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Title	The Book of Ballymote and the Irish book
Authors	Ó Macháin, Pádraig
Publication date	2018
Original Citation	Ó Macháin, P. (2018) 'The Book of Ballymote and the Irish book', in Ó hUiginn, R. (ed.) Codices Hibernenses Eximii II: Book of Ballymote. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, pp. 221-250.
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	https://www.ria.ie/codices-hibernenses-eximii-ii-book-ballymote
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Download date	2026-09-20 23:18:07
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/7071

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The Book of Ballymote and the Irish Book

Pádraig Ó Macháin

The Book of Ballymote (BB) was the third in a sequence of near-contemporary manuscripts, which included the Leabhar Breac and the Book of Lecan, to be digitised by the Irish Script on Screen Project in 2002–3. At the time, due to their format and extent, these three books presented photographic challenges to the capture of their pages as high-resolution digital images. While technical developments since then have meant that such matters do not present problems today, at that time the sheer size of these books crystallised, in the minds of those of involved in the endeavour, the magnitude of the task that the project had set itself. Contributing to that sense of challenge, and to the sense of occasion, was something that the digital process may never succeed in conveying completely: the impression of being in the presence of magnificent books.

In the case of BB—a 'noble volume', to quote Eugene O'Curry (1861, 188)—this impression is enhanced by the preservation of what appear to be contemporary front and back boards that housed what, in emulation of the monastic manuscripts from which Irish book-craft naturally evolved, may have been a relatively loose collection of gatherings.[1] The preservation of these boards may have contributed to the fact that, despite loss of leaves at a number of locations, this is still one of the most intact Irish books to survive from the late medieval period.

[1] While this is one of many under-researched areas in the history of the Irish book, it seems reasonable to propose that many surviving medieval and late medieval Irish manuscripts only received 'fixed' bindings from the seventeenth century onwards. It is of interest that one of the boards from the Book of Lecan still survives (in the National Museum of Ireland), though no longer attached to the manuscript. For individual quiring in the early Gospel books, see Mc Gurk (1956, 255).

It is probably no exaggeration to say that when we regard this large, bulky manuscript today, our sense of awe may, to some extent, replicate the reaction of all those who, over the centuries, have gazed on this book in admiration. This would probably include Aodh Ó Domhnaill who valued the Book at 140 milch cows in 1522 (see below). When one considers that the average dairy herd in Ireland is currently 60–80 cows,[2] with a value of *c.*€1,200–1,500 per cow, one can readily understand the value placed on this book roughly 150 years after its writing; in contemporary terms we may compare the 20 cows—a sixth of the rent of Ormond—paid by the Earl of Kildare in 1500 for a specialist medical manuscript (British Library MS Egerton 89), consisting at the time of 22 quaternions or 176 folios,[3] approximately two-thirds the size of BB.

Owners and readers: non-scribal notes

We know of Ó Domhnaill's valuation of BB from the somewhat bombastic note, originally begun on f. 248r before it was decided to cut away this 'waste' section,[4] but written in full on f. 180r, filling out the lower half of the first column of a folio, which had been left blank by Solamh Ó Droma. This note, with its disparaging reference to Mac Donnchaidh (see Appendix 5 in Chapter 6, this volume), brings us to the first general point that is to be made about BB, namely the quantity and variety of later notes and comments that it contains, mainly in its margins. Such marginalia are one stratum of the archaeology of any manuscript, and mean that Ballymote conforms in type to many other Irish manuscripts in bearing the signs of ownership, readership and general use over the centuries. Such later associations are, therefore, worthy of mention before we delve deeper into the origins and make-up of BB itself.

This non-scribal note enables us to trace the book from Sligo to Donegal in the early sixteenth century. Other early non-scribal marginalia may have the additional benefit of affording clues as to literacy in Irish among the nobility: the pen-test in the upper margin of f. 153r, for example, may be the work of Maol Ruanaidh mac Fearghail who was installed as Mac Diarmada

[2] Information provided by Irish Farmers' Association.

[3] *BLib. Cat.* I, 220–1.

[4] Thus providing a possible date for the excising of similar sections of leaves at ff 135, 267 and 275, and perhaps also a complete blank leaf from the first gathering. The hands of the two entries (ff 180r and 248r), though differing in minor respects, appear close enough to be declared identical. The text, however, varies slightly in that for *airdrige agus flaithemnus* of the full text on f. 180r, that on f. 248r reads *rigi agus flaithius*.

by Tomaltach Mac Donnchaidh in 1393;[5] while the famous comment in the lower margin of f. 224r referring to Ó Domhnaill taking the book from the writer of the note is commonly interpreted as being written by Ruaidhrí Mac Donnchaidh (d. 1524) himself in 1522.[6]

From the sixteenth century, the non-scribal marginalia lead us to Dublin in the 1720s and subsequent years, where Tadhg Ó Neachtain copied items from BB[7] and left his mark on the book in a sequence of unsigned marginal glosses on words in the various texts, glosses that pervade the entire manuscript and are not noted in the catalogue. Next we are brought to Drogheda in 1769, where it was signed by Tomás Ó Duirnidhin (*al.* Duirnighin) at a number of points;[8] and the marginalia eventually lead us to Charles O'Conor (Cathal Óg Ó Conchubhair), via the Chevalier Tomás Ó Gormáin,[9] from 1777 to 1781. After O'Conor, Ó Gormáin appears to have given access to the manuscript to O'Conor's contemporaries and fellow scholars, Cathal Ua Bhallansei[10] (General Charles Vallancey), and in 1784 to Tadhg Ua Flannagáin.[11]

Of all who put their names or their comments in the book, there is no doubt that Charles O'Conor was the most productive, glossing texts throughout, as was his wont, providing an introduction to the background of the manuscript, and providing what he himself in that introduction termed 'leading titles'[12] in English at the incipits of texts in the manuscript. It is hard to quibble with Paul Walsh's description of O'Conor as 'the chief custodian of Irish native learning during the dark century which followed the Williamite wars' (Walsh 1947, 24), and O'Conor's participation in BB is now part of the fabric of the manuscript and part of its history. In their own way, those titles to the texts enable us to add O'Conor to the list of numerous scholars who made notes of the contents of the manuscript in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The history of the later use and circulation of BB presents a number of enigmas. The question of its presence in Carraig na bhFear, Co. Cork, for instance, remains a moot one. It arises from a page (p. 332) written in January

[5] *AFM* s.a. 1393.5. The inscription reads: 'feachain glesa o mhaeltuanaidh mac ferghail'.

[6] 'IS beg an díth leam o domnaill do buain an leabairsi dim or is clu feamachuis do chúaidh air mur leaphor.' Dr Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha suggests to me that *feamachus* ('grossness' *DIL*) may refer to some of the drolleries found in the ornamentation (for example, 153ra.z, 199vb.z).

[7] TCD MS 1289 (H.1.15); RIA MS 24 P 41.

[8] Ff 36r (signature only), 47v (place only), 124r (signature only), 135r (signature, place and date, February 1769), 166r (signature, place and date, May 1769).

[9] See comments by O'Conor, f. 7vb.

[10] Signed f. 181r (upper margin).

[11] The locations of the annotations of O'Conor, Vallancey and Ó Flannagáin are given in *RIA Cat. Ir. MSS*, 1615–16.

[12] Note mounted on verso of front endpaper; text reproduced in *RIA Cat. Ir. MSS*, 1617–18.

1808 by Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin in RIA MS 23 E 16 on which he gives the contents, or 'Clár', of 'Leabhar Breac Meic Aódhagáin', which correspond to those of BB, even though Mícheál Óg, in a note appended to the same page, clearly identifies it with the Leabhar Breac proper. Having given the list of contents, Mícheál Óg says that the book was in his father's possession in Carraig na bhFear in 1767.[13] We know that Mícheál mac Peadair Uí Longáin (Mícheál Óg's father) was in Dublin for a time during the 1750s (Ó Conchúir 1982, 90), and that later genealogical work by him bears correspondences with material in BB (Ní Úrdail 2000, 142, 195). It could be that the list of contents and the copying of other material taken from BB by Mícheál mac Peadair were made in Dublin, rather than in Carraig na bhFear. One detail that encourages us in this conclusion is the fact that the list of contents appears not to derive from direct observation of the book itself by Mícheál mac Peadair, but is, rather, a version of a list dated 1726 found in two copies in a manuscript by Aodh Ó Dálaigh, one by Tadhg Ó Neachtain from which Ó Longáin's description derives, and an adaptation of Ó Neachtain's list by Ó Dálaigh.[14] It is also significant that an identical list of contents is found in a manuscript by Seán (na Ráithíneach) Ua Murchadha dated 1756, a manuscript that was later in the possession of Mícheál Óg, to which list he added the date-subtraction 1808/1767.[15]

Another enigma concerns the possession of BB by Tomás Ó Duirnidhin in Drogheda in 1769, already mentioned. According to James Hardiman, Ó Duirnidhin had been a clerk at the flour mills in Crumlin, Co. Antrim.[16] Ó Duirnidhin's hand is more in evidence in the margins of the manuscript than has been noted in the *RIA Cat. Ir. MSS*, taking the form of notes on sections of the manuscript, such as those that are found, for example, at ff 43r (lower margin), 70ra, and 87r (lower margin). The few fragments of this man's work that survive elsewhere show him to have been interested in contemporary northern literature, and this is true particularly of the sixteen pages written in 1765 at Carranstown, Co. Meath, less than five miles south of Drogheda, and

[13] Ó Conchúir (1982, 242–3); 'Do bhí an leabhar breac so a seilbh Mhichíl mic Peadair Uí Longáin a bpuróiste Charraig na bhFear san mbliadhain 1767' (RIA 23 E 16, p. 332).

