

RETRIEVING THE PRONUNCIATION OF EARLY INSULAR CELTIC SCRIBES: THE CASE OF DORBBĒNE

INTRODUCTION

In *Celtica* 21 (1990) 178–90, I attempted to establish a methodology for arguments connecting medieval Celtic sound-systems and orthographies on a somewhat firmer basis than seemed to have been done hitherto. Fusing insights gleaned from Professor Kenneth Jackson's *Language and history in early Britain*¹ and Roger Wright's *Late Latin and early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France*,² I adopted the hypothesis that, whenever present in one of the medieval Celtic realms, the Latin language will have been pronounced according to the vernacular sound-system. Conversely, in the spelling of the vernacular, the orthographic patterns of Latin will have had a paramount influence.

Now if this is so, it means that a text from our period which is in the Latin language throughout will be more or less opaque to the investigation of its phonology, however Celtic this may have been, since the spelling of Latin was effectively fixed hundreds of years beforehand and a continent away. If we wish to find out about a particular writer's pronunciation of Latin, we must therefore paradoxically look at anything he wrote which precisely was not in Latin, in order to gain the necessary logical leverage. Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae* is a particularly fruitful text for the application of this method, since it contains an astonishingly large number of proper names. These are in the vernacular, never more than slightly latinized; and therefore they will have been relatively free from the (for our purposes) deadening Classical constraints affecting the spelling of the Latin text which surrounds them. They are, however, intimately embedded in that text, so any phonological conclusions which we can draw from their own investigation can, in principle at least, be extended to the Latin of the text at large.

There is another reason why I seized on the *Vita Sancti Columbae* as an appropriate trial-ground for the hypothesis, and it is as follows. As I stated in last year's paper,³ the material for that contribution and the present one is drawn from research for a dissertation that investigated a number of different aspects of the relation between early insular Celtic spelling and phonology. When I began work on the latter I had guessed that Latin literacy would indeed be found strongly to have influenced the orthography of the medieval Celtic vernaculars; but time and again I discovered that this literacy was implicated at a surprisingly early stage and where one might least expect to find it. Thus, the system found in the Würzburg *prima manus* glosses for the representation of certain Old Irish consonants seems to point to a latinity which was naturalized in Ireland so early as to have been here before the time of Irish lenition

¹ Edinburgh 1953.

² Liverpool 1982.

³ *Celtica* 21 (1990) 178 n. 1.

(since the *prima manus* hides Irish lenition in the same way that Old Welsh, Cornish and Breton spelling hides British lenition, something which I described last year).⁴ Then again, an investigation I carried out into Ogham orthography suggests not only a roman-letter origin to the Ogham alphabet, but a strongly latinate background to the Ogham spelling-system itself. These findings were published in *Ériu* a few years ago,⁵ the historical and social implications being tackled in an article that appeared in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* at the same time;⁶ briefly what I there propose is a scenario which envisages a pre-Patrician Hibernian literacy embracing both Latin and the vernacular, the Latin having been written in roman letters on vellum (which has not survived), and the Gaelic principally in Ogham on stone and wood, of which the lapidary examples have sometimes survived. There is no need to go into this again; the important point is that I posit the existence in Ireland of a latinity, Hibernian in phonology, which was contemporary with and complementary to the writing of the Ogham inscriptions, but of which no documents survive as such. I surmise, however, that it would be likely to have been of a genre containing a high proportion of latinized Irish personal names – thus being the perishable roman-letter counterpart of the more durable Ogham-letter lapidary inscriptions – and therefore that any extant continuation of the tradition would be likely to display this feature.

Adomnán's *Vita Sancti Columbae* is a prime candidate for being viewed in this light, since it does contain literally hundreds of proper names, as I have said. And there are also the following considerations. The text itself, mainly written in the period 688 × 692, and probably completed by 697,⁷ is relatively early in terms of the range of Celtic-Latin works which survive, and yet the varying spellings of the names reflect different stages of Hibernian phonology and show that Adomnán was referring, directly or indirectly, to a whole series of still earlier texts lost to us. In other words, he was writing in a Latin tradition that stretches back in the manner we seek. Moreover, the likelihood that the content, whatever its accuracy in historical terms, reflects the same world as that in which the Oghams were carved is strengthened by the fact that the format of the names is frequently the same as that on the stones. Hence we have ethnic epithets (such as *Mocu Sailni*, *Mocu Neth Corb*, *Mocu Runtir* and *Niath Taloiric*) which do not survive long into the period of extant roman-letter sources. Also, MacNeill and Macalister, at least, saw

⁴See also A. Harvey, 'Some significant points of early Insular Celtic orthography', in *Sages, saints and storytellers: Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (ed. D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach, K. McCone, Maynooth 1989) 56–66, pp. 58–9.

⁵idem, 'The Ogam inscriptions and their geminate consonant symbols', *Ériu* 38 (1987) 45–71.

⁶idem, 'Early literacy in Ireland: the evidence from Ogam', *CMCS* 14 (1987) 1–15.

⁷K. H. Jackson, 'The Pictish language', in *The problem of the Picts* (ed. F. T. Wainwright, Edinburgh 1955) 129–66, p. 133.

the Ogham tradition as essentially pagan in origin; and although that assertion can be challenged,⁸ in the episode of the wizard Broichán we do see a world where Christendom was in contact with an active druidical paganism – for what that may be worth. Then again, the principal surviving manuscript, that by the Gael Dorbbēne (Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek Generalia I), was written satisfactorily close to the original both in place (probably Iona) and time (early eighth century). Finally, even this source can be controlled to some extent by the independent ‘B’ tradition, so that our text is remarkably well established.

