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Latin Grammar Crossing Multilingual Zones: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904

Abstract: Priscian's Latin Grammar was originally written to enable Greek-speakers to study Latin. In this ninth-century manuscript, a further dimension is added by the presence of over 9,400 annotations written sometimes in Latin, sometimes in Old Irish, and often code-switching between the two, all in the service of the study of linguistic science.

1 Introduction

St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904 is a vellum manuscript of 240 pages dated to 850–851 CE.¹ It contains the *magnum opus* of the Latin grammarian Priscian of Caesarea,² composed at Constantinople around 527 CE, easily the longest and most comprehensive work in its genre, extending to nearly 1,000 printed pages in the modern edition.³ The manuscript is generally held to have been written mostly in Ireland.⁴ It was brought to the Continent soon after its completion, evidently between 855 and 863, and must have come to St Gall sometime later than 888, not being listed in the catalogue of books in Irish script at St Gall compiled in that year.⁵

Apart from the text of Priscian, the manuscript also contains a very copious commentary in the form of interlinear and marginal glosses (Fig. 1). There are about (9,400 verbal glosses in all, the majority of which are written in Latin, but about 37% (3,478) are Old Irish or some mixture of the two languages.⁶ And

1 Ó Néill (2000) dates the completion of the main text to August 851, and estimates that it was written over about ten months. Images can be found online at <<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/csg/0904/>> (accessed on 13 Oct. 2021).

2 For a biography of Priscian, see Ballaira 1989. Many aspects of the author are discussed in Baratin, Colombat and Holtz 2009.

3 Edited by Martin Hertz in 1855 and 1859: *GL* 2–3.

4 Hofman 1996, vol. 1, 12–31; Hofman 2000, 260–262; but for a contrary view, see Dumville 1997, 23–7, 34–36, 51–52.

5 Hofman 1996, vol. 1, 23–24.

6 Hofman 1996, vol. 1, 17.

there are many additional glosses that comprise sets of symbols fulfilling a wide variety of functions, about 3,000 such groups in total.⁷

The main text is written mostly in two hands. The first signs himself Calvus Patricii (a Latinisation of the Irish name Máel Pádraig) in the upper margin of p. 157, where the second, anonymous scribe takes over (see Figs 2a and 2b). Their work is occasionally supplemented in short sections by others, some of whom sign their names: Finguine (p. 182b), Donngus (p. 194b and p. 207a). All of these write in a Latin minuscule script characteristic of Irish scribal training. The vast majority of the commentary glosses are written in Irish script by a single, anonymous scribe. However, a second glossator wrote glosses on two pages (pp. 66–67) and a scattering elsewhere, and there are up to 11 other glossing hands,⁸ all dated to the ninth century and using a mixture of Irish and Continental scripts.

2 Priscian's grammar

Priscian's work follows the conventional structure of Latin grammars, discussing first linguistic units smaller than the word (e.g. letters and syllables; books 1–2), and then proceeding through the traditional eight parts of speech: nouns (including adjectives; 2–7), verbs (8–10), participles (11), pronouns (12–13), prepositions (14), adverbs and interjections (15–16). Despite the title *Institutio grammaticae* 'Foundation of grammar' in this St Gall manuscript (p. 1), the work is far from elementary.⁹ Priscian himself produced a very short abridgement,¹⁰ which he says 'should be sufficient for teaching children'.¹¹ Concluding a short overview on the Latin noun in the latter, he recommends to readers to consult the seven books 'in his other work' for a full discussion.¹² Priscian's major grammar is, by contrast, a highly discursive work aimed at scholars. Apart from

⁷ All of the glosses are published in a digital edition: Bauer, Hofman and Moran 2017, incorporating the partial edition in Hofman 1996.

⁸ Hofman 1996, vol. 1, 23–25.

⁹ The conventional title, followed by Hertz in his edition is *Institutiones grammaticae*, though De Nonno (2009, 251–259) has argued that *Ars Prisciani grammatici Caesariensis* is a better reflection of the manuscript tradition.

¹⁰ Passalacqua 1999, 5–41.

¹¹ *in septem libris, quos de nomine scripsimus diligentius, invenire licet, et maxime in sexto et septimo* (Passalacqua 1999, 21).

¹² *Et haec quidem compendii causa ad instituendos pueros sufficiat in praesenti dixisse* (Passalacqua 1999, 21).

its length, it is differentiated from other Latin grammars by the meticulous detail of its discussion; by the huge number of quotations from literary authors; and by having two entire books (17–18) given over to a discussion of Latin syntax, the first such treatment in the history of the language.¹³

Priscian's grammar, written at Constantinople in the heart of the Greek-speaking world, is characterised above all by its engagement with the Greek grammatical tradition. Like many other areas of the Roman intellectual tradition, Latin grammar was originally entirely derivative of Greek models at the time of its inception around the first century BCE.¹⁴ But Priscian complains of a rupture in the two traditions, and charges previous Latin grammarians with ignoring the progress made in Greek linguistics by Apollonius Dyscolus and Herodian, who wrote in the second and third centuries CE.¹⁵ So his work sets out explicitly to update and renew Latin grammar, his innovative treatment of Latin syntax being a case in point, modelled closely on the work of Apollonius. He assumes a Greek readership, regularly drawing parallel examples from Greek literature in order to illustrate points of Latin grammar, or explaining unusual Latin words by providing Greek translations.¹⁶

So Priscian's work in its original context (before we come to consider its transmission and reception) already reflects deep interactions between languages and cultures, between the Latin and Greek linguistic and literary traditions. And this context is perhaps more complex than it may at first appear. We characterise Latin and Greek as Classical languages, that is, languages with standardised, prestige registers closely associated with literary canons. The fact that these languages dominate the surviving literary records tends to obscure the wide variety of everyday languages also spoken in the same period throughout a vast, ethnically diverse empire.¹⁷ Constantinople, the 'New Rome' founded by Constantine as his imperial capital in 330 CE, would have hosted a wide variety of immigrants – Jews, Goths, Huns, Thracians, Syrians, Egyptians, other North Africans, Illyrians, Italians – for many of whom Latin or Greek were second languages.¹⁸ Furthermore, by the sixth century Priscian was writing in a post-Classical world. Politically, the Latin-speaking western Roman Empire had

13 Baratin 1989, 42.

14 Rawson 1985, especially chapter 8.

15 *GL* 2, 1–2.