[14] TCD MS 1361, pp 1 (Ó Neachtain) and 2 (Ó Dálaigh). Ó Neachtain's list is headed 'Clár leabhruibh, leabhair mhóir cholaiste Atha Cliath 1726'; see Harrison (1989), 149. The subtraction of dates (1724/1447) occurring in BB f. 116r (upper margin) must belong to this period in the book's history.

[15] 'Mullingar' MS 2, pp 76–7; de Brún (1982, 86–7).

[16] Quoted in Ó Casaide (1932b).

found in Charles O'Conor's scrapbook.[17] One of these contains a fragment of verse subscribed 'P. O. D' (p. 115), which makes one wonder why Séamus Ó Casaide's short note of 1932 asking whether there might have been a family connection between Tomás and his namesake, the poet Peadar Ó Doirnín, has never been followed up.[18]

The latest of the jottings in BB brings us to the nineteenth century, and appears to have been inserted after the manuscript had finally reached the safe haven of the Royal Irish Academy library. It is an unsigned rhyming comment on an earlier one by Tomás Ó Duirnidhin that occurs in a blank space on f. 108rb. The later comment was identified by O'Curry,[19] and followed by the RIA cataloguer, Kathleen Mulchrone, as being in the hand of Owen Connellan, which points to a date in the 1830s when Connellan was engaged in making a complete transcript of BB, as he had done of the Book of Lecan which he had completed in 1831.[20] Both transcripts are held in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, and the background to them is explained in a note appended to the printed introduction that Connellan had prefixed to the Lecan transcript:

> I feel it a duty to explain the motives which gave rise to the present undertaking. Some Noble Patrons of Irish Literature having suggested to His late Majesty the necessity of preparing, for the Royal Library, Transcripts of the most valuable Historical MSS. in the Irish Language, of which no duplicates were extant —in case the Originals should meet with a similar fate to the MSS. of '*The Psalter of Cashel*,' '*The Book of Glendalough*,' '*Dromasneachta*,' and many other rare Records relating to the Early History of Ireland and other Nations—His Majesty most condescendingly acceded to the request, and was pleased to appoint me to the office of Transcriber. Subsequently, at the renewed instance and recommendation of other kind friends, His present Most Gracious Majesty has been pleased, of his Royal

[17] RIA MS E ii 1, pp 101–16. Another piece by Ó Duirnidhin (TCD MS 1421 (H.6.17) p. 98), a poem, must date from some time later, as it was sent by post to John White, gardener at the Botanic Gardens and author of *An essay on the indigenous grasses of Ireland* (Dublin 1808), which gives grass-names in Latin, Irish and English.

[18] Ó Casaide (1932a).

[19] RIA RR 67.E.11 (henceforth O'Curry, 'Catalogue' III), 774.

[20] See letters from Monk Mason and from Connellan in *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine* New Series 2 (1833) 618–32, 730–2. A partial transcript of BB by Connellan is now RIA MS 23 Q 7.

> bounty, to order my continuing in the same employment:—for which I cannot too warmly express my most gracious acknowledgements. Owen Connellan October 12, 1831.[21]

This royal patronage is further explicated by a note inserted in the same manuscript by Owen's cousin, Thaddeus:

> I Thaddeus Connellan of Ireland, suggested to The late noble Marquiss of Conynham, and late Sir William Knighton, the necessity of making a copy of the Irish MS of the Book of Lacan in The Royal Academy (Dublin) which they considered just and fit to be laid before His late most Gracious Majesty King George The Fourth and which was kindly granted: and at my instance, Owen Connellan my cousin and pupil, was highly honoured to be employed for the work, and since, at other Irish MSS.[22]

From introductory matter prefixed to the BB transcript at Windsor, matter that contains a description of the manuscript, it is clear that it was not completed until after the accession of Queen Victoria, June 1837.[23]

In the context both of the history of BB in the nineteenth century and of the history of the Irish book, mention must also be made of the facsimile of BB that was produced as the fourth in the Royal Irish Academy series. The Academy Scribe, Seosamh Ó Longáin (youngest son of Mícheál Óg) had been involved in the making of the three preceding facsimiles: *Leabhar na h-Uidhri* (1870), *Leabhar Breac* (1872–6) and *The Book of Leinster* (1880). Having died in the year of the publication of the *Leinster* facsimile, however, and shortly after starting work on BB (Ó Conchúir, 1982, 157–8), no complete transcript of his existed to form the basis for the facsimile of Ballymote. For that reason, and with patent reluctance, as Robert Atkinson explains in his preface, it was:

[21] Royal Library, Windsor, RCIN 1047554.

[22] Royal Library, Windsor, RCIN 1047554.b.

[23] Both manuscripts are referenced by their inventory numbers, 1047554 (Lecan) and 1047555 (Ballymote). I am indebted to Elizabeth Clark, Curator of Books and Manuscripts, The Royal Collection Trust, Windsor Castle, for her help with this matter; she provides the following details of the Connellan BB transcript: 'It is 44.2 × 29.2 × 8.5 cm, bound in brown calf by G. Bellew of Dublin. It is a beautiful manuscript, with coloured and decorated initials, and Connellan seems to have included marginal annotations.' Information regarding Connellan's remuneration for this work is to be found in the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle.

> necessary to adopt photography as the only available means for the speedy publication of this great MS. With the undoubted advantage of securing a faithful representation of the *ipsissima verba* of the MS., the photographic facsimile is also more fatiguing to read than the unblurred pages of LL.[24]

It is not any lack of focus that presents problems for the readers of the facsimile, however—the photographic quality of the plates is generally good, particularly given the times in which this innovatory publication took place—but rather the fact that the margins of the manuscript have in very many cases been cropped from the photographs, thus presenting an unsatisfactory representation of the great book. This should not, however, detract from this being the first complete photographic facsimile of an Irish manuscript.

Although there are obvious gaps in the chronology, it is still quite clear from the above that the non-scribal notes and jottings provide a framework that allows us to glimpse a history of continuous interaction with the manuscript down to near modern times. They also permit us to view the book—as we can many medieval codices—as an organism that renews itself over the centuries, and that enriches and informs the ages through which it passes in its later history.

Origins: scribal notes

Turning to the scribal notes themselves, those that have a bearing on the identity of the lead or main scribes have been recorded in the RIA *Catalogue*.[25] As is well known, the scribes identified are Robertus Mac Síthigh, Solamh Ó Droma and Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin. These notes also record the writing of one early portion of the book in the house of Tomaltach [Mac Donnchaidh] (f. 62v), and a late portion in the house of Domhnall Mac Aodhagáin, Maghnus's *oide* 'teacher' (f. 247r). In a note on the lower margin of f. 36r, Maghnus is identified as the owner of the book, 'fear in leabair sea'. We are to take him as the owner of BB at whatever time that this note was written, therefore, and possibly also the coordinator of the project to make the book.

[24] Atkinson (1887, 3). Proof pages of Ó Longáin's work on the early leaves of BB survive as RIA MS 24 H 30. In an earlier period in his life Ó Longáin had made copies of some of the decorated initials in BB, which he included in a letter-book that survives as Coláiste Cholmáin MS 36.

[25] *RIA Cat. Ir. MSS*, 1611–13.

