

Máire Herbert
'The *Vita Columbae* and Irish Hagiography: A Study of *Vita Cainnechi*'

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The *Vita Columbae* and Irish Hagiography: A Study of *Vita Cainnechi*

Máire Herbert

The surviving manuscript witnesses to the *Vita Columbae* (VC) by Adomnán indicate how the text circulated in Continental Europe and in Britain in the aftermath of its compilation around the year 700 AD.¹ There is no comparable Irish evidence to establish that the text was being read and copied contemporaneously in the saint's homeland. Up to recently it could only be asserted that the unabbreviated version of VC was used as a source by the author of the vernacular Life of Colum Cille around the mid-twelfth century, while a copy of the shortened recension was included in the collection of Hiberno-Latin hagiography in the fifteenth-century MS Z 3.1.5 in Primate Marsh's Library, Dublin.² Though it was suggested that Hiberno-Latin *vitae* of saints like Colmán Elo, Munnu, and Cainnech, saints who are mentioned in VC, drew in their turn on Adomnán's work,³ none of these *vitae* had been securely dated, and the manuscript collections of Hiberno-Latin hagiography in which they survived were no earlier than the fourteenth century.⁴ Thus, their evidence could not securely establish when VC became known in Ireland.

Recently, however, Richard Sharpe's examination of the medieval manuscript collections of Hiberno-Latin hagiography has noted within them groups of Lives sharing a common textual source. In particular, Sharpe has identified a group of nine or ten Lives, common to all three collections, which he assigns to an exemplar datable within the period 750–850 AD. He claims that the texts of the Lives in one of these collections, the *Codex Salmanticensis*, best represent this exemplar. Thus, a group of *vitae* in the *Codex Salmanticensis* may be seen as providing access to hagiographical works composed around the eighth century.⁵ Moreover, the group includes the *vitae* which I have noted as deriving

1 Anderson and Anderson, *Life of Columba*, pp. liv–lxv; Picard, 'Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*'.
2 Herbert, *Iona*, pp. 182–4; Brüning, 'Adamnan's *Vita Columbae*', pp. 272–6; Sharpe, 'Maghnus Ó Domhnaill's Source'. 3 Brüning, 'Adamnan's *Vita Columbae*', pp. 290–1; Plummer, VSH i.lxxxvi, 263–4 n. 14. 4 For a listing of the collections see Lapidge and Sharpe, *Bibliography*, pp. 110–29. 5 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, in particular pp.

material from VC. Therefore, does their witness help to provide a new date for the use of Adomnán's work in Ireland?

As Sharpe did not provide analysis of the content of each particular Life to cross-check its dating indications against those provided by the larger scrutiny of the collections, I have opted to do a test-case here. I have chosen to analyze the *Codex Salmanticensis* version of *Vita Cainnechi* (hereafter *VCainn.*)⁶ since it is a composition in which the use of VC extends beyond the simple borrowing of particular episodes to be a constitutive element of the text. Therefore, what is at stake is not simply the dating of *VCainn.* but also its evidence regarding the formative influence of VC on Irish hagiographical composition.

Initial examination for dating purposes reveals no glaring late feature in the text of *VCainn.* Several of the forms of its personal and place-names have been cited in Sharpe's listing of items diagnostic of a date in the Old Irish period.⁷ The fourteenth-century date of the manuscript in which the forms occur, however, means that purely orthographical evidence must be used with caution. More telling are instances of correct grammatical usage in vernacular forms in the text such as *haut longe o Birraib* (§35), and *i nAchuth Bo* (§54). Moreover, it is possible to compare other onomastic features in the text with external records. For example, the usage *apud dexterale Laginenses* (§41) for the realm of king *Cormaccus filius Dyarmici* correctly designates the realm of the Uí Bairrche king. Moreover, the locution in *VCainn.* finds a parallel in the annal phrase *apud Laginenses Dexteriores*, unattested after the eighth century.⁸ The form of the place-name *Cella Achith Drummoto* (§39) seems to be a rendering of *Cell Achaid Drommo Foto* of the eighth-century annals, abbreviated to *Cell Achaid* from the following century.⁹ The monastic site *Letube Kainnich* (§19) is otherwise unknown apart from two eighth-century annal notices, and it is probable that the foundation was among the many which ceased to function in the Viking era.¹⁰

