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MULTILINGUALISM IN THE
GRAECO-ROMAN WORLDS

EDITED BY
ALEX MULLEN AND PATRICK JAMES
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CHAPTER 8
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 tenth 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 Marcellus 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 classed 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 attainment 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.

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1 Tractatus de John (ed. Willems 1954) 177–194; et esse scriptum Hebraice, Graeco et Latinae: res Iudaorum, hoc quippe tres linguae ibi praeceps eminens: Hebraicae, proprii Iudaeos in Dei iegi gloriantes; Graecae, proprii gentium apertae; Latinae, proprii Romanos multis at peste omnibus tantum gentibus imperantes. De ciutiatis Dei (ed. Dubbert and Kall 1943) 18.43.8. Hieronymus) homo doceticus et omnium trium linguarum peritus. The term tres lingues sacrae seems to have been coined by Isidore in Etymologiae 9.1.2–3.

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. 2, pp. 399, vol. 2, 5).

3 Cited in translation by Borsch 1988a: 192, who endorses this position.

4 Exemplified in Borsch 1998a: 95, citing Fermin-Diderot 1875 (in translation): 'Hellenism, banned from the western reaches of the Continent, sought refuge further away on the island which had escaped the Roman conquest: Ireland... The mysticism which constitutes the basis of the Irish character disposed them to philosophical reveries, which explains their ardour for Plato. The study of the Greek language was thus one of the foundations of their education.'

5 Esposito 1912: 68.


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 Min, 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: ΔM (deum), ΗΧC (IHCOCYC), ΧP (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ), the last example familiar from the illuminated carpet pages marking the opening of Matthew (Christi autem generatio...). Over time the use of Greek script were extended. The Irish scribe Dodbéne, writing a copy of Adomnán’s Vita Columbae between 704 and 713, uses Greek script for words in Greek (e.g. ΠΗΡΙΣΤΗΨΑ ‘dove’), Latin (Dynitup Chkundac Aibep for finitur secundus liber) and even Irish (Korkupeti for Corcu Réti, 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. 36r), as well as assorted explicit, 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 ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙ ΑΓΙΩ ‘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 Altu Prosator, attributed to Columba (died 597), contains the words

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18 Latin Graecus is given the hybrid abbreviation XIPI. On nomina sacra, cf. Lindsay 1935: 403.
19 Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Generalia 1, pp. 268, 376 and 472, respectively, ed. Anderson and Anderson 1961.
20 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 emblems (e.g. in explicit) 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.
21 See Bloom, this volume, on code-switching in liturgical texts.
22 Reproductions of this page are in Bensch 1982: 503 and Bensch and Bensch 1988: PL 4.
24 Mcalister 1949–1949: 11 220. Photograph in Bensch 1982: PL 16. Confusion of η and ι (e.g. in ἡγοῦμαι) 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. 137). It is the Mozarabic doxology prescribed in the Fourth Synod of Toledo in 643, and Warden (1893-1895: II 74–80) has shown that the anthem closely corresponds to the opening of the ‘O’Píosa (Lauda) in the Greek Euchologion, cf. Hillgarth 1961: 193.
25 I derive these lists from the indices to their editions.
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c. 848) wrote a Greek Psalter with Latin interlinear translation. This was more than an exercise in penmanship; Walter BessinCs remarks that its supplementary material 'attests to the author's acumen in textual criticism'. Similarly the Basel Psalter, the St Gall Gospels and the Codex Boernerianus (Pauline epistles) were all identified by Traube as belonging to the same circle of Irish scholars and associated with him by Sedulius. Other manuscripts contain grammatical material relating to Greek. Martinus Hibernensis 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 Eriugena (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 

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 derives 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 177 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 fasnáitars can only be a matter for the imagination.' Herren (1987) also investigated Greek sources in his edition of other Hisperic poems: the Loricæ de lapide, Leiden iorica, Rubrica and Adelphus adelphæ meter. The first of these is associated with Laidenn of Clonfert-Mulloe (died 661). Of over 120 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 Scotti (at Liége from

The term is translated nume gloria 'vainglory' in Anglo-Saxon glossaries (cf. Stevenson 1999: 519); the substitution of or for ò (in the element kovo- 'empty') is a classicising hypercorrection, probably under influence of eino (monastic community).

