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Greek in early medieval Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores bilingualism in the area of literary education, that is, the formal study of another language using written documents. Its focus is the study of Greek in early medieval Ireland, in the period from the seventh to the ninth century. Though never absorbed into the Roman Empire, by the seventh century Ireland had thoroughly embraced Christian culture, and with it the prerequisite of Latin literacy. In their study of the Latin language, using late antique school books and commentaries, the monastic schools of early medieval Ireland might be regarded to some extent as inheritors of the Graeco-Roman tradition, and in particular the late antique grammatical tradition. It has long been suggested that the Irish interest in classical languages was not limited to Latin (itself a foreign language), but extended also to Greek. Although the means by which such a knowledge may have been acquired has never been clear, this discussion presents new evidence for the study of Greek in Ireland, and explores how late antique manuals of bilingual Greek–Latin instruction were later reused in circumstances far removed from those of their origins.

Knowledge of Greek in the West is generally held to have declined sharply by the end of the fifth century, when the compulsory efforts of Latin writers Boethius, Macrobius and Marcius Capella provided the main points of access to Greek literary culture for subsequent generations. There are plenty of indications, however, that the Greek language maintained a special prestige. It was recognised as the language of the New Testament and featured on the titulus of Christ's cross. Accordingly it was classified among the 'three sacred languages' (tres linguae sacrae) during the Middle Ages, along with Latin and Hebrew. Augustine regarded these as 'pre-eminent languages', and praised Jerome for his singular attainement in all three. Greek learning was also acknowledged as the foundation of secular scholarship.

The study of Greek among the early medieval Irish, both at home and abroad, has been the subject of a long and often lively debate since Ludwig Traube's seminal article 'O Roma nobilis' (1891), which identified circles of Irish scholars on the Continent in the ninth century, distinguished among other things by their shared interest in Greek. Traube remarked that anyone on the Continent who knew Greek during the time of Charles the Bald [King of the West Franks, 843–877] was either an Irishman or without question had acquired this knowledge from an Irishman, or else the report which surrounded the person with such renown was a fraud. This position found concord with a romantic view of medieval Ireland as a sanctuary for classical learning during the barbarian Dark Ages. The inevitable critical reaction was first articulated by Mario Esposito (1912), who dismissed the methods of earlier writers, characterising knowledge of Greek in Ireland before the ninth century as 'almost non-existent', while that of Irishmen in Carolingian circles (with the exception of Eriugena) was an 'inaccurate and uncritical smearing'. Max Laistner took a more moderate position, concluding that 'Traube's thesis is still sound, if by Irish we understand those who came to the Continent from Columban's time on; for there is no satisfactory evidence that they could have acquired any Greek, apart from a few ecclesiastical terms, in their homeland'.

1 Tresclau en John (ed. Willemce 1954) 117.41.2, and a scriptum Hellenice, Graecae et Latinae, ex Iudaeorum, haec quippe tres linguae ibi praeceptor eminens Hederatu, propter Iudaeos in Dei iure gloriosae: Graecae, propter divinum sapientiam, Latinae, propter Romanos multos et pene omnem terram eruditionem semper impersantes. De cistitiae Dei (ed. Deotta and Kall 1993) 18.43.8. (Hieronymus) homo docetnus et omnis trium linguorium peritus. The term tres linguae sacrae seems to have been coined by laisbre in Etymologiae 9.1.12–3.

2 An Old Irish gloss on the St Gall Priscian comments on a remark in the grammarians' introduction: 'The Latins have such love for the Greeks that they follow even their errors' (Hoffman 1996: vol. 1, 99, vol. 2, 5).

3 Cited in translation by Bescin 1985: 132, who endorses this position.

4 Exemplified in Bescin 1985: 95, citing Fermin-Diez 1875 (in translation): 'Hellenism, banned from the western shores of the Continent, sought refuge further away on the island which had escaped the Roman conqueror: Ireland. The mysticism which constitutes the basis of the Irish character disposed them to philosophical reveries, which explain our ardour for Plato. The study of the Greek language was thus one of the foundations of their education.'

5 Esposito 1912: 689.


8 When considering Greek in the West, my focus is principally outside Italy, which Bischin (1967: 46) characterises as something of an exception.

9 The principal survey is Bescin 1985: 15, with an overview for the eleventh period in Bescin 1988: 3. See also Latiner 1974 and Bischin 1967, who emphasises the activities of medieval Irish scholars. Howlett 1998 and Herren 2010 have more recently surveyed Irish sources.

Irish vernacular evidence has been all but ignored in this long debate. This paper will focus on early Irish glossaries, texts compiled in Ireland from the eighth century, comprising etymological and other notes on several thousand Irish words, very often comparing these with similar-sounding words in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Welsh, Norse, English and (in one case) Pictish. Paul Russell (2000) was the first to show that, in relation to the study of Greek, these texts contain evidence for the availability in Ireland of some of the same sources as those circulating on the Continent in the ninth century. I hope here to identify these sources more closely, and in the process show not only that Greek was indeed actively studied in Ireland, but how the language was studied, and to evaluate how well it was known. My focus here will be on O’Mulconry’s glossary (OM), being the earliest such text and concentrating on Greek far more than any other.

2 EVIDENCE PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED

It may be instructive to outline in brief the evidence for the Irish knowledge of Greek discussed in previous assessments. In the first place, there is almost no reliable evidence for access to native speakers of the language. Mo-Sinu macCu Míin, the abbot of Bangor who died in 610, is recorded as having learnt his computus from ‘a certain learned Greek’. However, nothing is known about this anonymous teacher, and in other cases the term Graecus can be merely synonymous with sapiens. The more significant figures are Theodore of Tarsus, the archbishop of Canterbury sent from Rome in 669, and his companion the abbot Hadrian, formerly of Naples. Bede, writing some sixty years later, tells us that Theodore’s pupils spoke Greek as well as their native tongue, and there were certainly close cultural contacts between Britain and Ireland throughout the period. However, there is little to corroborate Bede’s testimony, and there is no evidence for any continuity of such proficiency in subsequent generations.

