

Texts and Transmissions of the *Scúap Chrábaid*: An Old-Irish Litany in its Manuscript Context

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The *Scúap Chrábaid*, or ‘Broom of Devotion’, is a name applied to an Old-Irish litany, traditionally ascribed to Colcu Ua Duinechda (died c. 795), a learned scholar of Clonmacnoise (Kenney 1929, no. 580).¹ The text has been edited twice, first by Kuno Meyer (1900-1, 92-105) and later by Charles Plummer (1925, 30-45); more recently, a contemporary English translation has been produced by Oliver Davies (1999, 292-97).

Little is known of Colcu of Clonmacnoise apart from some legendary associations with St. Paul and the existence of a letter, written c. 790, from the great Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin ‘to the blessed master and pious father Colcu’ (*Benedicto magistro et pio patri Colcu Alcuine humilis levita salutem*: Alcuin, *Epistola 7*; Dümmler 1895, 31-33). Most scholars have accepted that Colcu Ua Duinechda was the intended recipient of this letter, although both Kenney (1929, 534, n. 104) and Kleinclausz (1948, 75, n. 20; 123) prefer to postulate an otherwise-unknown Colcu, resident at the school of York. It seems to me unlikely, however, that the epistle’s recipient would have left no other trace in the records of history. The letter itself is essentially a brief on the contemporary state of Europe, and it was accompanied by some significant gifts, which Alcuin enumerates in detail: alms amounting to no less than 203 shekels, as well as some rare sacramental oil (*aliquid de oleo, quod vix modo in Britannia invenitur*). Indeed, it appears the missive may have been an attempt to establish (or maybe re-establish) diplomatic relations with this Colcu, perhaps connected in some manner with the dispute between Charlemagne and King Offa of Mercia which Alcuin discussed in the letter.

It is therefore evident that this blessed master Colcu was a personage of no small importance, and thus unlikely to have been an otherwise-anonymous scholar at York. It is more probable that Alcuin’s correspondent was significant enough to have left some mark on the historical record, and thus Colcu Ua Duinechda, counted amongst ‘the scribes and bishops and anchorites’ in the *Annals of Ulster* (AU2, 796.1), remembered by the Four Masters as *fear-leighind Cluana mic Nois* and *Colcca egnaidh* (AFM, 789.6, 791.6), and commemorated at 20 February in MartG and MartD, is certainly one candidate for consideration. However, Kenney’s

1 In one manuscript (Ó Cléirigh²) the text is attributed to *Aireran ind ecna*, possibly Ailerán of Clonard (died 665), but, as Meyer notes, ‘[o]n linguistic grounds alone this attribution ... must be regarded as erroneous’ (1900-01, 93, n. 2). See also Follett 2006, 164.

caveat that ‘the name Colcu was quite common’ (1929, 534, n. 104) should be borne in mind, for another contemporary Colcu (mac Crunnmhail), abbot of Lusk, is also commemorated in the Annals (AU2, 787.1; AFM, 782.5); it is possible that this Colcu of Lusk could have been the intended recipient of Alcuin’s epistle.²

Confusion between Colcu of Clonmacnoise and Colcu of Lusk may also have contributed to Colcu Ua Duinechda’s supposed association with the *Céli Dé*. An ecclesiastic named Colcu is cited as an authority several times in the *Céli Dé* text *The Monastery of Tallaght* (§§56, 65, 81; Gwynn & Purton 1911, 148, 153, 161), and both Kenney (1929, 726) and Gwynn and Purton (1911, 173-74) suggest that this figure should be identified with Colcu of Clonmacnoise. This is certainly a possibility, as Clonmacnoise, which was not far distant from *Céli Dé* communities in the southern Midlands, is itself mentioned on two occasions in *The Monastery of Tallaght* (§§67, 85; Gwynn & Purton 1911, 155, 162-63). However, it is at least as likely that the *Céli Dé* communities at Finglas and Tallaght could have been in regular contact with the nearby monastery of Lusk, preserving memories of its own Abbot Colcu. Furthermore, a third Colcu, the punctilious anchorite of Slane chastised by Mael Ruain in an episode from *The Monastery of Tallaght* (§77; Gwynn & Purton 1911, 159-60; see also Follett 2006, 89-90, 187-88), is another candidate for identification with the eminent *Céli Dé* ecclesiastic. It is, after all, recorded that this Colcu submitted himself entirely to the will of the saint (*Slechtsais iarum fo ogreir maolruaoin*: Gwynn & Purton 1911, 159, lines 33-34); it is possible he went on to reform himself and became a figure of authority within the *Céli Dé* community. Given this covey of Colcus with plausible connections to the monks at Tallaght, it is surely prudent to accept the recent assessment of the evidence by Westley Follett, who does ‘not believe that there is sufficient cause to think that Colcu [Ua Duinechda] was affiliated with *céli Dé*’ (2006, 165).