Cf. Stevenson 1999, who assigns the poem to Isidore in the second half of the seventh century.

Warren 1893-1891. Found respectively in folios 127, 150, 169, 66, 121, 51, 61, 36V. Bradium, according to Warren, is probably a mistake for brachion, Late Latin for ἔπος.(Vé.)


From the index in Reeves 1857.

Histo riotergopha societatis in libris Granuactivi in Innten (2.27). On this basis, Manuiss 1911–1911: 1276 inferred that Adomanim had learnt Greek.


Herren 1974: 46–47.


The dates and authorship of the Rubrica and Adelphus adelphæ meter are a matter of speculation, with Herren suggesting Bobbio c. 800 and possibly liturgy in the ninth or tenth centuries respectively; given this uncertainty I will pass over them here.

44 The name is spelled by Lanvarna (Carnabid), MS 656V (images at http://digital-dub.dublin-ucdsie.ie/titledates/174951487). A direct connection to Sedulius is no longer supported, and Bieker 1988: 13–14 thought that this was tacitly revised by Tarsaale in his later work.

See p. 186 below.

59 Martinu and the school at Laon, see Convent 1978.


61 His name is spelled by Gearagama, Gearagama 'Greek-born', substituting Eriu 'Ireland'.
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 exceptions, 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, 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. The glossary presents etymologies for about 880 Irish words, very frequently deriving these from Latin, Greek or Hebrew. It begins:

incipit discreptio de origine Scottiae linguae quam congregaverunt religiosi iuri, adunectis nominibus ex Hebr <ae>; icano H<e>; ronimi et tractationibus, i.e. Ambrosi et Cassiani et Augustini et Eusiodrori.

Virgili, Prisciani, Competii, Ciceronis, necnon per literas Graecorum, i.e. Atticae, Doricae, Eolicae ling <u>ae, quia Scoti de Graecis originem duxerunt, sic est ling <u>am.

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 Augustine and Isidore, Virgil, Priscian, Comminius, Cicero; and also by means of Greek literature, i.e. in the Attic, Doric and Aeolic language, 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 1318 (H.2.16), cols. 88–132. The text was published, without translation, in Stokes 1909. Reference numbers, prefixed 'OM', are from this edition. Paul Russell, Sharon Arthurs 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.nua.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 (see previous note).
46 It is not always clear where a glossary entry begins or ends, making any count somewhat arbitrary.
47 adunectis MSS; adunectis MSS; duxerunt 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 altimn 'pleasant' is derived from Latin amoenus (OM 79) and aine 'fasting' from ietamn (OM 80), which are genuine borrowings from Latin into Irish. Irish cfech 'blind' from Latin cæsus (OM 196) and ingen 'nail' from ungus (OM 720) associate words which we now regard as Indo-European cognates (PIE *h₂ayker-, *h₂yngh₂e). 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 gymnasmum:

OM 1821 Baslec i.a. basil <i>ca Grece, eclesia Lateine, tech rig nime.

Basloc 'church', i.e. from βασιλική in Greek, ecclesia in Latin, house of the King of heaven.

OM 1751 Bādud ondī as bataillia i.a. gymnasia i.a. nochtcercord cēll.

Bādud 'a submerging, defeat', from bataillia, i.e. γυμνασία, i.e. naked exerciser.

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 222 Cerd grece cires i.a. manus . . . ar eam dogniat lámhae is cerd dongaithir i.a. lámde.

Cerd 'craft', in Greek χεῖρες, 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

48 The orthography of Latin words (e.g. batailla = batalia) 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 γυμνασίας.
49 See Amsler 1989 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 Etymologiae 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 tennitate.

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

cf. Etym. 16.18.2: brattea dictur tenuissima lamina, ἄπτο τοῦ βραθ-ν, qui est diuoclostonioa crepitandi, ἄπτο τοῦ βραθ-ν lamina.

The thinnest sheet of metal is called bratton from βραθέντον [cf. βραθόμ 'clamour'], which is onomatopoeia for rattling, or from βραθ-ν, 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: Erat grece erisucunda duiicio communis rei.