The Greek alphabet was certainly widely known, and was tabulated in computistical manuscripts along with its numerical values, the names of the letters and the names of the Greek numbers. The Greek alphabet was also used in abbreviations for nomina sacra: ΔΜ (deum), ΗΗ (HOCOY), ΧΡ (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ), the last example familiar from the illuminated carpet pages marking the opening of Matthew (Christi autem generatio...), and even Irish (KOPKUPETI for Corcu Reti, a population group). The trend of writing Latin in Greek script is further developed a century later in the Book of Armagh (c. 807), which has an entire Latin Paternoster written in Greek letters (fol. 36ra), as well as assorted explicita, page titles and similar notes.

There are just two Irish examples of any continuous Greek written in Greek script, both of which have a liturgical origin. The first is in the Schaffhausen manuscript (n. 17), which concludes (p. 137) with the Greek Paternoster in Greek script. The second is an inscription on a stone monument at Fahan in Donegal, which has been dated to various points between the eighth and eleventh centuries. It records the doxology: ΔΟΞΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΙΜΗ ΠΑΤΡΙ ΚΑΙ ΥΙΟ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ ΑΠΩ ‘Glory and honour to Father and Son and Holy Spirit’.

Individual Greek or Greek-derived words occur frequently in Hiberno-Latin writings of the period, invariably in isolation and frequently in an ostentatious and rather superficial way. The smattering is small enough to allow us to list all the Greek words in an illustrative sample of texts. The hymn Aelw Proser, attributed to Columba (died 597), contains the words

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11 For Næss, 1909 collects some interesting material in a study apparently unfinished. For the languages in order of their frequency of citation. For an overview of early Irish glossaries, see Russell 1988.
12 Cf. Ο Κοινίκι 1982.
14 These tables generally include the numerical letter digamma (as in its medieval form resembling sigma Σ = 6, labelled ειρῶνιον), kappa (Κ = 90) and sampi (Π = 900, labelled τρικόσιον). See, for example, Jones 1943: 181.

16 Latin Christus is given the hybrid abbreviation XPI. On nomina sacra, cf. Lindsay 1955: 403.
17 Schaffhausen, Stadtarchiv, MS Generalia 1, pp. 28, 103b and 472, respectively; ed. Anderson and Anderson 1966.
18 Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 52. This use of script is generally characterised as ‘playful’ or similar. However, there is some consistency. In the Schaffhausen manuscript, Greek script is used both for emphasis (e.g. in explicita) and to mark foreign words, much as italics are used in modern typography. Similarly in the Book of Armagh, its Paternoster in Greek script emphasises a key passage in Jesus’ own words, perhaps alluding to the original language of the Gospel.
19 See Blohm, this volume, on code-switching in liturgical texts.
20 Reproductions of this page are in Benchin 1982: 503 and Benchin 1988b: PL 4.
22 Mcalister 1948: 394–400; id. 1969. Photograph in Benchin 1982: PL 16 40: Confusion of η and ζ (e.g. in πηγή) is very common in the sources discussed here. The Latin equivalent, gloria et honor patri et filio et spiritui sancto, begins the last of a series of anthems following the Gloria in excelsis in the Antiphonary of Bangor (fol. 139). It is the Mozarabic doxology prescribed in the Fourth Synod of Toledo in 643, and Waren (1985: 76–80) has shown that the anthem closely corresponds to the opening of the 'Uphóos (Laudis) in the Greek Euchologion; cf. Hillgarth 1961: 193.
23 I derive these lists from the indices to their editions.
Apostateae, coenodokia, protoplastrum, poliandria. The Antiphonary of Bangor (680–691) contains the Greek or Latinised Greek words agie, agius, bradium, migrologoi, pantes ta erga, proto, protoplastrum and zoen, the last used resourcefully to conclude an abecedarian poem on the abbeys of Bangor. Muirch’s life of Patrick (c. 690) contains one Greek word: antropi. Adomnan’s Vita Columbae includes agonotheta, lithus, machera, omonimum, onoma, protus, sophia, xenium, and his De loci sancti discusses the Greek spelling of Thabor (Θαβόρ) with reference to ‘books of Greek’.

The group of texts whose style is labelled ‘Hisperic’ provides a different picture. These are characterised by an artificial vocabulary of neologisms and nonce words, many coined from Greek and Hebrew. Michael Herren has argued that the Hisperica famina derive from a mid-seventh-century Irish milieu, on grounds of references to Irish speech and ‘Irish oil’, and a small number of coinages perhaps derived from Old Irish words. He lists 117 Greek or Greek-derived words in the A-text of the Hisperica famina, and notes that words not derived from Isidore are found sporadically in some bits of CGL, concluding: ‘What Greek or Hebrew glossaries would have been available to the faminators can only be a matter for the imagination.

Herren (1987) also investigated Greek sources in his edition of other Hisperic poems: the Lorica of Laidcenn, Leiden lorica, Rubiska and Adolphus adelpho meter. The first of these is associated with Laidcenn of Clonfert-Mulloe (died 664). Of over 200 words referring to parts of the body, 86 are traced to Isidore.

There is considerably more evidence for active study of Greek among Irish scholars in ninth-century Carolingian schools. The most striking is a series of bilingual biblical manuscripts. Sedulius Scotus (at Liège from c. 848) wrote a Greek Psalter with Latin interlinear translation. This was more than an exercise in penmanship: Walter Berschin remarks that its supplementary material testifies to the author’s acumen in textual criticism. Similarly the Basel Psalter, the St Gall Gospels and the Codex Boermerianus (Pauline epistles) were all identified by Traube as belonging to the same circle of Irish scholars and associated by him with Sedulius.

