

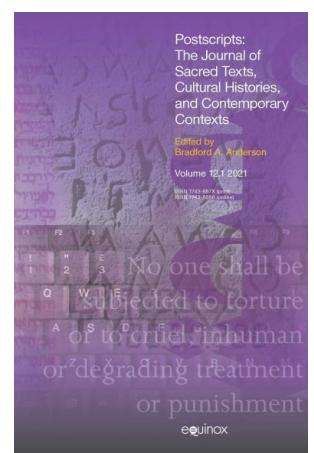
# The Bible Beyond Reading: The Iconic, Contested, and Mediated Bible in Ireland

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## Postscripts: what do we do?

- Postscripts invites submissions of original critical work that takes up the question of the reception and mobilization of sacred texts in areas ranging from religion, to contemporary politics, to culture, to social life.
- The journal also pays particular attention to thinking broadly and critically about the very category of 'sacred texts'.



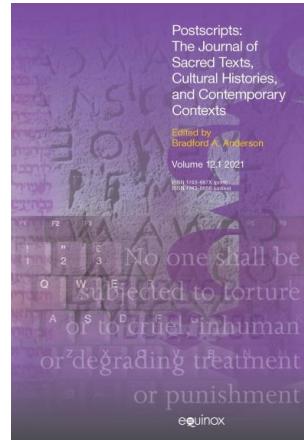
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## Postscripts: areas of interest

- Contemporary uses of and engagement with sacred texts (broadly understood)
- Scriptures and their cultural histories, particularly forms of reception that go beyond the mainstream exegetical and interpretive traditions
- Materiality and sacred texts
- Performative and iconic dimensions of scriptures
- Theoretical reflections on scriptures
- The arts and sacred texts

**We are always seeking contributions – standalone articles as well as ideas for special issues**

Get in touch with questions or proposals! [brad.anderson@dcu.ie](mailto:brad.anderson@dcu.ie)



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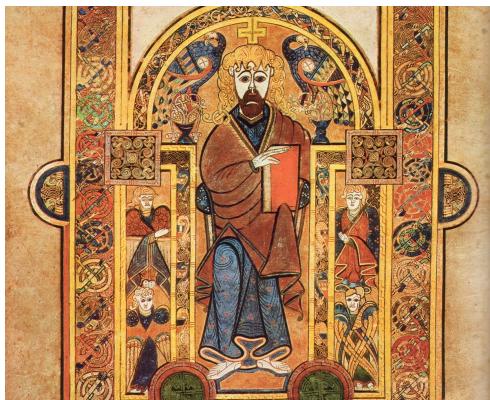
## How can we account for the impact and influence of the Bible in Ireland?

- My previous work has explored various aspects of the reception of the Bible in Ireland
- Recently reflecting on how we might account for the **impact and influence** of the Bible in Ireland
- Ireland has traditionally been known as a very religious island, but apart from a few well-known examples, is not often equated with the Bible
- Doesn't see itself as 'biblical' in the way that the US and UK might be
- Leaders very rarely invoke or quote from the Bible
- Little culture of Bible reading or study among laity



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# The impact of the Bible in Ireland



- And yet: Ireland has been significantly shaped and impacted by the Bible
- Woven into issues of identity, society, and culture
- People are more familiar with the Bible than they often realise
- How can we account for this?
- Working on some theoretical/conceptual ideas on this, and would appreciate input!

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## Reflecting on the impact of the Bible beyond reading

- Reflecting on the impact of the Bible in Ireland beyond engagement with the ‘written word’
- Using three heuristic, overlapping categories:
  - Iconic Bible
  - Contested Bible
  - Mediated Bible
- Each of these point to different ways in which the Bible has shaped and impacted Ireland
- See handout for bibliography



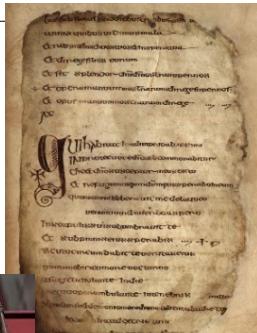
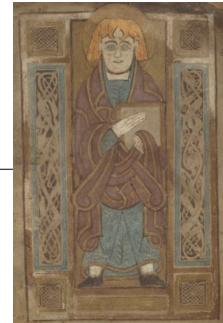
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# The Iconic Bible

- Material elements indicate how these texts came to point to something beyond themselves

- Watts; Parmenter; Latour; Bennett

- Materiality and acculturation
- Iconicity and talismanic use
- Relic status and Cultural identity



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## The Iconic Bible: Material texts and acculturation

- Early material texts point to **continuity and innovation** in relation to received manuscript traditions
- Can we think of this as **acculturation**?
  - changes that occur as two cultures come into contact and adaption takes place
- Book of Mulling: 8<sup>th</sup> c. CE
- Connected to St Moling, Co Carlow, Ireland
  - Trinity College Dublin Library (TCD MS 600)
- Includes text of the four Gospels, canon tables, a letter from Jerome, prayers, and a liturgical service