Æric 'payment, compensation', in Greek, erisucunda [division of inheritance], division of common wealth.

cf. Etym. 1.23.9–10: herisucunda enim apud ueteres diuisio nuncupabatur.

For division was called herisucunda by the ancients.

Perhaps a more telling entry is the following:


Égem 'a shout', ηγεμόν in Greek, leader <dux >leader in Latin, because it is the voice which leads all to where it goes. Or ëgem from ëγάμα 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 ëgam.

The second part of the etymology links Irish ëgem 'a shout' and Greek ëγάμα (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 ë reflects contemporary Greek pronunciation, which prevails in these texts. Isidore cites the word éfíç '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 -m. 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 Comynianus, which appears to be an error for Comynianus, under which name the grammarian Charisius was transmitted in Insular circles. The author is also cited by name in the main text:


58 This must ultimately reflect contact with native speakers of Greek, though not necessarily directly; see Moran 2001. The first etymology, drawing on the tenuous parallels between ëgem and ñγαμоν, duc and uoc may be an echo of Priscian (GL H. 6.4–5): uocam dicta est vel uocente, ut duce a duceano, vel ëtam dixit, ut quibusdam place.

59 Otherwise, the spelling ëgem may reflect the remodelling which took place in the Greek declensional system whereby an accusative ending -m spread to consonant stems. I am grateful to Patrick James for this suggestion.

60 Cf. Barwick 1931; see Law 1982: 28; Kaster 1988: 392–394; Hofman 1996: 114. The attribution is not entirely without foundation: Charisius' grammar is a compilation, Comynianus being frequently cited as one of his sources.
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Charisius is the most likely source for about thirty or so Greek words. But here again, the glossary author's focus on the Greek in the text sometimes leads him astray. In the following examples, a Latin genitive occurs where we would expect a nominative. The simplest explanation may be eye-skip: Charisius supplies both nominatives and genitives, and the glossary author appears to have copied from the wrong side of the Greek word.61

OM 318: Déor grece doriforas i. satellitess.
Déor 'base, unfree', in Greek δοριφόρος, i.e. attendant.
 cf. Charisius 47.15: satelles δοριφόροσ satellites.

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.62 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.63

OM 140: Béim grece bemandro i. paus.
Béim 'a beat, blow, strike', in Greek βέμα δόρπος, i.e. a step.
 cf. Charisius 55.7: passus βέμα δόρπος passus.

OM 205: Caint Grece cantabato i. sentes i. deilggi.
Caínt[e] 'satirist' (?), in Greek κανταβατό, i.e. sentes, i.e. thorns... 
 cf. Charisius 35.3: sentes ἱκετονία, βότος.

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:

61 Similarly OM 480 Fín [‘slope’] Greeke formē i. wallis (cf. Charisius 46.11: wallis φίλον; wallis) and OM 33 Agis ['head']. Greek ἀγιός i.e. i. ἀγιόν; ἀγιός, though the sense of the latter entry is unclear.
63 The first pair of Greek words comprise a noun followed by a qualifying genitive, the second two synonyms. MacNeill 1930–1933: 119 argued that passus' step was here misunderstood by the glossary compiler as the perfect passive participle of pastos 'having suffered' (based on the frequently violent connotation of béim). Alternatively, he may have had the best of both feet in mind: the context within a list of nouns in Charisius would reinforce this interpretation.
OM 160: Brithair insce apud Eoles.

Brithair, ‘word’ in Aesopic.

Brithair and insce both mean ‘word’ in Old Irish. Stokes added the note: ‘An Aesopic ἴτματος seems intended; cf. El[even] ἵτματα’.66 The attested Aesopic ἴτματος ‘orator’ (Attic-Ionic ἴτμος) provides a closer formal match.67 Latin grammarians tended to regard the digamma as characteristic of Aesopic Greek.68 Priscian is the only one to note that in Aesopic texts β tends to be written for γ before ρ at the start of words:

in b etiam solet apud Aesolins transire γ digamma, quotiens ab ρ incipit diction, quae solet aspirari, ut γήγερος γήγερος dicunt, quod digamma nisi uocali praeponi et in principio syllabae non posteat.69

The Aesopians change γ to β when a word begins with aspirated ρ; thus for γήγερος they said βήγερος, 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 ἴτμος ‘speaker’ and ἴτματος ‘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 Aesopic.