Other manuscripts contain grammatical material relating to Greek. Martinus Hiberniensis at Laon possessed a copy of the enormous Greek–Latin Harleian glossary, in a manuscript also containing Greek idioms and paradigms, lists of Greek words in Priscian and in the poems of Martinus’ contemporary Erriugena (John Scottus), and other notes. A similar miscellany may be found in the anonymous scholar’s notebook from Reichenau. Its eight folios contain a short Greek–Latin glossary with declensional paradigms, a paradigm of the Greek article (very faulty) and of the noun καθαριστής, as well as Latin hymns, Irish poetry and miscellaneous notes on Latin grammar, exegesis and astronomy.

Erriugena is credited with a knowledge of Greek far exceeding that of his contemporaries, as is evident in his translation from Greek of the theological works of Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor. His achievement must have been facilitated in part by his study of Macrobius’ comparative grammar De differentiis et societatis Graeci Latinique urbei; his extracts providing an important witness for its reconstruction.

So the evidence points to a considerable disparity between the study of Greek in Ireland and that among Irishmen on the Continent, supporting Laister’s view of Greek in Ireland being almost non-existent. But how

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44 The term is translated nuna gloria ‘vainglory’ in Anglo-Saxon glossaries (cf. Stevenson 1999: 319); the substitution of or for er (in the element kevo–‘empty’) is a classicising hypercorrection, probably under influence of coenodokia (‘monastic community’).
45 Cf. Stevenson 1999, who assigns the poem to Isidore in the second half of the seventh century.
48 From the index in Reeves 1857.
49 huan orthographic vocubuli in libro Graecastico in monast. (2.27). On this basis, Maniusii 1911–1931: 1–56 inferred that Adomnan had learnt Greek.
53 The dates and authorship of the Rubiska and Adolphus adelpho meter are a matter of speculation, with Herren suggesting Bobbio c. 800 and possibly Irlandia in the ninth or tenth centuries respectively; given this uncertainty I will pass over them here.

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44 Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 8097 (Vedere).
45 Berschin 1988a: 149.
47 St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 48 (images via www.e-codices.unifr.ch).
48 Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, MS G. A 141b (images at http://digital.dub-dresden.de/ sammlungen/titeldaten/1749914/87). A direct connection to Sedulius is no longer supported, and Berschin 1988a: 11–14 thought that this was tacitly revised by Traube in his later work.
49 See p. 186 below.
51 Stift Paul im Lavanttal (Carinthia), MS 60b (images at http://hildesheim.nistram.de/schultheis/).
52 Ostdamp 1978: 381–391 identified the scribe as that of the Karlsruhe Priscian.
53 31–41 also found in Laon, 300–306f, ed. Purseging 1888; cf. Dionysius 1998: 11–24. Geurts (CGL II xxviii) identified the first page of the Reichenau text (not present in Laon) as the earliest fragment of the bilingual glossary entitled Glossae Serbii.
54 His name is a play on Graugama ‘Graugama’ ‘Graugama’ ‘Graugama’, substituting Είρη ‘Ireland’.
55 These translations in turn influenced his own philosophical work, the Perihermea.
much of this is down to disparity of evidence. In fact, very few manuscripts
survive from early medieval Ireland at all. With a small number of excep-
tions, the extant manuscripts are mostly scriptural and liturgical books.
However, we do have a large corpus of Irish-language material in later
medieval manuscripts, much of which can be dated linguistically to the
same period as that of the Carolingian manuscripts discussed above. And
this evidence may help to bridge the gap.

3 GREEK IN IRISH ETYMOLOGICAL TRACTS

O’Mulconry’s glossary is the modern title given to a work found in an Irish
manuscript of 1572,44 with three other fragmentary witnesses of similar date.
The language of the core part of the text, however, has been dated to the
late seventh or early eighth century.45 The glossary presents etymologies for
about 880 Irish words,46 very frequently deriving these from Latin, Greek
or Hebrew. It begins:

incipit discreprio de origine Scotiae linguae quam congregauerunt
religiosi uiri, adiunctis nominibus ex Hebr<ae> into H<ae>ronini
et tractationibus, i.e. Ambrosi et Cassiani et Augustini et Eisi
dorii, Virgili, Prisciani, Commianni, Ciceronis, necnon per letteras Graeco-
rum, i.e. Atticae, Doricae, Eoliciae ling<ae>, quia Scoti de Graecis
originem duexerunt, sic et ling<ae> art.47

Here begins a description of the origin of the Irish language which
religious men compiled, having combined Jerome’s Hebrew names and
[other] discussions, i.e. by Ambrose and Cassian and Augusti
ne and Isidore, Virgil, Priscian, Commianus, Cicero; and also by
means of Greek literature, i.e. in the Attic, Doric and Aeolic lan-
guage, because the Irish derive their origin from the Greeks, and thus
too their language.

The sources stated fall into three groups coinciding with the three sacred
languages. Hebrew is accounted for by Jerome’s tract on Hebrew names.
 Authorities given for Latin are four Church Fathers and then (dropping

44 The Yellow Book of Lecan: Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS 1518 (H.2.16), cols. 88–122. The
 text was published, without translation, in Stokes 1908. Reference numbers, prefixed ‘OM’, are
 from this edition: Paul Russell, Sharon Abrahmstok and the present author have been engaged in
 editing this and related texts as part of the Early Irish Glossaries Project. Transcriptions and links to
 manuscript images, where available, can be accessed at: www.ucc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/.

45 Mac Neill 1910–1932. It is clear that the text suffered in transmission. Discussion of corruptions and
 problems of interpretation is avoided here, but will be treated in depth in the forthcoming editions
 (previous note).

