

# A Palaeographer's View

## THE SELECTED WRITINGS OF JULIAN BROWN

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*with a Preface  
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Gospels; and a documentary cursive, some traces of which can be detected in the fragment of Isidore from St Gallen and in the last ten lines of Mark in A. II. 10, but which has left a clearer impression of itself in the oldest known Anglo-Saxon minuscule, some from Northumbria and some from the South West, and in the small Irish minuscule of the grammar texts written at Bobbio, of 'pocket Gospel-books' such as *Mulling*, and of the Book of Armagh.<sup>10</sup>

## IV

THE TYPICAL QUIRE in Continental books of the fifth and sixth centuries differs in several ways from the typical quire of the oldest Insular books. In Late Antique books, the thinnish membrane exhibits a strong contrast between a rougher, darker hair-side and a smoother, whiter flesh-side; quires are normally formed from four sheets folded to make eight leaves and arranged so that the first recto is a flesh-side and hair-sides and flesh-sides face each other in pairs in the rest of the quire; and sheets were ruled on the flesh-sides before folding, one or more at a time, from prickings in the outer margins or in the outer half of the written space, so that the furrows and ridges left by the hard point faced each other in pairs within the quire. From *c.* 600 onwards regularly formed quires on the Continent began to be ruled on the hair-sides and to make the first recto a hair-side. Although irregularly formed quires in Continental books of the seventh and eighth centuries tended to break some of these rules, membrane continued to be prepared so that hair- and flesh-sides differed considerably in appearance; and sheets continued to be pricked in outer margins only and ruled before folding. The standard quire of the period before 600, in which alternate openings within the quire consisted of pairs of ridged hair-sides followed by pairs of furrowed flesh-sides, is a well thought-out solution to the problem presented by the contrasts in appearance between hair-side and flesh-side and between ridge and furrow.

The typical Insular quire of the seventh century is made of thickish membrane, both sides of which tend to have a slight, suede-like nap, making the hair-side difficult to distinguish from the flesh-side; quires are normally formed from five sheets folded to make ten leaves and arranged with all hair-sides outwards, so that flesh-sides face hair-sides all through the quire. Having been

folded, the quire was pricked in both margins and ruled vigorously with a hard point on the first recto, and then on one or more later rectos, sometimes also on the last verso, until every leaf was adequately ruled. In the ordinary way, all rectos were furrowed and all versos were ridged. In the first half of the quire, ridged flesh-sides on the left faced furrowed hair-sides on the right; in the second half, ridged hair-sides on the left faced furrowed flesh-sides on the right; between quires and the middle of quires, hair-sides faced hair-sides and flesh-sides faced flesh-sides respectively, but even here a ridged left-hand page faced a furrowed right-hand page. The thickness and the lack of contrast between hair-side and flesh-side in Insular membrane made this arrangement of the sheets less unsatisfactory than it would have been if the membrane had been prepared in the Continental way, with one side smooth, white and obviously furrowed, and the other side rougher, grayish or yellowish in colour, and obviously ridged. But the confrontation between ridges and furrows in each Insular opening could be conspicuous; and ruling on a recto in the middle of a formed quire of ten leaves of thickish membrane cannot have been easy. All in all, the Insular quire of the seventh century strikes me as technologically primitive when compared to the Continental quire of the fifth and sixth centuries.

Not all Insular books followed this standard method of quiring. In Irish books, the quires were often irregular — of six, eight, ten or twelve leaves — and ruling could be omitted or ignored; and the membrane was sometimes of extremely poor quality. From *c.* 700 onwards Anglo-Saxon books, beginning with the Wearmouth-Jarrow Biblical volumes in uncials and the Lindisfarne Gospels (*CLA* 2,187), in all of which Italian influence was very strong, usually have quires of eight and not ten leaves, although arrangement, pricking and ruling remain the same as before. All the leaves in the Echternach Gospels (*CLA* 5,578) and some of the leaves in the Durham Gospels (*CLA* 2,149), both written at Lindisfarne *c.* 698 by the same scribe, were apparently made from a stock of membrane prepared more or less in the Continental way; and the membrane of the Stonyhurst Gospel of St John (*CLA* 2,260), a Wearmouth-Jarrow book also very likely of *c.* 698, is also more Continental than Insular in appearance. Neither the 'Ussher' Gospels nor the St Gallen fragment of Isidore is in very good condition; but as far as one can tell, the membrane in each case has a rather Continental appearance: a fact which has raised the



