

Script modification in late medieval Ireland: a
case-study of Tadhg Ua Ríghbhardáin
(fl. 1470s)



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SCRIPT MODIFICATION IN LATE MEDIEVAL IRELAND:
A CASE-STUDY OF TADHG UA RÍGHBHARDÁIN (FL. 1470S)

ABSTRACT¹

This article presents a palaeographical and codicological examination of RIA MS 3 B 22 and RIA MS 3 B 23, two fifteenth-century volumes thought to have originally belonged together, written by Tadhg Ua Ríghbhardáin. RIA MS 3 B 23 contains a copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght* and an interpolated copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid*, both of which display certain palaeographical ‘peculiarities’ not found elsewhere in either manuscript volume. According to Gwynn and Purton (1911–12), these ‘peculiarities’ were probably copied from an exemplar. It is argued here, however, that these ‘peculiarities’ were introduced by Ua Ríghbhardáin himself and that he was assisted by another scribe who also employed unique palaeographical features. It is shown that Ua Ríghbhardáin deviated from his typical graphic repertoire and consciously modified his script when copying these texts. An overview of script modification in medieval Ireland is offered first, outlining the sources from which letterform variations were derived and the purpose for which scribes used them. This is followed by a palaeographical study of Ua Ríghbhardáin’s main scribal characteristics and, in turn, the ‘peculiarities’ employed by him and his assistant. Lastly, palaeographical and codicological features in the two manuscripts are reconsidered and it is suggested that they may not have been associated until much later in their history, contrary to previous suggestions that the two originally formed a single codex.

¹I undertook the research for this article in 2020 at the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, during which time my colleague Dr Andrea Palandri was also working on Ua Ríghbhardáin’s manuscripts. This article has benefitted from our many enjoyable and constructive discussions about Ua Ríghbhardáin and his manuscripts. I am deeply grateful to Dr Palandri for his feedback on an earlier draft of this article, as well as his encouragement and support. A version of this paper was presented at the Tionól of the School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, in November 2021. I am grateful to Prof. Liam Breatnach, Prof. David Stifter and Dr Jürgen Uhlich for their valuable feedback. Finally, I am indebted to *Celtica*’s editors and the anonymous reader whose suggestions helped improve the overall structure and argument of the article. I alone take responsibility for any outstanding errors.

INTRODUCTION

TADHG UA RÍGHBHARDÁIN was a scribe who flourished in the 1470s and was responsible for compiling several manuscripts.² RIA MS 3 B 22 (cat. no. 1226; hereafter B) and RIA MS 3 B 23 (cat. no. 1227; hereafter T) are among those attributed to this scribe.³ These two volumes are important sources for the study of the Early Irish language and the history of religion in medieval Ireland. B contains a range of devotional and homiletic texts as well as a copy of the Irish translation of *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, another copy of which is in TCD MS H 2.12, no. 2 (1303), also written by Ua Ríghbhardáin. T is frequently referred to as the Tallaght Codex (TC).⁴ It contains a copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght*, which is a group of anecdotes that relates the teachings and customs of Máel Ruain, the first abbot of Tallaght, and his pupil Máel Díthruib, of Terryglass.⁵ It also includes a copy of the *Old Irish Table of Penitential Commutations* (Binchy 1962), the sole surviving copy of the *Old Irish Penitential* (Gwynn 1914; with revised translation by D. A. Binchy in Bieler 1963: 258–77), and a copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid* (Hull 1968).

As well as being of literary and linguistic value, T's copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght* is noteworthy for its unusual palaeographical features, which Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) described as follows:

The script differs in certain respects from that employed in the rest of the volume. The chief peculiarities are (1) an unusual form of *d*, closely resembling *a*, with which it may easily be confused; (2) an unusual form of *m*, used mainly on p. 33, but occurring two or three times in later pages: it resembles a capital *H*, having the cross-bar depressed in the middle; (3) a contraction, consisting of *t* with a wavy stroke over it, which stands sometimes for *tir* (*ter*), sometimes for *irt* (*ert* ?); (4) the spelling, which is described below. For the reasons given above, however, we must assume that our document is written by the same scribe as the rest of the volume. The peculiarities just noted are probably copied by him from the archetype which he had before him.

The *RIA Cat.* draws attention to similar features in *Apgitir Chrábaid* (pp. 47a22–51a16, T), which is interpolated into T's copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght*.⁶ Apart from these brief observations, these particular aspects of

²See Palandri (2021) for a detailed description of Ua Ríghbhardáin's manuscripts and a study of the scribe's linguistic and orthographical tendencies.

³For a full description of B and T and their contents, see *RIA Cat.* pp. 3357–60 and 3360–4, respectively. See also Palandri (2021: 135–6) for a discussion of the two manuscripts.

⁴See Follett (2006: 102); McLaughlin (2012: 113–14). Palandri (2021: 135), following Follett (2013–14: 222), refers to both B and T as TC for convenience.

⁵Ed. and trans. Gwynn and Purton (1911–1912). For a discussion of the other extant manuscript witnesses of *The Monastery of Tallaght* and their relationship to each other, see Follett (2006: 102–14).

⁶See *RIA Cat.* p. 3362.

Ua Ríghbhardáin's handwriting have not been discussed in any further detail elsewhere, to my knowledge.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to fully describe these 'peculiarities' and place them in the wider context of scribal writing practices in late medieval Ireland. I argue that these features were not copied from Ua Ríghbhardáin's exemplar, as previously suggested. Instead, I propose that they belonged to the scribe's own intentional modified script. To begin with, I examine the history of the unusual letterforms which form the basis of Ua Ríghbhardáin's altered script. I then give a palaeographical examination of the general graphic characteristics of Ua Ríghbhardáin's main hand followed by an analysis of the 'peculiarities' in his diversified script in his copies of *The Monastery of Tallaght* and *Apgitir Chrábaid*. The article concludes by reconsidering materialistic aspects of B and T to establish the manuscript context of the two copies and to understand Ua Ríghbhardáin's motivations for writing them in a different script.

SCRIPT MODIFICATION IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Gaelic National minuscule assumed its fully realised form by the end of the twelfth century.⁷ Manuscripts dating from the middle of the fourteenth century, produced under the patronage of the nobility, show a continuity in the use of this minuscule script.⁸ This remained the dominant script in Irish language manuscripts for centuries to come.⁹ However, despite this script's apparent regularity in form and character, it will be seen in this article that a scribe could consciously alter his book hand by incorporating rare variant letterforms and/or switching letters based on the Latin alphabet for those of other alphabets.

Palaeographical studies on script modification have been published in adjacent fields. Scholars such as M. B. Parkes and Julia Crick, for example, have explored the phenomenon of scribes modifying their script in an archaising

⁷For the development of Gaelic National minuscule from the beginning of the eleventh to the end of the twelfth century, see Duncan (2010).

⁸The lack of manuscripts surviving from the thirteenth century hardly reflects a break in the Irish manuscript tradition nor does Gaelic National minuscule represent a revived script in the fourteenth century onwards (see for instance O'Sullivan 2005: 540). A substantial corpus of Irish literature dates to the thirteenth century, albeit surviving in later manuscripts, and must have been written down initially in manuscripts contemporary with that period (Ó Macháin 2018: 236 n. 46). For the pitfalls of positivistic approaches to book culture and palaeography, see Sharpe (2010: esp. 10–11).

⁹Bieler (1949: 283) described the development of Irish script between the thirteenth to the sixteenth century as a period of 'standardization' and that from the seventeenth century onwards as one of 'fossilization'. This statement gives the impression that there was no significant change or development to the script over the course of the centuries. But, as Sharpe (1986) pointed out, consideration has yet to be given to the variations and grades in minuscule from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.

fashion in English manuscripts.¹⁰ However, an examination of script modification in late medieval Ireland has not been undertaken.¹¹ Any discussion of this topic in an Irish context is not without its caveats. The most notable limitation is that a comprehensive study of Gaelic National minuscule and scribal practice from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century is still required. The scarcity of surviving material from the thirteenth century complicates any such study. Therefore, any attempt to identify script modification in an Irish context can be difficult because it is unclear whether the script that a scribe writes in reflects palaeographical continuity, scribal learned influence or an archaising tendency.

Irish scribes modified their script in the eleventh and twelfth centuries by incorporating variant letterforms and auxiliary components inherited from earlier models of script, such as Insular minuscule. For example, in the Book of Leinster (TCD MS H 2.18; 1339), hands T3 and F both write a rare half-uncial **d**.¹² This half-uncial **d** is also written in the twelfth- or thirteenth-century Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 460, which is written in 'a curiously artificial air'.¹³ This letterform emulates the half-uncial **d**, with a rounded bowl, found in earlier gospel books or psalters written in Hybrid minuscule.¹⁴ It consists of an angular bowl that bites a tall vertical ascender, making it very similar in appearance to a ligature **cl**, and is topped with an incomplete serif. The hands in the Book of Leinster do not use this half-uncial letterform consistently, however, and more frequently write the more commonly used rounded **d** with an angled and curved ascender or rounded and flat-topped **d**. By the time Gaelic National minuscule was fully developed by the end of the twelfth century, a round flat-topped **d** and a **d** with an angled curved ascender was the norm and this half-uncial **d** is rarely used. However, it reappears in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts, examples of which will be discussed below.

¹⁰See, for example, Parkes (1997); Crick (2011; 2015). According to Parkes (1997: 127; 1999: 141), an archaising hand aimed to imitate certain letterforms and auxiliary elements based on an earlier model of script, but quite often the ductus was not accurately executed, resulting in an artificial appearance of the written letter or text. In order to determine an archaising hand, letterforms which are no longer current in the contemporary script need to be identified and, in reverse, letter-shapes and abbreviations which would not be expected in an earlier script need to be found.

