

MAGHNUS Ó DOMHNAILL'S SOURCE FOR ADOMNÁN'S
VITA S. COLUMBAE AND OTHER *VITAE*

AS long ago as 1918 O'Kelleher and Schoepperle rejected as 'without foundation' Reeves's conclusion that Maghnus Ó Domhnaill had available to him the longer recension of Adomnán's *Vita S. Columbae*.¹ Although copies of this were known in England, there is no evidence that any copy was available in Ireland in the sixteenth century.² Reeves was misled by the fact that he relied on Colgan's 'copious abstract', translated into Latin, and not on Ó Domhnaill's own text.³ Towards the end of his version, Colgan has added a number of posthumous miracles, there marked as Book III, chapters 66–71, which have no place in Ó Domhnaill's work. These were apparently introduced by Colgan from the longer recension of Adomnán's *vita*, which had been 'rediscovered' in 1621 and supplied to Ward, Colgan, Ussher, and the Bollandists by Fr Stephen White. It is not clear why Colgan chose to introduce this confusion, nor what principles guided his treatment of Ó Domhnaill's *Beatha Coluimb Chille* [*BCC*].

Ó Domhnaill's modern editors more acutely perceived that on a number of occasions the reading of Ó Domhnaill differs from the critical text of Adomnán, in a manner generally consistent with the shorter recension and in particular agreeing at times with Reeves's manuscript D, Dublin, Marsh's Library, MS Z3.1.5.⁴ This is the only Irish witness to the text of Adomnán. It is a copy of the shorter recension contained in a collection of Lives of Irish saints. While this manuscript dates from the beginning of the fifteenth century, the collection itself was assembled and harmonized (as I have argued) by a canon of Ferns, probably in the 1220s.⁵ Readings which reveal that Ó Domhnaill's source closely resembled that of the D text are as follows:

¹A. O'Kelleher and G. Schoepperle, *Betha Colaim Chille: Life of Columcille* (Urbana 1918) xli, referring to W. Reeves, *The Life of St Columba by Adamnan* (Dublin 1857) xii.

²The three B manuscripts of the longer recension witness to an English transmission: London, British Library, MS Add. 35110 (Durham, s. xii²); MS Cotton Tiberius D III (s. xii/xiii); MS Royal 8 D IX (s. xv/xvi).

³Reeves, *Life of Columba*, xxxvi, indicates that, instead of using the Irish text (which might have been accessible to him with the help of O'Donovan or O'Curry), he used the version in J. Colgan, *Trias thaumaturga* (Louvain 1647) 389–446. Colgan introduces his additions, 'His attexamus quaedam alia miracula. . .'. I note in passing that these additions also include the identification of the praise of St Columba 'per quaedam Scoticae linguae carmina' mentioned by Adomnán (I § 1) with the *Amra Choluim Chille* (*Trias*, 444), an identification which Reeves, 17 n., mistakenly attributes to Ó Domhnaill.

⁴O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, *Betha Colaim Chille*, xli–xlii.

⁵R. Sharpe, *Medieval Irish saints' Lives: an introduction to Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford 1990) ch. 12. The argument was put forward in a paper to the Medieval Academy of Ireland at Maynooth in 1986.

BCC § 237. Ó Domhnaill's reading 'Lugaidh' agrees with the reading of D 'Lugaidus', where Adomnán's original (I 28) and other copies of the shorter recension agree on 'Lugbeus' (Reeves, 56 n. 2; O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, 238 n. 244a). The explanation of this reading is simple: the shorter recension retained the words 'cuius supra mentionem fecimus' after the name, even though the previous mention in I 24 had been omitted along with the whole of I 23-7. Yet in I 22, the chapter which precedes I 28 in the shorter recension, there is a story involving Lugaidus. The compiler of the D collection, ever given to tidying away inconsistencies, has substituted this name for Lugbeus in the later chapter.

BCC § 238. Ó Domhnaill's reading 'Colman liath' translates 'Colman canus', the reading of the shorter recension (including D), where Adomnán (I 43) wrote 'Colman canis'. The suggestion by O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, 240 n. 247, that 'Ó Domhnaill incorrectly translates' this, is mistaken: he translated the text he had.

BCC § 238. Ó Domhnaill's 're Cill Rois 'sa Mumuin' would indeed be incorrect as a translation of 'Cell Rois in prouincia Maudgornorum', the reading of Adomnán (I 43), *ibid.*, n. 248. I take it to be a guess at interpreting the text of D, which has the meaningless 'Muganorum'.

BCC § 289. Adomnán (II 27) reads 'caupallum', meaning a sort of boat, but D reads 'caballum', which Ó Domhnaill translates *capull* 'horse' (*ibid.*, 306 n. 318).

BCC § 367. Adomnán's reading 'Hinba' (III 23; p. 237 in Reeves) had become 'Hinna' in D, rendered as 'Inda' by Ó Domhnaill (O'Kelleher and Schoepperle, 418 n. 454).