All in all, there is little that can be said with certainty about Colcu Ua Duinechda, aside from his *floruit* in the late eighth century, and his association with Clonmacnoise and with the *Scúap Chrábaid*, reiterated in scholarship since at least the seventeenth century (e.g. AFM, 789.6; Colgan 1645, 379, n. 9). It is this ‘Broom of the Devotion’ which forms the focus of the present study. Even here, however, we find uncertainty and confusion, where textual tangles mix with imprecision and the lack of any clear definition of what constitutes the text of *Scúap Chrábaid*. This paper therefore seeks to re-examine the available evidence in an attempt to accurately delineate and define the ‘Broom of Devotion’.

2 Colcu mac Crunnmhail should not be confused with his grandfather, Colcu mac Móenaig, an earlier abbot of Lusk and signatory of the *Cáin Adomnáin*: see Ní Dhonnchadha 1982, 180 (no. 20), 190-91.

Manuscript Transmission and Editions of the *Scúap Chrábaid*

The text of the *Scúap Chrábaid* is preserved in five manuscripts, two of which were written by Murchad Ó Cuindlis in the early fifteenth century, and three by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh in the early seventeenth century. The earliest surviving text, written around the year 1400, is found in the codex now known as the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, TCD, 1318 (*olim* H.2.16); hereafter **YBL** = Y in Plummer 1925, L in Meyer 1900-1). About a decade later, another portion of the *Scúap* was included in the *Leabhar Breac* (Dublin, RIA, 23 P 16; hereafter **LB** = B in Plummer 1925, LB in Meyer 1900-1). After a gap of over two hundred years, three further copies were produced by Br Mícheál Ó Cléirigh during his wide-ranging travels across Ireland; these now survive in Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, cod. 2324-40 (hereafter **Ó Cléirigh¹** = Br.³ in Plummer 1925, B³ in Meyer 1900-1), cod. 4190-200 (hereafter **Ó Cléirigh²** = Br.² in Plummer 1925, B² in Meyer 1900-1), and cod. 5100-04 (hereafter **Ó Cléirigh³** = Br.¹ in Plummer 1925, B¹ in Meyer 1900-1).³

At the beginning of the twentieth century Kuno Meyer produced the first modern edition of the *Scúap Chrábaid*, under the title ‘Colcu ua Duinechda’s Scúap Chrábaid, or Besom of Devotion’ (Meyer 1900-1, 92). Meyer was aware of all five surviving manuscript copies, and he based his edition on Ó Cléirigh², providing select variants from YBL and LB; his text was not collated against Ó Cléirigh¹ or Ó Cléirigh³ (Meyer 1900-1, 93).⁴ Meyer also sub-divided his edition of the *Scúap* into thirty-seven discrete (and numbered) sections.

Some twenty years later, Charles Plummer prepared a new edition of the *Scúap Chrábaid* for inclusion in his collection of *Irish Litanies* (1925). Plummer consulted all of the five surviving manuscripts, and based his edition on the oldest copy, in YBL (Plummer 1925, xvii-xix). However, Plummer’s text is radically different from Meyer’s previous edition, for what Meyer printed as a single litany named the *Scúap Chrábaid*, Plummer divided into no less than four distinct litanies, which he published as separate entities in his collection (see Table 1). Thus, §§1-27 of Meyer’s *Scúap Chrábaid* correspond to Plummer’s ‘Litany of Jesus I’ (1925, 30-37); Meyer’s §§28-33 are printed by Plummer as ‘Litany of Jesus II’ (1925, 40-45); §§34-36 become the ‘Litany of the Saviour’ (Plummer 1925, 20-23); and the final §37 Plummer printed as the ‘Litany of the Virgin and All Saints’ (1925, 26-27).

This considerable divergence between the two editions has, understandably, led to some confusion in subsequent scholarship. Although neither editor explicitly

3 For the three Brussels manuscripts (which together constitute some of the most important sources for vernacular Irish hagiography) I have adopted the sigla of Ó Muraíle 2008, 9.

4 Meyer also included some variants from Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 512, but, as we shall see, these are not of direct relevance to the *Scúap Chrábaid*.

stated the rationale underlying their distinctive approaches, it is clear that this divergence results from two very different editorial methodologies.

EDITIONS		MANUSCRIPTS							
Plummer	Meyer	YBL	LB	Ó Cléirigh ¹	Ó Cléirigh ²	Ó Cléirigh ³	Eg.	R	Ad.
‘Litany of Jesus I’	§§1-26	X	–	X	X	X	–	–	–
	§27	X	X	X	X	X	–	–	–
‘Litany of Jesus II’	§§28-33	X	X	X	X	X	–	–	–
‘Litany of the Saviour’	§§34-36	–	–	–	X	–	X	X	X
‘Litany of the Virgin and All Saints’	§37	–	–	–	X	–	–	X	X

Table 1: Texts and Transmissions of the *Scúap Chrábaid*

Eg. = British Library, Egerton 92. R = Bodleian, Rawlinson B 512 Ad. = British Library, Additional 30512

