

Title	Continuity and change from vellum to paper in the Gaelic manuscript: bindings and book-size
Authors	Ó Macháin, Pádraig
Publication date	2022
Original Citation	Ó Macháin, P. (2022) 'Continuity and change from vellum to paper in the Gaelic manuscript: bindings and book-size', Paper Stories: Paper and Book History in Post-Medieval Europe, Reykjavík, Iceland, 5-6 May.
Type of publication	Conference item
Link to publisher's version	https://openlibrary.org/books/OL46071298M/Paper_Stories_-_Paper_and_Book_History_in_Early_Modern_Europe
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Download date	2025-08-23 20:40:16
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14287

Continuity and change from vellum to paper in the Gaelic manuscript: bindings and book-size¹

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THIS STUDY IS concerned with a survey of Gaelic vernacular manuscripts from the vellum tradition (1100–1600) and from the first two phases of the paper tradition (1468–1600, 1600–1700), the first phase of which ran in parallel with the end of the vellum era.² The survey is predicated on the understanding that it is not possible to discuss the use of paper as a manuscript material in Gaelic tradition without also understanding the use of calfskin vellum, the material that it replaced, which had been in use continuously since writing and book-craft were brought to Ireland with Christianity in the fifth century. The gospel books, psalters, missals and scholastic books created in monasteries and surviving in insular script from the early-Christian era down to the twelfth century are testament to the ecclesiastical and Latinate foundations that lie beneath the creation of books in the vernacular. As literature in the vernacular existed from at least the eighth century, it follows that vernacular manuscripts must have existed since that time also. Today, however, the earliest vernacular manuscripts survive only from the twelfth century, emerging at a time of Church reform and the beginnings of Anglo-Norman settlement.

The slow emergence of the vernacular manuscripts in the twelfth century parallels the tentative arrival of the paper manuscript in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Both eras were periods of increasing social and political turbulence, which in the case of the earlier era is reflected in the absence of any surviving vernacular manuscripts from the thirteenth century. When we speak of the vernacular vellum tradition, therefore, we are referring to three manuscripts surviving from the twelfth century (see below) and the Gaelic manuscripts that were produced between 1300 and 1600, together with a small handful written in the seventeenth century.

The Gaelic vernacular manuscripts of the late Middle Ages (1100–1600) were the means of conveyance and preservation of learning that was practised by hereditary families of secular scholars, who depended on local Gaelic chieftains for their maintenance. When this arrangement collapsed due to the disintegration of elite Gaelic society brought about by English conquest and colonisation from the second half of the sixteenth century, the practice of learning as a profession began to disappear, and the use of calfskin as a writing support was discontinued. New literary tradition-bearers emerged however, scholars who pursued the study and transmission of Gaelic learning in a part-time capacity. These scholars wrote on paper.³

The survey presented here focuses on the material aspects of this important change, and addresses the related questions of the binding and the size of the writing supports. While reference will be made to the books created during the monastic period pre-1100, the survey confines itself statistically to the vernacular tradition up to the end of the seventeenth century, when the first two phases of paper-manuscript production had passed. Such a study could not

¹ An edited version of this paper is to appear in Silvia Hufnagel, *Paper stories* (forthcoming).

² By ‘vernacular’ is meant manuscripts written in the Irish/Gaelic language, as opposed to the near-exclusively Latin ecclesiastical manuscripts of the period 600–1100. A small number of vellum manuscripts were created during the seventeenth century, and these have been included in this survey for sake of completeness.

³ Ó Macháin, ‘The emergence of the Gaelic paper manuscript’.

be carried out without consulting the work of scholars who, from the late nineteenth century onwards, produced catalogues of Gaelic manuscripts held in various institutional repositories. One of the earliest catalogues was that carried out between the years 1886 and 1892 by Standish Hayes O’Grady, who completed what would become the first volume of the *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the British Museum*.⁴ Published in 1926, eleven years after O’Grady’s death, the volume became – and remains – a classic introduction to Irish literature in manuscript, noted for the wit and discursive style of its author. His catalogue describes 76 manuscripts, extending in date mainly from the fourteenth century in the vellum era to the nineteenth century in the latter stages of the paper era, covering practically every aspect of medieval and modern Gaelic literature.

In outline, O’Grady’s methodology follows the modalities of the time: sparse in its summary of essential details, and precise in its listing of contents, but with the unconventional addition of his own valuable, learned commentary on the texts being described. The essential details are the four established by norm: material, dimensions, extent and date. The dimensions were expressed through a bibliographical terminology of descending sizes that had been established since the introduction of the printed book, of which the four primary terms – folio, quarto, octavo and, rarely, duodecimo⁵ – were adequate as general descriptors for what O’Grady found before him in both paper and vellum manuscripts. These terms remain useful today.

Descriptive manuscript catalogues that preceded O’Grady’s contained subdivisions capable of describing the variations that existed between those four general categories. The 1802 catalogue of the Cotton library, for example, describes dimensions *in folio*, *in 4to*, and *in 8vo* as ‘longiori’, ‘majori’, and ‘minori’, with less frequent subdivisions such as *in folio grandiori* and *in quarto ampliori*.⁶ The description in the Bodleian catalogue of 1858 subdivides sizes into ‘minimo’, ‘minori’, ‘majori’, and ‘maximo’, and *in folio* has the additional category of ‘oblongo’.⁷ The sub-categories that O’Grady called into service to describe the Gaelic manuscripts in the British Museum, vellum and paper, were ‘small folio’, ‘small quarto’, ‘oblato quarto’,⁸ ‘octavo’, and ‘octavodecimo’.⁹

Descriptive categories such as these referred to the size of the manuscript rather than the format; though there are many Gaelic manuscripts to which the term ‘folio’ might apply, for example, a folio manuscript – gathered in twos – has yet to be recorded for either paper or vellum books. The terminological subdivisions attempted to capture the variations in size that existed in both materials where irregularity of size was a constant feature. In many cases, the bindings – and the binders – of later times tended to impose an artificial regularity on materials that otherwise lacked regularity. The requirement that leaves be of uniform size for convenience of binding – and for other reasons such as painting or gilding of the edges, or simply for visual symmetry – meant that many of our Gaelic vellum manuscripts today do not appear as they originally did. This could result in significant losses to the size of the

⁴ O’Grady and Flower, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*. The dates for O’Grady’s work are provided by Flower in his introduction to Volume II, p. ix; in his Preface to the Volume I, however, Julius P. Gilson gives them as 1889–92.

⁵ Cotton, Nero A. VII, ff. 132–57 (O’Grady, *Catalogue I*, 141).

⁶ Planta, *Catalogue of the manuscripts in the Cottonian library*.

⁷ Coxe, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae*.

⁸ Additional 19995 (O’Grady, *Catalogue I*, 328). Oblong manuscripts are relatively rare in Gaelic tradition; others noted to date are Marsh’s Library ‘Irish Primer’, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 615, NLS MSS 72.1.29, 72.1.31 (ff 1–5), and 72.2.14.

⁹ Additional 15403 and Arundel 313 (O’Grady, *Catalogue I*, 222, 258).

manuscript. A telling example is the case of King's Inns (Dublin) MSS 12–13 which were originally a single vellum manuscript but were separated, given individual and identical bindings of marbled boards, and in the process the first section lost a centimetre in height and width compared to the second section.

Though the cutting, cropping and trimming indulged in by later binders cause us to lament the loss of marginal entries, pen tests, early paginations or foliations, and generally any true idea of what the manuscript looked like in its natural state, there are two considerations that oblige us to concede that the impetus to bind these manuscripts may have been compelling. The first was that, outside of Anglo-Norman or ecclesiastical settings,¹⁰ the concept of the library – a dedicated, sheltered space where books reposed – was not widespread in the autonomous Gaelic world of the late-medieval era, at least not to the extent that a word for such a utility existed in the Irish language. The word for 'library' now in use (*leabharlann*) is a seventeenth-century lexicographical neologism that gained no currency until the nineteenth century.¹¹ This fact, together with the relative rarity of surviving bindings, allows us to visualise the Gaelic manuscript as especially vulnerable, particularly in the leaves and quires at the beginning and end of books, where the outer leaves doubled as *de facto* covers, becoming darker and more illegible with use and with time. Such entities were therefore ripe for the attention of a binder in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The second consideration is that most manuscripts that had been bound at or near to the time they were created lost their bindings over time. The survival rate of original bindings of Irish vellum manuscripts is poor; but what survives suggests that binding with boards, though common, was not universal.¹² In the early-monastic period, limp bindings may have been more of the norm, as in the case of the Faddan More Psalter.¹³ In the late-medieval period, from which all vernacular Gaelic vellums date, original bindings are in short supply. Again, such a situation might have prompted the later antiquarian or collector to seek the help of the binder.