The evidence actually adds up to more than pinpointing the text-type for Adomnán's *uita* which served as Ó Domhnaill's model. The substitution of *Lugaid* for *Luigbe* so clearly indicates the desire for consistency on the part of the compiler of the D collection that we can be sure that we are not dealing with evidence for the archetype used by the compiler and by Ó Domhnaill. If Ó Domhnaill's text of the *Vita S. Columbae* had passed through the hands of the compiler of the D collection, we may guess that the collection as a whole was available to Ó Domhnaill. When one considers quotations from or references to the Lives of other saints in *Beatha Coluimh Chille* this becomes certain:

BCC § 121. Ó Domhnaill here cites a Life of St Mochutu. He translates into Irish § 42 of this Life as known in the D collection (C. Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* I-II (Oxford 1910) I, 186), adding one point from § 53 (*ibid.*, 190).

BCC § 160. Ó Domhnaill cites the Life of St Fintan. His source can be identified as § 2 of the Life in the D collection (Plummer, *Vitae* II, 96), which differs in wording from the two other Latin recensions of this Life.

BCC § 161. Here the Life of St Munnu is cited, of which there are again three (almost four) recensions. Ó Domhnaill's source, however, is

the recension in the D collection, §§ 2, 4 (part), 5, 7 (Plummer, *Vitae* II, 226–9).

BCC § 248. Ó Domhnaill elaborates on the D text of the Life of St Áed mac Bricc § 36 (Plummer, *Vitae* I, 45).

BCC § 249. In a second citation from the Life of St Fintán, Ó Domhnaill translates § 21 of the D text (Plummer, *Vitae* II, 105–6), a passage not found in either of the other recensions.

BCC § 368. Ó Domhnaill cites the Life of St Máedóc. Out of the four extant Latin recensions, Ó Domhnaill's source is almost certainly § 39 of the D text (Plummer, *Vitae* II, 157).

We may infer that Ó Domhnaill's search for historical texts bearing on the Life of St Columba brought him the use of a copy of the D collection of Latin Lives of Irish saints. The readings referred to here do not prove that this was the copy in Marsh's Library, the only one still containing the Life of St Columba. We can be confident that the severely mutilated sister manuscript, Dublin, Trinity College, MS 175 (s. xiv/xv), contained the same collection as a whole. Other manuscripts, including perhaps the parent copy from which these two derive, may still have been available in the sixteenth century.

No systematic study has been made of the evidence for knowledge of this collection. I have been able to show that the version of the Lives of St Ciarán of Saigir and St Máedóc contained in *Codex Salmanticensis* and in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 485, were based on the D texts of their Lives. I have argued that these two were part of a now lost collection of *vitae* compiled in the mid- to late thirteenth century; the compiler of the lost collection had access to the earlier D collection, while his own work was copied by the compiler of *Codex Salmanticensis* and part copied, part adapted by the compiler of the collection in the Oxford manuscript.⁶ Another writer who used the D collection may have been the compiler of this same Oxford collection, working somewhere near the river Shannon about 1300, for he introduces into his personal recension of the *Vita S. Brendani* § 104 a passage from the Life of St Columba.⁷ It is clear from the chapter-heading in the longer recension of Adomnán (III 11) that the story relates to St Brendan of Birr; the omission of the chapter-headings in the shorter recension such as we have in D has led the compiler of the Oxford collection to transfer the story to St Brendan of Clonfert. The D text of the Life of St Mochoemóc was used by the early modern Irish translator whose version was copied by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh in Brussels, Bibliothèque royale MS 2324–2340, ff. 287–302; Plummer notes that this seems closer to the reading of the Trinity manuscript than to Marsh's copy.⁸ Likewise, the early modern Irish translation of the *Vita S. Declani* in Brussels, Bibliothèque royale,

⁶ibid., ch. 9.

⁷Plummer, *Vitae* I, 151.

⁸ibid., lxxix.

MS 4190–4200, ff. 171–93, copied at Cashel by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh from an exemplar dated 1582, was based on the D text. For these two saints, D is the only collection known to contain a Latin Life.

We see, therefore, that Ó Domhnaill was not the only person to have used this collection between its compilation and our first evidence for the location of the surviving manuscripts in the 1620s. Both, we know, came into the possession of Archbishop Ussher. Marsh's manuscript had previously belonged to an Englishman called Wolverston living at Stillorgan. At that date the volume was known as 'Lour Darg', *Leabhar Dearg*.⁹ It may previously have belonged to the Friars Minor at Kilkenny.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the evidence for knowledge of the contents of the collection is too diffuse to permit any clear reconstruction of its medieval circulation. It is not possible to say how or where Ó Domhnaill came upon a copy.

RICHARD SHARPE

University of Oxford

⁹M. Esposito, 'Notes on Latin learning and literature in mediaeval Ireland', *Hermathena* 20 (1930) 225–60, pp. 259–60.

¹⁰J. Ussher, *An epistle concerning the religion anciently professed by the Irish and Scottish* (Dublin 1622) 21.