46 It is not always clear where a glossary entry begins or ends, making any count somewhat arbitrary.

47 adiunctis, adiunctis MSS, abiscerant, abiscerant v.l.

the conjunction et four secular authorities. By contrast, the sources for
Greek are unnamed.

About 246 entries (about 28 per cent) contain etymologies for Irish
words from Latin, and many of these posit relationships that are still
borne out. Irish alminn ‘pleasant’ is derived from Latin amnus (OM 79)
and aine ‘fasting’ from iterntia (OM 80), which are genuine borrowings
from Latin into Irish. Irish ceilih ‘blind’ from Latin cecus (OM 196) and
ingen ‘nail’ from unguis (OM 720) associate words which we now regard
as Indo-European cognates (PIE *hakera-, *higan-). Of the 192 entries
(about 22 per cent) which provide etymologies from Greek words, very few
identify any real linguistic relationships, not surprisingly given the absence
of language contact between Greek and Irish, except through Greek words
borrowed into Latin. The first example below recognises one such case,
showing awareness of the original sense of basilica < βασιλική ‘royal’.
The second distinguishes the original Greek sense of the Latin borrowing
gymnasion:

OM 1821 Baslecc i.e. a basil<ca> Grece, ecclesia Latine, tech rig nime.
Baslecc ‘church’, i.e. from βασιλική in Greek, ecclesia in Latin, house
of the King of heaven.

OM 1755 Bădūd ondi a batalia i.e. gymnasia i.e. noctifercithid cēll.
Bădūd ‘a submerging, defeat’, from bataula, i.e. γυμνασία, i.e.
naked exerciser.48

More commonly, however, Irish and Greek words are paired on the basis
of formal similarity, and some additional explanation is supplied to bridge
the semantic gap. For example:

OM 2221 Cerd grece cires i.e. manus ... ar each dagniit lāmah
is cerd dongairther i.e. lāmdae.

Cerd ‘craft’, in Greek χήρας, i.e. ‘hands’ ... for every skill which hands
perform is called a craft, i.e. handwork.

This is, of course, typical of medieval etymology, and goes back to Varro
and beyond to the Greek grammatical tradition. As Mark Amsler points

44 The orthography of Latin words (e.g. bataula = bataula) is generally non-classical and very likely
subject to normal corruption in places. I retain the manuscript spellings here, but for clarity give
classical forms in translations. The Irish translation of γυμνασία is inaccurate, rendering it as though
γυμναστής.

48 See Amsler 1899 for a full discussion.
out, it is precisely this 'extra-systemic justification' that invokes the wrath of modern linguists. The real value of this material in the present context is that, with nearly 200 such entries citing Greek words, we can treat them as a corpus with which to build some coherent profile of sources and to appreciate how these sources were used. Isidore of Seville is the fourth Latin authority in the prologue, and his influence is very clear throughout the glossary. His Etymologias was well known in Ireland soon after its completion in 636, and his etymological method must have been a model for the Irish glossary compilers. Passages from Isidore are cited frequently in the text, and two entries mention him by name. One entry cites a passage which is corrupt in Isidore's manuscript tradition:

**OM 126**: Brat grecce brathin lamminas a tenuitate.

*Brat* 'cloak', in Greek *brathin*, sheet, from [its] thinness.

*cf. Etym. 16.18.2: brattea dicitur tenuissima lamina, ήπτο τού βραθ-τοι, qui est δυσμεταστοχία crepitandi, ή ἄπτο τοῦ βραττών* lamina.

The thinnest sheet [of metal] is called *brattea* from *βραθέων* [cf. βράθω 'clamour'], which is onomatopoeia for rattling, or from [βραττόν], a sheet.

It should be no surprise to find Isidore used, not least because his work circulated widely in the early Middle Ages, but also because he cites hundreds of Greek words in his text. About seventy Greek words cited in the glossaries may be traced to Isidore. However, the Irish compiler's enthusiasm for mining such words sometimes leads him astray. In the following entry he misidentifies an uncommon Latin word in his source as Greek:

**OM 415**: Ératic grecc eircisundula diuiiciu communis rei.

*Ératic* 'payment, compensation', in Greek, *eircisundula* [division of inheritance], division of common wealth.

*cf. Etym. 1.25.9–10: herciscunda enim apud ueteres diuiisio nuncupabatur.*

For division was called *herciscunda* by the ancients.

Perhaps a more telling entry is the following:

**OM 375**: Égem, egemon Grece, dux Latine, quia est uox (<quae) ducit omnes quod uactit. Vel égem ab éga i. capra, quia clamat in morte, unde dicitur: Egium mare i. di labrai thondi. Namm inter Tenedum (<et Chium) saxum (<est in> mare simile capre, quam Greci egam dicunt.

*Égem* 'a shout', ὑγείω<ν in Greek, leader *dux* 'leader' in Latin, because it is the voice which leads all to where it goes. Or *égem* from *α'γγα* i.e. 'goat', because it shouts in death: from which the Aegean Sea is named, i.e. from the sounds of a wave. For between between Tenedos and Chios there is a stone in the sea similar to a she-goat, which the Greeks call *egem*.

The second part of the etymology links Irish *égem* 'a shout' and Greek *α'γγα* (apparently on the basis some curious animal lore), and incidentally cites *Etym. 13.16.5* on the name of the Aegean sea. The transcription *e* for *α* reflects contemporary Greek pronunciation, which prevails in these texts. Isidore cites the word *éf',* 'goat' in its accusative case. However, the compiler treats this as a first-declension Latin noun, and then goes on to hypercorrect Isidore by adding a Latin accusative ending -n. This indicates that not only was he unfamiliar with this basic word, but he was probably unaware of the morphology of Greek consonant-stem nouns.