Bindings

The question of the binding of Gaelic manuscripts is important if we are to understand a core element in the history of the Gaelic book, and a point of both continuity and divergence between the vellum and the paper traditions. While the concept of the library may not have been general in Gaelic society, many late-medieval Irish manuscripts could be said to be libraries in themselves, their quires textually complete and, in the case of some manuscripts at least, easily detachable from the parent manuscript.¹⁴ This may have been a reflex of the Gospel books of earlier times, where, it is suggested, the individual gospels were

¹⁰ Ó Corráin, 'Ireland's Medieval Manuscripts', 193; Byrne, 'The Earls of Kildare and their Books'; Ó Clabaigh, *Franciscans in Ireland*, 158–80; idem, 'Friar Maurice Hanlan'.

¹¹ Ua Súilleabháin, 'Dinneen's dictionaries of 1904 and 1927', 75–6. Another neologism, *seathar*, also appears in the seventeenth century. The term *tech screbtra* occurs in an early annalistic reference to the monastic scriptorium/library at Armagh (*Dictionary of the Irish Language* s.v. *tech*). The borrowing *librari* is found in an inscription of 1739 in OFM-UCD MS A 15, f. [iii].

¹² Examples from different periods: the earliest manuscript, the *Cathach* (RIA MS 12 R 33, c. AD 600), had a single cover of 'a thin piece of board covered with red leather' (now lost) when originally discovered (Betham, *Antiquarian researches* I, 110); the Book of Armagh (TCD MS 52: AD 807, oak); the Book of Ballymote (RIA MS 23 P 12: c. 1390, oak); two scholars' manuscripts that have lost part of their oak bindings are the Book of Lecan (RIA MS 23 P 2, c. 1418) and King's Inns, Dublin MS 15 (c. 1512). OFM-UCD MS A 8 (c. 1540) is a lone example of a manuscript bound in embossed leather.

¹³ Gillis, *Faddan More Psalter*. Prof. Timothy O'Neill reminds me of the Corpus Missal, bound in boards, fastened with thongs, and contained in a leather satchel (Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 282).

¹⁴ E.g. the Book of Leinster (TCD MS 1339, 12th century) and the Book of Lismore (UCC Library, 15th century).

codicologically complete in themselves.¹⁵ The prominence of the quire is particularly evident in patrons' large-sized manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and supports the proposition that in the case of multi-text manuscripts the quire, rather than the book, was the unit of bibliographical currency in late-medieval Ireland. An outstanding example of this is the quaternion – *caidirne* – created for the Bishop of Clonfert c. 1490 by a scribe who describes himself as his friend and companion and who warns him not to lend it to anyone. This was a stand-alone piece, complete in itself, and undoubtedly unbound, that was later incorporated into a large manuscript of related material known today as the Book of Uí Mhaine.¹⁶ The distinction between the Gaelic book and the book in European tradition is to be seen in an inventory of the library of an Irish book collector in the early sixteenth century, the earl of Kildare (the King's Deputy): the works in Latin, English and French all appear to be volumes, while at least 17 of the 20 Irish works listed appear to be quires.¹⁷

Throughout the vellum and paper tradition, patrons' manuscripts are less numerous than scholars' personal manuscripts, the books that were created by scholars for their own use or the use of their colleagues. As already explained, in the vellum era these scholars were members of families who practiced learning as an hereditary discipline. Remnants of collections assembled by some of these families survive and are instructive as to what scholars' manuscripts looked like. For instance, material from one of the most pre-eminent legal families, that of Mac Aodhagáin, is found as TCD MS 1363, a collection of 15 vellum items with a late paper addition. These items present as a set of quires ranging in extent from a single bifolium to a section comprised of two gatherings of 14. In size they extend from 13 to 22 cm in height. While the material is predominantly legal in content, significant amounts of traditional non-legal literature occur also, indicative of the eclectic interests of the Gaelic scholar. All of these sections originally existed separate from each other, and were only submitted to binding in five volumes in the early twentieth century. It is of interest, therefore, that among the sections are found the original wrappers belonging to three of them.¹⁸ These wrappers all bear Gaelic text, and are instances of the recycling of material from within the tradition, material that, for whatever reason, had been retired and repurposed to form wrappers.¹⁹ One of the wrappers contains literary material, the other two derive from legal manuscripts. Only one has been analysed to date, and has been shown to consist of 'three scraps of vellum laced together', one scrap of which contains a fragment of an important legal text.²⁰ The quire that was contained within this wrapper is described as never having been 'bound in an orthodox manner, but vellum thongs were passed through the centres of the

¹⁵ McGurk 'Irish Pocket Gospel Book', 254–5.

¹⁶ RIA MS D ii 1, ff. 48–55.

¹⁷ British Library MS Harley 3756, ff. 97v, 190v: O'Grady, *Catalogue I*, 154; Gilbert, *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland*, Item LXIII; Byrne, 'The Earls of Kildare and their Books'.

¹⁸ TCD MS 1363 sections VIII, X, XV. Manuscript described: Abbott and Gwynn, *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College*, 199–216.

¹⁹ In common with other traditions, vellum wrappers for Gaelic manuscripts also took the form of recycled material from Church service books (e.g. OFM-UCD MS A 9, RIA MSS D iv 1 and D v1, etc.), perhaps, as in the case of Sweden, when such material became available following the dissolution of the monasteries (Brunius, 'The recycling of manuscripts'). A comparable case from twelfth-century Ireland is that of the composite scholastic manuscript Bodleian MS Auct. F.III.15: part IV of this manuscript has been described as 'essentially a palimpsest of an eighth-century liturgical manuscript that was probably discarded as a result of the twelfth-century liturgical reforms in Ireland' (Ó Néill, 'Irishman at Chartres', 34). The remarkable case of a fragment of a ninth-century Irish double-psalter formerly binding NLS Adv. MS 72.1.40 is the subject of an important forthcoming publication by Timothy O'Neill and Martin McNamara.

²⁰ O'Sullivan, 'A legal fragment'; text analysed in Binchy, 'Mellbretha'.

sections at two places and probably through the cover and knotted together at the back.²¹ Thong-binding is a consistent feature of scholars' manuscripts.²²

Another notable remnant of a scholarly family collection from the vellum era is that of the Beaton medical family of the Western Isles of Scotland. Although many books are associated with this remarkable family,²³ the remnant in question survives in two manuscripts: National Library of Scotland Advocates MSS 72.1.2 and 72.1.13. The same characteristics as noted for the Mac Aodhagáin collection are seen here: individual thong-bound quires displaying a range of dimensions and extents, with original wrappers surviving in two cases.²⁴ These wrappers bear fragments of Gaelic medical texts.

The collection of the National Library of Scotland provides an especially good view of Gaelic manuscripts in their original state. In part at least, this is because many of them appear to have been transmitted directly to the library from the Gaelic-speaking Highlands unmediated by collectors or binders, some as a consequence of the evidence-gathering that accompanied the Highland Society's inquiry of 1805 into the authenticity of the *Poems of Ossian*. In this collection we see many manuscripts that were never contained within anything other than wrappers at best. In an important survey of these manuscripts, Dr Ulrike Hogg quotes Lachlan Mac Mhuirich's evidence to the inquiry regarding his family's books that 'some of the parchments were made up in the form of books, and that others were loose and separate'. She also notes Edward Lhuyd's 1699/1700 description of John Beaton's library as 'a chest full of Gaelic books . . . most of them (almost all) are written on parchment'.²⁵ Dr Hogg suggests that 'confined storage space and the need to house manuscripts in mouse-proof conditions may have made bindings seem both unnecessary and impractical'.²⁶

These manuscripts also provide us with a rare glimpse of the continuation of the phenomenon of the scholars' collection into the paper era, in the form of some of the remnants of the papers of the Mac Mhuirich family of poets, apparently collected by James Macpherson in Uist.²⁷ Some of these were lost after being transmitted to the Inquiry, but what remains today as Adv. MS 72.2.2 is a collection of 55 leaves of differing sizes written by various Mac Mhuirichs in the seventeenth century.²⁸ This marks a change from the vellum era as there is no discernible intimation here of the quire as an independent bibliographical unit, rather the leaf or the folded sheet of paper is now to the fore, though books continued to be arranged in quires, as they still are today. Just as binders could be confused when confronted with combinations of contemporary vellum and paper in sixteenth-century Gaelic manuscripts, leading to an illogical separation of materials,²⁹ so the use of single and double leaves of paper by late scribes led to problems when subject to the indiscriminating attention of binders. Some late paper manuscripts originated as disparate sheets which were then sold to collectors who had them bound into deceptively uniform volumes. In the case of part of the

²¹ O'Sullivan, 'A legal fragment', 140.