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# The Iconic Bible: Material texts and acculturation

- Retains elements from the broader Western manuscript tradition, including Old Latin/Vulgate, canon tables, letter from Jerome
- Indigenous elements:
  - Use of insular/Celtic visual elements
    - Celtic knots, crosses
  - Insular script
  - Irish glosses
- Connection to local religious figures/saints
  - Moling; cf. Columba



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# The Iconic Bible: Iconicity and talismanic use

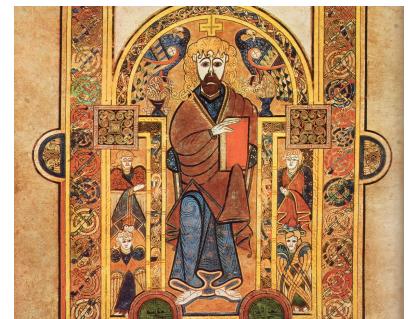
- Connection of these texts with key figures leads to talismanic use
- an Cathach / The Psalter of St Columba
- 560-600 CE – oldest Irish manuscript
- Connection to Columba gives the manuscript particular significance
- Shrine created in 11<sup>th</sup> century
- middle ages held by several families – becomes known as the Cathach, the Battler, as it was carried out to battle with these families as a talisman



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## The Iconic Bible: Cultural identity

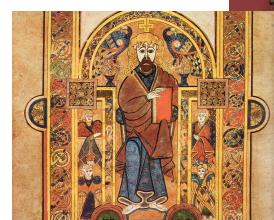
- Over time some of these manuscripts move from iconic to relic texts (Watts)
- Appropriated for the purposes of cultural identity
- Book of Kells
- Cultural revival in the 19th c. draws heavily on the visual imagery and iconography of the Book of Kells in shaping Irish national identity
- Used today in everything from films to passports to tourism materials



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## The Iconic Bible

- Early material texts point to continuity and innovation, what we might think of as the acculturation of the Bible
- Connection to saints and reverence for these texts leads to iconic status, including talismanic use
- Over time some of these become relics and are associated with the cultural identity of Ireland
- Not necessarily a linear process, but can we speak of an interrelated process that includes acculturation, iconicity, and cultural identity?



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## The Contested Bible

- Religious conflict in Ireland is bound up with colonialism, plantation, language, and other issues – and the Bible has played a part in this
- In the wake of the Reformation, the Bible comes to play a role in contested notions of group identity
- M. Moffitt; I. Whelan; C. Hill
- 1641 Depositions (17<sup>th</sup> c)
- Irish Famine (19<sup>th</sup> c)



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## The Contested Bible: The 1641 Depositions



- Testimony collected primarily from Protestant settlers after a rebellion in 1641 that led to a massacre of Protestant settlers in Ireland
- Thomas Rycroft: 'Those rebels ... before the faces of several protestants burnt all the bibles they cold meete ... saying ... in disgrace & contempt of religion, what will yow doe now yor bibles are burnt.'
- '[T]he English and Scotts combyned and joined in a petition to his Majestie... to come into Ireland with the Bible in one hand, the Sword in the other...'
- 'The Grievances of the Peers and Gentry of Ireland', 1641 Depositions

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## The Contested Bible: the 1641 Depositions

- Controversial documents – give primarily one side of events
- There is significant exaggeration in these depositions across a range of issues – and this likely extends to how the Bible was used/misused in this period
- And yet: we see how religious identity – and within this the Bible – is coming to play an increasingly important role in Ireland at this time
- Bible becomes a signifier for both Protestants and Catholics – its very existence can be used as a weapon, even if only in testimony



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## The Contested Bible: the Great Famine



- Great Famine of 1845-1852
- Potato blight along with social policy failure on the part of British government
- Lasting impact in Irish cultural memory
- 1 million deaths, further million emigrants

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## The Contested Bible: the Great Famine

- Some Bible societies took this as an opportunity to proselytise Catholics, including distributing Bibles and encouraging Bible study
  - Primarily Church of Ireland (Protestant) and other evangelically minded groups
- Children and converts were offered food / soup if they would convert, attend certain schools, etc.
- These came to be known as 'soupers' or 'jumpers' and were reviled by Catholic laity and leaders



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## The Contested Bible: the Great Famine

- A small number of groups proselytized in this way – and many in their own denominations were uncomfortable with this and challenged these groups
- A small number of people actually converted, or 'took the soup'
- But the idea of this had a long afterlife, and the terminology of 'soupers' would be used as a general insult for generations
- As Bible societies were at the heart of this movement, the place of the Bible was once again reinscribed in the traditions



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## The Contested Bible

- Both of these offer examples where the Bible came to signify identity – and the perception was far larger than the impact on the ground
- But the ideas had an outsized influence on how people perceived the Bible, and how this came to be associated with Catholic and Protestant identity



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## The Mediated Bible

- How do we account for the fact that the content of the Bible has saturated Irish culture, and that people know much more of the Bible than they assume?
- Mediated Bible: forms of transmission of content were primarily indirect
- E. Poleg; M. Schleicher