I propose, then, in the present paper briefly to investigate certain features of the consonantal orthography of the proper names in Adomnán’s work to see whether they are consistent with the notion that the latinity in which they are embedded was, or had been, distinctively Hibernian in its phonology. Dorbbēne’s text of it has been edited by the Andersons in a most satisfactory manner,⁹ and I follow their readings.

Before looking at particular forms, however, it is necessary to make three more brief points about the theoretical framework in which they are to be discussed. The *fact* is that in Dorbbēne’s manuscript we have varying forms of names each of which is often true to a particular stage in the development of Hibernian phonology but which is not chronologically ‘compatible’ with the other forms. Thus (to take the example I gave last year), *Colgion* would be described as presyncope and *Colgen* as postsyncope, yet Dorbbēne wrote both (as probably did Adomnán before him).¹⁰ The *explanation* is, as we have seen, simple: whoever first wrote

⁸ See Harvey, ‘Early literacy’, 11–12.

⁹ A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (ed. and transl.), *Adomnan’s Life of Columba* (London 1961). It is unfortunate that the same cannot honestly be said of the long introduction to this book, particularly the linguistic parts. Here one cannot but endorse the trenchant criticisms made by D. A. Binchy in his review (*Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963) 193–5). Apart from being bitty, and frequently confusing spelling with pronunciation in the way I shall describe, the Andersons’ arguments tend to be muddled (as in that describing ‘the group *mb*’, p. 127) and lax (‘the name that Adomnan latinizes as *Miathi* . . . *may have been, and therefore probably was*, a survival of Dio’s *Maiatai*’, p. 160: my italics). Moreover, there are frequent errors of fact. It is simply not true that, as is stated on p. 133, a ‘palatal consonant affected the preceding vowel’ (unless of course it is really once more spelling which is being discussed); nor is it the case that ‘the Latin ending *-ius* is added to the Irish nominative in *Dermītius* in 18a, 20b, 21a’ (p. 145). What is added is the *appropriate* case-ending for a Latin noun whose nominative ended in *-ius*; thus the pages cited in fact show *Dermītium* (accusative) twice and *Dermīti* (genitive) once, **Dermītius* itself not appearing at all. It is usually possible to work out what the Andersons mean, but their statements can be most confusing; and unfortunately the list of criticisms given here could easily be added to. Happily, however, most of them will probably not apply to the much-needed new edition (Oxford 1991).

¹⁰ I see no reason why this example should be considered problematical – unlike forms in which short *e* varies with *ia* or *ie* (on which matter see, for example, D. Greene, ‘Varia III: a detail of syncope’, *Ériu* 23 (1972) 232–4, *passim*; J. Carney, ‘Aspects of Archaic Irish’, *Éigse* 17 (1977–9) 417–35, p. 428; and W. Cowgill, ‘On the prehistory of Celtic passive and deponent inflection’, *Ériu* 34 (1983) 73–111, p. 99).

both forms was referring to texts of different dates, and retained their spellings. The *significance* of the fact that he did so is, however, more complicated. Whenever a given scribe writes mutually anachronistic forms of words, it goes without saying (since the scribe cannot anticipate sound-changes which have not yet happened) that the language has actually reached at least the stage reflected in the least archaic spelling, and that his other forms represent orthographic conservatism.¹¹ Derived from this is one of the axioms for dating sound-changes in a language: the absence of a change in the spelling is no indication that a sound-change has *not* taken place, while proof that it *has* occurred is furnished either by such a change in the spelling of the sound of interest, or by hypercorrect, hyperarchaic spellings of similar sounds which had in fact never suffered the change in question.

To show what I mean in a detached fashion by giving a non-controversial example from the history of standard Latin, we may look at the way Professor W. Sidney Allen uses this axiom twice when discussing the evolution of a certain vowel phoneme:

In the earliest recorded forms of Latin there had existed a diphthong *ei*, seen for example in the fourth-century inscriptional forms *deiuos*, *nei* = classical *dīuus*, *nī*. In the third century this diphthong began to change into a long vowel, first at the ends of words, then elsewhere; evidence for this comes from spellings with *e*, the earliest being nominative plural *plourume*, dative singular *dioue* (= cl. *plurimi*, *Ioui*) c. 250 B.C., followed by *uecos* (= cl. *uīcus*) ?third century, and *conpromesise* (= cl. *compromisisse*) 189 B.C. The spelling with *ei*, however, also continues (e.g. 189 B.C. *inceideretis*, *ceiuis*, *deicerent*, nominative plural *uirei*), and further evidence for the change to a monophthong is provided by such 'reverse' spellings as *decreiuit* for *decreūit*, which never had had a diphthong . . . subsequently, around 150 B.C., a further change took place, whereby the [resulting] \bar{e} vowel became merged with \bar{i} , as in classical Latin. The earliest inscriptional example of this change is nominative plural *purgati* (c.160 B.C.), for earlier *purgatei/purgate*. As might be expected, spellings with *ei* continued for some time (though the *e* spelling dropped out as unnecessarily ambiguous), and the change to \bar{i} is equally demonstrated by reverse writings such as *audeire*, *faxseis*, *omneis* (= *omnīs*), genitive singular *cogendei*, which had always in fact been pronounced with \bar{i} .¹²

¹¹ Though this principle would seem obvious, the Andersons confuse spelling with sound and get muddled. Dealing with the variant spellings *e* and *ia* in Adomnán manuscripts (for the sound which began as /e:/ and became /i:ə/), they speak of the change of *sound* as having been 'introduced gradually', and of a 'space of time during which both phases of the sound were familiar' (*Adomnan*, 129). This is not what the evidence shows.

