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# FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON READER'S AIDS IN IRISH MANUSCRIPTS

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## ABSTRACT

Scribes of Irish manuscripts used a variety of symbols to assist their readers by clarifying the layout of text on the page or by drawing attention to significant textual or codicological matters. While many of these take the form of standard technical signs, some scribes used ornamental symbols which are worthy of further examination as they may be of diagnostic significance for the identification of hands, schools or scribal networks. Reader's aids such as manicules can also provide evidence of Ireland's engagement with a wider European scribal culture.

## DIAGNOSTIC POTENTIAL OF ORNAMENTAL READER'S AIDS<sup>1</sup>

### *Reference marks*

A variety of symbols can be used for the purpose of textual annotation, highlighting matters such as omissions, emendations, errors or marginal items to be inserted into, or read in conjunction with, the main body of a text. The chapter *De notis sententiarum* in Isidore's *Etymologiae* contains a list of critical signs, and readers of Irish manuscripts will be familiar with symbols such as crosses, asterisci, oculi and trigons, which can perform a variety of functions. Isidore assigns a specific function to each symbol, however, and concludes the section on critical signs with some general observations on the *notulae librorum*, small signs which link marginal items to a specific location in the main text:

*Fiunt et aliae notulae librorum pro agnoscendis his quae per extremitates paginarum exponuntur, ut, ubi lector in liminare huiusmodi signum invenerit, ad textum recurrens eiusdem sermonis vel versiculi sciat esse expositionem, cuius similem superiacentem notam invenerit.* (Lindsay 1911, I.xxi.28)

'There are also other small marks (i.e. *signes de renvoi*) made in books for drawing attention to things that are explained at the edges of the pages, so that when the reader finds a sign of this type in the margin he may know that it is an explanation of the same word or line that he

\* I am grateful to the editors of *Ériu* and the anonymous reader for many helpful comments and suggestions. I am responsible for any remaining errors.

<sup>1</sup> For a general discussion of reader's aids and illustrative examples, see McLaughlin (2021, 69–115). The discussion on manicules in the present paper incorporates and expands upon material included in an online exhibition on ornamental reader's aids published on the Irish Script on Screen website of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (McLaughlin 2023).

finds with a similar mark lying above it when he turns back to the text.’ (Barney *et al.* 2006, 51 §28)

In Irish manuscripts, a variety of signs can function as *notulae librorum* or reference marks, matching marginal text with a specific location in the main body.<sup>2</sup> Just as scribes were constrained in their design of the *ceann fa eite* symbol by its interlinear location, so their choice of reference marks must also have been influenced by considerations of space and ease of execution. An oblique line, cross or circle could easily be modified by the addition of dots, strokes and colour to create a variety of quickly executed, matching symbols.<sup>3</sup> Generic signs are of limited diagnostic significance when attempting to identify a particular hand or scribal school. By contrast, scribes would have invested considerably more time and effort in the execution of ornamental reference marks, sometimes producing distinctive symbols with diagnostic potential or of codicological significance.<sup>4</sup>

Six sets of ornamental reference marks are found in the first fragment (pp 11–38) of TCD H 2. 15a (1316/2), which contains a series of legal texts belonging to the middle third of the *Senchas Már* (Breatnach 2005, 24–5). Aside from matching symbols on the bottom margins of pp 17 and 18, all of these link marginal commentary to specific locations in the main text.<sup>5</sup> They are found on the following pages:

pp 17, 18 *Díre* tract: hands holding objects (bottom-right margin p. 17 matching bottom-left margin p. 18 = *CIH* 438.23-439.6 and 439.6-14)

p. 19 *Bandíre* tract: faces (bottom-left margin matching col. b, l. 4 = *CIH* 443.3-9 and 442.21 *CACH BEN NAD FACCAIB ...*)

