higgitt, Katherine Forsyth, and David N. Parsons (eds.), *Roman, Runes and Ogham. Medieval Inscriptions in the Insular World and on the Continent* (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2001), 16-25.

⁴⁹ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society', 704-706; McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, 44. For the ogam inscription discovered at Selkirk in 2002, see Katherine Forsyth, 'Hic memoria perpetua: the early inscribed stones of southern Scotland in context', in Sally M. Foster and Morag Cross (eds.), *Able Minds and Practised Hands: Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the 21st Century* (Leeds: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2005), 113-134 at 122.

⁵⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society', 704.

⁵¹ Ewan Campbell, 'Were the Scots Irish?', *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 285-292; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, 144-149.

⁵² Katherine Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland', in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39-61; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, 43-67, 375-379.

Roman legacy of writing in different localities along and beyond the frontiers of the imperial province. Equally, by revealing how cultural influences flowed back and forth across the Irish Sea and North Channel, they exemplify the variety to be found within the Irish Sea cultural province.

As Christianity spread beyond the province's frontiers into southern Scotland and Ireland, missionaries not only preached but carried their Christian texts, taught the craft skills needed to replicate them and developed instructional techniques to propagate its unfamiliar language. Their traces take many forms, including a stratum of Christian British Latin words adopted into Old Irish, and the reputation which learned British teachers such as Uuinniau acquired among their Irish pupils.⁵³ The Springmount Bog tablets also shed light on the cultural gulf that needed to be bridged to make a written religion accessible. Tírechán recounted that when Patrick returned to Ireland with several companions to preach to his former captors, the missionaries were carrying "written tablets in their hands like Moses".⁵⁴ The Irish feared these were offensive weapons that turned into iron swords by night, but in view of the fact that the Springmount Bog tablets were found tied together in a box-like set designed to be slung across the shoulder on a strap, we should envisage that a missionary carrying such a set of gospel tablets could seem to be armed with a stumpy wooden club or knife box.⁵⁵ (Plate 00)

The Springmount Bog tablets are crucial to tracing the evolution of late Roman scripts after c.400 in the Irish Sea cultural province, for they bridge the chronological gap between the first phase of inscribed stones and the earliest extant parchment books, as well as between the techniques of incising and penning letters.⁵⁶ They add weight to the strong (but not incontrovertible) argument that the Irish adopted habits of book-making and ways of writing directly from the practices of late Roman Britain. Indeed, in method of parchment

⁵³ Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 176-181, 291.

⁵⁴ Bieler, *Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 122-123.

⁵⁵ Armstrong and Macalister, 'Wooden box', plate XIV.

⁵⁶ Gifford Charles-Edwards, 'The palaeography of the inscriptions', in Mark Redknap and John Masters Lewis (eds.), *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales, volume 1* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 77-87; eadem, 'The Springmount Bog tablets'.

preparation, layout and script, early British and Irish writing habits were archaic by the standards of sixth-century Italy and Gaul. In all probability, what has become known as the 'insular' tradition of book manufacture and scribal practice had evolved out of late Roman conventions in Britain and around the Irish Sea in the fifth century, although its practices only become evident from c.600.⁵⁷

Equally importantly, the Irish had worked out how to adapt the Latin alphabet to their own language before 600 (and possibly long before). Used in the margin of Latin manuscripts, it was an effective instructional aid, especially for comprehending biblical texts. The language's first manuscript occurrence is the dry-point glosses in the Ussher Gospels of c.600 (Dublin, Trinity College Library MS 55; [CLA II.271]). Penned glosses survive from the end of the period under review, although the earliest extant set, in a manuscript of the Pauline Epistles from the late eighth century (Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS M.p.th.f.12 [CLA IX.1403]), certainly draws on a lost archetype. From the late eighth century and penned on the Continent, there also survives the earliest specimen of continuously written Old Irish, a homily intercalated into a collection of ecclesiastical canons when an older exemplar was copied (Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 679 (619) [CLA VI.741]).⁵⁸

In tandem with working out how to write their own language, the Irish pioneered forms of Latin instruction specifically for those who learned it as a foreign, schoolroom language.⁵⁹ By contrast, Latin remained a living, spoken language in some parts of western Britain into the seventh century. When Latin finally dropped out of everyday usage and was reduced to a learned language alongside multiple, spoken vernaculars, the last traces of Roman

⁵⁷ Michelle Brown, 'Writing in the insular world', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, I: c. 600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 121-166; Gameson, 'Material fabric'.