Texts in **bold** indicate those identified as the *Scúap Chrábaid* in Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³

Meyer defined the limits of his text based upon his primary manuscript witness, Ó Cléirigh², which he had chosen as the base-text for his edition. Thus he presented the entirety of the material preserved in Ó Cléirigh² as a unified text, without any regard to the manner in which this same material is transmitted in the other manuscript witnesses. Meyer’s edition is essentially a reproduction of one individual witness, Ó Cléirigh². It was therefore somewhat disingenuous to entitle his text ‘Colcu ua Duinechda’s *Scúap Chrábaid*’, for in Ó Cléirigh² these litanies are explicitly attributed to *Airieran ind ecna* and they are never identified with the ‘Broom of Devotion’ (Gheyn 1905, 383, no. 24; Meyer 1900-1, 93, 94, n. 1; Plummer 1925, xix).⁵ Given Meyer’s chosen methodology of reproducing the material as it is preserved in Ó Cléirigh², it would have been more consistent, and more transparent, to have entitled his text ‘The Litanies of Airerán’.

Plummer, in contrast, adopted a different editorial methodology, which took into consideration all of the manuscript witnesses to each individual text. Any text, or portion of text, which occurred as a discrete unit in any one witness was published by Plummer as a distinct, individual litany, as becomes clear when we examine his treatment of §§34-37 of Meyer’s *Scúap Chrábaid* (see Table 1). These sections are transmitted independently of Meyer’s preceding text in both Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 512 (Plummer’s R) and London, British Library, Additional 30512 (Plummer’s Ad.), and Plummer accordingly separated them off from the preceding §§1-33. However, Meyer’s §§34-36 are also transmitted as

⁵ In fact, the litanies are only identified with the *Scúap Chrábaid* in Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³: the two manuscripts which Meyer did not consult in the preparation of his edition.

an independent unit in a third manuscript, London, British Library, Egerton 92 (Plummer's Eg.), which does not include Meyer's §37 (Plummer 1925, xvi-xvii). Plummer therefore sub-divided further, distinguishing §§34-36 (the 'Litany of the Saviour') from §37 (the 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints'); he also justified this division by noting the transition in the petitions from first person singular in the former litany to first person plural in the latter (Plummer 1925, xvii).

Plummer adopted a similar approach to Meyer's §§1-33: because §§28-33 are found as an independent unit in LB (Meyer 1900-1, 93; Plummer 1925, xvii),⁶ he separated them off to form the 'Litany of Jesus II', leaving the remainder of Meyer's text (§§1-27) to form his 'Litany of Jesus I'. This then is the origin of Plummer's transformation of Meyer's *Scúap Chrábaid* into four distinct litanies. §§28-33 became the 'Litany of Jesus II' because they are transmitted as an independent unit in LB. §§34-36 became the 'Litany of the Saviour' because they form an individual unit in Egerton 92. §37 became the 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints' because, although it is transmitted with the 'Litany of the Saviour' in Rawlinson B 512 and Additional 30512 (as well as Ó Cléirigh²), it is not found appended to that litany in Egerton 92. And the remainder of Meyer's text, §§1-27, Plummer distinguished as the 'Litany of Jesus I'.

This complicated relationship between the two editions, which was never explicated by either editor, can only be deciphered through close comparison of their texts and careful reading of Plummer's discussion of the manuscripts in his 'Introduction' to *Irish Litanies*. This has, unfortunately, created a situation in which the modern, printed texts of the *Scúap Chrábaid* represent a more confused state of textual transmission than the original manuscript witnesses. The difficulties of this situation were noted briefly by Paul Walsh in 1937 (Ó Muraíle 2008, 139-40). More recent scholars, such as Ó Maidín (1996, 178) and Follett (2006, 163, 233-34), have nonetheless been led astray into asserting that copies of the *Scúap Chrábaid* may be found in Rawlinson B 512 and Additional 30512; strictly speaking, these manuscripts contain only Plummer's 'Litany of the Saviour' and 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints', that is, §§34-37 of Meyer's *Scúap Chrábaid* (see O'Grady, Flower & Dillon 1926-53, vol. 2, 489-90, 516; Ó Cuív 2001, 242).

Given the confused nature of the editions, and the resultant lack of precision in subsequent scholarship, it is necessary to return to the original manuscripts in order to define the exact nature of the text, or series of texts, known as the *Scúap Chrábaid*.

⁶ Meyer (1900-1, 93) is incorrect in stating that LB contains 'a copy of the second half of the prayer, from §27 of my edition to the end'; only §§27-33 are found in this manuscript, in which §27 immediately follows §§28-33.