16 These Greek explanations may have been in Priscian's original text or may well have been inserted by early readers at Constantinople. Hertz accepts many as original in his edition.

17 For a broad survey of the interactions of Latin with other languages of the Empire, see Adams 2003.

18 Horrocks 2010, 207–210.

been entirely disbanded, even as the Greek-speaking eastern Empire continued in its territorial integrity. Although the cultivation of Latin learning certainly survived in the West,¹⁹ the Classical variety of Latin that Priscian minutely describes was by then at a considerable remove from the spoken language of native speakers, already evolving and diversifying in the direction of modern Romance languages.²⁰ The canon of literary authorities from which he cites was well established and already ancient: of the authors quoted most frequently – Virgil (1200 times, approximately), Terence (550), Cicero (470), Lucan (270), Sallust (250), Horace (200), Juvenal (190), Plautus (180), Ovid (100) – none postdate the beginning of the second century CE, already 400 years before Priscian's time, and many are considerably earlier. And the same applies to Greek authors: Priscian quoted sources as much as a millennium old – most frequently Homer (67 passages), Demosthenes (62), Plato (61), Isocrates (28), and Xenophon (22).²¹ He also makes reference to various Greek dialects that had probably disappeared as spoken varieties five centuries earlier.²² So Priscian inhabits a world of texts, an intellectual world disconnected from the linguistic realities of his time.

What is more, the Greek-Latin bilingualism that Priscian seems to take for granted is also somewhat illusory. Although proficiency in the Greek language had once been a central prop of Roman élite culture, the decentralisation of Roman administration and political division of East and West from the late third century marked the beginning of a significant linguistic rift. St Augustine, for example, in the late fourth century writes that he hated the Greek language and its literature, a remarkable thing for a former state-appointed professor of rhetoric to declare.²³ Certainly, by Priscian's time, knowledge of Greek in the West was in the process of vanishing almost completely. And in the Greek-speaking East, while Latin lasted as a language of administration until the seventh century, it too was gradually becoming obsolete.²⁴

¹⁹ For a broad survey, see the magisterial work of Riché 1978.

²⁰ Adams 2007.

²¹ Counts of Greek authors are based on Garcea and Giavatto 2007.

²² Moran 2015a; Conduché 2012.

²³ *Confessions* I.13–14, ed. Verheijen 1981.

²⁴ Bischoff 1951; Berschin 1988, 41–101.

3 Transmission

Despite the scholarly achievements of Priscian's encyclopaedic grammar, its influence in the generations immediately after him seems to have been limited. His work was known to Cassiodorus in Vivarium at the southern tip of Italy by 580 CE.²⁵ The next datable use is by the Anglo-Saxon scholar Aldhelm of Malmesbury towards the end of the following century, and linguistic archaisms in St Gall glosses indicate that the text was known in Ireland around the same time.²⁶

In Priscian's manuscript transmission, the sixth and seventh centuries are (not unusually in the western tradition) entirely bare, and we begin to find manuscripts only from the very end of the eighth century, initially two from Italy. Then, an explosion: there are 51 extant manuscripts datable to the ninth century, and around 100 in the tenth.²⁷ By this period, Priscian's text was being read in radically new contexts. In the former Roman West, regional varieties of spoken Latin had clearly separated as Romance vernaculars. In the north-western margins of the Empire and beyond, Latin and Celtic had ceded to the Germanic languages of invaders and immigrants. And with the extension of Christianity beyond the Empire's former frontiers to Ireland and northern and central Europe, native speakers of radically different languages were now confronting his text.²⁸

How did these native speakers of vernacular languages make sense of it? We have valuable evidence in the form of very copious interlinear and marginal glosses. Out of the 51 surviving ninth-century manuscripts, 31 are nearly complete, and all but 6 of these are glossed, some very heavily indeed. And some of these gloss commentaries provide a window on Classical and vernacular interactions. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 18375, for example, a mid-ninth-century manuscript from northern France or western Germany, has 280 glosses in Old High German, added in Tegernsee in the eleventh century;²⁹ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 114, a miscellany of grammatical texts compiled at Tegernsee at the end of the tenth century has around 160

²⁵ Holtz 2009, 39–42; Szerwiniack 2009, 69–70.

²⁶ Strachan 1905; Lambert 1996.

²⁷ Passalacqua 1978; Ballaira 1982.

²⁸ Ireland was already absorbing Latin culture when Priscian was writing in the early sixth century.

