

# THE NON-CLASSICAL VOCABULARY OF CELTIC-LATIN LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

Anthony Harvey

## *Context of the Research*

A milestone in work on the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources* (DMLCS) was reached at the end of 1994 when the Belgian firm Brepols published on CD-rom the first edition of the project's marked-up, full-text database of Celtic-Latin literature, the *Royal Irish Academy Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature* (ACLL), which had been under construction since 1980.<sup>2</sup> The first of two more, cumulative editions, which are planned as the database is expanded to an eventual total of about seven million words, has subsequently been launched on line,<sup>3</sup> this continuing expansion being why the opening CD was formally described as a preliminary version of ACLL; nevertheless, the latter offered a large sample of the 1300-odd Latin works written, or arguably written, in Celtic areas or by Celts abroad during the period 400 to 1200 A.D.<sup>4</sup> Spanning the dates, authors, geographical regions and genres involved, ACLL-1 included most of what are regarded as the distinguishing works of Celtic latinity, and was certainly representative enough for wordsearches conducted upon it to give results that were valid for lexicographical purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Papers embodying the substance of the present essay have been read on various occasions at conferences in Utrecht, Cork, London, Lampeter and Barcelona; I am very grateful to all who took part in the subsequent discussions, and also to Drs Karen Jankulak and Elva Johnston for their helpful vetting of certain historical assertions. A written version was published at the current Internet address in 2008; that now on the reader's screen has been updated in line with the hard copy that appeared in *Spoken and Written Language: Relations between Latin and the Vernacular Languages in the Earlier Middle Ages*, ed. M. Garrison *et al.* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 87-100.

<sup>2</sup> *Royal Irish Academy Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature*, first (preliminary) CD-rom edition (ACLL-1), compiled by A. Harvey, K. Devine and F.J. Smith (Turnhout, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> *Royal Irish Academy Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature*, second (developed and expanded) edition (ACLL-2), compiled by A. Harvey and A. Malthouse (accessible at <http://www.brepolis.net> since 2010). Progress on ACLL and on other elements of DMLCS work may be tracked by going to <http://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS> and following links to the relevant pages from there.

<sup>4</sup> See M. Lapidge and R. Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature 400-1200* (Dublin, 1985).

As the DMLCS title suggests, the project's main objective is precisely to compile in dictionary form an authoritative, documented guide to the meaning and usage of the individual words found in Celtic-Latin literature. Therefore, as soon as ACLL-1 was published, a copy was pressed into service in the DMLCS office; and dictionary-writing drawing upon it (and subsequently upon ACLL-2) has been the principal task there since then. However, given the minimal staffing establishment of the enterprise (one full-time Editor and, at that point, one half-time Project Assistant) it soon became clear that the traditional alphabetical approach to lexicography was not going to be feasible in the present case: comparable projects elsewhere had five times as many employees. In any event, as was observed in a review of progress that took stock of the situation, "university library shelves were replete with fascicules of definitive dictionaries of various languages that were complete for the first few letters, but that then petered out, either abandoned ignominiously or else still in progress after decades; and scholars were as likely to wish to look up a word beginning with S or T as they were one commencing with A or B".<sup>5</sup> The strategic decision was therefore made not to attempt to proceed by dealing with all of A, then all of B, and so on.

Instead, DMLCS would conduct a number of lexicographical sweeps through the entire alphabet, each restricted to certain categories of word and, as such, complete and constituting a worthwhile publication in itself, but each capable of forming part of an eventual whole that need not be very different from a traditional definitive dictionary. ... The first such sweep was designed to provide authoritative treatment of those words encountered in any part of the Celtic-Latin corpus that were not found in the Classical *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (even with a change of meaning).<sup>6</sup>

Such non-Classical items were considered to be in many ways the most interesting words, and by definition they were the most distinctive; and a skeleton collection of appropriate headwords had already been drafted for DMLCS by a British Academy research assistant, Deborah Ford. This first sweep, then, is the phase of the project that Jane Power and the present writer have been engaged on for the past few years, ACLL's valuable word-searching software being ideally suited to ferreting out further items for it. The first of two volumes of the resulting *Non-Classical Lexicon of Celtic Latinity*

