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A newly-discovered citation from a work by Columbanus

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Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS 6400B is a miscellaneous codex, made up of several codicological units of various date and origin. The unit under scrutiny here is ff. 249^{bis}r–284v: this section, which begins with the *titulus IN HONOMATE FILII REDEMPTORIS COSMI A MALO* ('In the name of the Son, who redeemed the world from evil')¹ and breaks off abruptly at a folio whose contents are almost completely effaced, was most likely written in Fleury during the 10th century.² It contains a heterogeneous collection of *computistica*, which, with the exception of Léon Fleuriot's and Pierre-Yves Lambert's analyses of the two Old Breton glosses found therein,³ have never been studied by scholars. The purpose of this brief note is to announce the discovery of some fascinating materials pertaining to Columbanus in one section of this codicological unit.

My attention was first drawn to this manuscript by the close similarity between a passage on the etymology of *Februarius*, transcribed by both Fleuriot and Lambert, and a corresponding passage in the Irish *Computus Einsidlensis*.⁴ A closer inspection, carried out between October and December 2013, first on the microfilm (available in digital format at <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>>) and then on the original,⁵ confirmed the presence of numerous indications of Insular origin for at least some of the texts copied in this unit of 6400B. Only the most salient features will be briefly presented here. At f. 260r, we find a discussion of the various (pseudo-)forms of Latin *uesper*, constituting a re-elaboration of a passage ultimately from the *Epistolae* of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus.⁶ At f. 264r occurs a quote falsely

¹ For more details on the peculiar phrase *in honomate*, cf. fn. 23 below.

² Cf. J.-L. Deuffic, 'La production manuscrite des *scriptoria* bretons (VIII^e-IX^e siècles)', in *Landévennec et le monachisme breton dans le Haut Moyen Âge* (Landévennec 1986) 289–321: 310; M. Mostert, *The library of Fleury. A provisional list of manuscripts* (Hilversum 1989) 211, §BF1078.

³ L. Fleuriot, *Dictionnaire des gloses en vieux-breton* (Paris 1964) 6, 139, 246; P.-Y. Lambert, 'Les commentaires celtiques à Bède le Vénérable (suite)', *Études celtiques* 21 (1984) 185–206: 206.

⁴ Cf. J. Bisagni, 'Leprechaun: a new etymology', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 61 (2012) 47–84: 70–2.

⁵ I wish to thank Charlotte Denoël, BNF Curator of Medieval manuscripts, for granting me permission to examine the original manuscript.

⁶ Cf. Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, *Epistolae: Epistola de nomine*, ll. 93–109 (ed. B. Löfstedt, *Virgilius Maro Grammaticus: Opera Omnia* (Munich & Leipzig 2003) 11–2). This passage is quoted, more or less *verbatim*, in several other Hiberno-Latin texts: cf. e.g. M. McNamara, 'The Irish affiliations of the *Catechesis Celtica*',

ascribed to Jerome, concerning the Creation of the world, which, to my knowledge, is only found in Irish computistics.⁷ At f. 269r, we can see a clear instance of the Insular (and especially Irish) abbreviation for *autem* (*h* with a ‘hook’); interestingly, this is immediately followed by the Continental abbreviation for the same word (*aut* with a stroke on top of the *t*). This peculiar dittography reveals that, while the scribe was normally ‘translating’ the Insular abbreviations of the exemplar into Continental ones, in this case he mistakenly copied the Insular *autem*, and subsequently supplied the abbreviated form that he should have written in the first place.⁸ At 277r, we come across a long passage that presents strong indications of Irish origin, as well as a dating clause for AD 754: this section, which deals with the recurrence of solar eclipses, was discovered and analysed by Immo Warntjes, who has also provided a brief description of its contents elsewhere in this same issue of *Peritia*.

The discussion on the eclipses ends at f. 277v, being immediately followed by a section titled *De quadrante*. As the title says, this is a fairly lengthy account of the grammatical form, meaning and etymology of the term *quadrans*, which in computistics typically designates a unit of time: the ‘quarter-day’ (i.e., the fourth part of a day). The section in question begins with a definition of the unit *quadrans* as corresponding to three hours of a *dies artificialis* (a day of twelve hours), or to six hours of a *dies naturalis* (a day of twenty-four hours): this distinction is typical of Irish computistics, and can be found, for instance, in the Munich Computus.⁹ After various grammatical remarks concerning the morphological fluctuation between *quadrans* and *quadras*, the discussion continues with an equation between Latin *quadras*, Hebrew *codras* and Greek *dodras* (*Quomodo in tribus linguis hoc nomen uocatur? Codras in Æbræico, dodras in Greca, quadras in Latina*). The equivalence of *quadra(n)s* and *dodra(n)s*, which is only found in Irish computistics (where it possibly originated from a misreading of a passage in the *Computus Einsidlensis*),¹⁰ is here followed

Celtica 21 (1990) 291–334: 318–9, 321; D. Ó Cróinín, ‘The date, provenance and earliest use of the works of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus’, in id., *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin 2003) 191–200: 198–9.