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of critical signs in the Book of Leinster version of the *Táin*, see Cleary (2020), where it is noted (119) that the function of individual signs varies from manuscript to manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the use of construe marks in the St Gall Priscian (*Codex Sangallensis* 904), see Draak (1967). I am grateful to Damian McManus for this reference. Steinová (2017) provides an overview of technical signs in early medieval Irish manuscripts produced or preserved on the Continent. For some examples of reference marks in Irish vernacular manuscripts, for which digital images are available, see: KBR 2324–40 f. 19v; RIA 23 A 4 (469) p. 55 (**asterisc**); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 506 f. 32v; RIA 23 Q 6 (1243) p. 45; TCD H 3. 18 (1337/2) p. 355; TCD H 3. 17 (1336/3) col. 556; TCD H 3. 18 (1337/2) p. 474 (**oculi/o-shaped signs**); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 488 f. 22r; RIA 23 P 26 (479) f. 46v; TCD H 3. 18 (1337/2) p. 262; TCD H 2. 18 (1339; Book of Leinster) p. 232; TCD H 2. 15a (1316/2) p. 24 (**oblique lines +/- dots**); TCD H 2. 15a (1316/2) p. 27 left margin; NLI G 131 p. 109 right margin (**trigon**), right margin (**dots**).

<sup>4</sup> Aside from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. B 486 (for which, see Ó Cuív 2001, 131; 2003, plate 47) and RIA 23 Q 4, all manuscripts referred to in this paper are available in digitised format. For collections held in institutions in Ireland and in the National Library of Scotland, and for British Library Egerton 88, see <https://www.isos.dias.ie>. For Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. B 488, 489, 503, 506 and Laud 610, see <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>. For manuscripts available via the Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland, see <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/csg/0051>.

<sup>5</sup> Charles-Edwards (2014, 97) observes that this fragment of H 2. 15a ‘... offers what, for many students of early Irish law, is the standard format of full text + glosses + commentary ...’

p. 19 hands (?) holding objects (bottom-middle margin matching col. b, l. 17<sup>6</sup> = *CIH* 443.15-20 and 443.10 *TECHTA CANA CAICH ...*)

p. 23 *Bechbretha*: hands holding object (bottom-left margin matching col. b, l. 11 = *CIH* 450.34-451.8 and 450.23 ... *DOMELAT*)

p. 25 *Bechbretha*: animal heads (top margin matching col. b, l. 12 = *CIH* 456.1-7 and 455.32 *BECH BITE I LLIUS NO LUBURT ...*<sup>7</sup>)

p. 27 *Coibnes Uisci Thairidne*: animal heads (top-left margin matching col. b, l. 1 = *CIH* 460.26-31 and 460.13 ... *BRITHEMON*).

An additional function of these symbols, beyond that of reference marks, may be to distinguish an individual scribe's contribution among layers of marginal commentary added by various hands. In their introduction to the facsimile edition of *Senchas Már*, Best and Thurneysen (1931, ix) comment on the high standard of ornamentation in this fragment of H 2. 15a:

This, as will be at once recognized, belonged to a manuscript of no mean order. ... There are large elaborate initials of zoomorphic and interlaced design, filled in with colour—red, purple and green—also smaller capitals both ornamental and plain. These, together with the little heads of animals, faces, hands, Pan-pipes, with which certain of the commentaries are set off, would seem to have been added by a special artist.

The sections of commentary to which Best and Thurneysen refer can be associated with one particular scribe, Aodh mac Conchobhair, a grandson of Giolla na Naomh Mac Aodhagáin. Aodh wrote his autograph on the bottom margins of pp 36 and 37 on Christmas Eve 1350, when he was aged 21. Binchy (1955, 55) identifies him as one of two later scholiasts responsible for having expanded upon or modified certain glosses written by the main glossator, Lúcas Ó Dalláin (L), and observes that his work on the copy of *Coibnes Uisci Thairidne* '... furnishes an inferior limit for the work of his predecessors, the unknown scribe of the text and the principal glossator (L)'. In their edition of *Bechbretha* (1983, 4–5), Charles-Edwards and Kelly refer to him as the 'Second Glossator'.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on his contribution to the glosses and commentary in the first section of H 2. 15a, Kelly (2020, 8) observes that Aodh 'was clearly a gifted student who was expected to

<sup>6</sup> As noted below, this symbol appears to be a later addition.

<sup>7</sup> The commentary linked with these reference marks relates to consecutive sections of canonical text on the theft of bees from various locations (Charles-Edwards and Kelly 1983, 84–9, §§51–4; 171 (h)).