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<sup>5</sup> A. Harvey, "Royal Irish Academy Activity in Celtic-Latin Studies", in *The Scriptures and Early Medieval Ireland*, ed. T. O'Loughlin (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 117-124, at p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

(NCLCL) has now been completed and published; covering the letters A to H, it contains something under 6000 headwords.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, the whole of Ms Ford's preliminary work has already been made available as an on-line *Celtic-Latin Word-List* on the DMLCS website;<sup>8</sup> the *List* is updated letter by letter as each is treated for the *Lexicon*, and serves as a sort of advance catalogue to the major work. The present opportunity seems an ideal one for complementing that by offering an overview, with analysis, of the kinds of vocabulary involved.

### *Overview of the Vocabulary, I: Distinctive Spellings*

When one speaks of the distinctive, non-Classical vocabulary of Celtic-Latin literature, as presented in the *Lexicon*, one is speaking of a spectrum of distinctiveness. In analysing it the best approach seems to be briefly to work through the shades in this spectrum, beginning at the end that is the closest to standard Latin and therefore only just permissible by the Classical exclusion rule explained above, and working towards the extremes of peculiarity that are to be encountered at the other end. Indeed, the starting-point has to lie among items that in strict terms actually are Classical words, but which are included in the *Lexicon* because they appear in the source texts in orthographic guises that might make them unrecognizable. About ten percent of the headwords that have so far been written are accounted for by this category. Routinely ignored — as in other medieval Latin dictionaries — are changes in spelling that are predictable thanks to known phonological developments in pan-European post-Classical Latin; for example, with the loss of phonemic vowel-length, the former long /o:/ sound is known to have merged almost everywhere with the former short /u/, so that Classical **vōx** (voice) and Classical **crūx** (cross) have ended up as (for example) Italian **voce** and **croce**, with the same vowel.<sup>9</sup> In the same way, the former long /e:/ has merged with the

<sup>7</sup> *The Non-Classical Lexicon of Celtic Latinity*, 1 (A–H), ed. A. Harvey and J. Power (Turnhout, 2005: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources*, 1).

<sup>8</sup> <http://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS/wordlist/wordlist.html>

<sup>9</sup> B. Migliorini, *The Italian Language*, ed. T.G. Griffith (London, 1966), p. 21. The slightly non-standard notation used in the present essay is designed to distinguish specific written types (indicated *in italics*) from words considered as lexemes and referred to, for convenience, in normalised spelling (and, these being citation forms, in **bold font**); the latter should be understood to include oblique case-forms if the word is a noun, finite forms if it is a verb, and so on. For the advantages of making this kind of distinction see A. Harvey, “Suggestions for Improving the Notation Used for Celtic Historical

former short /i/; and medieval Latin texts generally are replete with the resulting spelling confusions. A phenomenon characteristic of Insular texts, however — and the late Professor Bengt Löfstedt has been to the fore in pointing this out<sup>10</sup> — is renderings of the former long *close* vowel-sounds /i:/ and /u:/, even when stressed, with the letters *e* and *o* respectively. For example, the DMLCS database contains several early Hiberno-Latin instances of the spelling with *crem-* of case-forms of **crimen**, even though these would Classically have been pronounced with initial /kri:m-/. Again, in a late seventh-century Hiberno-Latin hagiographical work, one finds forms of what was Classical **būcula** (a young cow or heifer) written *boc-*.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, there is a tendency for the original short, open vowel /ɛ/ to be written in our texts with *i* (thus the *Lexicon* has headwords **finistra** and **gīlu** for Classical **fēnēstra** and **gēlu**). That this kind of spelling is distinctive is proved by the fact that in the mainly Continental database, the *Cetedoc Library of Christian Latin Texts* (CLCLT),<sup>12</sup> which is nearly an order of magnitude larger than that of DMLCS, the phenomenon is found more rarely, and then almost exclusively in the writings of Irish or English authors. The Anglo-Latin occurrences doubtless arise for the same reason as the Irish ones: namely that initially the Irish, and then the English, were the first races to learn Latin as a read and written language who were not themselves already familiar with it (or with a Romance derivative thereof) as a spoken tongue; hence these were the first nationalities who did not know as if by instinct what were the correct vowels and stresses, and who were therefore liable to vary *e* with *i* and *o* with *u* in their spellings of words where (for example) an Italian would only do so in quite exceptional circumstances. Distinctive and significant though this phenomenon is, however, one cannot claim that it is particularly widespread in the Celtic-Latin corpus; and Dr David Howlett has made the point that, on