²⁹ Edited in Steinmeyer and Sievers 1879–1922, vol. 2, 367–373; see Bergmann and Stricker 2005, vol. 3, 1221–1223, no. 642.

glosses as part of a Priscian commentary.³⁰ These glosses are invariably single-word lexical translations of Latin terms. The vernacular material in the St Gall Priscian is vastly more abundant, however. Of its 9,400 verbal glosses around 37% (3,478) draw on the vernacular, either Old Irish or a mixture of Old Irish and Latin, as noted above. Four other ninth-century manuscripts also contain Irish glosses, and in the context of medieval multilingual manuscripts, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 10290 is certainly the most complex.³¹ This was written in Caroline minuscule script by a Breton scribe in the second half of the ninth century, and contains glosses in Latin, Old Irish, Old Breton and Old Welsh. The scribe copied 73 Old Irish glosses, which he apparently did not understand, as he frequently abridges them and sometimes Bretonises them, making what seem to be inadvertent changes.³²

The complex language interactions in the Paris manuscript of Priscian have some parallels in the St Gall manuscript, particularly in the context of its later history. Hofman estimates that some ten other hands entered glosses after the initial stage of production.³³ Some of these are using Carolingian script and must therefore have been writing on the Continent. At the end of the fifth quire (p. 89), on a page originally blank, a scribe writing in Carolingian script copied a praise poem for Bishop Gunther of Cologne (in office 850–863); a corrector later made emendations in an Irish hand (Fig. 3).³⁴ Gunther is praised in several poems of Sedulius Scottus, the Irish scholar and poet based at Liège under the patronage of Bishop Hartgar (840–855), and the poem therefore seems very likely written by Sedulius or a close contemporary seeking to consolidate their network of support among powerful and wealthy episcopal patrons.³⁵ Passing through the area around Liège and Cologne on its way to St Gall, the manuscript was being read in a region where Old High German was the dominant spoken

30 Steinmeyer and Sievers 1879–1922, vol. 2, 374–377; Bergmann and Stricker, 2005, vol. 4, 1713–1715, no. 892.

31 For other manuscripts, see Hofman 1996, 31–39.

32 See Hofman 1996, 35–38 for bibliography, and more recently Lambert 2005.

33 Hofman 1996, vol. 1, 23–25.

34 Lines 25–30 illustrate the tenor: *Gloriferae fama Guntari fertur honestas / Europae turmis laudibus almisonis: / Pacifer egregius / praesul venerabilis almus, / At patiens humilis largus et ipse pius; / Moribus et forma pietateque dignus honore, / Electus domini pastor et ipse gregis.* ‘The reputation of the glorious fame of Gunthar is held in the throngs of Europe with charitable praises: outstanding peace-bringer, excellent, venerable, fruitful, and patient, humble, generous and very pious; worthy of honour in character, appearance and piety, chosen by the Lord as the shepherd of his flock’.

35 Godman 1987, 155, 164–165.

language, though with close scholarly and diplomatic links with the Romance-speaking lands to the west and south. For these local scholars, the Old Irish glosses would no longer have yielded any sense, and as the main script was now obsolete the book too seems to have fallen out of use. There are no indications of any glosses being entered after the ninth century.

4 Reading Greek in early medieval Ireland

The manuscript's three languages are for the most part written in two scripts: Greek script for Greek, Latin script doing service for both Latin and Irish. A small number of marginal notes are written in ogam letters, the indigenous Irish script found on archaic inscriptions, whose relationship to Latin writing is still debated.³⁶ Ogam occurs in one note in the lower margin (in Latin) and seven in the upper (in Irish). The first three record the date in the religious calendar: the feasts of Gaius and Martin, and Low Sunday. Pádraig Ó Néill has identified these dates as 27 October, 11 November and 29 March respectively.³⁷ The fact that Low Sunday (*minchásc*) is a moveable feast allowed him to fix the year as 851. Four subsequent ogams record the word *cocart*, meaning 'correction', referring presumably to a stage of editing, though the nature of the process is still opaque to us. The final ogam records the word *latheirt*, which appears to mean 'hung-over' (Figs 4a and 4b). A motivation for using ogam in these specific instances is difficult to identify. The possibility that it was used as a cipher seems undermined by the fact that *latheirt*, for example, is written out plainly in Latin letters in another margin (p. 189).

A similar freedom in the treatment of script is also evident in rubrics, where Greek letters often do service for Latin. This is a marked deviation from regular usage and also very inconsistent, as the scribe appears to mix Greek and Latin letters at a whim: *Ἐπιλείπει λιβερ.ii. / incipit λιβερ.iii. de. / συμπαρατινίς* (Fig. 5), etc. The same usage occurs in other Irish manuscripts already from as early as the beginning of the eighth century.³⁸ Here in particular, it signals that the peritext areas of books were spaces where scribal conventions could be relaxed. Already distinguished in red ink, the switch to Greek script in headings further separates these from the main body of text.

³⁶ McManus 1997, 65.

³⁷ Ó Néill 2000, 178–179.

³⁸ Moran 2012, 174–175.

Throughout the main text Greek words and phrases are in Greek script, and these are highlighted by the use of overlining in red ink (ending after p. 224). This draws attention to what was certainly the most challenging aspect of the text for any ninth-century readers in the West. Knowledge of Greek was scant at best, despite occasional achievements, notably among a few Irish scholars on the Continent in the mid-ninth century.³⁹ Generations of copying at the hands of scribes ill-equipped to transmit the language resulted in an extremely high level of textual corruption. Even if we imagine that a reader had a perfect knowledge of the language, in many cases no sense could possibly have been extracted.

We can illustrate the extent and difficulties of textual corruption with the example of a citation from Euripides' *Phoenician Women* occurring early on in the text (Fig. 6).

