The *Amra Coluim Cille*: Sources, Structure and Style

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A stylistic investigation of the *Amra Coluim Cille*, which argues that this early Irish poem was modelled on Christian hymnody, and that its composer was well versed in Scripture and patristic sources.

The structural unity of *ACC*:

Since whatever can be predicated in the present paper about *ACC* implies a single unified composition by one author, it is desirable to ascertain the integrity of the work as we have it.[1] In the surviving manuscripts *ACC* is divided into ten sections (*capitula*), each introduced by a title in Latin outlining its contents. This number was probably intended as a mystical representation of the Decalogue, the Law of the Ten Commandments, faithful adherence to which is portrayed as one of Columcille's virtues. Although the sections vary considerably in number of cola, and although Middle Irish copyists do not always delimit them consistently, they may be original to the work. This is suggested in the first place by the concordance between their contents and the individual Latin titles introducing them. It is also suggested by evidence of structural harmony within individual sections and a sense of their discreteness; for example, in Section 2, the final colon repeats the idea of the opening one that angels came to escort Columcille to Heaven; in Section 5, an extensive list of instances of the saint's scholarly activities is appropriately rounded off with the statement that his achievements were countless like the stars (§64). In Section 9, the communal sadness among the deceased saint's people (Ir *tuath*) is sustained as the single theme throughout.

In his edition of *ACC* Whitley Stokes divided the work into 145 consecutive cola, no doubt following the visual cues of his manuscript source.[2] In some places this numbering of cola seems inconsistent; for example, given that '*Boi cast*' (§75) is marked as a single colon, one might have expected the much lengthier '*Boe lien Boe lig la cride cach ecnada*' (§81), to constitute more than one colon. Indeed, given that the number of Stokes's cola approaches so closely to 150, one wonders if the poem was not originally designed with that number in mind, to make it correspond to the 150 poems of the Psalter, the biblical book so revered and studied by Columcille.

Stokes eschewed any effort at grouping the cola, a reflection of his view that *ACC* was 'a

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1) In the absence of a comprehensive and satisfactory edition of *ACC*, the present paper uses the text of W. Stokes (ed. and trans.), 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille', *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899), 31–55, 132–83, 248–89, 400–37; 21 (1900), 133–36. I have also consulted P. L. Henry (ed. and trans.), *Amra Choluim Chille: Dallán's Elegy for Columba* (Belfast, 2006).

2) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502, copied in the early twelfth century, presents the main text of *ACC* in Irish semi-uncial script, in contradistinction to the intervening mass of notes and glosses which are written in a pointed Gaelic minuscule. See B. Ó Cuív, *Catalogue of Irish Language Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and Oxford College Libraries*, 2 vols (Dublin, 2001), I, pp. 186–87.

complete piece of artificial, alliterative prose' and consequently should not be divided into larger structural units which might convey the impression of verse. His verdict that the work was prose rather than poetry creates an unnecessary dichotomy since *ACC* possesses qualities of both. A more nuanced approach would be to situate *ACC* in the historical context of a group of other early Irish works of religious content, such as the *Apgitir Chrábaid*, where the rhythmic (and alliterative) language hovers between poetry and prose.[3]

In its larger structure *ACC* shows evidence of another organizing principle at work, a prologue and epilogue designed to frame the main part of the poem, the eulogy proper. That was certainly how the eleventh- and twelfth-century Irish commentators saw it. Thus, a commentary on the poem in 'Lebor na Huidre' (*c.* 1100) refers to the first five cola as 'this preface' ('*ind remfocul so*') contrasting it with 'the body of the hymn' ('*curp ind immuin*').[4] Moreover, the differentiation of the prologue and epilogue is not merely an artificial construct; these two sections are set apart by features which they share against the rest of the poem. Thus, both prologue and epilogue are brief, consisting of four (or five) cola each. Both are cast in the first person (the author speaking about himself as author), in contradistinction to the body of the poem which has either third person singular (when referring to Columcille) or occasionally, first person plural (when referring to communal grieving for Columcille). For example, the Prologue has 'do-[r]*rogus*' ('I would entreat'; §1), 'ní-*m*-reilge' ('may God not abandon me'; §3); the Epilogue, 'ro-*dom*-sibsea' ('he will guide me'; §141), '*dím*' ('from me'; §142), 'do-*m*-chich' ('he will come to me'; §143), 'ní-*m*-da huain (§ 145).[5] Both prologue and epilogue are invocatory and supplicatory in tone, marked by subjunctives of desire—in contrast to the body of the poem which is descriptive in mode and indicative in verbal mood. In subject matter both prologue and epilogue are disassociated from the eulogistic matter which constitutes the body of the poem; thus, the prologue is the author's personal prayer to God before he begins his task, while the Epilogue declares his disengagement from the completed task with the statement, of the final colon 'I have no more time' ('*Nímda húain*'; §145).