<sup>8</sup> For a description of his hand, see Best and Thurneysen (1931, x) and Charles-Edwards and Kelly (1983, 4–5).

achieve great things in legal scholarship'. His high standing at the time of his death in 1359 is reflected in entries in the *Annals of Ulster*, where he is described as *adbur suadh re breithemhnus* (Mac Carthy 1893, 508) 'the makings of a master of law', and in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, where he is described as *aen rogha bretheaman Ereann* 'the choicest of the brehons of Ireland' (*AFM*, 616–7). A comparison of the zoomorphic reference marks on pp 25 and 27 of H 2. 15a noted above with the zoomorphic terminals of the illuminated capitals in the main body of text (pp 12a, 15a, 18b, 20a, 24a, 26a, 28a, 34b, 38a) suggests that the former are not the work of the main artist, as suggested by Best and Thurneysen, but of another scribe, quite possibly Aodh himself. A propensity for embellishment is evident in his colophons on p. 36, where he used distinctive wire capitals for the initial letters in the words *Mile* and *Aiche*, a style of ornamentation which is not used by the main scribe/artist and which is not normally associated with colophons.

Some observations may be made about these ornamental reference marks and their manuscript context. The symbols on the bottom margins of pp 17–18 are used in an unconventional way, in that they function like catchwords to link sections of continuous commentary from the *Díre* tract.<sup>9</sup> Binchy notes (*CIH* 438 n. h) that this commentary is 'obviously continued from the previous page, now missing'. The missing page would probably have had a hand-shaped symbol on the bottom-right margin matching the one on the bottom-left margin of p. 17. It may be significant that the reference marks on p. 19 are in the form of a human face, since the text is the *Bandíre* tract which deals with legal matters related to women and the two images seem to depict a female face, with long, braided hair. A similar face is drawn on the left margin of p. 17, beside a section of the *Díre* tract (*CIH* 437.13) outlining the payment of honour-price due to family members, including women.<sup>10</sup> Here the intention may have been to link passages in different texts which deal with a related topic. Best and Thurneysen's reference to 'Pan-pipes' in their discussion of ornamentation quoted above seems to allude to the symbol on the bottom of p. 19b. This is more likely to be an unfinished, hand-shaped reference mark, as suggested by a comparison with similar hands (holding objects) on pp 18 and 23. For some reason, the symbol on p. 19b was not completed by the scribe, who also omitted the matching reference mark we would expect to find beside the relevant section of main text. The intra-columnar symbol on p. 19b l.17 appears to have been added later by a much less skillful scribe. Although the section of commentary on the bottom of p. 23 is in the hand of the main glossator, Aodh is also associated with it as he has supplied some missing words above

<sup>9</sup> Another version of this commentary is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 506 (*CIH* 101 ff).

<sup>10</sup> Written beside the face, in Aodh's hand, is *alerauait*, the meaning of which is uncertain. *Alera* could possibly be the word *al(D)éara*, one example of which is cited in *eDIL* s.v. with the meaning 'come up, come hither'. This would suit the context if the purpose of the image is to attract the reader's attention. The meaning of the second element *uait* in this context is also difficult to interpret.

the line (Charles-Edwards and Kelly 1983, 170 (c)). On p. 25, his commentary in the upper margin is further distinguished from the adjacent text by a single-line, undulating border attached to the reference mark. The use of an ornamental line filler in the bottom right-hand margin of p. 18, mirroring the zoomorphic style of an adjacent run-over symbol drawn by the main scribe/artist, adds further to the sense that Aodh's contributions were intended to be distinguished visually from the other marginal texts.<sup>11</sup>

### *Text run-over symbols*

Symbols marking extra-columnar text run-overs are generally located in the lower margins of manuscripts and take the form of simple, abstract designs such as rectangular brackets, sinuous strokes or inverted pyramids.<sup>12</sup> Due to the generic nature of these designs, they are generally of little or no diagnostic significance. Occasionally, however, scribes added embellishments to a basic design, such as flourishes, pendants or heads, sometimes mirroring the style of decoration used in illuminated letters and borders elsewhere in the manuscript. Some examples are:

**Pendants:** NLS Adv. 72.1.3 f. 63v; RIA D iii 1 (671) ff 2vb, 14va; RIA 23 A 4 (469) pp 69, 112; RIA 23 O 4 (471) p. 21a; TCD H 1. 9 (1283) pp 16b, 17a, 24b, 25a, 26b, 37a, 61b; TCD H 3. 17 (1336/1) col. 348b

**Animal heads:** RIA 23 P 10 (iii) (456) pp 33b, 39b, 43b, 66b; TCD H 1. 9 (1283) p. 56b

**Human heads:** NLI G 3 f. 14rb ( *marg. sup.*); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 506 f. 15rb; RIA D iii 1 (671) f. 10rb; TCD E 3. 30 (1435) p. 67b.

