Virgil the Grammarian and Bede: a preliminary study

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ABSTRACT

The chapters in Bede's *De temporum ratione* begin with an etymology for the name of the subject to be examined. Sources and analogues for some have not hitherto been identified. This article shows that some of these etymologies of words for the divisions of time come ultimately, though perhaps not directly, from bk XI of Virgil the Grammarian's *Epitomae*. These accounts of the origins of calendrical and cosmological terms wound their way through early western computistical works and eventually into Bede's *De temporum ratione*. The article identifies examples of Virgil's influence on anonymous early medieval biblical commentaries and discusses their significance as pointers towards their place of composition.

There are few figures who offer a greater contrast than Virgil the Grammarian (Virgilius Maro Grammaticus) and the Venerable Bede, the subjects of this article. Bede has left an extensive corpus of writings and the circumstances of his life are well documented. Virgil, the 'enigmatic professor of the enigmatic',[1] is an elusive figure. It is difficult to say anything definite about his milieu, and much of what has been said has been contested.[2] It is increasingly accepted that he wrote his grammatical tracts and letters – which are also concerned with things grammatical – in seventh-century Ireland. The *Epitomae*, like the *Epistolae*, cover diverse aspects of grammar in their idiosyncratic way, such as

[1] B. F. Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry* (New York, 1959), p. 32.

[2] Investigations of this subject include M. Herren, 'The Pseudonymous Tradition in Hiberno-Latin: an Introduction', *Latin Script and Letters,* AD *400–900: Festschrift presented to Ludwig Bieler on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, ed. J. J. O'Meara and B. Naumann (Leiden, 1976), pp. 121–31; *idem*, 'Some New Light on the Life of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', *Proc. of the R. Irish Acad.* (C) 79 (1979), 27–71; *idem*, 'Virgil the Grammarian: a Spanish Jew in Ireland?', *Peritia* 9 (1995), 51–71; D. Ó Cróinín, 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus', *Proc. of the R. Irish Acad.* (C) 82 (1982), 405–30; *idem*, 'The Date, Provenance, and Earliest Use of the Works of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', *Tradition und Wertung: Festschrift für Franz Brunhölzl zum 65 Geburtstag*, ed. G. Bernt, F. Rädle and G. Silagi (Sigmaringen, 1989), pp. 13–22; V. Law, 'Fragments from the Lost Portions of the *Epitomae* of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', *CMCS* 21 (1991), 113–25; *eadem*, *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge, 1995); A. Cizek, 'Virgile le grammairien: un auteur hiberno-aquitaine?', *Aquitaine and Ireland in the Middle Ages*, ed. J.-M. Picard (Dublin, 1995), p. 136; M. Richter, *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin, 1999), p. 167; D. Bracken, 'Virgilius Grammaticus and the Earliest Hiberno-Latin Literature', *Ogma: Essays in Celtic Studies in honour of Próinséas Ní Chatháin*, ed. M. Richter and J.-M. Picard (Dublin, 2002), pp. 251–61; and my review of *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, ed. M. Bayless and M. Lapidge, in *Peritia* 15 (2001), 379–86.

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the parts of speech and metre, but they also include books on 'The dividing up of words' (*De scinderatione fonorum*) and a list of grammarians (*De catalogo grammaticorum*) where Virgil reveals himself to be the third in a line of grammarians of the name.[3] We read that the first Virgil was an alumnus of Donatus. He wrote seventy volumes on the rules of metre and a letter to the second Virgil, that is the Asian Virgil, explaining the nature of the verb. The second Virgil, an alumnus of the first, wrote a notable book on the twelve types of Latin. Virgil then reveals the origins of his own *nom de plume*. His teacher, Aeneas, himself the student of the three Vulcans, perceived the genius of his student and declared that his name should be [Virgilius] Maro since the spirit of the classical poet lived on in his promising student. This is strange territory populated by characters as colourful as Virgil himself; there's Balapsidus, Bregandus, Gabritius, Galbarius, Galbungus and a Gelvidius.[4] This literature is unconventional by any standards and this is what sets Virgil's grammars apart and makes them so compelling. Although there is an emerging consensus about his milieu, there is still a sharp division among scholars about his purpose in writing. Some see it as elaborate parody. Others have interpreted his work in the context of the Augustinian hermeneutic.[5] The reader who stays at the surface level of the narrative or who appreciates literature simply for its style is trapped in what Augustine calls a 'miserable slavery of the soul'.[6] The reader must penetrate beneath the surface to reach the meaning. What Virgil writes is deliberately obscure and so in the act of reading the reader must move beyond passive assimilation of information to active interpretation of what is before him on the page. The reader must use God-given rational faculties to understand what is being said and so literature 'addresses the soul, leads it from the external, corporal senses, to the perfected understanding of intelligible things'.[7]

[3] *Epitomae* XII, *De catalogo grammaticorum*. The editions of Virgil's works used here are B. Löfstedt, *Virgilius Maro Grammaticus, opera omnia*, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Munich and Leipzig, 2003) and G. Polara and L. Caruso, *Virgilio Marone Grammatico: Epitomi ed Epistole* (Naples, 1979). These editions are referred to henceforth as Löfstedt and Polara.

[4] Löfstedt, pp. 96–7; Polara, p. 56. On these names, see G. Calder, *Auraicept na n-Éces: the Scholar's Primer* (Edinburgh, 1917), p. xli, and Herren, 'Some New Light', p. 35.

[5] Augustine's conception of the Christian curriculum is set out in *De doctrina christiana*, ed. K. D. Daur and J. Martin, CCSL 32 (Turnhout, 1962) (PL 54, cols. 15–122), a work that has inspired an extensive modern literature; see *'De doctrina christiana': a Classic of Western Culture*, ed. D. W. H. Arnold and P. Bright (Notre Dame, IN, 1995).

