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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 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 used 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,1 when the compilatory efforts of Latin writers Boethius, Macrobius and Marcius Capella provided the main points of access to Greek literary culture for subsequent generations.2 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.3 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 ‘preeminent languages’, and praised Jerome for his singular attainment in all three.4 Greek learning was also acknowledged as the foundation of secular scholarship.5

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.6 This position found concord with a romantic view of medieval Ireland as a sanctuary for classical learning during the barbarian Dark Ages.7 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’.8 While that of Irishmen in Carolingian circles (with the exception of Eriugena) was an ‘inaccurate and uncritical smattering’.9 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’.10

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, 292; vol. 2, 5).
3 Cited in translation by Borsch in 1988: 132, who endorses this position.
4 Exemplified in Borsch in 1988: 95, citing Fermin-Díez 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: 685.

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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 them 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 macca 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: ΔΜ (deum), ΗΧ (IHC), ΗΧ (XPICTOC), the last example familiar from the illuminated carpet pages marking the opening of Matthew (Christis autem generatio...) in deluxe gospel books. Over time the uses of Greek script were extended. The Irish scribe Durbenné, writing a copy of Adomnan's Vita Columbae between 704 and 713, uses Greek script for words in Greek (e.g. ΠΗΡΙΣΤΡΗΠ 'dove'), Latin (CHI NUN DUCE ΑΙΒΕΡ for finitur secundus liber) and even Irish (KOPKUPETI 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. 36ra), as well as assorted explicitia, 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 Schaaffhausen manuscript (n. 17), which concludes (p. 137) with the Greek Paternoster in Greek script. The second is an inscription on a stone monument at Faham in Donegal, which has been dated to various points between the eighth and eleventh centuries. It records the doxology: ΔΟΞΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΨΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΠΗΝΥΜΑΤΙ ΑΠΤΟ '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 Altus Prostrar, attributed to Columba (died 597), contains the words

16 Latin Christi is given the hybrid abbreviation XPI. On nomina sacra, cf. Lindsay 1991: 403.
17 Schaaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Generale 1, pp. 28, 103b and 47a, 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 Schaaffhausen manuscript, Greek script is used both for emphasis (e.g. in explicitia) 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 Macalister 1949-1949: 232-230. Photograph in Benchin 1982: PL 16. Confusion of η and ε (e.g. in τηρη) is very common in the sources discussed here. The Latin equivalent, gloria et honor patri et figlio et spiritui sancto, begins the last of a series of anathemas 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 693, and Warren (1893-1895: 174-176) has shown that the anathema closely corresponds to the opening of the 'Oplòv (Laus) in the Greek Encholologie, cf. Hillgarth 1961: 195.
23 I derive these lists from the indices to their editions.
The term is translated *nunc gloria* 'vainglory' in Anglo-Saxon glossaries (cf. Stevenson 1992: 519); the substitution of *or* for *e* (in the element *kevo* - 'empty') is a classicising hypercorrection, probably under influence of *coenobium* (monastic community).

15. Cf. Stevenson 1992, who assigns the poem to Iona in the second half of the seventh century.


20. From the index in Reeves 1857.


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

25. The Antiphonary of Bangor contains a Greek or Latinised Greek words *agie, agius, bradum, migrology, pantes ta era, proto*, protoplastrum and zeon, the last used resourcefully to conclude an abecedarial poem on the abbeys of Bangor. Murchu’s life of Patrick (c. 690) contains one Greek word: *antropi*. Adomnan’s *Vita Columbae* includes *agonotheta, litus, machera, omonimmum, onoma, protus, sophia, xenium* and his *De loci sancti* discusses the Greek spelling of Thabor (Θαβόπ) with reference to ‘books of Greek’.

26. The group of texts whose style is labelled ‘Hispanic’ 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.’

27. Herren 1987 also investigated Greek sources in his edition of other Hisperic poems: the *Lorca de Laidenn, Leiden lorica, Rubrica* and *Adelphus adelpha 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.

28. 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 Scotius (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 ‘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 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 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 *kbasertis*, as well as Latin hymns, Irish poetry and miscellaneous notes on Latin grammar, exegesis and astronomy.

Eriugena 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 usbi*, 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 Laistcr’s view of Greek in Ireland being almost non-existent. But how
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 Scotiæ linguae quam congregauerunt religiosi iurii, adiunctis nominibus ex Hebr<ae> ino H<e>ronimii et tractionibus, i.e. Ambrosii et Cassiani et Augustini et Eisiordii. Virgil, Prisciani, Commanni, Ciceronis, necnon per literas Graecorum, i.e. Atticae, Doricae, Eolicae ling<ae>æ, quia Scoti de Graecis originem ducentum, sic et ling<ae>æ 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, Commianus, 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 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 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.nlc.can.ac.uk/irishglossaries/.