In cases such as these, the ornamental features can be used in conjunction with other scribal characteristics to help with the identification of individual hands, schools or networks (bearing in mind the caveat that marginal items such as these can be added later). An example of such a symbol can be found in RIA 23 O 4 (471), a compendium of medical, religious and miscellaneous texts which has been tentatively dated to the sixteenth century (*RIA Cat.* fasc. x, 1231). The second fragment (pp 7–24a) contains religious material and, according to the *Catalogue*, is in one hand. A note on the bottom margin of p. 19 states that it was written on St Martin's day in Slane. A run-over symbol in the bottom margin of p. 21a, in the form of a single-line bracket with an ornate pendant, is identical in style to a symbol on p. 24b of TCD H 1. 9 (1283), a medical manuscript dated in the online catalogue

<sup>11</sup> Ornamentation could also be added later by a specialist illuminator, as suggested by the convention of leaving blank spaces to accommodate ornate capitals. An artist's complaint in a colophon on f. 77 of British Library Egerton 88 alludes to the practice (McLaughlin 2021, 94–5).

<sup>12</sup> For a selection of designs, see McLaughlin (2023).

record on ISOS to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Similar designs, with single or double pendants, are found on pp 16b, 17a, 25a, 26b and 37a of TCD H 1. 9 (1283). Some similarities in the hand, taken in conjunction with the identical design of run-over symbols, suggest that the manuscripts can be associated with the same school, if not with an individual scribe.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE IRISH MANICULE

The word ‘manicule’ is derived from Latin *manicula*, a diminutive form of *manus* ‘hand’, and refers to small, pointing hands drawn in the margins of manuscripts and early printed books. Their purpose is to draw the reader’s attention to a particular word or section of text, and they are to be distinguished in both form and function from hand-shaped run-over symbols. The use of manicules in Irish manuscripts has not been the subject of detailed analysis, yet they often highlight matters of textual and codicological interest to modern readers. Manicules also provide evidence of Ireland’s engagement with a wider, European scribal tradition, although their significance within that context appears to have been equally neglected, as noted by William Sherman (2009, 29) in his study of the symbol:

But of all the symbols used by Renaissance readers ... the most interesting and least studied must be the small pointing hand ... that so often served to mark noteworthy passages. Between at least the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, it may have been the most common symbol produced both for and by readers in the margins of manuscripts and printed books ... The margins of Renaissance texts are littered with severed hands, frozen in gestures that cannot fail to catch the eye.

Sherman (2009, 33) also observes that there is no single term to describe the device in modern scholarship and provides a list of no fewer than fourteen other names used in manuscript studies, including hand director, pointing hand, pointing finger, pointer, digit, fist, index, maniple and pilcrow. Although no sources are given for the works in which these terms are used, the list does illustrate a lack of accuracy, clarity and standardisation in the terminology used by modern scholars.

The distinguishing feature of the manicule is generally, but not invariably, a pointing forefinger, which draws the reader’s eye towards a particular item of text. This role of the index finger has been observed in Isidore’s *Etymologiae* where, in a section on the fingers, each digit is given a name, some of which reflect a specific function. The little finger, for example, is called ‘*auricularis*’, *quod eo aurem scalpimus*, ‘because we use it to scrape out the ear (*auris*)’. Isidore states of the forefinger:

<sup>13</sup> For other examples of run-over symbols which may be associated with particular scribes, see McLaughlin (2021, 85).