The scribal names are of interest in that only one of the three—Maghnus—can be said to belong to an identifiable hereditary learned family. This is a useful reminder that while we rightly associate the craft of the Gaelic book in late medieval Ireland with the recognised secular families that were occupied professionally with the four branches of traditional learning, it would be naive to believe that the making of books was exclusively confined to the schools. We know, for example, that the writing of liturgical and other religious manuscripts was continued in the houses of the new religious orders in Ireland in the late middle ages,[26] and it would be natural that there should be a shared interest between these practitioners and their colleagues in the schools, just one indication that the association of the Church with native learning did not come to an abrupt and terminal conclusion following the twelfth-century ecclesiastical reform and the Norman settlement. Our two earliest surviving Irish manuscripts from the post-Norman era are the Book of Magauran and NLI MS G 5: the former is a token of a relatively recent development—the art of *dán díreach*—while the latter is very much representative of the continuity of the practice of native learning in an ecclesiastical context, in the form of the Life of St Féichín translated from Latin by 'Nicol og mac aba Cunga' and written by 'Ó Dubhthaigh' in 1329.[27]

Ecclesiastical interest in and connections with native book-craft continued throughout the fourteenth century and later: at a time roughly contemporary with the writing of BB, Mac Craith Mac an Ghabhann na Scéal was writing part of what is now Rawlinson B 486 for the Prior of Lorrha, while his kinsman, Faelán, was writing the beautiful gathering in Leabhar Ua Maine (ff 48–55) 'dá thigearrna carad companaig', Muircheartach Ó Ceallaigh, Bishop of Clonfert and later Archbishop of Tuam, urging him not to give it away to any (other) friend. At practically the same time Uighistin Mag Raidhin, a canon of the monastery of Oileán na Naomh on Lough Ree, was keeping the annals of that monastery in Irish,[28] a short distance from the western shore of the lake where, in the monastery of St John the Baptist at Rindown, Seaán Ó Dubhagáin, teacher of Ádhamh Ó Cianáin and Lúcás Ó Dalláin (see below), spent seven years until his death in 1372 (Carney 1943, viii).

It is therefore worth referring to the fact that of the scribes whose work survives from the fourteenth or very early fifteenth century, a significant

[26] Cf. Ó Macháin (2016, 126).

[27] There appear to be no evidential grounds for suggesting (*NLI Cat.* I, 31) that the colophon containing this information is not contemporary, nor the manuscript of early fourteenth-century date.

[28] Rawlinson B 488, ff 29–33.

number bear biblical Christian names: Ádhamh Ó Cuirnín, Ádhamh Ó Cianáin, Ádhamh Cúisín, Lúcás Ó Dalláin, and of course Solamh Ó Droma of BB, who was also a participant in a section of the Yellow Book of Lecan (Ó Concheanainn 1980). Brian Ó Cuív suggested that biblical Christian names occurring in Ireland in the immediate post-Norman era might not be baptismal names but rather 'names assumed ... at some point in a religious career',[29] and we know that one of those just mentioned, Ádhamh Ó Cianáin, was, at his death, a canon of the abbey of Lisgoole. In light of this it is hardly unreasonable to propose that Solamh Ó Droma may also have been an ecclesiastic, and also possibly Robertus Mac Síthigh[30]—who was an accomplished scribe in Latin and Irish as the matter on f. 43r shows—both deriving their scribal and bibliographical expertise not from the environment of the secular schools, but from the still closely aligned milieu of monastic learning. If so, we may regard BB as a collaboration between representatives of the religious and secular worlds of a type that must have been commonplace.

While the colophons, signed explicits[31] and marginalia of the main scribes are recorded in the catalogue description of BB, their personal incipits, opening invocations and pen-tests generally are not, except where such items double as textual headings.[32] This variety of scribal jotting is always of interest as an indicator of the commencement of a scribal stint, for example. In BB, many of them invoke the Trinity, particularly those of Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin, whose signed jotting in the lower margin of f. 36r, in which he is identified as the owner of the book as stated above, also makes reference to the coincidence of the feast of the obscure 'Saingte Lindean'[33] with Trinity Sunday. Maghnus's invocations are as follows:

> Laigin andso INomine trino dei (70r, upper margin)
>
> INomine trino dei paitris (130v, upper margin)

[29] Ó Cuív (1979, 45); from this, for no stated reason, he later (1986) excepted Ó Droma, Ó Cianáin and Lúcás Ó Duibhgeannáin (*AFM* s.a. 1323).

[30] In support of this one may cite Mac Síthigh's frequent use of the inverted semicolon as a mark of punctuation (for instance ff 63rc13, 64rb.z, 67rd8 and 14, 67v passim), common in earlier monastic manuscripts, but which Best thought was not to be found in the later secular books (Best and Lawlor 1931, xv).

[31] Very many unsigned explicits are unrecorded, however. These are of the type 'Finit', 'Finit Amen', 'Finit Amen Finit', etc., and are found throughout the manuscript (all three occur on f. 7v); so also slightly more elaborate explicits/incipits such as 'Finit primus liber. INcipit do lebar fercertne' (f. 174ra, Ó Droma), or 'Conide merugad .uilix. otus co derid cosin' (f. 248rb, Ó Duibhgeannáin).

[32] For example at ff 87r, 101r. Most of the unsigned later marginalia have also gone unrecorded.

[33] Associated by Pádraig Ó Riain (2011, 395) with Leannán, a priest and St Patrick's bell-ringer.

INomine trino dei (136r, upper margin)

INcipit dosceol incroicinn ocus dotrai conalloingis annso INomine trino dei (230r, upper margin)

Two of the three invocations of Robertus Mac Síthigh also invoke the Trinity:

Emanuel (6r, upper margin)

In nomine trino hoc opus incipio. A nainm na trinoidi tionsc[nai]m in toibreochan sa (43r, upper margin)

ananim in athar ⁊ in meic ⁊ in spiraid naem cuid na muman do leabar seanchusa (97r, upper margin)

The invocations and opening *probationes*[34] by Solamh Ó Droma are as follows:

[Ad majorem Dei gloriam (f. [1]r, now lost)][35]

a dia ge mor maith in lebuur [*sic*] sa is olc scribhtur e[36] (159r, upper margin)

in dei nomine amen cinnus sin a peinn ⁊ dar lim ni maith[37] (170v17)

Assit principio sancta maria meo (188r, upper margin)

Occurring at the beginning both of a gathering and of the 'Dindseanchus Érenn' text, one of the longest texts in the manuscript, this last invocation is of interest. 'Assit principio Sancta Maria meo' is a prayer that is relatively

[34] A non-text-initial *probatio* of O'Droma's, which has not been recorded, is 'as fada ata in lebar sa gan sgribadh' (151v, upper margin).

[35] Recorded in Richard Tipper's transcript of BB (TCD MS 1295, p. 1), and confirmed by Tadhg Ó Neachtain's copy of 1729 (TCD MS 1289, p. 1); as Tipper is careful to reproduce the other scribal invocations noted above, this may be taken as genuine. On the basis that ff 2–3 were written by Ó Droma, I make the assumption that f. [1] was also, though this might not necessarily have been the case.

[36] This occurs where Ó Droma takes over from Mac Síthigh. Recorded in *RIA Cat. Ir MSS*, 1612, but wrongly ascribed to Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin.

[37] This appears to be the *probatio*, not for the *Auraicept*, which begins here, but rather for the decorated initial.

common as a scribal invocation in western-European tradition of the late medieval period.[38] It has yet to be recorded among Irish-language manuscripts, however, perhaps due to the fact that such invocations were neglected in early catalogues. This is also the case with one of Mac Síthigh's invocations—'In nomine trino hoc opus incipio'—which is also common in European manuscripts, but only to date located elsewhere in Irish manuscripts in the work of the BB scribes' near contemporary, the Augustinian canon Ádhamh Ó Cianáin (died 1373).[39]

Though slight and barely legible, therefore, as is the nature of many *probationes pennae*, the two inscriptions just mentioned give us a tantalising glimpse of a possible external frame of reference for the work of these two scribes. They may also provide us with a valuable clue as to the milieu from which Mac Síthigh and Ó Droma approached the making of BB. At the very least, they do nothing to belie the proposition that both may have brought to Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin's project the experience of the scriptorium of a religious house. Given the emphasis on the Trinity, could that house have been the foundation on Oiléan na Tríonóide in Lough Key, fifteen miles south-east of Ballymote, six miles to the south of the Ó Duibhgeannáin heartland of Kilronan, Co. Roscommon, and in the lordship of the Clann Diarmada, kinsmen of the Clann Donnchaidh?