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Linguistics”, in *Hispano-Gallo-Brittonica: Essays in Honour of Professor D. Ellis Evans on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J.F. Eska, R.G. Gruffydd and N. Jacobs (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 52-57.

<sup>10</sup> B. Löfstedt, *Der hibernolateinische Grammatiker Malsachanus* (Uppsala, 1965), pp. 99-102.

<sup>11</sup> The forms in question occur on *paginae* (that is, digital pages) 366 and 370 of Adomnán’s *Vita Sancti Columbae*, which is text no. 305 as captured electronically in ACLL (from a 1961 edition by A.O. and M.O. Anderson).

<sup>12</sup> Cumulative versions of the database in question, compiled by P. Tombeur, appeared initially on CD-rom (Turnhout, 1991; fifth edn. 2002), but since 2005 have been released on line; the latest update is available as *Latin Library of Latin Texts: Series A and B*, at <http://www.brepolis.net>

balance, the fact of Irish scholars' having learned Latin as a written language actually made them better, rather than worse, at achieving Classical correctness than were their Continental counterparts, since they were not constantly being confused by the influence of post-Classical Romance developments emanating from within their own spoken tongue.<sup>13</sup>

## *II: Late Latin Words with Distinctive Meanings*

Moving on to genuinely non-Classical words, one finds that a first category is made up of items that, though they were in use throughout Catholic Europe, were nevertheless developed in post-Classical times, are consequently excluded by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, and therefore need to be included in the *Lexicon* if the latter is to be consistently useful. Most of these words, being so widespread, had appeared by about the seventh century, and accordingly count as Late, or "Later", Latin (in the sense adopted by Alexander Souter in his famous *Glossary*).<sup>14</sup> They form the single biggest category of *Lexicon* entries, accounting for fifteen to twenty percent of the headwords compiled to date; and they range from simple and obvious modifications of Classical words, such as **datrrix**, through technical grammatical and/or philosophical terms such as **germinalis**, to vivid, descriptive items such as **ensipotens** (powerful with the sword), **deuoratio** (the act of being swallowed up), and **ambisinister** (doing evil with both hands). A remarkably high proportion of these words seems to be associated with acts of violence. However, it would be fair to say that the bulk of the Late Latin vocabulary in the DMLCS database consists, as it does throughout western Europe, of specifically ecclesiastical or church-related words. In fact the project's source texts are packed with Late Latin words that together span all aspects of the Catholicism which permeated every part of Western European life and living throughout the relevant period, and that will probably be

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<sup>13</sup> This assertion was first aired at the 1996 Summer School of the Classical Association of Ireland; the clearest (albeit sub-scholarly) published exposition of it continues to be that found in a front-page newspaper report of the occasion (L. Siggins, "How the Irish Saved Latin and Schooled the English", *Irish Times*, 28 August 1996). Löfstedt had earlier noted the lack of Romance influence in Ireland, but presented this as having been a mixed blessing (*Der hibernolateinische Grammatiker*, p. 102).