Priscian cites this passage to support his assertion that the combination of mute consonant (*b c d g h k p q t*, by his definition) followed by a liquid (*l r*) or nasal (*m n*) can be metrically either long or short. Initially, he provides a line from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.531, cited at *GL* 2, 10.10):

piscosamque Cn̄idon grauidamque Amathunta metallis

fishy Cnidos, and Amathus, heavy in metals

Here the glossator identifies the second letter of *Cnidon* as the liquid in question (*liquida*, gloss 5b13 k). He adds symbols to mark off the segment *-samque Cni-* and designates it (correctly) as a dactylic foot (with a gloss *.d.* meaning *dactylus*, 5b13 i). As a dactyl by definition comprises one metrically long syllable followed by two shorts, the glossator is here confirming the second syllable as short, despite being followed by two consonants, and this is what Priscian wanted to show. So far, so good. But although Priscian's subject is Latin grammar, he follows this with a citation from a Greek author (Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 542, cited at *GL* 2, 10.12), both to reinforce the point with an example more accessible to his Greek readership and out of a more general interest in comparativism:

Manuscript: οτε, τατυετα, ξενκαι(α)ρε μοδιαρισεν

Restored (Hertz): Ἴσότης ἔταξεν καριθμὸν διῶρισε

Equality has arranged and divided the number

39 Moran 2012.

Leaving aside for now problems of word separation, a cursory comparison of the manuscript's text against the restored version shows enough corruptions to challenge any Greek reader. Despite this, the glossators clearly persevere in trying to extract whatever limited sense they can. Their task is rendered hopeless immediately by the fact that the sequence -θμ-, the focus of the example, is missing entirely from the corrupted text. Instead the glossator hones in on a defective -τν- (adding '*i. liquida*', 5b15 m). And on a false analogy with the line from Ovid he marks off the corrupt sequence -τατνετα- as a dactyl (5b15 n), not realising that this foot is alien here.

The glossator's efforts did not stop there, however. A *signe de renvoi* in the left margin acts as place marker, and the accompanying note *archiunn* 'ahead' points the reader to search forward for the referent of the same sign later on.⁴⁰ On page 25 of the manuscript, Priscian returns to the topic of syllable length and cites the same line of Euripides (*GL* 2, 52.7), this version only slightly less marred (Fig. 7):

Manuscript:	ιςοτ(ν)ετατετα ξενκαριε μον διορισεν
Restored:	Ἴσότης ἔταξεν κάριθμὸν διώρισε

In this passage the crucial -θμ- is again missing, and the glossator, confronted with a text incompatible with Priscian's discussion of it, attempts to rectify the issue by borrowing the corrupt letter from the previous occurrence. He inserts a letter ν to follow τ (though in a slightly earlier position). The result is equally garbled, but the emendation does at least offer a superficial resolution, the glossator confirming '*híc .t. ante .n. posita 7 communem sillabam facit*' ('here the letter *t* has been placed before *n*, and makes a "common" syllable', 25a22 y). Clearly, the result does nothing at all to render a corrupt passage any more meaningful. But it does show that – however obscure the Greek text may have been, due to corruption and unfamiliarity – glossators were attempting to decode the Greek passages by whatever restricted means were at their disposal.

A central barrier for anyone trying to read Greek was word separation. The Greek text had been transmitted undivided in *scriptio continua*. Any hope of using glossaries and similar lexica to help decipher it would have been severely hampered by not knowing where individual words begin and end. The glosses show regular concern to tackle this problem. The example below is from a context where Priscian discusses Latin nouns and adjectives with ambiguous endings (*GL* 2, 174.4–5; see Fig. 8).

40 Lambert 1987, 220.

In this case specifically, *haec prima* ‘this first’, *sacra* ‘holy’ and *maxima* ‘greatest’ may be read either as feminine nominative singulars or as neuter nominative/accusative plurals. How does Priscian convey the double meanings? For him, and his readers, the most direct way is to supply the respective translations in Greek, where the ambiguities do not apply. The manuscript reads:⁴¹

haec prima ΗΙΡΩΤΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΑΙΡΩΤΑ *sacra* ΗΙΕΡΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΑΙΕΡΑ *maxima* ΗΜΗΓΙΣΤΕ ΚΑΙ ΤΑΜΕΓΙΣΤΑ

haec prima [can mean] ‘the first’ (fem.) [ἡ πρώτη] *and* ‘the first things’ [τὰ πρῶτα];
sacra [can mean] ‘the holy’ (fem.) [ἡ ἱερά] *and* ‘the holy things’ [τὰ ἱερά];
maxima [can mean] ‘the great’ (fem.) [ἡ μεγίστη] *and* ‘the great things’ [τὰ μεγίστα]

For later Irish readers, of course, Priscian’s Greek translations only serve to heap obscurity on to an otherwise straightforward point. Nonetheless, the glossators attempt to decipher as much as they can. The general sense of the Greek words could be inferred from the Latin equivalents, so the main difficulty is to identify word units. The common word **καί** ‘and’ (in bold here) is most easily identifiable. The scribe of the main text has already partially or fully separated these words (possibly from the archetype) and the glossator has marked the first two examples with a tiny Tironian abbreviation 7 ‘and’; in the third, he adds a point to separate it. Next the glossator isolates the Greek article (underlined in the above transcription), marking both ἡ and τὰ throughout with the Insular abbreviation for *haec* (in the first case with a gloss inside the letter!), and sometimes adding points to separate them from the following word. The rubricator evidently worked after the glosses had been entered, to judge from glosses here partly covered by red ink, and for the most part breaks the line to follow the division of words already established.

