



The Cathach



c. AD 560

The *Cathach* is the oldest extant Irish manuscript of the Psalter and the earliest example of Irish writing on vellum. It contains a Vulgate version of Psalms 30:10 to 105:13 with an interpretative rubric or heading before each psalm. It is traditionally ascribed to St Columba as the transcript of a Psalter lent to Columba by St Finnian. A dispute arose about the ownership of the copy and King Diarmait Mac Cerbhaill gave the judgment "To every cow belongs her calf, therefore to every book belongs its copy". It is possible to date the manuscript to the late 6th or early 7th century from the script.



Shrine of the *Cathach*. © National Museum of Ireland.

The script is early majuscule with ornamental capitals, some of which are in red and, like the red in the lettering for the rubrics, the colour has faded. The framework of the capitals is often outlined by a series of scarlet dots and the decoration is mostly by spirals and animal heads. In the 11th century a *cumdach* or shrine was made for the manuscript. It was named 'Cathach' or 'Battler' from the practice of carrying it thrice right-hand wise around the field of battle as a talisman.

The Psalter was owned by the O'Donnells but in the custody of the Mac Robhartaigh family at Ballymagroarty, Co. Donegal. It was taken to France in 1691 and brought back to Sir Neal O'Donel, Newport, Co. Mayo, in 1802. The manuscript was discovered in 1813 when the *cumdach* was opened by Sir William Betham. It was deposited in the Academy by Sir Richard O'Donel in 1843. The shrine was subsequently transferred to the National Museum of Ireland, while the manuscript was retained in the Royal Irish Academy.

The *Cathach* was repaired and rebound in 1980-1 by Roger Powell and Dorothy Cumpstey. The vellum leaves were attached to new vellum mounts specially stained to match the original leaves.

RIA MS 12 R 33



Left from top: The *Cathach* / Psalter of St Columba, f. 48r; Psalm 90. *Qui habitas in adiutorio altissimi*. The *Cathach* / Psalter of St Columba, f. 21r; Psalm 56. *Misere mei deus misere mei*. The *Cathach* / Psalter of St Columba, f. 19r; Psalm 53. *Deus in nomine tuo saluum*.



TREASURES *of the* ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY
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The Cathach



CONSERVATION

Most of the Academy's vellum manuscripts have been conserved since the late 1960s. Vellum (calf skin) is durable but needs to be maintained in an environment with stable temperature and humidity levels.

Conservation begins with an assessment of a document to determine its condition and the extent of repairs required. The purpose of conservation is to ensure that the manuscript is given a renewed lease of life. To further preserve the document for the future we normally digitise it after conservation and publish the digital images. This helps to increase access while reducing handling thus preventing further damage.

The *Cathach* (RIA MS 12 R 33), the Academy's oldest manuscript, was conserved at the British Museum in 1920-23. At that time, the 58 folios or leaves were individually mounted on paper and bound together. By the late 1960s the paper mounts were cockling and the manuscript could no longer be closed properly. The leaves were coming adrift from the binding.



Above: Illustration showing the preserved, removed leaves sewn and ready for binding into new oak boards. Conservation work, 1980-81.

Below: Original leaves of the *Cathach* removed from their early 20th-century paper mounts, ready for repair prior to remounting on new vellum mounts. Conservation work, 1980-81.



The master conservator and binder Roger Powell, OBE (1896-1990) at work on the *Cathach* in his studio, Froxfield (Hamps.).

conservators allowed for missing lines of text before determining the final position of the leaf in the new mount. The manuscript was assembled into sections which were sewn and prepared for binding. Finally, the manuscript was bound into half-inch thick quarter-cut English oak boards, covered along the spine with white alum tawed pig-skin.

The bound manuscript is housed, under slight pressure, in a specially made oak box produced by George Taylor at the workshop of Edward Barnsley in England.

The *Cathach* was digitised with funding from Mrs Carmel Naughton, MRIA, and published on CD-ROM in 2002. Readers may now consult the digital version of the manuscript, and the CD-ROM may also be purchased for home use.