⁷ The sentence in question is: *Hieronimus ait ‘media nocte factus est mundus’*; cf. I. Warntjes (ed. & tr.), *The Munich Computus: text & translation. Irish computistics between Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede and its reception in Carolingian times* (Stuttgart 2010) CXXXII, 26–7.

⁸ A similar phenomenon can be observed in the *Computus Einsidlensis*: while the scribe faithfully copied Insular abbreviations in the first few pages of the computistical collection, he subsequently switched to the Continental system, which he must have found more perspicuous for his intended readership.

⁹ Cf. Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, 18–9 (also see the *apparati* that accompany this edition for further textual parallels).

¹⁰ Cf. Warntjes, *The Munich Computus*, cxlvii–cxlviii.

by the mention of three textual authorities: Isidore's *Etymologiae* (subtly modified to suit the argument),¹¹ the commentary on Job (38: 16) by Philippus Presbyter, and one further, more mysterious source. Here is a transcription of the passage where the latter two authorities are cited, with minimal editing and a tentative translation:

Hoc diximus quod dodras IIII^a pars diei apud Graecos, et tamen in aliis rebus hoc nomen inuenimus: in tractatu libri Iob inuenitur 'dodrante maris transmissa'¹² .i. quando habundantia maris in malina recipit [corr. into recidit], et in prologo columna nigri inquit '†u^tthis† .i. ... maris turgescens dodrantem', id dum malina eructat.

'We have said that, among the Greeks, *dodras* [designates] the fourth part of the day, and yet in other things [i.e., presumably, 'books'] we find this word: in the treatise on the Book of Job, the phrase *dodrante maris transmissa* can be found, i.e. when the abundance of the sea in flood-tide withdraws, and in the prologue †*columna nigri*† he (?) says '†*u^tthis† .i. ... maris turgescens dodrantem*', that [is] while the flood-tide flows forth'.

The phrase *in prologo columna nigri* does not make any sense, grammatically or otherwise, and is likely to be corrupt; thus, if we want to find out which source may be hidden behind these words, we need to concentrate on the quote itself. The copyist clearly had some trouble with its first word, which is garbled and very hard to read (my transcription *u^tthis* is only an attempt to reproduce in print what can be seen in the manuscript). Even the suprascript gloss seems to have caused some difficulty: an erasure is visible between the abbreviation *.i.* and the word *maris*, and, although traces of ink remain, it is no longer possible to read what the scribe wrote *ante correctionem*. In any case, this gloss makes it clear that: (1) the meaning of the garbled word must have been 'sea'; (2) this word was probably in the genitive case, thereby agreeing with *turgescens*. A brilliant solution to this problem has been suggested to me (in private correspondence) by Pierre-Yves Lambert: the

¹¹ The computus in 6400B states: *Ut Issodorus dixit 'Quodras dicitur eo quod IIII^a parte unciae adpendat quem Aebrei codran, Greci dodran, Latini quadran uocant'*. For a close parallel, cf. M. Walsh & D. Ó Cróinín (eds), *Cummian's letter De controuersia Paschali, together with a related Irish computistical tract De ratione computandi* (Toronto 1988) 21. The actual quote from the *Etymologiae* (XVI, 25.17; ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford 1911)) only says what follows: *Quadrantem Hebraei similiter codrantem uocant; et uocatur quadrans quod unciae quartam partem adpendat*.

¹² This quote from Philippus Presbyter's commentary is corrupt; the actual passage (at least according to the *PL* edition) reads *unius horae aequinoctialis dodrante transmissa* (*PL*, vol. 26, col. 752D). It is also worth noting that Philippus's work was certainly known to the Irish already at an early stage, as shown by the fact that it figures among the sources of *Altus Prosator* (cf. J. Stevenson, 'Altus Prosator', *Celtica* 23 (1999) 326–68: 337, 348, 351–2).

exemplar may have read *tithis*. Indeed, this Hisperic lexeme of Greek origin (it was originally the name of the Ocean goddess Τηθύς) occurs in several Early Medieval Insular works, always with the meaning ‘sea’, or more precisely ‘Ocean’.¹³ In view of the extreme rarity of this erudite term, the scribe’s bewilderment in dealing with it is hardly surprising. Accordingly, the quote can be reconstructed as follows: *tithis* ^{.i. maris} *turgescantis dodrantem*. As has been pointed out by Michael Herren, the term *dodrans* is used in the *Hisperica Famina* (A-Text, ll. 402, 491), in *Altus Prosator* (I.2)¹⁴ and in Aldhelm’s letter to Eahfrid,¹⁵ essentially as a synonym of *malina* ‘flood-tide’.¹⁶ That this interpretation is also applicable to our passage is confirmed by the next phrase, *id dum malina eructat*. The quote (including the suprascript gloss) can then be translated as ‘the flood-tide of the swelling Tithis (i.e., ‘of the sea’)’.