Priscian, in this way, regularly inserts Greek words as a means to disambiguate Latin words that are homophones or otherwise easily confusable. This would certainly have been practical for his original readership, but of little benefit in a later context when Greek was forbidding. In some cases, the Irish glossators employ a *third* language – their own vernacular – to fulfil the same clarifying function. So, for example, when Priscian lists pairs of Latin verbs that are identical in the first person singular only (*GL* 2, 403.7–11; Fig. 9):

⁴¹ The scribe here appears to have copied out a full line from his exemplar twice in error. Had he noticed it immediately he might have erased and overwritten it, but here it is scored out instead. A comparison of the two versions illustrates the propensity to disfigure the Greek: the form ΜΗΓΙΣΤΗ (μεγίστη) was copied more accurately on the second attempt.

mando ΕΝΘΕΛΛΟΜΑΙ mandas, mando ΜΑCΟΛΛΑΙ mandis; fundo ΘΕΜΕΗΩ fundas, fundo ΕΚΧΕΩ fundis; obsero ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΩΤΟΝ ΜΟΧΛΟΝ obseras, obsero ΠΕΡΙCΠΙΡΩ obseris; appello ΠΡΟCΤΟΡΕΥΩ appellas, appello ΠΡΟCΩΤΩ appellis

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| a) <i>mando</i> = ἐντέλλομαι ‘I enjoin’ | → <i>mandas</i> |
| <i>mando</i> = μασῶμαι ‘I eat’ | → <i>mandis</i> |
| b) <i>fundo</i> = θεμελιῶ ‘I found’ | → <i>fundas</i> |
| <i>fundo</i> = ἐκχέω ‘I pour out’ | → <i>fundis</i> |
| c) <i>obsero</i> = περιβάλλω τὸν μοχλόν ‘I bolt up’ | → <i>obseras</i> |
| <i>obsero</i> = περισπείρω ‘I sow’ | → <i>obseris</i> |
| d) <i>apello</i> = προσαγορεύω ‘I address’ | → <i>apellas</i> |
| <i>apello</i> = προσωθῶ ‘I drive on’ | → <i>apellis</i> |

Where ἐντέλλομαι and μασῶμαι originally distinguished the two meanings of *mando*, Irish glosses *imtrénigim* and *ithim* (146b10 m, 146b11 o) here perform the same role. Similarly, the two meanings of *fundo* are explained (firstly in Latin) with *fundamentum pono* and *dodálim*, *obsero* by *fescrigim* and *clandaim*, *appello* by *adgládur* and *inárbenim*, and so on. These Irish glosses fulfil multiple functions simultaneously. They provide the same disambiguation by language switch, while also providing for translations both the Latin terms and their Greek synonyms. Although Priscian used Greek as a convenient way to explain the meaning of Latin words, for Irish readers Latin now is the means for accessing rare words in Greek. This last function is highlighted by two marginal glosses that mark this passage with the letter *g*, for *graeca* ‘Greek words’.

As a grammarian, Priscian is a prolific collector of unusual forms. Whereas the previous two examples show the advantage of Greek (and Irish) for the purposes of disambiguation, Greek is also used simply to explain the meaning of rare Latin words. For example, in a list of feminine nouns ending in *-x* and neuters in *-t* (*GL* 2, 167.4–9; Fig. 10), Priscian includes *filix* (a type of grass), *uibix* (a weal or contusion), and *git* (a spice, identified with black cumin / *Nigella sativa*). For his Greek readership Priscian pragmatically provides Greek translations for these rare words ἄγρωστις [manuscript ΑΦΡΟΙΣ], μῶλωψ [manuscript ΜΟΛΟΥ], μελάνθιον.⁴² But later Irish readers draw on independent resources. For *uibix*, two glosses draw on Latin lexicography: one cites a source *Cic[ero]* – apparently a glossary erroneously ascribed to the famous Roman orator – with the explanation *pugna* ‘blows’; another says *uibices caesae plagarum* ‘uibices

⁴² It is possible that these Greek words were not part of the original text but were added originally as glosses in a very early stage of transmission. I quote the text reconstructed in Hertz’s edition here for clarity, but it is worth remembering that the manuscripts’ corruptions only render the problem more opaque.

[plural] are the cuts of blows’, attributed to an unspecified *glo[ssarium]*. For *git*, the glossator adds identical symbol glosses over it and the corresponding Greek term to note that the latter is a synonym. *Git* itself is then explained by reference to the superordinate category *nomen etha* ‘the name of a grain’, in a gloss code-switching between Latin and Irish.⁴³ A later occurrence of the same word is similarly explained (*nomen farris*, 94b42 f), and an associated citation reveals the source of this knowledge, paraphrasing Isaiah 28:27: *ut in prophetia. 7 serris non triturbabitur git* ‘as in the Prophet: “and *git* will not be threshed by saws [i.e. threshing-wains]”’. *Filix/ἄγρωστικ* are left unglossed: we have no way of confirming what meaning, if any, these terms may have had for their readers.

The example of *git*, a Latin word probably of Semitic origin (cf. perhaps *קצק* *qetsach*), and its translation *μελάνθιον* points to another challenge for readers of Priscian. Translation is not only lexical, but also cultural, and in an environment far removed from the eastern Mediterranean world, readers sometimes must have struggled to identify or imagine what his original readers may have taken for granted. Hence a large class of glosses (more than 200), in both Latin and Irish, that designate only superordinate categories: the ‘name of a bird’ (*nomen avis*), or an animal, a grain, a tree, a grass, a river, a fruit, a vegetable, a weight, a weapon and so on. These vague terms provide some degree of clarification, but in some cases like *git* the true referent may have been not only unknown to Irish readers, but unimaginable.

5 Conclusion

The St Gall Priscian manuscript presented here is emblematic of many encounters between languages. The sixth-century author of the text was writing about Latin in Latin, but was writing for a Greek-speaking audience and was deeply engaged in Greek linguistic and literary traditions. These Classical traditions were highly conservative and already archaic by Priscian’s day, ignoring entirely both the progressive evolution of the two languages and the hugely diverse language communities in which they were studied.

Priscian could scarcely have imagined the environments in which his work went on to be studied. The accommodations that his grammar makes to its original Greek-speaking readership were later rendered entirely obsolete in north-western Europe. In the latter context the status of Greek underwent a complete

⁴³ Moran 2015b, 113–142; for a broader analysis of this phenomenon, see Bisagni 2013–2014.

inversion, from accessible vernacular to a language both exotic and prestigious. Now Priscian's Greek, once parenthetical, becomes an object of study in itself, despite the huge barriers of poor transmission and lack of auxiliary resources. And in some cases, its original explanatory function as a language contrastive to Latin is eclipsed by Irish.