The second authority to feature prominently as a source for Greek in the glossaries is that named Commanianus, which appears to be an error for Comminianus, under which name the grammarians Chasius was transmitted in Insular circles. The author is also cited by name in the main text:

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58. On Isidore in Ireland, see Heselin 1990. The *Etymologias* was the authority most often cited in the corpus of 9,422 glosses in the St Gall codex of Priscian; cf. Hofmann 1996: 170.


60. *OM 114* (*Etym. 14.4.3*), OM 292 (*Etym. 15.3.3*). In the latter his abbreviated name was recognized in Mac Neill 1910: 1912: 119.

61. Similarly *OM 393*, referring to *merum* 'pure' (found in *Etym. 3.42.4*, etc.), and OM 731, referring to *elixium* (probably a late form of *belism* 'bay (colour)') and citing *Elynm. 19.28.7*. These Latin terms are not described as Greek by Isidore, though the Irish glossary compiler assumes them to be so. A similar confusion over *merum* occurs in the Munich Compius, an Irish computistical tract (as noted in Bischoff 1967: 240).

62. This must ultimately reflect contact with native speakers of Greek, though not necessarily directly; see Moran 2002. The first etymology, drawing on the tenuus parallels between *égem* and *ὑγείω<ν*, *dux* and *α'γγα* may be an echo of Priscian (*Gl. v. 6.4–5*: *uncum dicit ex ut vel unco unco, ut dux a ducendo, vel őpó τοώ βασίω, ut qui desiderum place*).

63. Alternatively, the spelling *egem* may reflect the remodelling which took place in the Greek declensional system whereby an accusative ending -n spread to consonant stems. I am grateful to Patrick James for this suggestion.

OM 519: Fer a uiro, i.e. uir a uirtute licent. Cominius dicit: uirus unde uir appellatur.

Fer 'man' from uir 'man', i.e. uir from uirtus 'virtue', though Cominius says: uirus 'noxious fluid, semen', from which uir is named.


Charisius compiled his Ars grammatica around the middle of the fourth century, and it is clear that his grammar was intended to teach Latin to Greeks. He frequently includes Greek translations in lists of Latin words illustrative of points of Latin grammar, as in the following extract discussing the genitive formation of certain Latin nouns:

sedes ['seat'] ἐπικ σείς, strages ['slaughter'] σύμπτωτος σομάτων stragis, siewes ['fence, hedge'] γραμμυσ σεις, wallis ['valley'] φάραγγις wallis, uerres ['male swine, boar'] κέπιτας βίβοτης uerres, rupes ['precipice'] ἐπιβομβικος rupis, scribes ['ditch'] βάδους φυτεις scriobis, torques ['collar'] μυκικος δέρνος torquis.

The pedagogical strategy extends beyond merely explaining unfamiliar Latin words. This kind of grammar contrasts significantly with the Latin grammars written for Roman schoolboys, epitomised in the work of Aelius Donatus. Donatus' work is sparse, mostly concerned with explaining grammatical terminology, categorising the parts of speech, and providing clear examples of tropes, semeiosis, barbarisms, and so on. In his Ars minor, he provides a paradigm for a single verb only (μόος). After all, his pupils could already speak Latin, they just needed to learn to speak and write correct Latin. Greek students, on the other hand, needed to build their vocabulary and learn the morphology of a wide range of Latin words. The same situation later pertained in the early medieval West, and vocabulary-building was a particular imperative in those areas where learners did not already speak a variety of Late Latin or Proto-Romance as their native tongue. Is it not surprising, therefore, to find Charisius being used in Ireland to teach Latin. What is more striking is to find him used to learn Greek.

66 Where the Greek translations comprise two words, the second word is sometimes a modifying noun in the genitive (σύμπτωτος σομάτων 'collapse of bodies'), βάδους φυτείς 'ditch for planting'), sometimes a synonym (e.g. μυκικος δέρνος (LS) u. βίβοτης (LS)), both with a sense 'neck ornament'). In the case of uerres 'male swine, boar', βίβοτης may serve to restrict the sense of κέπιτας, which may refer to either gender, to masculine (LS) explains the word 'stallion, Glottaristos), referring to CGL II, 480 βιβοτης αδημονικος'.

OM 318: Deo grece doriforas i. satillites.

Deo 'base, unfree', in Greek δοριφόρος, i.e. attendant.


But some more serious misunderstandings could arise as a result of the change of the text's intended use. Reverse-engineering a dictionary can be a fraught process, particularly when there is not an exact equivalence on both sides. Two Greek words translating a single Latin term may be either synonyms or one coherent phrase. Word division can also be challenging, as in the entries below:

OM 140: Beim grece bemandro i. paus.

Beim 'a beat, blow, strike', in Greek βημα ένδρος, i.e. a step.


OM 205: Caitre Grece cantabato i. sentes i. deilggi...  
Cain[e] 'satrist' (1), in Greek cantabato, i.e. sentes, i.e. thorns...


Isidore and Charisius would together account for about a hundred, or roughly half, of the Greek words cited in O'Mulconry. The other authorities named in the prologue occasionally offer some parallels, but fail to fill the remaining gap, though one notable parallel occurs with a single short and enigmatic entry:

65 Similarly OM 580 δραμ (‘slope’) Grece formen i. wallis (cf. Charisius 46:15: wallis (piπορευς, wallis) and OM 53 Argg [‘here’] Grece indoro... (cf. Charisius 46:15 in. indoro indoro, though the sense of the latter entry is unclear.
66 Compare Dionisioti 1988: 6-10 on the origins of the Latin-Greek Philoxenus glossary.
67 The first pair of Greek words comprise a noun followed by a qualifying adjective, the second two synonyms. MacNeill 1950-1952: 189 argued that passus 'step' was here misunderstood by the glossary compiler as the perfect passive participle (of passus) 'having suffered' (based on the frequently violent connotation of beim). Alternatively, he may have had the best of footsteps in mind: the context within a list of nouns in Charisius would reinforce this interpretation.
OM 160: Brīathar insce apud Eoles.