²² E.g. TCD MSS 1302, 1314, 1323; RIA MSS D i 1, D v 2.

²³ Bannerman, *The Beatons*, 142–3.

²⁴ 72.1.2 part VI and 72.1.13 part V.

²⁵ Bannerman, *The Beatons*, 39.

²⁶ Hogg, 'Scottish Gaelic manuscripts after the beginning of printing'. I am grateful to Dr Hogg for providing me with a copy of this paper in advance of publication.

²⁷ As suggested by Ronald Black in his online catalogue that accompanies the images of the NLS manuscripts on isos.dias.ie.

²⁸ These remnants are distinct from more substantial Mac Mhuirich material, see n. 78.

²⁹ Ó Macháin, 'Emergence of the Gaelic paper manuscript', 31, 33.

residue of the works of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cork scribal family of Ó Longáin, for example, the late Professor Sharpe observed:

Paper books are not made in the same way as vellum books, however, and the means to describe the physical structure of paper manuscripts have still not been established . . . we need to shake off the assumptions that shaped local cataloguing protocols. A manuscript is not defined by having a shelfmark or a binding. The present bindings conceal much that one wants to observe. And behind that, not enough is known about the basic materials available to the scribe. In buying paper, for example, we do not know what choices he made nor in any secure way what was on offer.³⁰

Despite disparities between the two periods, the unbound scholar's book continued as a phenomenon from the vellum era to the paper era, and we find examples of these among the Advocates collection also. One such is a copy of the *Lilium Medicinae* and other texts that was made towards the end of the sixteenth century, consisting of 331 folios of paper 'held together by thread and four binding tongs' up until the time that the leaves were laminated in 1977.³¹ Another is an important seventeenth-century paper manuscript written by Fear Feasa Ó Duibhgeannáin, one of the last of a family of professional historians. This manuscript came to light at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a parcel of loose leaves wrapped in newspaper.³² Good examples from the Royal Irish Academy collection are two of the five surviving manuscripts of the 'Annals of the Four Masters': the twin books 23 P 6–7 (dated 1632–6) were received by the Academy library as an 'unbound roll' in the late eighteenth century and were subsequently bound in two volumes in the 1830s.³³

Paper required greater protection than vellum. While the use of vellum or leather wrappers continued into the paper era,³⁴ the scholar's binding came into greater focus and greater frequency at this time. As surviving paper manuscripts outnumber vellum manuscripts by a ratio of 10:1, such home-made bindings are not difficult to identify. They generally consisted, not of recycled vellum from earlier times, but rather simple cardboard covers, or rough leather either on its own or over cardboard. The leather used might reflect locally available material: unshaven skin from hare,³⁵ deer,³⁶ seal³⁷ and cow.³⁸ One duodecimo manuscript of Catholic religious poems and other material (c. 1700), which was later to come into the possession of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, was bound with leaves from the *Book of Common Prayer*.³⁹ These bindings at times belied their makeshift appearance through skilful displays of stitching.⁴⁰ They maintain their presence up to the end of the tradition in the nineteenth century, in parallel with the professional bindings that collectors and antiquarians sourced in urban centres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

³⁰ Sharpe, 'The manuscripts of Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin', 270–71.

³¹ NLS Adv. MS 73.1.22; online description by Ronald Black.

³² NLS Adv. MS 72.2.9; online description by Ronald Black.

³³ Breatnach, *The Four Masters and their Manuscripts*, 106.

³⁴ For example, NLS Adv. MS 73.1.10, Bodleian Library MS Rawl. B 477 (preserved inside eighteenth-century boards).

³⁵ OFM-UCD MS A 40.

³⁶ NLS Adv. MS 72.1.48.

³⁷ NLI MS G 80; UCC MS Torna 43. Sealskin is also the binding material on one of the biggest vellum manuscripts of the late-medieval period, Rawl. B 514.

³⁸ Mount Melleray Abbey MSS 6–7.

³⁹ TCD MS 1385; the RIA copy of first book printed in Ireland, the *Boke of the Common Praier* (1551), was originally discovered functioning as binder's waste: Dix, 'Note upon the Leaves of the First Book Printed in Dublin'.

⁴⁰ Lévêque, 'Notes on scholars' bindings'.

The phenomenon of the recycling of Gaelic material can again be observed in the case of paper used as binder's waste. Examples exist from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the re-use of paper bearing verse⁴¹ and correspondence.⁴² From the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century we have the recently-discovered discarded draft (complete with cancels and corrections) of an introduction to a prose work in the autograph of a well-known author, Aodh Buidhe Mac Cruitín, which he used as pastedowns for his own binding of *The Royal Martyr: or, the Life and Death of King Charles I* (London 1676).⁴³

Dimensions of vellum manuscripts

Bound or unbound, a significant, and highly visible aspect of the vellum and paper traditions of the Gaelic manuscript is that of the dimensions of the books. The descriptive methodology of Standish Hayes O'Grady in this regard was referred to at the beginning of this paper. His successor, Robin Flower, who completed the British Museum catalogue and saw it through the press, measured books in inches, as did cataloguers of the collections of Trinity College Dublin⁴⁴ and the Royal Irish Academy. Subsequent cataloguers measured in centimetres.⁴⁵ Irrespective of the terminology of measurement, some general points can be made about the dimensions of Gaelic manuscripts in the vellum and paper traditions.

Practically all Gaelic manuscripts made from animal skin were written on calfskin,⁴⁶ and the size of the books produced from that material must have been limited by the size of the skins available. Our largest vellum manuscripts from early times to 1600 are relatively consistent across the centuries in the dimensions of their prepared sheets prior to folding (height x width): 39 x 57 cm (Cod. Sang. 904, mid-9th cent.), 42 x 53 cm (Book of Uí Mhaine, RIA MS D ii 1, late 14th cent.), 42 x 56 cm (TCD MS 1432 ?16th cent.), 42.5 x 56 cm (Beatha Choluim Chille, Rawl B. 514, 16th cent.). In a Gaelic context, these are large calfskins and they demonstrate what might be available to manuscript-makers throughout the vellum era. Noteworthy among them is the scholastic Cod. Sang. 904, a mid-ninth-century⁴⁷ copy of Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticae* with glosses and marginalia in Irish, the impressive dimensions of which leave one in admiration of the medieval monks who brought this book from Ireland to the monastery of St Gall in Switzerland, where it has resided for centuries. On average, however, as we will see, the most frequently occurring dimensions fall shorter than the size of these big books.

Although Latin manuscripts of the early Celtic Church do not come within the scope of the present survey, they are useful for comparative reasons because aspects of their production are shared with books from the post-1100 era. In early-Christian Ireland a general correlation between size and function is noticeable in some categories of liturgical book. One size

⁴¹ OFM-UCD MSS A 9, A 18.

⁴² NLS Adv. MS 72.1.33 (b); Bannerman and Black, 'Sixteenth-century Gaelic Letter', 56–7, where the paper used is described as 'possibly cut from a printed work'.

⁴³ In private possession: the Mac Cruitín. Fragment is displayed on Irish Script on Screen (isos.dias.ie).

⁴⁴ The catalogue was begun by T.K. Abbott, who used the folio-quarto descriptors, and finished by E.J. Gwynn who continued to use the traditional descriptors but who also measured in inches.

⁴⁵ Of the use of the decimal system, Sharpe remarked: 'it is worth taking note that the modern convention of measuring in millimetres may interfere with recognizing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paper sizes based on inches' ('The manuscripts of Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin', 271 n. 29).