[6] *De doctrina christiana* III.v.9, CCSL 32, p. 83; PL 34, col. 69; quoted by R. A. Markus, 'The Jew as Hermeneutic Device: the Inner Life of a Gregorian Topos', *Gregory the Great: a Symposium*, ed. J. C. Cavadini (Notre Dame, IN, 1995), pp. 1–15, at 3. This line of analysis was pursued by Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry*, pp. 32–5.

[7] Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry*, pp. 54–5, quoting from John Scottus Eriugena, *Expositiones super ierarchiam caelestem S. Dionysii*; PL 122, col. 146.

Virgil exercises his reader with his elaborate wordplay, but in the *Epitomae*, bk XI, *De cognationibus etymologiae aliorum nominum*, 'On the etymological relationships of other words', he gives accounts of the origins of words where he 'seems almost to look inside the word to derive its meaning'.[8] For scholars in the early medieval west, words were perceived to have an organic link to their referents; to understand the word is to understand the essentials of the thing it signifies. The most obvious example of this epistemology of words and their significance is, of course, St Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* where he reduces the knowledge of the ancients to a systematic account of the origins of words. In tracing these origins, Isidore seeks 'the places where . . . meaning becomes intrinsic',[9] for 'Etymology is the source of words, when the force (*vis*) of a word or name is deduced by interpretation . . . For when you have seen the source of a name, you understand its force more quickly. Every examination of a thing is clearer by knowledge of its etymology.'[10] This regard for origins and for the principle that origins have a defining influence on the present is evident in the practice of genealogy. By tracing lineage and ancestral origins, genealogy reveals something of the nature and status of the individual. Etymology and genealogy are linked.[11] Virgil says he is the third in a line of Virgils. This claim may illustrate something of his eccentricity, but in declaring his intellectual origins, he attempts to trace his intellectual lineage and so establish his authority. Virgil frequently states his respect for precedent and constantly defers to the *auctoritas seniorum*. His master warns him never to rely solely on his own authority, but to defer to his teachers (*doctores*).[12] His interest in etymology and,

[8] Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry*, p. 33.

[9] R. H. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: a Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1983), p. 56.

[10] *Etymologiae*, I.xxix.1–2: 'Etymologia est origo vocabulorum, cum vis verbi vel nominis per interpretationem colligitur . . . Nam dum videris unde ortum est nomen, citius vim eius intellegis. Omnis enim rei inspectio etymologia cognita planior est,' *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1957). This passage is discussed by E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1953), p. 497; F. L. Borchardt, 'Etymology in Tradition and in the Northern Renaissance', *Jnl of the Hist. of Ideas* 29 (1968), 415–29, at 419; G. de Poerck, '*Etymologia et origo* à travers la traditione latine', *Anamnesis: Gedenkboek Prof. Dr E. A. Leemans* (Brugge, 1970), pp. 191–228: 214; M. Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 222; S. Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text*, Cambridge Readings in Med. Lit. 27 (Cambridge, 1996), 82.

[11] See Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*; M. Rothstein, 'Etymology, Genealogy and the Immutability of Origins', *Renaissance Quaterly* 43 (1990), 332–4.

[12] Virgil says he received the following warning from his teacher: 'O Virgili, primum sidera, ne putius tuis inventis quam tuorum doctorum credas exemplis; quanto magis enim propria auctoritas defenditur, tanto magis inproba falsitas esse deprehenditur'; *Epitomae* V; Löfstedt, p. 150; Polara, p. 54. On this theme in Virgil's writings, see V. Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians*, Stud. in Celtic Hist. (Woodbridge, 1982), p. 47.

to a lesser extent, genealogy, is part of this respect for tradition and for the formative influence of origins on the present.

Origins define essence, and words say something fundamental about the things they signify. Therefore, etymology is often the starting point for an investigation of any subject. Early Irish canon law, the *Collectio hibernensis*,[13] introduces subjects in many of its sixty-five or so books with an etymology and singles out the instance when that subject appears for the first time in scripture. For the compilers, knowledge of origins of the name was the starting point for knowledge of the subject itself. The year 724 is given by some as the *terminus post quem* for the compilation of the collection. In the following year, Bede completed his *De temporum ratione* (*DTR*). For Bede, words held a similar value and he too begins the chapters of *DTR* with the etymological derivation of the word as an introduction to each new subject as it arises. This paper argues that some of the etymologies in *DTR* for which no sources have hitherto been identified come ultimately from bk XI of Virgil's *Epitomae*. In some cases, Bede favours Virgil over Isidore's explanation of the same word.[14] Although it has been recognized that Bede quotes Virgil in his grammatical work, *De orthographia*, only a full survey of his works will allow anything certain to be said about his knowledge of Virgil. This study is limited to sections of *DTR* where words relating to the computus or time are examined. The preliminary nature of the conclusions reached here must be stressed for, in the case particularly of the computistical material, any firmer conclusions will have to await a detailed study of the manuscripts.

Charles W. Jones's edition of *DTR* appeared in 1943.[15] The English translation by Faith Wallis was published in 1999 and is prefaced by a superb introduction.[16] In his notes, Jones edited an extract giving etymologies for the names of the seasons from computistical material in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 63.[17] This was quoted, according to Jones, in part verbatim by Bede in *DTR*, §35. The extract was re-edited with corrections by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín in an article on the earliest use of the works of Virgil where he showed that it is closely paralleled by the section of bk XI, *De cognationibus etymologiae aliorum nominum*, of Virgil's *Epitomae*.[18] There are significant and telling differences

[13] *Die irische Kanonensammlung*, ed. H. Wasserschleben (Leipzig, 1885).