At this point, it is most interesting to observe that one further use of *dodrans* in the sense of ‘flood-tide’ (also listed by Herren) offers a textual parallel which is strikingly close to the quote in 6400B: in his letter to Pope Boniface (*Epistula* V, §11), Columbanus magnifies with a feast of Hisperic vocabulary and convoluted syntax the triumphal arrival of the Christian faith in Ireland, Christ having reached the island *trans turgescentem dodrantem*, ‘over the swelling flood’.¹⁷ Needless to say, the verbal match is remarkable: Columbanus’s phrasing and the citation from the Parisian computus exhibit the same collocation of *turgescens* and *dodrans*; moreover, both passages have *dodrantem* in the accusative. Yet, there are some significant differences too: in 6400B, the genitive *turgescantis* qualifies *tithis*, which is inflected in the same case (as shown by the gloss *maris*), whereas in Columbanus’s *Epistula* this participle agrees with *dodrantem*; even more importantly, the latter text shows no trace of the word *tithis*. Now, the manuscript transmission of Columbanus’s letters is notoriously problematic: *Epistula* V is one of four letters that the Franciscan scholar Patricius Fleming

¹³ The phrase *trans tithicam vallem* (where *tithica* is an adjective obviously formed from *tithis*) can be found in Gildas’s *De excidio Britanniae* 19.1 (ed. & tr. M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: the ruin of Britain and other works* (Chichester 1978) 94). As for the noun *tithis*, it occurs most notably in Columbanus’s *Epistula* III, §2 (ed. & tr. G. S. M. Walker, *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin 1957) 22.30), in *Altus Prosator*, U.3 (ed. & tr. T. O. Clancy & G. Márkus, *Iona. The earliest poetry of a Celtic monastery* (Edinburgh 1995) 50), and several times in the various recensions of the *Hisperica Famina* (for the occurrences in the A-Text, cf. M. Herren (ed. & tr.), *Hisperica Famina* (Toronto 1974) 64, l. 17 and 94, l. 393; cf. also p. 122).

¹⁴ Cf. Clancy & Márkus, *Iona*, 46.

¹⁵ Cf. R. Ehwald (ed.), *Aldhelmi Opera*, MGH AA 15 (Berlin 1919), *Epist. 5 ad Eahfridum*, 489.

¹⁶ Cf. Herren, *Hisperica Famina*, 180.

¹⁷ Cf. Walker, *Opera*, 48–9.

transcribed in 1623 ‘ex pervetusto, sed mendoso satis Bibliothecae Bobiensis codice’;¹⁸ this may be the same manuscript from which Jodoc Metzler, abbot of St Gall, had copied the *Epistulae* some twenty years before (his work survives in St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 1346), or in any case it may be a closely related copy.¹⁹ In light of this, it might be not utterly unthinkable to envisage an emendation of the passage from the *Epistula* such as *trans <tithis> turgescens<is> dodrantem*. On balance, though, this remains unlikely: Metzler’s and Fleming’s transcriptions agree as to the absence of *tithis* here, and so, in order to justify such an extreme emendation, we would need to posit that this Hisperic word had already been omitted in the lost exemplar(s) from which the two 17th-century scholars were copying (unless Metzler was copying from Fleming’s transcription, cf. fn. 19). Moreover, even accepting this emendation for argument’s sake, we would still have to explain why the computus of 6400B ascribed the quote to a *prologus*, an attribution which is plainly inapplicable to *Epistula* V (unless the letter itself, or parts thereof, where at some stage used as a prologue to some other work; however, there is no evidence that this was ever the case).

Anyhow, regardless of this specific problem, the fact remains that the passage attested in the Parisian computus is perfectly compatible with Columbanus’s *usus scribendi*: the use of *tithis* is attested elsewhere in the Saint’s *corpus* (cf. fn. 13), and the phrase *turgescens dodrantem* is at least very similar to the collocation that Columbanus used in his letter to Boniface, so that, theoretically, he could have used it more than once. For these reasons, it is very tempting to understand the attested reading *colūna nigri* as a scribal error for *colūbani grē*, that is, with expansion of the abbreviations, *Columbani graece*. The second word may refer to the fact that *tithis* is a Greek term; moreover, as we have seen, *dodra(n)s* was also identified as a Greek word, corresponding to Latin *quadra(n)s* and Hebrew *codras*. The whole passage could then be reconstructed as follows:

in prologo Columbani graece inquit ‘tithis .i. maris turgescens dodrantem’.