⁵⁸ James F. Kennney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide* (reprint edn.; New York: Octagon Books, 1979) at nos. 111, 461, pp. 283, 635-116. More generally, see Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin Literature to 1169', in idem (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 371-404 at 379-380; Paul Russell, 'What was best of every language': the early history of the Irish language', *ibid.*, 405-450 at 412-413. The Old Irish notes in the Book of Armagh are the oldest extant piece of Old Irish written in Ireland; below, p 00.

⁵⁹ Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Hiberno-Latin Literature to 1169', at 376-377.

linguistic conventions ended. And with the emergence of the first written vernacular, we enter the Middle Ages.⁶⁰

On the opposite shore of Britain, along the North Sea and English Channel, the story of writing was very different. Although the south-eastern part of Britain had been far more thoroughly Romanised than the remainder, and had supported a vigorous civil society, its written, especially epigraphic, habits seem always to have been more restricted than in rural and military areas, and this surely contributed to the collapse of literate culture in the post-Roman era. Isolated pockets of Christian practice do seem to have persisted, but in the absence of any evidence, it is impossible to say whether they owned any books or maintained any written traditions. Instead, as this region became heavily Germanised, runes made an occasional appearance. A fifth-century bone gaming-piece from a cemetery at Caistor by Norwich (Norfolk) is probably the oldest specimen.⁶¹ Although assessment of the extent of their use depends on fortuitous archaeological discoveries, it clearly was never more than the occasional word, invocation or mark of ownership.

In south-eastern Britain, the resurgence of Latin writing was the direct consequence of the spread of Christianity. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* presents an attractive narrative of how this came about, starting with Augustine's mission sent from Rome by Pope Gregory the Great which reached Kent in 597, and culminating with an assessment of the condition of Roman Christianity throughout Britain when the author laid down his pen. Famously, Bede's scholarly career marks the culmination of Christian learning and Latin scholarship in the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but also has much to tell us about the history of writing more broadly.⁶²

From the beginning of the missions, even before the establishment of schools, the reintroduction of Latin literacy took two forms. On the one hand, Gregory kept in touch

⁶⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society'; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The five languages of Wales in the pre-Norman inscriptions', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 44 (2002), 1-36.

⁶¹ Parsons, *Recasting the Runes: The Reform of the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc*, 47-48; John Hines, 'The runic inscriptions of early Anglo-Saxon England', in Alfred Bammesberger and Alfred Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400-600: Language and History* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1990), 436-455. at 441-442.

⁶² See Chapters 00 and 00 below. [R Love and Bede chapter]

with his missionaries by letter, in typical Roman fashion. Although his correspondence only survives in later registers of archive copies, the originals were quite possibly on papyrus rather than parchment. On the other, the missionaries brought with them books, only one of which has certainly come down to us, the so-called 'St Augustine Gospels' (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 286 [CLA II.126]). Of sixth-century Italian origin, it plausibly came with the first group of missionaries to arrive from Rome and was preserved at Canterbury throughout the Middle Ages.⁶³ Exacerbating the poor rate of manuscript survival from this early date may have been the presence in the missionaries' baggage of papyrus codices, whose chances of survival in the damp British climate are minimal. It has been suggested, however, that an elegantly written fragment of a sixth-century papyrus copy of Gregory the Great's homilies may be the vestigial token of the pastoral texts available to guide Augustine at Canterbury.⁶⁴ Both this papyrus leaf and the St Augustine Gospels conform to the contemporary codicological norms of Italy and Gaul, as can be ascertained from manuscripts extant on the Continent.

In late antiquity, literary books always differed from administrative documents in both script and layout. On the Continent, moreover, both book-making practices and documentary hands had evolved in important ways since the fourth century. Gregory's letters would have had a functional appearance, and are likely to have been penned in the the informal, cursive script common for letter-writing in late sixth-century Italian ecclesiastical writing offices. By contrast, the manuscripts which missionaries and pilgrims brought from Gaul and Italy had the formal script and stately appearance deemed appropriate for Christian holy books. Their generous margins and spacious lettering confirmed that no expense had been spared in their preparation. They set a standard for the material presentation of Christian scripture which was significantly different from the conventions of the Irish Sea cultural province.