[14] On Bede's use of the works of Isidore and a challenge to older views that emphasized Bede's lack of regard for the Spanish writer, see W. D. McCready, 'Bede and the Isidorean Legacy', *MS* 57 (1995), 41–74, and 'Bede, Isidore and the *Epistola Cuthberti*', *Traditio* 50 (1995), 75–94.

[15] *Bedae opera de temporibus*, ed. C. W. Jones, Med. Acad. of America 41 (Cambridge, MA, 1943); referred to henceforth as *BOT*.

[16] *Bede: the Reckoning of Time*, ed. F. Wallis, Translated Texts for Historians 29 (Liverpool, 1999); referred to henceforth as Wallis.

[17] *BOT*, p. 369.

[18] Ó Cróinín, 'Date, Provenance', p. 22.

between the Virgilian source and the computistical tracts. The order of the seasons and the particular etymology offered for *aestas* 'summer' in Digby 63 and Bede differ from Virgil. Furthermore, when Bede says that 'winter is translated by learned men as "cold" and "sterility" ',[19] he is offering information not found in Digby 63 but is repeating precisely what is found in Virgil who says *hiems a doctoribus frigus interpretatur vel sterilitas*.[20] This suggests that in this instance, Bede quotes Virgil indirectly, but his source is very close to Virgil. The same conclusions can be drawn in the examples discussed below, which examine etymologies in *DTR* for which no source or analogue has been found.

The complex transmission of Virgil's ideas is well illustrated in this explanation of the names for the seasons. It is found in the so-called 'Merovingian computus of 727', but in a very different format from Digby 63 and *DTR*. Virgil's more expansive treatment clarifies some of the obscurities of the 'Merovingian computus'. For example, the rather laconic explanation of the word 'summer' in the 'Merovingian computus' runs: *estas de longitudinem, quod ardor sit*.[21] Virgil helps us to understand the reference to lengthening and the semantic significance of 'heat' when he writes that, 'Summer (*aestas*) is so named from the length of the days of summer; this heat (*aestus*) is called *ardon*' (*Aestas de longitudine dierum aestatis nominatur, aestus ipse ardon dicitur*; *Epitomae* XI.v). The 'lengthening' of the 'Merovingian computus' therefore refers to the lengthening of the day in summer and the word for 'summer' *aestas*, is related to the word for 'heat', *aestus*. Virgil gives *ardon* as another word for heat. It is likely that the *ardor* of the 'Merovingian computus' was originally the Virgilian *ardon*.[22] Bk XI of the *Epitomae* contains a series of etymologies relating to the calendar and to terms for the divisions of time. These etymologies wind their way through early western computistical tracts and eventually into *DTR*. Bede begins *DTR* with the etymology of *tempus* 'time':

> Tempora igitur a temperamento nomen accipiunt, sive quod unumquodque illorum spatium separatim temperatum sit, seu quod momentis, horis, diebus, mensibus, annis, saeculisque et aetatibus omnia mortalis vita curricula temperentur (*BOT*, p. 182).
>
> Times take their name from measure, either because every unit of time is separately measured, or because all the courses of mortal life are measured in moments, hours, days, months, years, ages and epochs. (Wallis, p. 13)

[19] Wallis, p. 102. Isidore, *Etymologiae* V.xxxv, is cited as the source in the editions of *DTR*, CCSL 123B (Turnhout, 1977), 394–5; *BOT*, p. 248.

[20] Polara, p. 156; Löfstedt, p. 235.

[21] The full text is: 'Tempus a temperamento nomen accipet, ver eo quod viriscent, estas de longitudinem, quod ardor sit, autumnus designacionem frugum [?], qui in eo colliguntur. Hiems frigus interpretatur'; B. Krusch, *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterliche Chronologie*, II: *Die Entstehung unserer heutigen Zeitrechnung* (Berlin, 1938), p. 54.

[22] It is possible that the computist knew more of Virgil than is at first apparent since elsewhere (*Epitomae* I.iv) Virgil explains *ardon* as 'burns' *ardeat*.

Jones cites *in apparatu* the 'Merovingian Computus of 727' and Isidore's *Etymologiae*. Wallis says that in both sources the reference is to seasons (*tempora*), not times, and that there is no known source for Bede's etymology. However, Virgil writes in *Epitomae* XI, 'Tempus a temperamento nomen accipit, eo quod diebus mensibus annis frigore aestateque temperatur sive quod uniuscuiusque spatium separatim temperatum est.' ('Time (*tempus*) takes its name from measure (*temperamento*) because it is measured (*temperatur*) in days, months, years, the cold and summer; or because the length of time of each one is measured separately'). It is clear that Virgil is talking here about the measurement of time, not seasons. Although the derivation of *tempus* from *temperamentum* is attested elsewhere, Bede shows that Virgil is his ultimate source in the reference to the specific divisions of time and to the measuring of lengths of time separately.

Bede begins the next chapter with an etymology of *dies* 'day': 'Day is air which is lit up by the sun, and it derives its name from the fact that it separates and divides the darkness' (*quod tenebras disiungat ac dividat*).[23] Jones cites Basil's *Hexaemeron*, Isidore's *Etymologiae* and the Irish *De divisionibus temporum* (*DT*). Basil gives the definition of day as air illuminated by the sun, as does his paraphrast Eustatius, but he says nothing about the division of day from the darkness (nor does *DT*). Instead, he talks of the sun driving off (*affert*) darkness.[24] Neither Isidore nor *DT* are much more helpful in revealing Bede's source. However, in bk XI of the *Epitomae* Virgil says,

> Dies nominatur a quibusdam quia diis iocundus est, sed nos dicimus diem nominari qui a tenebris disiungat ac dividat . . .[25]

'Day' (*dies*) is so called by some because it is pleasing to the gods (*diis*)[26] but we say that day is so called because it divides and separates from darkness . . .