¹² *Vox Latina: a guide to the pronunciation of Classical Latin* 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1978) 53-4.

Now my first point is that when a scribe is orthographically conservative and uses an 'old' spelling for a 'new' sound, not only is he not retaining the 'old' pronunciation (which is what the Andersons seem to imagine), but also he is not being perverse in the sense of using a spelling which 'does not accurately represent' the 'new' sound concerned. What has happened is that as the sound-change has occurred, the spelling of particular words containing the changing sound has remained the same, so that the *actual meaning of the letters used* has altered (in terms of their pronunciation). This point provides, of course, as we saw last year, the basis for Jackson's explanation of Old Welsh, Cornish and Breton spelling and for Wright's entire *Late Latin* thesis, but it is one that can scarcely be made too often.¹³ And in the present case it confronts us with the following question: what can be said about the pronunciation of a scribe like Dorbbēne who uses (for whatever reason) both old and new spellings of the same word (or, in this case, name) indifferently?

The answer is surely, in the light of what has just been said, that he will have used just one pronunciation, and that it will have been that reflected in the least phonologically-archaic of his spellings (if indeed it will not have been newer still). This is my second point, and I do not see why it should be a problem. The American who writes *nite* informally and *night* formally does not pronounce them differently, and never says [nixt]. Wright makes the point that 'when reading aloud the Authorized Bible (of 1611) in church, modern Englishmen give to archaic words and morphemes (such as the *-est* of *thou makest*, or the *-eth* of *doeth*) the pronunciation which they would have had were they not archaisms'.¹⁴ And nobody supposes that Shakespeare pronounced his name in more than one way, however many ways he may have spelt it. Therefore, it is logical to assume that Dorbbēne will have pronounced both *Colgion* and *Colgen* as /kolg'an/ – and that the scribe of f. 18 r a of the Book of Armagh will have pronounced uniformly as /kaθβæð/ the name which he wrote variously on that page as *Cathboth*, *Cathbath* and *Cathbad*.¹⁵ We are only inclined against this view by our bad modern habit of pronouncing written words in historical languages 'as they are spelt' – by which we often actually mean, 'as if they were in our own, modern language'.

¹³ Anyone, for example, who is tempted to read out the spelling *omneis* (in the passage quoted above) as /omneis/ needs to have the statement made again!

¹⁴ *Late Latin*, 64.

¹⁵ I do not believe that we can dodge the question of how these scribes pronounced what they wrote by assuming that they merely copied their exemplars without assigning any particular pronunciation to the forms. To do that, we should need to envisage them as reading and writing *silently*; and there seems to be plenty of evidence that until even the late Middle Ages this was a rare art indeed. See J. Balogh, 'Voces paginarum', *Philologus* 82 (19[26-]27) 84–109, 202–240, on the whole question, and (most strikingly) pp. 215–16 on Thomas Kempis's inability to conceive of writing without pronouncing as late as the fifteenth century.

If this second point is granted, it leads on to the third: if, to Dorbbēne, *Colgion* and *Colgen* both meant /kolg'ən/ then it follows that, to him at least (as I said last year), 'io and e in certain environments could represent the same sound and were therefore to some degree synchronically interchangeable for spelling purposes'. Dorbbēne himself had an excellent visual memory,¹⁶ and was not given to writing forms which he had not himself seen written down (something which would be betrayed by hyperarchaisms of the type described above); but the principle still applies that in analysing his orthography we must take account of all his spellings and see them all as part of his synchronic system, whatever diachronic explanation may be available for the alternations.¹⁷ And other scribes, confronted with various spellings within their own language dating from different periods, and tending to pronounce them all the same way as long as they perceived them to be representations of the 'same' word (or name), have indeed felt free to use them all themselves when they wished in their turn to represent the sounds concerned in writing. Thus in the Irish-language sections of the Lambeth Commentary (an eighth-century text preserved in a tenth-century manuscript) 'the voiceless dental spirant is frequently represented by *d*, e.g. *peccdaib* . . . *midig* . . . *rémeperdu* (= *-thiu*)'.¹⁸ As Bieler and Carney go on to point out,

the simplest explanation of this feature, which is also found in Wb., might be as follows. After the archaic period final unaccented *th* > *d*, e.g. *molath* > *molad*. This led to a feeling that *th* and *d* were equivalent orthographic symbols, and hence *búaiith* (Wb. 11 a 7) could be written for *búaid*, and *maid* (Wb. 2 b 21) for *maith*.

These are hyperarchaisms – there was never /θ/ in Wb.'s *búaiith* – but Carney's point is that the spelling with *th* will have been inspired by forms in which the coexistence of *th* with *d* did have a diachronic basis, precisely as have the Book of Armagh's *Cathboth* : *Cathbath* : *Cathbad* cited above, and the scope for increased variation in spelling will have been exploited.

With the need for the holistic and hermeneutic approach outlined above in mind, we may now at last examine a certain few of Dorbbēne's consonantal spellings. The constant interplay of orthography

¹⁶A point confirmed in a private communication by Dr J. M. Picard.

¹⁷This is the principle followed by Meinir Lewis in her important but unpublished MA dissertation 'Disgrifiad o orgraff Hen Gymraeg gan ei chymharu ag orgraff Hen Wyddeleg' (University College, Aberystwyth, 1961), and applied to the whole corpus of her early Old Welsh 'Cyfnod A' material. Listing under '[e] ddiacen' the spellings *e* (331 instances), *o* (4), *a* (6) and *i* (2), she makes the point that the variations can be explained in terms of orthographic conservatism, copying from pre-affection texts and the influence of non-affected words, but that this is no reason not to include them in the analysis as part of the synchronic orthographical system.