⁴⁶ An exception is the seventeenth-century TCD MS 1340 which contains both sheepskin and vellum (O'Sullivan, 'The Tinnakill Duanaire', 214). Sheepskin is also found in the parallel, Anglo-Norman tradition in the case of the fourteenth-century Red Book of Ossory (Representative Church Body Library, Dublin).

⁴⁷ For the date see Ó Néill, 'Irish observance of the three Lents'.

differentiator may have been portability. Such is the case with the pocket gospels that range in height from 12.5 to 19.5 cm. With few exceptions,⁴⁸ these gospels are presented without apparatus in codicologically distinct sections of the manuscript.⁴⁹ In size they stand in contrast to other manuscripts: for example the glorious display books that are the Book of Kells (c. 800 AD) and its contemporary, the Mac Regol Gospels, both folio-size books at 33 and 35 cm in height respectively.⁵⁰

Comparable difference in size is also seen in other varieties of ecclesiastical book: in psalters, for example, pocket versions of which, measuring under 20 cm in height, are the most frequently found.⁵¹ One of the smallest of these books is the twelfth-century Galba Psalter, which measures 12 cm in height.⁵² The earliest surviving Irish manuscript is a psalter traditionally referred to as the *Cathach* (c. 600 AD)⁵³ which is c. 19 cm in height but with upper and lower margins lost. This contrasts with the single surviving quire of the late eleventh-century Psalter of Caimín, containing a single Psalm accompanied by an elaborate commentary in a hierarchy of scripts. Exceptionally, this psalter stands at 36 cm high.⁵⁴ As with the gospel books, perhaps portability or personal use were factors in deciding the dimensions of these books also. Another factor may have been whether or not the psalters, some of which contain glosses and scholia, had a pedagogical function, bearing in mind the role of the psalter in the acquisition of literacy from an early age.⁵⁵

Vellum manuscripts written wholly in the Irish language become visible about the year 1100 with the writing of *Leabhar na hUidhre*.⁵⁶ Two further manuscripts are dated to the middle and second half of that century: the Book of Leinster⁵⁷ and Bodleian MS Rawlinson B 502, part B. The dimensions of these three twelfth-century manuscripts are instructive. At heights of 28 cm (*Leabhar na hUidhre* and Rawl. B 502) and 32 cm (Book of Leinster), these early vernacular books belong to a popular range of dimensions that is to be observed again and again throughout the following centuries.

There is, of course, great variation in the size of Gaelic vellum manuscripts. The two largest books are patrons' books, the two smallest are personal *vade mecums*. The former have been referred to already: the Book of Uí Mhaine and *Beatha Choluim Chille*. Both were created for wealthy patrons in the fourteenth and sixteenth century respectively, noblemen of the powerful Ó Ceallaigh and Ó Domhnaill families. The two smallest books are personal manuscripts created for their own use by professional scholars. The smaller of the two (6 x 4.5 cm) is the remarkable Beaton manuscript of the fifteenth and sixteenth century,⁵⁸ containing in 100 folios a mixture of medical and theological definitions, preceded by a copy of the longest psalm, Psalm 118 (Vulgate),⁵⁹ from which the modern name 'Neil MacBeath's Psalter' derives. The binding contains straps that allowed the book to be carried on the owner's belt. The second is the work of an Irish scholar, Pilib Ballach Ó Duibhgeannáin,

⁴⁸ Mullins, 'The Eusebian apparatus'.

⁴⁹ See n. 14 above.

⁵⁰ TCD MS 58; Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.2.19.

⁵¹ See list in Ó Corráin, *Clavis Litterarum Hibernensium* II, 823–32.

⁵² British Library, Cotton MS Galba A. V.

⁵³ RIA MS 12 R 33.

⁵⁴ OFM-UCD MS A 1; Ó Néill, 'Glosses to the Psalter of St Caimín'.

⁵⁵ McNamara and Sheehy, 'Psalter text and psalter study', 205–6.

⁵⁶ RIA MS 23 E 25.

⁵⁷ TCD MS 1339.

⁵⁸ NLS Adv. MS 72.1.4.

⁵⁹ The same psalm that survives as the only text in the eleventh-century Psalter of St Caimín.

written during the years 1579–84 (6.8 x 5.4 cm).⁶⁰ It is a commonplace book containing in its 92 folios collections of sayings, riddles, prognostications and further similar material. As with the pocket psalters and gospel books of an earlier time, portability was probably an important factor in the size of this and the Beaton manuscript.

A rough correlation between size and function is obvious in the distinction between the large patrons' manuscripts and the small private manuscripts just mentioned. It does not hold true at all times, however,⁶¹ and between these extremes there lies a spectrum of sizes encompassing all of O'Grady's categories, with the folio or small folio the most prominent. This prominence is reflected across individual collections of Gaelic manuscripts, as also are aspects of continuity and contrast with the paper tradition. In comparing statistics for vellum manuscripts (1100–1600), and paper manuscripts (1468–1700), it might be thought that the statistical basis for would be too dissimilar, given the different time-spans. In fact, however, the total numbers are not too dissimilar because the loss of vellum manuscripts from the late-medieval era and the sudden growth in the use of paper in the seventeenth century provide a balance that allows for a productive comparison and produces total figures of 279 (vellum) and 256 (paper). No doubt these numbers will be further modified as this research progresses.

Dimensions of paper manuscripts

The change from vellum to paper as a writing support in Gaelic manuscripts began gradually at the end of the fifteenth century, but paper only finally became dominant at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and was well consolidated by the end of that century.⁶² In the pre-urban society in which Gaelic manuscripts were produced, this involved a change from a locally-sourced material that took a length of time to create with additional time required to prepare for writing, to an imported, ready-to-use, convenience material. As alluded to already, the change occurred at a disturbed time in Irish history when vellum virtually disappeared along with the class of scholars who employed it, to be replaced by one of the material tokens of the conquerors. This change was not a matter of choice, therefore, but, as we will see, it may have resulted in a greater flexibility in the type of book that could be created.

Miscellaneous institutional collections of vellum and pre-1700 paper manuscripts help to inform our understanding of the similarities and differences in the size of the Gaelic manuscript across the vellum-paper divide. No two collections are identical in the data they present. For example, we may observe the relatively homogenous collection of Gaelic manuscripts that was brought from the Friary of Donegal into exile in Louvain by Franciscan friars in the early years of the seventeenth century.⁶³ Among the eleven vellums in the collection, eight are 28cm or higher, the Psalter of St Caimín (mentioned above) being the largest. The smallest vellum measures 22.5 cm.⁶⁴ Among the thirteen paper manuscripts⁶⁵ that either accompanied the vellums into exile or were created on the Continent in the early years after arrival in Louvain, there are five that are 28 cm or higher, two in the range of 20–

⁶⁰ NLI MS G 1.

⁶¹ The Book of Lecan (RIA 23 P 2, 15th cent.) is a personal manuscript nearly 30 cm in height, consciously created as a family heirloom; the Nugent Poembook (NLI MS G992, 16th cent.), a patron's manuscript, is 23 cm high.

⁶² Ó Macháin, 'The emergence of the Gaelic paper manuscript', 23.

⁶³ These manuscripts were removed to Rome c. 1792 and returned to Ireland in 1872. They form part of the OFM-UCD collection in University College Dublin. The collection is described in Dillon (et al.), *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Franciscan Library Killiney*.

⁶⁴ OFM-UCD MS A 11.

⁶⁵ This number excludes fragments, correspondence items, and inventories.

28 cm, and six manuscripts less than 20 cm in height, a category not represented at all among the vellums in the collection. When we look at the cognate collection of eleven paper manuscripts preserved in the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels – representing a residue of the Louvain library – we see that one book⁶⁶ is 26 cm in height while the rest are 21 cm or less.

A slightly variant profile is in evidence in the collection of vellums and sixteenth/seventeenth century paper manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland. Here the respective numbers are seventeen of vellum and seventeen of paper, presenting an almost identical break-down of dimensions in both categories. In the vellums there are five of 28 cm and higher, ten in the height range of 20–28 cm, and two less than 20 cm, including the miniature MS G 1 mentioned above. Among the paper manuscripts two are over 28 cm, there are seven between 20 and 28 cm, and eight that are less than 20 cm.