RIA MS 12 R 33

In March 1980 the *Cathach* was taken to the workshop of Mr Roger Powell at Froxfield, Hampshire, for major conservation work. Roger Powell, a master conservator, and his assistant Miss Dorothy Cumpstey disbound the manuscript, separated the leaves from their mounts and secured loose fragments at the edges. Each leaf was mounted on a frame of new vellum, sourced from County Kildare. Each piece of vellum was matched to each manuscript leaf for spine direction and for balance in weight. The



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The Stowe Missal



ca. AD 800

The *Stowe Missal* is a Mass-book of the early Irish Church, compiled about the end of the 8th century. An inscription on the *cumdach* or shrine links it with the monastery of St Ruadhan in Lorrha, Co. Tipperary, ca. 1050. The manu-

end there is a miniature of St John the Evangelist. The *Missal* proper (56 folios) is in the second manuscript and it contains the Ordinary and Canon of the Mass, the Order of Baptism and the Order of Visitation of the Sick, Extreme Unction and Communion. The initial P of the opening prayer, *Peccavimus Domine*, in the Ordinary of the Mass is decorated and set in a border coloured in yellow and pink. Except for playful drawings of initial letters, the rest of the manuscript is not decorated. The original scribe of the *Missal* wrote in an angular majuscule script. A more cursive hand was used by a scribe signing himself *Moll Caich* (f. 37) who revised it.

It is bound in boards of oak covered with uncoloured vellum and round the three outer edges there are strips of kid skin 2cm wide stained with red. The *Missal* was rebound in existing boards, cleaned and repaired by A. Cains in the Trinity Conservation Laboratory, Dublin in 1993-4. Digital images of the *Stowe Missal* can be viewed on www.isos.dias.ie.



Stowe Missal, f. 12r. *Peccavimus domine*. The opening lines of the text of the Mass.

script may have been written at Lorrha, although a link with Tallaght has also been suggested. The *Missal* was named 'Stowe' because, in the 19th century, it was part of a collection of manuscripts in the library of the Duke of Buckingham at Stowe House, Buckinghamshire. In 1883 it was purchased by the British Government and deposited in the Royal Irish Academy.

The *Missal* consists of two separate manuscripts. The first manuscript (11 folios) contains excerpts from the Gospel according to St John. Written in a cursive minuscule script by a scribe who signed himself in Ogham writing *Sonid* (f. 11r), at the

end there is a miniature of St John the Evangelist.



Stowe Gospel of St John, f. 11r. Decorated opening page of St John's Gospel. *In principio erat verbum.*

Top: Stowe Gospel of St John, f. 11r. Signature of scribe 'Sonid' in ogham.
Bottom: Stowe Missal, f. 30c. Invocations to the saints, including Brendan, Columba, Finnian and Patrick.



TREASURES of the ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY
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Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta

Book of Ballymote

ca. AD 1391



The Book of Ballymote is one of the largest Irish manuscript compilations produced by the learned class in medieval Ireland. It is like a one-volume library, and contains genealogical, topographical, biblical and hagiographical material, including *Leabhar Gabhala* (Book of the Invasions), *Leabhar na gCeart* (Book of Rights), *Dinnsheanchas* and a key to the Ogham alphabet. It also has versions from Latin of the Destruction of Troy and the History of Philip and Alexander of Macedonia.

The manuscript was written mostly in Irish, with some Latin, at Ballymote Castle, Co. Sligo, the former seat of the Mac Donnchaid of Corann. The principal scribes were Maghnus Ó Duibhgeannáin, Solam Ó Droma and Robeartus Mac Sithigh. The writing is in two columns. There are decorated capital letters and the colours used in colouring the interlaced designs on the capitals are vermilion, chrome, red, black, green and blue. The Book of Ballymote is bound in leather with oak boards.



This was the first Irish manuscript to be acquired by the Royal Irish Academy; presented in the year of foundation, 1785, by the Chevalier O'Gorman, who purchased it from Tomás Ó Duirmin of Drogheda for £20. A facsimile edition was published in 1887. Digital images of the Book of Ballymote can be viewed on www.isos.dias.ie.