¹⁸L. Bieler and J. Carney, 'The Lambeth Commentary', *Ériu* 23 (1972) 1–55, p. 8.

and phonology in the arguments exemplifies the 'spiral logic' described in last year's paper.

EXAMPLES

I have analysed phonologically all the names in Dorbbēne's text of Adomnán using the approach described. The following examples, or rather chains of examples, have been chosen because they concern the consonants (which are easier to deal with than the vowels), because they give a clue as to the existence of the very early 'Hibernian' latinity which I have postulated, and because they illustrate the use of the spiral logic effectively. In each case the variants chosen are as close to minimal orthographic pairs as possible. The orthographic/phonological rule which can be deduced is in each case used as the heading, for convenience. Many more such rules, or at least patterns, can be found by this method.

1. /x'/ already > /ɣ'/ finally after unstressed vowel

DATA: *Ainmurech* (p. 49 b) vs *Ainmuireg* (108 a)

Although the form with *g* is an insertion to Adomnán's text, it was still penned by Dorbbēne,¹⁹ so it is entirely legitimate to include it in this survey. It is an example from Schaffhausen that prompts an argument similar to that deployed by Carney in connection with the phenomenon of hyperarchaization as quoted above. Whatever the meaning of the name, we have here a guttural-stem genitive which in normal Old Irish would be pronounced /an'μ'ər'əx/ (the lenition of the bilabial seems guaranteed by Mod.Ir. 'Ó hAinmhire, Ó hAinmhireach').²⁰ Such guttural stem-finals have always been voiceless when non-palatal as here, so why does the insertion show *g* against Adomnán's *ch*? The answer must be that, at least by Dorbbēne's time, the well-established sound-change in our heading had occurred, so that readers were confronted with a widespread alternation *ch* vs *g* for palatals which was phonologically unconditioned in synchronic terms. Our scribe, or an earlier one, has merely extended the domain of the spelling-alternation to the equivalent non-palatal environment, even though the phonemic collapse which prompted the variation had not there occurred.

2. The absence of phonological gemination confirmed

DATA: *Cormaccus* (95 a, 96 b) vs *Cormacus* (94 b, 95 b (× 2), 97 a)

Oingussius (21 a) vs *Oingusio* (21 a)

Lam Dess (72 b) vs *Lam Des* (72 b)

Moc/cu Min (30 a) vs *Mocu Min* (22 a, 28 b, 66 b, 74 b)

Cette (58 b) vs *Cete* (19 a)

Roiss (44 a) vs *Rois* (43 b)

These examples speak for themselves: if Dorbbēne could pronounce *cc* and *c* the same, *ss* and *s* the same, and *tt* and *t* the same, and hence

¹⁹Andersons, *Adomnan*, 474 n. 6.

²⁰See P. Woulfe, *Sloinnte Gaedheal is Gall: Irish names and surnames* (Dublin 1923) 551.

was prepared to write them in a synchronically unconditioned way, it is clear at least that the device of orthographic gemination did not to him convey its phonological equivalent in the writing of Irish names. This is actually what I should have expected, since I am firmly of the opinion (as I argue elsewhere)²¹ that phonological gemination no longer existed after the time of lenition. But this assertion is minimal; the evidence also suggests the following considerations:

(a) As we saw in last year's paper, the (single) letters *t* and *c* came to mean /d/ and /g/ postvocally in British Latin. This convention was taken over into the standard spelling of OIr., but in our text it is perhaps not as well established as it later came to be. For *Cormacus* (/kormæk-/) and *Cete* (latinized, according to Binchy, from *Ce(a)t(t)*)²² had /k/ and /t/ in this position.

(b) In Modern English (Scots) and Welsh, if one wishes to represent the sounds /θ/ and /x/, one writes *th* and *ch*. As I have argued elsewhere,²³ I believe that this convention represents a deliberate decision, probably made between the mid-fifth and mid-sixth centuries, about how to spell these sounds in one of the Insular Celtic vernaculars. One sees it fully established in Dorbbēne's time; hence for OIr. /kann'əx-/ he writes *Cainnechus* (16 a, 63 a, 63 b, 64 a, 118 a), for /exwð'-/ *Echodius* (18 a, 18 b, 19 a (× 3), 20 a), for /to:θəl' > tu:əθəl'/ (gen.) *Tothail* (21 b), and for a latinized diminutive of OIr. 'báeth' (foolish) *Baitheneus* (25 a and *passim*), counter-examples being more apparent than real; see (3) below. It is this fact, coupled with consideration (a), which gives him the scope to alternate *t* with *tt* and *c* with *cc* for the voiceless stops.

(c) It would be wrong to suggest that Dorbbēne's single and double consonant symbols are in free variation only in his more-or-less vernacular names. The same alternations occur to some extent in his Latin, despite the official fixedness of its spelling; and in this Dorbbēne is, of course, far from unique among Irish scribes. As J. M. Picard says, 'gemination of single consonants and simplification of geminates are not limited to Ireland, but they are more numerous in Hiberno-Latin than in continental texts'.²⁴ This observation is not original, but it seems to me that its phonological implications have not yet been stated fully. Logically, since the phenomenon is found both in Dorbbēne's Latin and in even his completely unlatinized proper nouns (such as the nickname *Lam Des(s)*, 'Right Hand', in our data), the same synchronic conclusion should be drawn for both languages: that there no longer existed in

²¹ A. Harvey, 'Aspects of lenition and spirantization', *CMCS* 8 (1984) 87-100 (particularly p. 91).