The National Library of Ireland also contains the two smallest paper manuscripts so far identified, both dating from the seventeenth century. They are found in the composite NLI MS G 201 containing *Materia Medica* (9.5 × 7 cm) and genealogical material (8.5 × 7 cm). It is worth noting that reduction or diminution in size appears not to have been accompanied by diminution in script. The text-frame in such manuscripts is naturally contracted, resulting in fewer characters per line and fewer lines per page than in bigger manuscripts. The size of the script, however, remains unaffected, and this is true of small manuscripts in both vellum and paper.⁶⁷

From the varying evidence and different emphases in the Louvain and National Library of Ireland collections, it is clear that it would be unsatisfactory to base any broad conclusions regarding variations in book-size on them alone. When combined with the details from other collections however, the data generated provide us with a more representative overview of the size of Gaelic manuscripts before and after the transition to paper. This overview is presented in graphic format in Figure 1.⁶⁸ Relative to their vellum counterparts, the data for these miscellaneous collections show a paucity of paper in height-ranges greater than 22 cm. In those below 22cm, however, that situation is practically reversed, spectacularly so in the case of books in the range of 18–20 cm.

Not included in the data from the miscellaneous collections are those from the manuscripts in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, which contains the most extensive collection of Gaelic manuscripts in existence, and deserves to be mentioned separately. For the purposes of the present analysis this collection provides 58 vellums and 91 paper manuscripts (pre-1700). It is the most comprehensive of all our collections in that it is home to the earliest Irish

⁶⁶ KBR MS 6131–33, a poem-book created in honour of one of the exiled nobility, Nualaidh Ní Dhomhnaill.

⁶⁷ Remarkably so in the case of the Latin ‘computus manualis’ (O’Grady, *Catalogue* I, 285) among the Beaton manuscripts (NLS Adv. MS 72.1.2, ff 20–26), measuring 8 x 6 cm.

⁶⁸ Collections represented are those in the British Library, National Library of Scotland, Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Libraries, KBR (Brussels), Edinburgh University Library, Glasgow University Library, Maynooth University Library, Trinity College Library (Dublin), Archbishop Marsh’s Library (Dublin), National Library of Ireland, King’s Inns Library (Dublin), Hardiman Library (NUI Galway), National Library of Wales, University College Cork Library, University College Dublin Library and the OFM-UCD collection. To these have been added the details of individual manuscripts: the Book of the O’Conor Don (private possession), ‘Mullingar’ MS 1 (private possession), the Red Book of Clanranald (Nat. Mus. Antiquities, Edinburgh), Det Kongelige Bibliotek NKS 268b (Copenhagen), BNF Fonds Celtique 1 (Paris), Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole MS 598, John Rylands Library Irish MS 35 (Manchester). Further small collections remain to be consulted.

manuscript, the *Cathach*, and includes the earliest vernacular manuscript, Leabhar na hUidhre, mentioned already, together with some of the large-sized patrons' manuscripts and many scholars' books, and also the earliest paper manuscript written in either Ireland or Scotland, that is RIA MS 24 P 15, which was written in 1478.⁶⁹ This single collection therefore affords us a panoramic view of the evidence presented by a significant range of vernacular manuscripts written on both materials, dating from the beginning of the vernacular period in 1100 to the end of the seventeenth century: that panorama is represented in Figure 2. It conforms to the pattern that emerges from the data provided by miscellaneous collections to the extent that it reflects the paucity of paper manuscripts in the upper range of 34 cm and higher; and the significantly greater frequency of paper manuscripts in the ranges smaller than 20 cm, particularly that of 18–20 cm. In the middle ranges, however, there is a closer alignment of dimensions between the paper and vellum books than is observable elsewhere.

Combining the data from the miscellaneous collections with those from the Royal Irish Academy library in a single consolidated graph (Figure 3) we obtain something approaching a true picture. This consolidated evidence prompts a number of deductions.⁷⁰ Firstly, folio- and small folio-sized books (22–32 cm) in the vellum tradition, while underlining the continuity from one medium to the other, outnumber their paper counterparts in the early paper era by 2.5:1. Secondly, there are 4.5 times more vellums than paper books in the 32–42 cm category, though the numbers are small for both materials, and there are no paper manuscripts above the 36 cm mark. Thirdly, below heights of 22 cm the situation is reversed. Paper and vellum are close to parity in the 20–22 cm size, but in manuscripts smaller than 20 cm paper is superior in all but the smallest dimension, where the vellum Beaton 'psalter' and the Ó Duibhgeannáin commonplace stand alone, as explained above. Supplementary analysis of the paper manuscripts created prior to 1600 shows that the preference for small-sized books was not just a seventeenth-century phenomenon: over half the paper manuscripts from the sixteenth century are under 20 cm in height.⁷¹

The paper-vellum differential is most eye-catching in the 18–20 cm range. The total for manuscripts in this range amounts to almost a third of all paper manuscripts under consideration here. Until more detailed examination of all of these books is conducted it will not be possible to offer much more than a hypothesis for this notable statistic. The phenomenon of the general trend towards smaller format books from the late-medieval period through the Renaissance period has been observed in manuscripts and printed books of other traditions.⁷² It is difficult to see that this is entirely true of the Gaelic manuscript tradition, however, especially if we factor in the monastic books and the preponderance of pocket-sized works associated with that tradition.

Whether part of a trend or not, this survey points to the prevalence of sheets that could produce folio, small-folio and quarto paper corresponding to the ranges in Figure 3. Full

⁶⁹ The earliest Gaelic paper manuscript (Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.48) identified so far is dated ten years earlier, and was written in England by an Irish medical scholar: Ó Macháin, 'Emergence of the Gaelic paper manuscript', 23–6.

⁷⁰ For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that a small number of paper manuscripts written by Gaelic scholars in locations outside of Ireland and Scotland are included in these data. These are to be found in the OFM-UCD, Cambridge, Maynooth and RIA collections; also included is the Book of the O'Connor Don.

⁷¹ The round figures for paper manuscripts pre- and post-1600 in Ó Macháin, 'Emergence of paper manuscript', 23, hold true. In the present survey 36 pre-1600 paper manuscripts have been accounted for, and no doubt this will change with further research.

⁷² E.g. Greenia, 'The bigger the book', 726–7; Harris, *Paper and watermarks*, [41].

sheets measuring (height x width) 25.5–28.5⁷³ x 36–40 cm will produce the small-folio range of heights (26–28 cm) and quartos in the 18–20 cm range. Sheets measuring 28.5–32 x 40–45 cm will produce the folio range (28–32 cm) and quartos in the 20–22 cm range. In other words, one could argue for a direct correlation between the folio sizes represented in the consolidated graph (Figure 3) and the dominant quarto sizes in the same graph. It remains for future research to determine whether this is a result of folding of full sheets by scribes, or if paper, particularly in the smaller dimensions, was available pre-folded, cut and quired.⁷⁴

These full sheets correspond to the lower end of the popular chancery paper.⁷⁵ They can also be seen in use in early printed books in the Irish language and script. The first such book, *Aibidil Gaoidheilge & Caiticiosma* (1571), is an octavo created from a sheet measuring 28 x 39 cm; a lone example of this sheet still survives, on which the newly created Queen Elizabeth type was trialled prior to the printing of the book.⁷⁶ The second book to be printed, the Irish translation of the New Testament, *Tiomna Nvadh ar dTighearna* (1602), is a folio created from a sheet trimmed to c. 27 x 38 cm, and further examples could be cited.

Full sheets of similar sizes to those just mentioned are also prominent in administration and record-keeping of the early seventeenth century. An examination of the Roche Papers and the Kinsale Manorial Papers, for example, shows a preponderance of sheets in a general range of 29–32 x 42–45 cm, being folded or cut for a number of purposes, including correspondence,⁷⁷ records of financial transactions, and true copies of deeds of ownership.⁷⁸ The keeping of records of estates and municipalities would multiply with the confiscation of lands and the creation of new settlements during the seventeenth century. Combined with the military and political administrative correspondence and records that attended the conquest of Ireland, it is not difficult to visualise the proliferation of paper in Gaelic Ireland at this time. Even though the two sets of seventeenth-century records just cited can hardly be taken as indicative, their evidence does not contradict the proposition that much of the paper in pre-eighteenth century Gaelic manuscripts could derive from sheets of the dimensions referred to above.