While *VCainn.* sets out to depict a sixth-century reality, it is to be expected that the content of the text will be influenced by the contemporary circumstances of its composition. As a ground-clearing exercise, we may cite at the outset a lack of evidence of post-Viking date. Literary derivation might serve as an explanation for the fact that the circumstances of Iona appear very similar to those depicted in VC. It does not suffice, however, to explain how the independent material from the author of *VCainn.* also reflects the conditions of pre-Viking times. Sea-travel is unhindered. Menaces to Irish society which require saintly intervention in the Life are those involving the misdeeds of local kings and of *laici*.¹¹ There is

297–339. 6 Text ed. Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 182–98. 7 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 318–34. 8 AU s.a. 712.9. For the substitution by subsequent redactors of the anachronistic *Uí Cheinnselaig*, see VSH i.164. See also Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 308–9; and Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 136–7. 9 AU s.aa. 746.6, 796.4. Pádraig Ó Riain suggests that the *VCainn.* form may, indeed, be the older. 10 AU s.aa. 773.2, 779.2. I take the instance in CGSH §707.463 to be derivative: the form there is *Lethdubi*. 11 See Sharpe,

no sense of external threat. All in all we may hypothesize that as far as the composition of *VCainn.* is concerned the use of VC provides a *terminus a quo* of c.700 AD, while the content of the work may suggest a *terminus ante quem* of the early ninth century, before the beginning of Viking impact on ecclesiastical life.

VCainn. has a biographical structure. It recounts the circumstances of the saint's birth and early upbringing, his departure to Britain to study with the holy man Dooc, his ordination and onward travel to Rome, and his performance of various miracles in Italy. Then, divine intervention reminds him that his destiny lies in Ireland, whereupon he returns home. He is depicted as performing miracles in various places throughout Ireland, and subsequently appears in Britain, where he has various encounters, particularly with Colum Cille on Iona. Another round of travelling and miracle-working throughout Ireland follows. Finally, and rather abruptly, his approaching death is announced, and the Life recounts how he received the final eucharist, not from one of his own *familia*, but from *Fintan Meldub*, 'sent by God'.

The Life appears to be a carefully-wrought hagiographical construction by an author well-acquainted with the conventions of his genre. Throughout the text there is emphasis on Cainnech's role as *electus Dei*, and on the manner in which heavenly agency marks all stages of his life. Indeed, there is conscious stylization to underline this. The Life reveals how the Lord parted flood-waters for him, saved him from fire and drowning and was willing to move a mountain for him.¹² Cainnech himself had parents who were 'poor like those of Christ', he fasted for forty days and forty nights, *exemplo Domini*, and he raised the dead to life.¹³

Yet the individuality of the saint emerges also, with a good deal of plausible information about persons and places in his career, even the detail that in appearance Cainnech was small and bald.¹⁴ While annal evidence indicates that ecclesiastical and secular figures brought in contact with the saint are, indeed, his contemporaries,¹⁵ there is no other means of ascertaining whether the hagiographer drew on genuine historical records of Cainnech's career. In any case, *VCainn.* is a work of literature, and we need to look further at its compositional aspect in order to discover more about its outlook and purposes.