Briathor, ‘word’ in Aegolic.

Briathor and insce both mean ‘word’ in Old Irish. Stokes added the note: ‘An Aegolic ἤβρητος seems intended; cf. El[ean] ἦβρητρα’.66 The attested Aegelic ἤβρητος ‘orator’ (Attic-Ionic ἤβρητος) provides a closer formal match.67 Latin grammarians tended to regard the digamma as characteristic of Aegolian Greek.68 Priscian is the only one to note that in Aegolic texts β tends to be written for ἤ before π at the start of words:

in b etiam solet apud Aegolius transire ἤ digamma, quotiens ab π incipit diction, quae solet aspirari, ut [ἐ]βρητορ βρητωρ discunt, quod digamma nisi vocali praeposito et in principio syllabae non potest.69

The Aegolians change ἤ to β when a word begins with aspirated π; thus for ἤβρητος they said βρητως, because digamma can only be placed at the start of a syllable and before a vowel.

Although the entry relies on a convenient blurring of the distinction between ἤβρητος ‘speaker’ and ἤβρητα ‘speech’, it would appear to justify the prologue’s claim not only to use Priscian, but that the Irish language derived from Greek dialects including Aegolic.

So far, we have traced only about half of the sources for Greek words in the Irish glossary. In going further, we might recall that the actual stated source for Greek is not a named author at all, but a rather vague reference to litterae Graecorun (recalling Adomnán’s reference to lībus Graecice). This is compatible with the use of anonymous Greek–Latin glossaries. Such texts are often invoked as a last resort in source analysis, and the genre tends to be treated by scholars as something of an amorphous mass. While the tradition of glossing and glossary-compiling goes

66 Stokes 1900: 241.
67 Going on the date of O’Mulconry, it is possible that briathor would originally have been written (and pronounced) brívher. This early form of the word also occurs in the Irish Priscian glosses: cf. Strachan 1903.
68 E.g. Pomponius’ commentary on Donatus (GL v 105.3–4): quid est digamma? Graeci habet varias longas, ien et una longa quae dicitur Aegolica. apud ilios Aegolici in una littera quae appellator digammas, quasuis duas gamma superponit. ‘What is digamma? The Greeks have various longs; moreover there is one letter which is called Aegolic. Among those Aegolians there is a letter which is called digamma, like two gammas superimposed.’
69 GL ii 18.5. In his edition, Hertz did not print the digamma before ἤβρητος, which I give in brackets here and I think makes more sense in the context. This is also the reading found in the Irish St Gall manuscript, and the same passage is paraphrased by the glossator; cf. Hoffman 1986: 1126/11. 43. Allen 1968: 48 notes that this spelling (β for ἤ) is found in texts of Sappho and other Lesbian poets.

back at least to Hellenistic times, the medieval transmission of bilingual Greek–Latin glossaries appears to have its roots in the early centuries AD.70 The surviving corpus may be divided into two well-defined groups. The first, known as idiomata, lists peculiarities in the comparative grammar of Greek and Latin.71 Idiomata focus in particular on the nominal class, and are grouped into categories listing nouns with different genders in Latin and Greek (idiomata generum), verbs which govern different cases (idiomata casuum), and defective nouns (singulatae/pluralia tantum).72 The categories are in turn subdivided under headings such as apud Latinos masculina, apud Graecos feminina (e.g. hic adventus ἡ παροικια), apud Latinos feminina, apud Graecos neutrarea (e.g. haec aqua τό υδρω), and so on. Such lists are also associated with Latin grammarians such as Chassius, who makes references to idiomata being among his sources.73

The second major category of Greek–Latin glossarial material is known as hermenewmatia (Latin interpretatio).74 These derive from late antique classroom texts intended for elementary bilingual instruction.75 Carlotta Dionisotti divided their constituent parts into four main elements.76 The first two are word-lists, one alphabetical with a particular focus on verbs (including inflected forms), the other organised into class lists (capitula) covering topics, such as names of pagan gods and goddesses, the heavens, houses and temples, feast days, sacrifices, winds, parts of the body, and so on. The third, perhaps most characteristic, element is a colloquium between master and pupil, consisting of rudimentary exchanges on topics.
concerning the classroom environment and daily routine. A final part comprises extracts of texts for reading practice.77

Besides the idiomata and hermeneumata, two major dictionaries survive from the early medieval period. The Harleian Greek–Latin glossary is a massive lexicon, running to about 270 pages in Georg Goetz’s edition.78 It is found in an eighth-century Italian manuscript that once belonged to Nicholas of Casa;79 nothing is known of its history between the eighth and fifteenth centuries. A copy, however, is preserved in Laon 444, the manuscript owned by Martinus Hibernensis.80 Joseph Vendryes 1904 observed that this manuscript contains misplaced quire signatures written in Old Irish, indicating that its exemplar was organised by an Irishman, and raising at least the possibility that it might have been written in Ireland. The second major dictionary, known as Pseudo-Philoxenus, is the only Latin–Greek lexicon to survive from this period, originally compiled for Greek speakers needing to read Latin.81

Russell noted that the rigidly formulaic citation of Greek in Irish glossaries (X Greek, Y Latin) has affinities with the format of Greek–Latin glossaries.82 He observed that the bilingual glossaries published in CGL it offered a potential source for many entries that could not otherwise be traced, and in particular the large Harleian glossary. Russell suggested that there was a ‘strong likelihood... that a version of this glossary, or material closely related to it, was available to the compilers of the material which ended up in the early Irish vernacular glossaries’.83

Was the Harleian glossary available in Ireland? The implications are not small: the Harleian glossary has been described as the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae of its day;84 if such a resource were really available in Ireland as early as the seventh century it would substantially change our picture of the knowledge of Greek in Ireland at that time.