*Secundus index et salutaris seu demonstratorius, quia eo fere salutamus vel ostendimus.* (Lindsay 1911, XI.i.70)

‘The second is the index finger (*index*), which is also called the ‘greeter’ (*salutaris*) or ‘pointer’ (*demonstratorius*), because we greet someone (*salutare*) or point something out (*ostendere*) usually with it.’ (Barney *et al.* 2006, 235 §70)

An analysis of an extensive corpus of manuscripts would be required before we can form a clear impression of Irish scribes’ use of the manicule. A preliminary survey, however, suggests that it is not a particularly common reader’s aid. It is used much less frequently than marginal written directions to the reader such as *plene* or abbreviated forms of *féch* ‘look!’ and *nota* ‘note!’<sup>14</sup> This is probably because it is more difficult and time-consuming to draw a symbol in the shape of a hand than it is to write a standard abbreviation consisting of a few letters.<sup>15</sup> Table 1 below records a selection of manicules encountered in Irish vernacular vellum and paper manuscripts ranging from the eleventh to the nineteenth century and encompassing legal, linguistic, medical, genealogical, historical and literary genres. It can be seen from the table that annals are a particularly rich source for the collector of manicules, since scribes and readers would naturally be inclined to highlight dates or events of particular significance or of personal interest to themselves, as well as to draw attention to textual matters.

#### *Design and orientation of manicules*

Commenting on the stylistic variation to be found among manicules in English manuscripts and early printed books, Sherman (2009, 29) observes that:

...some are clothed in the simplest of sleeves and others emerge from billowing cuffs with pendant jewels; some suggest the merest outline of a hand while others capture the sinews, joints, and even nails with a precision that rivals the most artful anatomical study.

While the manicules added by scribes and readers of Irish manuscripts are generally lacking in the levels of anatomical detail and embellishment suggested above, some do demonstrate a degree of originality and skill in their execution. For example, manicules in the copy of the Annals of Ulster in

<sup>14</sup> For examples of *féch* in the Annals of Tigernach, see McLaughlin (2021, 97 n. 43), and for examples of *féch* and *nota* in legal texts published in *CIH*, see Eska (2016, 168–9). In some instances, manicules are accompanied by abbreviations for *nota* or *nota bene*; see p. 123 below.

<sup>15</sup> Abbreviated forms of *féch* and *nota* are used on the same folios (11v, 13r, 14v, 16rv and 43r) in King’s Inns 15, indicating that the scribe viewed them as being interchangeable. While *féch*, the more common of the two exhortations, is written consistently throughout King’s Inns 15 as *.f.* (for example on ff 11v, 12r *et passim*), *nota* is abbreviated variously as *.n<sup>o</sup>*. (ff 6r, 11v, 13rv, 14rv, 15r, 16r and 54r), *.n’*. (f. 16v) and *.n<sup>o</sup>*. (f. 13r).



TABLE 1—Manicules in Irish manuscripts\*

Manuscript	Date	No. of ff/pp	Location of manicules	Text/Genre	Total
Rawl. B 503	11–15th century	57 ff	17va, 45va, 48ra, 48rb	Annals of Inisfallen	4
Rawl. B 486 <sup>^</sup>	14th century	53 ff	29ra	Genealogical	1
Rawl. B 506	14th century	62 ff	57vb	Legal <i>CIH</i> 180.10–19 (+ <i>decc uirri</i> )	1
Rawl. B 488	14–15th century	131 ff	19rb 31r, 35r, 37v x 2, 38v	Annals of Tigernach	1 5
RIA 23 P 12 (536) (Book of Ballymote)	14–15th century	251 ff	168ra, 169r x 2, 169v x 3, 170r x 2 170va, 170vb x 2, 171va	<i>In Lebor Ogaim</i>  <i>Auraicept na nÉces</i>	8  4
TCD H 2. 15a (1316/2)	14–15th century	11–38 pp	12a, 22a	Legal <i>CIH</i> 426.5, 448.3	2
Laud 610	15th century	146 ff	91r	Colophon	1
RIA 23 P 2 (535) (Book of Lecan)	15th century	311 ff	159ra, 159va	<i>Auraicept na nÉces</i>	2
TCD H 5. 27 (1398/71)	15th century	1 f.	1ra x 3, 1vb x 3	Medical	6
Adv 72.1.21	15th? century	8 ff	5vb x 2	Medical (aphorisms by Hippocrates)	2
British Library Egerton 88	15th century	92 ff	12vb	Colophon (+ <i>N.B.</i> )	1
RIA 23 Q 6 (1243)	16th century	28 ff	20a	Legal <i>CIH</i> 1160.19	1
Rawl. B 489	16th century	121 ff	14va, 26ra, 41vb, 42va x 2, 43rb, 43va, 43vb, 44va, 45va, 46va, 46vb, 57rb, 57vb, 58rb, 60rb, 63rb, 67vb, 70va, 72va, 78rb, 79rb, 86va, 87rb, 88va, 98rb x 2	Annals of Ulster	27
NLI G 14	16th century	76 ff	10a, 117a	<i>Smaointe Beatha Chríost</i>	2
NLI G 53	17th century	144 pp	52 x 2	<i>Auraicept na nÉces</i>	2
KBR MS 5095-96	17th century	106 ff	8r 105r	Martyrology of Donegal Miscellaneous notes	2
Maynooth C98 (b)	18th century	119 pp	190, 194, 196, 214 227 237, 238 248	<i>Gabhála Éiríonn Ríghthe Mumhan</i> <i>Leabhar Oiris</i> <i>Leabhar na gCeart</i>	4 1 2 1
RIA 23 Q 4		152 pp	45, 47, 49, 72, 85, 87, 94, 101, 112	<i>An Leabhar Muimhneach</i>	9
King's Inns 4	18th century	80 pp	52	Chronological material	1
Mount Melleray 6	19th century	456 pp	35 x 6, 135 x 3, 152 x 3, 166 x 3, 177, 202 x 3, 254, 306 x 3, 339, 349 x 2	Marking titles of texts	26