Patronage

Of the manuscripts written in Irish that can be assigned with certainty, in whole or in part, to the fourteenth century,[40] many continue the ecclesiastical connections evident in the pre-1200 manuscripts, and only a very few show signs of having been conceived as secular patrons' manuscripts, in the sense that individuals outside of the broad scholarly community were the commissioners or intended recipients of the finished item. The only obvious example is the Book of Magauran, a *duanaire*, the bulk of which was compiled for Tomás Mág Shamhradháin at some time prior to his death in 1343, and a new type of book in many ways. A case might also be made for Leabhar Ua Maine,

[38] See for example the Index of Opening Words in Colker (1991, II, 1554).

[39] NLI MS G 3, f. 26r. Ó Duibhgeannáin's 'In nomine trino' is also found in the Book of Fermoy (RIA MS 23 E 29), p. 169.

[40] NLI MSS G 2–3, G4 with parts of TCD MS 1318 (Yellow Book of Lecan), G 5 (*pace* Catalogue), G 1200 (Magauran); RIA MSS D ii 1 (Uí Mhaine), 23 P 12 (BB), 23 P 2 (in part, Book of Lecan); Bodleian Library MSS Rawl. B 486, Rawl. B 488 (part) and Rawl. B 506; TCD MSS 1298, 1316 (part); NLS Adv MS 72.1.8 (part). A number of other manuscripts, assigned only questioningly by cataloguers to the fourteenth century, have been omitted from this list.

a manuscript that remained in Ó Ceallaigh possession until the eighteenth century (O'Sullivan 1989), save that it retains—in the bishop's gathering already alluded to—a strong flavour of the informal, familiar element seen elsewhere in manuscript-writing at this time.

In the thirteenth century this familiar and familial element is typified in an ecclesiastical context in the obit, recorded in 1221, of the scribe and historian Diarmaid h. Cúlecháin ('sói senchusa ocus scríbhinn') who wrote a missal for his teacher and another for his foster-brother, coarbs of Aghagower, Co. Mayo.[41] In fourteenth-century manuscripts it is pervasive. For example, Seaán Ó Cianáin wrote the genealogical quinion that is now the first part of Rawlinson B 506 for Ádhamh Ó Cianáin, who himself wrote what is now NLI G2-3 for his own use, copying part of the material at least from the book of his teacher, Seaán Ó Dubhagáin. Another glimpse of a pupil–teacher connection involving Ó Dubhagáin is provided by TCD 1298 written by Lúcás Ó Dalláin, who was also involved in the making of the fourteenth-century section of TCD 1316 (Ó Muraíle 2004, 35–6). The second part of Rawlinson B 506 was written, it is suggested (Ó Cuív 2001, II, 217), for Brian Mág Aodhagáin, 'Ollamh na Bréfne i mbreitheamhnas', whose death is recorded in 1390.[42] Mac Craith Mac an Ghabhann na Scéal wrote what is largely a genealogical manuscript (Rawlinson B 486, ff 10–22, 37–53) for his own companion (*da companach fein*), Giolla Ruadháin Ua Macháin, coarb of Lorrha, sometime between the years 1369 and 1400 (Ó Cuív 2001, II, 217). Murchadh (Riabhach) Ó Cuindlis wrote part of what is now the Yellow Book of Lecan for his own use (*do fen*), and parts of the Book of Lecan for his own teacher (*da aidi bodesin* and *da aide diles*) Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh (Ó Concheanainn 1973, 67 nn 21, 23). The same Giolla Íosa provides us with a memorable example of the phenomenon: he compiles the Book of Lecan and his part of the Yellow Book of Lecan as an heirloom for himself and his posterity (Ó Concheanainn 1987, 144). It is worth observing in passing that this mention of the manuscript as an heirloom—a *séd fine*—points up a constant theme of the making of these books: that is, the high value placed on them by their creators. Seaán Ó Cianáin makes his gathering for Ádhamh on condition that he gives it to no-one else, as does Faelán Mac an Ghabhann na Scéal for Muircheartach Ó Ceallaigh (see above). The men of learning were well aware of the value of their creations. It is no surprise, therefore, that great codices

[41] *ALC* s.a. 1221.9.
[42] *AFM* s.a. 1390.9.

such as Lebor na hUidre or the Book of Pottlerath were used as ransoms, or that Aodh Ó Domhnaill should value BB at the equivalent of two modern dairy herds.

This familiar, and often fraternal or familial, element in the creation of manuscripts, therefore, in combination with the personal aspect of books being created for the scholar's own use, dominates the relationship between scribe and recipient at this time, and shows the learned classes making books for themselves to a far greater extent than for members of any external nobility. One might go farther and suggest that in some cases what we are seeing is some of the most long-lived of the learned families—those of Ó Cianáin, Mac Fhirbhisigh and Mac Aodhagáin, for example—engaged in the process of creating their family libraries. Nor would it take too many manuscripts to make up a library: one big collection of gatherings would suffice, such as we have in BB, in fact. Whatever the circumstances, the personal or familial manuscript is much more easily identified among the surviving corpus of late medieval manuscripts than is the manuscript created expressly at the behest of a patron. There are, of course, outstanding and obvious patrons' manuscripts, such as the *duanaireadha*, or great fifteenth-century collections such as the fragmentary White Earl's Book, and the Books of Pottlerath, Lismore and Fermoy. It is quite possible, however, that these constitute a minority of manuscripts, and that in general the late medieval Irish manuscript was created within and for the use of the scholarly community itself.

Our idea of the manuscript patron may be conditioned by what we know of the patronage of bardic poems, and coloured perhaps by the tradition in medieval and renaissance Europe of the patronage of art and decorated books by wealthy magnates. In the latter case it should be pointed out that such patrons had access to professional scribes,[43] which profession was unknown in late medieval Gaelic Ireland, where the making of books was an adjunct occupation arising from the writer's specialisation in a particular area of learning. There was another type of patronage, however, which might be termed 'subsistence patronage', and which took the form of the provision of food and board while a manuscript or part thereof was being written. Notwithstanding notable projects initiated by patrons—such as the Annals of Ulster, Beatha Choluim Chille and the Book of Fenagh—subsistence patronage, of the type practised by Fearghal Ó Gadhra in the case of the work of the Four Masters,

[43] See for instance the example of a scribal specimen sheet, prepared for prospective patrons, in de Hamel (1992, 38).

may have been the prevalent form of book patronage in medieval and early modern Ireland.

The evidence for the assumed patronage of BB rests largely on the note of exchange on f. 180r alluded to earlier, which records the transfer of ownership of the manuscript in 1522 from Mac Donnchaidh to Aodh Ó Domhnaill. That sixteenth-century note is taken as complementing the two references made by Robertus Mac Síthigh to Mac Donnchaidh, Tomaltach mac Taidhg (d. 1397): his genealogy on f. 59rc and the reference to Mac Síthigh 'ag scribad na codachsa don leabar a tigh tomaltaig meic taidg' on f. 62va. Part or all of a manuscript being written in someone's house is no guarantee that the finished book was intended for the householder, however,[44] which is why the 1522 note is deemed so important as support for the proposition that Mac Donnchaidh was the book's actual patron. This, however, needs to be reconciled with the fact that, as already mentioned, Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin is identified early in the book as the owner of the manuscript, and later as having completed Togail Troí *in the house* of his teacher Domhnall Mac Aodhagáin. All we can really say, therefore, is that by the early sixteenth century the leader of Clann Donnchaidh was in possession of BB. In light of all this, O'Curry's explanation 'that the compilation was made for Mac Egan who undoubtedly sold it to Mac Donagh of Corann'[45] has merit, save that we might now modify this to suggest that this was an Ó Duibhgeannáin manuscript that subsequently came to be housed in Ballymote.

Contents: the *seanchas*-manuscript

If we consider the contents of BB in general terms, there is no doubt about the planning that went into this book. This should come as no great surprise to us, as it is difficult to find an Irish manuscript from the vellum period that does not display degrees of planning at all levels—and one could make the same claim for many books from the paper era also. The Irish handmade book as an artefact is a relatively conservative item, and the books produced in the late medieval era can trace their lineage and their modalities back to the monastic era without too much difficulty; in paper manuscripts of the modern period,

[44] A good example is Dubhghall Albanach's section of NLI MS Adv 72.1.1, parts of which were compiled by this Mac Mhuirich scribe 'a tigh Meic Aedhagain Urmuman' (5r) and 'a mBaile I Buaghaigh a fochair Elisi Puitilear' (7r). On the other hand, the scholars of the Book of Pottlerath 'shared very closely the life of their patron [Éamonn Buitilléar], travelling with him to his various houses in Kilkenny, Waterford and Tipperary' (Ó Cuív, 2001, I, 63).

[45] O'Curry, 'Catalogue' III, 773.

dry-point ruling is still to be found in the nineteenth century. Whether conservative or innovative, common sense dictates that one does not go through the various stages of preparing vellum for writing, and then abandon this precious writing material to an arbitrary set of contents based on whimsy alone.