²² Review of *Adomnan*, 195.

²³ Harvey, 'Some significant points', 59-64.

²⁴ 'The Schaffhausen *Adomnán* - a unique witness to Hiberno-Latin', *Peritia* 1 (1980) 216-49, p. 241.

either tongue, as pronounced by him, a phonological opposition based on gemination.²⁵

(d) Finally, this raises the question as to whether, when pronouncing Latin, Dorbbēne would have made *any* distinction between, for example, *ager* and *agger*, given that he did not do so on the basis of phonological length as had been done in Classical Latin. A clue to this is given by the relative frequency of orthographic gemination and simplification of consonants in early Hiberno-Latin texts. In the Lambeth Commentary, which is probably typical of such works, Bieler and Carney remark that

the most obvious 'Hibernicism' is the doubling of intervocalic *s* (over thirty instances); the opposite is rare. Alternative spellings [showing *s* varying with *ss*] are common (*essurire-esurire, farisei-farissei* . . .). No other intervocalic consonant is wrongly duplicated, and the few instances of irregular simplification of such consonants are not characteristic.²⁶

My impression from working on other Hiberno-Latin texts is that the special propensity of the letter *s* to this treatment holds good there too.²⁷ Why should this be so? A possible explanation would run as follows. If Latin was indeed introduced to Ireland and assimilated to the native Hibernian phonology before lenition – as individual words certainly were²⁸ – then, after lenition, postvocalic double consonant symbols will have stood for unlenited sounds and single ones for the corresponding lenited sounds, at least until other conventions were substituted (an example being that described in (b) above). Thus *ager* and *agger* will have been distinguished by being pronounced as /aγer/ and /ager/ respectively – a detail which, in the case of consonants whose lenition was phonetically the same in Britannic and Hibernian, seems to be fairly widely accepted (Eoin MacNeill says that the /aγer/ pronunciation persisted in Ireland until the fourteenth century, although he regards it as a postlenition import from Britain)²⁹ – and this is in line with what I have found in connection with the corpus of loanwords taken as a whole.³⁰ The graphs *s* and *ss*, however, would be less likely

²⁵On this Hiberno-Latin orthographical gemination and simplification, Dr Picard comments that 'perhaps the importance of these phenomena in Old Irish played some part'. I find it a little difficult to see what he means here. He refers in a footnote to R. Thurneysen, *A grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946) 89–96 and 150–53, passages notorious for their confusion of spelling with sound; and I suspect that a little of the same confusion exists in Picard's own mind, since he uses the word 'however' before concluding that the alternations 'may have been merely graphic as in continental Latin'. Has he not simply said the same thing twice?

²⁶'Lambeth Commentary', 4.

²⁷This view is reinforced by remarks of E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores: a palaeographical guide to Latin manuscripts prior to the ninth century* II. *Great Britain and Ireland* 2nd ed. (Oxford 1972) xii.

²⁸See, for example, D. McManus, 'A chronology of the Latin loan-words in early Irish', *Ériu* 34 (1983) 21–71, p. 22.

²⁹'Beginnings of Latin culture in Ireland', *Studies* 20 (1931) 39–48, 449–60, p. 41.

³⁰See Harvey, 'Aspects', 94.

to be bound into this convention than most other consonant symbols, since the lenition of the sibilant gave /h/ and this was a sound which was already either spelt *h* or routinely ignored in Latin spelling. Thus scribes were free to vary *s* and *ss* at will as the representation of /s/, since neither symbol was required for any other purpose. (For some indication that Dorbbēne did, in any case, occasionally use *s* word-initially for /h/,³¹ see (4) below.)

3. *The ex-Britannic rule postvocalic /d/ = t, /g/ = c, not yet fully adopted*

(This is the converse of (2a) above.)

DATA: *Lathir* (57 a) vs *Laitirus* (86 a)
 Emchathi (114 b) vs *Emchatus* (115 a)

At first sight these examples negate the observation made under (2b) above that the *th*-for-*/θ/* convention was consistently in force by Dorbbēne's time. In fact, however, it is unlikely that the phoneme */θ/* is what is being represented by the *ts* and *ths* here. The first word appears, as the Andersons say, to be an early instance of the modern 'láidir' (strong).³² As they remark, '*lathir* . . . and *laitirus* . . . are equally well attested as Adomnan's spellings [since the manuscript readings are in each case unanimous]. They are epithets of the same man, and should express the same attribute. But they are inconsistent forms. *Láitir* . . . would make sense, but it is difficult to decide that *lathir* is wrong'.³³ What we have is a case of hesitation about how to spell the sound /d/ postvocally. The spelling *lathir* shows that the convention which was not yet universally established was not one about how to spell */θ/*, but the ex-British one of writing *p, t, c* for */b, d, g/* in such positions.³⁴ The fact that *d* was not used indicates that, in whatever tradition our form originally belonged to, such would have meant the wrong thing (presumably */ð/*). The evidence is therefore consistent with my hypothesis of a naturalized Hibernian roman-letter literacy dating from before the time of lenition, since postvocalic *d* in such an orthography would indeed have come to mean */ð/*, but the solution to the problem of how to write /d/ (other than with a geminate) would not automatically have been furnished by the system (as it was in Britannic by the use of *t*), because the Hibernian lenition of original [t] was not /d/, but */θ/*.