This is a hypothesis that remains to be fully explored and tested. A number of matters arise that should be systematically researched in both Gaelic and non-Gaelic sources: details such as watermarks and their disposition, cropping of leaves, and layout of text. Although it has been suggested above that the integrity of the quire, which is such an overt feature of the vellum era, disappeared with the advent of paper, in truth much more work needs to be done to garner information about the collation of the Gaelic paper manuscript in these early years. Nor have we any proper understanding yet as to what extent the determination of the size of their manuscripts was under the control of the manuscript-makers in the paper era, or to what extent those scribes manipulated paper to suit their purposes.

⁷³ These generalised dimensions of sheets are based on a height : width ratio of 1 : $\sqrt{2}$, while accepting that this ratio may have been only an approximation on the part of many mould-makers (Gaskell, *Bibliography*, 67; Harris, *Paper and watermarks*, [37]).

⁷⁴ See the case of RIA MS 23 N 10, a quarto, discussed in Ó Macháin, ‘Emergence of paper manuscript’, 33–4.

⁷⁵ Harris, *Paper and watermarks*, [38]–[42]; Da Rold, *Paper in Medieval England*, 172. Helpful statistics and tables are available at <https://schoenberginstitute.org/2017/01/30/the-needham-calculator-1-0-and-the-flavors-of-fifteenth-century-paper/>

⁷⁶ Ó Macháin, ‘Aspects of the materiality of printed and manuscript works’ (forthcoming).

⁷⁷ Sizes of correspondence paper are cited in Daybell, *Material letter*, 34.

⁷⁸ UCC UC/LR/PP/U16/1 (Roche Papers, 1607–1657); UC/KM/PP/U20/21 (Kinsale Manorial Papers, 1662–1665).

Among the part-time scholars of the seventeenth century who took on the task of preserving the record of Gaelic tradition, there was a clear predilection for the creation and use of smaller-sized books. The prominence of small-sized manuscripts is also reflected among the books created by the residue of the professional scholars who continued for a while to ply their trade in the seventeenth century. For example, the few remaining manuscripts of the preeminent Scottish poetic family, the Clann Mhuirich, measure *c.* 15cm or less in height.⁷⁹ The surviving manuscripts written solely by the historian, Cú Coigcríche Ó Cléirigh, are noteworthy, all eight coming within the 18–20 cm height range.⁸⁰ These are in contrast to the same scholar's collaboration on the manuscripts of one of the most outstanding new texts of the paper era, the 'Annals of the Four Masters', five of which survive and come within the range of 22–28 cm. Another historian was An Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh. This scholar moved freely across the boundaries of Gaelic and English society, urban and rural, in seventeenth-century Ireland, and therefore, more than many other Gaelic scholars, he would have had access to a comprehensive selection of the varieties of paper available in the country during the years in which he was active, 1643–1671. Perhaps in token of that mobility, with the exception of his continuation of the work on the miniature manuscript for the Poor Clares mentioned below, much of his surviving manuscripts, including his *magnum opus* the Great Book of Genealogies,⁸¹ belong to the 18–20 cm range of heights. It is true that his earliest surviving book, TCD MS 1317, measures 33 x 20.3 cm, but it seems that this manuscript incorporates and continues work by Dubhaltach's grandfather⁸² so that the size of the paper used in this case may have been predetermined.

The flowering of paper manuscripts in the seventeenth century displays many of the traditional facets of Gaelic book tradition over time, and some new ones. Most obvious among the latter are the transcription of printed material in Irish and the subsequent transmission in manuscript of texts that had first been generated in printed format.⁸³ Original texts that may have been initially intended for print but that remained in manuscript also prospered in manuscript transmission, none more so than a new history of Ireland ('Foras Feasa ar Éirinn') that was written in the 1630s by a French-educated Irish priest, Geoffrey Keating. As this work provided a continuous historic narrative from mythological times down to the end of the twelfth century, it gained an immediate popularity, and was to become one of the most frequently-copied prose texts in Gaelic tradition. It is interesting to note that of the 23 seventeenth-century copies of Keating's work surveyed for this study, only two are under 24 cms,⁸⁴ while eight are in the 26–28 cm range, and nine range from 28 to 32 cm in height. Copies of this text also furnish us with the largest volumes created during the first two centuries of the paper era, both measuring just over 35 cm in height.⁸⁵

As has been noted elsewhere, familiarity with the norms of the printed book is evident in the organization and layout of some Gaelic manuscripts at this time.⁸⁶ Paper bears witness to and facilitates these innovations. A number of Gaelic manuscripts created in the Low Countries

⁷⁹ E.g., RIA MS E i 3; TCD MS 1337/2 (pp 693–9); NLS MSS 72.1.48 and 72.1.50; Red Book of Clanranald.

⁸⁰ Breatnach, *The Four Masters and their Manuscripts*, 108.

⁸¹ UCD Additional Irish MS 14; Ó Muraíle, *Leabhar mór na ngenealach: the Great Book of Irish genealogies*.

⁸² Ó Muraíle, *The celebrated antiquary*, 81.

⁸³ E.g. British Library MSS Sloane 3567 (ff. 18–30); TCD MS 1350; Glasgow University Library MS Gen 21 ('Ratisbon Manuscript').

⁸⁴ Bodleian Library MS Fairfax 29 (A), and NLS MS 72.1.43/72.2.2.

⁸⁵ Respectively TCD MS 1403 and Archbishop Marsh's Library MS Z 3.1.7 (where the use of white space in some of the ancillary texts is remarkable).

⁸⁶ Ó Macháin, 'Emergence of the Gaelic paper manuscript', 40.

contain indexes.⁸⁷ Keating's history comes with an Apologia (*Díonbhrolach*) in the form of an address to the reader, a feature unknown in the vellum tradition. The 'Annals of the Four Masters' contains testimonials, a dedication, and a preface.⁸⁸ An Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh, mentioned above, who was well acquainted with the printed book, includes prefaces and addresses to a reader in his original work.⁸⁹ Looser, less overt forms of prefatory material also begin to appear in paper manuscripts at this time, in the form of grammatical or metrical summaries as an introduction of sorts to what followed in the manuscript.⁹⁰ This prefatory material is an indication not just of the migration of the genre of the preface into Gaelic paper manuscripts, but also of the growing need that would be felt among some of the manuscript-makers to explain to the uninitiated the knowledge they purveyed. A related development was the novelty of historic works in Irish being translated into English. Most notable was the translation of Keating's history a number of times to English and at least once to Latin, a token of the instant popularity of this work.⁹¹ In 1666 Mac Fhirbhisigh translated to English part of a set of annals, now lost, for Sir James Ware in Dublin.⁹² Predating these translations was Conall Mac Eochagáin's 1627 translation of the Annals of Clonmacnoise, which contains an address to the reader and a dedication in which he refers to the destruction of vellum manuscripts and to the decline in learning among the learned classes who 'neglect their Bookes' and choose to:

put their children to learne eng[lish] than their own native Language, in soe much that some of them suffer Taylors to cutt the leaves of the said Books (which their auncestors held in great accoumpt, & sliche them in long peeces to make their measures off) that the posterities are like to fall into meere Ignorance of any things hapened before their tyme.⁹³

Ironically, we are dependent today on secondary copies of this work as neither the manuscript from which the translation was made nor Mac Eochagáin's own manuscript survive.

Though it is an area that awaits exploration, it is possible that the influence of printed works extended beyond layout and innovations in preliminary material to the size of Gaelic manuscripts, as may be the case with one of the smaller paper manuscripts of the period. This was a translation into Irish of the Rule of St Clare, made for a community of nuns of that order, which was copied by Míchéal Ó Cléirigh in 1636 on pages measuring 9.8 x 7.6 cm (RIA MS D i 2). The translation and transcript were continued in 1647 by An Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh on paper that may not have been an exact match to the size of the original, but which was 'drastically cut down'⁹⁴ by the later binder. The original work in English from which the translation had been made measures 8.8 x 6 cm,⁹⁵ and the general proximity of these measurements to those of the manuscript has been remarked on.⁹⁶ It is possible that this

⁸⁷ E.g. Duanairé Finn (OFM-UCD MS A20 (b)), the Book of the O'Connor Don (private possession), and especially the substantial indexes to KBR Brussels MS 4639 (ff. 122–178r) and MS 5095–96 (ff. 66–100); see also Ó Macháin, "One glimpse of Ireland", 139 n. 22.