VCainn. reflects conventional practice in its reliance on miracle-working as the chief affirmation of sanctity. Its connection with VC is evident immediately in its direct borrowing of two miracle stories involving sea-travel through

'Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*'. I do not agree with Plummer's assumption (VSH i.xii n. 4) that *gial[li]cherd* (*VCainn.* §41) is necessarily inferior to *gallcherd* in the other manuscripts; nor do I accept his inference that *gallcherd* necessarily refers to Viking practice. ¹² *VCainn.* §§5, 8, 21. ¹³ *Ibid.* §§1, 48, 59. ¹⁴ *Ibid.* §§46, 57. ¹⁵ Plummer, VSH i.xlv. Clearly, my focus is on the literary representation of Cainnech, and I do not propose to enter into speculation about the saint's putative origins or identity. In this regard, see Ó Riain, 'Cainnech *alias* Colum Cille'; on the onomastic aspects of the name, see Paul Russell's contribution elsewhere in this volume.

storms.¹⁶ Certainly these are borrowed from VC because they show Cainnech being viewed in a positive light by the Columban community. When re-set in *VCainn.*, however, the Columban aspect of the stories is diminished. For example, Adomnán's work (VC II.13) asserted that the prayers of both saints had worked together to ensure the safety of the Columban crew. Cainnech's hagiographer, however, gives his subject sole credit.

On further examination we see a continuation of this pattern. The hagiographer depicts instances in which Cainnech's career is made to track that of Colum Cille in places associated with the Iona saint, across the Spine of Britain, in Tiree, and in Iona itself. Thus Cainnech's sanctity is affirmed in Colum Cille's own bailiwick, but without Columban accompaniment.¹⁷ Elsewhere, Cainnech's saintly attributes implicitly parallel those of Colum Cille. For example, books, learning, and preaching the word of God are given prominence in the *vitae* of both saints, and Cainnech's books, like those of the Iona saint, are undamaged by exposure to the elements.¹⁸

Probably the most evident aspect of saintly portrayal which *VCainn.* shares with VC is that of supernatural visitations and otherworldly contacts. Book III of VC, which is devoted to this topic, seems to provide the unacknowledged model for episodes which have been termed 'vertical' in import, illustrating the saint's relationship with the divine sphere.¹⁹ Like Colum Cille, Cainnech was rebuked by an angel when he took an unapproved initiative.²⁰ He not only saw angels,²¹ but also had the facility of seeing distant events through the Spirit.²² Heavenly light surrounded him.²³ He retreated from human company, and spent three days and three nights in uninterrupted contemplation.²⁴ *VCainn.* not only highlights angelic visitations to the saint, it also shares with VC a parallel focus on encounters with demons. Both *vitae* recount aerial contests against demons for the possession of souls,²⁵ and tell of saints being enveloped in diabolically induced mist.²⁶

Clearly, the author of *VCainn.* did not slavishly follow his exemplar, but used it shrewdly to complete a portrait of his subject which would reveal him as having been affirmed in his sanctity by the same range of supernatural signs which marked the Columban Life.²⁷ Yet it emerges that this definition of Cainnech is not framed as homage for he appears not as a second Columba, but rather as a superior alternative.

16 VC I.4, reflected in *VCainn.* §28; VC II.13, reflected in *VCainn.* §54. 17 *VCainn.* §§24, 25, 26. 18 See, for instance, VC I.25, II.8, 9, III. 23; *VCainn.* §§18, 22, 23, 33, 43. 19 On this topic see Stanciliffe, 'Miracle Stories', especially pp. 94–110. 20 VC III.5, *VCainn.* §9. 21 VC I.1, III.1, III.5, III.15, III.16, III.23; *VCainn.* §§9, 18, 21. 22 VC I.1, I.20, I.41, II.39, II.42; *VCainn.* §§17, 38. 23 VC III.19, 20, 21; *VCainn.* §§42, 46. 24 VC III.18, *VCainn.* §37. 25 VC III.6, 10, 13; *VCainn.* §§13, 27. 26 VC II.34, *VCainn.* §46. We may note further that the phrase *instinctu diabuli* is used with similar effect in VC II.24 and *VCainn.* §5. 27 Other episodes which may be characterized as VC-type *uirvutes* include *VCainn.* §§17, 47, 50.