**Notes** \* The manuscript context of manicules in the following manuscripts has been discussed in McLaughlin (2021, 97–8): Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 486; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 506; Book of Ballymote; British Library Egerton 88; NLI G 14; NLI G 53.

<sup>^</sup> An image of this symbol is reproduced in Ó Cuív (2003, plate 47).

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 489 demonstrate a variety of design features such as ornate cuffs (f. 26ra) and extended arms and sleeves (ff 58rb, 60rb, 63rb, 67vb and 72va). Although manicules are normally drawn with an extended forefinger pointing directly at a particular word or phrase in the column, there is some variation in their orientation. A manicule in the left margin of the fragmentary copy of *Bretha Éitgid* in section 2 of RIA 23 Q 6 (1243) (Breatnach 2005, 11, 178) points directly at the location of the text beginning in the middle of the upper margin, just after a hole in the page. It is located at the point in the column where the marginal text is to be inserted (p. 20a17; *CIH* 1160.19), while the marginal text itself (*CIH* 1160.19-21) and the exact point of insertion are marked by a pair of reference marks. TCD H 5. 27 (1398/71), a single folio which originally formed part of Maynooth C111, contains six manicules drawing attention to *ceann fa eite* symbols which are underlined by a later hand, as noted in the online catalogue on ISOS. There are no manicules in Maynooth C111 itself, however, suggesting that those in TCD H 5. 27 (1398/71) were added after the folio had become detached. The orientation of all three manicules on f. 1vb is unusual, as they point towards the outer margin rather than towards the main body of text. In the Book of Ballymote, two faintly drawn manicules on the right margin of f. 170r (*In Lebor Ogaim*) also point away from the text column and towards the edge of the folio.

Manicules in Maynooth C98 and RIA 23 Q 4 are drawn in the form of flat or open hands and lack the distinguishing feature of the pointing forefinger. Ó Fiannachta (1943, 49) tentatively suggests that these manuscripts may have originally formed a single volume. Their close connection is also suggested by a shared programme of decoration, which features an identical design of zoomorphic border (for example RIA 23 Q 4 p. 139 and Maynooth C98 p. 6) and stylistically similar zoomorphic capitals (for instance the letter *F* in 23 Q 4 p. 72 and RIA 23 Q 4 p. 190). The manicules, which appear to be the work of a single reader, are distributed throughout both manuscripts, adding further evidence in support of a common origin. The design and orientation of later manicules such as these suggest that the pointing forefinger may have ceased to be the defining characteristic of the symbol. A possible further stage in this development is illustrated in Mount Melleray 6, in which several manicules are placed in random patterns, as a purely decorative function, around the titles of texts on pages 35, 135, 152, 166, 202, 306 and 349.