Applying this insight to the second name in our data, we see that the Andersons are not justified in saying that 'when Adomnan quotes names

³¹Or rather, 'pronounced a letter written *s* in his source as /h/, and retained the spelling' – but I maintain that this amounts to exactly the same thing.

³²*Adomnan*, 416 n. 10.

³³*ibid.*, 336 n. 8.

³⁴F. J. Byrne's comparison with the Antiphony of Bangor's *munther* (in his review of *Adomnan* in *Scriptorium* 16 (1962) 397–400, p. 399) does not seem relevant, since there the sound is */t/*.

that contain a British, or North British lenited sound, he often substitutes for it the Irish lenited sound [*sic*] of the same letter [*sic*].³⁵ Instead, what we have are straightforward renderings of /d/ by *th* and (on the same basis) of /g/ by *ch*,³⁶ so that our forms are to be pronounced /emgad-/ as, presumably, in the original Britannic.³⁷ The same is probably true of the *t(h)* in the North British tribal name *Miathoru(m)* (18 a), which varies with *Miatorum* (19 a).

4. *Initial lenition not generally marked*

DATA: *Mocu Fír Roide* (132 a) vs *Mocu Sailni* (5 a, 16 b)
Mocu Sogin (55 b)
 (also *Mocu Moie* (13 a, 24 a)
Mocu Min (22 a, 28 b, 74 b, 66 b)
Moccu Min (30 a)
Mocu Druidi (42 a)
Mocu Blai (43 b, 115 a, 123 a)
Mocu Dalon (118 a))

Dorbbène's *punctum delens* above the *F* in our first form indicates that it is lenited, as indeed one would expect after 'moccu' if that word, whether or not derived from what appears in Ogham as 'MAQQI MUCCOI', retains (as the Ogham formula presumably does) an original final vowel. But if, to Dorbbène, the word 'moccu' lenites, then the second element in all the other forms will also be affected. Thus *Sailni* and *Sogin* will be pronounced with /h/, *Moie* and *Min* with /μ/, *Druidi* and *Dalon* with initial /ð/, and *Blai* with /β/. Even in 'standard' Old Irish this would not be shown in the spelling (except in the case of the forms with *s*, which would sport a *punctum delens*).³⁸ What is interesting is that

³⁵ *Adomnan*, 157.

³⁶ The use of *ch* for /g/ is also found in other medieval Celtic texts; examples range from the occurrences in *i chomus*, *ar chruche duun* and *tondech omnuchuir* in the Archaic Old Irish Cambrai Homily (ed. R. Thurneysen, *Old Irish reader* (Dublin 1949) 35–6) to *Maenchi* in the tenth-century Lanlawren charter from Cornwall (ed. O. J. Padel, 'The text of the Lanlawren charter', *Cornish Studies* 7 (1979) 43–4). As for Old Welsh material, Meinir Lewis finds two examples of *ch* for /g/ and four of the corresponding usage of *th* for /d/ in her 'Cyfnod B' texts. One hesitates, however, to see in all this traces of an early pan-Celtic convention for spelling voiced stops that began in Ireland, was extended to Britain, and was subsequently ousted by the 'standard' ex-Britannic convention spreading the other way. Instead, the digraph spellings in the British material are more likely to be *ad hoc* occurrences, and the resemblance to the early Irish usage coincidental.

³⁷ The Andersons, after all, argue that the initial vowel must be 'an instance of *i*-affection of *a* in the North-British language', since this would not have happened in Irish (*Adomnan*, 160). K. Jackson appears to deny the existence of such affection in North British as well ('Pictish language', 162), though on what basis is unclear.

³⁸ Dorbbène also writes forms in which a resonant follows 'moccu', such as *Mocu Neth Corb* (13 b), *Mocu Runtir* (23 b) and *Mocu Loigse* (113 a). Formally these spellings do fit lenition, inasmuch as *n* reflects lenited /n/ rather than unlenited /nn/, *r* lenited /r/ rather than unlenited /rr/, and *l* lenited /l/ rather than unlenited /ll/. But the orthography is doubtless conditioned by the rule, displayed also in the Oghams, that words should not begin with double symbols whatever the phonology. Thus nothing about lenition can be deduced from these spellings.

Dorbbēne's forms are embedded in a Latin text. In view of the fact that we are investigating the hypothesis that his Latin was fully assimilated to the phonology of the vernacular, and given the likelihood that lenition (whether Hibernian or Britannic) had affected consonants in at least the interior of its words, the present examples, which have lenition operating across word-boundaries in a wholly Irish nexus, prompt the speculation that the same may have occurred in Dorbbēne's spoken Latin as well. The difficulty lies in detecting it, since Latin spelling is so nearly fixed. On this, see (6) below.

5. *Nasal mutation not generally shown*

In Dorbbēne's place-name *Ard Ceannachte* (56 a), the initial *C* must represent /g/: 'ardd' is a neuter noun which has already lost final /n/ by apocope, yet nasalization must date from before such losses took place. Similarly, we must have /g/ and /d/ after the preposition *hi* (in) in *hi Clochur* (57 a) and *hi Teilte* (106 b). The spellings do not show the mutation; nor would one expect them to. But once again, given the intimate relationship between the Latin and the Irish in our text, one may enquire whether the mutation did not also cross mixed-language word-boundaries in pronunciation. A likely kind of locus for this phenomenon is in phrases like *in Muirbulc Mar* (131 b). Here the first element is surely the Latin rather than the Irish word for 'in', since (particularly before /m/) the original Irish nasal would have been assimilated centuries before the date of our text.³⁹ Yet in his manuscript Dorbbēne has given the word one of his characteristically vernacular-marking over-dashes, indicating that he, for one, took it as the Irish preposition.⁴⁰ He would therefore have regarded it as provoking nasalization in pronunciation: in this case not so much by actually nasalizing the /m/ (nasalized and radical /m/ were the same) but by *not* pronouncing the *n*.⁴¹ Inasmuch as Dorbbēne thus reveals himself to be prepared to write letters which he did not pronounce, this in itself may have considerable implications for our general view of his phonology and orthographic practice.