<sup>14</sup> A. Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 A.D.* (Oxford, 1949).

familiar to most readers.<sup>15</sup> What may be of more interest is the fact that some of these words have, in at least some instances, been given particular twists of meaning by Celtic authors in ways that give an insight into what may be distinctive social features, world-views and ecclesiology.<sup>16</sup> There is, in fact, a whole area of ecclesiastical life in the early Middle Ages — centring on the seventh and eighth centuries — which (unless we are being deceived by quirks of the manuscript tradition) seems to have been pioneered by Celtic churches, and where they therefore appear to have taken the lead in adapting (and indeed coining) words to deal with new concepts. This is the area of penance, acts of penance, and penitential behaviour. Of course, penance and extreme asceticism were not new in the Catholic Church at that time; but it seems to have been Celts who, at a series of Insular synods, first began to codify these practices, specifying particular penances for particular sins according to a well-defined scale.<sup>17</sup> This

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<sup>15</sup> One thinks here of the vocabulary needed to describe everything from ecclesiastical grades (such as **episcopus**, **diaconissa** and **abbas**) through sacred texts and teachings (such as **decalogus** and **euangelium**) and church discipline and administration (such as **decimatio**, meaning a tithe) as well as ritual and sacrament (such as **eucharistia**, **exorcismus**, **genuflexio**, **benedictio** and **baptismus**) down simply to lay individuals participating in expected Christian behaviour (such as **elemosynarius**, meaning a giver of alms or charity, and **adorator**, meaning a worshipper). There is also a whole associated category of words dealing with such ecclesiastical necessities as the calendar, finding the date of Easter, and computistics generally; examples include the words **decemnouenalis** (consisting of nineteen years) and **bissexus** (a leap-year or intercalary day therein).

<sup>16</sup> Probably the most frequently cited example is that of the word **paroecia** or **paruchia**. It occurs in texts from St Jerome's time onwards, and is defined by Souter in its pan-European sense as a parish, country parish, or diocese; but, until recently, historians were fond of asserting that in the context of Celtic churches it could mean a monastic federation, that is a group of monasteries all acknowledging the same founder, but not necessarily close together geographically. For example, it was held that foundations stretching from Derry in the north-west of Ireland, through Iona in the Hebrides, to Dunkeld in the eastern Highlands of Scotland together formed an entity that in the early tenth century constituted the "paruchia" of St Columcille. Research in recent decades, however, has shown that "The Implications of *paruchia*" are somewhat more complicated: see the 1993 article of that name by C. Etchingham (*Ériu* 44, pp. 139-162), as well as R. Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland", *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 230-270.

<sup>17</sup> Many of the key documents here, since captured electronically in ACLL, are those originally brought together and edited by L. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin, 1963); it should be noted that some of them are British or Breton in origin rather than Hibernian. Very relevant too are both recensions of the so-called *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, though only one has so far been published, under the title *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, ed. F.W.H. Wasserschleben (Giessen, 1874; 2nd edn. Leipzig, 1885). This was used as a basis for the electronic compilation of ACLL text 612; but keenly awaited is *The Hibernensis: A Study, Edition, and Translation, with Notes*, ed. R. Flechner (Dublin, forthcoming).

legalistic approach manifests itself too in a readiness on the part of Celtic churches to institutionalise aspects of Old Testament, Old Covenant law in their regulations in a manner apparently unparalleled on the Continent. A few years ago, DMLCS research brought to light an amusing example of how this mentality could lead to highly aberrant uses of what was otherwise a straightforward Christian Latin term, namely the verb **excommunicare**. The examples extracted from the project's database by its word-searching software appeared at first to be duly falling into the expected transnational meanings: sense 1, to excommunicate; sense 2 (past participle as noun), (an) excommunicate individual. There were a few spelling variations to be coped with but generally this seemed likely to be an item with an entirely mainstream profile. Closer inspection, however, revealed a remarkable use of the word in one of the strikingly numerous early Hiberno-Latin saints' *Lives*, namely that of St Colmán Elo as preserved in the Codex Salmanticensis.<sup>18</sup> Here, an anecdote states that one day at the monastery farm St Colmán, who is described as having the gift of second sight, suddenly ordered that one of the novices should run immediately to the brothers who were milking the cows in case one of them should pollute himself with the milk, because a crow was in the act of "excommunicating" it. "*Coruus excommunicat lac!*" This seemed very strange: and for his part the late Professor Heist, when editing the text, had obviously thought so too, because in a footnote he had suggested that perhaps the medieval scribe of the manuscript had misread his exemplar, and that maybe the verb should have been something like **coinquinare**, so as to mean contaminate (or whatever).<sup>19</sup> Now while it is true that the manuscript does show some slight uncertainty at this point, it is equally clear that Heist's suggested emendation is based on the context rather than on any actual palaeographical evidence; and in fact a little further investigation revealed that no such change was necessary. One advantage of computers and databases is that, while they may sometimes almost overwhelm one with data, at least they do not miss anything;<sup>20</sup> and, sure enough, DMLCS procedures duly turned up another, somewhat earlier example of **excommunicare** used in a sense that solved the

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<sup>18</sup> ACLL text 401.