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 Graecorum (recollecting Adomnán’s reference to ἱερα Θεοτοκίας). 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 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 genderum), verbs which govern different cases (idiomata casuum), and defective nouns (singularia plura praemia tantum).72 The categories are in turn subdivided under headings such as apud Latinos masculina, apud Graecos feminina (e.g. hic aduentus ἡ περσονα), apud Latinos feminina, apud Graecos neutrally (e.g. hae aqua τὸ ὕδωρ), and so on. Such lists are also associated with Latin grammarians such as Charesius, who makes references to idiomata being among his sources.73

The second major category of Greek-Latin glossarial material is known as hermenemutae (Latin interpretationes).74 These derive from late antique classroom texts intended for elementary bilingual instruction.75 Carlotta Dionisioti 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, spectacles, 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.

66 Stokes 1900: 241.
67 Going on the date of O’Mulloy, it is possible that brithair would originally have been written (and pronounced) brither. This early form of the word also occurs in the Irish Priscian glosses: cf. Strachan 1993.
68 E.g. Porphyrius’ commentary on Donatus (GL v 105, 3-4): γιγειν διγαμμονα. Graeci hebetas varias linguas ibi et una linguas quae dicitur Aesopic apud ibi Aesopios in una littera quae appellator digamma, quasi duo gamma superpositas. What is digamma? The Greeks have various dialects; moreover there is one dialect which is called Aesopic. Among those Aesopians there is a letter which is called digamma, like two gammas superimposed.
69 GL v 105, 3.
70 The most important manuscript witnesses are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 7530 (Monte Cassino, 779 × 779), printed in CGL 11549-11531; Naples, Biblioteca nazionale, MS v.A.8 (Bobbio, s. v. irius, irius, irius), CGL 11 537-548, also printed in Varrius’ edition of Chaitis, 379–386, 410–465; London, British library, MS Harl. 1572 (800), CGL 11 487-506 = Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 444 (Laon, 928 × 866).
71 E.g. edh C. Julius Romanus en verbis idiomata appellavit (351, 31). Kaster (1988: 424–436) suggests that Julius Romanus may date to the third century AD.
73 For a discussion of this material in glossaries and Latin grammars, and Bede’s use of it, see Dionisioti 1988a.
74 The most important manuscript witnesses are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 7530 (Monte Cassino, 779 × 779), printed in CGL 11 549-551; Naples, Biblioteca nazionale, MS v.A.8 (Bobbio, s. v. irius, irius, irius), CGL 11 537-548, also printed in Varrius’ edition of Chaitis, 379–386, 410–465; London, British library, MS Harl. 1572 (800), CGL 11 487-506 = Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 444 (Laon, 928 × 866).
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78 For a discussion of this material in glossaries and Latin grammars, and Bede’s use of it, see Dionisioti 1988a.
79 The most important manuscript witnesses are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 7530 (Monte Cassino, 779 × 779), printed in CGL 11 549-551; Naples, Biblioteca nazionale, MS v.A.8 (Bobbio, s. v. irius, irius, irius), CGL 11 537-548, also printed in Varrius’ edition of Chaitis, 379–386, 410–465; London, British library, MS Harl. 1572 (800), CGL 11 487-506 = Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 444 (Laon, 928 × 866).
80 E.g. edh C. Julius Romanus en verbis idiomata appellavit (351, 31). Kaster (1988: 424–436) suggests that Julius Romanus may date to the third century AD.
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concerning the classroom environment and daily routine. A final part comprises extracts of texts for reading practice.  

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.  

It is found in an eighth-century Italian manuscript that once belonged to Nicholas of Casa; 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. Joseph Vendryes 1904 observed that this manuscript contains misplaced quiere 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.  

Russell noted that the rigidly formulaic citation of Greek in Irish glossaries (X Graece, Y Latine) has affinities with the format of Greek–Latin glossaries. 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.  

Was the Harleian glossary available in Ireland? The implications are not small: the Harleian glossary has been described as the Theasaurus Linguae Graecae of its day, 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.

