

# Catch these Hands

*or: describing descriptors; an index of paleographical terminology concerning insular minuscule*



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Scriptie

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2017/2018

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*Plagiaatverklaring*

Hierbij verklaar ik dat ik bij het schrijven van dit Bachelor Eindwerkstuk geen plagiaat gepleegd heb.

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*\* Introduction*

The differences between medieval hands became apparent to me when following a course on Irish Paleography in 2016. It turned out that, apart from differences between hands, there were also differences in how these hands were described. While there have been attempts to create more objective criteria by digital analysis of scripts and manuscripts<sup>1</sup>, a central part of the descriptions are still presented in the somewhat subjective traditional manner. An example of such traditional descriptions is ‘somewhat smoother’.<sup>2</sup> These subjective descriptions complicate creating criteria for scripts and hands alike and can confuse a modern day reader; furthermore it may interfere with their understanding of paleography. In order to create clarity regarding these manual descriptions my intention is to make an overview of terminology used to describe insular minuscule. In addition to that, a visual index will be supplied. By analyzing works by scholars concerning insular minuscule, both in general and regarding a particular corpus, I will find out if there are terms that are used more regularly; if so a paleographic terminological standard can be proposed.

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<sup>1</sup> for example Andrea Romein’s 2015 BA-thesis concerning computer-aided paleography

<sup>2</sup> Ó Concheanainn (1973) 165

### Methodology

To accomplish the set goal for this thesis, comparative methodology will be used. This comparative methodology will be loosely based on Peter Lor's fourth chapter in *International and Comparative Librarianship* (2011). First, descriptors or differentiators will be examined in sources about insular minuscule in general. Examples of such sources are Timothy O'Neill's *The Irish hand: scribes and their manuscripts from the earliest times to the seventeenth century with an exemplar of Irish scripts*, Wallace Martin Lindsay's *Early Irish minuscule script*, and articles such as *Palaeographical Notes III* by R.I. Best. By extracting terms used to describe the hand, an overview of terminology on a higher level<sup>3</sup> will be achieved. After collecting terms and descriptions on a higher level, sources concerning a select corpus will be studied. This corpus will consist of a collection of articles and chapters on the insular minuscule in a selected manuscript, together with scans of the selected manuscript. The result will be that there is more comparative material available, enhancing the trustworthiness of the conclusion. Working with in-depth cases will show not only if there are differences between descriptions between higher and lower levels, but also if there are differences of descriptions within the lower level itself. After detracting the corpus-based terminology, I will have an overview of terms on various levels. Both will lead to a better understanding of the description of hands and the differentiators maintained (used) to distinguish different scripts. The next step is to make an index of paleographical terminology about insular minuscule to create a clear overview. Thereafter visual aids will be provided by using the online manuscript base *Irish Script on Screen (ISOS)*.

### Theoretical Background

In 1708 paleography acquired its name with Maurist Bernard de Montfaucon's *Paleographia Graeca*.<sup>4</sup> This book dealt with the handwriting and characteristic of Greek manuscripts so explicitly that it remained a leading authority on the subject for about two centuries. However, it was not the first published book on the subject; in 1681 Jean Mabillon published a systematic study of Latin manuscripts in Book V of his *De re diplomatica*, in which he arranged fragments of manuscripts according to date and type of script.<sup>5</sup> Still, Mabillon assumed that the different scripts existed in isolation from one another; Scipione Maffei of Verona recognised that the scripts were

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<sup>3</sup> Lor (2011) p.3; with a higher level is meant a level which concerns itself with more general descriptions; i.e. a broader, less specialized research area. Lower levels then refer to case studies in which something specific is examined, i.e. where there is a more select number of sources available.

<sup>4</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.1

<sup>5</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.1, O'Sullivan (2005) p.511

developments of Roman script and divided Latin scripts into majuscule (can be written in between two lines), minuscule (can be written in between four lines), and cursive<sup>6</sup>. This has been an important development in the study of script, as we still use these divisions today. Initially, the task of paleography was to provide the means of dating manuscripts, for which characteristics of letterforms were examined together with the nature of the writing materials. Léopold Delisle and Ludwig Traube however linked paleography closely with Latin philology, revealing its importance for history.<sup>7</sup> Paleography transformed from a means to date manuscripts into the study of ancient handwriting. According to Julian Brown it has two objectives: “first, to read ancient texts with accuracy; secondly, to date and localize their handwriting”.<sup>8</sup> Whilst paleography deals with the handwriting of manuscripts, the term codicology can be used to deal with the other aspects of book production, i.e. ruling, rubrication, decoration, binding, correction and annotation.<sup>9</sup> These two disciplines go hand in hand when studying (medieval) manuscripts. However, the term paleography in English speaking countries often includes codicology.<sup>10</sup>

As the origin and purpose of paleography is known, we can now venture into the methodology of paleographers. What are their methods?

“With the aid of technological advances palaeography, which is an art of seeing and comprehending, is in the process of becoming an art of measurement”<sup>11</sup>. It is this quotation from Bischoff that sparked a debate after the publication of his book. By stating that paleography is ‘an art of seeing and comprehending’ it is implied that paleographers themselves are subjective; only by technological advances or computing can paleography become objective, as it will become ‘an art of measurement’. This is a common modern view: the observation of computer-based systems for identifying and classifying writing as objective and the paleographer’s work as subjective. It then also is one of the main difficulties that paleographers face: the classification and identification of hands<sup>12</sup>. While a vast set of rules and classifications is associated with the use of digital systems, it may be that they are not as uniform in the manual tradition. Because digital systems *need* a clear set of rules and classifications, a lot is known about the approach of digital paleographers. The clarity surrounding the work ethics of manual paleographers is less obvious. As Bischoff stated, it is mostly done by seeing and comprehending, describing what a paleographer sees. Sometimes, as done by Ó

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<sup>6</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.1, O’Sullivan (2005) p.512

<sup>7</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.2, O’Sullivan (2005) p.512

<sup>8</sup> Brown (1974) p.1

<sup>9</sup> Brown (1974) p.2

<sup>10</sup> Brown (1974) p.2

<sup>11</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.3

<sup>12</sup> Stokes (2007) §1

Concheanainn, measurements are made by hand. There have been attempts to establish terminologies for describing letter-forms and script-systems which reflect the decisions, conscious or otherwise, made by medieval scribes.<sup>13</sup> However, restricting oneself to this terminology has proven difficult, as those features were the ones scribes easily adopted and abandoned at will.<sup>14</sup> While paleographers do adhere to a vast set of rules when making transcriptions,<sup>15</sup> such rules are not yet clearly known for the qualification and identification of scripts. To see if subjectivity is the norm, my research will focus on the descriptions made by scholars concerning insular minuscule.

### Research Question

#### *Main Question:*

- Is there uniformity in terminology used by paleographers in describing insular minuscule?

*(How are the hands traditionally described and which differentiators are used?)*

#### *Sub Questions:*

- What is insular minuscule according to scholars?
- Are there any peculiarities in the script of the selected corpus, and if so are they described differently?
- Are there differences between the description of insular minuscule in theory (general) and in practice (concerning a specific manuscript) ?
- Can matching visual representations be found in manuscripts?

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<sup>13</sup> Stokes (2007) §1

<sup>14</sup> Stokes (2007) §1

<sup>15</sup> Clemens and Graham (2007) ch.5

Insular Minuscule, as well as various other hands, survive in manuscripts. Because of the transmission of texts and books, we are now able to point out differences between manuscripts and its contents from various time periods. The survival of the manuscript is essential to paleographers and codicologists alike, as it provides knowledge and both historically and culturally important information. Before diving into the different types of scripts and hands, it is important to take into consideration not only the fact that they came to us, but also in what form. To be able to put my research into context, I will now briefly discuss manuscript production. This will give insight into the circumstances in which Insular Minuscule was created. What sort of material are we dealing with? Where is Insular Minuscule found?