<sup>19</sup> *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi*, ed. W.W. Heist (Brussels, 1965), p. 218.

<sup>20</sup> On these phenomena see A. Harvey, "From Full-Text Database to Electronic Lexicon and Beyond: The Role of Computers in the *Dictionary of Celtic Latin* Project", *Listy filologické – Folia philologica* 131 (2008), pp. 469-491.

riddle satisfactorily. What they found, embedded in some strict seventh-century monastic regulations concerning ritually clean and unclean foods — a distinction clearly inspired by Old Testament law — was the following passage:

That which is contaminated by a cow is to be taken with a clear conscience. For why should we “excommunicate” the contamination of a cow if we do not reject the milk tasted by a sucking calf? <sup>21</sup>

The point is that this example provides the necessary missing link between the straightforward examples of **excommunicare** and the one in the case of the crow. When people are excommunicated they are effectively declared pariahs or untouchables to the faithful. The food law just quoted shows this meaning as having been extended from its original application, which was to persons, to the declaration of foodstuffs and drink as ritually unclean. From there it was just one semantic step further for **excommunicare** to become associated, not with the declaration of the item as unclean, but with the actual causing of the uncleanness — in the present case, the crow’s bathing (or doing something else) in the milk. Thus it was possible to trace how the Hiberno-Latin meaning of the verb had developed over time, in a manner that simultaneously vindicated the correctness of the manuscript readings.

### *III: Coinings by Celts*

To take another step away from Classical Latin is to move out from the realm of the pan-European Late Latin vocabulary found in the DMLCS database into that of the words that are found there and nowhere else, or at least nowhere else until later (in the latter case, the appearances elsewhere may then represent loans from Celtic latinity into whatever other Latin corpus is involved). It might be thought that much of this unique vocabulary would be etymologically derived from the underlying Celtic vernaculars of the authors; but this is spectacularly not the case. In the articles written so far (and not counting proper names) a Gaelic etymology has been posited for fewer than thirty headwords, and a Welsh origin for less than a dozen. Of course, this could be used to argue that some of the texts in question are not of Celtic origin at all; but, on balance, this would seem a

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<sup>21</sup> Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*, p. 178; compare his translation on p. 179. The text is ACLL no. 609, the so-called *Canones Adomnani*.



misguided use of the evidence. The fact that any particular Latin text contains few loanwords from a given vernacular language does not indicate that its author was, in reality, anything other than a native speaker of that vernacular; all it shows is that he had a good knowledge of Latin! After all, it is not as if DMLCS source texts did contain a lot of vocabulary from other, non-Celtic vernaculars: instead, by far the greatest proportion of their coinings (about fifteen percent of all the *Lexicon* headwords) have been generated directly from existing Latin forms, and Classical ones at that — often with great inventiveness, and in a manner that suits Latin. In other words, the compilers were at home in their adopted literary language. In the case of Celtic *literati*, this should not surprise us: as I hoped to have demonstrated some years ago in an article on the Cambridge Juvenius manuscript, what the evidence there seemed to show was that as late as the tenth century it was possible for Irish individuals to travel to a Welsh monastery, remain there long enough to receive their entire formal training as scribes (as was shown by their Welsh handwriting) and be kept on as trusted members of the scriptorium (as was shown by the fact that they had been allowed to gloss the valuable manuscript in question), while at the same time remaining so ignorant of the local Welsh vernacular that on the rare occasions when they had tried to write a gloss in that language they had made elementary mistakes (for example, not even knowing the plural of the local word for stones). This state of affairs could surely only have come about if Latin was the everyday, not just the liturgical, language of the house.<sup>22</sup> What pronunciation might have been used in such settings was another, extremely interesting question which I have gone into elsewhere but which space forbids me to address here;<sup>23</sup> the point, however, is that Celtic authors were adepts. Their Latin was a living, fully developed language which, if not their mother tongue, can at least meaningfully be described as their father tongue;<sup>24</sup> to use a metaphor from biology,