77 Goetz published five major hermeneumata in vol. iii of CGL: Hermeneumata Leidensia, Amploniana, Monacensis, Einsidlensia, Montepesulana. He also included, under the heading hermeneumata uriae, several fragments, extracts and other material derived from lost texts, including lost fragments prefixed by Stephanus. For a very useful table of contents and manuscripts, see Dionisiotti 1982b: 87, revised in Dionisiotti 1988: 16–28. The Leiden version was recently edited in Flammini 2004. A new edition and study is soon to be published; see Dickey 2012; this book appeared too late for me to consult it.

78 CGL iii, 213–483. It is also referred to (after Stephanus) as Pseudo-Cyril or the Cyrillic glossary, to be distinguished from the Byzantine lexicon of the same name.


81 Printed in CGL iii, 213–212; edited, with source analysis, in Lindsay et al. 1916–1917: iii, 128–291.

82 Russell 2000: 411. The invariable abbreviation in manuscripts of Graece, Latine further underlines this formularic character. I expand g and similar here with the medieval spelling Greek.


Table 8.2  Glossaries in CGL ii–iii with most entries matching O’Mulanory (untraced sources)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
<th>CGL</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Matches</th>
<th>Avg/page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Glossarium Leidense</td>
<td>ii 308–421.21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harleian (Cyriacus) glossary</td>
<td>ii 233–483</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Monacensis</td>
<td>i 119–220</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Montepessulanus</td>
<td>i 281–343</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philo lexus glossary</td>
<td>ii 3–212</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Leidensis</td>
<td>i 1–72.45</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Stephani</td>
<td>ii 347–90</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Stephani i</td>
<td>ii 438–67.1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Glossae Bernenses</td>
<td>ii 487–506.4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Amploniana</td>
<td>ii 77–94</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Glossae Vaticanae</td>
<td>ii 506–31.31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. Einsidletia</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Frag. Bruxellense</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Stephani 2</td>
<td>ii 467–74.48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiomata (Paris 3792)</td>
<td>ii 487–506</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glossae Serui Grammatici</td>
<td>ii 507–33.28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glosses from Laron 444</td>
<td>ii 554–44.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. Medicobonica Vetustiora</td>
<td>ii 535–563</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiomata (Naples iv.A.8)</td>
<td>ii 537–48</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

seventy-eight) even though it is less than one tenth of its size (twenty-three pages), and Fragmentum Bruxellense, which shares twenty-one entries in under five pages.

I have already argued that both Isidore and Charisius were used directly by the compiler of O’Mulaney, and these sources furnish about half of the Greek words found in that glossary. Many of these words also occur in the Greek–Latin glossaries, and it is of course very possible that our author came across the same terms in more than one source. But where words occur in Isidore or Charisius, they hardly constitute useful evidence for the use of Greek–Latin glossaries. Accordingly, Table 8.2 lists correspondences for words otherwise not accounted for (ordered by number of correspondences).

In this context, the Glossarium Leidense, already noted above, appears to be far more significant. It contains more of these entries than any other (including the Harleian glossary), despite being one of shortest glossaries in CGL. The text is found in Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS VLF 26 (Amiens, s. viii), the earliest surviving manuscript of any of the hermeneumata. In fact, it represents the partial reworking of a hermeneumata text into a conventional alphabetical glossary, and its original form is preserved in a later manuscript, Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS 1828–1830 (s. x). This is the text printed by Goetz as Fragmentum Bruxellense, and although the shortest text printed in CGL ii or iii (fewer than five pages), it has the highest average correspondence of any. It seems likely, then, that the hermeneumata text available to the author of O’Mulaney was much more similar to that represented in Goetz’s Glossarium Leidense/Fragmentum Bruxellense than to the Harleian lexicon. It may be significant that the Brussels manuscript was written in England, the only hermeneumata manuscript with an Insular provenance.

If the use of Isidore, Charisius and the Brussels Hermeneumata together provides the most economical account of the sources for O’Mulaney, this still leaves about forty-five entries (roughly a quarter) untraced. Some of these occur in various parts of CGL, without any particular pattern evident. Some could potentially have been derived from the works of Servius, Martinus Capella and other authors, although cumulative evidence pointing to dependence on one or other work is similarly lacking. I have been unable to trace a few words to any printed Latin source. This is perhaps not surprising. Of all genres of text, glossaries may have suffered the vicissitudes of manuscript transmission more than most, generally lacking the authority of either of a named author or a non-generic title (other than glossae, interpretamenta, or similar). We can be sure that many early glossary sources no longer survive. Indeed, the Brussels Hermeneumata is partially a case in point. The elements that survive are fragments, lacking the usual colloquia or reading passages, and an earlier, more complete, version may well have accounted for several more entries in the Irish glossary.

What about other bilingual texts? I have noted above (pp. 176–177) the existence of bilingual ninth-century Irish manuscripts of the Psalter, Gospels and Pauline epistles, as well as an early eighth-century Paternoster in Greek only (p. 175), which might relatively easily have been converted into such a bilingual. Could the remaining Irish glossary entries have been derived from the study of such a text? The very restricted range of words cited in the Irish glossary would indicate that these were not culled from a continuous text, however. There is a preponderance of nouns in particular (about 70 per cent), with the remainder mostly verbs, and a handful of adjectives, adverbs and prepositions. The grammatical forms are similarly

8) Goetz printed the Brussels capitula only under the heading (CGL ii 393–398.39).
restricted, nouns being almost always in the nominative singular, verbs in the first person singular present indicative active, with a smaller number of imperatives, infinitives and present participles. If we argued that the Greek words cited are normalised versions of oblique forms found in running text, we would need to demonstrate a knowledge of Greek grammar which the glossaries do not support. And there are no indications of declensional errors, or other grammatical mistakes that might be expected in any such process of normalisation. The evidence instead points to the use of vocabularies and Latin texts citing Greek words in isolation.