45 MacNeill 1910–1931. 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 adiuncti, adiunctis MSS, adiuncat, adiuncat 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 ailmhin 'pleasant' is derived from Latin amoenus (OM 79) and aine 'fasting' from ieiunia (OM 80), which are genuine borrowings from Latin into Irish. Irish cēdech 'blind' from Latin cœcus (OM 196) and ingen 'nail' from ungus (OM 720) associate words which we now regard as Indo-European cognates (PIE *kēyker- 'bṃogh-.') 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 gymnasia:

OM 1821 Baslecc iæ basil<e>ca Grece, eclesia Latine, tech rig nime.

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

OM 1751 Bâdod ondi as batalia i æ gymnasia i æ noctircerecith cell.

Bâdod 'a submerging, defeat', from batrulisa, 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 2222 Cerd grece cires i æ manus . . . ar cach dán dogniat lámhae is cerd dongairther i æ lámda.

Cerd 'craft', in Greek χέφος, 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
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 composers. 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 greece brathin lamminas a teniutate.

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

*cf.* Etym. 16.18.2: brattea dicitur teniussima lamina, ὑπὸ τοῦ βραθοῦ, qui est διαφανπετομὴν λεπιτανδι, ἑπῆ τοῦ ἰ ὑπετοῦ βραθοῦ. lamina.

The thinnest sheet [of metal] is called *brattea*, from βραθον [cf. βραθο ‘clamour’], which is onomatopoeia for rattle, or from ἰ βραθον, 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**: ἄριστος γραμματικις διευκονισμοι rei.

*Éric* ‘payment, compensation’, in Greek, ερίσκοντα [division of inheritance], division of common wealth. *cf.* Etym. 1.25.9–10: ἐρίσκοντα ἐνισχυμεν ἀποδ ὑετες διευκονισμος nuncupabat.

For division was called *eriscunda* by the ancients.

Perhaps a more telling entry is the following:

**OM 375**: Égem, egemon Grece, dux Latine, quia est uox <scare> ductum omnis quo uadict. Vel égem ab éga.i. capra, quia clamat in morte, unde dicitur: Egium marc. i. di labrai thondi. Namm inter Tenedum <et Chium> saxum <est in> mare simile capitum, quam Greci egam dicunt.

Égem ‘a shout’, ἡγματος in Greek, leader dux ‘leader’ in Latin, because it is the voice which leads all to where it goes. Or égem from αγγα 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 egam.

The second part of the etymology links Irish égem ‘a shout’ and Greek αγγα (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 a reflects contemporary Greek pronunciation, which prevails in these texts. Isidore cites the word αγγα ‘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 Comminianus, which appears to be an error for Comminianus, under which name the grammarian Charisius was transmitted in Insular circles. The author is also cited by name in the main text:

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58 This must ultimately reflect contact with native speakers of Greek, though not necessarily directly; see Moran 2001. The first etymology, drawing on the tenuos parallels between *ágam* and *tékitho*, *duc* and *now* may be an echo of Priscian (GL II 4.4–5): *ux uxor dicitur uel uexa uel uexd*; *ux dux uexcadu, vel dux uex cauboe, uex quibudm uel place*.

59 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.

60 Cf. Barwick 1993: 102; Law 1982: 38; Easter 1988: 393–394; Hoffman 1996: 114. The attribution is not entirely without foundation: Charisius’ grammar is a compilation, Comminianus being frequently cited as one of his sources.
OM 519: Fer a uir. i. uir a uirute licet Cominianus dicit: uirus unde uir appellatur.

Fer 'man' from uir 'man', i.e. uir from uirute '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'] ἐκ τὰς sedes, specific ['slaughter'] σύμπτωσις σωμάτων stragis, specific ['fence, hedge'] φραγμόσ saepis, wallis ['valley'] φάραγγες wallis, uerres ['male swine, boar'] κέλται βιβριώσ σώματα, rhes [precipice] ἀποβεβηγύσ ῥυποσ, scrobes ['cleft'] βόδων φυτεύσ scrobis, torques ['collar'] μυτίδος βέρον τούρκος.