Augustine's mission of 597 was the first of many moments of direct contact between Rome and Canterbury. Particular attention in this context needs to be paid to the arrival of the

⁶³ Rosamond McKitterick, 'Exchanges between the British Isles and the Continent, c. 450-c. 900', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, I: c.600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 00-00 at 00-00.

⁶⁴ Robert Babcock, 'A papyrus codex of Gregory the Great's *Forty Homilies on the Gospels* (London Cotton Titus C.xv)', *Scriptorium* 54 (2000), 280-289.

Greek Theodore of Tarsus to take up the see in 668. Sent by Pope Vitalian and accompanied by Hadrian, a monk of North African origin serving as abbot of a monastery near Naples, Theodore's pontificate was marked by the emergence of Canterbury as a major centre of scholarship, nourished by the Greek and Latin learning the two men brought with them. Their arrival posed enormous linguistic challenges, for themselves as much as for their pupils, and has left its trace in later copies of students' verbatim notes of their exposition of biblical passages. Equally important are collections of Old English glosses derived from the texts being studied, and a manuscript written in southern England during the last quarter of the seventh century allows us to get very close indeed to Theodore's classroom. Épinal, Bibliothèque municipale MS 72 (2), fols 94-107 [CLA VI.760]) preserves a list of Latin words extracted from texts studied at Canterbury, with each word followed by its vernacular equivalent. Other, somewhat later, glossaries preserve extensive lists of classical and patristic words accompanied by their Old English translation that had been accumulated by combining batches of glosses from several different glossed texts or sets of students' notes.⁶⁵

No later than the pontificate of Theodore, the nascent churches of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had begun to prepare written title deeds (charters) to the lands bestowed on them. Whereas, on the Continent, charters were produced in the rapidly penned cursive script used for any administrative and documentary purposes, the scribe of the earliest surviving original Anglo-Saxon charter, datable to 679, made his document more visually authoritative by adopting a formal majuscule book hand (London, British Library MS Cotton Augustus II.2; [ChLA III.182]). He also used parchment, rather than papyrus, although the latter still remained in common use for documentary purposes in Italy. If it is possible to generalise on the basis of the dozen or so surviving original Anglo-Saxon charters from before 800, the dignity and Romanising aura of a formal book-hand continued to have some

⁶⁵ Michael Lapidge, 'The school of Theodore and Hadrian', *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986), 45-72; Michael Lapidge, 'The career of Aldhelm', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 15-69 at 31-48; J. D. Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon glosses and the school of Canterbury', *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987), 17-44.

appeal for charter scribes, but mostly they appreciated the advantages of a more efficient minuscule script.⁶⁶ We will return to the question of where and how they learned it below.

The most important of the three cultural provinces was the central section of Britain, wedged between the Irish Sea and eastern seaboard zones. It enjoyed easy coastal or river access in both directions, particularly at its northern and southern extremities. In this intermediate space, a distinctive culture of writing developed, whose main symptom is a fluid interplay of cultural styles drawn from both the western, Ireland-facing and eastern, Continent-facing parts of the island. This must have built upon local foundations, however modest, for although it remains impossible to identify any substantive contribution to literate culture from the local British Christian communities, an indigenous substrate of local post-Roman Christianity certainly persisted in many places.⁶⁷ It can be illustrated with reference to two of its best-known early centres of Christian learning, Malmesbury (Wiltshire) in the south and Wearmouth-Jarrow (Northumbria) in its northern sector. Both underscore the futility of attempts to identify a single origin point for the cultures of writing and manuscript production in this central zone.

Judging by its founder's name (Máeldub), Malmesbury's earliest religious settlement was Irish, yet its famous early house author, abbot Aldhelm (d. 709/10), was of West-Saxon royal stock. He received part of his education under Adomnán on Iona, and his extensive corpus of Latin writing confirms his deep familiarity with seventh-century Hiberno-Latin literature. He then moved south to Canterbury, where he studied under Theodore and Hadrian, supplementing his learning with the late antique Mediterranean instruction available there and polishing his exceptional Latinity. Additionally, he is known to have visited both Rome and the British communities in Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall), and his correspondence includes exchanges of letters with British and Anglo-Saxon rulers as well as with Irish and

⁶⁶ Patrick Wormald, *Bede and the Conversion of England: the Charter Evidence* (Jarrow Lectures; Jarrow, 1984). See below, 00-00 for further discussion of indebtedness to Roman scribal traditions. [J Crick chapter below, section on 'The Roman experiment']

⁶⁷ Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 30-33; Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Anglo-Saxon scholars.⁶⁸ Aldhelm's wide range of contacts and literary models typifies the synthesising cultural style characteristic of the 'central belt' of Britain.