RIA MS 23 P 12; Cat. no. 536



From top:
Book of Ballymote, f. 8r. The beginning of *Leabhar Gabhala* / the Book of the Invasions. *In principis creavit Deus caelum et terram.*

Book of Ballymote, f. 170r, the key to ogham writing.

Book of Ballymote, f. 43r. This page gives an account of the Deluge: *'Delugium factum et al diebus / et noctibus super terram.*
'A great deluge lasting 40 days and 40 nights spread over the earth'. There is also an account of the division of Eire between Eremón and Eber, beginning *'Hibernia in duas in occidentem partibus'* / Ireland is an island situated in the west', and a list of the Eireannian kings of Eire down to Lóegair, a contemporary of St. Patrick.



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Leabhar Breac



THE BOOK OF THE MAC EGANS LEABHAR MÓR DÚNA DOIGHRE AD 1408–1411

The *Leabhar Breac* was written in Irish by Murchad Riabhach Ó Cuindlis, at Cluain Lethan and Lothra (Lorrha) in Múscraige Tíre, in north Co. Tipperary in the years 1408–1411. It is the largest Irish vellum manuscript by one scribe. The writing is in double columns, the decoration of the capitals is simple and there are some fine interlaced letters of zoomorphic design, coloured in red, vermilion, yellow and blue.

The manuscript contains religious and biblical material derived from Latin sources, Irish literature and history, including lives of St Patrick and St Brigid, the Litany of Our Lady, *Féilire Oengusso Céilí Dé*, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, a history of Philip of Macedonia and Alexander the Great.

In the 16th century this manuscript was held by the Mac Egans of Duniry and in the 17th century it was known as '*Leabhar Mór Dúna Doighre*' ('The great book of Duniry'). The *Leabhar Breac* was acquired by the Royal Irish Academy in 1789.



Leabhar Breac, p. 220, St Patrick's crowing in Ireland, with a list of his successors.



Leabhar Breac, p. 121, illustrating the Menorah, a branched candelabrum used in Jewish religious ceremony.

In 1973 Roger Powell replaced the 19th-century binding and repaired the manuscript. The cockled leaves of the manuscript were flattened and the fragile parts of the vellum with writing have been reinforced with cellulose-free sausage skin stuck with parchment size. Other repairs were made with specially toned vellum. The leaves were re-sewn in one volume and bound between mahogany boards with an alum-tawed pigskin spine. Digital images of the *Leabhar Breac* can be viewed at www.isos.dias.ie.

RIAMS 25 P 16; Cat. no. 1230



TREASURES *of the* ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY
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Hoo Book of Hours



AD 1444



Books of Hours were devotional texts designed to assist private prayer and meditation. Often lavishly illustrated, these illuminated manuscripts were very popular in the Middle Ages. Each manuscript was unique, being personalised for an individual patron. The Hoo Book of Hours in the Royal Irish Academy was written at Rouen in France about 1444, and belonged to an Englishman, Thomas, Lord Hoo, Chancellor of Normandy and France. It may have been a wedding present to his wife, Eleanor Welles, as a number of the prayers concern marriage.

The Hoo Book of Hours contains 293 folios with 28 miniature illustrations in 15th-century French style. The Hoo Master was responsible for 27 of the 28 miniatures, with the Talbot Master contributing one. Lord Hoo kneels before the Trinity on f. 192; his wife kneels before the Madonna on f. 196v, in an image that also contains heraldic symbols of the two families. The borders contain rich floral and gold leaf ivy decoration. The vellum manuscript measures 23cm x 16cm. The binding in red morocco leather with gilt-edged leaves dates from c.1600.

The contents are items normally found in a Book of Hours: a liturgical calendar, psalms, readings from the Gospels, prayers, and the Hours of the Virgin. The 'Hours' were prayers and readings arranged for the eight canonical hours of the day: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. The liturgical contents follow the Sarum Use, common in Britain and Ireland before the Reformation.

The manuscript belonged at one time to the Lindores family of Scotland. There is a note on an inserted flyleaf: 'Mrs Trenchard, sister to the late Lady Lindores, states that the missal belonged to Queen Mary' (i.e. Mary, Queen of Scots). The Book was presented to the Royal Irish Academy by H.A. Forbes in 1874.