Of course, the aggrandizement of his subject is the hagiographer's task and there is nothing particularly remarkable in the revelation of a saint's status through comparison with others. Indeed, in one instance *VCainn.* follows the example of VC itself in representing a gathering of eminent churchmen in which the superiority of one is demonstrated. In VC, a ball of fire is seen to shine over the head of Colum Cille as he celebrates Mass with Brendan, Comgall and Cainnech. In *VCainn.* the narrative depicts how inclement weather soaked the clothing of Colum Cille and of Comgall, while their companion, Cainnech, remained entirely dry.²⁸ What is significant about *VCainn.*, however, is that the author goes beyond conventional hagiographical competitiveness to draw a pointed contrast between Columban moral misguidedness and Cainnech's unimpeachable judgement.

The particular narrative demonstration gains added literary force from the fact that it is a calculated reworking of a narrative of VC.²⁹ Adomnán's work (I.2) relates how Finten, son of Tailchán, arriving to join the monastic community of Iona in the aftermath of Colum Cille's death, learns from the new abbot, Baithéne, that the saint had prophetically advised that Finten should not remain in Iona, but should found his own monastery in Ireland. The episode as it appears in *VCainn.*, however, recounts how Finten (here called Munnu, the hypocoristic form of his name) is brought to Iona by his pilgrim father. *Bithinus* (Baithéne) alleges that the father loves his son more than he does God, and demands that the boy be cast into the sea. Grieving, but obedient, the father does so, a fact which the Holy Spirit revealed to Cainnech as he was sailing from Tiree. He snatches the boy from the waves and proceeds to Iona to vent his anger on Colum Cille. The latter in turn orders Bithinus to present himself to Cainnech for judgement. After a three-year search throughout Ireland, Bithinus reaches Cainnech. He is told that the years of his quest suffice as punishment, and he is enabled to return to Iona. Cainnech clearly holds the high moral ground, and his humane decisions contrast with the doctrinaire attitude on Iona. The narrative concludes by indicating that despite closure of the matter the legacy of Columban culpability remained.

There is no doubt that the hagiographer designed this material as polemic. What was the context in which he did so? Just as the influence of VC signals a particular emphasis in *VCainn.*, we now find that affinities with another hagiographical work provide further illumination. An episode relating how Cainnech came to the aid of Bishop Áed mac Brice clearly proclaims a positive association between the two saints,³⁰ while at the literary level, the narrative of *VCainn.* has echoes of the *vita* of the bishop (hereafter *VAed.*).³¹ Indeed, there

²⁸ VC III.17; *VCainn.* §20. Note also *VCainn.* §§18, 52, which duplicate an episode of Cainnech's superiority. ²⁹ *VCainn.* §§26, 27. ³⁰ *Ibid.* §32. ³¹ Text in Heist, *Vitae*, pp. 167–81.

are several other narratives in *VCainn.* which recall miracle-stories in *VAed.*, though they do not mention the bishop. Like Bishop Áed, Cainnech had unbroken horses become tame for him, he revealed the deceptive power of a *magus*, he removed an unwanted pregnancy through his blessing, and restored an eaten animal.³² Stories of bishop Áed's extraordinary powers of travel have their cognate in *VCainn.*,³³ as have accounts of the immobilization of the saint's attackers,³⁴ and the story of miraculous provision of his Lenten fare.³⁵

It is possible that *VCainn.* and *VAed.* were both simply drawing on the same stock of hagiographical lore, but the episode in *VCainn.* which makes explicit mention of the bishop seems to be based directly on two narratives in *VAed.*³⁶ What are the implications of this? *VAed.*, like *VCainn.*, belongs to the group of *vitae* in the *Codex Salmanticensis* for which Sharpe proposes a pre-Viking date.³⁷ My own examination suggests that *VAed.* was compiled in the first half of the eighth century.³⁸ If the text, as we have it, was directly used by the compiler of *VCainn.*, therefore, the latter's work must be placed no earlier than the mid-eighth century.