The pedagogical strategy extends beyond merely explaining unfamiliar Latin words. This kind of grammar contrasts significantly with Latin grammars written for Roman schoolboys, epitomised in the work of Aelius Donatus. Donatus' work is spare, mostly concerned with explaining grammatical terminology, categorising the parts of speech, and providing clear examples of tenses, declensions, and so on. In his Ars minor, he provides a paradigm for a single verb only (leve), Latin whose pupils could already speak Latin, they just needed to learn to speak and write correct Latin.

Greek in early medieval Ireland

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.

OM 518: Deō grece doriforos. i. satellitis.
Deō 'base, unfree', in Greek δοριφόρος, i.e. attendant.

OM 520: Caint Grece cantabato. i. sentes. i. deilggi...
Cánt [e] 'satrist' (1), in Greek κανταβατο, 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:

OM 140: Béim grece bemandro. i. paus.
Béim 'a bear, blow, strike', in Greek βύμα δόρπος, i.e. a step.

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

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61 Similarly OM 468 Fán ['slope'] Grece foram. i. wallis (cf. Charisius 46.11: wallis φράγματος) and OM 31 Argo ['shroud']. Greek ἔδειξε... (cf. Charisius 46.10: ēδειξε διδότα), 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. MacNeil 1990–1992: 139 argued that the genitive's 'stallion' was here misunderstood by the glossary compiler as the perfect passive participle of the verb 'having suffered' (based on the frequently violent connotation of kóllon). Alternatively, he may have had the best of both worlds in mind: the context within a list of nouns in Charisius would reinforce this interpretation.
OM 160: Briathor ince apud Eoles.

Briathor, ‘word’ in Aeolic.

Briathor and ince both mean ‘word’ in Old Irish. Stokes added the note: ‘An Aeolic βρήτταρα seems intended; cf. El[ean] βρήτταρα’.66 The attested Aeolic βρήτταρ όρατος (Arctic-Ionic βρήττωρ) provides a closer formal match.67 Latin grammarians tended to regard the digamma as characteristic of Aeolian Greek.68 Priscian is the only one to note that in Aeolic texts β tends to be written for φ before π at the start of words:

in b etiam solet apud Aeolis transire φ digamma, quotiens ab π incipit dictio, quae solet aspirari, ut [φ]βρήττορ βρήτταρ dicunt, quod digamma nisi vocale praepenit et in principio syllabae non ponet.69

The Aeolians change φ to β when a word begins with aspirated π; thus for [φ]βρήττορ they said βρήτταρ, 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 βρήτταρ όρατος and βρήτταρ όρατος, it would appear to justify the prologue’s claim not only to use Priscian, but that the Irish language derived from Greek dialects including Aeolic.

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 rather a vague reference to litterae Graecorun (recalling Adomnán’s reference to libri Graecitatis). 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 generum), verbs which govern different cases (idiomata casuum), and defective nouns (singularia/pluralia tantum).72 The categories are in turn subdivided under headings such as apud Latinos masculina, apud Graecos feminina (e.g. hic acceuntur ἡ παροιμία), apud Latinos feminina, apud Graecos neutrall (e.g. haec aquā τὸ ὅμορ), and so on. Such lists are also associated with Latin grammarians such as Choricius, who makes references to idiomata being among his sources.73