The relatively regular collation of BB (see below) is complemented in turn by the orderly arrangement of the contents. The early gatherings deal with origins and fundamental knowledge: the origins of the World (*Sex Aetates Mundi*), of the Gaoidhil (*Lebor Gabála*) and the Christian kings of the four provinces; this is followed by wisdom texts, extensive post-diluvian genealogies, the history of the Britons, the Irish saints, biblical history, the origin of names, the cycle of the kings followed by the rights of kingship (*Lebor na Cert*), the lore of women, texts on poets and prosody and the lore of places, the manuscript culminating in the final five gatherings containing translated classical texts.

It would be hard to think of a collection of texts that more comprehensively defines *seanchas* than this one. Like other manuscripts of the time, BB continues the trends and emphases of the few books in Irish that survive from the twelfth century, and that establish what we might call 'the Matter of Ireland', which is recycled and redefined in manuscripts throughout the late medieval period. These *seanchas*-manuscripts, deceptively miscellaneous in their contents, are the all-embracing encyclopaedias of late medieval Ireland. Looking at their contents, as exemplified by BB, we can appreciate the remarks of An Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbhisigh many years later, in which he explains the pre-eminence of the *ollamhuin seanchais* by providing this definition of their subject-area:

> *ós isin seanchus atá eólus firinneach an talmhan 7 gach fios as eól do dhaoínibh an domhuin mhóir uile, bíoth gur doiligh duine d'fhaghál agá mbeth a fhios i n-iomláine* (Carney 1946, 91).
>
> 'since it is *seanchas* that contains the true knowledge of the earth and every knowledge known to people throughout the whole world, though it would be difficult to find one person who possessed all that knowledge'.

In BB we have a perfect exposition of Mac Fhirbhisigh's definition. In it we see that the *seanchaidh* is, at the same time, a specialist and a factotum. He is the keeper of all knowledge on which the social order depends. His knowledge

of origins, as expressed most visibly through genealogical material, is used as a basis for rightful leadership and kingship, which in turn dovetails with texts such as *Tecosca Cormaic* and *Lebor na Cert*. To the books of the *seanchaidh* this gives the status of moral portfolios. It is one of the subtleties of BB, and a testament to the amount of planning that was involved in its creation, that items such as biblical history and saints' genealogies merge reasonably seamlessly with more secular material, in acknowledgement of the unified discipline that is *seanchas*.

Whatever the immediate motivation behind the great *seanchas* miscellanies of this time, whether they reflect a renewed emphasis on morality in post-Black Death society or the simple need to create a family archive, a *séd fine* of practical purpose for the *seanchaidhe*, it is true to say that BB reflects primarily a continuation of the concerns of the twelfth-century miscellanies. It picks up the tone of Lebor na hUidre and Rawlinson B 502, where *seanchas* texts are associated by location with overtly religious or gnomic material, and all are seen as part of a unit. This should not be interpreted as antiquarianism or neo-*seanchas*, no more than the penmanship in the Book of Magauran or NLI G2–3 should be considered 'revived script',[46] but rather it is a sign of the continuity of the practice of this aspect of traditional learning from the pre-Norman to post-Norman eras, to which the great loss of manuscripts in the thirteenth century in particular has given a false sense of fragmentation and hiatus.

Though metrics and prosody occupy a significant section of BB, the omission from the manuscript of *dán díreach*, the high art of the professional poets which was thriving at this time, is symbolic of the bedrock concerns of the *seanchaidh*. *Dán díreach* was a relatively young discipline, and as specialist an activity as was the growing tradition in Ireland of European medicine. The recording of *dán díreach*—which, in its secular realisation, was patron-specific—might not always be central to the immediate terms of reference of the *seanchas*-manuscript. Just as the only bardic praise poem in Ádhamh Ó Cianáin's manuscript (NLI MS G 2–3)— which contains a significant amount of metrical teaching, both old and contemporary—is the pre-*dán díreach* lament for Maol Seachlainn, King of Meath, inserted as a filler item (Ó Macháin 2015, 100), it is equally symbolic that the only vestige of *dán díreach* to be found in BB occurs as a pen-test on the recto of what is now the first leaf, which, on its verso, contains the depiction of Noah's ark (see below).[47] Metrical the-

[46] O'Sullivan (1985, 356) and O'Sullivan (2005, 540). Such a view ignores, inter alia, the significant amount of literature that survives from the thirteenth century, which must have been recorded in writing at that time.
[47] The pen-test consists of quatrain 8 of a famous poem to Maghnus Ó Conchubhair, King of Connacht (1288–1293), *Gach éan mar a adhbha* (Mac Cionnaith 1938, Poem 98).

ory was a legitimate scholarly concern of the *seanchaidh*, much of whose work was transmitted in verse format, but praise-poems in *dán díreach* were a specialisation that might be of limited relevance to the broad concerns of the *seanchas*-manuscript. The makers of these manuscripts might therefore include bardic poetry—as they do in Leabhar Ua Maine—or exclude it, as they do here.

BB may therefore be considered a miscellany representative and definitive of the art of the *seanchaidh*. Though it should not be thought that the miscellany per se was the exclusive preserve of those who were engaged in this branch of learning,[48] it is the *seanchaidh*'s world-view and that of his manuscripts that give to these books their general attraction, and that make them among the most frequently created type of book in late medieval Ireland. As we will see when we examine the structure of BB, the *seanchaidh* was the book-maker par excellence. It is no wonder, therefore, that he should be in demand for the creation of other types of book also, *duanaireadha* for example: from the Book of Magauran (an Ó Cianáin manuscript, in part at least) to the Maguire *duanaire* (an Ó Cléirigh book).

Physical structure of BB

Frontispiece

Turning to the physical structure of BB, it is hard to avoid consideration of the frontispiece, one of the most memorable and bibliographically innovative features of the manuscript. This depicts a ship with mast and rudder, a bird with a leaf in its beak perched on the prow, and the ship occupied by eight people; the ship sits atop a mountain range with vegetation beneath (see Pl. xxxiv, Chapter 11, this volume). Though perhaps more familiar through the later print medium, the frontispiece as a feature of the book is well known in many manuscript traditions, from Arabic to Anglo-Saxon,[49] and continues into the late middle ages in Britain and on the continent,[50] whence it would make the easy transition to the printed book. In specifically Irish tradition, the feature of the frontispiece may be a throwback to the gospel books and psalters of the earlier era.[51] In the late medieval and early modern period, however, the frontispiece occurs only rarely in Irish manuscripts: only two other examples are known to me.[52]

[48] For miscellanies associated with lawyers, see O'Sullivan (1999, 282–3).
[49] See for example Budny (1992).
[50] For example, cf. Salter and Pearsall (1980, 115–16).
[51] See for example Henry (1960).
[52] Dr Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha informs me that she believes that TCD MS 1315, p. 14 (a diagrammatic representation of the three branches of philosophy), which is misbound, may have served as a frontispiece originally.

The first is the rotula that occurs as a frontispiece facing p. 3 of RIA MS B ii 1, the beginning of the famous astronomical tract, to which manuscript the cataloguer questioningly assigned a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century date.[53] The second is the equally famous portrait of Colum Cille which occurs as a frontispiece to Rawlinson B 514, Maghnus Ó Domhnaill's 'Beatha Choluim Chille', dating from roughly the mid-sixteenth century, at a time when presumably BB still formed part of the Í Dhomhnaill library, to which it had been added by Maghnus's father and predecessor as chieftain, Aodh Dubh (*al.* Aodh Óg). By this time, of course, an additional influence would have been the emergence of the frontispiece as a feature of the printed book, but we have no way of knowing if in fact the addition of the BB frontispiece can be dated so late. In favour of the drawing being contemporary with BB is the fact that the boat depicted in the picture, and as identified and reproduced in an excellent sketch by Timothy O'Neill (1987, 107–8), is a variety of vessel known as a cog, which, according to nautical archaeologists, declined in use after the fourteenth century.[54]

The leaf, on the verso of which the drawing was made, presents now as a stray piece of vellum, worm-eaten in places, that was used for pen-tests. Such leaves must have been commonplace in the making of manuscripts, and whether or not those pen-tests belonged to BB is not known. They are mostly confined to the recto of the leaf, and only one—the quatrain of poetry mentioned above—could be classified as something other than a jotting.[55] This should not detract from the quality of the drawing, however, which is meticulously executed, particularly with regard to the detail of the boat. One should also note that the top outer corner of this leaf was roughly cut away at some time subsequent to the making of the drawing, as the top of the mast and part of the left supporting shroud are missing. This leads one to conclude that the drawing was created first, and that the use of the recto for pen-tests was a later development. Perhaps what we see, therefore, is the surviving front leaf of an original wrapper, purposely carrying an appropriate illustration as a frontispiece on its verso, which was retained in situ after the creation of the boards that now bind the manuscript.