[23] *BOT*, p. 186: 'Dies est aer sole illustratus, nomen inde sumens quod tenebras disiungat ac dividat'; trans. Wallis, p. 19.

[24] Basil, *Homilia in hexaemeron*, VI.viii; PG 29, col. 138; Eutatius, *In hexaemeron s. Basilii latina metaphrasis*, 'Nunc quidem post solis creationem dies appellatur, id est aer sole illustratus . . . '; PL 53, col. 888.

[25] Löfstedt, p. 234; Polara, p. 156. Cf. the commentary on Genesis in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 10616, 11v: 'Dies deiciendo (?) siue diuidendo dictus est'; *Prebiarum de multorium exemplaribus*: 'Unde dicitur dies? Id, diuidendo inter lucem et tenebras', CCSL 108B, 165; *Liber de numeris*: 'Dies unde nomen accepit? A divisione, eo quod dividat lucem a tenebris . . . ', R. E. McNally, 'Der irische *Liber de numeris*: eine Quellenanalyse des pseudo-isidorischen *Liber de numeris*' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Munich 1957), p. 76; the 'Bobbio computus': 'Lunae a meridie usque ad meridiem dies dictus sit, qui dies [*sic*] jucundus sit, sive dividendo lucem, et tenebras dies solis ab ortu solis usque ad ortum diei', PL 129, col. 1293.

[26] Varro, *De lingua latina*, VI.iv, also links *deus* and *dies*; '. . . quo tempus id ab hoc deo [*sc.* Jupiter] dies appellatur'; R. G. Kent, *Varro: on the Latin Language*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1967) I, 174–6; Isidore, *Etymologiae* V.xxx.5: 'Dies dicti a diis . . . '

For the second part of this etymology where Bede refers to the separation and division of the day he depends ultimately on Virgil. Of the word 'night', Bede says the following:

> Nox dicta quod noceat aspectibus vel negotiis humanis sive quod in ea fures latronesque nocendi aliis occasionem nanciscantur (*BOT*, 193)
>
> Night is so called because it detracts from human affairs or vision, or else because thieves and robbers find occasion therein to injure others. (Wallis, p. 28)

Jones comments that here Bede rejected Isidore's definition and based his etymology on the Irish *DT*.[27] The etymology found in this computistical tract undoubtedly comes from Virgil who says in the same book of the *Epitomae*, ' . . . nox dicitur ab eo quod humanis noceat negotiis, sive quod in ea fures latronesque nocendi aliis occasionem nanciscantur'[28] ('night is so called because it injures human affairs, or because thieves and robbers find occasion therein to injure others'). The significant difference between Bede and *DT* on the one hand and Virgil on the other is that the former refer to the impairment (*noceat*) of vision caused by the night (*nox*); Virgil does not. In this instance, Bede is using a Virgilian etymology, but again by way of another source.[29]

Bede is also elusive in his etymology of *mensis* 'month'. Jones found parallels in *DT* and the 'Merovingian computus'.[30] Another text with this etymology is the *Liber de computo* ['Bobbio computus'], a work said to contain many Irish elements, and which Jones says was written about the year 800 (in one chapter it lists late Merovingian kings and in another it gives as 784 the number of years from the Incarnation to the time of writing).[31] This etymology is not found in Isidore, and Wallis (p. 41) suggests that an untraced common source for Bede and the 'Merovingian computus' is likely. Both begin by saying that month

[27] *BOT*, p. 339 with reference to PL 90, col. 658, which reads: 'Unde dicta est nox? Quod noceat aspectus, vel negotiis humanis, sive quod in ea fures vel latrones nocendi aliis occasionem nanciscantur.'

[28] *Epit.* XI.ii; Löfstedt, p. 234; Polara, p. 156. An etymology similar to Virgil's, but which includes the effects of night on vision, is found in the Irish *De ratione computandi*; see *Cummian's Letter 'De controversia paschali' and the 'De ratione conputandi'*, ed. M. Walsh and D. Ó Cróinín, Stud. and Texts 86 (Toronto, 1988), 131–2.

[29] For other examples, cf. BN, lat. 10616, 11v: 'Nox nocendo dicitur; demones enim semper hominibus noxii sunt'; *Liber de numeris*, 'Nox nocendo dicitur', McNally, 'Der irische *Liber de numeris*', p. 77; Varro, *De ling. lat.* VI.vi: 'Nox . . . quod nocet', Kent, *Varro* I, 178.

[30] *BOT*, p. 346.

[31] PL 129, col. 1301: 'Mensis a mensura quadam nomen accepit . . .' The tract calculates the time of death of Merovingian kings *a passione domini* and *a transitu Martini* in cols. 1312–13. The work is described as mainly Irish in Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter*, p. 115; for the suggested date of compilation, see C. W. Jones, 'Polemius Silvius, Bede, and the Names of the Months', *Speculum* 9 (1934), 50–6, at 55, and C. W. Jones, 'The "lost" Sirmond Manuscript of Bede's *Computus*', *EHR* 52 (1937), 204–19, at 206.

(*mensis*) comes from measuring (*mensura*). The table below shows that bk XI of Virgil's *Epitomae* is again the ultimate source. After the etymology *mensis a mensura* (which is not found in *DT*), Bede and Virgil both move on to another explanation.