4 CONCLUSIONS: KNOWLEDGE OF GREEK

Based on the sources identified above, how do we assess the knowledge of Greek evident in the work of the glossary compiler? On the face of it, 192 words in O’Molconry’s glossary does not seem to amount to very much. The original tally may have been somewhat higher, allowing for its faulty transmission and in particular the fact that only the first half of the glossary appears to have survived (the number of entries falls off very sharply after letter I).

Even so, this is to miss the point. For the author did not set out to write a text about Greek at all, but instead to produce an etymological tract exploring the origins of Irish words. As mentioned, these etymologies draw in not just Greek, but Latin and Hebrew, and also all of the languages spoken in Britain and Ireland in the early medieval period. At a time when medieval Irish historians were attempting to reconcile traditional accounts of Irish history with received Christian and classical traditions (by positing a Greek origin for the Irish race, for example), students of language were trying to understand the relationship of Irish to classical and biblical languages, as well as those of their neighbours. The Irish glossaries might thus be considered as an early stage in the history of comparative linguistics.

Accordingly, the compiler cites only Greek words that suit his purpose, that is, Greek words that correspond roughly with Irish words in both sound and sense. We may take it that not every Greek word known would answer to an Irish word in this way (even allowing for the broad parameters of ancient etymology), and that the compiler must have drawn on a stock of Greek many multiples greater than that cited in the text.

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To build a truer picture of the extent of Greek known to the compiler, we must extrapolate from the evidence of the sources. Isidore and Charisius both contain large amounts of Greek vocabulary. Neither source, however, was intended to teach Greek. Isidore aimed to provide enough Greek to explain the etymology of Latin words, while Charisius supplied Greek words as a crib to those who knew the language already, in order to aid their study of Latin vocabulary. We have seen, in both cases, that confusion could arise in the use of these texts by Irish scholars for a purpose for which they were not designed.

Certainly, with the range of vocabulary in these sources being largely restricted to nouns in the nominative singular, the potential to read continuous Greek would have been very limited. The evidence for the availability of hermeneumata, however, suggests that some more progress in the language may have been possible. After all, these were texts written specifically for language learners. Whether originally composed for Greek-speaking students of Latin or vice versa, the parallel texts in both languages closely correspond, and could therefore have been applied to either scenario. Their word-lists were intended specifically to supply common vocabulary, and the conversation texts were pedagogically oriented: simple sentences, repetition and variation, introduction to basic grammar.

The overall picture, therefore, points to some passive knowledge and at best very basic reading ability. Dionisotti warns against evaluating such knowledge in absolute terms: “We should beware of... creating a strange anachronism between the "use of glossaries", on the one hand, and "real knowledge of Greek", on the other — as if a Westerner could wake up in the morning knowing the meaning of Greek words without learning them from somewhere.”

The main challenge for anyone attempting to acquire a reading knowledge of Greek in this period was the absence of sources for grammatical information, particularly in relation to the verbal system. This was later discovered in Macrobius’ comparative grammar of the Greek and Latin verb, excerpted by Eriugena in the ninth century, and the contemporary interest in producing bilingual biblical manuscripts suggests that this was another avenue into a more advanced study of Greek. The etymological

87 A search of the text of Isidore on the CETEDOC CD-ROM returns about 1,000 passages citing Greek words.
88 Dionisotti 1988. 2. Vendryes (1913: 221) expressed a similar point (referring to Cormac mac Cuilennain, to whom the related Irish glossary Sancti Cermoch is attributed): “En que vont dire M. E. E. F. quando il s'oublie qu'il est grec, il est indubitable que Cormac savait du grec.” (Italics as printed.)
tracts compiled in Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries show a very resourceful use, and minute study, of all available material containing information on Greek, and provided a foundation of learning on which later Irish scholars were to build.⁹

⁹ Part of this research was funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

CHAPTER 9

An habes linguam Latinam? Non tam bene sapio
Views of multilingualism from the early medieval West

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I CAROLINGIAN GAUL AND IRELAND

When Charlemagne came to power in the second half of the eighth century AD, he rewrote the existing written laws, had the unwritten laws of the Germanic tribes and their ancient barbaric poems written down, and began the composition of a grammar of his native language; Einhard, his biographer, writing c. 817–836, relates:

post susceptum imperiale nomen, cum aduerteret multa legibus populi sui deceae – nam Franci duas habent leges, in plurimis locis ulde diuerras – cogitavit quae decrant addere et discrepancia unire, praua quaque ac perperam prolatas corrigere, sed de his nihil aliud ab eo factum est, nisi quod paucis capitulis, et ea imperfecta, legibus addidit. omnium tamen nationum, quae sub eius dominatu erant, iura quae scripta non erant describere ac literis mandari fecit. item barbara et antiquissima carmina, quibus uterum regum actus et bella canebantur, scripsit memoriaeque mandavit. inchoauit et grammaticam patrii sermonis.

After assuming the imperial title [Charles] realizing that there were many deficiencies in the laws of his own people – for the Franks have two sets of laws that differ tremendously at a number of points – decided, therefore, to fill in what was lacking, to reconcile the disagreements, and also to set right what was bad and wrongly expressed. He did nothing more about this than to add a few items to these laws, but even those in an imperfect state. But he did direct that the unwritten laws of all the peoples under his control should be gathered up and written down. [Charles] also [ordered] that the very old poems, in which the deeds and wars of ancient kings were sung, should be written down and preserved for posterity. He began [as well] a grammar of his own language.¹

¹ Einhard, Vita Karoli Magni §39 (ed. Holder-Egger 1911: 33; translation in Dutton 1998: 34). This probably refers to when he assumed sole power in 771 rather than when he came to joint power.
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