It is generally impossible to establish either the provenance or the date of manicules since, like text run-over symbols and other marginalia, they can be added at any time by scribes or readers. Sometimes, however, they can be associated with a particular scribe, as is the case in the Annals of Inisfallen in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 503 (ff 45v, 48ra, 48rb), in which three of the four symbols are added by hand 30, which is closely connected with Anglo-Norman hands. An ornate manicule on the bottom margin of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 506 f. 57vb can be associated with the main scribe on stylistic grounds. The trefoil design on the 'cuff' of this symbol matches elements of the overall programme

of decoration throughout the manuscript, such as the ornamentation on letter terminals (for instance on ff 18ra, 22rb and 38rb), run-over symbols (such as on 21vb, 24rb and 24va) and a text border (30vb). Ó Cuív (2001, 222) notes that the marginal additions in this manuscript generally seem to be in the same hand as that of the main text, an unidentified scribe writing for Brian Mac Aodhagáin, who died in 1390. It is likely that the manicule was also drawn by this scribe, to draw attention to a lacuna in a fragmentary legal tract on livestock values. The symbol also differs stylistically from the standard design in that all fingers are extended, although the forefinger is given some prominence by being depicted as slightly longer than the middle finger. It is unusual in that it has an instruction to the reader (*decc uirri* ‘look at it’) written on a text box or banner which is superimposed on the forefinger and middle finger. A manicule in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud 610 f. 91r may have been added by Sighraídh Ua Maíl Chonaire, who complained about the quality of his materials while working on the restoration of the manuscript: *Sighraídh do graiff sin le drochaidmib*, ‘Sighraídh wrote this with bad materials’ (Dillon 1963, 146–7; Ó Cuív 2001, 63).

#### *The Irish manicule in a European context*

How does the Irish manicule compare with its European counterparts in its design and frequency of use? As noted above, in his study of the symbol in Renaissance England, Sherman (2009, 29) suggested that it may have been the most common marginal symbol in manuscripts and early printed books between the twelfth and eighteenth century. As regards its use within the wider European scribal tradition, a preliminary comparison may be made with a selection of manicules recorded in five manuscripts among a corpus of 855 held in the Abbey Library of Saint Gall (Table 2).<sup>16</sup>

As with the Irish manicule, there is a great deal of variation in the design and frequency of the symbol in any given manuscript, but some general observations may be made. The earliest manuscript in the collection for which manicules are recorded is Codex 867, and this also contains the largest number, as well as line drawings of human faces (pp 30, 45, 58, 63, 69, 76 and 85) which may perform the same function. All except one symbol (p. 76) are located in the left margin, and they appear to be the work of a single scribe or reader. According to the online description of the manuscript, the interlinear and marginal glosses date to the same period as the script, but the manicules cannot be dated with any degree of certainty. The majority are of an abstract style and, aside from the carefully drawn examples on pp 8 and 76, they appear to have been hastily added (for instance the examples on pp 10, 38 and 59). Codex 816 contains eight manicules in varying styles, some of which seem to have been added by different scribes or readers.

<sup>16</sup> The manuscripts are digitised on the e-Codices website, which is the Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland run by the University of Fribourg: <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en>. The site currently holds a total of 2,894 manuscripts (when accessed on 19 July 2024). The e-Codices project is a work in progress and the recording of manicules in the online overview may be incomplete.

TABLE 2—Manicules in manuscripts in Stiftsbibliothek St Gallen

Manuscript	Date	No. of pp	Material	Location of manicules	Text/Genre	Total
Cod. Sang. 773	14th/15th century	246	Paper	134	Theological	1
Cod. Sang. 781	14th/15th century	484	Paper	266	Sermons	1
Cod. Sang. 813	15th century	316	Paper	13, 14 x 2, 17, 34 x 2, 51, 55, 60, 65, 73 x 2, 90, 142, 152	Sermons	15
Cod. Sang. 816	13th/14th century	434	Parchment	36, 93, 276, 302, 352, 416, 432, 434	Logic/dialectics	8
Cod. Sang. 867	13th century	91	Parchment	4, 8, 9 x 2, 10 x 2, 12, 25, 29, 30 x 2, 32, 35, 36, 38 x 2, 41 x 2, 44, 45, 55, 56, 59, 62 x 2, 63 x 2, 64, 67, 69, 75, 76 x 2, 81, 84, 90, 91	Ovid's <i>Pontics</i>	37