¹¹The recent article by Duncan (2018) is an important contribution to our understanding of the differing formalities in Gaelic National minuscule in the fourteenth century.

¹²O'Sullivan (1966: 11–12); see also Duncan (2012: 32–3). Hand F writes the stylistic half-uncial **d** in the following instances: *rigdacht*, 163a13; *tholгда*, 163b19; *Dagda*, 164a9; *Dagdo*, 164a25; *Dagdai*, 164a38; *Moigda*, 164b5; *coigrád*, 164b19; *nDagdai*, 164b34; *Dagda*, 164b48; *Dagda*, 246a8; *Dagdai*, 249a31; *gradugud*, 271b18; *gradugud*, 271b19 (versus the more common Irish minuscule **d**, with a curved ascender, e.g. *Dagdai*, 164a8; *Dagda*, 164a28, *séгда*, 250a48, *rigdomna*, 273a30). Hand T3 writes this half-uncial **d** less frequently, viz. *aireгда*, 218b18; *rigda*, 217b15; *áes gráda*, 217b30; *aireгда*, 233a3; *degda*, 233a24; *argda*, 233a29.

¹³O'Sullivan (2005: 544). See also Byrne (1979: 5, 15 and 27), who drew attention to the apparent archaising hand in MS Laud Misc. 460. He also noted two similar instances in British Library, MS Harley 1023 and 1802, which show distinct reminiscences, both in script and decoration, of the 9th century Book of Armagh (TCD MS 52).

¹⁴See, for instance, in the script used for the *Hebraicum* text in 'The Rouen Psalter' (Duncan 2005: 27). For Insular Hybrid minuscule, which is a mixture of half-uncial and minuscule letterforms, see Brown (1993: 201–2, 209–11); cf. Dumville (1999: 7).

Medieval Irish scribes also diversified their writing by using mixed scripts. This was a practice whereby the occasional letter from an alphabet other than Latin was written.¹⁵ This quite often involved the use of Greek letters.¹⁶ One such letterform was an artificial Greek letter referred to as the ‘M-siglum’, which arose without direct contact with the Greek East and may have originated with Irish scribes.¹⁷ This, along with other majuscule Greek letters such as Greek majuscule **H** (eta) for **e**, were used for iconographic, ornamental or cryptic purposes in early medieval manuscripts.¹⁸ Greek characters could, for instance, have an iconographic value in *nomina sacra*, such as the use of the majuscule delta symbol in *Deus* and *Deum* in the Book of Durrow (TCD MS 57, fol. 193r).¹⁹ Greek transliteration was also used to signify scribal erudition. For instance, Ferdomnach wrote Greek letterforms in numerous scribal colophons, marginal headings and words in the Book of Armagh (TCD MS 52).²⁰ The late eleventh- or early twelfth-century UCD-OFM MS A 2, which contains a copy of the *Liber Hymnorum*, has Greek Ψ for Latin *ps* in *Psalmo* (leg. *psalmo*), p. 15, l. 21.²¹ In the Annals of Tigernach in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 502, Latin names are sometimes written in Greek letters (Best 1914: 116), for instance: fols 4vb25; 7rb19; 7rb30; 7va10, perhaps for ornamental emphasis.

The use of mixed scripts continued into the late medieval period. Alphabetic tables, including Greek, Hebrew and Egyptian alphabets, are often presented

¹⁵For a discussion of mixed scripts in early Irish manuscripts and its cultural significance, see Tilghman (2011).

¹⁶On the Greek language and alphabet in the early medieval Irish period, see Moran (2011: 174–8; 2012).

¹⁷See Berschin (1982; 1988; 2020). The earliest written example of this grapheme is found in the Latin *Paternoster*, transliterated in Greek, in Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, MS Gen. 1, dated between 688 and 713. It is given as a variant of **m** in the Greek majuscule alphabetic table in *Formae Litterarum secundum graecos* associated with Alcuin (Vienna ONB, lat. 795, fol. 19r, dated to c. 799). The grapheme was also used as an abbreviation for *magister*. The earliest instance of this usage is found in Aldhelm’s *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedom regulis*. Aldhelm wrote that he used this grapheme as an abbreviation for *magister* in a dialogue between teacher and pupil. The pupil used the majuscule delta grapheme for *discipulus* (for the passage in question, see Ehwald (1961: 81–2); trans. Lapidge and Rosier (1985: 195)). This abbreviation for *magister* is found in several twelfth-century Irish manuscripts written in a school setting, e.g. British Library MS Eger-ton 3323 (see Bieler and Bischoff (1956: 213 n. 1); cf. Ó Néill (1997: 30)) and Bodleian MS Auct. F III.15. The siglum is used as a construe mark in the twelfth-century schoolbook, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, sub Pluteus 78.19, fol. 2r (see Oskamp 1997: 191–7; cf. Ó Néill 1997: 30).

¹⁸Greek script could also be used for emphasis, as well as marking foreign words (Moran 2012: 175 n. 18).

¹⁹One might also consider in the same instance the borrowing of Greek letters for the Latin *nomina sacra*, especially *ihs* ‘Jesus’, where *h* (eta) is used instead of *e*, and the use of the chi-rho in *xps* ‘Christus’. Similarly, see for instance, the Stowe Missal (RIA MS D ii 3), fol. 67v7 *Alpha ocus omega*, with *omega* written with Greek minuscule ω (Nooij 2021: 239).

²⁰See, for example, the Latin subscription *amen* on fol. 52v (cf. Sharpe 1982: 13). See Moran (2011: 35 n. 37) for further examples in the manuscript. This manuscript also contains a copy of the Latin *Paternoster* transliterated in Greek script on fol. 36ra. Moran (2011: 36) has shown that this is a transliteration based on alphabetic tables rather than reflecting a knowledge of Greek as a spoken language in early medieval Ireland.

²¹See Bieler (1948: 188). This practice is also found in earlier manuscripts, for instance, the 8th- or 9th-century Stowe Missal (RIA MS D II 3; cat. no. 1238), fol. 26v.

alongside learned texts such as *Auraicept na nÉces*, *In Lebor Ogaim* and *Bríatharogaim* in the late medieval Irish manuscript tradition.²² The inclusion of such alphabetic tables together with grammatical texts in late medieval Irish manuscripts attests to the learned professions’ engagement with such material.²³ These groups of texts likely formed part of the medieval Irish educational curriculum and would have provided medieval Irish scribes with a rich repertoire of different graphemes they could avail of in various circumstances.²⁴ Two graphemes that are noteworthy in the present context include those used to represent Greek *delta* and *mu*.

The Greek letter *delta* is represented in alphabetic tables in early medieval Latin manuscripts by majuscule Δ, rather than a minuscule δ. This continues to be the practice in the later medieval Irish copies of the alphabetic tables in the Book of Ballymote and the Book of Lecan, as seen in the table below.

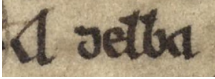
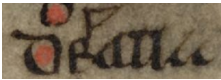
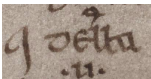
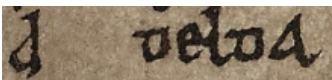
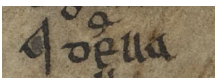
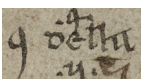
RIA MS 23 P 12 (Book of Ballymote), fol. 175v	
RIA MS 23 P 2 (Book of Lecan), fol. 158ra	
TCD MS H 2.16 (1318; Yellow Book of Lecan), col. 535	
TCD MS H 3.18 (1337; ‘Máel Íosa’s book’), vol. 3, p. 35	
British Library, MS Egerton 88, fol. 71r	
TCD MS H 2.15B (1317), p. 199	

Table 1. Representation of *delta* in the late medieval Irish copies of the Greek alphabetic table.

The scribes in the Book of Ballymote and the Book of Lecan are conservative in their execution of the grapheme Δ. In three of the manuscripts, the angular aspect of Δ is retained and a descender extends below the triangular body, viz. in

²²Such tables are found in early computistical manuscripts on the Continent during the Carolingian period and were derived from *De inventione linguarum* (or *litterarum*) (Moran 2012: 174–5). For a study of a manuscript from the earlier medieval period containing such alphabets, see Derolez (1951). For a discussion of the *De inventione* text and alphabetic tables in medieval Ireland, see Hayden (2016: 46–9).

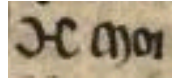
²³See Hayden (2011).

²⁴Alphabetic tables are found at the end of the longer recension of *Auraicept na nÉces*, namely, British Library, MS Egerton 88, fol. 71r; the Yellow Book of Lecan (TCD MS H 2.16; 1318), col. 535; and the Book of Lecan (RIA MS 23 P 2), fol. 158r. A copy is also found in the Book of Ballymote (RIA MS 23 P 12), fol. 175vb where it is interpolated into the copy of the *Auraicept*. Another copy of the alphabetic tables is preserved in TCD MS H 3.18 (1337), p. 35, following a copy of the *Lebor Ogaim* and the *Briatharogaim*.

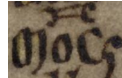
the Yellow Book of Lecan, Egerton and H 2.15B. The example in ‘Máel Íosa’s book’, however, is of particular interest.²⁵ In this instance, the scribe writes a half-uncial **d** rather than Δ. The scribe must have considered this a higher-grade variant letterform compared with the more common round flat-topped **d** or straight **d** with curved ascender.