Defining the Broom of Devotion

To the best of my knowledge, the only surviving sources which identify a definitive text by the name *Scúap Chrábaid* are the two manuscripts Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³, and in both cases this identification is copied from a common exemplar, which will be discussed in further detail below. It seems to me most prudent to accept these manuscripts' identification, which originates within the native learned tradition and was endorsed in the seventeenth century by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh. It is, in any case, the sole piece of evidence we possess; and any attempt to re-create or re-establish an alternative *Scúap* runs the risk of producing an artificial and anachronistic textual unit, in effect, a new recension of the 'Broom of Devotion' which inaccurately reflects the manner in which this text is preserved in the surviving manuscripts.

Unfortunately, this, in essence, is what Kuno Meyer achieved in his own edition of the *Scúap Chrábaid*. By editing the litanies from Ó Cléirigh² as a collective unit, yet arbitrarily imposing upon that unit a title which he imported from Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³, he created what is, in fact, Kuno's (not Colcu's) 'Broom of Devotion'. In particular, his inclusion of §§34-37, otherwise Plummer's 'Litany of the Saviour' and 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints', was a serious error, for these litanies are present neither in Ó Cléirigh¹ nor Ó Cléirigh³ (see Gheyn 1905, 386; Gheyn 1901, 319; MartG, ix), and thus their first recorded association with the *Scúap Chrábaid* is in Meyer's own edition of 1900-1. Furthermore, these two litanies circulated as separate entities in Rawlinson B 512, Additional 30512 and Egerton 92, none of which contain the text identified with the *Scúap Chrábaid* in Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³ (Plummer 1925, xvi-xvii).

Of course, the texts were brought together in Meyer's exemplar, Ó Cléirigh², and thus presumably occurred in conjunction in Ó Cléirigh's own exemplar, a now-lost fifteenth-century manuscript written by Giolla Glas Ua hUiginn, and loaned to Ó Cléirigh by Fr Nioclas Ó Cathasaigh during the friar's sojourn in Dublin, probably in 1628 (Ó Muraíle 2008, 51, 139-40; Plummer 1925, xiv, n. 2; Gheyn 1905, 383, n. 10). Even in Ó Cléirigh², however, Plummer's 'Litany of the Saviour' and 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints' are marked off as separate from the rest of the text. This is evident in Meyer's own edition, from the last lines of his §33, that is, the conclusion of the text distinguished by Plummer as 'Litany of Jesus II'. These run as follows: '*Ar nīmtá nī manomthí iar n-indsci Pōil nodrāidhe: "Quis me liberabit de corpore mortis huius peccati nisi gratia, Iesu Christe, qui regnas in saecula saeculorum."* Amen. Credo et pater' (Meyer 1900-1, 98; cf. Plummer 1925, 44, n. 1). The Latin quotation of Romans 7.24-25, the standard concluding formula *qui regnas in saecula saeculorum*, the concluding *Amen*, and, most especially, the instruction to recite the Creed and the Our Father, all mark a distinct break in the

text (and in any putative performance) of the litany. Thus, even in Meyer's own edition, his §§34-37 are marked off as separate from the text elsewhere identified as the 'Broom of Devotion'. They should henceforth be recognised as distinct compositions which form no part of the *Scúap Chrábaid*.

It appears, therefore, that Plummer was correct in publishing these sections as distinct individual pieces, the 'Litany of the Saviour' and 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints'. Was he also correct in separating Meyer's §§1-33 into the 'Litany of Jesus I' and 'Litany of Jesus II'? The manuscript evidence would suggest that he was. The oldest surviving copy of the text, in YBL, also distinguishes these litanies in a similar manner. The book now known as 'The Yellow Book of Lecan' is, of course, a composite codex, made up of seventeen different components, only one of which is the manuscript named the *Buidhe Leacáin*, the Yellow Book of Lecan properly so called (see Abbott & Gwynn 1921, 342; on the Yellow Book of Lecan proper, see Best 1949-50; Oskamp 1975; O'Sullivan 1981). Our text is found in a different manuscript, comprising cols. 281-344 of the current codex; this was written by the scribe Murchad Ó Cuindlis, in southern Tipperary (Múscraige Treithirne and the vicinity of Sliabh Cua) around the years 1398-1401 (Abbott & Gwynn 1921, 99, 344-45; Ó Concheanainn 1973, 67 & n. 21, 77, 78-79; for this manuscript's contents, see Abbot & Gwynn 1921, 98-100, 344-46). Murchad Ó Cuindlis was a pupil and close associate of Giolla Íosa Mac Fhir Bhisigh, and collaborated with his mentor on both the Yellow Book of Lecan proper and the (Great) Book of Lecan (Walsh 1947, 104; Ó Concheanainn 1973, 76-79; Ó Concheanainn 2000, 387-89); he also played a pivotal role, as we shall see, in the transmission of the *Scúap Chrábaid*.