Goetz published five major hermeneumata in vol. 111 of CGL: Hermeneumata Leidense, Amploniania, Monceana, Einsideliniana, Montepessulana. He also included, under the heading hermeneumata uriae, several fragments, extracts and other material derived from lost texts, including lost fragments printed by Stephanus. For a very useful table of contents and manuscripts, see Dionisotti 1982b: 87, revised in Dionisotti 1988: 16–28. The Leiden version was recently edited in Flammini 2004. A new edition and study is soon to be published: see Dickey 2002; this book appeared too late for me to consult it.

CGL II. 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.


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


Russell found that about half of the Greek words in Irish glossaries occur in this text. In addition, he discussed a number of entries in Irish glossaries that might be explained by reference to entries that occur in the Harleian glossary uniquely. However, the high degree of correspondence is perhaps not surprising given the monumental scale of this work, containing, at a rough estimate, some 18,000 entries. Indeed, it would be surprising if many of these Greek words did not occur in such a work. Taking the Harleian glossary as a vast compilation, perhaps the material available to the Irish author was one or other of its sources. More interesting, then, are smaller bilingual glossaries which contain a higher proportion of common entries relative to their size.

In Table 8.1 (ordered by number of correspondences), this proportion can be roughly gauged in the column listing the average number of correspondences per page. The Harleian glossary has on average only 0.3 corresponding entries per page (i.e. three entries in every ten pages), and the large Philoxenus glossary even fewer. By contrast, some of the shorter hermeneumata have a much higher rate of correspondence. The most notable are the texts named by Goetz as Glossarium Leidense, which has more than half the number of Harleian entries (forty-five against
<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. uraria: Glossarium Leidense</td>
<td>398–421.21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harleian (Cyprianus) glossary</td>
<td>213–483</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. Monacensis</td>
<td>119–220</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. Montepessulanus</td>
<td>281–343</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philexenos glossary</td>
<td>3–212</td>
<td>209</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1–72.45</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Stephani</td>
<td>347–90</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>438–67.1</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uraria: Glossae Bernenses</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Amploniana</td>
<td>72–94</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uraria: Glossae Vaticanae</td>
<td>506–31.31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Einsidlenia</td>
<td>223–79</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>467–74.48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiomata (Paris, 5792)</td>
<td>489–506</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossae Sequii Grammatici</td>
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<td>553–449</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm. Medicobonocia Vetusiora</td>
<td>535–633</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiomata (Naples IV.A.8)</td>
<td>537–48</td>
<td>3</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’Mulconry, 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, Universiteitsbibliothek, MS VLI 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 i 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’Mulconry 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’Mulconry, 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, Martianus 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 either of a named author or a non-generic title (other than glossae, interpretationes, 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 iii 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 declen-
sional 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’Mulconry’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.

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 Char-
sius 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 contin-
uous Greek would have been very limited. The evidence for the availability
of hermeneumata, however, suggests that some more progress in the lan-
guage 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, rep-
tition 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
antithesis 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 knowl-
edge 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

57 A search of the text of Isidore on the CETEDOC CD-ROM returns about 1,000 passages citing
Greek words.

58 Dionisotti 1988: 2. Vendryes (1913: 222) expressed a similar point (referring to Cormac mac
Cuiilennkin, to whom the related Irish glossary Sanas Cormaic is attributed): ‘Et que veut dire
M. Euphrose quand il soutient que Cormac ne savait pas grec – qu’il n’en possédait pas l’histoire
et la littérature autant qu’un Bened ou Walhnowitz? C’est certain. Mais s’il ne savait pas le 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.

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CHAPTER 9

An habes linguam Latinam? Non tam bene sapio

*Views of multilingualism from the early medieval West*

Paul Russell

University of Cambridge

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 — cogituit quae decrante addere et discrepantia unire, prua quoque ac perperam prolata corrigere, sed de his nihil aliud ab eo factum est, nisi quod pauca capitula, et ea imperfecta, legibus addidit. omnium tamen nationum, quae sub eius dominatu erant, iura quae scripta non erant describere ac litteris mandari fecit. item barbara et antiquissima carmina, quibus ueterum regum actus et bella cœperantur, scripsit memoriaeque mandavit. inchoavit 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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