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<sup>22</sup> A. Harvey, “The Cambridge Juvenius Glosses – Evidence of Hiberno-Welsh Literary Interaction?”, in *Language Contact in the British Isles*, ed. P.S. Ureland and G. Broderick (Tübingen, 1991), pp. 181-198. In the present essay I paraphrase in somewhat conditional terms the conclusions drawn there, because my argumentation has since been searchingly examined in H. McKee’s long and detailed “Introduction” (pp. 1-75) to her monograph on *The Cambridge Juvenius Manuscript Glossed in Latin, Old Welsh, and Old Irish: Text and Commentary* (Aberystwyth, 2000). However, I maintain that most of my reasoning is still valid, and the conclusion about the scribes’ facility in Latin certainly stands.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Harvey, “Retrieving the Pronunciation of Early Insular Celtic Scribes: Towards a Methodology”, *Celtica* 21 (1990), pp. 178-190.

<sup>24</sup> See L. Bieler, “Das Mittellatein als Sprachproblem”, *Lexis* 2 (1949), pp. 98-104.

it was symbiotic with but not parasitic upon the Celtic vernaculars of those who used it. Of course, on the rare occasions when the texts do show Celtic authors latinizing words from their mother tongues, this naturally constitutes confirmation of their nationalities. Such instances sometimes only reinforce what we already know; for example, when at the end of the seventh century we find Adomnán coining a Latin word **gergenna** from Irish **gerrcenn** to mean a stout fastening-pin or bolt it comes as no surprise, since we are already aware that this author was abbot at the Gaelic Hebridean island of Iona and since the work in question contains literally hundreds of latinised Irish proper names.<sup>25</sup> But sometimes these words can constitute potentially important pieces of evidence: for example, there is no agreement about who wrote the weird *Cosmography* attributed to Aethicus Ister, but DMLCS research has identified in it what might constitute corroboration of arguments for significant Irish influence upon it, namely the adjective **camus**; a recent editor of the text, Otto Prinz, suggested emending the reading to make it an instance of the fairly rare Classical Latin word **camurus** (meaning arched), but as the Irish word **cam** has at all times been very common, meaning curved or bent, and as the Cosmographer applies the adjective to a fishhook (a context that would suit the Gaelic word perfectly), it seems very tempting to accept that as the etymology, particularly as no emendation is then required.<sup>26</sup>

#### ***IV: The Most Inventive Authors***

It has been remarked above that, of the coinings first found in DMLCS texts, the largest share are intelligently generated from existing (and often perfectly Classical) Latin words.<sup>27</sup> One thinks of

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<sup>25</sup> *Vita Sancti Columbae* (ACLL text 305); see *pagina* 360 for the word in question.

<sup>26</sup> The text is no. 647 as captured electronically in ACLL (from an 1853 edition by H. Wuttke; Prinz's edition, *Die Kosmographie des Aethicus* (Munich, 1993), is not necessarily preferable, as M.W. Herren shows in his review in the *Journal of Medieval Latin* 3 (1993), pp. 236-245). The word in question occurs on *pagina* 33 in the accusative form *camum*. As it stands, it rhymes with the fishhook word, *hamum*, which follows it three words later; but the text is (at least mostly) prose, and the fact that the rhyme would not exist if Prinz's emendation were made could be used as an argument either for or against adopting it. M.W. Herren's own edition, *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Turnhout, 2011), p. 120, n. 68, ignores both suggestions in proposing his own.