6. *Initial lenition to some degree a dynamic feature of Hiberno-Latin*

(a) DATA: *Virgnovo* (120 b) vs *Fergnovo* (131 a)

The Andersons are doubtless right in saying that the spelling with initial *V* suggests 'a British derivation';⁴² but, given that the same man is intended in each case, what our two forms taken together would appear to suggest is that Dorbbēne pronounced initial *V* and initial *F* in the

³⁹See R. A. S. Macalister, *Corpus inscriptionum Insularum Celticarum* I (Dublin 1945) no. 160, for a pre-apocope Ogham example in which this appears to have happened.

⁴⁰Andersons, *Adomnan*, 532 n. 9.

⁴¹I suggest that he would have pronounced the first two words in what he wrote as /ə mur'βəlg/.

⁴²*Adomnan*, 139.

same way. This would not be surprising, for 'after a word ending in a Primitive Irish consonant other than **n*, or when not closely linked to a preceding word, word-initial **w* became Old Irish *f*'.⁴³ This is said to have happened around the beginning of the seventh century;⁴⁴ Latin was unquestionably being written by Irishmen by this time, and if, as I have suggested all along, it was assimilated to the native sound-system, with *v* originally being pronounced as /w/, then this change will have affected it too, and hence the spelling of vernacular names. Professor Janet M. Bately points out that 'Irish influence has been suggested as a possible explanation of initial *f* for *v* in both OE and OHG',⁴⁵ and this influence would be much more likely to have been mediated through the Latin language, pronounced in a Hibernian way, than through Irish itself. If so, this influence is probably what lies behind a feature of ex-Insular Latin as taught by Alcuin's school on the Continent: the alliteration of *f* and *v* 'as in *flamine* and *versus*, *verba* and *fudit*; no Romance speech has ever merged these two sounds in initial position'.⁴⁶ Again, A. Ahlqvist draws attention to the spelling *fitalis* for standard Latin *vitalis* in the composite Irish manuscript TCD H.3.18, now 1337.⁴⁷ The evidence is therefore that, in radical word-initial position, Dorbbēne and other Hiberno-Latin scribes pronounced both *f* and *v* as /f/ and, when not conditioned by Latin's fixed spelling – in other words, when writing personal names – wrote /f/ either as *F* or as *V*.⁴⁸ The question is what they did in postvocalic position, which I investigate next.

(b) DATA: *Fergnoi* (29 b) vs *Virgnovi* (120 b, 121 a)

What this pair shows is *v* alternating with zero in word-internal postvocalic position. It is compatible with the view that Dorbbēne was able to use the letter *v* as an orthographic hiatus-filler, in this case between the Irish stem of the name (/f'eryno-/) and the Latin genitive ending which his exemplar had grafted onto it.⁴⁹ The same thing is

⁴³W. Cowgill, 'On the fate of **w* in Old Irish', *Language* 43 (1967) 129–38, p. 129.

⁴⁴K. H. Jackson, 'Common Gaelic: the evolution of the Goidelic languages', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 37 (1951) 71–97, p. 80.

⁴⁵'The Old English Orosius: the question of dictation', *Anglia* 84 (1966) 256–304, p. 286 n. 198.

⁴⁶Wright, *Late Latin*, 100.

⁴⁷'The early Irish linguist', *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 73 (1982) 1–81, p. 16 n. 44.

⁴⁸In the case of one name, Dorbbēne interestingly alternates *F* with *B*: *Broichano* (79 b and elsewhere) vs *Froichano* (80 a). The simplest explanation seems to be that this name, whether originally Irish or North British, formerly had initial /w/, which had developed into /f/ in Irish (precisely as in *Fergnovo*): hence the spelling with *F*. The other spellings presumably date from when the sound was still /w/, but have *B* rather than *V*, 'the combination *vr-* (with consonantal *v*) being unknown in Latin' (T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin 1946) 534). In any case, the net outcome is that Dorbbēne seems to be spelling the sound /f/ with the letter *b* as a result of alphabetic traditions – a counterintuitive usage which goes to show how strong such traditions can be and how readily they can obscure the sound-system being represented.

⁴⁹The Andersons hint at this view (*Adomnan*, 139).

probably to be seen in our text's numerous citations of the name of Iona: they all begin *Iov-*, followed by Latin first-declension terminations. The Andersons think that the *v* marks the survival of intervocalic /w/;⁵⁰ but if the original name of the island was /iwowa:/, as they suggest, both of the etymological /w/s should have disappeared long before this, leaving simply the diphthong /eo/ as the Gaelic name.⁵¹ It seems best to regard this as having indeed happened, and the *v* as purely orthographic and silent.⁵²