RIA MS 12 R 31



From top: Hoo Book of Hours, RIA MS 12 R 31, f. 200b
St Hilivere (detail).
Hoo Book of Hours, RIA MS 12 R 31, f. 196v
Lady Hoo kneeling before the Madonna and child.
Hoo Book of Hours, RIA MS 12 R 31, f. 52a
The Shepherds (detail).



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Annála Ríoghachta Éireann / The Annals of the Four Masters

AD 1632–36



The *Annals* are a chronicle of Irish history from the year of the world 2242 to AD 1616. They contain records under successive years of the deaths of kings and other prominent persons, both ecclesiastical and lay, along with accounts of battles and other exploits. They end with the death of Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone, in 1616. The compilation was largely derived from older manuscripts, many of which have not survived.

The *Annals of the Four Masters* were compiled in the years 1632–36 in County Donegal by a Franciscan brother, Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, and three laymen, Cú Choigriche Ó Cléirigh, Fearfeasa Ó Maoilchonaire of Co. Roscommon, and Cú Choigriche Ó Duibhgeannáin of Castlefore, Co. Leitrim. Two other scribes also assisted, Conaire Ó Cléirigh (an older brother of Mícheál) and Muiris Ó Maoilchonaire. The various hands are clear, legible and swiftly written with a pointed quill.



In 1831, George Petric arranged for the purchase by the Academy of an autograph set of the post-1170 annals (23 P 6–7).

These are believed to be part of the set formerly in St Anthony's College, Louvain. The manuscripts were repaired, mounted on paper, and bound in leather in two volumes by George Mullen. Another autograph volume (C iii 3), containing annals up to the year 1171, and believed to have been presented to the patron, Fergal O'Gara, was acquired by the Academy with the Stowe Manuscripts in 1883. The *Annals* were



published in 1848–51 in a classic dual-language edition edited by John O'Donovan. Digital images of the manuscripts of the *Annals of the Four Masters* are available at www.isos.dias.ie.

RIA MS 23 P 6: Cat. no. 687
RIA MS 23 P 7: Cat. no. 688
RIA MS C iii 3: Cat. no. 1220

Top: *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann / Annals of the Four Masters*, RIA MS 23 P 7, f. 293v, entry for 1616, recording the death of Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone.

Below: Charles O'Connor of Belanagare, MBIA, 1710–91. Portrait by Henry Boscawen, 1762–1837, in 1785. Charles O'Connor was a former owner of the manuscripts of the *Annals of the Four Masters* now in the RIA (RIA MS C iii 3 and 23 P 6–7).



TREASURES *of the* ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY
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Ordnance Survey of Ireland

LETTERS, MEMOIRS AND SKETCHES



The Ordnance Survey (OS) was established in 1824 to undertake a survey of Ireland and to map the entire country at a scale of 6 inches to one mile. The cartographic project was completed by 1842, and a full set of maps exists for each Irish county.

LETTERS

The 'Ordnance Survey Letters' comprise correspondence of John O'Donovan (1806–1861) and other researchers employed on the survey. The original Letters for 29 Irish counties are preserved in the Royal Irish Academy Library. The exceptions are Antrim, Cork and Tyrone, for which no OS letters exist. The letters contain a vast amount of antiquarian and topographical information, together with family histories, local lore and customs.

MEMOIRS

Surveyors also compiled manuscript memoirs, containing descriptions of topographical details and antiquities that could not easily be summarised in cartographic form on the maps. The OS Memoirs are arranged by county and parish and contain information on landscape, topography, population, economy and society, as well as recording features of antiquarian interest and a range of statistical data.

OS Memoirs are preserved in the Royal Irish Academy for counties Antrim, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone, and some parishes in counties Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, Louth and Sligo. A modern edition of the text of the Memoirs was published in 40 volumes, (1990–98).

SKETCHES

Drawings and sketches of buildings and other antiquarian items were made by the OS researchers who were recording antiquities in the landscape. Among the artists employed by the Survey were George Petrie (1790–1866), George Victor du Noyer (1817–69), and William Frederick Wakeman (1822–1900), all of whom were members of the Royal Irish Academy. There are over 1,000 OS Sketches in the Royal Irish Academy collection.