[53] Text edited in Power (1914).

[54] Breen and Forsythe (2004, 79–80); Brady and Corlett (2007, 314). (I am grateful to Dr Karl Brady for expert advice in this matter.)

[55] Jottings *recto*: (a) 'Ga [*sic*] macaomh m*ar* mui*n*tear. magnas maith do mu*ined* . slat breagh brian / na ngaoid*eal* . flat [*expuncted*] mac m*ar* niall geal glundubh. Misi sean no tuath*al*'. (b) 'IS leam tusa iduidgi*nn* m*ac* m*eic* [? Con]'. (c) 'A A a a b b b' [brown]. (d) 'A muire'. (e) 'IS innsa/misa marthaim'. (f) 'A muire mo beandacht duit'. (g) 'feach*ain* gle*as*i'. (h) 'amen'. (i) 'Amen a muire cabhan'. (j) 'feasadh / *fed* / feasadh *ar* / fec / amend'. Jottings *verso*: (a) '… Libris Ballimote'. (b) 'C …. g … a n*n*'. (c) 'T …'. (d) 'Coimeasann ri*n* Sanfeac … Sre huidhe'. (e) 'Bo dearrsgnach an Lamh ro graiphni / Me sidhe Tadg Ua Flannagain'.

Since O'Curry's time at least,[56] scholars have interpreted this drawing as representing Noah with his family—his wife, three sons, and their three wives (Genesis 7.13)[57]—in their ark that has come to rest on the mountains of Ararat. This interpretation is challenged compellingly by Karen Ralph in the present volume (Chapter 11) and in an earlier one (Ralph 2011). Ralph argues that if this is the ark, then it is out of kilter with other medieval representations, including that in Ó Cianáin's NLI MS G 3 (f. 16v). She suggests instead that it is a depiction of Mac Donnchaidh, supposed patron of the manuscript.

When the various elements of the composition are considered, however, the Noah interpretation still has something to recommend it. Those elements include the dove; the number of people on board; the ship sitting atop the mountains; the fact that, when the first folio of BB was *in situ*, the image would have been facing text that refers to the Flood and to Noah's ark[58] before going into great detail about the descendants of Noah; and also the fact that there is a character present in the drawing who has not been discussed in any commentary up to now. This is a small figure on the extreme left, lurking behind the mountains.[59] So unobtrusive is he, and so great is our concentration on the ship and its crew, that he passes unnoticed. He is a malevolent-looking individual, with horns and one wing, and in his right hand he holds a club. This is a representation of the devil,[60] and it gives the picture a different aspect, one that looks away, as it were, from the *Sex Aetates* and *Lebor Gabála* texts that it faces, and that connects the picture with the wider world of folklore and apocryphal tradition concerning Noah.[61]

Materials and ruling

Initial investigation suggests that, with the exception of the outer bifolia of gatherings, there is no consistency one way or the other in matching the sides of the vellum in the arrangement of the skins in BB. In other words, most gatherings begin and end on the hair side, which gives them their outer shiny

[56] O'Curry, 'Catalogue' III, 753, 778–9.

[57] The 'éanochtar' referred to in quatrain 2 of Mac Con Midhe's poem cited below (n. 61); cf. 'aonochtar' in a poem by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (Knott 1922, Poem 7.40).

[58] Preserved in Richard Tipper's transcript (TCD MS 1295, p. 2). It should also be noted that the opening of *Togail Troi* at f. 230r refers to Noah's survival of the Flood.

[59] Partly reproduced in Seosamh Ó Longáin's 1879 proof (RIA MS 23 H 30) referred to above, n. 24.

[60] On representations of the winged devil, see Russell (1986, 132).

[61] See Utley (1988); Muir (1995, 73–4); Freedman and Simon (1977, I, 290; this reference courtesy Dr Fearghas Ó Fearghail). That apocryphal traditions regarding Noah were current in Ireland is evidenced by the poem beginning 'Crann do chuir amach Naoi nár', attributing the invention of the plough to Noah: Williams (1980, Poem 22).

appearance at the front and back, and this feature can be of use in confirming the collation. Thereafter, however, the pattern is not regular—neither flesh-side to flesh-side nor hair-side down throughout—unlike the Book of Lecan, for example, where the general pattern is that of hair-side down.[62]

An outstanding example of hair on hair at the juncture of gatherings is that of ff 187v (end of gathering xxviii) and 188r (beginning of xxix), which also marks the break between the end of the Prosody section of the manuscript and the beginning of the *Dindshenchas*. This happens as part of a collaboration between Ó Droma and Ó Duibhgeannáin, the latter finishing gathering xxviii, the former picking up again at the beginning of xxix. The relatively dark and shiny appearance of these two pages is what would be expected from hair on hair, but it may have been augmented by additional handling if it were the case that these sections of the manuscript were extractable.

The ruling of the manuscript varies between drypoint, mainly on rectos only, and ink ruling on both sides of leaves (for example, gatherings xxix, xxx and xxxi), f. 130r (a singleton) being an excellent blank example of the latter and f. 157r a blank example of the former. Marginal prickings as aids to the guidelines have been executed in both margins, apparently after folding, and with a knife-point as often as an awl, as the marginal slits on many of the opening folios reveal. The text frame for the two-column pages consists of four single, vertical bounding-lines and two horizontal ones, all extending to the margins; double vertical bounding lines are found occasionally (for instance ff 113 (dry-point), and 117 (ink)); multicolumn pages (containing genealogies and other lists) have single, vertical bounding lines between columns (for example f. 88). The vertical lines are planned in the usual way with prickings in the top and bottom margins. The average number of lines varies, but is always within the range from 50 to 60.

Collation

In his 1981 article, the pioneer of the palaeography of north-Connacht manuscripts, Tomás Ó Concheanainn, remarked that:

> In its present state BB cannot be subjected to examination of the make-up and sequence of its gatherings, but the order of its contents would suggest that it still maintains its original arrangement. (Ó Concheanainn 1981, 19)

[62] Conservation notes by Roger Powell, November 1968 (typescript in RIA Library).

Through the good offices of the RIA librarian, Siobhán Fitzpatrick, and her staff, who made the manuscript available to me, it has been possible to establish the collation as follows:

i[10] ff 2–8 (wants 1, 8 (stub between ff 7 and 8) and 10 (f. [9]), with loss of text)
[Ó Droma ff 2–3**; Mac Síthigh** ff 4–8]

ii ff 10 and 11 singletons
[Mac Síthigh]

iii[10] ff 12–21
[Mac Síthigh]

iv ff 22 and 23 singletons
[Mac Síthigh]

ff 24–30 wanting, with loss of text

v ff 31 and 32 singletons
[Mac Síthigh]

vi[10] ff 33–41 (wanting 10 (f. [42]), with loss of text)
[Mac Síthigh]

vii[10] ff 43–52
[Mac Síthigh]

viii[8] ff 53–61 (61 a singleton)
[Mac Síthigh]

ix[8] ff 62–68 (wanting 8 (f. [69]), with loss of text)
[Mac Síthigh]

x[6] ff 70–75
[Ó Duibhgeannáin]

xi ff 76–79 singletons
[Ó Duibhgeannáin]

xii[4] ff 80–83
[Mac Síthigh]

xiii ff 84, 85 and [86] ([86] missing, with loss of text) singletons
[Mac Síthigh]

xiv[10] ff 87–96
[Mac Síthigh]

[chasm, not reflected in foliation]

xv[10] ff 97–106
[Mac Síthigh]

xvi ff 107 and 108 singletons
[Mac Síthigh]

xvii[4] ff 109–12
[Mac Síthigh]

xviii[10] ff 113–22
[Mac Síthigh]

xix ff 123, 124, 125 and 126 singletons
[Mac Síthigh]

xx[2] ff 127–8
[Mac Síthigh]

xxi ff [129] (missing, with loss of text), 130 and 131 singletons
[Ó Duibhgeannáin]

xxii[4] ff 132–35
[Ó Duibhgeannáin]

xxiii[10] ff 136–46 ('144' skipped in foliation)
[**Ó Duibhgeannáin** to f. 140ra5; **Ó Droma** ff 140ra6–141ra45; **relief scribe** f. 141ra46–z; **Mac Síthigh** f. 141v–146]