Our text also shows what are probably hypercorrections stemming from this use of orthographic *v*. Dorbbēne's *Feachnaus* (32 a), *Fechno* (5 b, 31 b) seem probably, and *Beognai* (16 b), *Beogni* (64 a) almost certainly, to contain as their second element the reflex of a form cognate with British /gna:wios/, the latter apparently lying behind a number of Welsh names in *-noe*, *-no*.⁵³ If this analysis is right, then the vocalism of the element will still have been at the stage /au/ (in transition from /aw/ to /o:/) in Dorbbēne's time⁵⁴ (this is backed up by the appearance of the letter *a* in one spelling of each of our names). Why then is the second part of the diphthong, /-u/, not indicated? The answer is probably that the symbol *u* (graphemically undifferentiated throughout the Middle Ages, of course, from *v*) was felt to be optional after another vowel symbol, by analogy with forms in which it was indeed purely orthographic.⁵⁵

(c) The evidence in (a) and (b) indicates that Dorbbēne's written *v* alternates in value between /f/ and zero. Now these are precisely the extremes of the range of values which the reflex of original /w/ came to have in Irish;⁵⁶ and it is clear that the convention *v* × /w/ was established before the differentiation of sound. However, when the differentiation took place, it was on the basis of environment, and was a kind of lenition (though of course much later than the main sound-change called by that name). It even applied word-initially. The significant point is that, from the time of this 'lenition' onwards, the pronunciation of *v* will (depending on its environment) have had one of two values, even word-initially; and it seems clear that this will have applied to Hiberno-Latin as well as to the vernacular (for how could the former escape such an automatic sound-change, having been established before it took place?).

⁵⁰ibid., 97, 128, 154.

⁵¹See, for example, Thurneysen, *Grammar*, 125.

⁵²In this light it is perhaps significant that *u* is the symbol involved in the clearest example of the writing by Dorbbēne of a letter that cannot have been pronounced by him (whatever the origin of the form containing it): *Fechureg* (22 b), beside *Fechreg* (121 a).

⁵³On these see Jackson, *Language and history*, 382–3.

⁵⁴Thurneysen, *Grammar*, 125.

⁵⁵Nominative *Finnio* (160 b, twice) versus dative *Vinniavo* (53 b) are consistent with this conclusion, whatever Britannic input there may have been into the name (*Adomnan*, 68, 127, 128).

⁵⁶Thurneysen, *Grammar*, 122–5; see also Cowgill, 'Fate of *w', 129–30.

To this extent at least, then, initial lenition was a dynamic feature of Hiberno-Latin, and the (Latin) phrase *de Vertrige in Bertrigam* (Book of Armagh, f. 15 r a) probably represents an actual example of it. At all events, the structure of Hiberno-Latin phonology was evidently not such as to exclude the possibility of even a more generalized system of word-initial lenition as such a dynamic feature. If this is correct, it means that the full range of word-initial dynamic lenition is still more likely to have been in play in the medieval Latin of Celtic Britain (in the Britannic guise of /b/ vs /β/, /k/ vs /g/, /d/ vs /ð/, etc.).⁵⁷ And if at any stage Celtic-Latin final syllables became weak in pronunciation – something which is exceedingly likely if there is any truth in my notion of the language's having been carried along, phonologically speaking, with the vernacular – then, depending on the strength of the spoken Latin tradition through the time of that stage, there will potentially have been the phenomenon of grammatically load-bearing initial lenition within the Latin of the Celtic areas. Can it even be the case, then, that spoken medieval Celtic Latin may be regarded as having had initial mutations in the full sense of the word?⁵⁸ That would be an exciting conclusion to reach; but whatever one may think about that, and however conclusive or otherwise the examples given in this paper may be, they do (I hope) illustrate the scope that exists for investigating linguistic phenomena within a given text by means of identifying and collating what must

⁵⁷I say this by analogy with the principle just deduced for the Hibernian case. British Latin was established before Britannic lenition and was conformed to the native sound-system; so when lenition took place, how can even word-initial consonants in such Latin have escaped? This conclusion is reinforced by Meinir Lewis's figures, which show that, in general, initial lenition in Old Welsh was not recognized in spelling – thus prompting the argument about the significance for Latin pronunciation of 'lenition-hiding' vernacular orthography (which I have several times rehearsed).

⁵⁸This possibility would arise principally in the case of set Latin phrases that had become well established in the Celtic-speaking areas before the time of lenition and apocope. One might think, for example, of nominative *Filius Dei* versus genitive *Fili Dei*: assuming that the pronunciation of these had been assimilated to native phonology and had consequently participated in the sound-changes in question, they would subsequently have become, in Hiberno-Latin, /f'i:l'ə d'e:/ versus /f'i:l'ə δ'e:/ (although of course their unchanging written forms would give no hint of this). Although I only present it as a possibility, this suggestion appears less outlandish when one considers that the Latin phrase *secundus abbas* really did yield 'secndabb' and 'segynnab' as early Irish and Welsh words respectively for 'prior'. It may, of course, be objected that the evidence from metrical compositions in Celtic Latin rules out the possibility that whole syllables can have been lost in pronunciation; but one can never be certain to what extent metrical rules represented more than an exercise on vellum, and in any case liturgical or recitative pronunciation may have differed to some degree from that of the everyday speech of the monasteries. (Wright argues analogously in respect of the Romance-speaking areas in *Late Latin, passim*; for evidence that Latin was the everyday language of Celtic religious houses at least as late as the tenth century, see A. Harvey, 'The Cambridge Juvenius glosses: evidence of Hiberno-Welsh literary interaction?', *Language contact in the British Isles: proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on Language Contact in Europe* (ed. P. S. Ureland and G. Broderick, Tübingen 1991) 181–98.

have been spelling-variants for the same sound. As such, this can be seen as an orthographic analogue to the process of identifying, within the discourse of a given speaker, what must be allophones of the same phoneme; and it could potentially be taken much further. I have merely demonstrated the application of what I hope may be a useful tool.

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