### A Brief Introduction to Manuscript Production

Before the existence of the manuscript as we know it today, knowledge was contained in various ways. Wax, metal, or stone were used to carve in.<sup>16</sup> Scrolls or *codices* were used to store texts. In late antiquity and in the middle ages, a common form of book was a codex. A codex consisted of sheets of papyrus or parchment folded once, and sewn together to form quires or gatherings.<sup>17</sup> In continental book production, a parchment gathering usually consisted of four double leaves (sixteen pages), which is called a *quaternio*. Gatherings could also be formed by folding large sheets several times, causing the gathering to have to be cut along the edges.<sup>18</sup>

Parchment was produced by preparing animal skin, sometimes that of a calf, but usually that of a sheep<sup>19</sup>. The skin would be soaked in caustic calcium lye, loosening up the hair and removing the fat.<sup>20</sup> With a sickle-shaped scraping iron the skin then was cleaned<sup>21</sup>, and if necessary soaked a second time. Thereafter, it was put on a frame (*herse*)<sup>22</sup> to dry. In this process of drying, the skin was stretched. If the skin was stretched too thin, small holes could arise, which then can be found in the manuscript that used the parchment.<sup>23</sup> From this point forward, the treatment of the parchment differs depending on in which century and country it was produced.<sup>24</sup> Normally, both sides were worked: to remove hair from the outer surface, which was known as the hair-side, and remaining fat

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<sup>16</sup> Clemens (2007) pp.4-5

<sup>17</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.20

<sup>18</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.21

<sup>19</sup> De Hamel (1992) p.8

<sup>20</sup> Bischoff (1990) pp.8-9, De Hamel (1992) pp.9-11

<sup>21</sup> Clemens (2007) p.11, De Hamel (1992) p.11

<sup>22</sup> Clemens (2007) p.11

<sup>23</sup> Clemens (2007) pp.12-13, De Hamel (1992) p.11

<sup>24</sup> Bischoff (1990) pp.8-9



and flesh from the flesh-side. In a continental manuscript, it was normal to have flesh-side face flesh-side, and hair-side face hair-side when the gatherings were made. In that way, like faced like. Once completely dried, the skin was taken off the herse. On average a calf-skin provided three-and-a-half sheets of medium-sized parchment.<sup>25</sup> By folding a sheet in half, a bifolium was made.

Once the skins had been cut, the sheets would be grouped together to form a quire or a gathering.<sup>26</sup> When putting together the gatherings, the leaves were ruled before folding the sheets. The positions of the vertical lines and the spaces between the horizontal ones were marked by pricking the leaves in preparation for the ruling.<sup>27</sup> Tools for pricking were knives, awls, or compasses: a knife would leave small snits, while the awl or compass left rounded holes.<sup>28</sup> Turning towards the end of the middle ages, dry point ruling became popular: 'invisible' lines were drawn by putting pressure onto a dry point object and drawing it across the sheets.

After ruling the parchment, the scribe could start writing or copying. Copying was done from an *exemplar*, a manuscript that served as example, containing the text to be copied. For doing so, the scribe needed a variety of tools. In the classical Mediterranean, the normal writing implement of choice had been the reed pen,<sup>29</sup> but Western Europe throughout the middle ages preferred the quill pen. Such pens were made for example from goose feathers, which due to their strong yet flexible quality made proper quills.<sup>30</sup> An essential tool was the penknife, with which quills were sharpened, or errors could be erased, or whole texts if desired, creating reusable pieces of parchment called *palimpsests*.<sup>31</sup> Pencases and inkpots were useful too. Different types of ink could be used, made in various ways of various materials.<sup>32</sup> Lampblack was made from dense carbon, gum, and water, and was found suitable for papyrus, but less so for parchment, as it sat on top of it. Iron-gall, or oak-gall, ink, was much more suitable for parchment because of its acidic properties.<sup>33</sup> These acidic properties, however, do harm to the manuscript over time; the acid can eventually start to 'eat' its way through the material.

The copying process was known to consist of several stages; writing, rubrication, decoration, and illustration.<sup>34</sup> The first stage contained writing everything in plain ink, which generally was the

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<sup>25</sup> Clemens (2007) p.11

<sup>26</sup> Clemens (2007) p.14

<sup>27</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.22

<sup>28</sup> Clemens (2007) p.15

<sup>29</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.18

<sup>30</sup> Clemens (2007) p.18, De Hamel (1992) p.27

<sup>31</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.12, De Hamel (1992) p.29

<sup>32</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.16, Clemens (2007) p.19, De Hamel (1992) pp.32-33

<sup>33</sup> Clemens (2007) p.19, De Hamel (1992) p.32

<sup>34</sup> Clemens (2007) p.22

largest part of the text. Whilst copying, the other areas were left blank, to be filled in in later stages with coloured initials and titles.<sup>35</sup> These blank areas were exactly the suitable size of such planned initials. Well-used colours for rubricating were reds and greens, sometimes accompanied by blue or even yellow.<sup>36</sup>

### The Insular Idiosyncrasy

While this is process of (early) medieval manuscript production was generally true for both continental and insular areas, there are some deviations in the insular process.

Firstly, the material used as basis for manuscripts was *vellum*, parchment made of calfskin. Calfskin was known to be stronger and more durable,<sup>37</sup> and more suitable for colour painting.<sup>38</sup> Instead of scraping the skin with a sickle-shaped iron, both sides were usually roughened by pumice stone. By using this sort of material, and roughening both sides, flesh-side and hair-side became almost indistinguishable from one another.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, insular manuscripts were usually made out of five double leaves, named a *quinio*. This means that, opposed to continental manuscripts which were normally made out of sixteen pages, Irish/Anglo-Saxon manuscripts contained twenty pages.<sup>40</sup>

Insular manuscript tradition was also known for adjusting the way the sides of sheets were facing. In Ireland, the sequence was usually hair-flesh-hair-flesh. It was usual for the hair-side to face downward when folding, resulting in the hair-side being on the outside of a quire as its first and last page. This practice continued up until the 10th or early 11th century.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, a difference in the practice of pricking and ruling was found between the British Isles and continental Europe.<sup>42</sup> Whereas ruling was done before folding on the Continent, and only the outer margins were pricked, the common Insular practice was to first fold the sheets and then apply the ruling.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the pricking was done for both the inner and outer margins of each leaf, and this manner was continually used up until the 9th century, after which it matched the continental style.

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<sup>35</sup> Clemens (2007) p.22, De Hamel (1992) p.48

<sup>36</sup> De Hamel (1992) p.33

<sup>37</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.9, Brown (1993) p.125

<sup>38</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.10

<sup>39</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.9, Clemens (2007) p.15, O'Sullivan (2005) p.515

<sup>40</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.20, O'Sullivan (2005) p.516

<sup>41</sup> Clemens (2007) p.15

<sup>42</sup> Brown (1990) p.49, Clemens (2007) p.16

<sup>43</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.22, Clemens (2007) pp.16-17

Before Insular Minuscule became a script, there had been a range of developments. It is important to acknowledge that there is a fluidity to the form of scripts; although hands can be pinpointed and categorised, it is the changes over time that create new scripts. Naturally then, Insular Minuscule has a rich history which we can explore before diving into the script itself. To give some indication of this history, a range of developments leading to the main script of this thesis will be examined.

Where did Insular Minuscule originate? How did it come into being?

### Writing Techniques

Looking at the graphical aspects of the scripts, there are two distinctive techniques of writing: calligraphic and cursive.

The calligraphic technique is proper to bookhands in general, and requires a broad and slit quill.<sup>44</sup> This is the technique used for the production of script types such as Uncial, Half-Uncial, and Caroline Minuscule,<sup>45</sup> in which the letters have to be constructed from various elements. These elements require either broad strokes or hair strokes, which have to be executed technically correctly and with precision. This way it follows the limits of the quill-point(s). Ideally, the quill does not damage the page surface or spill ink through movement. In order to accomplish such constructed scripts<sup>46</sup> the hand had to be firmly supported on the little finger. The structure of the letters - the sequence of strokes- determined the first alterations that appeared in cursive writing.

The cursive technique in its turn is more proper to everyday scripts, as in creating it the hand moves swiftly over the writing surface. Cursive does not consciously distinguish between broad and hair strokes, thus a finer quill was used instead of a broad quill. The letters are written as a unit, as far as possible, without lifting the pen, resulting in an immediate attachment of letters to their neighbours. As this type of writing consist of more rapid, lighter strokes, the script appears simplified.

### From Rome to Llundain

The Latin script, which is at the base of Insular Minuscule, was brought to the British Isles around the 5th century.<sup>47</sup> It has a rich history, which roughly starts with *Monumentalis*, which changes into *Capitalis* transforming into *Capitalis Cursiva* and *Majuskel Cursiva*, until it blooms into *Minuskel Cursiva*,

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<sup>44</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.51

<sup>45</sup> Bischoff (1990). p51

<sup>46</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.51

<sup>47</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.65, Brown, J. (1993) p.55, Brown, M. (1999) p.51

which is said to be the base for Uncial, Half-Uncial, and Minuscule.<sup>48</sup> Because the latter are important in Insular Manuscripts, this is where I start my *History of Hands*.