The text of Plummer's Litanies of Jesus begins on line 16 of col. 336 in YBL, where it is marked off as distinct from the preceding text (the so-called 'Litany of St Michael' of Mael Ísu Ua Brolcháin) by both a break in the column and a very large initial *A*, which stretches over a full six lines and is by far the largest initial on the page (all other enlarged initials in cols. 335-36 occupy only two or three lines). The text runs on to line 3 of col. 338, at which point another distinct break occurs, for thereafter the column splits into two sub-columns, with the 'Litany of the Trinity' running down col. 338a, and (in much smaller script) a list of the Archbishops of Armagh, a poem on the Jewish cities of refuge, a note on the tribe of Dan, and other material, occupying col. 338b (see Abbott & Gwynn 1921, 99-100, 346). Thus the Litanies of Jesus are clearly distinguished as a distinct textual unit in YBL, both by the large initial *A* which marks the beginning of Plummer's 'Litany of Jesus I' and by the division of col. 338 which immediately follows the conclusion of Plummer's 'Litany of Jesus II'.

However, this distinct textual unit in YBL is clearly subdivided into two component parts, for the transition from Plummer's 'Litany of Jesus I' to his

‘Litany of Jesus II’ is highlighted by a large initial *A*, stretching over four lines, and marking the beginning of the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ (*A Isu noeb, a chara coem...*: YBL, col. 337, line 29). Therefore, while the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ and ‘Litany of Jesus II’ are transmitted as a unit in this, the oldest surviving copy, they are also clearly distinguished, one from the other.

This distinction is further highlighted in the other early copy of the text, in the manuscript once known as the *Leabhar Mór Dúna Daighre* (Mulchrone & Fitzpatrick 1943, 3380, 3387 at 47i; Ó Concheanainn 1973, 65; Follett 2006, 103); today it is better known as the *Leabhar Breac*. This manuscript was, in all probability, written by Murchad Ó Cuindlis (see Ó Concheanainn 1973), the same scribe who copied the Litanies of Jesus in YBL; various marginal notations reveal the scribe at work on LB in the region of Múscraige Thíre (the baronies of Lower and Upper Ormond, North Tipperary) between the years 1408 and 1411 (Ó Concheanainn 1973, 64-65, 71-75).

At some point during this period,⁷ Ó Cuindlis transcribed a series of four litanies on p. 74 of LB (see Mulchrone & Fitzpatrick 1943, 3397). The series begins, at line 7 of col. a, with the ‘Litany of the Virgin’ (Plummer 1925, 48-51).⁸ This is followed (at col. b, line 38) by Plummer’s ‘Litany of Jesus II’, and, on its heels (at col. c, line 53), the concluding portion of Plummer’s ‘Litany of Jesus I’ (this corresponds to §27 of Meyer’s *Scúap Chrábaid*: see Plummer 1925, 34, n. 20). Finally, at col. d, line 22 begins a copy of the ‘Litany of the Trinity’ (Plummer 1925, 78-85), which breaks off, incomplete, at the foot of the page, in the midst of the invocations of God the Son (Plummer 1925, 82, n. 6).⁹

Ó Cuindlis’ manuscripts, the oldest surviving copies, therefore corroborate Plummer’s distinction between the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ and ‘Litany of Jesus II’. Not only are the two distinguished in YBL, but, in LB, the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ is transmitted as a separate entity, which follows on from the ‘Litany of the Virgin’ and not (as in the other four manuscripts) from the ‘Litany of Jesus I’. This demonstrates that the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ did circulate as an independent litany,

7 There is no indication as to where or when this portion of the manuscript was written, although on the relevant recto (LB, p. 73), Ó Cuindlis informs ‘Domnall’ (possibly the book’s patron) that he is writing alone, with only a robin for company: ‘*Ata in spideog derg uli, a Domnaill, ocus atusa am oenur*’ (Mulchrone & Fitzpatrick 1943, 3387 at 73i; Plummer 1926, 13, n. 5; Ó Concheanainn 1973, 64, n. 5).

8 Another copy of this litany, unknown to Plummer, can be found in Dublin, RIA, 3 B 22, p. 52: see Mulchrone & Fitzpatrick 1943, 3359.

9 Plummer’s statement that ‘[i]n B [=LB], we have Nos. 2 [the ‘Litany of the Saviour’], 3 [the ‘Litany of the Virgin and All Saints], 9 [the ‘Litany of the Trinity’] in immediate sequence’ (1925, xxii) is clearly in error, as is evidenced by his own descriptions of these litanies in the preceding pages. It should be emended to read: ‘In B, we have Nos. 6, 5, (4), 9 in immediate sequence’.

at the very least in the *Leabhar Breac*, and should therefore be distinguished as a separate text from the ‘Litany of Jesus I’.

This distinction is further confirmed if we turn to examine the contents of the two litanies. The ‘Litany of Jesus I’ is ecclesiological in tone: it focuses on the evangelists, the apostles, the angels, the prophets, the martyrs. And it consistently opens its invocations through these figures with the characteristic entreaty *Ateoch frit*. The ‘Litany of Jesus II’, in contrast, is entirely Christological, focusing on various epithets or aspects of Christ and on events from his life, which it consistently introduces with a different invocation, *Ar ecnairec*. It appears, therefore, that the distinction which Ó Cuindlis introduced into his manuscripts, and which Plummer followed in his publication of the texts, is entirely consistent with their content. These are two different litanies, each with a different focus, each introducing their invocations with a different entreaty, and each distinguished in the earliest manuscript copies of the text: Charles Plummer was correct to separate §§1-33 of Meyer’s *Scúap Chrábaid* into the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ and the ‘Litany of Jesus II’.