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## Visual mediation

- Long tradition of the visual reception of the Bible in Ireland
- Illuminated manuscripts (late antique/ Middle Ages)
  - Southampton Psalter
- High crosses (8-10<sup>th</sup> c)
  - Muiredach's cross – OT and NT scenes
- Stained glass windows (19-20<sup>th</sup> c.)
  - Harry Clarke; Evie Hone
- Influenced reception of Bible in Ireland, primarily around stories that became cultural touchpoints



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## Cultural mediation (textual & aural)

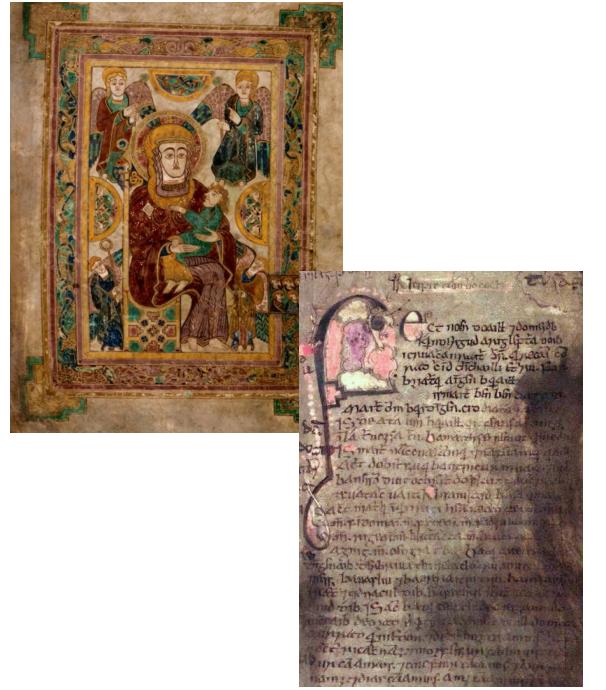


- Medieval Irish histories – The Book of Invasions
  - Tells story of the Irish that puts their story alongside the biblical story
- Liturgy/lectionary
  - Pre- and post-Vatican II
- School: Religious education taught in schools, and Bible has historically been a part of this
  - Fragmentary in nature
- Literature: James Joyce, Colm Tóibín

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## The Mediated Bible

- The way in which people have experienced the Bible in Ireland has been overwhelmingly in mediated forms
  - Visual transmission
  - Cultural traditions



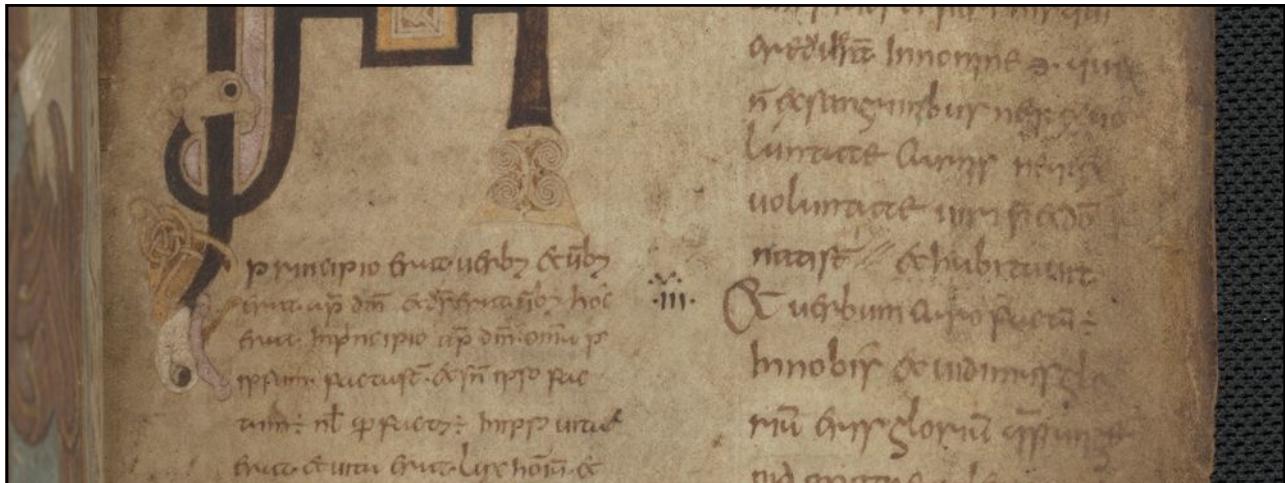
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## The Iconic, Contested, and Mediated Bible in Ireland

- How do we account for the impact and influence of the Bible in Ireland?
- Using three heuristic and interrelated categories
  - Material/Iconic Bible: acculturation, iconicity, and cultural identity
  - Contested Bible: signifier of personal and group identity
  - Mediated Bible: diverse and indirect transmission of content
- Not the entire picture, but these categories offer a starting point for thinking about the Bible beyond reading, beyond engagement with the written text
- Thoughts, comments, input welcome!



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