⁸⁸ OFM-UCD MS A 13.

⁸⁹ Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson B 480; UCD Additional Irish MS 14.

⁹⁰ Ó Macháin, 'Prosodic analysis in manuscript and print', 124–6.

⁹¹ E.g. NLI MS G 293, RIA MS 24 G 16, TCD MS 1443; Latin translation RIA MS 24 I 5 (see Sharpe, *Roderick O'Flaherty's Letters*, 64); see also Caball and Hazard, 'Late seventeenth-century partial English translation'.

⁹² Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated Antiquary*, 271–2.

⁹³ Murphy, *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 8.

⁹⁴ O'Rahilly et. al, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, 3282.

⁹⁵ Knott, 'An Irish seventeenth-century translation of the Rule of St. Clare', 2.

⁹⁶ Ó Muraíle, *Celebrated antiquary*, 133.

was an attempt to match the size of the manuscript to that of the printed book from which the translation was made.

The Annals of the Four Masters and Keating's history are instances from the paper tradition where the status of the contents seems to be reflected in the size of the books in which these texts were recorded. It is significant that these were newly-created historical texts of national importance. Paper quickly became part of scholarly life and part of the apparatus of the learned in this new era, to the extent that a poet of that time would number his penner and his paper among his cherished companions.⁹⁷ One of the 'Four Masters', Míchéal Ó Cléirigh – who copied the first part of the Rule of St Clare mentioned above – published a glossary of medieval Irish in Louvain in 1643, the year of his death. Among the sources he cited were a plurality of vellum manuscripts and a single 'old paper book' (*Seinleabhar paipéir*).⁹⁸ Ó Cléirigh's glossary, together with earlier publications from Louvain, paved the way for a modicum of Gaelic printed works which were produced over the ensuing decades without in any way eroding the Gaelic manuscript tradition that would thrive and continue until the end of the nineteenth century.

Conclusions

The landscape of vernacular manuscript production across the vellum and paper traditions in the Gaelic world is dominated by the scholar-scribes. They assembled and wrote the books; they bound them with thongs or with skins (at times recycled) or with boards; and they used them. One significant point of difference that marked the change from vellum to paper occurred in the area of size. With the decline in patronage that followed the dismantling of Gaelic society, most Gaelic manuscripts created in the seventeenth century were personal books, but whether personal or intended for an imagined readership, in many cases smaller sizes were found to be the most convenient. This was the continuation of a trend that had begun with the first phase of paper manuscripts in the sixteenth century. Some texts, which in earlier times might have been associated with middle- to large-sized books, now appeared in small sizes.⁹⁹ It is clear that paper provided a flexibility that allowed for greater choice among the manuscript-makers. Had we a view of the entire output of all the scholars of this period, we might well see that flexibility reflected in the work of many of them.

There are many aspects of the production of paper manuscripts that bespeak sizes that were never regular, except perhaps at the moment the sheets left the maker's mould. In this irregularity the paper manuscripts find correspondences in the irregularity of the dimensions of books created during the vellum era. Despite this correspondence, the data arising from a survey of the paper manuscripts tell us that books in small sizes were the particular choice of the paper scribes, with the exception of special texts for which larger-sized leaves seemed more appropriate as a writing support during and after the transition from vellum to paper. If vellum had never vanished with the professional schools and scholars, it is likely that paper would still have become increasingly the material of choice and convenience for the scribes of the early-modern Gaelic world. While the Latin books of early-Christian Ireland have not formed part of this study, one cannot but remark on the symmetry of the return in the paper era to books of dimensions similar to those of the pocket gospels and psalters prominent at the beginning of the handmade book in the Gaelic world.

⁹⁷ Bergin, *Bardic Poetry*, Poem 46; Longfield, *Anglo-Irish Trade*, 190.

⁹⁸ Ó Cléirigh, *Focloir no Sanasan Nua*, [iv].

⁹⁹ E.g., TCD MS 1378; BL MSS Egerton 185 and Cotton Nero A VII (ff. 132–57); NLI MS G168.

There are many matters arising from this survey of the sizes of Gaelic manuscripts that will repay in-depth investigation. Research topics should include a record of watermarks, of collations, of sheet sizes and of bindings; correlation of the different sizes of paper used by individual scribes; and a systematic analysis of the availability of paper in Ireland and Gaelic Scotland. For the present, however, we must content ourselves with this overview of the transition from one writing support to another and wonder at the near absoluteness of that transition after 1600 when paper became established so quickly, and at how it enabled a thousand years' tradition of the transmission of literature in handmade books to continue for another three centuries.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ This paper was written in a time of pandemic when libraries and archives were closed. I am indebted to Prof. Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha and to Dr Ulrike Hogg for their help in checking sources and other details. I am grateful to Paddy Vaughan for making the graphs.