Before proceeding further with the matter of date, however, we should note that the association portrayed between Cainnech and Bishop Áed highlights another important feature of *VCainn.*, that it locates several episodes of the saint's career in Southern Uí Néill territory, and in the borderlands between Uí Néill and Munster.³⁹ Certainly the author of *VCainn.* sought to demonstrate that his subject had widespread associations both within and without Ireland. We have already noted the Columban resonance of episodes set in Britain. In Ireland, the saint's family origins explain links with the north of Ireland in the *vita*⁴⁰ while Cainnech's association with the church of Achad Bó and thereby with Ossory and South Leinster is already attested in VC.⁴¹ The text goes further afield, moreover, depicting Cainnech even in Munster, beside Loch Léin.⁴² While this episode is probably intended to enhance the idea of a country-wide cult of Cainnech, the unlikelihood of the location may have chronological implications. In the second half of the eighth century, up to the year 786, it was the Eoganacht of Loch Léin who held Munster kingship.⁴³ It is possible, therefore, that the hagiographer simply drew on such contemporary information to represent Munster interest in *VCainn.* through a Loch Léin setting.

32 *VCainn.* §11, *VAed.* §14; *VCainn.* §14, *VAed.* §39; *VCainn.* §56, *VAed.* §15; *VCainn.* §58, *VAed.* §20. 33 *VCainn.* §57, *VAed.* §§36, 42. 34 *VCainn.* §7, *VAed.* §42. 35 *VCainn.* §15, *VAed.* §47. 36 *VCainn.* §32, drawing on *VAed.* §24 and §31. 37 Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 297–339. 38 I hope to publish my views in the forthcoming volume of the *Ireland and Europe* series, edited by Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter. 39 *VCainn.* §§32–5, 38, 59. 40 *VCainn.* §§10–2, 14, 17–8. 41 VC II.13, *VCainn.* §§41, 46–7, 50, 54. 42 *VCainn.* §45. 43 Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 216–9; *Annals of Inisfallen*, s.a. 786.

What of the episodes associated with Southern Uí Néill territory? Dedication evidence links Cainnech with the church of Kilkenny West in Westmeath, which, in turn, was not far distant from Bishop Áed's church of Killare.⁴⁴ Both saints also are associated with churches close to the Uí Néill–Munster boundary.⁴⁵ Cainnech's activities in Uí Néill territory, however, involve secular as well as ecclesiastical associations. The hagiographer depicts his subject assisting Bishop Áed in a confrontation with the Uí Néill king, Colmán Bec (*Colmanus Medicus*). Struck down by divine intervention, the king was miraculously resurrected by Cainnech who received thereafter not only royal submission but also the gift of a church-site.⁴⁶ Subsequently, *VCainn.* recounts how the saint, on his travels *in regionibus Neill*, came upon a wayside cross, and was told that it marked the spot where the king, Colmán Bec, had been slain. Cainnech prayed so fervently and tearfully at the cross that surrounding snow melted, until finally he received a revelation through the Holy Spirit that the soul of Colmán had been brought out of hell.⁴⁷

Cainnech's role in Southern Uí Néill territory, therefore, is associated with the secular power of Colmán Bec's branch of the Uí Néill. In the historical record it was the families of the brothers of Colmán Bec, Colmán Mór and Áed Sláne, who dominated Southern Uí Néill politics from the end of the sixth century up to the 760s. Then there was a brief interlude of prominence for Colmán Bec's family, after which they were again eclipsed.⁴⁸ Is it the case, therefore, that Cainnech's hagiographical association with Colmán Bec had contemporary resonance for an author whose work we have tentatively placed around the second half of the eighth century?