Is this then the end of the *Scúap Chrábaid*: nothing more than four individual litanies combined by Kuno Meyer in the twentieth century? It is not; for there remains the testimony of Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³, the only manuscripts to explicitly identify a text with the *Scúap Chrábaid*. The relevant portion of both these manuscripts (Gheyn 1905, 386, nos. 19-28; Gheyn 1901, 319, nos. 5-13; MartG, viii-x) was copied from the same exemplar, the now-lost *Leabhar Ruadh Muimhneach*, the Red Book of Munster (Plummer 1925, xiii-xiv; see also Grosjean 1930), as the colophons inserted by Ó Cléirigh into both manuscripts make clear.¹⁰

The Red Book of Munster was a manuscript produced, presumably in the early years of the fifteenth century, by the now-familiar figure of Murchad Ó Cuindlis (Walsh 1947, 252-53), as Ó Cléirigh explicitly acknowledges in his colophons. It is a sobering thought, but were it not for the work of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh in the seventeenth century, we would only possess two copies of the *Scúap Chrábaid* (YBL and LB); however, were it not for the work of Murchad Ó Cuindlis, in the fifteenth century, we would possess only one (Ó Cléirigh²). It appears that Ó Cléirigh first encountered the Red Book of Munster at some point prior to 1630,¹¹ possibly in 1627, when he produced the copy which now survives in Ó Cléirigh¹

10 The relevant colophons from the two manuscripts are reproduced in Plummer 1922, xxiv-xxv; the colophon from Ó Cléirigh¹ may also be found in Plummer 1925, xiv, n. 1; the colophon from Ó Cléirigh³ is reproduced independently in Hamel 1917-9, 349, and Ó Muraile 2008, 98; see also MartG, viii, x.

11 The entry on Colcu Ua Duinechda in the *Martyrology of Donegal*, which was completed in 1630, is dependent on colophons copied from the Red Book of Munster, as will be discussed in further detail below.

(Plummer 1922, xxiv). He later encountered, and copied, the Book for a second time, at the Franciscan friary of Quin, Co. Clare in June 1634, when he transcribed the pieces now preserved in Ó Cléirigh³ (Walsh, 1947, 104; Ó Muraíle 2008, 97-98, 144). On both occasions Ó Cléirigh inserted the same colophon, presumably copied from the Red Book of Munster, identifying the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ and ‘Litany of Jesus II’ as Colcu Ua Duinechda’s *Scúap Chrábaid: Aurnaighthi Colgan hÚa Duinechdhan fer leiginn Cluana meic Nois síšana .i. scúap crabaidh*; ‘The Prayer of Colcu Ua Duinechda, scholar of Clonmacnoise, here below, i.e. the *Scúap Chrábaid*’ (Plummer 1925, xvii; text from Ó Cléirigh¹).

Following this identification, the colophon describes an encounter between Colcu and St Paul the Apostle, which will be discussed in further detail below. The text here appears to be identical in both Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³ (Plummer 1925, xviii), which suggests that Ó Cléirigh copied the colophon directly from the Red Book of Munster, and therefore, as Plummer notes, ‘we may assume that this attribution of authorship was derived from that MS’ (Plummer 1925, xviii). Unfortunately, however, we do not know exactly where this colophon occurred in Murchad’s *Leabhar Ruadh*, for Ó Cléirigh, in a characteristic example of his fidelity to his sources (see McCarthy 2008, 59-60), inserted the colophon before the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ in Ó Cléirigh¹, and after the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ in Ó Cléirigh³ (Plummer 1925, xvii). This leaves us with no way of knowing whether the Red Book of Munster identified the *Scúap Chrábaid* with the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ or the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ or both. The only solid testimony is that of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, who clearly regarded the two litanies combined ‘as forming jointly the *scuap crabaid*’ (Plummer 1925, xvii).

I propose that we accept Ó Cléirigh’s testimony on this matter; it is, after all, the only one we possess (unless we are prepared to accept Meyer’s twentieth-century expansion of the *Scúap* to include all the litanies in Ó Cléirigh²). True, this means our identification of the text is based upon an assertion made over 900 years after the death of its supposed author, an assertion which could be incorrect. However, we have to base our identification on some evidence, and Ó Cléirigh’s colophon is the only definitive identification which is known to date. Furthermore, there are several factors which may be adduced in his support.