FIGURE 1

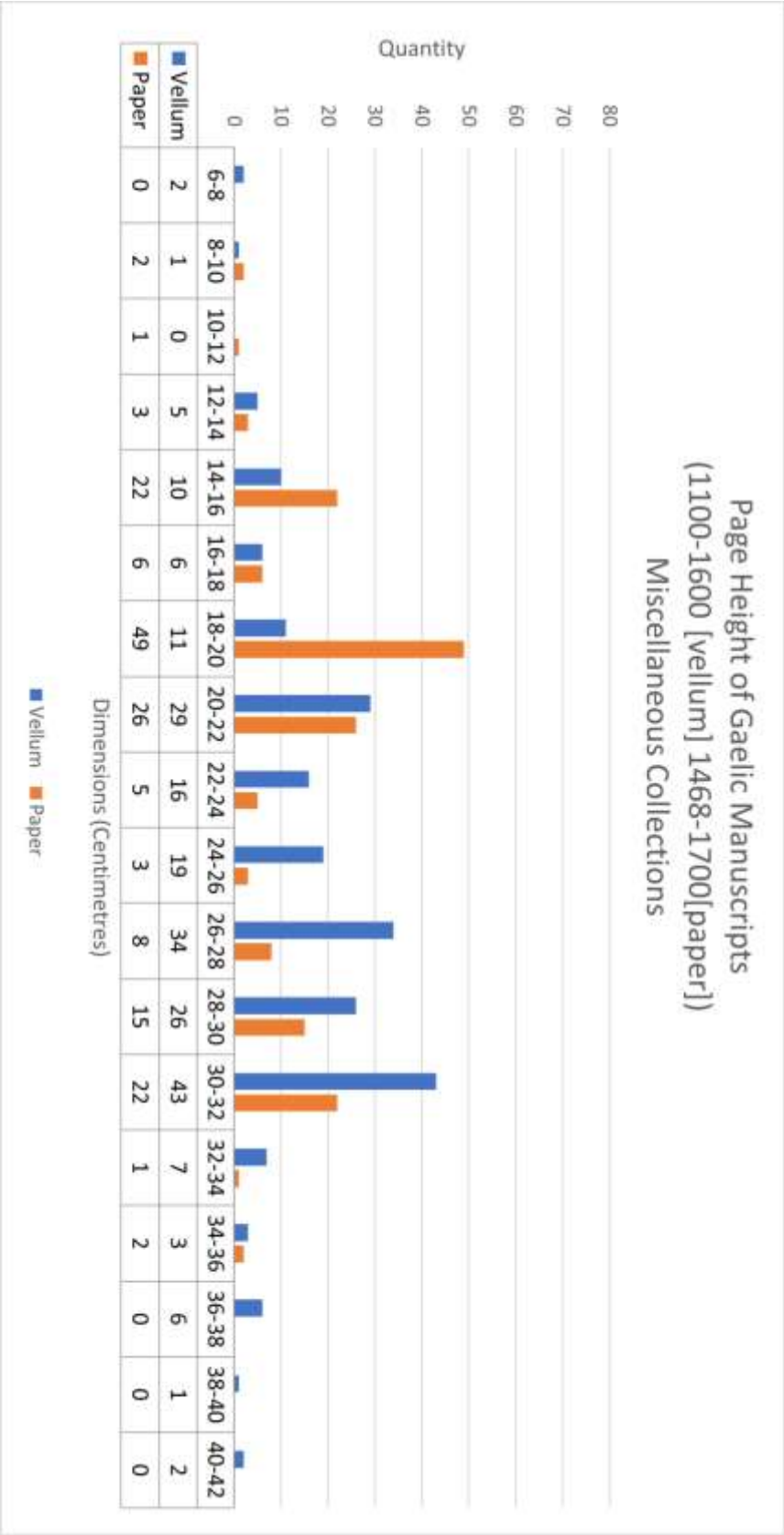


FIGURE 2

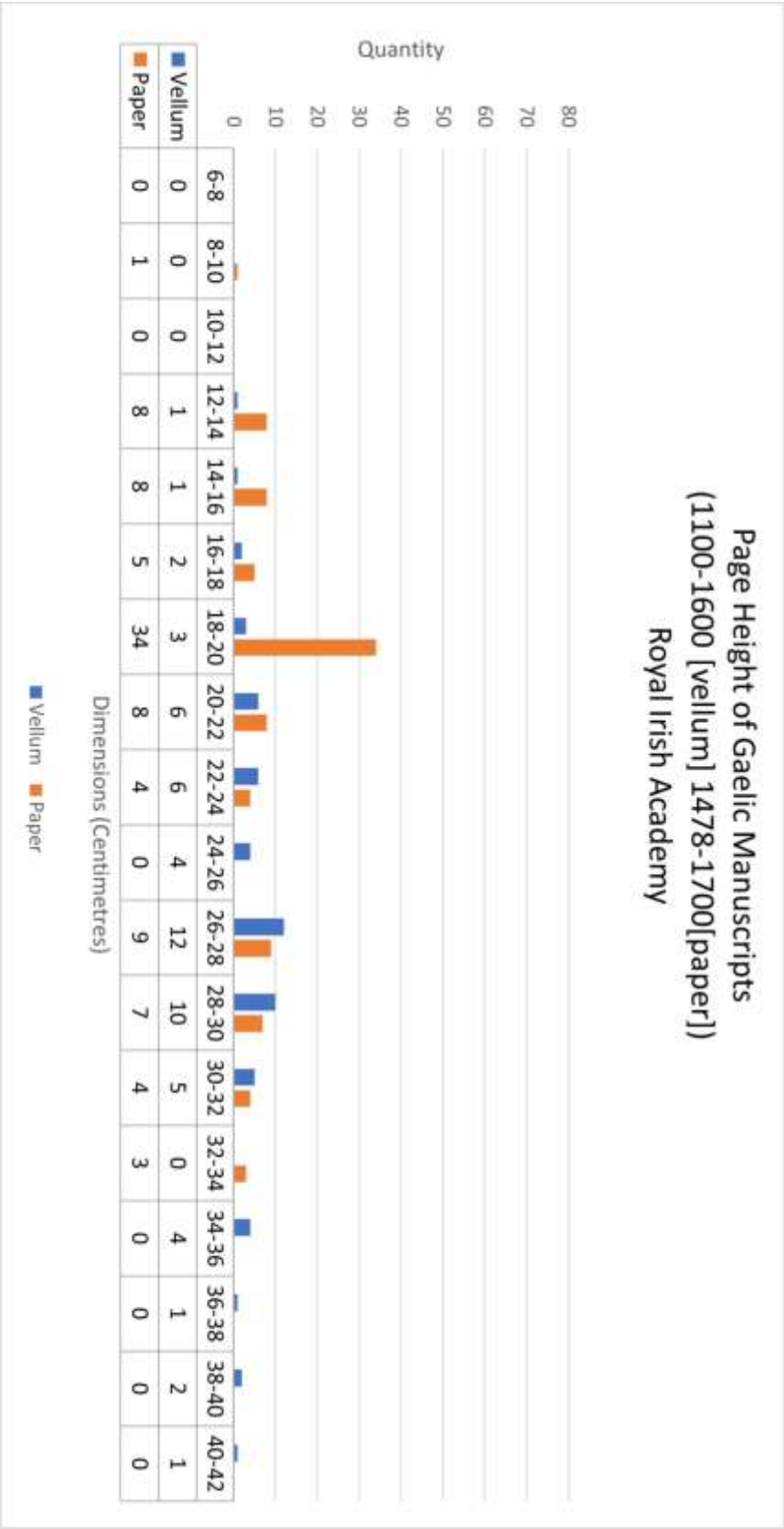
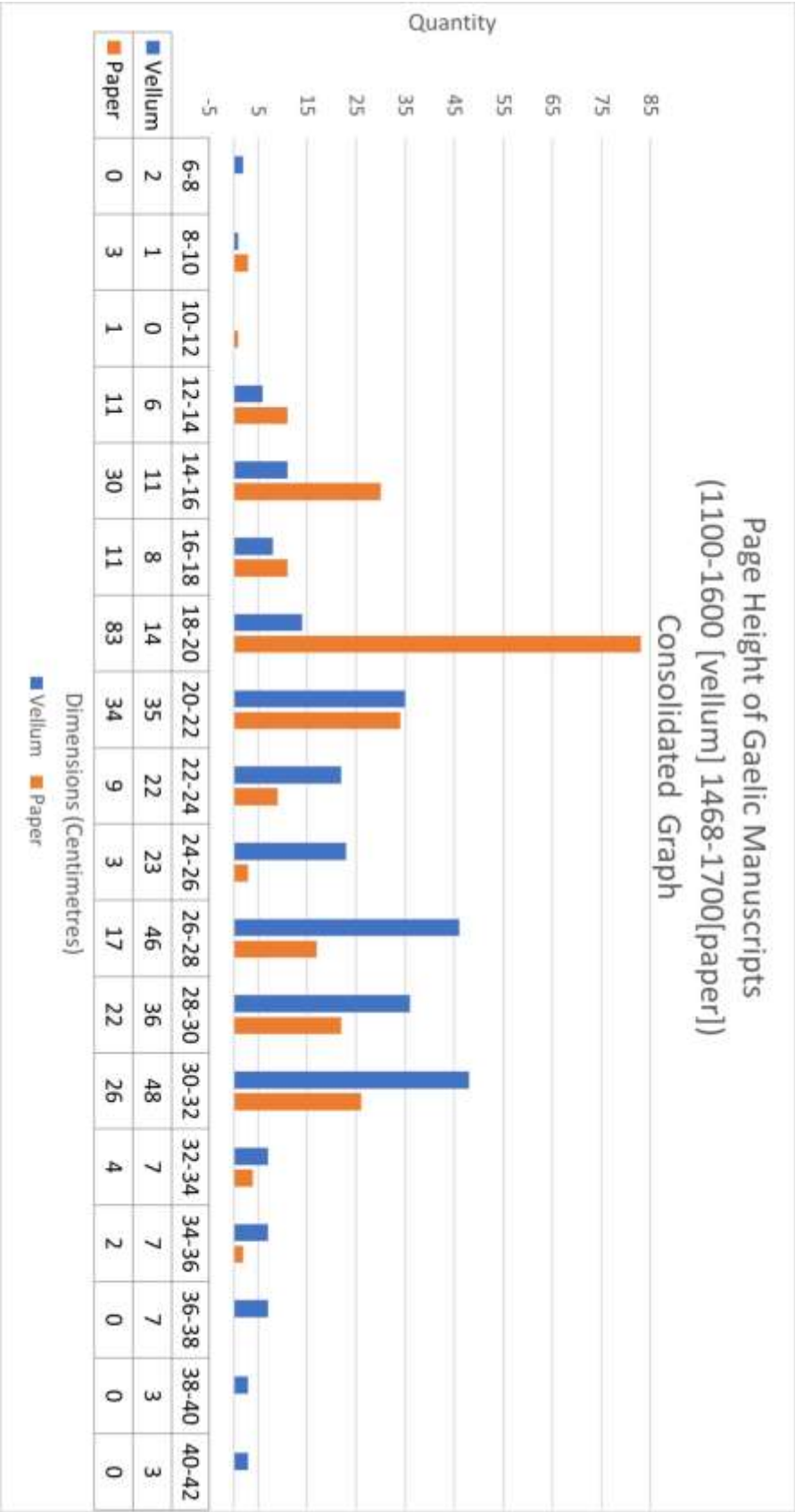


FIGURE 3



ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library
BNF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NUI	National University of Ireland
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
UCC	University College Cork
UCD	University College Dublin

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