RIA, OS Collection



Above: OS Map Dublin, Sheet 14, showing Land Charlemont's residence, Martine House, and the adjacent Custom House. It also shows The Crescent, Martine, where Brian Stokes (author of *Dracula*) lived.

Top left: One of the Lac illustrations of the medieval church of St Davough's near Balgriffin, County Dublin, before the eighteenth-century spire fell (William Frederick Wakeman, 1837). This is one of a number of separately mounted watercolour sketches. RIA MS 12 T 12 (6).

Bottom left: John O'Donovan, 1806–61. Portrait by Charles Grevy, 1808–92. © The National Gallery of Ireland.



TREASURES *of the* ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY
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Edward Donovan's *Insects of China*



A prolific writer and artist, Edward Donovan produced illustrated books on various topics of natural history. His main interest was entomology. Donovan engraved and hand coloured his own plates for all his books, a meticulous and skilful process. When first published, his use of extravagant bright metallic paints was often criticised and regarded as 'gaudy'; later opinion proved more favourable.

This illustrated book from the library of Cynthia Longfield, acquired by donation in 1979, is representative of the Royal Irish Academy's rich collection of scientific books of historic interest. Cynthia Longfield (1896–1991) became known

as 'Madam Dragonfly' for her work in entomology, research that took her to many parts of the world.

Scientific subjects are well represented among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century library holdings of the Royal Irish Academy. The varied subject matter includes astronomy, chemistry, geology, mathematics, natural history (botany, mineralogy, zoology, etc.) and natural philosophy (physics). Many of the books are illustrated. Apart from Cynthia Longfield, major donors to the natural history collections include Alexander Henry Haliday, MRJA (1807–70), Robert Lloyd Praeger, MRJA (1865–1953) and Richard J. Ussher, MRJA (1841–1913).

RIA, Longfield-Roberts Collection

Illustrations from *An epitome of the natural history of the insects of China: comprising figures and descriptions ...* by Edward Donovan (1768–1837). Printed for the author by T. Bensley, London, 1798. Part of the Longfield-Roberts Collection.



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Senate Casket and Roll of Senators of the Irish Free State

1924

The ornate Senate Casket was designed in 1924 by Mía Cranwill (1880–1972) to hold the membership roll of the first Senate of the Irish Free State. It was commissioned by Senator Alice Stopford Green. The design was inspired by Gallarus Oratory, Co. Kerry.



on the front to represent 'patronage introducing art to the people'.

The casket is made of Norwegian copper overlaid with pierced and repoussé silver panels with top panels of filigree silver and gold. It is ornamented with four large cones in blue, vermilion and a deeper red cloisonné enamel. The feet of the shrine were fashioned to allow the casket to be carried ceremonially on poles, in the manner of early shrines. The design at the front of the casket embodies heraldic devices relating to the donor and artist. To the left is a figure representing the recipient senators. Cranwill intended the scene depicted

The senators who signed the membership roll were prominent public personalities in the early years of the Irish Free State. Senators were elected by members of the Dáil and Seanad voting together, and were selected from those whose experience in public life or special attainments qualified them for membership. Some, for example W.B. Yeats, are now best remembered for their literary achievements rather than their political activities.

The casket and roll of signatures was presented to the Royal Irish Academy on the dissolution of the senate in 1936, 'as a gift for preservation'. The Friends of the National Collections of Ireland contributed towards some repairs to the casket soon after its reception into the Academy.

Considered a fine example of metalwork inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement, the casket has been displayed previously in exhibitions in Dublin, Edinburgh and Los Angeles.

RIA Collection

Above: Casket made to hold the membership roll of the first Senate of the Irish Free State. Inspired by artist Mía Cranwill in 1924, the casket was inspired by the form of Gallarus Oratory. The front, shown here, includes heraldic devices representing the donor and the artist, and a figure on the left represents the senators, the recipients of the gift. The reverse has three inscribed figures in the centre, representing 'body, mind and estate'.

Left: Membership roll of the first Senate of the Irish Free State.



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