The ‘M-siglum’, discussed previously, continues to be used in the later medieval Irish copies of the Greek alphabetic table:

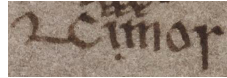
RIA MS 23 P 12 (Book of Ballymote),
fol. 175v



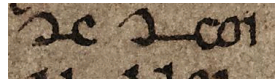
RIA MS 23 P 2 (Book of Lecan), fol. 158ra



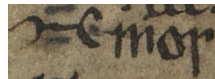
TCD MS H 2.16 (1318; Yellow Book of
Lecan), col. 535



TCD MS H 3.18 (1337), p. 35



British Library, MS Egerton 88, fol. 71r



TCD MS H 2.15B (1317), p. 199

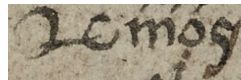


Table 2. Representation of *mu* in the late medieval
Irish copies of the Greek alphabetic table.

Such variant letterforms are particularly noticeable in late medieval Irish medical and legal manuscripts. This half-uncial **d** is witnessed on occasion in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century legal manuscripts, where it is used for ornamental purposes or in more formal executions of minuscule script.²⁶ Further examples will be discussed below. The ‘M-siglum’ was also popular among the medical and legal scribes. NLI MS G 8 was compiled by Éumann Ó Bolgaoi, with the assistance of several others, in 1548. Ní Shéaghda (1967: 41–2) described this as a ‘pocket-size medical encyclopaedia’ intended as a teacher’s notebook and written by a whole school. Ó Bolgaoi intermittently wrote the Greek-style **m** in a text on the elements of human nature, e.g. *do mhuírach*,

²⁵For a description of this particular legal miscellany known as ‘Máel Íosa’s book’, see Kobel (2020).

²⁶I have noted the following examples, for instance, in ‘Máel Íosa’s book’ (TCD MS H 3.18 (1339), vols 2–4, pp. 1–87), e.g. *da-ruacht*, p. 47b37; *nibdar*, p. 40 marg. supr. and as a capital letter in *Do-luidh*, p. 38a2; in ‘Conla’s book’ (TCD MS H 3.18 (1337), vol. 13, pp. 353–98), which contains a copy of the first and part of the middle third of *Senchas Már* and is written in a neat and formal hand, e.g. *tuaid*, p. 385b1 (top-line), *Dia n-airbiatar*, p. 389a23 (rubricated capital letter), *Dia rotechtaitger*, p. 391b16 (rubricated capital letter); and in TCD MS H 4.22 (1363), vol. 4, e.g. *dano*, p. 42.10; *a delba*, p. 42.12; *Taidel*, p. 42.12.

p. 134v6; *domhain*, 134v10; *a anam*, 134v15; *mad*, 134v18. In the fifteenth-century medical manuscript Kings Inns MS 15, Maeleachlainn mac an Leagha uses the 'Greek' style **m** in his scribal notes, which are written in various cryptic styles.²⁷ In a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century legal miscellany, the scribe Donnchadh writes the Greek **m** as a *littera notabilior* in two instances.²⁸ Thus, the substitution of Latin for Greek letterforms, particularly the 'M-siglum', was employed either as a practice in a school setting, as a mark of erudition, in cryptic writing or for ornamental emphasis, following similar practices in earlier manuscripts.

A PALAEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HANDWRITING IN B AND T

This section examines the handwriting of Ua Ríghbhardáin, beginning with a description of the characteristic features of his main hand in B and T. This is then followed by an analysis of Ua Ríghbhardáin's 'peculiarities', which were outlined by Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 118).²⁹

Ua Ríghbhardáin's main hand consists of a generally compressed and angular script that is neat and upright in aspect. The closed allograph **a** has an angular bowl and a descender that frequently extends below the base-line and terminates with a foot serif, e.g., *an spirat*, 90a11 (B); *labrad*, 45b3 (B); *aidchi*, 18a2 (T), etc. The horizontal top of the round-backed **d** curves slightly upward at the left in *foighidi*, 7a10 (B); *dib*, 43b2 (B); *duine*, 79a5 (T), etc. A trailing **d** with a rounded bowl and a left-leaning ascender is used on occasion, for instance, in *lenad*, 43b25 (B); *cucad*, 41a8 (B); *snathaide*, 44b1 (B); *creid*, 66a4 (T), etc. The tall **e**, sometimes consisting of two pen-strokes, has an angular hat in *teind*, 55a18 (B); *denam*, 25a13 (B); *as-bert*, 33b1 (T); *nemda*, 65b4 (T); *n-aithneda*, 65b8 (T); *an ben*, 79a1 (T), etc. The tongue of **f** sits on the baseline and the hook usually extends above the height of the following letter in *fulang*, 25b1 (B); *fuil*, 65b16 (T); *fuilid*, 65b17 (T), etc. The letter **g** has typically a fully closed tail and the flat horizontal top sometimes curves slightly upwards to the right in *tigi*, 25a11 (B); *foigidech*, 45b12 (B); *gabala*, 18b20 (T); *in gini*, 33a11 (T), etc. The bowl of **p** is not fully closed in *peine*, 5a5 (B); *plaineid*, 40a17 (B); *pecad*, 42b12 (B); *corpaib*, 2a7 (T); *pecach*, 65a6 (T), etc. The **r** tends to have a rounded shoulder with an outward flick at the end of the down-stroke in *fúair*, 14b3 (B); *greni*, 42b8 (B); *roibi*, 63b22 (B); *mair*, 4a15 (T);

²⁷Walsh (1947: 211–13) transliterated these cryptic scribal notes, changing the graphemes from Ogham and other alphabets, into Latin script. Another example of this Greek **m** is found in a text written in cipher in the fifteenth-century NLS MS Adv. 72.1.5, fol. 7rb16–7va8. Bischoff (1990: 177 and n. 94) draws attention to the use of foreign alphabets, including 'the Greek M', in ciphers and secret writing, especially in German and English manuscripts, but does not refer to the practice in Irish language manuscripts.

²⁸See TCD MS H 3.18 (1337), vol. 9, p. 204, ll. 13 and 16. A similar use of this Greek **m** as a *littera notabilior* is found in a copy of *Togail Troí* held in the sixteenth-century manuscript fragment, now bound with the Book of Leinster (TCD MS H 2.18; 1339), i.e. *IMtusa*, p. 398b27 fcs.; cf. the regular *littera notabilior* in *IMthusu*, p. 407a38 fcs. The Greek **m** is substituted for Latin minuscule **m** in a small legal miscellany, namely, TCD MS H 3.18 (1337), vol. 12, e.g. p. 324.10.

²⁹See Palandri (2021: 143) for a general overview of Ua Ríghbhardáin's main hand.

brathrib, 23a34 (T); *co hiarmergi*, 40a11 (T), etc. The uncial **r** has an angular arch in *oritur*, 11b1 (B); *legthar*, 65b1 (T), etc. Wedged serifs are found on the ascenders of **b**, **h**, **l** and the tops of minims. The **t** normally has a flat horizontal top-stroke. The distinctive elongated *us*-compendium begins above the height of the preceding letter, e.g. *parrdus*, 25a4 (B) *flathamnus*, 41a1 (B); *parrdus*, 2a18 (T); *ocus*, 33a6 (T); *tusu*, 39b38 (T); *cindus*, 65b4 (T), etc. The horizontal stroke of the *et*-compendium points downwards to the left and flicks up at the tip in *ocus*, 20a5 (B); *ocus*, 4b10 (T), etc. The **æ** ligature consists of the e-component written as a ligature on the back stroke of the fully closed angular **a** in *sæthur*, 14a5 (B); *dænna*, 42a7 (B); *ro scaeil*, 1b18 (T); *an gæth*, 63a24 (T), etc. Biting frequently occurs between **d** and **o**,³⁰ e.g. *doib*, 81a8 (B), *do*, 82b1 (B), *do*, 33a3 (T),³¹ and **d** and **e**, e.g. *de*, 90a1 (B).

On occasion, Ua Ríghbhardáin's main hand shows a change in aspect and variation in letterforms. For instance, he reverts to a less formal and cursive style in the marginal notes and quatrains.³² Change in the appearance of script also occurs elsewhere as a result of writing on an uneven writing surface or a change in the nib of the pen, e.g. 45a7–21,³³ 81b7–35 and 82a1–3 (B). On occasion, a distinctive curved suprascript **i** (rounded to the point of resembling an **o**) is written, instead of the common straight suprascript **i** with a serif that Ua Ríghbhardáin uses elsewhere, for example, *crithnugud*, 18a1 (B); *fria*, 28a7 (T); *frisa*, 33a17 (T); *fri*, 51a2, 14 (×2), 15 (×2), etc. (T). A curved suprascript **i** of the *air*-compendium is also seen in Rennes Metropole MS 598, fol. 89ra10 (*tri*), another manuscript attributed to Ua Ríghbhardáin.³⁴ This feature is found in earlier manuscripts such as in the twelfth-century *Lebor na hUidre*, e.g. *fri*, 16a37.³⁵ Ua Ríghbhardáin also uses an angular horned **a** with a tall straight ascender, e.g. *fola*, 36a28, *anois*, 37a2, *móra*, 37a3, *anoraigh*, 37b5 (B). Some variations suggest an experimental style or perhaps embellishing tendency. For example, a curved capital **o**, 36a24, 37a5; 37a11; 37a15; 37a17; 37b4; 37b12; 37b17 (in B only); an unusual rounded **d** consisting of two pen-strokes, e.g. *umad*, 36a15, *gidhbhe*, 37b8 and *pennaid*, 37b8 (in B only); and the letter **g** with a curved top extending upwards to the left, *ceanglaigh*, 38b16 (B); *sluag*, 78 sup. (T).

Having examined the characteristics and variation displayed by Ua Ríghbhardáin's main hand, it is now possible to examine the 'peculiarities' in T's *The Monastery of Tallaght*, which were identified by Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120), and in *Apgitir Chrúbaid*, as was noted in the *RIA Cat.* p. 3362.

³⁰For a description of the palaeographical feature of biting, see, for instance, Bischoff (1990: 130).