*Minuskel Cursiva*, or Later Roman Cursive, emerged in the third century AD, and appeared up until approximately the tenth century AD.<sup>49</sup> In contrast with its predecessor the script is now standing up straight for the most part, making the ascenders (the part of a letter that extends above the headline) and descenders (the part of the letter that extends below the baseline) stand out. This display counts on the four-line scheme of minuscule. The materialisation of necessary joining pen movements has some novel consequences, creating tall, narrow loops.<sup>50</sup> Later Roman cursive was the script in which a final and definite form of the structure of Latin letters was realised in principle. The dual system of majuscule (can be written in between two lines) and minuscule (can be written in between four lines) was created, providing material for new bookhands, and creating the possibility of forming ligatures.

Although Later Roman cursive is generally considered to be at the base of Uncial, the latter can be found in roughly five hundred manuscripts from the fourth century on.<sup>51</sup> The start of the transmission is likely to be explained by the transition to parchment in western book-writing.<sup>52</sup> Uncial was one of the scripts that originated from the fixing and appropriate clarifying of a cursive script by means of calligraphic execution, meaning that the structure of letters changed and became composed from various elements. Together with Half-Uncial and Caroline Minuscule, Uncial adopted the alterations in cursive forms that made them stand apart from the original alphabet.<sup>53</sup> As it is a script that is confined between two lines, Uncial is best described as majuscule. It follows in the line of *Capitalis*, another majuscule script, with a writing angle of 40°-50°.<sup>54</sup> However, it is slightly broader than *Capitalis*, with its bows in a more circular shape.<sup>55</sup> Leading up to the sixth century the writing angle changes to 90°,<sup>56</sup> and uncial is enlarged, fitting between a four-line band. Through the Roman mission of Gregory the Great, the script left the continent and appeared in large areas of England.

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<sup>48</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.65, Brown, J. (1993) p.55, Brown, M. (1999) p.51

<sup>49</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.63

<sup>50</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.65, Brown, M. (1990) p.30

<sup>51</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.68, Brown, J. (1993) p.61

<sup>52</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.69, Brown, M. (1999) pp.39-44

<sup>53</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.66, Brown, M. (1990) p.24

<sup>54</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.69

<sup>55</sup> Brown (1990) p.24

<sup>56</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.71

The rise of Later Half-Uncial took place in late antiquity and the early middle ages, generally consisting of isolated letters originating in the Later Roman cursive.<sup>57</sup> The script preserved the ligatures and thickened ascenders from its cursive origin, and was in all probability brought to Ireland as early as the fifth century by the Christian mission. There it was, with an expanded alphabet, refashioned into the Insular script. Half-Uncial is known to be used less frequently than the Uncial script.<sup>58</sup>

### The Irish Foundation

Together with the conversion of the Irish to Christianity came their entry into the Latin church.<sup>59</sup> This is where the history of the Insular Script- and thus the Insular Minuscule- has its roots. The term Insular includes Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and other Celtic scripts.<sup>60</sup> Through the coming of the Latin church Latin writing established itself in Ireland.<sup>61</sup> The earliest surviving texts in Latin script written by Irish hands originate from about a century and a half after Saint Patrick.

Some of the first of these are the Springmount Bog Tablets,<sup>62</sup> wax tablets with psalter texts, and the *Codex Usserianus I*,<sup>63</sup> which are Old Latin gospels closely related to the tablets.

The *Cathach* belongs to the list as well, containing a psalter, consisting of fifty eight vellum leaves, ascribed to St. Collumcille (Columba) who died in 597 A.D. This work, however, has been dated to the later sixth century.<sup>64</sup> The *Cathach* is exceptional, as it is the earliest surviving Irish manuscript book. Noteworthy is the name of the book, 'Battler', as it was carried three times around the O'Donnell army, the army of the Northern Uí Néill to which Collumcille belonged, in a special shrine before a battle to ensure victory.<sup>65</sup>

Another interesting early source, dated to the late seventh century, is the Book of Armagh, in which the technical and aesthetic problems of writing Irish are explicitly mentioned.<sup>66</sup> The book itself is small in size and contains little illumination, but it is nevertheless one of the most important Irish manuscripts prior to the twelfth century.<sup>67</sup> Missing only seven of its original 222 vellum leaves, the

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<sup>57</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.76, Brown, J. (1993) p.54, Brown, M. (1990) p.26

<sup>58</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.78, Brown, J. (1993) pp.61-62

<sup>59</sup> Richter (2002) p.27

<sup>60</sup> Bieler (1949) pp.267-294

<sup>61</sup> Brown, M. (1990) p.48, Richter (2002) p.29

<sup>62</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.83

<sup>63</sup> Richter (2002) p.29, O'Sullivan (2005) p.515

<sup>64</sup> Brown, J. (1993) pp.204-205, O'Neill (1984) p.2, O'Sullivan (2005) p.515

<sup>65</sup> O'Neill (1984) p.2

<sup>66</sup> Richter (2002) p.29

<sup>67</sup> O'Neill (1984) p.8

manuscript contains a variety of religious texts such as a complete New Testament, documents relating to Saint Patrick, and many more.<sup>68</sup> The scribe, according to one colophon, is known to be Ferdornach, writing the text during the abbacy of Torbach. As the annals note that Torbach held office for one year, the book can be precisely dated to 807.<sup>69</sup>

In these sources the script proceeds from a script that is close to Italian Half-Uncial, though it has more angular features and there is a gradual introduction of alternative forms leading to an almost fully rounded type of the Half-Uncial.<sup>70</sup> In the seventh century there was a rise of monastic schools in Ireland, which probably contributed to a transformation of script, namely the development of Insular Minuscule.<sup>71</sup> Stylistically, Insular Minuscule is known to contain a few peculiarities, such as the triangular terminals of the ascenders in both half-uncial and minuscule. These triangular terminals can already be found in the *Codex Usserianus I*. The use of decorative capitals is one of the elements that is considered particularly Insular or Irish as well. They were known for their peculiarities in book-production too, as discussed in the paragraph ‘The Insular Idiosyncrasy’, together with their abbreviations, the tendency to use a *diminuendo*, in which the sentences start out with a larger letter and the script slowly diminishes in size.<sup>72</sup>

For liturgical and biblical manuscripts the Irish used Insular half-uncial, sometimes in combination with minuscule.<sup>73</sup> An example of a manuscript written in Insular half-uncial is the well-known Book of Kells, which was believed to be created around 800 A.D.<sup>74</sup> For several centuries these two scripts were used side-by-side. The ninth century was the start of a transitional phase, in which more pointed forms became apparent.<sup>75</sup> The use of Insular Minuscule increased steadily, until a highly calligraphic ‘mannered minuscule’ developed.<sup>76</sup> From the twelfth century on only the minuscule remained in use, surviving into modern times.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Lindsay (1910) p.24, O’Neill (1984) p.8

<sup>69</sup> Lindsay (1910) pp.24-25, O’Neill (1984) p.8

<sup>70</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.84, Brown, J. (1993) p.63

<sup>71</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.84

<sup>72</sup> O’Sullivan (2005) p.520

<sup>73</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.87

<sup>74</sup> Brown, M (2012) p.148

<sup>75</sup> Brown, M (2012) p.160

<sup>76</sup> Brown, M (2012) p.160

<sup>77</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.88

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## \* *Insular Minuscule*

While Insular Minuscule has been contextualized, it might remain unclear what it exactly is, and what makes a script an Insular script. To gain a better understanding of that, various academic descriptions of the script will be looked at. From there, an index of terminology will be created to provide an overview. What do scholars categorise as Insular Minuscule? Is there a set of differentiators ascribed to it? What terms are used?

### Defining Insular Minuscule

Determining what Insular Minuscule is often goes hand in hand with looking at the socio-historical background regarding scribes<sup>78</sup>. The various characteristics of a script can be more easily understood if one knows the geographical-historical background of it and its creators.<sup>79</sup> In essence, the word Insular is an umbrella-term for a group of scripts, art, etc. tied to a specific geographical location. In the context used, the term is most commonly applied to Irish and Anglo-Saxon scripts with corresponding features, as proposed by Ludwig Traube.<sup>80</sup> There have been attempts to find characteristics that distinguish Irish from early Anglo-Saxon script, for example by W.M.Lindsay,<sup>81</sup> but it has proven to be a challenge.