¹⁸ Fleming’s words can be found in the reprint of his *editio princeps* of the *Epistulae* (originally published at Louvain in 1667), contained in Margarin de la Bigne (ed.), *Maxima Bibliotheca veterum Patrum et antiquorum scriptorium ecclesiasticorum*, 27 vols (Lyon 1677): vol. 12, p. 24a; cf. also Walker, *Opera*, xxxv.

¹⁹ This brief account is mostly based on M. Tosi, ‘Arianesimo Tricapitolino norditaliano e Penitenza privata Iroscozzese: due piste importanti per riprendere la questione critica delle opere di Colombano’, *Archivum Bobiense* 10-11 (1988–1989) 9–118: 12–20, and N. Wright, ‘Columbanus’ *Epistulae*’, in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Columbanus: studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge 1997) 29–92: 48. For the (unprovable) suspicion that Metzler actually worked from Fleming’s transcription, cf. J. Smit, *Studies on the language and style of Columba the Younger (Columbanus)* (Amsterdam 1971): 35–8.

‘in the prologue of Columbanus, he [i.e., the author] said in Greek ‘the flood-tide of the swelling Tithis (i.e., ‘of the sea’)’.

Of course, even this reconstruction leaves many questions open. In particular, why is the name *Columbanus* used here, whereas the Saint always refers to himself as *Columba* in his own writings?²⁰ Could this quote come from a lost work by Columbanus, perhaps one written by him before he left Ireland?²¹ What is the relationship between the sources cited in 6400B to illustrate the meanings of *dodrans* and Bede’s reprimand against the Hiberno-Latin use of this word, found in *De temporum ratione*, IV (*de ratione unciarum*)?²² What is the textual relationship between the section *de quadrante* and the preceding tract of AD 754 on eclipse prediction? And also, in more general terms, what is the precise role played by Brittany in the transmission of these Irish *computistica* to Fleury?²³

²⁰ I wish to thank Alain Dubreucq for alerting me to this important point.

²¹ It is most likely that Columbanus did produce a number of works before leaving for the Continent: Jonas of Bobbio informs us that, in his youth, the Saint wrote a commentary on the Psalms (*...psalmodium librum elimato sermone exponeret*) as well as many other works useful for the liturgy and for teaching (*...multaque alia, quae vel ad cantum digna vel ad docendum utilia, condidit dicta*; ed. B. Krusch, *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, MGH SRG 37 (Hannover & Leipzig 1905) 158); moreover, Michael Lapidge has argued convincingly that the hymn *Precamur patrem* from the Antiphony of Bangor should be attributed to the young Columbanus (cf. M. Lapidge, ‘*Precamur patrem*: an Easter hymn by Columbanus?’, in Lapidge, *Columbanus*, 225–63).

²² For more details on this matter, cf. A. K. Brown, ‘Bede, a Hisperic etymology, and early sea poetry’, *Mediaeval Studies* 37 (1975) 419–32; Wright, ‘Columbanus’ *Epistulae*, 48. This matter is especially relevant to the question of the possible early reception of Bede’s work in Ireland, as is shown by this sentence, found in 6400B immediately after the quote from Columbanus’s ‘prologue’: *Alii dicunt quod hoc exemplum quod praediximus in auctoritate non habetur*. Could *alii* be a reference to the discussion of *dodrans* in Bede’s *De temporum ratione*?

²³ That Brittany did indeed serve as intermediary in the process of transmission of these materials to Fleury is shown not only by the presence of Old Breton glosses in 6400B, but also by the striking parallels that I have discovered between this anonymous computus of AD 754 and the *computistica* preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Latin 7418A, an 11th-century Breton manuscript possibly from Landévennec, as is suggested by the two mentions of Saint Guéanolé inserted in the unpublished calendar found at ff. 2r–7v (where, moreover, several Irish Saints’ names also occur). Furthermore, the use of the Hellenizing phrase *in honomate* (in lieu of the more usual *in nomine*) in the *titulus* opening the computistical section of 6400B finds a precise parallel in the occurrence of the same phrase in several manuscripts of Breton origin, cf. L. Lemoine, ‘Symptômes insulaires dans un manuscrit breton de l’*Ars de verbo* d’Eutyches’, *Études Celtiques* 26 (1989) 145–57: 146–7; id., ‘Maniérisme et Hispérisme en Bretagne. Notes sur quelques colophons (VIIIe-Xe siècles)’, *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest* 102 (1995) 7–16: 11–3.

Obviously, it is not possible to deal with all these matters in this brief note: Immo Warntjes and the present writer will provide a more thorough analysis of this entire section of 6400B in a future publication. In the meantime, it will suffice to remark that, among various interesting features, this newly-discovered Irish computus also appears to offer a rare and fascinating glimpse on the transmission of Columbanus's writings in Ireland.