The body of *ACC* which at first glance gives the impression of a medley of disjointed comments

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3) On these works, see D. Ó Corráin, *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium* 3 vols. (Turnhout, 2017), II, §§ 843–48 (pp. 1117–27).

4) R. I. Best and Osborn Bergin (eds.), *Lebor na Huidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin, 1929; rpt. 1970), p. 15, lines 424–26.

5) First person elements are highlighted in italics.

on the saint's virtues and achievements, is actually held together by a broad structural plan. The first three sections serve as a quasi-narrative to establish that Columcille is truly ensconced in heaven: Section 1 announces his death and its effects on his followers; Section 2 begins and ends by describing his immediate ascent with an angelic escort to Heaven; Section 3 confirms that he has taken his place in Heaven. The next four sections, which constitute the core of the poem, address the saint's spiritual and monastic life: Section 4 talks of his professional spiritual prowess (his '*cerd c[h]umachtach*' §42), Section 5 describes his learning, Sections 6 and 7 his practice of the monastic life ('*a cherd cléirchechta*'; §83). Section 8 dwells on Columcille's leadership roles, both in the religious and the secular spheres; while Section 9, the final part of the main body of the work, neatly counterbalances the first section and rounds off the poem by again describing the devastating effect of Columcille's death on his followers. At the same time three recurring themes are inter-woven throughout the poem, even in the dedicated sections. These themes are: (1) Columcille as leader of both a secular and an ecclesiastical family[6]— the Uí Néill dynasty and the Columban *familia*, respectively; (2) Columcille as an ascetic; and (3) Columcille as a scholar. This strategy of repetition through variation (*commoratio*) is typical both of orality and, as will be argued below, Christian hymnody.

Other evidence points to the essential unity and integrity of *ACC*. There is the ubiquitous presence of the author's voice, personal and controlling. As already noted, it appears overtly in the prologue and epilogue; it is also present throughout the poem in protestations of humility—the author describes himself as an ignoramus ('*duí*'; §9), admitting that he cannot adequately describe Columcille's death and journey to Heaven (§§134−5). Elsewhere, the authorial voice emerges in 1st person asides, '*certo indias*' ('surely, I should tell'; §132), '*co ecuas*' ('how will I relate?'; §134); as well as in collective identifications with the *familia* of Columcille, expressed through various types of 1st person plural pronouns (possessive, prepositional and infixed): '*lenn*' (§11), '*huain*' (§16), '*ar (suí)*' (§12), '*ar (n-airchenn)*' (§14), and infixed '*(do)n*' (§§14−18), as well as 1st plural verbs, '*muinemmar*' (§35), '*cualammar*' (§64), '*munimar*' (§88); and even a 2nd person plural '*fó lib*' ('you are pleased'; §106), where the author directly addresses the Columban community at Iona.

Also indicative of the poem's integrity is the repetition of certain topoi throughout. The concern

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6) He is expressly called *airchenn* ('chief, leader') twice, and is implicitly portrayed as *érlam* ('patron') of the Iona *familia*. Correspondingly, he protects his churches (§93), and is 'the king who will bring us safely to Zion' (§140), meaning that he will guide his followers to Heaven, the defining role of the *érlam*.

in the prologue with escaping eternal tortures (§§3–4) is repeated in the epilogue (§141); §§10 and 120 mention that Columcille now sits beside God in heaven; §§18 and 119 portray Columcille subduing the inhabitants of the Tay (*Toi*)); §§ 23 and 127 state that he kept vigils; §§33, 47, and 82 that he was intimate with apostles and angels. A peculiar, and therefore telling, motif is that Columcille's life was cut short as a result of his austerities, '*Boe saegul sneid*' ('His life span was brief'; §24), an idea repeated in §§39, 82, and 113. In reality, the saint lived into his mid-seventies, so this shared hyperbolic distortion of the truth likely stems from a single author.

Finally, certain stylistic feature suggestive of authorial unity are found throughout, notably a fondness for litotes, whereby a statement is expressed by denying its opposite. Of course, litotes is a common rhetorical figure, but the present author employs it so frequently as to mark his use as a stylistic predilection. For example, '*ní díscéoil dúe Néill*' ('The house of Niall does not lack news'; §§6 and 145), meaning that it has received a burden of bad news about the saint's death; '*ní ellestar cloenchléir*' ('he did not bring together perverse clerics'; §94), meaning that he abhorred errant clerics; '*ní handil*' ('he was not unbeloved'; §116); '*ní nia nad nua fri cotach Conuail*' ('he is not a champion who is not vigorous in support of the league of Conall'; §118), meaning that Columcille was an assertive defender of his own people in n.w. Ireland, known as Cenél Conaill ('the kindred of Conall'). The most striking example of litotes is the author's assertion that on Judgment Day Columcille 'will not depart' with those of 'the second utterance' (§§111–12)—the damned—a highly understated way of saying that the saint occupies a lofty place in Heaven.