³¹This instance noted here is an exception. Biting of **d** and **o** is not generally found on pp. 33–44 and 46–52 in T because Ua Ríghbhardáin employs predominantly an angular-bowled **d** with a straight ascender. This variant letterform is discussed in more detail below.

³²Note, for instance, the embellished ascenders of **d** in the marginal quatrains on pp. 16 inf., 17 inf., and the embellished left-leaning ascender of **d** and the elongated descender of the **g** in the marginal note on p. 78 sup. (T).

³³The *RIA Cat.* suggests this is a different hand (*RIA Cat.* p. 3357).

³⁴For a discussion of this Rennes manuscript and its scribe, see Palandri (2021: 139–42).

³⁵For further examples, see Duncan (2015: 37).

(1) ‘an unusual form of *d*’

The first peculiarity that Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) highlighted was an unusual *d*. This letterform is in fact similar in morphology to the half-uncial *d* found in the Book of Leinster, discussed earlier. It consists of an angular bowl with a short straight ascender, topped with a wedged serif. However, sometimes the serif is forked or split, a contemporary feature influenced by continental script, e.g. *biaid*, p. 34a16 (seen in the first line in figure 1 below). The short ascender not only gives the letter an awkward appearance, but also makes it very similar in appearance to the letter *a*, to the modern reader at least. Ua Ríghbhardáin writes this letterform consistently throughout the copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght* as well as in the copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid*, rather than the prevalent round-backed uncial *d* or the trailing *d* with a curved and slanted ascender that he writes throughout the rest of B and T, as noted above, and which are the normal variants in contemporary Gaelic National minuscule. Ua Ríghbhardáin slips back to using the more common rounded *d* only on a rare occasion.³⁶

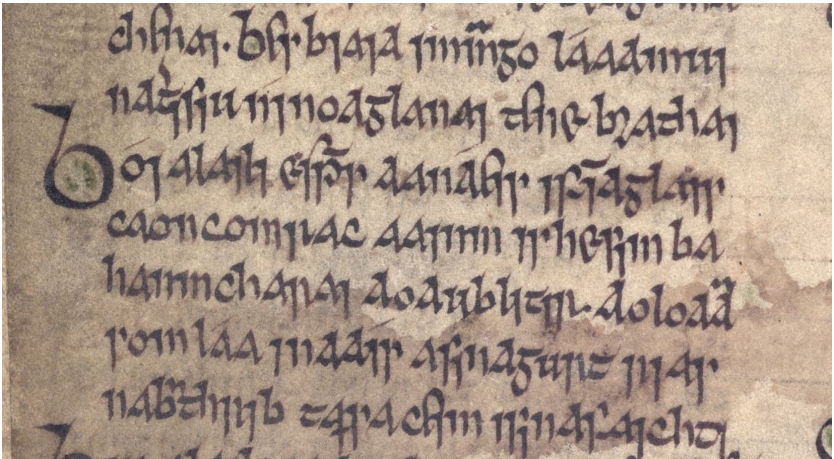


Fig. 1: RIA MS 3 B 23, p. 34a16–22.

Image courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy Library.

Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) suggested that Ua Ríghbhardáin probably copied this unusual *d* from the ‘archetype which he had before him’. If the suggestion is accepted that a scribe was influenced by the handwriting in his exemplar, such unusual letterforms might also be expected in the other copies transcribed from the same exemplar. Incomplete copies of *The Monastery of Tallaght* are found in three other manuscripts, viz., RIA MS 23 P 3 (cat. no. 1242; hereafter P), fol. 14v; London, British Library, MS Additional 30512

³⁶For instance, *accaldim*, 33a15; *chuincid*, 33a28; *do-bered*, 40a24; *do*, 33a3 (as noted in n. 31), etc.

(hereafter A), fol. 33v and RIA MS C i 2 (cat. no. 1234; hereafter C), fol. 38r–v.³⁷ Uilliam Mac an Leagha compiled P and A in 1467. C is a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century composite manuscript possibly compiled at a bardic school.³⁸ The copies in A, C and P closely follow T, but also contain passages not found in T. Follett (2006: 106) argued that A, C and P are not likely copied from T and that all four copies derive from a shared exemplar.

The anecdote concerning the monk and the devil in *The Monastery of Tallaght* is found in T, pp. 43b27–44a32, and C, fol. 38ra2–38rb23, but not in P.³⁹ The half-uncial **d** is used predominantly throughout the entire copy in T, including the anecdote. In C, however, only one instance occurs, where it is used as the initial letter of a new sentence in *Da-choid*, fol. 38rb6. Otherwise, the rounded **d** variant is used. Interestingly, the anecdote in C is followed by an imperfect copy of a grammatical tract concerning the vowels and consonants of the Latin alphabet in which the scribe writes the half-uncial **d** more frequently.⁴⁰ Therefore, the use of this stylistic variant **d** in separate texts in C points to an idiosyncratic, and perhaps eclectic, scribal approach in using this letterform rather than the scribe having copied it from an exemplar.

The half-uncial **d** is also the preferred variant used by Ua Ríghbhardáin in his copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid*.⁴¹ Another copy derived from the same exemplar is found in the composite manuscript Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 512, fols 37ra1–39ra12 (Ó Cuív 2001: 223–54). The Rawlinson scribe writes an angular half-uncial **d** but not with the same frequency as in Ua Ríghbhardáin's copy. These include, for instance, *discére*, 37rb24; *do-gni*, 37rb35; *daithfenn*, 37va17; *ced doda-ceil ced doda-faillsigader*, 37vb3 (see figure 2 below); *dond fírinde*, 37vb17; *do decmae*, 37vb17; *o duine*, 37vb37; *deuc*, 38ra1 (also in 3 B 23); *cride*, 38ra25 (but with round-backed **d** in *cride*, 38ra24); *ni benecndach*, 38rb34; *ding*, 38va16 (but with straight-backed **d** in *ding*, 38va15); *tiagdæ*, 38va31; *duine*, 38va36; *dendi*, 38va37; *dendi*, 38vb1; *do*, 38vb5 (here exceptionally executed with an open round bowl rather than an angular bowl elsewhere); *lind*, 38vb7 (but with round-backed **d** with a flat top in *lind*, 38vb6); *deid dus-ni*, 38vb9; *nad*, 38vb21; *isind í*, 39ra2; *dál*, 39ra9 (but with round-backed **d** with a flat top in *dal*, 39ra9; *dal*, 39ra10 (×2); *dal*, 39ra11. It is striking that the scribe conspicuously avoids the repeated use of the same letterform **d**. Instead he alternates variant letterforms when writing

³⁷For a more detailed discussion of all the manuscript witnesses, see Follett (2006: 104–8). Copies are also found in UCD OFM MS A 31.10 and Rome, St. Isidore's College, MS W 21.4. However, these are later adaptations, dated to the seventeenth century, and are not relevant for the present discussion.

³⁸RIA Cat. pp. 3414–18.

³⁹Bergin (1905) edited and translated the anecdote in C. Bauer (2018) edited and translated both C and T. Bauer (2018: 9–15) argued that C and T are independent copies. C also contains an anecdote concerning the anchorite named Laisrén but this does not contain any instances of the stylistic half-uncial **d**.

⁴⁰I have noted the following instances: *dia*, 39ra22; *Cred*, 39rb17; *Créd*, fol. 39va13 and *Cred*, fol. 39vb13 (written *plene*); *muid*, fol. 39vb24.

⁴¹Copies of *Apgitir Chrábaid* survive in eighteen manuscript witnesses, for which see Hull (1968: 45–8). According to Hull (1968: 55), the copies in T and British Library, MS Rawlinson B 512, fols 37r–39r, derive from the same exemplar.

this letter. The deliberate decision by the Rawlinson scribe to stylistically vary graphemes is perhaps indicative of a higher grade of minuscule.⁴²

The instances in which half-uncial **d** correlate in the same position in both copies in T and Rawl. are minimal, with the most striking example shown in figures 2 and 3 below. This correlation might support the suggestion that these letterforms were transcribed directly from a shared exemplar. However, the Rawl. scribe also writes this stylistic angular straight-backed half-uncial **d** in other texts in this gathering, e.g. *bid*, 39ra19; *Co naemdetar*, 39rb11; *dilachtai*, 40rb4; *doennachta*, 40rb29.⁴³ Therefore, this half-uncial **d** is more likely due to this scribe's own graphic practice rather than being copied from the exemplar.

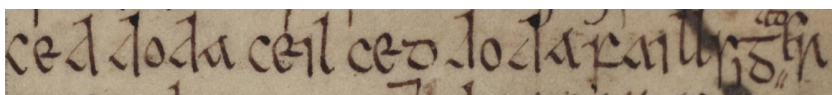


Fig. 2: Rawlinson B 512, fol. 37vb3.
Image courtesy of the Bodleian Library.

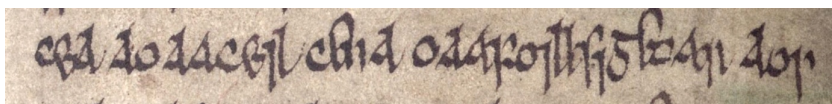


Fig. 3: RIA MS 3 B 23, p. 48b25.
Image courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy Library.

Ua Ríghbhardáin writes this peculiar angular half-uncial **d** mostly in his copies of *The Monastery of Tallaght* and *Apgitir Chrábaid*, and rarely in any other main text in B and T. However, he writes this letterform (instead of the dominant round-backed **d** with a flat top which he uses widely elsewhere) in several marginalia in T.⁴⁴ He also uses this letterform in a scribal note in another of his manuscripts, namely, Rennes Metropole MS 598, fol. 69r inf.: *Dardáein*.⁴⁵ The fact that Ua Ríghbhardáin writes this letterform in his marginalia in T and elsewhere suggests that this variant belongs to his graphemic repertoire, rather than him having transcribed it from his 'archetype'.