The second major category of Greek–Latin glossarial material is known as hermeneumata (Latin interpretationes).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, 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’Malley, it is possible that briathor would originally have been written (and pronounced) briathor. This early form of the word also occurs in the Irish Priscian glosses: cf. Strachan 1903.
68 E.g. Pompeius’s commentary on Donatus (GL n 105.3-4): quid et digamma? Graeci habent varias linguas, etiam et una lingua quae dicitur Acceles. apud ibi Aeolico ex una lingua quae appellatur digamma, quasque duo gamma superponet. ‘What is digamma? The Greeks have various dialects; moreover there is one dialect which is called Aeolic. Among those Aeolians there is a letter which is called digamma, like two gammas superimposed.’
69 GL n 105.2. In his edition, Hertz did not print the digamma before βρήττωρ, 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 1996: 1126/11 43. Allen 1968: 48 notes that this spelling (β for φ) is found in texts of Sappho and other Lesbian poets.
70 On Hellenistic scholarship, see Dickey 2007. For a broad overview of the Latin tradition, see Heseltine 1910. On bilingual glossaries, see Goetz, CGL i 12–47, and especially Dionisotti 1988.
71 For a discussion of this material in glossaries and Latin grammars, and Bede’s use of it, see Dionisotti 1982a.
72 The most important manuscript witnesses are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Ms lat. 7350 (Monte Cassino, 779 × 797), printed in CGL n 1 549–553; Naples, Biblioteca nazionale, Ms v.7.8 Bobbio, s. viii, Irish manuscript), CGL n 2 537–548, also printed in White’s edition of Choricius, 379–386, 410–416; London, British Library, MS Harl. 1579 (c. 800). CGL n 2 477–506 = Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, Ms 444 (Laon, 858 × 866).
73 E.g. ibid. C. Iulius Romanus ex versibus idiomata appellavit (337.32). Kaster (1988: 424–434) suggests that Julius Romanus may date to the third century AD.
74 St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Ms 902 (c. 12), was one of the first manuscripts to be rediscovered by Humanists. As the manuscript also contains Donatus’ bilingual grammar, the text became known as Hermeneumata Doniethani. This authorship was rejected by Krumhardt 1882, who referred to the author as magistri secularis. (High-quality images of the St Gall manuscript are now available online via www.o- codices.ch.)
75 The question of whether they were composed to teach Greek to Latin speakers or vice versa is a matter of debate. Dionisotti (1982a: 93) has argued that they were used to teach Greek in Roman schools on the basis of a Western manuscript transmission.
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 Cusa;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 Graece, Y Latine) 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 Theaurus Linguar Graecar 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.

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77 Goetz published five major hermeneumata in vol. III of CGL: Hermeneumata Leidensia, Amploniana, Monacensia, Einsiedleins, Montepessulana. He also included, under the heading hermeneumata uraria, several fragments, extracts and other material derived from lost texts, including lost fragments printed by Stephanus. For a useful table of contents and manuscripts, see Dionisioti 1982a: 87, revised in Dionisioti 1988: 16–22. The Leiden version was recently edited in Flammini 2004. A new edition and study is soon to be published, see Dickey 2022; this book appeared too late for me to consult it.

78 CGL II. 321–483. 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.


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


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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 8.2 Glossaries in CGL II–III with most entries matching O’Mulaney (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>III 308–421.21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harleian (Cyprian) glossary</td>
<td>II 233–483</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Monacensis</td>
<td>III 110–220</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Montepessulana</td>
<td>III 281–343</td>
<td>70</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. Leidensa</td>
<td>II 1–72.45</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Stephani</td>
<td>III 347–90</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Stephani &amp; Herm. uria: Glossae Bernenses</td>
<td>III 438–67.1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Glossae Bernenses</td>
<td>III 487–506.1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Amploniana</td>
<td>III 77–94</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Glossae Vaticanae</td>
<td>III 506–31.31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Einsidlenia</td>
<td>III 233–79</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Frag. Bruxellense</td>
<td>III 393–98.39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. uria: Stephani &amp; Herm. uria: Glossae Vaticanae</td>
<td>III 467–74.48</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiomata (Paris 5792)</td>
<td>III 487–506</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossae Serui Grammatici</td>
<td>III 507–33.28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glosses from Laon 444</td>
<td>III 533–659</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herm. Medicoboticana Vetus,</td>
<td>III 533–653</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiomata (Naples IV.A.8)</td>
<td>III 537–428</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, Universiteitsbibliothek, 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, 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, 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 collocation 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

85 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 Charis-
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
emulated, 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-
etition 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

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: 322) expressed a similar point (referring to Cormac mac
Cuilennan, to whom the related Irish glossary Samhs Cairmeic is attributed): “Et que veut dire
M. Épistol, quand il soutient que Cormac ne savait pas d’grec... quil n’en possédait pas l’histoire
et la littérature autant qu’un Jude ou Wlaronwitz? C’est certain. Mais s’il ne savait pas l’grec, il
est indubitable qu’il savait du grec.” (Italics as printed.)

86. The exception being the treatment of alyx discussed above (p. 181), which is clearly in this case
derived from Isidore.
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

Paul Russell
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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 adueteret multa legibus populi sui deceae – nam Franci duas habent leges, in plurimis locis ulde dieras – cogitaret quae decrant adderet et discrepandia unire, prae quoque ac perperam prolata corrigere, sed de his nihil aliud ab eo factum est, nisi quod paucia capitula, et ea imperfecta, legibis addiderit. omnium tamen nationum, quae sub eius dominatu erant, iura quae scripta non erant describere ac litteris mandari fecit. item et antiquissima carmina, quibus uesterum regum actus et bella canebantur, scripsit memoriaeque mandari. 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 it up 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 §59 (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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