This ninth-century manuscript had its own journey, one which illustrates the interconnectedness of native and scholarly languages in its day. Priscian scholars who were native speakers of Irish travelled to the Continent, probably through Wales and Brittany, where they were teachers of Latin in ecclesiastical centres inhabited by native speakers of Romance and German. In some ways the impressive mobility among these different ethnic groups may not have been so different from the cosmopolitan world of Priscian's day. And the Latin teachers of the ninth century were certainly concerned to follow Priscian's lead in preserving an ancient and venerable language tradition.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviation

GL 2–3 Martin Hertz (ed.), *Prisciani grammatici Caesariensis Institutionum grammaticarum libri XVIII*, 2 vols (Grammatici latini, 2–3), Leipzig: Teubner, 1855 and 1859.

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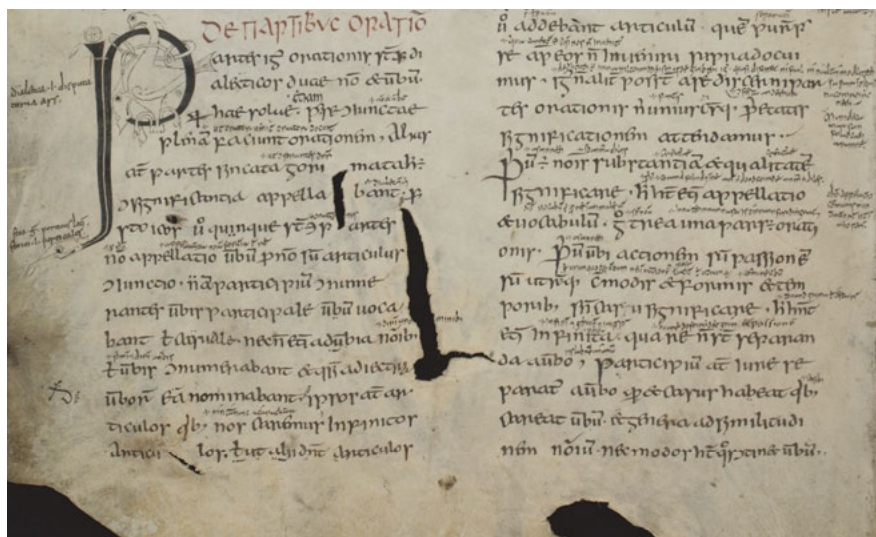


Fig. 1: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 26 (half page, lower part).

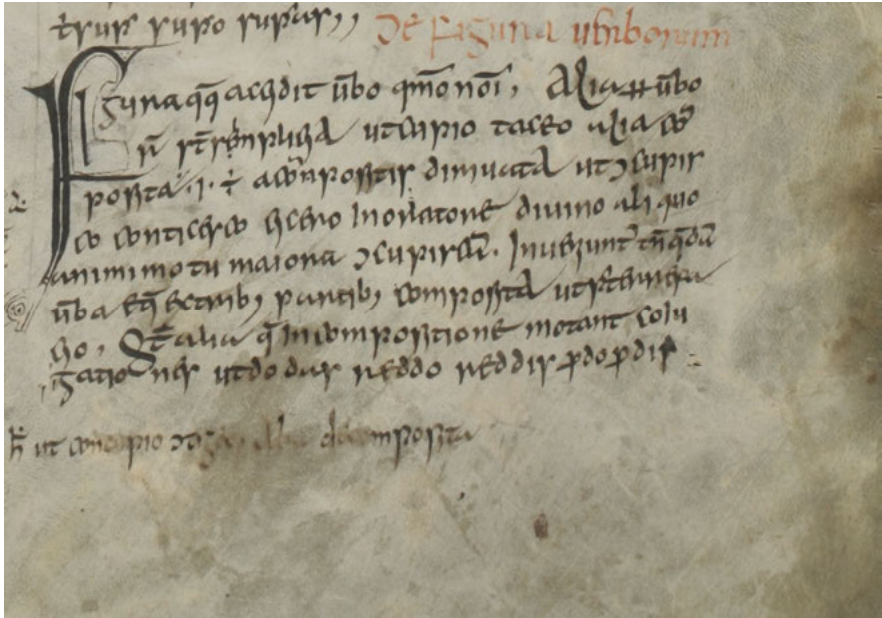


Fig. 2a: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 156b (detail: lower margin); scribe Calvus Patricii.

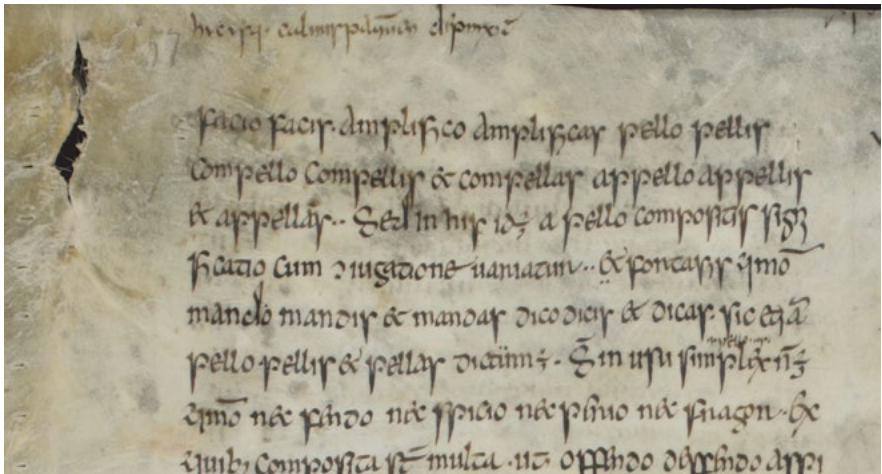


Fig. 2b: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 157a (detail: upper margin); scribe B takes over from Calvus Patricii.