(2) 'an unusual form of m'

The second palaeographical 'peculiarity' that Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) identified in *The Monastery of Tallaght* was 'an unusual form of *m*' that resembles 'a capital H, having the cross-bar depressed in the middle'.

⁴²The practice of using variant letterforms to denote a higher grade of minuscule is found in eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts (see discussion in Duncan 2010: 282–3).

⁴³Best (1928: 397) also drew attention to a 'distinctive half-uncial d' in the copy *Betha Brigitte* (fols 31–5; esp. fols 31vb to 33vbz) which 'probably reflects the influence of an exemplar dating from the ninth century'. Cf. Ó Cuív (2001: 231). This letter is a cursive form and a crude, artificial imitation based on an earlier model of script, rather than copied from an exemplar.

⁴⁴See, for instance, *ind*; *dixit*; *nabad*; *rád*; *nád*, *do*, p. 13 inf.; *dian*; *cid*; *níbad*; *do*, p. 15 inf.; *ernad cen fiadna*, 23a20; *cid*; *lebud*, p. 23 inf.

⁴⁵I am grateful to Dr Palandri for bringing this example to my attention.

Ua Ríghbhardáin writes this character sporadically at the beginning of *The Monastery of Tallaght* and in two further instances later on in the text (I list all examples below). Ua Ríghbhardáin does not use this letterform in *Apgitir Chrábaid*. This letterform is in fact the artificial Greek character for **m** (discussed earlier in this article). Ua Ríghbhardáin writes this as a substitute for the regular Latin minuscule **m** in the following instances:⁴⁶

- i) written plene in: *immo* saorad, 33a7; *immo* ar saorad, 33a9; *compert*, 33a11; *ammain*, 33a22 (but see *ammain*, 33a24, with minuscule **m** + *m*-stroke); *mada gnet*, 33a23; *mani*, 33a24; *canticim*, 38a25.
- ii) written as a suprascript **m** (analogous to an *m*-stroke) in *iarom*, 33a10; *accaldim*, 33a15 and in the emphasising particles *som*, 33a25; *som*, 33b7; *som*, 33b12; *som*, 33b28 and *som*, 33b34.
- iii) with subscript *i* and the *ur*-compendium in: *Muire*, 33a11; *Múiri*, 37b19 (but cf. *Múiri*, 37b15 written with a minuscule **m**).
- iv) with a *spiritus asper* in: *émh*, 33a4; *sessomh*, 33a5.
- v) with a *punctum delens* in: *láimh*, 46a29.

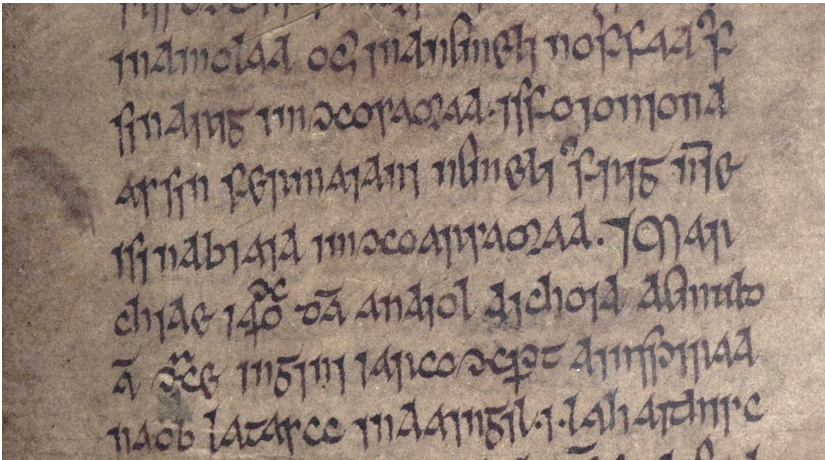


Fig. 4: RIA MS 3 B 23, p. 33a6–12.
Image courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy Library.

(3) ‘a contraction, consisting of *t* with a wavy stroke over it ... for *tir* (*ter*) ... *irt* (*ert* ?)

Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) pointed out the peculiar use of ‘a contraction, consisting of a *t* with a wavy stroke over it’. Indeed, Ua Ríghbhardáin

⁴⁶All instances of this ‘an unusual m’ are placed in bold when written in proximity to a minuscule **m**.

writes a flourished **t** and **g** which both have a distinctive curved or wavy top, with the cross-stroke ascending to the left at a 45-degree angle. This variant is written rather than the letterforms with a flat-topped horizontal stroke used elsewhere in B and T and typical of contemporary Gaelic National minuscule. Ua Ríghbhardáin begins writing these variant letterforms intermittently only on pp. 34 and 35 and with more frequency and confidence from p. 36 onwards, e.g. *trebi*, 34b26; *deisciurt*, 34b32; *ind tí*, 35b24; *abstanit*, 35b25. He employs them in *Apgitir Chrábaid* too, e.g. *homaldoit*, 47b2; *eirgi*, 48a12; *dochrait*, 50b2. This curve-topped **t** is also accompanied by a curved suspension-stroke, to accommodate the contour of the top-stroke of the letter, which can be expanded as *-er(-)*, *-ar(-)*, *-ir*, e.g. *at-bert*, 37a11; *espartain*, 38a5; *tara*, 39b28; *eitir*, 42b12, etc. Ua Ríghbhardáin also uses suprascript vowels above the curve-topped **t**, e.g., suprascript **a** in *trath*, 40a11; *atraig*, 44b12; suprascript **i** in *tri*, 44b14; suprascript **o** in *trossciud*, 44b28. An example of a wavy cross-stroke above a curve-topped **d** is found in *fercugud*, 39a13. These flourished variants seem to be influenced by the style similar to that in Lambeth Palace MS 1370 ('The Mac Durnan Gospels'), e.g. fols 2v, 3r and 9v. However, Ua Ríghbhardáin's deliberate use of this style in closely spaced lines gives this script a rather cramped aspect. Ua Ríghbhardáin reverts to writing the more common flat-topped **t** and **g** from p. 48 onwards again.

(4) 'Certain eccentricities of spelling'

Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) also noted the 'spelling' in *The Monastery of Tallaght*, which is written in a pseudo-archaising and hypercorrect orthography. Such deliberate orthographical policies are found in other late medieval Irish manuscripts such as British Library MS Egerton 88, British Library MS Harley 5280 and RIA MS 23 N 10.⁴⁷ In *The Monastery of Tallaght*, Ua Ríghbhardáin writes *ld* for *ll*, e.g. *muldach*, 33a10, *accaldim*, 33a15, *Maccaildecha*, 43b21, *to-lduid* (also with pseudo-archaic preverb *to* for *do-lluid*), 44b14; *nd* for *nn*, e.g. *muindtir*, 46b1, *andos*, 46a6 (for Lat. *annos*; the hypercorrect variant *anttos* is written in 46a8), *indní* (for *aní*), 37a10; *tt* for *d* in *fo-ceirtt*, 43b30; *p* for *b* in *as-pered*, 46a13. Internal vowels are also represented in a hypercorrect fashion, such as *úaoi* for the diphthong *úa* in *Cluaoin*, 44b4 and *Máol Ruaoin*, 38b34 and *áoe* for the diphthong *aí* or *oí* (or modernised *ao*) in *cáoectæ*, 44b14. Such spellings are also seen in the copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid*, for instance, *co ldéiri*, 47a24, *indna*, 47b9, etc. A particularly interesting feature in this copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght* is that Ua Ríghbhardáin sometimes employs the *et*-compendium to represent a **d** in hypercorrect spellings, e.g. *a lʔessai* (= *a ldessai*), 36b6 and *cailʔech* (= *caildech*), 34a23. This symbol typically stands for *et* (Ir. *ocus*) or for its Latin sound value *et* (later *e(al)idh*) and I am unaware of examples elsewhere of this compendium being used similarly to this instance.⁴⁸ This usage

⁴⁷See the discussion by Liam Breatnach (2012).

⁴⁸In the *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum* (RIA MS 23 O 48 a–b; cat. no. 476), dated to 1437–40, the *et*-compendium represents **e** and is written with a following **t/d** (Caoimhín Breatnach 2011: 132–3).

possibly reflects Ua Ríghbhardáin's own idiosyncratic use. Ua Ríghbhardáin's deliberate pseudo-archaising orthographical policy in *The Monastery of Tallaght* and *Apgitir Chrábaid* is not employed in other texts in B and T.

An assistant scribe in T

Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 120) suggested that pp. 33a1–47a21 and 51a24–53b2 were written by the same scribe as the rest of T, based on the colophon on p. 51. However, p. 45, which is also written in a calligraphic style, is worthy of attention. It has certain features that are similar to Ua Ríghbhardáin's main hand such as the angular **a**, the angular tall **e**, the *et*-compendium, the open bowl of the **p**, etc. However, some characteristics on this page are different and strongly suggest that this hand belongs to a different scribe. These characteristics include a fully closed eye of the **e** with the tongue extending beyond the letter to the right, e.g., *noeb*, 45a3; *cene*, 45a32; *duine*, 45b23; a rounded **d** with a flat horizontal top-stroke, e.g. *daine*, 45a2; *dano*, 45a16; *pende*, 45b12; the **g** is not fully closed and has an elongated tail, e.g. *riagail*, 45a11; *bargin*, 45b13; *go*, 45b20; an angular **r** with a pointed arch in *oenfer*, 45a25; *iarsin*, 45b6; the **æ** ligature consists of the **a**-component attached to the back of fully written out **e**, e.g. *caraed*, 45a20; *Fael*, 45b3. This hand also has two unique letterforms not employed by Ua Ríghbhardáin:

(a) a **t** with the top-stroke extending upwards at a straight angle to the left (thus resembling a **d** with a slanted ascender but without a fully closed bowl), e.g. *centai*, 45a10; *fitt*, 45a19; *tenid*, 45b7 (see figure 5 below) and *ro theiscset*, 45b14 (with an **e** ligatured to the slanting top-stroke analogous to the **de** ligature); with a *punctum delens* in *thri*, 45b2; with a *spiritus asper* in *thoirthib*, 45b23; with a suprascript **o** in *troscad*, 45b7; with a suspension-stroke extending out from the slanting top-stroke in *as-bert*, 45b16 (rather than the typical abbreviation of **b** + medial suspension-stroke).