Virgil, *Epit.* XI	Bede, *DTR*	'Merovingian computus', 5
Mensis a mensura dicitur quia quisque eorum mensuratur, sed veteres alio dixere modo. . . (Polara, p. 156; Löfstedt, p. 235).	Menses dicti a mensura, qua quisque eorum mensuratur. Sed melius . . . (*BOT*, p. 203).	Mensis a mensura dicitur, eo quod mensuratur . . . (Krusch, *Studien* II, 54).

These explanations of the derivations of words are attested in a range of early computistical works, and similar material may yet be found in word lists and glossaries.[32] However, the similar formulations of the etymologies in Bede and the Irish sources suggest that these are not independent borrowings from earlier material but that they ultimately go back to Virgil. As Ó Cróinín has shown, Virgil was quoted in the computistical sources at a very early date; indeed, these sources sometimes name him as their source.[33] The computists found Virgil's accounts of the origins of the key terms of the calculus useful. In some ways, it is not surprising that Virgil should be quoted in these sources. He shows an interest in the subject and refers to the activities of computists (*conpotarii*). In one passage, he names Quintilian 'the computist of days and months, the moon and sun' and, using the technical language of the calculus, he writes of the difficulty of his task.[34] Although Virgil may be unconventional and his etymologies 'fanciful', it must be significant that a writer as discerning as Bede should, at times, favour his etymologies above Isidore's. While Virgil's influence on Bede in *DTR* may be indirect, at least as far as the evidence exam-

[32] I am mindful of the cautionary remarks of Marina Smyth ('Isidore of Seville and Early Irish Cosmography', *CMCS* 14 (1987), 69–102, at 70) on the role of vocabulary lists in spreading this kind of information. I have not found comparable etymologies for the words considered here in the works she cites.

[33] *De ratione conputandi* attributes a quotation, identified by Ó Cróinín as coming from Virgilius, to 'Grammaticus'; see Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter*, p. 130. Another etymology (*Pos enim Grece pes Latine dicitur*) is said to 'look like a "Virgilian" etymology' (Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter*, p. 119). On this etymology, see Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, p. 83. It is found in a marginal note in Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1780, 64r: *pos .i. pes*. I am grateful to Tomás O'Sullivan for obtaining an electronic image of the folio from the Vatican Film Library, St Louis University.

[34] 'Sicut in Quintiliano legi, qui erat conpotarius dierum et mensuum et lunae et solis: "totorum" inquit "mensium quibus in sese reciproca successione revolvitur annus supputatio perdifficilis est et intellectu egens diligenti" . . .', Polara, p. 216; Löfstedt, p. 31. Elsewhere, he writes of Primogenus, 'vir dulcissimus . . . in fissicis satis gnarus et in conpotatione lunae et mensuum sagacissimus'; Polara, p. 166.

ined here goes, examples of his direct influence on other writers can tell us something about the manner in which his work circulated and eventually came to influence Bede; this may, perhaps, have something to contribute to the scholarly discussion about Hiberno-Latin literature.

Virgil pursues his interest in the question of origins in a number of directions. His works concern grammar and the derivation of words, but his interest in origins extends to the Christian cosmogony and the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. In *Epitomae* IV.xiii, he writes on the nature of humankind and how humans are composed of two elements, a body made from the mire (*ex limo*) and a soul (*affla* 'breath') from on high. This is derived from exegesis of Gen. II.7, 'God formed the man of the slime (*de limo*) of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life.'[35] Elsewhere he quotes Origen the African on the nature of the immortality enjoyed by prelapsarian man.[36] Virgil even claims to have written a commentary on 'the creation of the world' the year before he wrote his *Epistola* VII, directed 'against the pagans'.[37] This may be a casual reference to the *contra paganos* type of literature; it is certainly evidence of an interest in the Christian origin legend, and it complements his interest in the subject of origins seen most clearly in his extended attention to etymologies. Virgil's etymologies are found in early medieval Genesis commentaries and are particularly important because of the significance of such commentaries in the current debate about the nature and extent of Hiberno-Latin biblical exegesis.

This debate has come to focus on Bernhard Bischoff's theory of Hiberno-Latin exegesis and his identification of a range of diagnostic features he held to be 'symptomatic' of that exegesis.[38] His theory that a number of anonymous

[35] 'Illud quoque omni sapienti sciendum atque scrutandum est quomodo et qualiter sese plastus homo habeat, qui primum plastum ex limo, dein affl am ex superioribus et haec ineffabiliter coniuncta habet, dissimili natura in semetipso perfruens . . . affla, quae est anima . . .', Polara, p. 36; Löfstedt, p. 133; D. Tardi, *Les 'Epitomae' de Virgile de Toulouse* (Paris, 1928), p. 59.

[36] '. . . hominis . . . status si in coepto permaneat, nihil instabilitatis habebit, sed inmotabilis quodammodo et aeternus aestimabitaur' [*sic*], Polara, pp. 236; Löfstedt, pp. 43–4. Cf. Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram* VI.xxii–xxv; PL 34, cols. 353–4; Augustinus Hibernicus, *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, PL 35, col. 2153; Pseudo-Isidore, *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, '*Liber de ordine creaturarum': un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII*, ed. M. C. Díaz y Díaz, Monografias de la Universidad de Santiago de Compostela 10 (Santiago de Compostela, 1972), 160, 164–6.

[37] He quotes the opening in *Epist.* VII.iv: 'Multa sunt huius rei exempla iuxta illud, quod et ego hesterno feceram anno, cum librum de mundi creatione cummentatorium aduersus paganos ediderim, cuius principium est: "Absque Deo nullus est solo, qui omnia creat"', Löfstedt, pp. 98–9; Polara, p. 322.