Although the Insular world is often viewed as isolated,<sup>82</sup> this view can be reassessed considering the fact that literacy was brought to Ireland with Christianity through the establishment of the Latin Church.<sup>83</sup> No other region [than the Insular] was truly heir to the multi-tiered script system of the Roman world.<sup>84</sup> It is from this Latin background that Insular Minuscule was born; from a basis of half-uncial a readable minuscule script evolved.<sup>85</sup> As the Irish had determination to master Latin, they commonly wrote a word-by-word translation above or alongside the Latin texts as a gloss to aid

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<sup>78</sup> As seen in various works such as Brown, M. (2012), Knight (1996), O'Neill (1983/2014), O'Sullivan (2005), Smith (2013), etc.

<sup>79</sup> Most developments within scripts are directly tied to their creators, who could be influenced by various factors such as aptitude and location. For example, Irish monks working in a monastery in Italy could be influenced by that style of writing, but this goes both ways; the appearance of foreign influences can be explained by the mobility and occurrence of missionaries or scribes in a specific area. For example, the minuscule hand was presumably introduced to southern England by Irish missionaries (O'Sullivan 2005). Insular writing found on the continent is no surprise once one knows that there have been Irish monasteries on the continent.

<sup>80</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.512

<sup>81</sup> Lindsay (1910)

<sup>82</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>83</sup> Richter (2002) p.27

<sup>84</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>85</sup> Stevenson (1989) p.135

comprehension.<sup>86</sup> This was done without differentiating the hand, and with the moving of Old Irish from a marginal position of being dependent on Latin to that of an independent written language. In this way Insular Minuscule established itself as one script applicable to two languages.<sup>87</sup> Thus Latin scripts played a large part in the dawning of Insular scripts, and both Uncial and Minuscule were used together for quite some time.<sup>88</sup> A correlation between form and function existed: minuscules were considered appropriate for less formal books and pragmatic literacy, and Half-Uncials or Uncials for sacred texts and other formal works. At times this distinction became blurred, and Uncials were used informally, while a more formally penned minuscule could be used for scripture of higher status<sup>89</sup>. This complicates the categorisation of scripts, as it rules out limitations which could be useful for distinguishing scripts.<sup>90</sup> Still, however, as a general tendency the correlation seems useful.

### Describing the Script

We now have created an (albeit a bit vague) understanding of what Insular Minuscule is, where it comes from and where it is found. The question then remains how to describe it. How does one recognise the script without historical context, what are its characteristics?

Diving headfirst into literature, finding exact descriptions proved difficult. The focal point seems to be more on the context than the exact form of the script itself. Generally, the descriptions can be divided into two categories:

- 1) Descriptions regarding letter forms
- 2) Descriptions regarding style

The first category is the one I found to be the largest. Within this category, a division can be roughly made between different scholars. Longer pieces of academic writing concerning Insular Minuscule often tend to focus on different periods, and how the script was represented visually in that time, sometimes split into different categories, while shorter accounts tend to focus on the more general descriptors. This way roughly two groups of scholars emerge, the first consisting of Julian Brown, whose significant contribution was the idea of a hierarchy of hands, Michelle Brown, Timothy

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<sup>86</sup> Smith (2013) p.46

<sup>87</sup> Smith (2013) p.46

<sup>88</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.87

<sup>89</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.126

<sup>90</sup> i.e. it would be impossible to rule out minuscule because of the location of its appearance; although there are approximate limits, these limits are not set and the script does not limit itself to one type of writing.



O'Neill (to a certain extent), and William O'Sullivan; the second consisting of Bernard Bischoff, Raymond Clemens, and Stan Knight. This division might be explained by their areas of expertise.

1) *Descriptions regarding letter forms*

Julian Brown, who is known for his palaeographical work, started by categorising the development of the Insular script into two phases: Phase I and Phase II<sup>91</sup>. The second assumed several different forms according to region.<sup>92</sup> Within these phases, Brown perceived three categories of minuscule; Phase Ia, characterised by loops, ligatures, and reversals of the ductus of certain letters; Phase Ib, notable for its retention of a number of New Roman cursive features, such as a reversed ductus 'g', resembling a long 'z', and other labour-saving tricks;<sup>93</sup> and Phase Ic.<sup>94</sup>

Apart from that, he went as far as to divide the minuscule into four categories, distinguished by the amount of speed and formality applied during the act of writing<sup>95</sup>:

- 1) 'hybrid minuscule'            *bastarda*
- 2) 'set minuscule'             *cursiva formata*
- 3) 'cursive minuscule'        *cursiva media (formata)*
- 4) 'current minuscule'        *cursiva currens*

The first category was defined as a slanted pen script, meaning it was written with a slanted pen with the nib cut at right angles to the shaft. As a result of this, slanted tops to minims were produced.<sup>96</sup> It is described to have 'sloping heads to letter strokes', but was written with the maximum degree of care and formality, with frequent lifts of the pen from the page, and with minimal use of ligatures and other linking strokes.<sup>97</sup> Hybrid Minuscule also featured some letter-forms proper to Half-Uncial, such as a round 's', Uncial 'R' and 'N', and Insular Half-Uncial 'oc' shaped 'a' to distinguish it from 'set minuscule'.<sup>98</sup> Insular Minuscule is referred to as 'set minuscule' at its most formal, because it is known to have a heightened number of penlifts.<sup>99</sup>

The third category was distinguished by the use of lower-case letter-forms, with the use of ligatures, loops and reversal of ductus on certain letter-strokes in order to heighten the speed of writing. This

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<sup>91</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.149

<sup>92</sup> Brown, M (2012) p.150

<sup>93</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>94</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.158

<sup>95</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>96</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>97</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>98</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.156

<sup>99</sup> Brown, M. (1999) p.60

does not mean, however, that Insular cursive minuscules were not carefully and calligraphically written. The last category was written most rapidly and with least care and formality. For Brown, this then was termed ‘current minuscule’.<sup>100</sup>

Michelle Brown analyses the script in a more technical way. In *The historical source book for scribes* she writes that Insular Minuscule was a script which was adapted by writers for their individual use, resulting in a number of variations in letter formation, style, heights of letters and angle of pen nib. It had the *x-height* of about four nib widths, together with the *ascenders* of seven nib widths and *descender* height of anything up to ten nib widths.<sup>101</sup> The angle at which the pen was held varied from 40° to 60°, with an average of 48°.<sup>102</sup> She states that the ‘upright, oval shaped letter o’ contributes to the compressed style of Insular Minuscule. The general feel of the hand is one of an upright nature.<sup>103</sup> The *e* seems to join almost every letter. Letters show slight exitstrokes, sometimes slightly curved and extending below the baseline for x-height as in the letter h and m, and there are pronounced wedge-shaped serifs. These are formed by moving the nib downwards and to the right, making a stroke which is the thickness of the nib. The pen is then lifted and the downstroke written. The most marked feature of the hand is not the serifs but that long extending downstroke on descenders.<sup>104</sup>

Timothy O’Neill, who himself is a calligrapher, does not use the divisions Julian Brown does, nor does he analyse the script in the fashion of Michelle Brown. His analysis starts with the seventh century, where ‘examples of a second type of script appear which scholars term minuscule’.<sup>105</sup> According to O’Neill, Insular Minuscule is a script that is not necessarily smaller than majuscule, but has a sharper, more compressed appearance<sup>106</sup> and therefore is more economical in terms of words per line. Minuscule forms of certain letters, *a*, *n*, *r*, *s* differ from majuscule, causing palaeographers to sometimes have very technical discussions when trying to classify a particular manuscript.<sup>107</sup> This classification is furthermore made difficult by the inconsistency in use of types of letters by Irish scribes up until the tenth century, when majuscule and minuscule forms were used

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<sup>100</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.157

<sup>101</sup> Brown, M. (1999) p.63

<sup>102</sup> Brown, M. (1999) p.64

<sup>103</sup> Brown, M. (1999) p.64

<sup>104</sup> Brown, M. (1999) p.64

<sup>105</sup> O’Neill (1983) p.223

<sup>106</sup> O’Neill (1983) p.223

<sup>107</sup> O’Neill (1983) p.223

together. The distinction between both forms can be made, as stated by O'Neill, by looking at the letter *a*, which in minuscule is made with a straight back in a triangular form.<sup>108</sup>

William O'Sullivan seems to adjust the descriptions of Insular minuscule to the time period it was produced in. As one of the landmarks of development he mentions the manuscript of the Life of St. Columba by Adomnán. He proceeds to describe the Insular Minuscule as follows:

“Here the script has already reached the angularity that is to characterise the Irish minuscule to its latest days. This was achieved (the calligrapher Timothy O'Neill tells us) by a sharper pen angle, thirty degrees to the writing line. The *a* is made in three strokes, but with a pointed top; uncial *d* is normal, but a half-uncial form, inclined to be open, also occurs; the top stroke of the *g* is waved; the open bowl of the *p* is finished by a serif to the right; the *q* is very much like the *a* with an added tail.<sup>109</sup>