ACC's hymnodic features:

Granted its structural and authorial unity, how best to categorize ACC as a literary composition? Conventional wisdom characterizes the work as a eulogy.[7] Besides its simplicity, the appellation has much to recommend it; after all, the poem celebrates the life of its subject, and the very title '*Amra*' (with the meaning of 'eulogy', though perhaps also with connotations of the marvellous and prophetic)[8] would seem to epitomize neatly the celebration of Columcille's virtues and achievements which constitutes the poem.[9] However, Irish readers of the poem in the eleventh

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7) See, for example, J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929; rpt. with addenda and corrigenda, Dublin, 1979), pp. 426–27 (no. 212).

8) See *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language A*, fasc. 2 (1967), s.v. *amrae*.

9) Moreover, the author himself calls his composition an *amrad* (§140).

century took a rather different view. The long prose preface which accompanies the text of *ACC* in most of the manuscript witnesses, and which Máire Herbert dates to the early eleventh century,[10] actually calls the poem 'a hymn' ('*ind immun*'), while also conferring on it the title of '*in molad*' ('a eulogy'). The latter term is attested in the Milan Old Irish glosses (early ninth-century) as an explanation of Lat. *hymnus* (Ml 55ᵇ 14) and *psalmus* (Ml 122ᵇ 9), and brings to mind Lat. *canticum*, which is often glossed as '*hymnum laudis*'. The eleventh-century compiler of the 'Liber Hymnorum', a collection of early Irish devotional and liturgical poems, by including *ACC* in the collection, evidently made a similar assessment of it as a Christian hymn.

Following this lead, I will argue that a major influence on *ACC* was Christian liturgy, especially the hymns sung in monastic circles as part of the Divine Office. Such hymns were an essential part of the Office celebration at Iona in the seventh century. In his 'Life of Columba' (al. Columcille), Abbot Adomnán of Iona (*c.*627–704) mentions a book containing the weekly cursus of hymns which was written in the hand of Columcille himself ('*hymnorum liber septimaniorum Sanctae Columbae manu descriptus*');[11] and elsewhere in the same work he relates that on the morning of the saint's death hymns were sung in the monastic offices at Iona ('*hymnis matutinalibus terminatus*').[12]

The composer of *ACC* may have conceived of the hymnody to which Columcille was so devoted as the most appropriate literary vehicle to honor his memory. But the litmus test must remain the internal evidence of the work's form and content, and how well they match those of Christian hymns. A marked feature of the latter is their organized structure, consisting of stanzas or strophes containing units of verse. As argued earlier, *ACC* has such a strophic structure in its division of discrete sections, with the additional embellishment of a framing prologue and epilogue, features commonly found in biblical and Christian works (e.g. Proverbs, Book of Job).

Hymns also show certain stylistic features, designed both to embellish their sacral character and to facilitate oral delivery. In the latter function belongs the rhetorical figure of asyndeton, whereby the matter of the hymn is presented in clauses without the use of conjunctions; e.g., '*Te Deum*

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10) M. Herbert, 'The Preface to *Amra Coluim Cille*', in D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach & K. R. McCone (eds.), *Sages, saints and storytellers: Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth, 1989), pp. 67–75.

11) *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, ed. and trans. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (revd. edn, Oxford, 1991), pp. 106–7 (Bk II, Ch 9).

12) *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, pp. 320–1 (III. 23)

laudamus, te Dominum confitemur'. Compare *ACC*, §20, '*Is crot cen cheis is cell cen abbaid*' ('It is a harp lacking a part, [and] it is a church without an abbot'); §36, '*nad genatar ciuil, nad eitset ecnaide*' ('melodies are not produced [and] scholars do not die'); §44, '*Rofess ruam, rofess seiss*' ([God's] glory was known [to him], [and] God's design was known [to him]'). Such examples also create a dynamic of parallelism, which not only serves as a mnemonic but reinforces the utterance through balanced repetition. Indeed, *ACC* throughout contains memorable strings of similarly framed cola; for example, 'Catha *gulae* gailais/ Libru Solman sexus' ('He won the battles against *gula*/ He observed [the advice of] the books of Solomon'; §§56–57), where each colon of six syllables has the same structure of object+defining genitive+verb. Likewise, '*Ba dín do nochtaib/ba did do bochtaib*' ('he was a shelter to the naked, he was a nurse to the poor'; §85), where the isocolonic parallelism is again reinforced by matching syntax and inflections.[13]