question of whether they were made at Bobbio or in Ireland itself. The above-named examples of unusual membrane at Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow look like isolated experiments with the Continental method of preparation, in a period when Anglo-Saxon book-production was being heavily influenced by Italy; and it seems possible that the equally isolated cases of the two Irish specimens were similar experiments, inspired by the fresh contacts with Italy and/or Spain that brought on the Irish renaissance of the mid-seventh century. Normal Insular membrane occurs in the Cathach, the Bangor Antiphonary and the Schaffhausen Adomnan, from Ireland and Iona; in the Orosius and in other seventh-century books from Bobbio; and in all but the three mentioned above of the oldest Anglo-Saxon books, including A. II. 10: a pan-Insular diffusion which seems to prove that it was an early, basic feature of Irish book-production.

The Latin manuscripts of Late Antiquity whose quires diverge, according to *CLA*, from the Late Antique standard pattern in the direction of the Insular standard pattern are the following:

- 7 1. The Bembine Terence (*CLA* 1,12), Italy, saec. IV<sup>2</sup>, in rustic capitals. Quires of ten leaves, apparently ruled after folding, several leaves at a time, on flesh-sides.
2. Seneca, *De Amicitia*, etc. (*CLA* 1,69), saec. III-IV, in early half-uncials, probably from the Eastern Mediterranean. Probably ruled after folding.
3. Aulus Gellius (*CLA* 1,174), saec. IV, in rustic capitals, primary script in a palimpsest. Quires of ten leaves, ruled apparently after folding, on hair-sides.
4. Cicero, *In Verrem* (*CLA* 1,115), Italy, saec. V, in rustic capitals, primary script in a palimpsest. Quires mostly of ten leaves.
- 11 5. Lactantius (*CLA* 3,280), Africa, saec. V<sup>2</sup>, in uncials. Quires normally of eight leaves, but ruled after folding on the first recto and on succeeding rectos as required.
- 5 6. Josephus, *De Antiquitatibus Judaicis* (*CLA* 3,304), North Italy, saec. VI, on papyrus, in cursive minuscule. Quires mostly of ten leaves.
- 2,3 7. Probus, etc. (*CLA* 3,397a), Italy, saec. V, in literary cursive. Quires mostly of eight leaves, but ruled after

folding, on flesh-side or hair-side, with only a four-sided frame for the written space.

8. Gospels, *Vetus Latina*, Codex Bobiensis (k) (*CLA* 4,465), Africa, saec. IV-V, in uncials. Quires mostly of eight leaves, but ruled after folding on hair-sides, several leaves at a time. Late tradition says that the book was owned by Columbanus himself, but there are no solid grounds for thinking that he took it to Bobbio from Ireland.

The dates of these eight books suggest that in the fifth century quires of ten leaves and ruling after folding were going out of fashion, not coming in. And it is reasonable to suppose that if both practices are basic to the standard Insular quire, it is because they were known in Roman Britain early in the fifth century, in the period when local methods of book production lost touch with codicological developments on the Continent. In Ethiopia, a 'peripheral zone' which the codex form of book reached in the fifth century, quires of ten leaves are still standard.<sup>11</sup>

Some further pointers in the same direction are obtainable from Sir Eric Turner's codicological examination<sup>12</sup> of the mostly fragmentary remains of Greek and Latin codices on papyrus and membrane as a whole, including much material outside the scope of *CLA*:

1. No codex consisting of eight-leaf quires only can be dated before the fourth century (Turner, p. 62).
2. Between the third and the sixth century, the quire of ten leaves continues to be a strong rival to the quire of eight (Turner, p. 63).
3. The quiring of the oldest known codices is often irregular (Turner, pp. 60-64). Such irregularity is not uncommon in Irish manuscripts, although it is practically unknown in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, on which the influence of the eight-leaf quire was strong from the end of the seventh century onwards.
4. Even in the oldest codices made of membrane hair-sides and flesh-sides usually faced each other within the quire: the natural result of folding a single skin to make four or eight leaves. But in codices made of papyrus horizontal fibres (rectos) usually faced vertical fibres



(versos) (Turner, p. 65); and papyrus codices in which matching pairs of vertical and horizontal fibres faced each other are less common before the fifth century than the other sort, in which vertical fibres faced horizontal fibres in unmatched pairs. Of Turner's listed examples of the former sort only about a quarter are earlier than the fifth century, while about half his examples of the latter sort are earlier (Turner, pp. 66-7).