The symbols on pp 276, 352 and 416 are identical in design and are likely to be the work of one person. Manicules on pp 36 and 434 are adjacent to marginal entries and point directly towards the associated text in the main column. The examples on the bottom margins of pp 302 and 432 are very roughly drawn and are barely discernible, as is the case with some Irish manicules (such as Book of Ballymote f. 169v and NLI G 53 p. 52). There is only one roughly drawn manicule on the left margin of Codex 773 which, judging by the darker colour of the ink, was a later addition, and there is also just a single example, in lighter ink, in Codex 781. By contrast, there are fifteen manicules in Codex 813. Aside from the example on p. 152 (which is in red ink and takes the form of an open, rather than a pointing, hand), these are rather roughly drawn; all have extra-long forefingers, some of which are rubricated (for instance on pp 51 and 55). The manicules on pp 14 and 34 are accompanied by abbreviated forms of *nota* and *nota bene* respectively, as is an Irish manicule in British Library Egerton 88 f. 12vb.

This survey can be expanded by including some other manuscripts from the libraries and collections on the eCodices website for which manicules are recorded. Sion/Sitten, Médiathèque Valais, S 104 is an early fourteenth-century Italian manuscript containing a legal treatise on the Decretals of Gregory IX. Manicules on f. 154rv are skillfully drawn, possibly all by the same person, and have extra-long forefingers. They appear to have been added by the same individual who added profiles of human heads along the text borders. A symbol on f. 155r has a particularly long forearm, and in this it resembles an Irish manicule in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 489 f. 63rb. Cologny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 100, a fourteenth-century Italian manuscript, is a particularly rich source, as stated in the overview on the eCodices website: 'Many manicules or fists (lat *manicula*, ae: small hands) testify to the assiduous labor which a large number of readers have performed on this dry text'. The work in question is Justinian's *Digestum Vetus*

and the extraordinary number of manicules, taken in conjunction with copious glosses, commentary and marginalia, indicates a high level of scholarly engagement with the main text by successive scribes and readers, suggesting that it was viewed as anything but 'dry'. Some folios have several manicules of varying styles (for example, there are four on f. 5r, six on f. 6v and seven on f. 7r). A highly distinctive design with an elongated, curled thumb (as on ff 12v, 13v, 15r, 17r, 18r, *et passim*) could be a useful diagnostic feature, enabling scholars to identify sections of the text which were of interest to one particular reader. Both manicules in Cologny, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 122 (early fourteenth century; ff 5v, 14r) have been added by a single person in a lighter coloured ink than that used in the main text.

Lausanne, Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire V 1765 consists of two different manuscripts, each of which has distinct styles of manicule. There are seven in the first parchment section (ff 6r, 8v, 9r, 10r, 20r and 58r x 2), which is dated to the late fourteenth/early fifteenth century. Three of these (ff 6r, 8v and 10r) are ornately drawn and rubricated and two are depicted as holding items associated with scribal activity. The hand on f. 6r holds a text banner, while that on f. 10r holds a pen which points directly towards a marginal entry in red. With the former, we can compare an Irish manicule in the lower margin of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 506 f. 57vb, which incorporates a text banner as part of its design (p. 122 above). The manicules on ff 9r, 20r and 58r of Lausanne V 1765 are accompanied by abbreviations for *nota*. The scribe or reader responsible for the manicules on ff 6r, 8v and 10r was clearly of an artistic bent, as can be seen by his drawing of a bird in the bottom margin of f. 24v. By contrast, the two manicules in the second, paper section of Lausanne V 1765 (ff 73v and 74v), which has been dated to the fifteenth century, are noticeably plainer and less skillfully drawn.

Frauenfeld, Kantonsbibliothek Thurgau, Y 222 is a fifteenth-century paper manuscript containing numerous manicules in red ink, added by a later hand. They are often accompanied by red brackets marking off specific sections of text and are quite uniformly drawn, having extra-long forefingers. Some folios have many manicules and brackets highlighting entire columns of text rather than drawing attention to specific words or sections (for instance ff 5v x 4, 6r x 5, 21v x 6, *et passim*). A manicule on p. 163 of Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex 157(372), dated in the online catalogue to the eighth or ninth century, points directly to a marginal abbreviation for *nota*. This may be compared to the manicules in Cod. Sang. 813 (pp 14 and 24), Lausanne, Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire V 1765 f. 9r and the Irish manicule in British Library Egerton 88 f. 12vb. This preliminary survey suggests that Irish scribes were entirely in accordance with their European counterparts in their design and use of the manicule.

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