<sup>27</sup> On the exceptions see now A. Harvey, "Lexical Influences on the Medieval Latin of the Celts", in *Influencias léxicas de otras lenguas en el latín medieval*, ed. M. Pérez González and E. Pérez Rodríguez (León and Valladolid, 2011), pp. 65-77.

items like **discessor** (one who departs or decamps), apparently coined by Adomnán of Iona; or **abscribere** (to ignore or discount), seemingly generated by the Breton abbot Wrdisten around the year 880; or **glacialiter** (icily or in a frozen condition), evidently concocted in the year 655 by Augustinus Hibernicus. Just four groups of texts, however, show themselves far ahead of all others in their display of neologisms. The least venerable such group is the writings of Gerald of Wales, dating from between 1188 and the early 1220s;<sup>28</sup> he is responsible for such wholly-Latin splendours as **eliminator**, **abietinus** and **delicaciter**, though (being late and half Norman) he also makes words from contemporary Romance, such as **gardio** (a kind of fish; compare Old French **gardon**), and indeed from English, for example **beuer** (a beaver). More striking is the vocabulary found in my much older second and third groups of texts, namely the so-called *Hisperica famina* compositions and the writings of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus.<sup>29</sup> I refer to these two groups together since not only do they probably both come from seventh-century Ireland and have an interest in marine matters, but they also have in common an extraordinary and joyous inventiveness in vocabulary terms: among their Latin-based coinings consider Virgil's happy **declinamentum**, meaning a distinct word or lexeme, his **affla**, meaning spirit or soul, his **deundare**, coined to oppose Classical **inundare** and meaning to leave land dry or ebb (of the tide), or his clever **a-liquidatio**, meaning grammatical fusion; and the *Hisperica famina*'s **discurrimina**, meaning tidal movements, the lovely **delficinum seminarium** (school of dolphins), or the clever **di-uiduare** (to abandon or depart from), as well as **breuiusculus**, coined from Classical **breuior** as Classical **maiusculus** is from **maior**. Furthermore, the inventiveness shown in these texts is so clearly deliberate that it seems to have constituted one of the main reasons for writing them: it seems that often an obvious word is not used if a neologism can be coined, the latter often involving plundering the resources of other languages besides Latin. Thus we find the *Hisperica famina* referring to cloaks as **blemmi**

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<sup>28</sup> For details see the Lapidge and Sharpe *Bibliography*, nos 52-75.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, nos 325-329 and 295-297 respectively. The former were published by F.J.H. Jenkinson, *The Hisperica Famina* (Cambridge, 1908); since then, one recension has been re-edited and all five usefully commented upon by M.W. Herren, *Hisperica Famina I: The A-Text* (Toronto, 1974). The works of Virgil have been edited and translated into Italian by G. Polara, *Virgilio Marone grammatico: Epitomi ed Epistole* (Naples, 1979) in a volume not really advanced upon by B. Löfstedt in his *Virgilius Maro Grammaticus: Opera Omnia* (Munich and Leipzig, 2003). ACLL-2 contains electronic versions of all of these texts.

(possibly from Greek βλημα, meaning a coverlet), and even to the straightforward concepts of man and head by means of the Semitic-based **gibra** and **gigra** respectively; and describing the sea as **afroniosus** (foamy, from Greek ἄφρός). As for Virgil, given his penchant for inventing his authorities (such as Galbungus and Balapsidus) as well as the quotations he attributes to them, we might well apply to him an epithet of his own invention, **glifosus** (meaning obscurantist or enigmatist).<sup>30</sup> The motivation behind this word-spinning is an extremely vexed question, and entire papers can be given about that and about the coinings themselves; for now, I shall merely remark that I like a suggestion made by Dr Paolo Zanna to the effect that the neologizing tendency may well have arisen in a classroom context where Latin was being taught and learned as a foreign language.<sup>31</sup> Remembering that the Irish were the first nation to attempt this in post-Imperial times we can see that, having learned the standard paradigms, the next step would naturally be to learn the exceptions; and anyone who has used Kennedy's *Revised Latin Primer* will know that in this situation one can very easily end up being rather more familiar with the oddities rehearsed there than with the hundreds of common but docile words that the great grammarian has no cause to mention.<sup>32</sup> Of course, the natural corrective to this distorted view is familiarity with the mainstream vocabulary of Latin either by constantly reading its Classical texts or else by knowing its reflexes in one's own language if one is a native Romance speaker; but these correctives will not automatically apply if one is in a Celtic (or indeed Germanic) region and has readier recourse to grammars than to texts. This still applies today; so is it not possible that in early