[chasm, not reflected in foliation = 1 folio?]

xxiv[10] ff 147–56
[**Ó Droma** to f. 154va10; **Ó Duibhgeannáin** ff f. 154va11–156]

xxv ff 157 and 158 singletons
[**Ó Duibhgeannáin** f. 157; **Mac Síthigh** f. 158]

xxvi[8] ff 159–67 (f. 167 a singleton)
[**Ó Droma**]

xxvii[10] ff 168–77
[**Ó Droma**]

xxviii[10] ff 178–87
[**Ó Droma** to f. 180; **Ó Duibhgeannáin** ff 181–7]

xxix[10] ff 188–97 (scribal catchword f. 197)
[**Ó Droma**]

xxx[10] ff 198–207
[**Ó Droma**]

xxxi[10] ff 208–26 [foliation jumps in error from 209 to 220] (wants 10 (f. [227]), with loss of text)
[**Ó Droma**]

xxxii ff 228 and 229 singletons
[**Ó Duibhgeannáin**]

xxxiii[10] ff 230–39
[**Ó Duibhgeannáin**]

xxxiv[10] ff 240–48 (wants 10, not reflected in foliation, no loss of text)
[**Ó Duibhgeannáin**; (**Ó Droma** as relief scribe f. 247vb1–19)]

xxxv[10] ff 249–59 (f. 259 a singleton)
[**Ó Droma**]

xxxvi[8] ff 260–67
[**Ó Droma**]

xxxvii[8] ff 268–75 as follows: ff 268 and 275 conjugate; 269–72 a four; 273–74 a bifolium
[**Ó Duibhgeannáin**]

It will be seen from this that the dominant unit is the gathering of ten (seventeen units), followed by the gathering of eight (five units). This is what we would expect from books at the time, a mixture of the *cín* (the quinion or gathering of ten) and the *caidirne* (the quaternion or gathering of eight). Unfortunately, we do not yet possess comprehensive data for the collation of Irish medieval manuscripts, but one can say, for instance, that the structure of BB is comparable to near-contemporary manuscripts such as the Leabhar Breac and Leabhar Ua Maine, the collation of which is known. The Leabhar Breac (compiled *c.*1408–11) has a dominant quantity of tens,[63] while in Leabhar Ua Maine (*c.*1393) the dominant unit is the eight (O'Sullivan 1989, 159). As regards the 27 singletons surviving in the manuscript, in the description above groups of singletons are regarded as gatherings in themselves, while lone singletons are presented as quired with the preceding gathering.

One of the valuable aspects of Richard Tipper's almost complete transcript of BB, made in 1727–8, is that it shows that the loss of leaves that is detectable in the manuscript today took place for the most part after Tipper's time, in the second half of the eighteenth century, a token perhaps of how much the manuscript moved around during that period. There are only four places in the manuscript where a chasm is reflected in the transcript: ff 69 and 86 were clearly missing before Tipper made his copy, and the chasms after ff 96 and 146 are also replicated in his copy.[64] All the other textual leaves were lost

[63] Information from conservation notes (October 1972) by Roger Powell in RIA Library. Collation as follows: i[6], ii–iii[10], iv[10] (+ 1), v[16], vi[8], vii–ix[10], x[10] (+ 1), xi–xii[8], xiii[2] (+ 1), xiv[10], xv[8] (+ 1).
[64] TCD MS 1295, pp 321 and 436 respectively.

after that time: ff [1], [9], [24]–[30], [42], [129] and [227],[65] a total of twelve leaves, and not a large quantity given the size of the book.

Because of the nature of the material being copied—long genealogical tracts, for example—the feature of the self-contained gathering fronted by a significant text, observable in other manuscripts, is not present here. In fact only three gatherings could be removed without leaving obvious chasms: gatherings xxiii, xxiv, and the final one, xxxvii. We do, however, have groups of gatherings in which a series of texts begins on the recto of the first folio of the first gathering and ends on the verso of the final folio of the last gathering in that group, and these may be taken as forming units on their own, as follows: vii to ix, x and xi, xii and xiii, xiv to xvii, xviii to xx, xxi and xxii, f. 158 + xxvi to xxviii, xxix to xxxii, xxxiii and xxxiv, xxxv and xxxvi.

Though these textual units are in some cases produced by scribes working alone for many continuous stints—most notably Robertus Mac Síthigh (gatherings vii–ix, xii–xx)—inspection of the collation serves also to emphasise the element of what we may call thematic collaboration, particularly obvious between Mac Síthigh and Ó Duibhgeannáin in the genealogical section between gatherings xi and xii, suggestive of the writing of gatherings in parallel by these two scribes. More intensive collaboration is in evidence between the three named scribes[66] in those parts of the book where gatherings are shared. Comparison with Ó Concheanainn's Table B (Ó Concheanainn 1981, 19) suggests that there are six instances of this: in gathering i (Ó Droma and Mac Síthigh), xxiii (Ó Duibhgeannáin, Ó Droma, Mac Síthigh), xxiv (Ó Droma and Ó Duibhgeannáin), xxvii (Ó Droma and Ó Duibhgeannáin), xxviii (Ó Droma and Ó Duibhgeannáin), and xxxiv (Ó Droma and Ó Duibhgeannáin, on f. 247v). There is also the interesting case of f. 158, a singleton,[67] on which Mac Síthigh began (marked by a large decorated 'C') and wrote four columns of a prosodic tract which was continued in gathering xxvi (ff 159–67) by Ó Droma.

Probably the most notable instance of a shared gathering is that of xxiii, which is a ten, where the three scribes are involved together. On the first recto of the central bifolium (f. 140) Ó Droma takes over from Ó Duibhgeannáin,

[65] O'Curry remarks with regard to the missing f. [227] that it 'appears to have been torn out within, rather, a recent period' ('Catalogue' III, 755).

[66] This analysis is based on the general division of hands established by Ó Concheanainn, and does not take into account the relief scribes and secondary scribes identified in Elizabeth Duncan's contribution to the present volume (Chapter 10).

[67] It does not appear that this was originally conjugate with f. 167 (also a singleton), which would have made gathering xxvi a ten.

who has just completed the *Cóir Anmann*. Ó Droma supplies three texts from the Book of Glendalough (140ra6–141ra45) before a relief scribe takes over (141ra46-z) followed by Mac Síthigh to the end of the gathering, after which there is a chasm. These instances of in-quire collaboration support what one would conclude from an examination of the palaeography: that the writers of BB were working in concert on this huge project. It therefore supports Tomás Ó Concheanainn's conclusions with regard to collaboration in the writing of texts, and this can be further reinforced by an examination of the use of space in BB.

Excisions and the use of space

The first and last gatherings of any manuscript are frequently of extra interest, as it is in them that one expects to find signs of trauma, for example, or clues as to patterns to be found elsewhere in the work. BB does not disappoint in this regard. As indicated in the collation, the opening unit presents as a gathering of 10, with three leaves wanting. The excision of the first leaf of the book is one that drew the observation from Henry and Marsh-Micheli (1987, 799) that it must have been 'stolen because of some handsome initial'. If this was so, we know from Tipper's copy that this must have been the initial letter 'S' of the opening sentence 'Sex aetates sunt mundi'.[68] From the fact that the text survives in this and in Ó Neachtain's transcript, we can deduce that the page was excised after the 1720s.

We know that the conjugate of f. 3 was excised because a stub, measuring a generous 8 mm, is now to be seen between ff 7 and 8. The only sign of any writing here is a letter 't' in the margin of the recto of the stub, 35 mm from the lower edge, and examination shows that the excision took place along the line of the rule-prickings. Henry and Marsh-Micheli (1987, 799) suggest that this missing leaf contained an illustration facing the opening of *Lebor Gabála*. It is more likely, however, that this leaf had been left blank and is to be reckoned with the other excisions that may have been made *c.*1522 (see n. 4 above).

The same authors also suggest that the missing tenth leaf (f. [9], their pp 17–18) between what are now f. 8 and f. 10 was also excised 'probably because [it] proved too tempting for a collector'. In this case, however, it is clear that this was a textual folio, as Richard Tipper was able to transcribe its contents in

[68] TCD MS 1295 (H.2.4), p. 1. Tipper does not attempt to replicate the decorated initials in BB. Ó Neachtain, on the other hand, has an elaborate initial 'S' (TCD MS 1289, p. 1) but his efforts at copying other initials in BB do not inspire confidence in the accuracy of his reproductions.

1727, as noted in the RIA *Catalogue*. As this leaf was in all probability the conjugate of the missing f. [1], the excision of the latter would have loosened the former, which might have been lost subsequently, if indeed the entire gathering was not loose enough to allow the removal of the bifolium intact.