The minuscule of the eleventh and twelfth centuries O'Sullivan sees as based on the ninth century script of the Book of Armagh, although sharpened and standardised.<sup>110</sup> This script is perceived as the final form, with “lengthened descender and widely splayed base”, which will be revived by the learned families in the fourteenth century after the Anglo-Norman conquest.<sup>111</sup> Then, in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ireland, manuscripts continued to be written in the unadorned minuscule, stripped even of its serifs. It survived the nineteenth century, but the end of an era came in 1880 with the death of Joseph O Longan, the last of the hereditary scribes of Ireland.<sup>112</sup>

Bernhard Bischoff mentions the oldest examples of the small Irish minuscule, but does not categorise by period. Instead, he gives the most noticeable stylistic particularities, which he does not limit to Insular Minuscule, but applies to almost all insular scripts, ‘whether half-uncial or minuscule.’<sup>113</sup> The triangular terminals of the ascenders, which are said to be a decorative element, are repeated on the shafts of *i*, *u*, *f*, *þ*, *z*, the first shafts of *m* and *n*, the shafts of *N* and *R*, and which is also favoured in the triangular terminals of the horizontal strokes on round *d*, half-uncial *g*, and *t*.<sup>114</sup> Bischoff also describes how these triangular tips were made: ‘with a short turn of the pen against the direction of the writing (leftwards, then rightwards into the path of the shaft); with round *d*, *g*, *t*

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<sup>108</sup> O'Neill (1983) p.223

<sup>109</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.534

<sup>110</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.536

<sup>111</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.536

<sup>112</sup> O'Neill (1983) p.224

<sup>113</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.86

<sup>114</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.86

this was done with a light upward left stroke then obliquely down to the horizontal. In many manuscripts however, the easier method of adding a separate, angular stroke to the shaft or horizontal was preferred'.<sup>115</sup>

Raymond Clemens also describes the characteristics of Insular script, but focusses more on the letter forms. The listing of distinctive letter forms of Insular Minuscule according to Clemens included the following: a rounded *d*, low-set *f*, flat-topped *g*, *p* with a bowl not fully closed, *r* with a descender at the left, and low-set *s*.<sup>116</sup> He then continues to describe its stylistic characteristics, which will be discussed in the next section.

Stan Knight has a similar succinct description of the Insular Minuscule. He writes that word division and punctuation are quite consistent, and that numerous ligatures and abbreviations occur. 'The *a* and *d* are open; *c* and *e* are tall (especially in ligature); *p*, *r*, and *s* all have descenders and are very similar in appearance.'<sup>117</sup>

## 2) *Descriptions regarding orthography*

Apart from the form of letters, various scholars have also made notes about the way Insular Minuscule was stylized. The aforementioned Bischoff, Clemens, O'Neill, and O'Sullivan all used the orthography within the script to set it apart from other scripts, and thus categorise it, as well.

Bischoff's main focus seems to be the style he views as characteristic of Insular Minuscule. This style is determined by the triangular, spatulate terminals. The design of decorative capitals plays a part in this too, as do the peculiarities of book production as mentioned in *The Insular Indosyncrasy*.<sup>118</sup> Explicitly mentioned are the triangular construction of the groups of initials and the initials surrounded by red dots. Bischoff acknowledges the frequent substitution of *s* and *ss* as well. Other peculiarities, such as false aspiration (especially for *ch* or *h*), *-is* for *-iis*, *y* for *i* or *e*, *-iens* instead of *-ens*, are believed to be Irish.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.86

<sup>116</sup> Clemens (2007) p.

<sup>117</sup> Knight (1996) p.318

<sup>118</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.87

<sup>119</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.87

Clemens mentions the ligatures in which vowels linking with a preceding consonant are written below the baseline as typical of Insular minuscule. The rise of the letter e high above the headline in the *ae* digraph and the entering of e into a ligature with the following letters he views as insular as well, together with the tallness of the i in initial position, and the favorisation of the Tironian abbreviation for *et*.

For O'Neill, such abbreviation is important as well. He states that the use of peculiarly Irish suspensions and abbreviations can be a clue to the Irish origin of continental texts. Some of those were inherited from antiquity. Like Clemens, O'Neill mentions the Tironian notes, which is a system of shorthand reputedly invented by Cicero's secretary M. Tullius Tiro.<sup>120</sup> The system used in Ireland includes an inverted c, (C) for the syllable *con*, and inverted e for *eius*, 7 for *et*, s- for *sed*, and many others. The letters **n** and **m** could be indicated by a suprascript stroke or curve respectively. Within the Insular Minuscule, these were adapted for both the original Latin as well as the equivalent vernacular words or syllables. 7 could stand for *ocus* (*agus*) or any syllable in *et* or *eat*, q- for *ar* 'because' or any syllable so spelled, and with a suprascript i became Irish *air*, s- represented Irish *acht* 'but', and I- Irish *nó* 'or'.<sup>121</sup>

Separately, O'Sullivan mentions characteristics of developed Insular script. These are as follows:<sup>122</sup>

- 1) triangular wedge-shaped serifs
- 2) the inclusion as alternatives of the uncial forms of d, r, and s
- 3) punctuation by the developed use of initials
- 4) diminuendo

On a higher level, a variety of descriptions exists. The different approaches of scholars result in several accounts which can be roughly divided into two categories: descriptions regarding letter forms or orthography. One difficulty, however, is that the scholars seem to be using their own terminology when talking about the developments within the script. This is noticeable especially when reading O'Sullivan; e.g. minuscule of the eleventh and twelfth centuries are based on the ninth century script, although adjusted.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> O'Neill (2014) p.xiv

<sup>121</sup> O'Neill (2014) p.xiv

<sup>122</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.250

<sup>123</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.536

As general descriptions of the Insular Minuscule have been studied, it is time to turn to more specific descriptions and its terminology. From the descriptions a visual index will be created. For this case study, I have chosen to use the book of Leinster, which was produced in the second half of the twelfth century. According to O’Sullivan and Michelle Brown, twelfth century Insular Minuscule was based on that of the ninth century, although it had become more pointed.<sup>124</sup> For this reason, the descriptions of Insular Minuscule given above by various scholars, while not necessarily referring to twelfth century script, will remain valid. This manuscript in particular has been chosen because it was created in a time when Insular Minuscule was the most prominent script used in Insular manuscript production, and from the twelfth century on the only one that remained in use.<sup>125</sup>

### The Book of Leinster

Written partly by Áed Ua Crimthainn,<sup>126</sup> the Book of Leinster (LL) is the largest of the pre-Norman collections of Irish sagas and genealogies.<sup>127</sup> Its proper title is *Leabar na Nuachongbála*,<sup>128</sup> and it was collected from many books, as written by Áed himself.<sup>129</sup> The manuscript began to be written after 1151, and additions were made to it up to 1198.<sup>130</sup> It is composed of 374 pages, and preserved in two separate manuscripts: Dublin, Trinity College, MS. 1339 (pages 1-354) and Dublin, University College, MS. Franciscan A.3 (pages 355-76),<sup>131</sup> including versions of 100 prose texts and heroic sagas. Examples of such texts are the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* and the *Leabhar Gabhála*.<sup>132</sup>

### Describing the Script

When it comes to Insular Minuscule in LL, there are three scholars who have been prominent in researching the script: R.I. Best, William O’Sullivan, and Elizabeth Duncan. Other scholars, when discussing the script of LL, tend to yield to the authority of these three scholars. For example, Gearóid Mac Eoin states that R.I. Best expressed that the book was written by a single scribe, and that William O’Sullivan later identified six scribes in an important article in *Celtica*.<sup>133</sup> Tomás Ó

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<sup>124</sup> Brown, M. (2012) p.60, O’Sullivan (2005) p.536

<sup>125</sup> Bischoff (1990) p.88

<sup>126</sup> O’Neill (1984) p.30

<sup>127</sup> O’Neill (2014) p.42

<sup>128</sup> Mac Eoin (2009-2010) p.80, O’Neill (1984) p.30, O’Neill (2014) p.42

<sup>129</sup> O’Neill (1984) p.30, O’Neill (2014) p.42

<sup>130</sup> Best (1954) p.xvii, Mac Eoin (2009-2010) p.82, O’Neill (2014) p.42

<sup>131</sup> Duncan (2012) p.28

<sup>132</sup> Mac Eoin (2009-2010) p.81, O’Neill (2014) p.42

<sup>133</sup> Mac Eoin (2009-2010) p.82

Concheanainn, who has done paleographical research regarding the Leabar Breac, also acknowledges the views of Best and O’Sullivan.<sup>134</sup> Patrick O’Neill, a paleographer himself, writes: “William O’Sullivan distinguishes two hands in addition to those of Áed and Find in the body of the manuscript but paleographer Elizabeth Duncan distinguishes nine principal scribes.”<sup>135</sup> This shows that these scholars have been, at the least, of importance and influence in their field.