Examination of the historical record of Southern Uí Néill over-kingship indicates that after a period of Sil nÁedo Sláne dominance the long reign of Domnall mac Murchada (*c.* 728–763) initiated an era of power for his Clann Cholmáin Móir dynasty. Annal evidence suggests, moreover, that Domnall was allied from the early years of his reign with Follomon, head of the dynasty of Colmán Bec.⁴⁹ Another significant alliance, attested from the latter part of Domnall's reign, was with the *familia* of Colum Cille. While there were immediate connections with the Columban monastery of Durrow within Domnall's own realm, the Columban connection extended beyond the local to the headship of the *familia* in Iona. As over-king of all the Uí Néill kingdoms, a position which he attained after 743,⁵⁰ Domnall appears to have been the main secular ally of

44 O'Donovan, 'Ordnance Survey Letters', pp. 10–1, 20–3. 45 *VCainn.* §§35–7, *VAed.* §§1, 7, 42, 44. Bishop Áed's church of *Enach Midbren* has not been identified, but it is evidently in Muscraige Tire. 46 *VCainn.* §32. 47 *VCainn.* §38. 48 Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 93–4, 116, 281–2. 49 AU s.a. 733.7 indicates that both rulers were targets of attack by the Munster ruler, Cathal mac Finguine; see also Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings*, pp. 207–10. Another view is expressed by Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, p. xii n. 3. 50 His succession follows the defeat and killing of Áed Allán of Northern Uí Néill in that year (AU s.a. 743.4).

the Iona successors of Colum Cille, kin-saint and patron of all the Uí Néill. The alliance is reflected in the annal record of Domnall's proclamation of a church-state legal measure called 'The Law of Colum Cille' in the year 753. Sléibéne, newly-elected abbot of Iona, came to Ireland in the following year, and himself proclaimed *Lex Columbe Cille* in the year 757.⁵¹

The death of Domnall in the year 763 was followed by conflict amongst his sons, and it appears that at this juncture Follomon of the family of Colmán Bec, the long-time associate of the dead king, took the kingship of Mide. Yet he remained engaged with the fortunes of Domnall's family also, since he is reported as having been on the side of Donnchad, son of Domnall in his victory over another of the king's sons in the year 765. Follomon apparently got no reward for his loyalty, however, but rather he was slain *dolose* in the following year.⁵² As Donnchad son of Domnall succeeded to the kingship thereafter, there is at least a strong suspicion of his involvement in the killing. The murder of Follomon, a senior political figure, must have been widely deplored. Yet the author of *VCainn.*, who declares his interest through representation of Follomon's ancestor Colmán Bec, nevertheless directs the hostile focus of his composition not against treacherous political colleagues of the king but against the Columban community. Why should this be?

If we examine church-state interaction in Southern Uí Néill lands in the aftermath of Follomon's killing, we see that the Columban community, and its Iona leaders, continued to ally themselves with the leading political power in Southern Uí Néill, and thereby with the king Donnchad. Indeed, the annals record an Irish visitation by the abbot of Iona in the same year that Follomon was murdered. Though Donnchad seems to have gained power through this violent deed, and though his reign was marked by aggression, the Columban *familia* of Durrow were involved on his side in a conflict against the Munstermen in 776. Moreover, the annals reveal that *Lex Coluim Chille* was jointly proclaimed by Donnchad and by Bresal, abbot of Iona in the year 778.⁵³

This state of affairs, therefore, appears as a likely catalyst for the critical attitude of *VCainn.* toward the Columban community. The Life acknowledges the former friendship between Cainnech and Colum Cille, which is reflected in VC. In Southern Uí Néill lands, the two communities were on the same side politically for as long as the dynasties of Colmán Mór and Colmán Bec were allies. For the followers of Cainnech, however, the aftermath of Follomon's killing and Donnchad's accession must have estranged them from a Columban community which appeared to put politics before principle. The author of *VCainn.* represents the Iona leadership of the Columban community as having lost its moral compass. The rigidity shown in its ecclesiastical life seems to stand

51 See Herbert, *Iona*, pp. 60–7; and AU s.aa. 753.4, 754.3, 757.9. 52 See AU s.aa. 763.1, 765.5, 766.2. 53 AU s.aa. 766.6, 770.8, 775.5, 776.11, 778.4.

for a more general inflexibility which failed to take account of specific circumstance. Moreover, there is an episode in *VCainn.* where even demons are represented as mouth-pieces of the watch-word *Relinque mundum*.⁵⁴ Is this also a veiled criticism of monastic concern with worldly support at the expense of humane values?