Wearmouth-Jarrow is famous as the community where Bede spent all except the earliest years of his life, and about whose founder, Benedict Biscop, and first abbot, Ceolfrith, he wrote with such warmth. Together with its Romanising liturgy, architecture and sculpture, its library of patristic texts, including many books fetched from Rome, mark it out as a northern outlier of the eastern seaboard cultural province, with its dependence on the written culture of Italy and Gaul for both texts and scripts. Manuscripts produced there, however, tell a more complex story. On the one hand, the Codex Amiatinus is witness to a perfect mastery of late antique Mediterranean script and modes of book production, and makes a deliberate statement of affiliation to the orthodoxy and leadership of the Roman church (Plate 00). On the other hand, several of the other manuscripts produced there in the eighth century melded Italian and Irish influences in various ways.⁶⁹

In common with many other eighth-century centres of manuscript- and charter- production in Britain, both in the parts under Anglo-Saxon political control and elsewhere, scribes at Wearmouth-Jarrow made frequent use of a minuscule hand which derived from western Britain and Ireland, in preference to both the book hands and documentary cursive scripts current on the Continent at that time. It had grown out of Irish efforts to master the informal late Roman scripts they learned from their British teachers, and then to reorganise them in a way which made it easier to comprehend Latin. As Chapter 00 shows, a characteristic script known as 'insular minuscule' had emerged in the sixth century throughout the Irish Sea cultural province. In addition to its use for the earliest surviving manuscripts written in Ireland, Irish missionaries to Britain and to the Continent exported versions of it wherever they went. On Iona, for example, Dornb ne used it for when he copied Adomn n's Life of Columba within a decade of the author's death in 704 (Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Generalia 1 [CLA VII.998]). The earliest surviving manuscripts from the Welsh margin of the Irish Sea are ninth-century: they confirm that this

⁶⁸ Lapidge, 'Career of Aldhelm'; and 00-00 below. [section on Aldhelm in R Love's chapter]

⁶⁹ M. B. Parkes, *The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow* (Jarrow Lectures; Jarrow, 1982).

characteristic hand was in normal use for Latin and Old Welsh as well as some inscribed stones.⁷⁰

This script had several advantages. A high level of calligraphic regularity could be achieved; it was fairly quick to write; it was economical in its use of parchment; and it was suitable for both Latin and the vernacular. As part of their determination to master Latin, the Irish commonly wrote a word by word translation above or alongside the Latin as a gloss to aid comprehension, without differentiating the hand. And as Old Irish moved from a marginal position of dependency on Latin, to that of an independent written language in its own right, so 'insular minuscule' established itself as one script applicable to two languages.

Two points follow for our understanding of the early cultures of writing in the Anglo-Saxon parts of Britain. In the first place, though heavily indebted to the sixth- and seventh-century examples of writing and book production imported from the Continent, the churches of the south-eastern quadrant of Britain rapidly appreciated the utility of insular minuscule script. Scribes in a wide range of locations throughout central and southern England employed it for documents which were preserved in the archives of Canterbury cathedral, preferring it over the formal, slow majuscule book hands. Wealdhere, bishop of London chose it when he wrote to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury in 704/5; his letter is the earliest extant original letter from in the Latin West, (*ChLA* III.185).⁷¹ Insular minuscule is the autograph hand of two Anglo-Saxon missionaries to the Continent: one, Boniface (d. 754), educated in southwestern England, the other, Willibrord (d. 739), in Northumbria and Ireland, both men who visited Rome and felt the strong pull of its authoritative culture.⁷² It features in many

⁷⁰ Michael Lapidge, 'Latin learning in Dark Age Wales: some prolegomena', in D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith, and E. M. Jope (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies, Oxford 1983* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1986) 91-107; W. M. Lindsay, *Early Welsh Script* (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1912).

⁷¹ Pierre Chaplais, 'The letter from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury: the earliest original 'letter close' extant in the West', in M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (eds.), *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays presented to N. R. Ker* (London: Scolar Press, 1978) 3-23; Wormald, *The charter evidence*.

⁷² Illustrated in Webster and Backhouse (eds.), *The Making of England*, 159-160, nos 123-124.