The first scholar is R.I. Best, who made a complete edition of the Book of Leinster consisting of six volumes. It has supplementary remarks on the history and the title of the codex to the full account of Robert Atkinson, who made his edition in 1880.

Best’s description of the script is short. He concludes that: “The volume despite the variety and inequality of the script, is I think the work of a single scribe, who signs his name in rubricated formal letters on p.313: *Aed mac meic Crimthaind ro scrib in leborso 7 ra thinoil a llebraib imdaib*. ‘Áed Húa Crimthaind wrote this book and collected it from many books’.”<sup>136</sup>

Then he gives his short account on the nature of the script:

“The hand varies considerably, giving at times the impression of a second scribe, ranging from the formal and elegant book-hand, as in the frontispiece to the *Facsimile*, to a hurried, careless script, due doubtless to the varied conditions under which our scribe worked- his materials, pen, ink, membrane, renovated or ‘palimpsest’, and perhaps place; for it must be remembered that Áed was not a mere copyist, but a compiler, gathering his texts from various sources.”<sup>137</sup>

While Best’s analysis may not seem valuable, it is the analysis which caused William O’Sullivan to publish his own observations on the script of the LL in his article *Notes on the scripts and make-up of the Book of Leinster* written in 1966. The manuscript has, according to O’Sullivan, an uncommonly complicated palaeography.<sup>138</sup> While he does not agree with Best’s view of the writing being the work of a single person, he does believe that all styles of writing in the manuscript (except for the later additions) are of a single family.<sup>139</sup> O’Sullivan believed that Best’s inclination to see all as the product of a single scribe writing with more or less care and being more or less well provided with suitable materials was to ignore the different types of formal and informal scripts, and the abrupt transitions from one style to another.

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<sup>134</sup> Ó Concheanainn (1984)

<sup>135</sup> O’Neill (2014) p.42

<sup>136</sup> Best (1954) p.xv

<sup>137</sup> Best (1954) p.xvii

<sup>138</sup> O’Sullivan (1966) p.6

<sup>139</sup> O’Sullivan (1966) p.6

O'Sullivan divides the writing in four main styles:

*A*: the style signed by Áed

*F*: the style of the page (f. ccvi) on the bottom of the margin of which Bishop Find wrote his letter to Áed

*T*: the style common to the Táin and the Togail Troí

*U*: the style characterized by the frequent use of uncial *a* in medial positions.

Supplementary to these styles, there are two subsidiary styles, which both occur only once: *M* which stands for the writing of the Mesca Ulad and *S* for the scribe employed by Aed to copy ff. ccvii-ccxvi at Bishop Find's request.<sup>140</sup>

After these compact explanations O'Sullivan goes on and describes each hand, as quoted:

*A*: at its best a formal hand of character and strength, well rounded but not fine, and without any great contrast between thick and thin strokes. The general impression is solid with a strong horizontal emphasis.<sup>141</sup>

*F*: the finest hand, generally a fine calligraphic hand showing a careful regard for the contrast of thick and thin strokes with good spacing, but not monumental or stiff. The hooked open *a* is here exclusive to F. The u-shaped open *a* is a noticeable feature of this hand, but it also shares with the others the pointed form opening slightly to the right. A few cases of stretching *d* occur, and also very little stretching *t* and *g*. Three strokes to the *d* are taken. The left side of the bow of the *d* is often pointed and (in comparison with A) the emphasis of the writing is towards the angular and vertical.<sup>142</sup>

*S*: seems simple and unstudied. More compressed than A with a more vertical emphasis. If notable at all, it is for the abundance of stretching *d*.<sup>143</sup>

*U*: a more variable style than A or F. Commonly uses an uncial *a* in medial positions.

Another prominent feature of U is the dominance of a *d* with an almost vertical tail.<sup>144</sup>

*T*: often extremely ragged with very uneven inking. At best it is an informal untidy style, with the uprights leaning at varying angles from the vertical. What distinguishes it from the other hands is the curious spikiness it at times assumes. The stretching *d* is very common. An odd feature is the high *a* made by extending the right hand stroke of an ordinary Irish pointed *a*

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<sup>140</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) pp.6-7

<sup>141</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) p.7

<sup>142</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) pp.7-8

<sup>143</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) p.8

<sup>144</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) p.9



vertically and bending the tip slightly forward. The hand is very variable even over quite small areas.<sup>145</sup>

*M*: uses a wide variety of *d*'s. There is the very formal three-stroked *d* with the left side of the bow ending in a point; the two-stroke more rounded *d* of A; the straight an almost vertical tailed *d* characteristic of U; and the similar but twisted tailed *d* of S and T; the stretching *d* common in S and T and occasional in A. Besides all this there is the extraordinary *d* like an *a l* ligature.<sup>146</sup>

Elizabeth Duncan reacts to O'Sullivan in her reassessment of the script and make-up of *Lebor na Nuachongbála*. One of the first things she writes is: "To regard *Lebor na Nuachongbála* as a single manuscript does not allow for its complexity either physically, palaeographically, or textually, and gives the impression that it was written at the same time and place in a straight run."<sup>147</sup> She proceeds to analyse the script of the LL and states that "The palaeography of TCD 1339 also points towards some further problems with clear-cut terminology."<sup>148</sup> The six styles as conceived by O'Sullivan are accepted, but Duncan adds four varieties to T: T1-4. Furthermore, she includes an analysis of the letter forms of each scribe, as quoted below:

*A*: Hand A has a rather plain repertoire and most letters are typical of Gaelic National Minuscule forms inherited from Insular Minuscule. The most common form of *a* is the closed angular form with a pointed top, round open *a* with slightly tapering horns was also used relatively frequently. A closed angular *a*, a round-backed flat-topped *d*, round-backed *d* with its tail rising above the body in a straight line, the head and descender of *r* drawn in a single stroke, a tall Insular *s*, are all found frequently.<sup>149</sup>

*T1*: The hand is awkward-looking and rather jagged. Closed angular *a* and round open *a* with horns were both employed. Angular *a* with ascender, both forms of round-backed *d*, a very tall straight-backed *e* is found in ligature with following *t*, and Insular *s* whose head was drawn above the head-line are also present.<sup>150</sup>

*T2*: Small size in comparison to other hands, both forms of round-backed *d* were used. There is a

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<sup>145</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) pp.10-11

<sup>146</sup> O'Sullivan (1966) p.11

<sup>147</sup> Duncan (2012) p.28

<sup>148</sup> Duncan (2012) p.28

<sup>149</sup> Duncan (2012) pp.29-30

<sup>150</sup> Duncan (2012) pp.30-31

tendency for the ends of the tails of *d* to curl back a little at the ends. An *e + o* ligature seems to be distinctive of T2. Tall *e* is found in ligature with other letters.<sup>151</sup>

*T3*: Far neater in comparison to T1 and T2, less spindly and is rounder. Some of its palaeographical features are shared with A and T1–2, for example the tall Insular *s* and *l* which descend under the base-line. Closed angular *a* and round open *a* with tapering horns, angular *a* with straight ascender, both forms of the round-backed *d*, and straight-backed *d* with an angular body was employed occasionally. Trailing *d* is particularly frequent in this hand.<sup>152</sup>

*T4*: Like T3 more neatly executed than T1 and T2. The script does not display trailing *d* and straight-backed *d*, but the Insular *s* and *l* and both of the round-backed *d*'s are displayed. Pointed closed *a*, slightly taller than minim-height, was also used. Distinctively, the *d + e* ligature (with the *e* inside the bowl of *d*) was employed as a large initial.<sup>153</sup>

*F, M, S, and U*: All four styles are described by Duncan in similar terms, the occurrence of each term variable for each style, as each style employed different letterforms with a different frequency.<sup>154</sup>

After describing the particularities of each style, she proceeds to describe the common ground of all styles. According to Duncan, hands F and S share (to a certain degree) the heavy aspect of a 'monumental' style of Gaelic script written in the second half of the twelfth century. All scribes of LL contained minims tidily between the head- and base-line, giving the script a slightly disjointed aspects. The *l* which descends slightly under the baseline is an important feature, along with the distinctive tall Insular *s*. All hands display a distinctive *d+e* ligature, and an extended usage of monograms.