First, there is the fact that in four of the five manuscripts (YBL, Ó Cléirigh¹, Ó Cléirigh² and Ó Cléirigh³) the two litanies are transmitted as a unit, with the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ following immediately after the ‘Litany of Jesus I’. Even in the fifth surviving copy, LB, where the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ is transmitted independently, it is itself immediately followed by the concluding portion of the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ (§27 of Meyer’s *Scúap Chrábaid*). LB is thus the exception which proves the rule, for even its independent copy of the ‘Litany of Jesus II’ is conjoined with part of the text of the ‘Litany of Jesus I’. This demonstrates that

the two litanies were already circulating in close association before the year 1400. Indeed, it is significant that the earliest surviving witness, Ó Cuindlis' manuscript in YBL, presents them as a distinct textual unit, sub-divided into two component parts (see above, pp. 32-33).

Second, there is the testimony of another vernacular litany, the 'Litany of Creation' (Plummer 1925, 102-07; cf. Meyer 1912, 231-32), preserved in Dublin, RIA, 23 N 10. This metrical litany appears to fall into two distinct sections, only the first of which was published by Meyer in his 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften' (see Plummer 1925, xxiv). The second section (beginning *Iorraimm duit, a Athair*: Plummer 1925, 104) consists, in large part, of descriptions of the first, which is referred to as a summons to saints (*Is congra do naemuib*), a sanctification of people (*Is naomad do dainib*) and a breastplate for the soul (*Is luirech dom anmain*). It is also described as 'the fine Broom of Devotion': *Isi seo co cumair / In sguab cunnail crabaid* (Plummer 1925, 104). Here, at least, we have an alternative witness to place beside Ó Cléirigh: a text which self-identifies as a *scúap chrábaid*. And it is notable that the first section of this 'Litany of Creation', that very portion which is described as a breastplate for the soul and a fine Broom of Devotion, consistently begins its invocations with the words *Ateoch friut*, that is, the very form of entreaty which, as we have seen, is characteristic of the 'Litany of Jesus I'. Indeed, when Plummer first encountered this litany, he assumed it was simply a copy of the 'Litany of Jesus I', and he asserts that the 'Litany of Creation' 'evidently is modelled on that piece' (Plummer 1925, xxiii). The evidence here may be slight and tangential, but it is noteworthy that only two litanies in Plummer's collection make use of the entreaty *Ateoch frit*, and both are connected in some way with the name *Scúap Chrábaid*.

Finally, there is the evidence that the Litanies of Jesus were not the only litanies to circulate as a conjoined unit in medieval Ireland. We have already seen that the 'Litany of the Saviour' and the 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints' are linked in three of the four surviving copies (see Table 1; Plummer 1925, xvi-xvii). The case of Plummer's 'Litany of Irish Saints II' (1925, 60-75) is even more instructive. It is quite clear that this text is made up of two conjoined litanies: the first of these, quite possibly the most-intensely studied of all medieval Irish litanies, was dubbed the 'Irish Litany of Pilgrim Saints' by Kathleen Hughes (1959; see also Bowen 1969, 68-71; Sanderlin 1975; O'Loughlin 2000, 156-59); the second litany is appropriated described, in instructions for its use against jaundice and boils which are appended to the end of the text, as the litany of the Seven Bishops (Plummer 1925, 74). However, as O'Loughlin has pointed out, 'these must have been combined by someone at an early date, for they are found in this way in the four manuscripts in which they survive, [and] are never found separately' (2000, 157; cf. Plummer 1925, xx).

The ‘Litany of Irish Saints II’ therefore provides a concrete example of two different litanies being combined to form a new unit. I suggest that a similar development led to the creation of the *Scúap Chrábaid*. Whether the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ and ‘Litany of Jesus II’ were composed as complementary parts of an individual litany, or were composed separately and later combined, and, indeed, whether or not the author or combiner was Colcu Ua Duinechda, are questions we simply cannot answer. However, it is clear that these two litanies did circulate as a conjoined unit in medieval Ireland; in Plummer’s words, ‘the association of Nos. 4 [the ‘Litany of Jesus I’] and 5 [the ‘Litany of Jesus II’] is quite constant’ (1925, xxii). Furthermore, it is clear that Mícheál Ó Cléirigh regarded the two litanies together as forming Colcu Ua Duinechda’s *Scúap Chrábaid*; and I propose that, henceforward, we follow Ó Cléirigh’s definition. We may recognize the ‘Litany of Jesus I’ and ‘Litany of Jesus II’, with Plummer (and, indeed, with LB), as two distinct pieces of text; however, when they are combined, in the order ‘Litany of Jesus I’ + ‘Litany of Jesus II’, we may refer to them as the *Scúap Chrábaid*.

The *Codex Cluanensis* and the Red Book of Munster

There remains to discuss one final manuscript witness to the *Scúap Chrábaid*: the *Codex Cluanensis* referred to by John Colgan in his discussion of Colcu in the *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* (1645, 378-79; see also Follett 2006, 165). There Colgan states:

Extat apud me ex Codice Cluanensi, & aliis vetustis membranis, quoddam huius sancti viri opusculum, ... Hibernicè vocatur scuapchrabhaigh id est, scopu deuotionis. Estque fasciculus ardentissimarum precum, per modum quodammodo Litaniarum; opus plenum ardentissima ecuotione, & eleuatione mentis in Deum (Colgan 1645, 379, n. 9).