(b) a unique **a** somewhat resembling the shape of **u** with a horizontal top, giving it a square appearance. The first stroke leans to the left and the descender frequently extends below the baseline, e.g. *riaglaib*, 45a18; *la*, 45b1 (see figure 5 below); *chomrac*, 45b10. This symbol also serves as the component for the *a(i)r*-compendium, e.g. *galair*, 45a28. This Square minuscule **a** is similar to that found, for instance, in the ninth-century Stowe Missal (RIA MS D ii 3), e.g. *anima*, fol. 48r7, *dignatus*, fol. 51r6.

The similarity in ductus and certain characteristic features, outlined above, led Gwynn and Purton (1911–20: 120) to believe that this page was also written by Ua Ríghbhardáin.⁴⁹ However, the distinctive stylistic features and different characteristics to Ua Ríghbhardáin also outlined above strongly suggest that

⁴⁹Cf. Palandri's (2021: 143–6) suggestion that Ua Ríghbhardáin supposedly imitated relief hands.

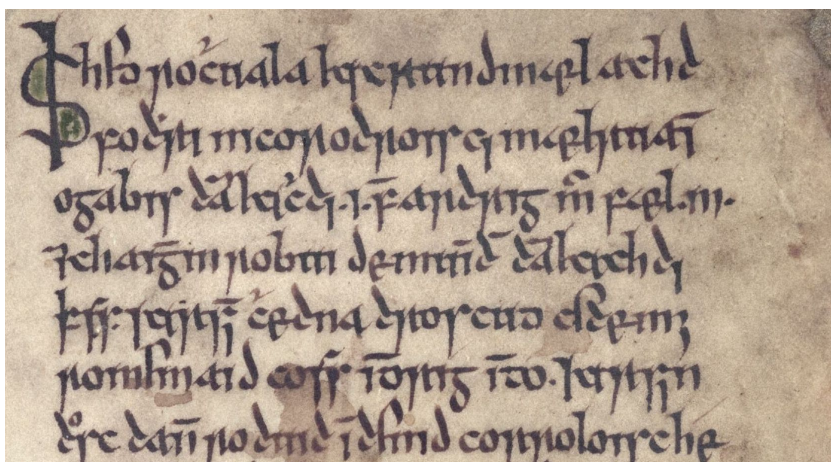


Fig. 5: RIA MS 3 B 23 p. 45b1–7.

Image courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy Library.

this hand belongs to a secondary scribe, who worked under the direction of Ua Ríghbhardáin.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF RIA MS 3 B 22 AND RIA MS 3 B 23

Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 110) suggested that B and T belonged originally to the same manuscript on account of the two volumes having been paginated concurrently from pp. 1–114 (B) to 115–96 (T).⁵⁰ Follett (2006: 102) noted several codicological similarities between B and T which suggested to him that these were originally two halves of one codex. Moreover, Palandri (2021: 136) remarked that since the two volumes are thematically similar and share no overlap of texts that ‘the two manuscripts were conceived as a single work’. Although this is a reasonable assumption, a re-evaluation of the evidence might point to another possibility.

A codicological examination (the details of which are provided in the appendix below) indicates that B and T consisted originally of loose gatherings. Differences in the varying quality of vellum, the ruling and pricking patterns as well as variation in ink across the gatherings suggest these were compiled at different times. The pagination in a modern hand runs across several lacunae in the two volumes. These gaps occurred when the volumes were bound and rebound, possibly more than once, causing the original quire tackets to be disturbed and some leaves to be loosened and lost.

T has six marginal quatrains and eight scribal notes written in the lower margins, viz. pp. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 81. The note on p. 81 is a citation of the first line from the poem *Marthain duit a chroch an Choimheadh*.⁵¹ This is the only instance of Bardic verse written in Ua Ríghbhardáin’s hand in a

⁵⁰See also *RIA Cat.* p. 3360.

⁵¹Ed. McKenna (1938: 124).

manuscript otherwise predominantly occupied with devotional texts. A scribal note on p. 27 alludes to Ua Ríghbhardáin using T for his own personal use: *ní tucais mo críde dam a libuir re cois caich ga breith uaim*, ‘thou hast not given me back my heart, O book, while everyone is being carried away from me’ (trs. Gwynn and Purton 1911–12: 119). Furthermore, Ua Ríghbhardáin writes on p. 44 that he copied the text for himself: *do scribus sin dom doig 7 inddí sceol so 7 ní hainfis acht dúa necar doniam indnos*, ‘I have written this on my own account, and these two tales; and it is not in ignorance, but to set them forth that we proceed in this way’.⁵² Moreover, Ua Ríghbhardáin interpolates a copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid* into his copy of *The Monastery of Tallaght* in T.⁵³ He connects the two disparate sections of the latter text by means of a cross drawn at the end of the first section on p. 47 and another at the beginning of the second section on p. 51. At the end of *Apgitir Chrábaid*, Ua Ríghbhardáin writes the following colophon:

Is fó cech ní sluindess ind lebarsa dú tuicmis hé. 7 a comaldad
Tadcc Ua Ríghbhardn qui scribsit 7 ní hanmfis tuc ind a.b.c.d. eider
na riaglaib acht degla feccbalæ, p. 51a16–20 (T).

‘Good is everything that this book sets forth, if we understood it, and good it is to fulfil it: Tadg O’Riordan *qui scripsit*, and he placed the Alphabet among the Rules not in ignorance, but for fear of omitting it.’⁵⁴

Ua Ríghbhardáin explains that he has copied the text knowingly in its unusual location for fear that he would omit it otherwise. Thus, he must have considered this text of significant importance to include it at this point. This note and that on p. 44, mentioned above, give the impression that Ua Ríghbhardáin compiled and organised material of interest for his own personal use.

B, on the other hand, has no scribal marginalia or marginal quatrains, apart from the two instructional notes in *Smaointe Beatha Chríost* and paratextual information in the Life of Mary to aid the reader.⁵⁵ This may suggest that B was intended for a patron rather than his own personal use.

B and T were possibly compiled at a Mac Aodhagáin school in lower Ormond, under the patronage of the Uí Chearbhaill (Follett 2006: 103). Little is known about the history or location of these two volumes following their compilation until several centuries later. At some point, B belonged to the Mac Aodhagáin family, with undated signatures bearing the Mac Aodhagáin surname found on pp. 6, 7, 40 and 68.⁵⁶ Signatures from this family are not found in T. The two volumes are only associated together for the first time in the late seventeenth century when they had fallen into the possession of the Uí

⁵²Trans. Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 154).

⁵³He expanded the writing area of a gathering when the length of the text(s) demanded it. For instance, in quire *iv* (T), Ua Ríghbhardáin inserted an additional bifolium to allow for the inclusion of the interpolated copy of *Apgitir Chrábaid*.

⁵⁴Trans. Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 118).

⁵⁵These notes are discussed in the appendix below.

⁵⁶For these marginalia, see Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 115–16); *RIA Cat.* pp. 3357 and 3360.

Cheinnéidigh. The signatures from members of this family are found in both volumes, such as that of Philip Kennedy found on p. 47 (B), dated 1684, and on p. 58 (T), undated. In the eighteenth century, the two volumes belonged to the Uí Bhriain, after which they came into Charles Vallancey's possession. In 1813, the Royal Irish Academy Library bought B and T as part of Charles Vallancey's collection. According to a slip from the sale catalogue, they were sold as two volumes:

'1270 Two vols beautifully written on Vellum at least 600 years past. These are in excellent preservation and most elegant penmanship. Small folio.'⁵⁷

The discrepancies outlined above suggest, I believe, that we should be more circumspect about the original relationship between the two volumes. The possibility that they were originally two separate manuscripts and only brought together in the late seventeenth century cannot be entirely ruled out.

CONCLUSION

There was a nascent historical awareness in the Irish manuscript tradition from the fifteenth century onwards, evidenced by pseudo-archaising language and orthography, as well as styles of decoration.⁵⁸ Such scribal practices reflect an underlying engagement with older manuscripts as well as a textual and visual appreciation of the past. This awareness is also witnessed calligraphically, whereby scribes could consciously step outside the contemporary conventions of writing to visually enhance the appearance of the text on the page for archaising, stylistic or ornamental purposes. Scribes modified their script by incorporating rare variant letterforms, based on those from earlier models of script or from alphabetic tables, into their contemporary repertoire. Such script modification displays a graphic self-consciousness as well as a scribal concern for the aesthetic appearance of the written medium.

This concern for the aesthetic of the page is found in two texts copied by Ua Ríghbhardáin, an industrious scribe who compiled numerous manuscripts in the late fifteenth century. Ua Ríghbhardáin wrote mostly in a regular low-grade minuscule script throughout B and T, the latter intended for his own personal use. However, his copies of *The Monastery of Tallaght* and *Apgitir Chrábaid*, written in a single gathering in T, are unique examples of his formal book hand, which consists of a consciously modified minuscule script. Ua Ríghbhardáin modified his script by incorporating rare letterforms, imitating those from earlier manuscripts, such as the half-uncial **d**, the letters **t** and **g** with pronounced curved top-strokes, and the unusual Greek 'M-siglum'. In modifying his script, he demonstrates an adept versatility and scribal agency

⁵⁷RIA MS 3 B 22, p. 1.