While the main counter-Columban episodes of *VCainn.* are played out in Britain, the Life makes it clear that Ireland is at the centre of its concerns. The hagiographer sets out to depict Cainnech, not only as a saint who embodied and surpassed Columban virtues, but also as a saint whose presence was asserted in many Irish regions, and in several religious communities. He is credited with miracles of assistance to fellow ecclesiastics⁵⁵ and favoured rulers,⁵⁶ as well as with punishment-miracles wrought against erring kings⁵⁷ and churchmen.⁵⁸ What is significant in an Irish context is that the Columban presence is edited out. In Southern Uí Néill lands, the saint favoured by Cainnech is Bishop Áed mac Bricc. Moreover, hints of Patrician partisanship may be a direct rebuff to Columban interests.⁵⁹ Cainnech is depicted as working a miracle for Brendan, and as choosing to receive the last rites from Fintan Maeldub, successor of Fintan of Clonenagh.⁶⁰ The hagiographer is depicting a network of alliances which implicitly repudiate the Columban community in nearby Durrow.

Given the historical context which I have outlined, the hagiographer is most likely to have compiled his work during the period 766–780. He presents a strongly individualized picture of Cainnech, while also projecting the shadow-image of Colum Cille through literary parallelism. Episodes in *VCainn.* derived from VC reflect the close bonds that had existed between Cainnech and Colum Cille, as well as the rupture of those bonds in the second half of the eighth century. The testimony in VC to friendship between the saints surely implies continuation of this friendship by their communities down to Adomnán's day. This in turn suggests that the community of Cainnech was a likely destination for a copy of VC. We still have not discovered how soon the work reached Ireland after its completion around the year 700. It seems to me that if VC had not immediately been circulated in Ireland, it must surely have become available from the year 727 when Adomnán's *reliquie* were brought from Iona to Ireland.⁶¹

Early Hiberno-Latin saints' Lives seem to have been addressed primarily to an ecclesiastical public, aware of the local and of the literary contexts of hagiographical composition. For the Columban community, the use of VC by the author of *VCainn.* must have considerably intensified the impact of the *vita*.

⁵⁴ *VCainn.* §57. Note also that *VCainn.* §20 opposes spiritual and worldly concerns. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.* §§35–7, 39, 40, 53, 58, 59. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* §§46–7. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.* §§10, 32. ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* §47. ⁵⁹ Note the testimony to the power of 'Patrick's hymn', *VCainn.* §48. There are echoes of Patrician hagiography in *VCainn.* §§12, 19, 46. Compare Tírechán, *Collectanea* § 40; Muirchú I.23 (22) and II.3 (Bieler, *Patrician Texts*, pp. 154–5; 102–7, 114–17). ⁶⁰ *VCainn.* §§53, 60. ⁶¹ AU s.a. 727.5. The *reversio reliquiarum Adomnani* is recorded at AU s.a. 730.3.

VCainn. could be viewed as having impugned the iconic status both of Columban sanctity, and of its hagiographical memorial. In literary terms, moreover, *VCainn.* not only testifies to the presence of VC in Ireland in the second half of the eighth century, it also testifies to the development of the genre of hagiography in Ireland about a century after the earliest works were compiled. It shows Irish hagiography drawing on exemplars from within its own tradition, and developing its own rhetorical strategies, while also retaining generic conventions adopted from external models during the seventh century.