Most of the above examples would also qualify as anaphora (*repetitio*), a common stylistic feature of Christian hymnody which involves the deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses or sentences. Indeed, *ACC* is replete with multiple repetitions, such as §§24–27 and 74–81, where each colon begins with the substantive verb *boe* ('was') or the copula *ba* (§§82b–86) or its negative *ní* (§§116–18); and within a single colon, §104, '*Cuil deim de eot, Cui[l] deim de formut*' ('He concealed not a bit of jealousy; He concealed not a bit of envy'); and §137, '*Ní ong oentaige ní ong oenteta*' ('Not for him the lamentation of a single house, not for him the lamentation of a single string').[14] Such verbal repetitions embellish the style, creating a rhythmic cadence reminiscent of liturgical chants and litanies. The anaphora is especially effective in those parts of *ACC* where the author strives for rhetorical effect, for example in the cumulative catalogue of the saint's virtues. Thus, §§74–81, '[*Boi*] *cath, Boi cast, Boi cartoit…Boe less lan Boe leor less oeged, Boe obeid, Boe uasal, Boe huas a bas, Boe lien, Boe lig la cride cach ecnada*' ('He was holy, he was chaste, he was charitable… he was most helpful, he was an abounding benefit to [monastic] guests, he was obedient, he was noble, his death was noble, he was mild, he was a physician to the heart of every scholar'), where the verb *Boi/Boe* occurs initially no less than ten times.

Metonymy, the substituting of an attribute or something closely related in place of the subject is

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13) Other notable occurrences are found at §§7, 8, 20, 44, 73, 74, 99, 105, 112, 113, 137.
14) See also §§14–15, 33–6, 65, 74–81, 82b–86, 116–7, 144.

also common in Christian hymns. For example, St Paul is called '*doctor gentium*' ('Doctor of the heathens'), St John the Baptist, '*vocem Verbi, amicum Sponsi*' ('the voice of the Word, the friend of the bridegroom').[15] Similar usages are fairly numerous in *ACC*, as when the Eastern Picts (among whom Columcille proselytized) are identified not by their proper name but by the river Tay which defined their territorial boundary ('*Toi*'; §§18, 119); or Heaven is called Zion (§§10, 140), a reference to the sacred sanctuary of that name in Jerusalem. In the same manner Columcille is identified not by name but by reference to his ancestors, as in '*meicc macc hui Chuind*' (§104), '*hua… Conuaill*' (§121), '*macc Fedelmthe*' (§125), '*hua Airt…Néill*' (§128). These examples serve to enlarge and enhance their subject's stature by associating him with notable attributes and achievements, such as his eminent genealogy which connected him with the ruling dynasty of Cenél Conaill, and his proselytizing among the Picts.

Another technique of the Latin hymns (especially in doxologies) is the employing of relative constructions which elaborate the qualities of the subject with more detail than a mere descriptive adjective could do; e.g. '*Gloria et honor Deo…Cui laus est et potestas*' ('Glory and honor to God… to whom belongs praise and power'); '*Jesu, tibi sit gloria, Qui victor in caelum redis*' (Jesus, glory to you, who returns victorious to heaven'); '*Gloria tibi, Domine, Qui scandis super sidera*' ('Glory to you, Lord, who soars above the stars').[16] Compare the run of six consecutive relative clauses in *ACC* §§13–18: (1) '*Conróeter bíu bath*' ('He who protected life has died'); (2) '*Ad-don-bath ba ar n-airchenn adlicen*' ('He who was our leader of the needy has died on us'); (3) '*Ad-don-bath ba ar fíadait fóidiam*' ('He who was our messenger to God has died on us); (4) '*Ar nin-fissid fris-bered omnu huain*' ('For we lack the knowledgeable one who used to divert fears from us'); (5) '*Ar nin-tathrith do sluinned foccul fír*' ('For he does not run back to us who used to declare the true word'); (6) '*Ar nin-forcetlaid forcanad tuatha Toi*' ('For we do not have the teacher who used to instruct the peoples of Tay'). Here the relative clauses serve to highlight the range of Columcille's roles as protector, mediator, spiritual counsellor and proselytizer, accentuating the sense of loss incurred by his death.

Originally composed to praise the Godhead, Christian hymns had by the fifth century extended their range to include the saints, who because of their special place in Heaven were deemed to be

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15) Examples taken from A. Blaise, *Le Vocabulaire Latin des principaux thèmes liturgiques* (Turnhout, 2013), p. 224.