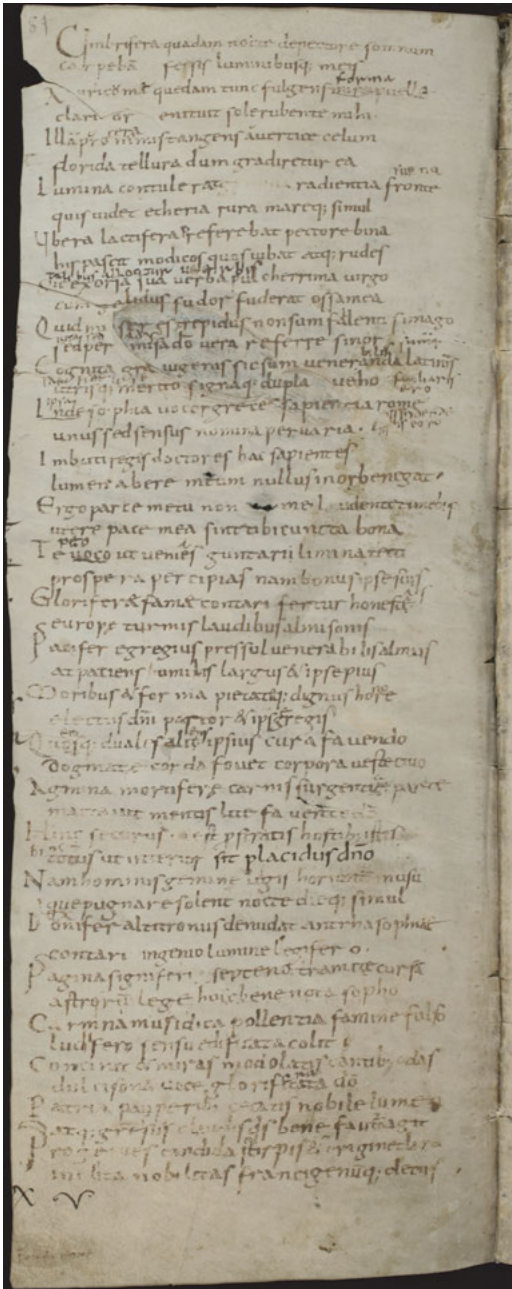


Fig. 3: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 89 (full page: only col. b is preserved); encomium to Gunther.

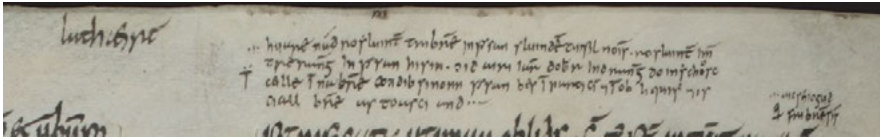


Fig. 4a: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 189 (detail: upper margin); *latheirt* 'hungover' in Latin script.

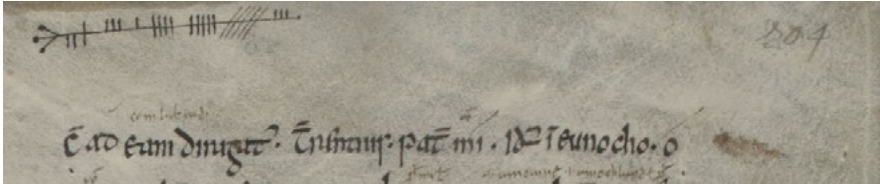


Fig. 4b: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 204 (detail: upper margin); *latheirt* 'hungover' in ogam script.

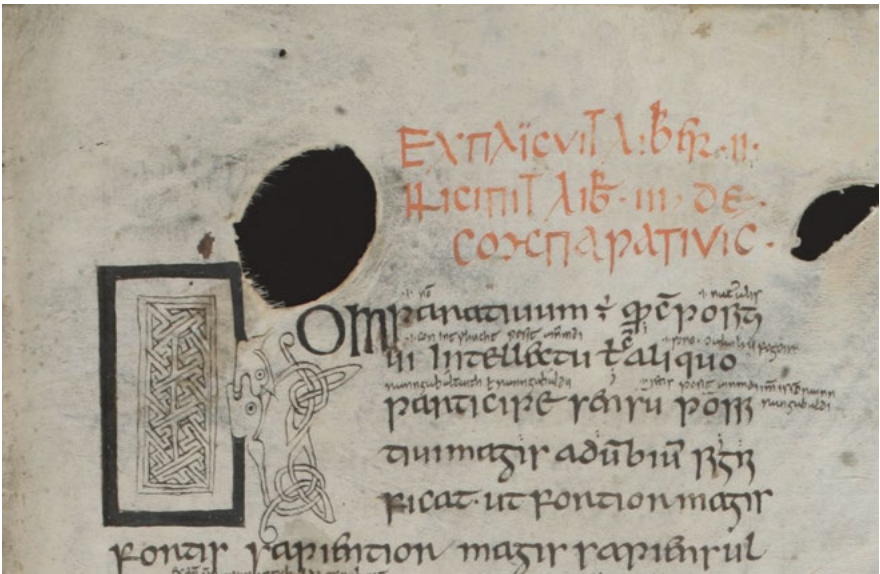


Fig. 5: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 39a (detail: top); Greek script for Latin.