⁵⁸See Palandri (2021: 156 n. 63) who draws attention to the use of pseudo-archaic language in the fifteenth-century *Irish Marco Polo*, *Stair Ercuil ocus a Bhás* and *Lorgaireacht an tSoidh-igh Naomhtha*. For references to discussions on the antiquarian decoration of late medieval Irish manuscripts, see n. 62 below.

over his own writing practice. Moreover, an assistant scribe wrote a single page of *The Monastery of Tallaght* under the guidance of Ua Ríghbhardáin. This scribe also wrote in a modified script, albeit employing different letterform variants such as a unique sloped **t** and a square-like **a** and *ar*-compendium. Such modification by both scribes points to a deliberate plan of writing these two copies in a higher-grade minuscule than the regular low-grade script used for the other texts throughout T. This calligraphic change in script as well as the different orthography might also suggest an archaising tendency. The instances of letterform variation in these copies, and other manuscripts mentioned in this article, also seem to point to a window of experimentation in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.⁵⁹ Furthermore, this case-study has shown that late medieval Irish scribes had a nuanced approach to writing minuscule, which could be executed with degrees of variation and formality depending on the skill and training of the scribe.

APPENDIX I

This appendix includes a discussion of the codicology, decoration and scribal practice in B and T.⁶⁰ It also provides a tentative collation of the quire-structures and the textual arrangement in the two tables below.

The two volumes are comprised of vellum. The average dimension of B is 226 × 156 mm with 35 lines on average per page (57 leaves), whereas T is approximately 227 × 155 mm and has 33 lines per page (41 leaves). Hair and flesh sides cannot typically be distinguished because the vellum was rubbed extensively with pumice during the preparation of the material, leaving no trace of hair follicles. Although the vellum in both volumes is generally of good quality, certain leaves are quite thin, possibly due to excessive rubbing. This has led to subsequent deterioration of the material, such as that seen on pp. 29/30 (T). Original tears and holes in the vellum, however, were repaired with thread of varying colours prior to writing. For example, orange thread is used on p. 6 (T), red thread on pp. 17 and 23 (T) and overlapping blue and yellow threads on p. 109 (B).

The fact that the leaves in B and T are no longer conjoined complicates any attempt to reconstruct the quire-structures and their original arrangement. However, the discolouration or staining of certain leaves, the thickness of the vellum, as well as pricking and ruling patterns provides helpful codicological clues that can help establish the quire-structures. Moreover, the original arrangement of some of the gatherings can be ascertained when a text is written continuously across two gatherings.⁶¹ The results of this examination are given in Tables A1

⁵⁹Cf. n. 9 above.

⁶⁰For cursory codicological observations on B, see *RIA Cat.* p. 3357, and on T, see *RIA Cat.* pp. 3360–1.

⁶¹Unfortunately, there are no quire signatures in B and T which might help establish the arrangement further. Ua Ríghbhardáin employs quire signatures in some of his other manuscripts. In TCD MS H 2.12, no. 2 (1303), he writes ‘r’ at the bottom of fol. 1r, with the letter ‘s’ at the bottom of fol. 10v, marking the end of a gathering of five bifolia. This should have been followed by a

and A2 below. The codicological analysis shows that Ua Ríghbhardáin generally worked with gatherings of four or five bifolia, which he folded, pricked and ruled individually. The variation in ink colour, changing from black to brown across various gatherings, the different quality of vellum, and the varying dimensions of the text-blocks in certain gatherings (especially in T) suggests that they were compiled at different times. Discoloured outer leaves of gatherings point to the gatherings having been kept loose rather than bound together between boards.

B and T are decorated with ornately executed initials in the antiquarian artistic style popular in late medieval manuscripts produced in the post-Norman era.⁶² Texts throughout the two volumes typically begin with ornate ‘wire-type’ initials (Henry 1960: 33; Henry and Marsh-Micheli 1962: 105; 1987: 783). These are executed with a single wire, which was the preferred style in later manuscripts (Ralph 2014: 10), e.g., the **P** on p. 25 (B). Some have a double-wire in imitation of those ‘wire-type’ initials found in eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts (Ralph 2014: 10–11), e.g., the **P** on p. 13 (T) and the **H** on p. 30 (T). An example of a knotted ‘wire-type’ initial is found on p. 75 (B), although most initials are unknotted. The remains of an ornate double ‘wire-type’ initial can be seen on p. 1 (B). This was erased at a later stage in the manuscript’s history, together with the main text on the page.

The ornate initials do not generally contain zoomorphic figures. A rudimentary zoomorphic head, serving as a design guide, is drawn in light ink in the upper margin on p. 53 (T), beside a large ornate **L**. The decoration in B and T is far less detailed in comparison to the more elaborate and accomplished zoomorphic ‘wire-type’ initials witnessed throughout Ua Ríghbhardáin’s other manuscripts.⁶³ This may suggest that the limner, possibly the scribe himself, was still a relatively young artist-scribe who had not yet fully grasped the skill of drawing zoomorphic figures when he compiled these two volumes.⁶⁴

These initials and smaller *litterae notabiliores* are frequently coloured in green, red or yellow pigment. Some are decorated with a mosaic pattern. For instance, the fully decorated and striking initial **P** on p. 13 (T) marks the beginning of a new text as well as a new quire. The centre of the letter’s bowl is

gathering marked ‘s’, but this is now missing. Following on from this, Ua Ríghbhardáin writes ‘t’ at the bottom of fol. 11r (TCD MS H 2.12, no. 9 (1309), the beginning of a new gathering. There is no signature at the end of that gathering. However, he writes ‘x’ on p. 29, a bifolium. These quire signatures demonstrate that the fragments in TCD MS H 2.12, no. 2 (1303) and TCD MS H 2.12, no. 9 (1309) formerly belonged together and were part of a much larger codex of which now only two gatherings and a bifolium survive.

⁶²On antiquarian artistic practices in late medieval Irish manuscripts, see Hourihane (2007); Ralph (2014); O’Neill (2017: 294–301).

⁶³Note, for instance, the **R** in Rennes Bibliothèque, MS 598, fol. 4r; the **D** in RIA MS 24 P 1, p. 17a; the **L** in RIA MS 24 P 1, p. 60b; the **f** in RIA MS 23 P 3, fol. 11v; the **s** in RIA MS 23 P 3, fol. 15v.

⁶⁴See also Palandri (2020: 135) for a similar conclusion. Limners, or scribe-artists, rarely signed their work in medieval Irish manuscripts. But Palandri (2020: 148–9) was likely correct when he suggested that Ua Ríghbhardáin was the limner of all his manuscripts on account of the ‘consistent similarities between the illuminations’.

coloured in a mosaic pattern with green and red. But many initials are only partially coloured or left entirely without colour, e.g. **R** and **F** on pp. 9 and 11 (B), respectively, and **H** on p. 30 (T). The lightly drawn design in the bowls of these letters shows the intention was to colour them in a mosaic style at a later point but that this was not completed.

Ua Ríghbhardáin is generally a careful scribe. However, he does commit minor slips on occasion.⁶⁵ For example, he copies *fo* rather than the Latin abbreviation for *secundo* (which consists of an *s* with stroke through the descender + suprascript *o*) on p. 44a26 (B).⁶⁶ Despite such errors, the scribe is attentive and frequently goes back over his work to correct mechanical copying errors, adding omitted text interlineally or in the margins and using critical symbols to note the correct placement of the added text. Ua Ríghbhardáin uses marginal annotations and notes to connect portions of texts together. He draws a large cross in the margin of p. 97, the acephalous beginning of the copy of *Smaointe Beatha Chríost*. Another cross is placed beside the concluding section of the text, which is written on a slip of vellum, namely p. 53.⁶⁷ The scribe writes [*feuch*] in *cros ele* ‘Look at the other cross’ beside this cross, referring the reader to the main portion of text, and at the bottom of the page, he writes *Ar dered an caiderne ticc an beccán so tuas* ‘This little thing above comes at the end of the tract’.⁶⁸ A cross in the margin in B highlights the phrase *do-faidh a spirad an tan sin* ‘his spirit went then’ on p. 66b17–18. A large cross is also found in the margin in another copy in RIA MS 24 P 1, also compiled by Ua Ríghbhardáin, drawing attention to the same phrase *do-faidh a spirad an tan sin*, p. 4a13–14. Ua Ríghbhardáin writes the names of a number of biblical figures in the margins beside the copy of the Life of Mary in B, identifying the location of the names in the text.⁶⁹ These are also found in the margins of another copy of this text in RIA MS 24 P 1, p. 9. The shared similarities between the two manuscripts supports Palandri’s (2021: 151 n. 50) assertion that Ua Ríghbhardáin may have been influenced by the *mise-en-page* of his exemplar.

In the tables, I follow the textual arrangement provided by Palandri (2021: 150–1), who identified additional chasms in B and T that are not noted in the *RIA Cat*. Any digression from Palandri’s arrangement is indicated in the footnotes.

⁶⁵Cf. the remarks by Binchy (1962: 48) who describes Ua Ríghbhardáin as a careless scribe who had ‘a very imperfect understanding of the text’, referring to the copy of the Old Irish table of penitential commutations on pp. 13a1–16a24.

⁶⁶Cf. the correct manuscript reading preserved in RIA MS C I 2, fol. 38 (Bauer 2018: 7).

⁶⁷For the correct arrangement of these leaves, see Table A1 below.

⁶⁸For the meaning ‘tract, subject-matter’, rather than ‘quaternion’, see *eDIL* s.v. *caidirne*. *Smaointe Beatha Chríost* is written across two gatherings at least (see the collation below).