Moving to the final gathering, written entirely by Ó Duibhgeannáin according to Ó Concheanainn: we might call this the Alexander gathering, as it contains the History and the Epistle within a single unit. It is unique in BB because of the density of scribal annotation that it contains, showing that it was collated with another copy of the History after writing. The structure of the gathering is an outer bifolium containing within it a four and a two. This suggests, first, some uncertainty on the part of the scribe as to how many leaves would be needed to accommodate the text; second, that this was intended to be what it is today—the closing section of the Book of Ballymote as planned; and third, that the Epistle is to be regarded as a short filler-item, used to complete the gathering when the writing of the main text had been finished at f. 274v13. The epistle ends at f. 275r11, and the remainder of the folio has been cut away in piecemeal fashion.

The cutting away of blank sections of the end-leaf of a gathering occurs elsewhere in this section of the manuscript and may possibly date to the sixteenth century (n. 4). It draws our attention to a feature throughout the manuscript, namely the sense of opulence conveyed by the use of space, or the non-use of space, internally and at the end of gatherings, a feature shared with the Book of Lecan. There are many instances of this in BB, two typical and outstanding examples occurring at ff 62v and 112v. Folio 62 is the first leaf of gathering ix, the last section of Mac Síthigh's initial contribution to the manuscript. Here he brings an end to the Síl Muireadhaigh section of the genealogies by adding[69] contemporary information 'nu[a]if[h]iadnaisi' (62ra20) that culminates in the reference (62rv) to Toirdhealbhach Óg (Ó Conchubhair) as King of Connacht at the time of writing of this part of the book in the house of Tomaltach mac Taidhg; this is hardly a colophon but rather a sign that the text is petering out. The remainder of the page is left blank, and the next text, the Í Fhiachrach section, is begun by Mac Síthigh on the following recto (f. 63r). In Irish book tradition, this is where we expect to find scribal and non-scribal notes and comments—where there is spare space—and another example of this is f. 180r, between the end of *Auraicept*

[69] It is not clear what *RIA Cat. Ir. MSS* 1631 means by 'added at a later date', as the text seems continuous here.

na nÉces and the beginning of *Uraicecht Becc*, where the later hand records the purchase of the book from Mac Donnchaidh in 1522.

The second notable example of the luxury of the blank space as evidenced in BB is f. 112v. This is the verso of the fourth leaf of a double bifolium or gathering of four (gathering xvii) containing the genealogies of the Corcu Loígde. The end of the Ó hEidirsceóil genealogy occupies just 23 lines of the only column on the page. This is part of the second of Mac Síthigh's contributions to the manuscript, and he leaves this page blank, anticipating further additions, perhaps, but also certainly so that he can begin the excerpts from the 'Breatnochas' or the *Historia Brittonum* on the opening recto of the next gathering (f. 113r).

It is not surprising to find that some of these spaces coincide with changes of scribal hand. For instance, the change from the Ogham section (Ó Droma) to the *Uraicecht Becc* (Ó Duibhgeannáin) towards the middle of gathering xxviii, mentioned already, is accompanied by a blank leaf (f. 180). In the ninth gathering, also mentioned already, the final folio—what must have been f. [69]—is missing. As the text breaks off at the end of the second column on f. 68v, one could assume that these Uí Mhaine genealogies were continued in BB as they were in Lecan, and that a single folio of BB would have been sufficient to contain the remaining text. (The Tipper transcript breaks off at the same point (TCD 1295, p. 232), showing that the leaf was lost before his time.) We see further from the next folio in the sequence, f. 70r, where Ó Duibhgeannáin takes over from Mac Síthigh, that he does so not on the first column but on the second. In other words, Mac Síthigh and Ó Duibhgeannáin, working together, were allowing for additional matter to emerge—'nuaifhiadhnaisi' perhaps—which would be added to Mac Síthigh's section. One might go further and surmise that perhaps the missing f. [69] did not have the end of the text, but that, for whatever reason, Mac Síthigh did actually stop at the end of 68v, leaving [69] blank to receive the end of the text, which was never added, the blank page being eventually excised for use in some other context.

An exact parallel to this is presented at the end of gathering xxiv, where the *Banshenchas* breaks off on f. 156vb, and this is followed by a blank singleton (f. 157), to the verso of which a second copy of some material on f. 158 was later added. As with gathering ix, the Tipper transcript breaks off at the same point (TCD MS 1295, p. 604), but judging by the related text in Lecan a single folio would accommodate what is missing from the *Banshenchas* in BB. The conclusion must again be that either a further leaf is missing between 156 and 157, or 157 was intended to accommodate the end of the text, but

this did not materialise. Again, this happens at a point where one scribe hands over to another: Ó Duibhgeannáin writing the *Banshenchas* and Mac Síthigh starting the treatise on prosody on f. 158 before handing over to Ó Droma after one folio. Variations on this situation occur elsewhere in the manuscript.[70]

Unusually, the final leaf of gathering xxxiv is both missing and passed over in the foliation. This comes after the end of *Merugud Uilixis*, completed by Ó Duibhgeannáin, after which f. 248v is blank save for jottings, and the missing folio would then have followed but may have been cut away prior to foliation; this missing folio must also have been blank. Ó Droma then takes over at f. 249, beginning gathering xxxv and *Imthechta Aeniasa*.

The leaving of blank spaces gives an unfinished aspect to BB in places, but it shows us that availability of writing material was not a concern to those involved. The history of the Irish book tells us that, generally speaking, scribes abhor blank spaces within the text-frame, and filler-items abound in such situations in order to maximise the use of the valuable material that was vellum. In BB, however, there is a sense of opulence. Furthermore, in the use of space at the point where scribal hands change we find clear evidence for a concentration of planning and consultation between the makers of this manuscript.

Conclusion

The value placed on BB in 1522 should not really surprise us. It is, by any standards, a formidable codex about which much remains to be said. Of all the learned people who came into contact with it during its later history, up to and including the nineteenth century, modern scholars are most indebted to Eugene O'Curry. To his analysis of the manuscript, for instance, is due the number of blank parchment leaves that were inserted to mark chasms when the manuscript was rebound in the nineteenth century. Like Charles O'Conor before and Seosamh Ó Longáin after him, O'Curry was both custodian of and participant in the tradition to which he was providing scholarly commentary. This gave him an insider's understanding of texts that impels us always to give his views serious consideration.

It is with one of his interpretations that I wish to conclude. It concerns the record of transfer on f. 180r of BB from Ruaidhrí Mac Donnchaidh to Aodh Ó Domhnaill in 1522, referred to at the beginning of this chapter. The

[70] In the case of the missing f. [129], which appears to have been a singleton, we know from the Tipper transcript that it contained text. Here again, as Mac Síthigh finishes his text on the sons of Eóghan mac Murchadha, Ó Duibhgeannáin leaves a blank page (f. 130r) and begins the History of the Hebrews on f. 130v.

entry states: 'Is e in tAed sin fuair in lebarsa 7 do gab se he a seacht fichid loilgeac o Mac Dunnchaidh co cead da cloinn 7 da brathribh co haentadhach.' Ostensibly, it bears witness to a supreme act of honesty and generosity on the part of Ó Domhnaill, marred somewhat by the derogatory tone of the scribe in his reference to the transaction as 'ceannach lebair o tuata'. O'Curry, who was very familiar with the tradition of late medieval legal documents, knew well that the transfers of property that are recorded in those deeds may conceal subtexts and subtleties that require much elucidation. In this instance, O'Curry was aware that the previous Mac Donnchaidh had been killed in 1516 by Ó Domhnaill's agent, Donnchadh Ó Baoighill,[71] and O'Curry extrapolated from that as follows:

> Thus we see that O'Donnell had the next Mac Donagh completely in his power, and we may fairly infer that he did not allow him to escape from his grasp without extracting a suitable ransom—that this ransom was fixed at seven score milch cows, or the Book of Ballymote, and that it was more convenient to Mac Donagh to give the Book, which, of the two, was more acceptable to O'Donnell .... It is evident from the very circumstantial manner in which the sale of this book is related in the above note that there were some people who thought that O'Donnell did not come fairly by it, else why was it found necessary to say that Mac Donagh's sons and brothers gave their unanimous consent to the transfer ...?[72]

In other words, Ó Domhnaill may never have paid the 140 milch cows, but rather Mac Donnchaidh handed over BB to secure his own liberty or protection. It is an interpretation that has much merit, and one that adds to the already colourful history of this great book.

[71] *AFM* s.a. 1516.
[72] O'Curry, 'Catalogue' III, 777.