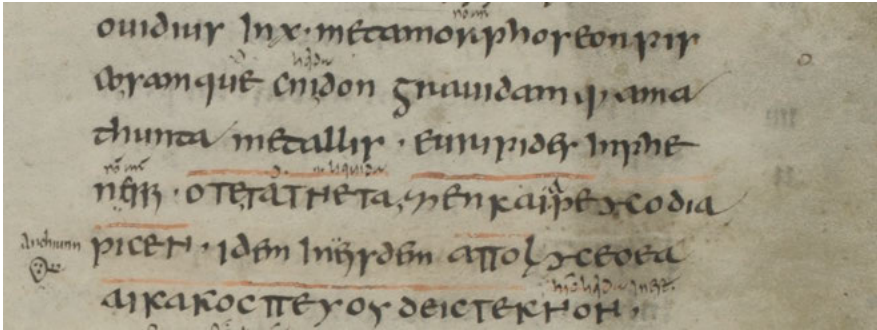


Fig. 6: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 5b (detail: ll. 12–17); Ovid and Euripides.

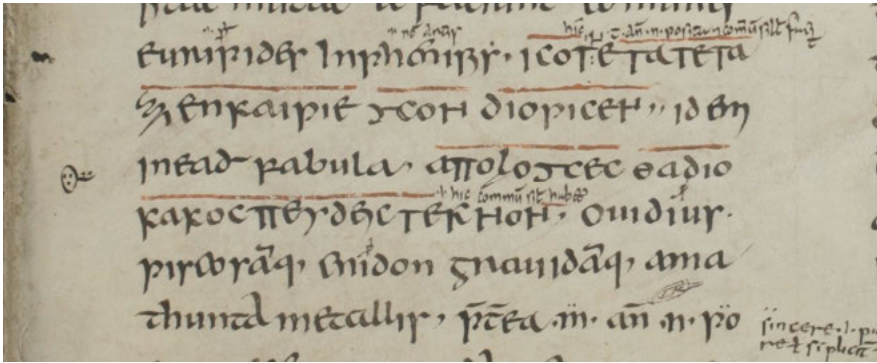


Fig. 7: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 25a (detail: ll. 22–27); Euripides.

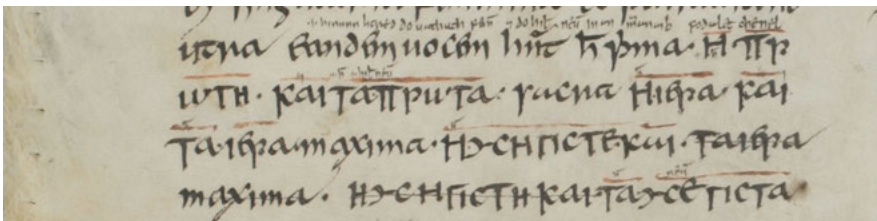


Fig. 8: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 72a (detail: ll. 14–17); Greek word division.

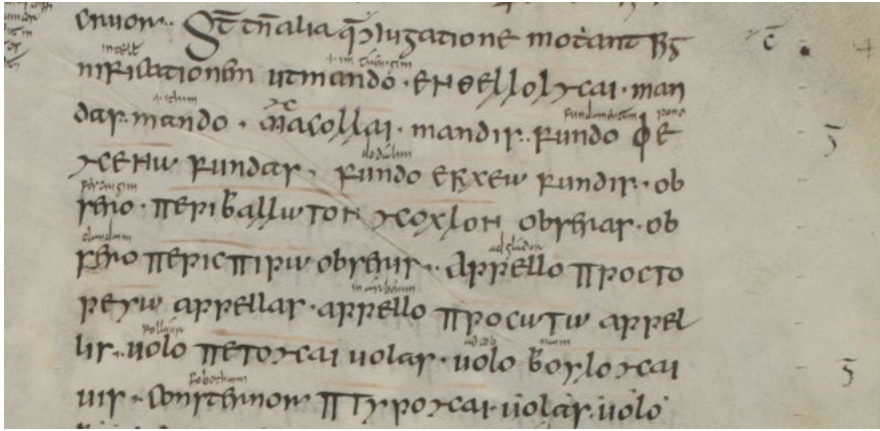


Fig. 9: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 146b (detail: ll. 9–17); disambiguation.

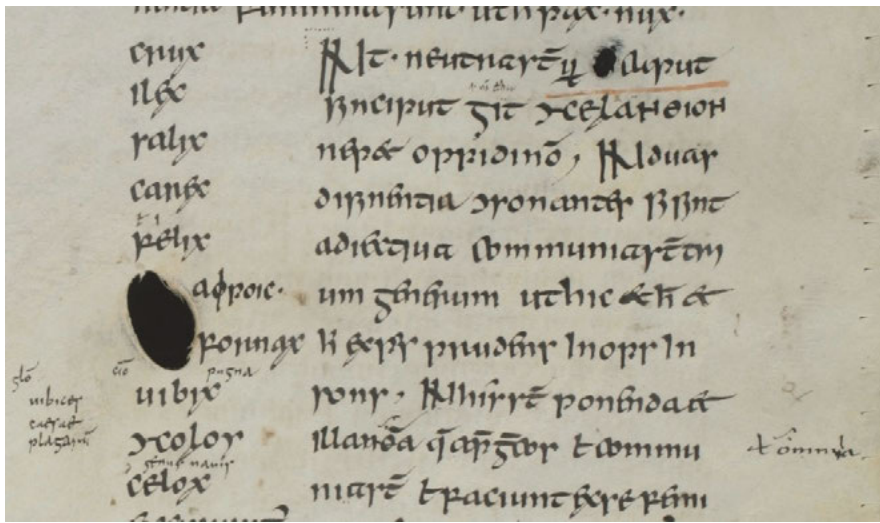


Fig. 10: St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, 904, p. 25b (detail: ll. 16–25); lexical glosses.