16) Examples taken from Blaise, *Le Vocabulaire Latin*, p. 151.

suitable subjects for religious celebration as well as useful intermediaries with the deity—as evident, for example, in the poems of Prudentius. Ireland, by the seventh century had similar compositions; a notable example being a hymn in the Antiphonary of Bangor (no. 14) in praise of St Comgall, who like Columcille was the founder of an eminent monastery and reputedly a spiritual confidant of the latter.[17] Significantly, many of the themes (and images) of *ACC*, especially those dealing with Columcille's virtues and learning, have their counterparts in the Bangor Hymn. For example, like Columcille, Comgall is conducted to heaven by angels,[18] crowned in Heaven,[19] and sits on the right hand of God;[20] he is imbued with conventional Christian virtues such as humility, justice, and sobriety, as well as the specifically monastic virtues of abstinence, continence, and meekness; he is a 'lamp of wisdom',[21] a *sapiens* who is learned in the Scriptures,[22] who applies his intellect to the text of sacred Law,[23] who follows in the footsteps of the Apostles,[24] and who combines scholarly expertise in the Old Testament with actions based on the New Testament.[25] However, whereas the Bangor Hymn to Comgall 'is general and diffuse in its phraseology' and 'contains…no such special description of [Comgall's] character that… might not be applied with equal propriety to almost any saint',[26] *ACC* provides specific details about Columcille's scholarship and asceticism which at the same time reveal much about the author's own knowledge of Christian sources. These latter, which can be broadly classified as biblical and patristic, are discussed below.

Biblical sources and parallels:

In Section 6 Columcille is praised for his charity, '*ba dín do noctaib, ba did do bochtaib*' ('he

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17) Adomnán's *Life of Columba* mentions two visits to Columcille at Iona made by him; pp. 88–89 (I. 49), and pp. 206–07 (III. 17).

18) '*Quem Deus ad aetherea/conduxit habitacula/ab angelis custodita*' (prologue); ed. by F. E. Warren, *The Antiphonary of Bangor*, 2 vols, Henry Bradshaw Society 4, 10 (London, 1893–95).

19) '*Adeptus est sub corona*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, section xx.

20) '*Parte sancta in dextra*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, section xviii.

21) '*Lampadem sapientiae*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, section xi.

22) '*In Scripturis eruditus*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, section ix.

23) '*Suam exercens animam/ Sanctae legis per paginam*' (section xvii); '*Aucta in legis pagina*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, sections xvii and I, respectively.

24) '*Actum per apostolicum./Hujus sequens vestigium*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, section xxi.

25) '*Canonicis affatibus/Veteris, Novi actibus Testamenti praefulgidus*', *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, section ix.

26) Warren, *Antiphonary of Bangor* I, p. 56.

was a shelter to the naked, he was a source of food for the poor'; §85), language which clearly recalls the Final Judgment scene of Matthew 25: 37–8, where Christ commends the just for their corporal works of mercy ('*esurientem et pavimus…nudum et cooperuimus*'). Another reference to the same Judgment scene occurs further on when the author expresses the conviction that because of his virtues Columcille 'will not undergo the alternative pronouncement, the second verse of God's twofold judgment' ('*Cona raga in rígmac for déde Dé/ I n-athguth, i n-athfers*'; §§111–12). Here the reference is to Christ's twofold verdict at Judgment, in which the invitation to the blessed ('Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you…'; Matthew 25: 34) is followed by the condemnation of the damned—the alternative pronouncement—with the words 'Depart from me ye cursed' ('*Ite maledicti…*'; Mt 25: 41).

Other New Testament references, though more echoic than explicit, reflect the Pauline Epistles: §50 '*Ráith rith rethes*' ('he ran a course of grace')—cf. 2Tim 4: 7, '*cursum consummavi*'.

§86 '*ba núe no chéssad cach trom díofhothaig*' ('every heavy battering he used to suffer anew'), probably echoes I Cor 15: 31, '*cotidie morior*' ('I die daily'), and perhaps II Cor 11: 28, '*instantia mea cotidiana*' ('my daily obstacles').

§110, '*Fiched fri coluain*' ('he used to fight against the flesh'); cf. Gal 5: 17, '*spiritus autem adversus carnem*' ('the spirit [struggles] against the flesh').

Among *ACC*'s references to books of the Old Testament the psalms stand out, which is hardly surprising given their popularity, especially in Irish monastic circles. The opening invocation, '*Dia Dia do rogus re tías in[a] gnúis*' ('God, O God, I should invoke him, before entering in his presence'), blends the '*Deus, Deus*' formula of appeal in the opening of Pss 21 and 62 with the entreating sentiments of Ps 118: 70, '*intret postulatio mea in conspectu tuo Domine*' ('may my request enter into your presence, Lord'). Probably also derived from the psalms are *ACC*'s two references to Mt Zion: §§10–11, '*In Faith Dé de deis Sion suidiath*' ('the prophet of God has sat down on the right side of Zion') and §140, '*ind rig for-don-snaidfe Sione*' ('of the king who will escort us to Zion'). Historically, Zion was regarded as God's dwelling place and holy mountain, as in Ps 47: 3, '*fundatur exultatione uniuersae terrae monte*[27] *Sion latera aquilonis civitas regni magni*' ('With the exultation of the whole earth Zion, the city of the great king, is established on the mountain—the northern side'). But over time it came to symbolize the heavenly Jerusalem as