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<sup>151</sup> Duncan (2012) p.31

<sup>152</sup> Duncan (2012) p.32

<sup>153</sup> Duncan (2012) p.33

<sup>154</sup> Duncan (2012) pp.33-36

To propose a paleographic terminological standard regarding the descriptors of Insular Minuscule would be ambitious. An analysis of a collection of academic writings revealed that the descriptions of this script are varied. Julian Brown categorised developments of insular script into two phases, of which the first was divided into three categories. Based on the amount of speed and formality applied during writing, he divided minuscule into four categories: hybrid, set, cursive, and current minuscule. Insular Minuscule is said to be set minuscule because of its heightened number of penlifts.

Michelle Brown looked at Insular Minuscule in a more technical way, based on letter formation and nib widths, altogether with the height of letters and the writing angle. The overall feel of the script is upright and compressed, as a result of the manner in which the letters are formed.

Calligrapher Timothy O'Neill describes the Minuscule as having a sharper, more compressed appearance, and states that minuscule forms of letters *a*, *n*, *r*, *s* differ from their majuscule counterparts.

William O'Sullivan characterises the Irish script by angularity, created by the angle of the pen. Apart from that he describes a number of letter forms in *Manuscripts and Paleography*, while in *Notes on the Scripts and Make-up of the Book of Leinster* O'Sullivan uses a mixture of general descriptive terms (e.g. 'solid with a strong horizontal emphasis') and specific letter descriptions (e.g. 'u-shaped open *a*'). Bernhard Bischoff reveals the most noticeable stylistic peculiarities to all insular scripts, which he says are the triangular terminals.

Raymond Clemens bases his descriptions on the forms of letters in Insular Minuscule, such as a low-set *f* and *s*, a flat-topped *g*, and a *p* with a bowl not fully closed. Stan Knight follows this, writing that the *a* and *d* are open, and that the *c* and *e* are tall. Some of the scholars, such as Bischoff, Clemens, and O'Neill, also use orthography to categorise Insular Minuscule.

While it can be seen that both Michelle Brown and Timothy O'Neill describe the script as being (more) compressed in appearance, they still approach the categorisation of the script differently. Clemens, O'Sullivan, and Knight all present letter descriptions, but each describes a different set of letters. Both O'Sullivan and Knight address the open *a*, but that is their only similarity. The inclusion of pen angle in Michelle Brown's work returns in O'Sullivan's approach, but the letter height and nib width of the pen is not explicitly mentioned by anybody else.

As can be seen from the above, general descriptions of Insular Minuscule vary significantly from one another. Interestingly, descriptions of the Insular Minuscule found in a specific manuscript also

display similar variation. The case study showed that scholars describe and categorise the script within one single manuscript differently from each other. The debate about the number of scribes of the Book of Leinster (LL) reflects this: whereas R.I. Best viewed the script to be a product of one single hand with varying conditions and care, the aforementioned O'Sullivan believed the script to be a result of six scribes at work, (but) belonging to one single family. Elizabeth Duncan revised O'Sullivan's view and, through analysis of the script in the LL, concluded that there were nine different hands involved. While Best does not describe the script extensively in the introduction to his edition of the book, apart from "The hand varies considerably, giving at times the impression of a second scribe, ranging from the formal and elegant book-hand, as in the frontispiece to the *Facsimile*, to a hurried, careless script<sup>155</sup>", O'Sullivan justifies his views by giving multiple descriptions of the various scripts he differentiated. Whereas O'Sullivan gives both letter-form specific and general descriptions, Duncan sticks to only describing the letter-forms to distinguish the nine hands in the Book of Leinster. Although both O'Sullivan and Duncan describe the same letters, mainly *a*, *d*, and *l*, none of their descriptions match perfectly. For example, O'Sullivan's 'hooked open a' seems to be the same as Duncan's 'round open a with slightly tapering horns', and what O'Sullivan calls a 'high a' seems to Duncan to be an 'angular a with ascender'. Moreover, Duncan's 'trailing d' is visually the same as O'Sullivan's 'stretching d', which is visible in the visual index created from the letter descriptions.<sup>156</sup>

Uniformity in terminology seems to be absent, both in general and concerning the LL. As each scholar has their own approach, their depictions of the script vary. General descriptions seem to concern themselves with the development of the script, resulting in descriptors that do not catch one static aspect of the script, but instead touch upon its fluid nature. The fact that I was able to identify two groups regarding general descriptions (*letter forms* and *orthography*) might not have been an obstacle had the descriptions within those groups been similar. However, J. Brown establishes a hierarchy of hands, while M. Brown uses technical terms in regards to Insular Minuscule. O'Neill concerns himself more with the classification of the script, while O'Sullivan takes the historical route. Bischoff and Clemens focus more on characteristics, the things that make Insular Minuscule stand apart from other scripts. Knight then turns to a combination of punctuation and letter forms to describe the script. In the orthographical descriptions both Clemens and O'Neill mention Tironian notes, and both Bischoff and O'Sullivan mention the spatulate terminals, but neither share other similarities. Although the descriptions regarding Insular Minuscule in the Book of Leinster

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<sup>155</sup> Best (1954) p.xvii

<sup>156</sup> see attachment 'A Visual Index: the Book of Leinster' p.31

(LL) focus on the same aspects, they do somewhat differ. This is mainly because the descriptions that were used in this thesis were merely in reaction to one another; R.I. Best was one of the first to write about the script in the LL, and was in turn mentioned by O'Sullivan in his work about the hands involved in the LL. Duncan builds on the words of O'Sullivan and presents her own views, which results in similar yet different letter descriptions, as can be seen in 'A Visual Index: the Book of Leinster'.

It can be said that there are similar categories used to describe Insular Minuscule, i.e. in what way the script was written (e.g. "carefully") or how it looks (e.g. "sharper", "more compressed"). The descriptions regarding the manuscript do not describe the script by illustrating all specifics, but instead focus on the differences within the displayed scripts to discuss the number of scribes involved in its production. Because it focusses on the visible differences, a visual representation is necessary to gain a complete understanding of the descriptions of Insular Minuscule. Whereas visual representation would be useful for understanding general descriptions about letter forms as given by Bisschof, Clemens and Knight, it is not a requirement for understanding the terminology. As a result, two different attachments were created: 'An Index of Terminology' and 'A Visual Index: the Book of Leinster'.

There still is a significant amount of research to be done regarding the description and categorisation of Insular Minuscule. As is shown by the analysis of works by various scholars, there are too few similarities between descriptions to create a uniform language. After looking into manuscript production, and examining out of which scripts Insular Minuscule developed, I researched the definition of Insular Minuscule. Brought to Ireland by the Latin Church, Insular Minuscule was a script which evolved from a basis of Half-Uncial, revealing the importance of Latin scripts for the creation and existence of Insular scripts.

Although researching the subject gave insight in the terminology used to define the script, only a part of the available descriptions has been analyzed. To create a better understanding of these manual descriptions, academic writings about more than one selected manuscript will have to be examined. Analysis on a larger scale will enable more data, which then can be used to construct an overview of the descriptive terms used by scholars. A supplementary glossary to the descriptions of scholars and learned men would be helpful in clarifying terminology. From there on one might propose the usage of similar terms. After the analysis of multiple other descriptions a more complete index can be provided, creating a better insight in what scholars categorise Insular Minuscule to be. A uniform language might only be created if more research is done on both higher and lower levels. Creating more objective criteria, as can be done by using digital analysis, would help in regards to how one classifies a script. Once these indicators are established there will be a

frame of reference to which paleographers can turn. This frame might limit the subjectivity of the traditional descriptions, which will create more clarity and help establish a uniform language or body of terminology.