(though not all) of the extant books written both north and south of the Humber in the eighth and early ninth centuries.

Two of those hold our attention because they contain the earliest continuous Old English. The first is one of the two copies of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* which date from within a decade or so of the author's death in 735, the St Petersburg/Leningrad Bede (St Petersburg, Russian National Library MS Q.v.I.18 [CLA XI.1621]). Made at Wearmouth-Jarrow itself between 731 and 746, it must stand in a very close relationship with Bede's own fair copy. On the lower margin of the page containing the narrative of Cædmon's vision and the Latin account of the words he sang (f. 107r), the scribe carefully entered the Old English version, using a smaller version of the same insular minuscule hand that he used for the main text (Plate 00). We have here the oldest Old English verse extant, the Northumbrian recension of 'Cædmon's Hymn'.⁷³ The second is the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library MS Ll.1.10). This is an early ninth-century prayerbook for private devotion produced somewhere in the midland reaches of the third, central zone, possibly at Worcester. It is written throughout in an elegant insular minuscule but fuses texts, decorative styles and iconographic themes drawn from a wide variety of cultural traditions within Britain, Ireland and as far beyond as, ultimately, the eastern Mediterranean, and synthesises them into a coherent, original creation. It opens with an Old English exhortation to prayer placed by the scribe in order to compose and focus the reader's mind on the religious journey ahead: this is the oldest continuous Old English literary prose.⁷⁴ Both manuscripts demonstrate the ease with which eighth- and ninth-century scribes used insular minuscule interchangeably

⁷³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* IV.24. Colgrave and Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 416-417. See also O. Arngart, *The Leningrad Bede: an eighth-century manuscript of the Venerable Bede's Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum in the Public Library, Leningrad* (Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile; Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1952); and Daniel Paul O'Donnell, *Cædmon's Hymn: a Multimedia Study, Archive and Edition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005) at 225.

⁷⁴ Michelle Brown, *The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-century England* (London: The British Library, 1996) at especially 65, 129-130. For the earliest documentary use of Old English, also in the early ninth century, see below, 00-00 [J Crick's chapter on vernacular grants to Christ Church Canterbury]

for Old English and Latin, a 'language-blindness' which persisted until the Benedictine reforms of the tenth century.⁷⁵

Committing Old English to parchment did not begin with either of these manuscripts, however, and this emerging tradition deserves comment. The communities at Wearmouth-Jarrow and Malmesbury each remembered their respective house author for having composed texts in the vernacular. As Bede lay dying, one of his students reported that he had been dictating a translation "into our mother tongue" of parts of St John's Gospel and excerpts from Isidore of Seville; King Alfred apparently knew of Aldhelm's great reputation as a poet in the vernacular as well as in Latin.⁷⁶ Yet the convention certainly predated these two authors, for as we have seen, glossaries reveal that Old English was acquiring a written form by the late seventh century, if only on a word by word basis.

So how far back did skill in written English reach? Bede, famously, asserted that King Æthelberht of Kent (d. 616) issued "a code of laws after the Roman manner...written in English" immediately after his conversion by Augustine of Canterbury.⁷⁷ Evidently, Bede's eighth-century Canterbury informants knew of written vernacular laws attributed to the first Christian Anglo-Saxon king, but this is not proof that Æthelberht issued such an edict. As preserved in the twelfth-century *Textus Roffensis*, the earliest Kentish laws have orthographic features which may betray Irish influence.⁷⁸ In postulating that Anglo-Saxons first learned how to represent their own language in written form in centres where Irish and Anglo-Saxon scholars studied and taught alongside each other, we may need to look to the monasteries in Ireland to which large numbers of Anglo-Saxon students flocked for their

⁷⁵ Julia Crick, 'English vernacular script', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, I: c. 600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 174-186 at 176-178.

⁷⁶ Cuthbert, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*. Colgrave and Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 581-587, quotation at 582. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum anglorum*, V.190. Michael Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (eds.), *William of Malmesbury, Gesta pontificum Anglorum. The History of the English Bishops* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), at I:506-507.

⁷⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II.5. Colgrave and Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 150-151.