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27) The reading found in Irish Psalters as against *montes* in the Vulgate.

evidenced by IV Esdras 2: 42−48,[28] which describes a great crowd gathered on Mt Zion with a young man of heavenly aspect in their midst who distributes crowns and palms to them and is identified as the Son of God ('*Filius Dei*'). Such also is the interpretation of Zion inherent in the two *ACC* passages, the first implying that Columcille has already reached Heaven, the second that the author himself hopes for the same outcome. However, the reference to Columcille's sitting 'on the right side of Zion' (§§10−11) is somewhat odd; it seems to mean that the saint sits on God's right-hand side in Heaven,[29] and consequently shares in the power and divinity of the deity. The idea was probably suggested by Ps 109: 1, '*dixit Dominus Domino meo sede a dextris meis donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum*'. If so, the author of *ACC* has combined the imagery of the two quotations in a manner which suggests a familiarity with the psalms normally associated with clerics.

Another allegorical application of a Scriptural reference occurs at §88, '*Míad már munimar manna*' ('a great honor we judge that manna'), where 'manna' seems to represent the joys of Heaven which Columcille now partakes of. Historically, manna was the food from Heaven which refreshed the Israelites as they wandered in the desert (Ex 16: 15), but under the influence of Apocalypse 2: 17 ('To him who overcomes I will give the hidden manna') it came to be read allegorically as symbolizing the joys of Heaven. The same context of the Israelites in search of the Holy Land informs *ACC* §35, '*Ránic tír do Moise muinemmar*' ('He has reached the land assigned to Moses, we believe'), literally a reference to the Promised Land, but allegorically Heaven. For the author of *ACC* the implied comparison of his subject with Moses had rich possibilities since both men were exiles from the land of their birth, and both were influential lawgivers whose covenants with God would ensure that their people would reach the Promised Land.

Even as it applies Old Testament parallels to Columcille, *ACC* refers to the saint's expertise in the field of scriptural interpretation. Section 5 which is dedicated to the range of his learning says that he produced accurate glosses ('*Gaís glúassa glé*'; §53); that 'he studied allegorical meanings among scholars of the Scriptures' ('*Legais runa rochuad eter scolaib screptra*'; §60);[30] that 'he

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28) Robert Weber et al., *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1975), II, p. 1934.

29) Cf. also *ACC* §120, '*oc Deo deissestar*' ('with God he sat').

30) However, the meaning of '*rochuad*' is unclear; Stokes takes the Yellow Book of Lecan reading, '*rosuath*' and translates 'great sages'; Greene, 'Archaic Irish', in K. H. Schmidt (ed.), *Indogermanisch und Keltisch* (Wiesbaden, 1977), pp. 11–33 at p. 24, evidently treated it as a verb, and hence gives a different interpretation, 'he read the mysteries and lent out copies of the Scriptures among the schools'.

made clear (the text of) the psalms' ('*Glinnsius salmu*'; §54), possibly by carefully checking the text[31] against the exemplar,[32] but more likely by collating it with the *Hebraicum*, the most scholarly version of the psalms in the Latin West; that 'he described books of the Law' ('*Sluinnsius leig libru*'; §55)—probably the Pentateuch, which Jerome had identified as the five books of Moses, comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; that 'he apportioned typological divisions between the books of the Law' ('*Rannais rainn co figuir eter libru leig*');[33] and that he followed the teachings of 'the books of Solomon' ('*Libru Solman sexus*'), presumably the wisdom books ('Proverbs' and 'Ecclesiastes') attributed to that king.

From this evidence of biblical echoes and parallels in *ACC* as well as the frequent notices of Columcille's activity as a biblical scholar we may draw three conclusions. First, the Scriptural references are mostly indirect and allusive, implying a fuller knowledge of the text on the part of author and audience. Secondly, those specifically drawn from the New Testament are moral in import—referencing the need for charity, praising Columcille in Pauline terms, and envisaging the Final Judgment (eschatological). Thirdly, the mentions of Columcille's exegetical expertise relate exclusively to the Old Testament, primarily the Psalms and the Pentateuch, the two books most revered by the Early Irish Church. Thus, there is a neat complementarity in *ACC*'s portrayal of Columcille's engagement with the Bible: the New Testament references valorize the saint's moral life, while those of the Old Testament highlight his scholarship in that field.

Patristic sources:

Two Church Fathers mentioned by name are Basil of Cappadocia (fl. mid 4th century) and John Cassian (c. 360–430), both of whom were eminent practitioners as well as legislators of the monastic life. *ACC* makes clear that Columcille was an ardent follower of their teachings, as also was another cleric from northern Ireland of about the same date, Columbanus of Bangor.[34] Thus,

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31) Presumably the *Gallicanum* version of the Psalter which became the standard text in early Ireland.