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<sup>30</sup> On Virgil's mindset in general see V. Law, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge, 1995); for notes on specific items of his vocabulary, as well as on interesting words from the *Hisperica famina* and other Hiberno-Latin texts, consult the "Index of Rare Words and Unusual Forms" appended to the collected studies of M.W. Herren published as *Latin Letters in Early Christian Ireland* (Aldershot, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. P. Zanna, "Lecture, écriture et morphologie latines en Irlande aux VII<sup>e</sup> et VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles: Nouveaux matériaux, nouvelles hypothèses", *Bulletin du Cange: Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 56 (1998), pp. 179-191.

<sup>32</sup> One thinks, for example, of the way his "Memorial Lines on the Gender of Latin Substantives" are dominated by the lists of exceptions to the rules there laid out (B.H. Kennedy, *The Revised Latin Primer*, ed. J. Mountford (Harlow, 1962), pp. 221-225). As a result, until a few decades ago English public-school students knew by heart the Latin for such items as withies, whetstones and winnowing-fans, however rarely these may have figured in Classical literature.

medieval Ireland, faced with a similar need to learn lists of what were avowedly idiosyncracies, some alpha-stream students turned duty into delight and gave the lists a self-developing life of their own?<sup>33</sup>

Leaving Virgil and the *Hisperica famina* we finish with my final group of texts, namely the works of the ninth-century Celtic-Latin word-master himself, John Scottus Eriugena.<sup>34</sup> He produces all kinds of vocabulary: useful Latin-based coinings like **donula** for little gifts, **gluttosus** for greedy, **disceptatiunculae** for a friendly debate, **dilapidatrix** for a female asset-stripper, or the noun **anhelantia** for the roaring of a fire; as well as more abstract items like **deiformitas** for congruence to God, the metaphorical **accolorare**, meaning to gloss over, or **angulositas**, used metonymically to mean the property of unifying at a fundamental level. Then there are his straight loans from Greek like **anax** for king and **acherdus** for a kind of wild pear tree, as well as technical philosophical terms like **anomia** (meaning disparate elements), and calques on Greek like **decursatiuus** on διεξοδικός for multiplex or **adnarratio** on παραδιήγησις for corroborative discourse. Furthermore he carries out inventive semantic adaptations of existing words, such as the use of **exalienari** to mean to migrate (of animals), or the sensitive etymologizing of what were in fact misreadings, such as *excolicum* for Late Latin *et scholicum*, in a manner worthy of real words (in this case, as the opposite of Classical Latin **incola**, and so meaning alien or not of this world).

One could go on and on, and on. In fact, fully five percent of the *Lexicon* articles are estimated to be for headwords that the DMLCS corpus attests first or indeed exclusively in the works of Eriugena; and that excludes variations by him on Classical vocabulary or semantically-innovative use of Late Latin items. If whole papers can be given on Virgilius Maro Grammaticus and the *Hisperica famina*, then whole conferences can and have been held on John Scottus;<sup>35</sup> however, while the contribution of that author enormously enlivens the

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<sup>33</sup> On some of the techniques used in seventh-century Ireland to generate new Latin vocabulary see A. Harvey, “Blood, Dust and Cucumbers: Constructing the World of Hisperic Latinity”, in *Medieval Ireland: Clerics, Kings, and Vikings*, ed. E. Purcell *et al.* (Dublin, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> For details see the Lapidge and Sharpe *Bibliography*, nos 695-713.

<sup>35</sup> These have taken place primarily under the auspices of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies; see, for example, *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and his Time*, ed. J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (Leuven, 2002), a volume that constitutes the Proceedings of the Society’s Tenth International Colloquium.

lexicon, what I hope has emerged here is that even without him the words generated within the Celtic tradition would constitute an interesting and not unimportant part of the total medieval Latin wordstore.

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