Papyrus must unquestionably have been imported into Roman Britain in large quantities down to the departure of the imperial troops and administrators after 410: the military and bureaucratic machines would soon have seized up without it. Further, the eventual triumph of membrane over papyrus as the standard material for a codex was hardly complete by the end of the fourth century; and we may reasonably suspect that at the lower end of the codicological scale, from which books produced in Roman Britain itself are likely to have come, papyrus was still as common as, if not commoner than, membrane as the material for the manufacture of codices. With the Roman army and administration gone, regular supplies of papyrus, some of which will no doubt have been available for sale to the public, will have been cut off. When books had to be made of membrane, scribes who were not yet accustomed to folding single skins so as to bring hairsides and flesh-sides together in matching pairs, may well have continued to form quires of membrane as if they were quires of papyrus, by making a pile of five sheets with all their hair-sides facing downward and then folding it, as if it were a pile of papyrus sheets cut from a roll (Turner, pp. 43-50), with all their vertical fibres facing downwards. Papyrus codices were not normally pricked or ruled; but Insular pricking and ruling could well have been learned from imported fourth-century codices of membrane which resembled nos. 1, 2 and 7 in the list on pp. 236-7 above. The result will have been a less advanced form of quire than the standard type found in the great majority of fifth-century codices on membrane.

The 'Continental' type of membrane was apparently perfected long before the fifth century A.D., since the quality of the Greek document from Dura Europos, third to second century B.C., is reputedly excellent. Membrane of which the two sides were made to look as similar as possible was used for the earliest Hebrew books in the East and, in Yemen, down to the end of the Middle

Ages; but hairside and flesh-side alike are 'glossy', not suede-like.<sup>13</sup> Since Insular membrane has so little in common either with Continental or with Oriental membrane, it seems reasonable to think of it as a local variant, devised in some Romano-British centre to make good the sudden disappearance of papyrus from a province in which the usual method of manufacture was not yet established. We meet it for the first time in seventh-century manuscripts of Irish and Anglo-Saxon origin; and if the Anglo-Saxons failed to give it up after their late-seventh-century love affair with Italian book production, it was probably because they found that it held ink and pigments equally well on both sides.

In most professionally produced Latin books of the fifth and sixth centuries the text is arranged in two columns; and Turner has suggested that papyrus codices with text in a single column were thought of as 'second-class' (Turner, p. 37). The cache of fourth-century codices in Coptic from Nag Hamadi, made of papyrus and unpretentiously bound into leather jackets, is perhaps our best guide to the general appearance of 'second class' Christian books in Late Antiquity; and all thirteen of them have text arranged in a single column. The two fifth-century grammar books at Naples, all in literary cursive, also have text in a single column. So do the 'Ussher' Gospels, the Bobbio Orosius, and the Isidore fragment at St Gallen. The (early) eighth-century volume of glosses, partly in Anglo-Saxon and partly in Old Irish, on the Psalms (*CLA* 1,78), from Northumbria, in quires of ten, is strongly reminiscent of the two grammar books in Naples: modest size, minuscule script, text in a single column. Liturgical Gospel books in two columns are as old as the early fifth century (*CLA* 7,978a and 984), and the Anglo-Saxons used that arrangement from the late seventh century onwards; but in Ireland and England alike the tradition of the one-column Gospel book persisted until the ninth century. Early examples are the seventh-century Gospels from Bobbio (*CLA* 3,350), the Book of Durrow (*CLA* 2,273), and the Durham Gospels; later examples include the Lichfield Gospels (*CLA* 2,159), the Book of Kells (*CLA* 2,274), the Hereford Gospels (*CLA* 2,157), and the Gospels of Macregol (*CLA* 2,231). The Irish 'pocket Gospel books' studied by Patrick McGurk are miniature volumes in some of which each Gospel occupies a quire of its own, which may contain considerably more than ten leaves.<sup>14</sup> Such are the Book of Mulling, with quires of 12 + 1, 26 + 2, 22 and 14 + 3; the Cadmug Gospels (*CLA* 8,1198), with quires of 14, 16, 18 and