[38] B. Bischoff, 'Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frümittelalter', *Mittelalterliche Studien: Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1966) I, 205–73, trans. C. O'Grady, 'Turning-points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Irish Church: AD 650–800', *Biblical Studies: the Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. M. McNamara, Proc. of the Irish Biblical Assoc. 1 (Dublin, 1976), pp. 74–160.

biblical commentaries are the work of Irish exegetes went unchallenged for a long time.[39] Two of the more recent contributions to the debate concentrate in particular on Genesis commentaries. Michael Gorman studied the commentary on Genesis of the *Commentaries on the Pentateuch* published among the *dubia et spuria* of Bede's works in the Patrologia Latina. Many scholars considered this to be the work of an Irish exegete or exegetes – including, according to Joseph F. Kelly, Gorman himself.[40] Gorman examined the manuscript tradition of the commentary, separated out the interpolations and published a new edition. He proposes that the first recension of the Pseudo-Bedan commentary was compiled in Spain towards the end of the seventh century, and in the article where he sets out his argument he debunks Bischoff's theories.[41] (Another article that is more direct in its criticism considers the Genesis commentary in Clm 6302.)[42] In reply, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín examined a commentary on Genesis found in Clm 17739, a manuscript from the abbey of St Magnus near Regensburg, and applied Bischoff's criteria to argue that it is the work of an Irish commentator from the second half of the seventh century.[43] He showed that the commentary (which, for ease of reference, I will call the Regensburg commentary) displays many of the diagnostic features identified by Bischoff and that it uses sources known to have been cited often by the early Irish. Furthermore, Ó Cróinín identified a quotation in the commentary from *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* by Augustinus Hibernicus, a work which has been securely dated to the middle of the seventh century and located in southern Ireland. Part of the text Ó Cróinín edits from the Regensburg commentary concerns the etymology of the word *caelum* 'heaven'. It reads:

Quid est caelum, aut quem sensum tenet? Ambrosius ostendit, dicens: 'Caelum graeco uocabulo "Uranus" dicitur, apud Latinos autem propterea "caelum" appellatur, quia inpressa stellarum lumina uelut signa habens tamquam "caelatum" dicitur'. In libro de

[39] One of the few questioning voices was C. Stancliffe, 'Early "Irish" Biblical Exegesis', *Texte und Untersuchungen* 12 (1975), 361–70 [= *Studia Patristica* 12]; E. Coccia, 'La cultura irlandese precarolingia: miracolo o mito?', *SM*, 3rd ser., 8 (1967), 257–420.

[40] J. F. Kelly, 'A Catalogue of Early Medieval Hiberno-Latin Biblical Commentaries: I–II', *Traditio* 44 (1988), 537–71; 45 (1989–90), 393–434; I, 557, citing a private communication from Gorman. On the authorship of this work, see D. N. Dumville, 'Biblical Apocrypha and the Early Irish Church: a Preliminary Investigation', *Proc. of the R. Irish Acad.* (C) 73 (1973), 299–338, at 315; D. Ó Cróinín, review of M. McNamara, *Apocrypha in the Early Irish Church*, in *Éigse* 16 (1976), 353, and D. Ó Cróinín, *The Irish 'Sex Aetates Mundi'* (Dublin, 1983), 144–5, 154.

[41] M. Gorman, 'The Commentary on the Pentateuch Attributed to Bede in PL 91: 189–394: I – II', *RB* 106 (1996), 61–108, 255–307.

[42] M. Gorman, 'A Critique of Bischoff's Theory of Irish Exegesis: the Commentary on Genesis in Munich Clm 6302 (Wendepunkte 2)', *Jnl of Med. Latin* 7 (1996), 178–233.

[43] D. Ó Cróinín, 'A New Seventh-Century Irish Commentary on Genesis', *Sacris Erudiri* 40 (2001), 231–65.

cognitione nominum sic definitur: 'Caelum a celsitudine nomen accepit, uel eo quod intra se grandia caelat archana'.

What is 'heaven' or what does it mean? Ambrose shows us, saying: 'The sky is called "Uranus" in Greek and so among Latin speakers it is called "heaven" (*caelum*) because, having the lights of the stars like embossed works, it is called "carved" (*caelatum*)'. In the *Book of the Examination of Names* it is defined thus: 'Heaven (*caelum*) takes its name from loftiness (*celsitudine*), or because it hides (*caelat*) great mysteries in itself'.

The first statement comes indeed from Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* and is also found in Isidore's *Etymologiae*.[44] Ó Cróinín says that the second definition relating *caelum* to *celsitudo* 'loftiness' and *celat* 'hides' is found in the Pseudo-Bedan Genesis commentary examined by Gorman and asks what the *Book of the Examination of Names* (*Liber de cognitione nominum*) named by the Regensburg commentator as his source could be. The answer must be bk XI, *De cognationibus etymologiae aliorum nominum*, of Virgil's *Epitomae*, the source of many of the etymologies we have encountered in the computistical sources. (The reading of *cognitio* in the title of the work in the Regensburg commentary, for *cognatio* in the *capitulum* of the edition of the *Epitomae* is found in one of the three principal manuscript witnesses to the text of Virgil.)[45] In bk XI of the *Epitomae*, Virgil defines 'heaven' *caelum* thus:

> Caelum ob hoc dici putatur, quia quaedam intra se grandia celat archana et ipsius aeris spatiis nubiumque obstaculis ab humanis celatur obtutibus . . . caelum a celsitudine sua rectissime nomen accepit . . . (Löfstedt, 226–7; Polara, 146)

> Heaven (*caelum*) is thought to be so called for this reason: because it hides (*celat*) certain great mysteries within itself, and is hidden (*celatur*) from human sight by the spaces of the air itself and the obstacles of the clouds . . . heaven very rightly takes its name from its loftiness (*celsitudine*).[46]

The etymology of the word for heaven in Pseudo-Bede and certainly in the Regensburg commentary comes from Virgil.[47] Ó Cróinín contends that the discovery of a quotation from Augustinus Hibernicus and the other elements he

[44] Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, II.iv.15, as identified by Ó Cróinín; PL 14, cols 164–5; Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIII.iv.