⁷⁸ Lisi Oliver, 'Irish influence on orthographic practice in early Kent', *NOWELE* 33 (1998), 93-113.

education in the central decades of the seventh century. In the multi-lingual environment of communities such as Mayo 'of the Saxons' (Co. Mayo) and Clonmelsh (Co. Carlow), it might not have been such a leap in the dark to replicate in Old English what the Irish had achieved for their own language two generations or so previously.⁷⁹

The history of writing in Britain and Ireland is, then, inextricably intertwined. Writing tells a 'joined-up' story that cannot be contained within parameters defined by language, script, religion or ethnicity. It requires that we transcend national narratives and the barriers of language and tradition, and focus instead on techniques, styles and uses, and on the cultural adaptation which they fostered. It provides a graphic illustration of the way in which early medieval cultural zones intersected and influenced each other, irrespective of political boundaries, religious affiliations or difficulties of language. It is, then, as a multi-lingual world that early medieval Britain and Ireland can best be understood. Culturally influential because ideologically potent, and ideologically potent because culturally influential, writing affords a sensitive index to its development across the four centuries that transformed the late Roman era into the Middle Ages. The following chapters demonstrate how those patterns of influence, appropriation and creativity were repeatedly refashioned in the writing and literature of the next four centuries, to c.1150.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* III.27, IV.4. Colgrave and Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 310-315, 346-349. Discussed by Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 320, 336-337; Pádraig P. Ó Néill, 'The Irish role in the origins of the Old English alphabet: a reassessment', in James Graham-Campbell and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations before the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3-22.

⁸⁰ I am grateful to Dauvit Broun, Julia Crick, Wendy Davies, Richard Gameson, and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for guidance and help with this chapter.

Abbreviations used in this chapter:

- ChLA* Albert Bruckner and Robert Marichal, eds, *Chartae Latinae antiquiores: facsimile-edition of the Latin charters prior to the ninth century* 49 vols (Olten/Dietikon- Zurich: Urs Graf-Verlag, 1954-1990)
- CLA* E. A. Lowe, *Codices latini antiquiores*, 11 vols + supplement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-71)

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Anderson, Alan Orr and Anderson, Marjorie Ogilvie (eds.) *Adomnan's Life of Columba* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1961).
- Bieler, Ludwig, *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae; Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979).
- Colgrave, Bertram and Mynors, R.A.B. (eds.) *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
- Winterbottom, Michael (ed.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Documents* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1978).
- Winterbottom, Michael and Thomson, R. M. (eds.) *William of Malmesbury, Gesta pontificum Anglorum. The History of the English Bishops* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

Secondary Bibliography

- Anderson, Marjorie O., *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980).
- Armstrong, E. C. R. and Macalister, R. A. S., 'Wooden book with leaves indented and waxed found near Springmount Bog, Co. Antrim', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 6th Ser., 10 (1920), 160-166.
- Arngart, O., *The Leningrad Bede: an eighth-century manuscript of the Venerable Bede's Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum in the Public Library, Leningrad* (Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile; Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1952).
- Babcock, Robert, 'A papyrus codex of Gregory the Great's *Forty Homilies on the Gospels* (London Cotton Titus C.xv)', *Scriptorium* 54 (2000), 280-289.
- Blair, John, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Breen, Aidan, 'A new Irish fragment of the *Continuatio* to Rufinus-Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Scriptorium* 41 (1987), 185-204.

- Broun, Dauvit, 'The origin of Scottish identity', in Claus Bjørn, Alexander Grant, and Keith. J. Stringer (eds.), *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Copenhagen: Academic Press, 1994) 35-67.
- Brown, Michelle, *The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-century England* (London: The British Library, 1996).
- Brown, Michelle, 'Writing in the insular world', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, I: c. 600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 121-166.
- Bruce-Mitford, Rupert Leo Scott, *The Art of the Codex Amiatinus* (Jarrow lectures; [Oxford]: Archaeological Association, 1969).
- Campbell, Ewan, 'The archaeology of writing in the time of Adomnán', in Jonathan M. Wooding, et al. (eds.), *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010) 139-144.
- Campbell, Ewan, 'Were the Scots Irish?', *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 285-292.
- Carver, M. O. H., *Portmahomack: Monastery of the Picts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
- Chaplais, Pierre, 'The letter from Bishop Wealdhere of London to Archbishop Brihtwold of Canterbury: the earliest original 'letter close' extant in the West', in M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (eds.), *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays presented to N. R. Ker* (London: Scholar Press, 1978) 3-23.
- Charles-Edwards, Gifford, 'The palaeography of the inscriptions', in Mark Redknap and John Masters Lewis (eds.), *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 1 77-87.
- Charles-Edwards, Gifford, 'The Springmount Bog tablets: their implications for insular epigraphy and palaeography', *Studia Celtica* 36 (2002), 27-45.
- Charles-Edwards, T. M., *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Charles-Edwards, T. M. (ed.), *After Rome* (Short Oxford History of the British Isles, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- Charles-Edwards, Thomas, 'Language and society among the insular Celts AD 400-1000', in Miranda J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge, 1995) 703-736.
- Clarke, Howard B., 'Economy', in Pauline Stafford (ed.), *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c.500-c.1100* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 57-75.
- Coatsworth, Elizabeth, 'Text and textile', in Alastair Minnis and Jane Roberts (eds.), *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007) 187-207.
- Crick, Julia, 'Edgar, Albion and insular dominion', in Donald Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English 959-975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008) 158-170.