⁶⁹For instance, in the margins on p. 73, Ua Ríghbhardáin wrote *Adam*, *Naei*, [A]praham; *Ysac*; *Iacob*; *Moyse*, etc. On p. 74, he wrote *trinitas*, *filius*, and *spiritus sanctus*. *Spiritus* is abbreviated as *s̄pc* in the manuscript, rather than the more common *s̄ps*. The former abbreviation is based in analogy with *x̄pc* ‘Christus’ and *īhc* ‘Iesus’ (see Traube 1907: 166; Bains 1936: 7).

Gathering	Page	Text
i ³ (lacking leaves)	1–12 ⁷⁰	• Homily on Passion and Death of Christ, pp. 1a1–5b12 • Homily on the Virgin Mary, p. 5b13–6bz (defect.) • Homily on Mary, pp. 7a1–9b20 (aceph.) • Homily on Christian Government, pp. 9b21–11az • Homily on the Love of God, pp. 11b1–12bz (defect.)
ii ⁵	13–32	• Homily on Loving God, pp. 13a1–17a25 • Homily on the Punishment due to Sin, pp. 17a26–25a22 • Homily on Peace of Mind, pp. 30b23–32bz
iii ³ (lacking leaves)	33–38 ⁷¹	• Appeal to the Sinner, pp. 33a1–38a26 (aceph.) • Homily on Repentance, pp. 38a27–bz (defect.)
iv ⁴	39–52 ⁷²	• <i>Do Geineamain Muiri</i>, pp. 39a1–52a18 (aceph.) • Litany on Blessed Virgin, p. 52a19–bz.
v ⁵	55–74 ⁷³	• An extract from <i>Smaointe Beatha Chríost</i>, pp. 55a1–55az.⁷⁴ • Life of Mary, pp. 55b1–74bz.
vi ⁵ (chasm after 112)	97–114 ⁷⁵	• <i>Smaointe Beatha Chríost</i> (aceph.).

Table A1: tentative collation of B (continues)

⁷⁰Pp. 1 and 12, the outer leaves of this gathering, are both discoloured. The text on p. 1 is entirely erased. At least one leaf is missing between pp. 6 and 7. The final text in the gathering ends incomplete on p. 12. Either the copy in the exemplar was incomplete or the text in this manuscript continued across onto a different gathering, leaves of which are now lost.

⁷¹This gathering is fragmentary. The first text begins acephalous and the last text ends incomplete. This suggests that the surviving leaves are the inner part of a gathering and that an outer bifolium has been lost. Page 38 is discoloured, and the leaves are ruled with plummet.

⁷²This gathering consists of four bifolia (220 × 150 mm). Pp. 39 and 52, the outer leaves of the gathering, are discoloured. The gathering is ruled with plummet. There are no pricking marks in the margins for the horizontal lines. Bounding lines are drawn without guiding pricking marks in the upper and lower margins. The copy of *Do Geineamain Muiri* begins acephalous on p. 39, but the Litany ends complete on p. 52. This suggests that the first text probably began on a preceding gathering. The *litterae notabiliores* are coloured in yellow.

⁷³This gathering consists of five bifolia (225 × 145 mm). Pp. 55 and 74, the outer leaves of the gathering, are discoloured. There are regularly spaced pricking marks in the inner and outer margins of each leaf. These pricking marks appear faint on p. 74, suggesting that the ruling occurred after the leaves were folded. The *litterae notabiliores* are also coloured in yellow.

⁷⁴Palandri (2021: 151) placed this extract into the running sequence of *Smaointe Beatha Chríost*, but this misconstrues the collation of the manuscript. The text from *Smaointe Beatha Chríost* on p. 55a is an extract corresponding to ll. 5989–6011 of the edition (Ó Maonaigh 1944: 217–18). Ua Ríghbhardáin interpolated this extract here disrupting the sequence of the three texts concerning Mary, reasons for which are not immediately apparent to me.

⁷⁵This is a gathering of 5 bifolia (225 × 147 mm). The text begins acephalous and ends defective and is now bound out of order in the manuscript. The correct order is pp. 97–112, 113–114, 77–96, 75, 76, 53 (Ó Maonaigh 1944: xxxi; *RIA Cat.* p. 3359–60). The first page in the gathering is

Gathering	Page	Text
vii ⁵	77–96 ⁷⁶	• <i>Smaointe Beatha Chríost</i> , cont.
singleton	75–6	• <i>Smaointe Beatha Chríost</i> , cont.
vellum slip	53	• <i>Smaointe Beatha Chríost</i> , cont., ends at 53z.

Table A1: tentative collation of B.

Gathering	Page	Text
i ³ (*lacking bifolium after p. 6)	1–12 ⁷⁷	• Homily on the Eight Arrows of Sin, pp. 1–7a25 (a chasm foll. p. 6). • Homily on Almsgiving, pp. 7a26–12bz.
ii ⁴	13–28 ⁷⁸	• Treatise on the penitential commutations, pp. 13a1–16a24. • <i>De Luxoria</i> , pp. 16a25–28az.

Table A2: tentative collation of T (continues)

discoloured, i.e. p. 97. Page 114 is heavily stained. Each leaf has regular pricking patterns in the left and right margins. There are faint pricking marks in the outer margin of pp. 113/114 which follow the same pattern as those on pp. 97–112, thereby indicating that this singleton belonged to this gathering. Regular pricking marks for inner bounding lines are also found on the top and bottom margin of each leaf. Ruling is with plummet. The *litterae notabiliores* are coloured in red, with some in yellow.

⁷⁶This is a gathering of 5 bifolia (215 × 150 mm). There is discolouration on pp. 77 and 96. Ruling is by ink and there are no visible pricking marks in margin. Although some *litterae notabiliores* and line dividers are coloured in red, most are left uncoloured.

⁷⁷This gathering consists of six leaves. Pp. 1 and 12, the outer leaves of the gathering, are discoloured. The vellum in this gathering is thinner than that used in the rest of this volume. The leaves are highly polished making it difficult to differentiate hair from flesh side. The leaves were pricked with an awl and ruled after they were folded and placed together in a gathering. The same pricking pattern is found on the outer margin of pp. 1 through to 12. Two pricking marks at the top and bottom of each leaf were used to mark the inner bounding lines. The outer and inner bounding lines, drawn in a light brown ink are still visible, for instance, on p. 10. A chasm following p. 6 suggests the innermost bifolium of the gathering is missing. I suggest a bifolium is missing here rather than a singleton because the latter is usually inserted between the first and second bifolium or between the third and fourth bifolium in a quaternion to keep it in place. But the use of a singleton cannot be ruled out entirely either.

⁷⁸The second gathering in T is a quaternion. Although there are no pricking marks in the outer margins, there are two regularly placed pricking marks at the top of each page used to guide the ruling of the inner bounding lines. This gathering was ruled with plummet (see, for example, the lines still visible on p. 15). The text block is slightly thinner in dimension in this gathering than in the other gatherings. The scribe leaves the second column blank on p. 28, perhaps with the intention of beginning the next text on a new gathering.

Gathering	Page	Text
iii ¹ (*lacking outer & inner bifolia)	29–32 ⁷⁹	• Homily on the Passion, p. 29a1–b21 (aceph.). • <i>Bo beres buar o [rigai]b</i>, p. 29b22–bz.⁸⁰ • <i>Speculum Peccatoris</i>, pp. 30a1 (chasm foll. 30bz)–32bz (defect.).
iv ⁵	33–52 ⁸¹	• Monastery of Tallaght, pp. 33a1–47a21; 51a24–53bz. • <i>Apgitir Chrábaid</i>, pp. 47a22–51a20 (interpolated).
v ³⁺¹ (*lacking inner folio)	53–66 ⁸²	• Homily on Poverty, pp. 53a1–57a23. • Homily on Mercy, pp. 57a24–58bz (defect.). • Homily on Sin, pp. 59a1–65az. • Homily on the Ten Commandments, pp. 65b1–66bz.
vi ⁴	67–82 ⁸³	• The Ten Commandments, cont. pp. 67a1–80a14. • Homily beg. with the story of the priest Mathias and his resistance to idolatry, pp. 80a15–82bz (defect.).

Table A2: tentative collation of T.

ABBREVIATION

RIA Cat. T. F. O’Rahilly, K. Mulchrone, M. E. Byrne, J. H. Delargy, E. FitzPatrick, L. Duncan, W. Wulf, G. Murphy, A. I. Pearson and T. Ó Concheanainn, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin, 1926–70).

⁷⁹The third gathering consists of two bifolia only. Given that the first text begins acephalous and the second text ends imperfect, it is probable that an outer bifolium at the very least has been lost. A chasm following p. 30 indicates further loss. The texts in this gathering are written in a brownish ink, differing to the black ink used in the first two gatherings.

⁸⁰This poem serves as filler material. According to Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 117), a different scribe writes this text. However, the angular **a** (e.g. *buar*) and the letter **g** (e.g. *failigh*) are similar in style to those in Ua Ríghbhardáin’s hand. A different hand repeats the initial line of the first quatrain beneath the text. The poem is noted in *RIA Cat.* p. 3362 and printed in Gwynn and Purton (1911–12: 117) but omitted in Palandri (2021: 151). Another poorly legible copy is found in King’s Inns, MS 12, fol. 8v *i*.

⁸¹The fourth gathering is a quinion. Texts are written in black ink and ruled with plummet, as seen for example, on p. 42.

⁸²The fifth gathering is a quaternion. The slight discolouring on p. 66 marks the end of the gathering. There is a chasm following p. 58. Texts are written in brown ink and ruled with plummet (see pp. 54 and 55, for instance).

⁸³The final gathering consists of pp. 67 to 82. Given that the text ends imperfectly at the end of the gathering on p. 82, it is possible that the text continued onto a following gathering, which is now lost. However, it cannot be ruled out either that Ua Ríghbhardáin was copying from an exemplar which lacked the ending.

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