32) Cf. the edifying story recounted by Adomnán, 'Life of Columba', pp. 50–51 (I. 23), where Columcille miraculously identifies a single error in a newly copied text of the psalms, which was about to be collated with its exemplar.

33) Whatever its precise meaning, the phrase may be modeled on Jerome's Preface to the Book of Joshua, '*Monemusque lectorem, ut silvam hebraicorum nominum et distinctiones per membra divisas diligens scriptura conservet*'; *Biblia Sacra* I, p. 285.

34) In a Letter to a Frankish synod held in 603 Columbanus identifies humility as one of the four qualities that

ACC §48, '*Arbert Bassil brathu*', rendered by Stokes as 'he used Basil's judgments', translates better as 'he applied Basil's judgments'. Basil originally wrote a rule for monastic observance comprising 55 *regulae fusius* and 313 *brevius tractatae*, which was translated from Greek into Latin and rearranged in a single work by Rufinus of Aquileia in 397.[35] Apparently the translation was well known in Ireland under the name of Basil (presumably on the evidence of Rufinus's own title where he identifies Basil as the author). Unlike the Rule of Benedict, the Basil-Rufinus Rule consists mainly of general exhortations and principles of the spiritual life.[36] For Columcille it would presumably have served as a repository of general verdicts (what *ACC* calls *brátha*, a term normally denoting 'verdicts, pronouncements' in Irish secular law), while leaving him free to work out the details of daily monastic life in an Irish context.[37]

The second patristic authority mentioned by *ACC* is Cassian whose name appears in §56, '*Sluinnsius léig libru, libuir ut car Caisseoin*' ('He described the books of the Law, books that Cassian loved [to describe]'). Cassian, as far as we know, did not write a formal commentary on the Pentateuch, but he frequently drew on its five books in his two treatises on monasticism, even discussing how one might make them relevant to a monastic audience through judicious interpretation. For example, Cassian's *Institutiones* (Bk X. 21) has a chapter entitled 'Different passages from the writings of Solomon against *accidie*'.[38] Immediately after this reference to Cassian by name, *ACC* adds that Columcille 'won the battles against *gula* (gluttony)' ('*Catha gulae gailais*'; §56). In the *Institutiones*, Cassian devoted eight books (V–XII) to the eight principal vices, heading the list with *gula* ('gluttony'). In Bk V. 3, he explained that *gula* came first among the vices because the

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make children models for adult behavior, quoting Basil's *Responses* 161 and 163; while the Rule attributed to Columbanus, known as the *Regula Monachorum*, shows strong influence from Basil. For examples, see G. S. M. Walker (ed. and trans.), *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin, 1970), pp. 20–21 and 122–23; and C. Stancliffe, 'The Thirteen sermons attributed to Columbanus and the question of their authorship', in M. Lapidge, *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin writings* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 93–202 at pp. 106 (and n. 53) and 127.

35) A. M. Silva (ed. and trans.), *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition* (Collegeville, MN, 2013). See further, Francis X. Murphy, *Rufus of Aquileia (345–411): his Life and Works*, Catholic University of America Studies in Medieval History, new series vol 6 (Washington D.C. 1945), pp. 89–91.

36) See F. Laun, 'Die beiden Regeln des Basilius, ihre Echtheit und Entstehung', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 44 (1925), 1–61 at 20.

37) The Irish (and British) practice of having a 'second abbot', Irish *secnap* ('a prior but often with the right of succession') as against the mere prior (*praepositus*) of Benedict's Rule, may go back to Basil; see T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 287.

38) Basil also regarded the Scriptures as the true basis of all monastic legislation.

monk's first struggle must be against the spirit of gluttony. Likewise, in his other major work, the *Conlationes* (Bk V. 18), Cassian had argued at length that *gula* should be placed first because by freeing himself from gluttony the monk could get 'clear of the snares of the world' and thus unburdened could tackle the other seven vices. So, by stating immediately after the mention of Cassian's name that Columcille fought the battle of *gula*, the author of *ACC* echoes Cassian's system of the deadly sins which placed that vice first—in contradistinction to the conventional list of seven deadly sins formulated by Pope Gregory the Great (in his *Moralia in Iob*), which begins with pride (*superbia*). Other possible influences from Cassian are the soubriquet for Columcille as '*macc cruchi*' ('a devotee of mortification'; §131), with which compare *Institutiones* IV. 34, 'our renunciation is nothing but mortification and the image of the crucified'; and the emphatic statement that Columcille 'did not do any fasting that was not in accord with God's law' ('*Ní aened ní ná buí i rrecht ríg*'; §97), a practice which accords with Cassian's warning against excessive fasting (*Institutiones* V. 9).