- Crick, Julia, 'English vernacular script', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, I: c. 600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 174-186.
- Dumville, David, 'Palaeographical considerations in the dating of early Welsh verse', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 27 (1976-78), 246-251.
- Esmonde Cleary, A. S., *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1989).
- Evans, D. H., Loveluck, Christopher, and Archibald, Marion, *Life and Economy at Early Medieval Flixborough, c. AD 600-1000: The Artefact Evidence* (Excavations at Flixborough; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009).
- Evans, Nicholas, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010).
- Fleming, Robin, *Britain after Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400-1070* (The Penguin History of Britain; London: Allen Lane, 2010).
- Foot, Sarah, 'The making of *Angelcynn*: English identity before the Norman conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 6 (1996), 25-49.
- Forsyth, Katherine, 'Hic memoria perpetua: the early inscribed stones of southern Scotland in context', in Sally M. Foster and Morag Cross (eds.), *Able Minds and Practised Hands: Scotland's Early Medieval Sculpture in the 21st Century* (Leeds: Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2005) 113-134.
- Forsyth, Katherine, 'Literacy in Pictland', in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 33 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 39-61.
- Forsyth, Katherine, 'The Ogham inscription at Dunadd', in Alan Lane and Ewan Campbell (eds.), *Dunadd: an Early Dalriadic Capital* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000) 264-272.
- Fraser, James E., *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
- Gameson, Richard, 'The material fabric of early British books', in idem (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 1: c. 600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 13-93.
- Ganz, David 'The text of the inscription', *Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* <<http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/davidganz>>.
- Handley, Mark A., 'The origins of Christian commemoration in late antique Britain', *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001), 177-199.
- Higgitt, John, 'The stone-cutter and the scriptorium: Early medieval inscriptions in Britain and Ireland', in Walter Koch (ed.), *Epigraphik 1988* (Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Denkschriften, 213 Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988) 149-161.
- Hines, John, 'The runic inscriptions of early Anglo-Saxon England', in Alfred Bammesberger and Alfred Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400-600: Language and History* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1990) 436-455.

- Hughes, Kathleen, 'The Welsh Latin chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and related texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973), 3-28.
- James, Edward, *Britain in the First Millennium* (London: Arnold, 2001).
- Kelly, Eamonn P., Neehan, Bernard, Ó Floinn, Raghnaill, Read, Rolly, and Wallace, Patrick F., 'The Faddan More Psalter', *Archaeology Ireland special supplement* 77 (2006), 1-16.
- Kelly, Fergus, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Early Irish law series; Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988).
- Kennney, James F., *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical. An Introduction and Guide* (reprint edn.; New York: Octagon Books, 1979).
- Keynes, Simon, 'Between Bede and the *Chronicle*: London BL Cotton Vespasian B.vi, fols. 104-9', in Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard (eds.), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 1:47-67.
- King, Heather A., 'An ogham-inscribed antler handle from Clonmacnoise', *Peritia* 20 (2008), 315-322.
- Langford, Paul, 'General Editor's Preface', in T. M. Charles-Edwards (ed.), *After Rome* (The Short Oxford History of the British Isles, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) v-vi.
- Lapidge, Michael, 'The career of Aldhelm', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 15-69.
- Lapidge, Michael, 'Gildas's education and the Latin culture of sub-Roman Britain', in Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984) 27-50.
- Lapidge, Michael, 'Latin learning in Dark Age Wales: some prolegomena', in D. Ellis Evans, John G. Griffith, and E. M. Jope (eds.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies, Oxford 1983* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1986) 91-107.
- Lapidge, Michael, 'The school of Theodore and Hadrian', *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986), 45-72.
- Lindsay, W. M., *Early Welsh Script* (Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1912).
- Lowe, Christopher, *Inchmarnock: An Early Historic Island Monastery and its Archaeological Landscape* ([Society of Antiquaries of Scotland monograph series]; Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2008).
- Mattingly, David, *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC-AD 409* (The Penguin History of Britain; London: Allen Lane, 2006).
- McKitterick, Rosamond, 'Exchanges between the British Isles and the Continent, c. 450-c. 900', in Richard Gameson (ed.), *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, I: c.600-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 00-00.
- McManus, Damian, *A Guide to Ogam* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1991).
- O'Donnell, Daniel Paul *Cædmon's Hymn: a Multimedia Study, Archive and Edition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005).
- Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí, 'Hiberno-Latin Literature to 1169', in idem (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 371-404.

- Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí, 'Ireland, 400-800', in idem (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 182-234.
- Ó Néill, Pádraig P., 'The Irish role in the origins of the Old English alphabet: a reassessment', in James Graham-Campbell and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations before the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 3-22.
- Okasha, Elisabeth 'The Staffordshire Hoard inscription', *Staffordshire Hoard Symposium* <<http://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/elisabethokasha>>.
- Oliver, Lisi, 'Irish influence on orthographic practice in early Kent', *NOWELE* 33 (1998), 93-113.
- Parkes, M. B, 'The palaeography of the Parker manuscript of the *Chronicle*, laws and Sedulius, and the historiography of Winchester in the late ninth and tenth centuries', *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), 149-171.
- Parkes, M. B, *The Scriptorium of Wearmouth-Jarrow* (Jarrow Lectures; Jarrow 1982).
- Parsons, David, *Recasting the Runes: The Reform of the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc* (Institutionen för nordiska språk; Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1999).
- Pearce, John, 'Archaeology, writing tablets and literacy in Roman Britain', *Gallia* 61 (2004), 43-51.
- Pheifer, J. D., 'Early Anglo-Saxon glosses and the school of Canterbury', *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 (1987), 17-44.
- Redknap, Mark and Lewis, John Masters, *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales. Vol. 1, Breconshire, Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Radnorshire and geographically contiguous areas of Herefordshire and Shropshire*, 2 vols. (A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture in Wales; Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).
- Russell, Paul, 'What was best of every language': the early history of the Irish language', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 405-450.
- Scragg, Donald G., 'The nature of Old English verse', in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 55-70.
- Sims-Williams, Patrick, *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain: Phonology and Chronology c.400-1200* (Publications of the Philological Society, 37; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).
- Sims-Williams, Patrick, 'The five languages of Wales in the pre-Norman inscriptions', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 44 (2002), 1-36.
- Sims-Williams, Patrick, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Smith, Julia M. H., *Europe after Rome: a New Cultural History 500-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Stevenson, Jane, 'The beginnings of literacy in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 89c (1989), 127-165.

- Tedeschi, Carlo, 'Osservazioni sulla palaeografia delle iscrizioni britanniche paleocristiane V-VII sec. Contributo allo studio dell'origine delle scritture insulari', *Scrittura e Civiltà* 19 (1995), 67-121.
- Tedeschi, Carlo, 'Some observations on the palaeography of early Christian inscriptions in Britain', in John Higgitt, Katherine Forsyth, and David N. Parsons (eds.), *Roman, Runes and Ogham. Medieval Inscriptions in the Insular World and on the Continent* (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2001) 16-25.
- Thomas, Charles, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (London: Batsford, 1981).
- Webster, Leslie and Backhouse, Janet (eds.) *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Arts and Culture AD 600-900* (London: British Museum Press, 1991).
- Wood, Ian, 'The final phase', in Malcolm Todd (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2004) 428-442.
- Wood, Michael, 'The making of King Aethelstan's empire: an English Charlemagne?', in Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 250-272.
- Woolf, Alex, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', in Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, and Walter Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (The Transformation of the Roman World, 13 Leiden: Brill, 2003) 345-380.
- Woolf, Alex, *From Pictland to Alba 789-1070* (New Edinburgh History of Scotland, 2; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).
- Wormald, Patrick, *Bede and the Conversion of England: the Charter Evidence* (Jarrow Lectures; Jarrow 1984).
- Wormald, Patrick, 'Engla lond: the making of an allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1-24.
- Wormald, Patrick, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).