[45] 'De cognitio[ni]b[us] . . .', Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, 426; 'De cognitionibus nominum et verborum', Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 7930; Löfstedt, p. 225; Polara, p. 146.

[46] The passage from Virgil is examined in Smyth, 'Isidore and Early Irish Cosmography', pp. 91–3.

[47] Varro, *De ling. lat.* V.xviii (Kent I, 16–18), relates *caelum* to *celare*. Cf. the Genesis commentary in BN, lat. 10616, 20v: 'Caelum caelando quia in se et ultra se posita celat multa'; 21r: 'Caelum scriptura intellegitur eo quod alia celat et alia ostendit . . .'; 21v: 'Caelum paciens est qui in se multa celat . . .'; the commentary on Revelation in Cambridge, University Library, Dd. x. 16, fol. 71a: 'Aliter, "in caelo", id est in ecclesia quae caelum est, eo quod celantur mysteria in ea a peccatoribus . . .' On this commentary, see M. McNamara, 'The Newly-Identified Cambridge Apocalypse Commentary and the Reference Bible: a Preliminary Enquiry', *Peritia* 15 (2001), 208–60.

identified point strongly to an Irish provenance for the Regensburg commentary or to the fact that it was composed in a centre with Irish associations. The presence of a Virgilian etymology in the commentary and the interpolator's explicit naming of his source supports that view. Since the exegete identifies that source as bk XI of Virgil's *Epitomae*, neither he nor Virgil is taking his information independently from another source. The Regensburg commentator's naming of his source says something about the way Virgil's work circulated and found its way to Bede. Bk XI, with its useful accounts of the origins of calendrical and cosmological terms, was likely to have been of interest to a computist, and many of the Virgilian etymologies that appear in the compustitical tracts are derived ultimately from that book. This suggests that Virgil's *[Liber] de cognationibus etymologiae aliorum nominum* circulated separately from the rest of his works. Its etymologies wound their way through early western computistical works and eventually into Bede's *DTR*.

Gorman's research on Pseudo-Bede's *Commentaries on the Pentateuch* has shed much light on an important but obscure text. His examination of the manuscript tradition and his establishment of the various recensions of the text allow scholars to approach the work with considerably more confidence than before. His contention that in the past scholars were misled in believing the commentary was Irish because of the presence of traits that Bischoff proposed were characteristic of Hiberno-Latin exegesis deserves further exploration. These traits Gorman has shown are present as interpolations in what he identifies as the β recension of the commentary. Interpolations or not, these elements may reveal much about the later transmission and use of the commentary. However, since Gorman rejects Bischoff's theory as a mirage, we are left no nearer a clear understanding on that score. Yet the identification of quotations from known sources can reveal something of the background and influences of the writer. It is therefore particularly significant that so many of Virgil's etymologies are to be found in the β recension. The etymology for heaven just discussed is immediately followed by another which may also come from Virgil. Of *terra* 'earth', Pseudo-Bede writes: *Terra autem, eo quod teritur* 'However, earth is so called because it is trodden on'.[48] This etymology is standard; yet Virgil, again in bk XI of the *Epitomae*, says, *Terra ob hoc dicitur quia hominum pedibus teritur* 'The earth is so called for this reason, because it is trodden on by the feet of men'.[49] (Isidore of Seville also relates *terra* to *tero*, but the Pseudo-Bedan interpolator's formulation is much closer to Virgil's.)[50]

[48] PL 91, col. 192. [49] Löfstedt, p. 227; Polara, p. 148.

[50] Isidore, *Etymologiae* XIV.i.1: '. . . terra dicta a superiori parte, qua teritur'. Gorman's rejection of Bischoff's proposal that the etymology for *terra* in the Genesis commentary of Clm 6302 comes from Virgil the Grammarian seems entirely plausible; see 'A Critique of Bischoff's Theory', pp. 185–6.

Another etymology found in the Pseudo-Bedan commentary may be derived from Virgil. Of the word 'sun', the Pseudo-Bedan commentary reads:

Alii dicunt solem nomen sortiri eo quod solus lucet in die, vel de solemnitate lucis

Others say that the sun (*sol*) receives its name because it alone (*solus*) shines in the day, or from the solemnity (*solemnitate*) of light.[51]

Turning again to bk XI of the *Epitomae*, we find that Virgil writes:

Sol dicitur quia solus per diem sui fulgoris vi totum orbem obtunsis una stellis cum luna inlustrat; vel certe sol ex sollemnitate, hoc est abundantia splendoris, nuncupatur

The sun is so called because it alone lights up the entire earth by day with the force of its splendour, obscuring the stars as well as the moon; or the sun, at least, takes its name from its solemnity, that is from the abundance of its splendour.[52]

Although the explanation of the word sun (*sol*) by reference to the fact that it alone (*solus*)[53] lights up the world is found elsewhere, the explanation by reference to *solemnitas* is not standard and reinforces the impression that Pseudo-Bede depends on Virgil. Lastly, the etymology for *mare* 'sea' offered in the Pseudo-Bedan commentary gives much more conclusive evidence for the interpolator's dependence on Virgil. The interpolated passage reads:

Congregationes aquarum maria dicuntur, id est, pro magnitudine, quia mare quasi magna res intellegitur, uel de amaritudine dicitur mare. Et idcirco congregatio aquarum maria appellatur, quia omnis aqua magna apud hebraeos mare uocatur

The gatherings of the waters are called the seas, that is, because of their vastness, for the sea (*mare*) is understood as a mighty thing (*magna res*); or the sea (*mare*) is so called as a result of its bitterness (*amaritudo*). And therefore the gathering of the waters is called the seas because among the Hebrews every great [body of] water is called sea.