Another patristic source, though never mentioned by name, is Jerome's prologues to his translations of books of the Old Testament, which subsequently came to be known as the Vulgate. In his Prologue to the Book of Kings, Jerome divides the 22 books of the Old Testament into three categories, of which the first was '*Lex*' (the five books of Moses; .i.e. the Pentateuch);[39] Most likely the references to Columcille's expertise in '*libru léig*' ('the books of the Law'; §§55 and 59) refer to Jerome's first category of *Lex*. Elsewhere in *ACC*, the mention that Columcille 'followed [the advice of] the books of Solomon' ('*libru Solman sexus*'; §57) probably reflects the influence of Jerome's prologue to the Books of Solomon where he established the canon of that king as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.[40] Commentary by Jerome may also shed light on *ACC*'s statement. According to Jerome these three books represent the three successive stages of life, with the first book intended for children, the second for adults and third for the old. Viewed in this context the statement in *ACC* may suggest that in the three stages of his life Columcille was guided by the successive works of Solomon.

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39) *Biblia Sacra* I, pp. 364–5: '*Primus…quem nos Genesim dicimus; secundus…qui Exodus appellatur; tertius… id est Leviticus; quartus…quem Numeros vocamus; quintus…qui Deuternomium praenotatur. Hii sunt quinque libri Mosi, quos proprie Thorath, id est Legem appellant*'.

40) *Biblia Sacra* II, p. 957, lines 9–12.

Conclusions:

Earlier scholars such as J. F. Kenney saw *ACC* as the most famous example of *bérla na filid*, a type of intentionally artificial language reserved for the *filid* (professional poets of early Ireland) and marked by 'pseudo-rhetorical, arbitrarily reconstructed phraseology and diction'.[41] More recently, Ó Corráin characterizes the work as 'modelled on Latin panegyric and written in a vernacular *Kunstprosa*'.[42] That the author knew Latin is evident at the most basic level from occasional instances of single words intermingled with the dominant Irish text; e.g. '*ecce*' (132), '*certo*' (132), '*Occidens*' and '*Oriens*' (28, 29), '*Deo*' (70, 120), '*magister*' (122); and more significantly by instances where the Latin is in close syntactical relationship with proximate Irish words, as in 'ut *car Casseoin*' (55), *fin* nouit' (125), and most strikingly '*cath* gulae' ('the struggle against gluttony'; 56) where the Latin owes its genitive case to the preceding Ir. *cath*.

Whether the author was familiar with formal panegyric and its conventions is a moot point. But what can hardly be doubted is his debt to the classical rhetorical tradition in matters of style (asyndeton, anaphora, metonymy, elaborative relative clauses), organizational structure (stanzas and framing prologue and epilogue), and tropes. Among the latter belong erotesis, a rhetorical question which implies strong affirmation or denial, e.g. '*Co india dui dó sceo Nera*?' ('How should an ignoramus tell of him when even Nera could not?'; §9);[43] polyptoton, the repetition of words derived from the same root but with different endings, including *figura etymologica*; e.g. '*Is nú nad mair; ní marthar lenn*' ('It is only now that he does not live; there is no remaining with us'; §11) and '*Ráith rith rethes*' ('He ran a favourable race'; §50).[44] Not surprisingly, the trope of hyperbole is pervasive in *ACC*, serving to magnify the subject's achievements; for example, Columcille's wise sayings are as numerous as the stars of the heavens (§64); he was the protector of a hundred churches (§93); and 'a great warrior' ('*Oll nia*'; §94)—the latter also illustrates the author's predilection for the superlative adjectives *oll* (§§94, 115, 144 [2x]) and *uile* (§§19, 115). The author was no less versed in Christian Latin literature, biblical and patristic, as suggested by numerous echoes of the Bible (Old and New Testament), allusions to Mt Zion that imply allegorical readings, and

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41) Kenney, *Sources*, p. 427 (§212).

42) Ó Corráin, *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium* II, §843 (p. 1117).

43) See also §§65, 104, 134–5.

44) For other examples, see §§18, 59, 80, 102–3, 128, 140.

references to Church Fathers, specifically Basil and Cassian.[45]

If, as tradition has it, the author of *ACC* was Dallán Forgaill, chief poet of Ireland, then he must have been expert not only in the repertoire of native learning (Ir *senchas*) proper to his profession but also in the new learning of Christianity. As with other aspects of this poem there are more puzzles than answers.

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45) In praising Columcille's knowledge of the natural sciences, the author displays some familiarity on his own with technical terminology; thus, §61, 'He linked the mutual course of the moon around the course of the sun' ('*ellacht immuaim n-eisci im rith [ngréne]*') — a reading based on *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language 'I'* (Dublin. 1966), s.v. 3 *imm-úaimm* (b), p. 158, lines 77–81.