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## *Index of Terminology*

<i>angularity</i>	the quality of something being angular
<i>ascender</i>	the part of a letter that extends above the headline
<i>baseline (Majuscule)</i>	the lowest of the two lines in between which letters are written
<i>calligraphic hand</i>	a slanted script produced by using a broad slit squill
<i>descender</i>	the part of the letter that extends below the baseline
<i>diminuendo</i>	script in which the sentences start out with a larger letter and the script slowly diminishes in size <sup>157</sup>
<i>ductus</i>	the shape and order of the strokes used to compose letters/number, sequence, and direction of the strokes used in forming each letter of the script's alphabet
<i>-reversal of ductus</i>	when the shape and order of strokes used to compose letters or numbers is reversed, e.g. such as a reversed ductus 'g', resembling a long 'z'
<i>exit strokes</i>	the stroke made when the pen leaves the paper
<i>headline (Majuscule)</i>	the upper line of the two lines between which letters are written
<i>horizontal emphasis</i>	when the script is written relatively broadly and evenly between the base- and headline, stressing the horizontal aspects and appearance of the script
<i>ligatures</i>	vowels or consonants linking with a preceding consonant, combined into one, more compressed, letterform
<i>linking strokes</i>	strokes linking letters together
<i>lengthened descender</i>	when the part of the letter that extends below the baseline is lengthened
<i>minim</i>	short, vertical stroke used in handwriting
<i>nib width</i>	the breadth of the tip of a pen
<i>open bowl of the p</i>	when the rounded half circle after the straight lengthened minim (descender/shaft) is not fully closed
<i>penlift</i>	the raising of the pen which occurs while writing, varying from script to script
<i>pointed top</i>	when the top of a letter appears sharp and angular, coming together in a ^-like shape at the top

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<sup>157</sup> O'Sullivan (2005) p.520

<i>serif</i>	a small stroke attached to the end of a line or minim, in either a letter or a symbol <sup>158</sup>
<i>wedge-shaped serif</i>	a small line with a slight curve attached to the end of a line or minim, creating a wedge-like form <sup>159</sup>
<i>shaft</i>	a single upright stroke, minim
<i>sharper, more compressed appearance</i>	when the letters of a script seem more angular, and are written more closely together
<i>slanted pen script</i>	a script written with a pen, the nib of which was cut at right angles to the shaft, creating slanted tops to minims (i.e. not parallel to the baseline)
<i>slanted tops</i>	tops which are aslope
<i>sloping heads to letter strokes</i>	when the heads of a letter are slightly tilted in regards to the letter strokes
<i>suprascript</i>	one or multiple letters written above the headline, often in a smaller script
<i>terminals</i>	serifs placed at the end of minims
<i>- spatulate terminals</i>	terminals in a triangular shape
<i>Tironian notes</i>	a system of shorthand reputedly invented by Cicero's secretary M. Tullius Tiro
<i>vertical emphasis</i>	when the script is written in a more compressed fashion, and the shafts of the letters are lengthened, and stress on the upright appearance of a script is created
<i>waved top stroke of the g</i>	when the top stroke of the g is not straight, but instead curves slightly
<i>widely splayed base</i>	when the the lowest part of a script is spread out broadly
<i>writing line</i>	the line on which is written, similar to the base line
<i>x-height</i>	the height as measured of [x]-units

AaBbCc

Image I



Image II

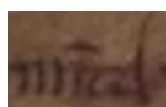
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<sup>158</sup> see image I

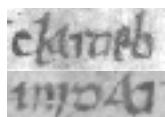
<sup>159</sup> see Image II



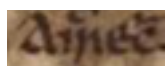
A



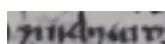
minta          angular *a* with ascender



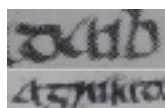
claideb  
im dai          closed angular *a*



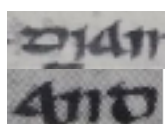
aīrech          closed angular *a* with a pointed top



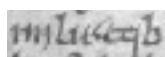
ruanaid          high *a*



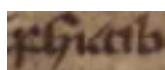
daib  
agruad          hooked open *a*



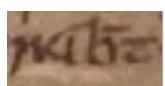
dian  
and          ordinary Irish pointed *a*



imluatib          round *a* with tapering horns



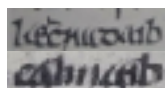
feraib          round open *a* with slightly tapering horns



rabert          round open *a* with horns

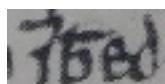


can          uncial *a*

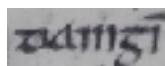


læchrudaib  
calmaib          u-shaped open *a*

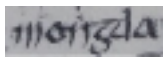
D



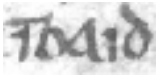
imbered          *d* with an almost vertical tail



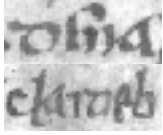
daingī          formal three-stroked *d*



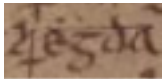
mongda pointed left side d



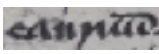
imbaid round-backed d with its tail rising



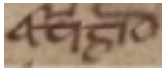
dena  
claideb round-backed flat-topped d



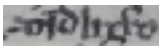
airegda straight-backed d with an angular body



caurad stretching d



athigid trailing d

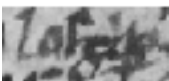


dindliged twisted tailed d

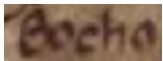


dó two-stroke more rounded d

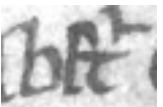
## E



loegaire tall e

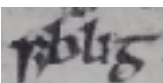


eocha e+o ligature



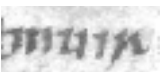
beth tall straight-backed e in ligature following t

## G



siblig stretching g

## R



muir the head and descender of r drawn in a single stroke

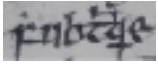
S



*sech*

tall insular s

T



*fubthaire*

stretching t

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## Glossary

<i>annotation</i>	commentary made on the written text
<i>ascender</i>	the part of a letter that extends above the headline
<i>bifolium</i>	a sheet folded in half
<i>calligraphic technique</i>	a writing technique which requires a broad and slit quill, used for the production of script types such as uncial, half uncial, and caroline minuscule
<i>codex</i>	a form of book, consisting of sheets of papyrus or parchment folded once, and sewn together to form quires or gatherings
<i>codicology</i>	term for aspects of book production other than paleography, i.e. ruling, rubrication, decoration, binding, correction and annotation
<i>colophon</i>	an inscription at the end of a book or manuscript giving the title or subject of the work, its author, the name of the printer or publisher, and the date and place of publication
<i>comperative methodology</i>	methodology which makes use of the comparison of material, working with a variety of levels
<i>correction</i>	alteration, often of text, made by a scribe working on a text
<i>cursive</i>	one of three categories in the division of development in Latin script made by Scipione Maffei of Verona
<i>cursive technique</i>	a writing technique which uses a finer quill, and writes the letters as a unit, as far as possible, without lifting the pen, creating a swift script
<i>descender</i>	the part of the letter that extends below the baseline
<i>diminuendo</i>	a style in which the sentences start out with a bigger letter and the script slowly diminishes in size
<i>drypoint ruling</i>	a ruling technique with which 'invisible' lines were drawn by putting pressure onto a dry point object and drawing it across the sheet
<i>exemplar</i>	a manuscript serving as an example from which is copied
<i>flesh-side</i>	the side of parchment or the vellum on which the flesh used to be
<i>gathering</i>	leaves which were grouped together
<i>graphical aspects</i>	aspects of the way of writing, writing techniques
<i>hair-side</i>	the side of parchment or vellum on which the hair used to be
<i>hand</i>	a script or letters, created by a scribe
<i>herse</i>	the frame on which skin dried in the process of making parchment or vellum

<i>higher level</i>	a plane of study which is broader and thus contains more general descriptions
<i>Insular</i>	an umbrella-term for a group of scripts, art, etc. tied to a specific geographical location. In the context used, it is applied to Irish and Anglo-Saxon scripts with corresponding features, as proposed by Ludwig Traube
<i>ligature</i>	a form of letters where two or more letters are joined as a single glyph (an elemental symbol within an agreed set of symbols)
<i>lower level</i>	a plane of study which is confined to a specific scope, resulting in a more specific, detailed field of research
<i>majuscule</i>	a script all the letters of which can be written between two lines
<i>manual descriptions</i>	man-made descriptions
<i>minuscule</i>	a script all the letters of which can be written between four lines
<i>Paleography</i>	the study of scripts and manuscripts
<i>palimpsest</i>	a reused piece of material, often parchment or vellum, made out of pieces of which the previous text was erased
<i>parchment</i>	material on which was written, made out of goat- or sheepskin
<i>philology</i>	field of study dealing with with the structure, historical development, and relationships of a language or languages
<i>quaternion</i>	a gathering consisting of four double leaves (sixteen pages)
<i>quinio</i>	a gathering consisting of five double leaves (twenty pages)
<i>quire</i>	leaves which were grouped together, also known as a gathering
<i>rubrication</i>	the decorating of a text or initials with coloured inks
<i>script</i>	the system of letters and characters used in writing by hand; handwriting, also known as <i>hand</i>
<i>strokes</i>	movements made to create letters
<i>-broad strokes</i>	thick strokes, which are generally broader in appearance
<i>-hair strokes</i>	fine strokes, which are thin in appearance
<i>terminals</i>	small decorative strokes placed at the end of a stroke
<i>vellum</i>	material on which was written made out of calf- or cowskin
<i>writing angle</i>	the angle of writing

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