The interpolator gives the standard explanation of *mare* by reference to *amaritudo* 'bitterness', but he also indulges in what seems to be a 'syllabic' etymology when he proposes that because the sea is so vast, *mare* is *magna res* 'great thing', taking the first syllable, or first two letters, of each word to give *mare*. The Hebrews, *Hebraei*, are credited with this information. This certainly comes from bk XI of Virgil's *Epitomae* where he writes:

Mare a Latinis ex amaritudine diriuari putatur, ab Hebreis aquarum collectus dicitur. A philosophis ex duobus conponitur uocabulis uelut magna res, quae nulli mortalium ut est patere potest

[51] PL 91, col. 197.

[52] Löfstedt, p. 228; Polara, p. 148. Also quoted in *De ratione conputandi*, where part of the quotation is attributed to Augustine, but the section relating *sol* to *solemnitas* is attributed to Isidore; see Walsh and Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter*, p. 116.

[53] Isidore, *Etymologiae* III.lxxi.1: 'Sol appellatus eo quod solus appareat, obscuratis fulgore suo cunctis sideribus'; cf. VIII.xi.53. Varro, *De ling. lat.* V.lxviii; Kent, I, 64.

'Sea' (*mare*) is believed to be derived from "bitterness" (*amaritudo*) by Latin speakers; it is called the "gathering of the waters" by the Hebrews. Wise men say it is made up of two words, that is "mighty thing" (*magna res*) for no one among mortals can comprehend (?) it as it is.[54]

Virgil follows Isidore[55] in his references to the bitterness of seawater and to the sea as a gathering of the waters, but Isidore says nothing about the Hebrews or how the sea eludes human comprehension, and there is certainly no attempt to explain the word *mare* with reference to *magna res* (information from Virgil that is repeated, for the most part, by the interpolator in Pseudo-Bede's commentary). A form of this etymology is found in the Genesis commentary in Clm 6302, the text used by Gorman to argue against Bischoff;[56] yet another, intriguing, example of the adaptation of Virgil's etymology is found in the Genesis commentary preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 10616. This manuscript was produced in the scriptorium of Bishop Egino/Heginus of Verona who is identified by some as the Heginus who died at Reichenau in 802 as bishop of the south German city of Constance.[57] This Genesis commentary gives an etymology for 'earth' ('"Terram" qui pedibus hominum terrenda esse', 24r) that is close to Virgil ('Terra ob hoc dicitur quia hominum pedibus teritur'; *Epitomae* XI.1). There follows immediately an etymology for *mare* that is a sophisticated amalgam of information from Isidore and Virgil: *maria* comes from *magna res* because the eye of man is unable to take it in, or from *amaritudo*; every gathering of waters is called 'sea' by the Hebrews. The commentary to this point reflects Virgil, but what follows is part a rewording of, and part verbatim quotation from, Isidore.[58]

[54] Löfstedt, p. 228; Polara, p. 148. See V. Law, 'Learning to Read with the *oculi mentis*: Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', *Literature and Theology* 3, 159–72.

[55] *Etymologiae* XIII.xiv.1: 'De mari. Mare est aquarum generalis collectio. Omnis enim congregatio aquarum, sive salsae sint sive dulces, abusive maria nuncupantur, iuxta illud (Gen. I.10): "Et congregationes aquarum vocavit maria." Proprie autem mare appellatum eo quod aquae eius amarae sint.'

[56] 'De magna re dicitur mare siue amaritudine'; Gorman, 'A Critique of Bischoff's Theory', p. 215.

[57] On the manuscript and commentary, see E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 11 vols. and supplement (Oxford, 1934–71) V, 601; J. E. Cross, *Cambridge Pembroke College MS 25: a Carolingian Sermonary Used by Anglo-Saxon Preachers*, King's College London Med. Stud. 1 (Exeter, 1987), 77; Bischoff, 'Turning-Points', pp. 103–4: no. 3; Kelly, 'Catalogue, I', 555–6: no. 20.

[58] '"Marea" quia magna res est quae oculis hominum conprehendi non potest, siue de amaritudine mare dictum est. Notandum quod omnis congregatio aquarum siue salsa siue dulce sit secundum Hebreos mare nuncupatur', BN lat. 10616, 24r–v. What follows, telling of the return of the waters to their source though the hidden channels, is from Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIII.xiv.1.

The Virgilian influences considered here are found in parts of the Pseudo-Bedan commentary that Gorman identified as interpolations and among elements that betray the features that Bischoff said are characteristic of Hiberno-Latin exegesis. If, as most believe, Virgil was Irish, this suggests at the least that at some point in its transmission the text was amplified by a commentator with knowledge of Hiberno-Latin works. The point has been made that one way to identify an anonymous text as the work of an Irish writer is to uncover instances when the influence of, or quotations from, known Irish writers appear in it. (The influence of Virgil the Grammarian on Pseudo-Bede's *Commentaries on the Pentateuch* may be significant in this regard.) This may also be a way to test Bischoff's theory of Hiberno-Latin exegesis, for when elements he considered to be symptomatic of that literature occur on the same page as quotations from known Irish writers, his theories may be shown to have more substance than some admit. The rigorous testing of Bischoff's ideas has just begun, and, it seems, the day when the last word will be written on his theory of Hiberno-Latin exegesis is still far off.[59]

[59] I am grateful to Professor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Dr David Woods for reading this article.