I have in my possession, from the *Codex Cluanensis*, and other ancient parchments, a certain little work of this holy man’s, ... called in Irish *scuapchrabhaigh*, that is, the Broom of Devotion. And it is a little gathering of most ardent prayers, in the manner of litanies in a certain way; a work filled with most ardent evocation and with the elevation of the mind to God.

Aside from providing one of the most apt descriptions of the *Scúap Chrábaid* (*fasciculus ... precum, per modum quodammodo Litaniarum*), Colgan also brings to our attention a certain *Codex Cluanensis*, a Book of Clonmacnoise, which was known to him and apparently contained the ‘Broom of Devotion’. O’Donovan (AFM, vol. 1, p. 396, n. f) suggested that this may refer to *Leabhar na hUidhre*, the premier *codex Cluanensis*, but there is no copy of the *Scúap Chrábaid* in that

manuscript. Furthermore, it is clear that Colgan's *Codex Cluanensis* was the primary source for his information on Colcu, for he refers to it on no less than three occasions in his short discussion of the scholar of Clonmacnoise (1645, 379, notes 6, 7, 9).

From this *Codex Cluanensis*, Colgan provides us with some short hagiographs regarding Colcu's interactions with St Paul, which, he tells us, he has excerpted from the *argumentum* to the *Scúap* in that same manuscript (1645, 379, n. 6). He also provides us with the *titulus* which prefaced the 'Broom of Devotion': *Oratio Colgan sancti sapientis & presbyteri, & scribae omnium Scotorum* (1645, 379, n. 8). Significantly, this is all but identical to the *titulus* which Mícháel Ó Cléirigh copied from the Red Book of Munster into Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³: *Oratio Colgan sancti sapientis et prespiteri et scribe omnium sanctorum incipit* (Plummer 1925, xviii). This suggests that the *Codex Cluanensis* may have been related in some manner to the *Leabhar Ruadh Muimhneach*, a suggestion which is further strengthened by the legendary material regarding St Paul which was also transmitted in both manuscripts.

Colgan gives by far the most detailed account of these Pauline legends, which describe the Apostle's miraculous interventions on Colcu's behalf:

Coluit mirum in modum S. Paulum Apostolum, vt suum in spiritu & littera Magistrum, et patronum singularem: cuius & singulares fauores, vsque ad miracula legitur expertus. Cùm enim ex scholis, dum reuerteretur, & iter faciens per locum, qui mointire anair appellatur, thecam, sive peram, in qua eius libris iacebant, in humeris portaret; ad ipsum ex itinere fatigatum legitur S. Paulus in humana specie accessisse, eumque, suaui colloquio recreasse, sacrisque monitis, & instructionibus confortasse: quin & tanta erga suum pium & deuotum clientem dignatione ferri, quod peram illam ex euis humeris sublatam, ipse reliquo itinere ad locum, quo erat venturus transtulerit.

Alia etiam vice, cùm quaedam grauis quaestis inter Doctores in scholade Cluainmicnois ventilaretur, & alij loci Patres, & viri doctrinae & autoritate pollentes, aduersam quaestionis partem, contra virum Dei acriter tuerentur, legitur etiam Diuus Paulus eius partes suscepisse, coram senioribus perorasse, & controuersiam ad eius mentem decidisse (Colgan 1645, 378).

He was remarkably devoted in manner to St Paul the Apostle, who was his Teacher in the spirit and the letter, and his singular patron; from whom, it is read and proven, he received singular favours, even miracles. For once he was away from his school, and while he was returning, making a journey through the place which is called *Móin Tíre an Áir*, he was carrying on his shoulders a case, or a satchel, in which his books were deposited; it is read that, when he was weary from the journey, St Paul drew near to him in human appearance, and revived him with pleasant conversation and with sacred admonitions, and comforted him with instruction; indeed, his pious and devoted client was held in such

respect that, the satchel being lifted from his shoulders, [the saint] himself carried it for the remainder of the journey to the place to which he was going.

And on another occasion, when a certain grave matter was debated with dissension between the teachers in the school of Clonmacnoise, and the fathers of another place and the men of doctrine and those with high authority vehemently upheld a contrary position in the dispute against the man of God, it is read that the divine Paul defended his position, pleaded the case in the presence of the elders, and settled the controversy according to his understanding.

These are attractive hagiographs, which effectively demonstrate Colcu's devotion to St Paul, and, indeed, St Paul's devotion to Colcu. They may perhaps be read as allegorical expressions of Colcu's affection for, and mastery of, Pauline theology, as they tell of how Colcu found the material of his learning burdensome and wearying, until his burden was removed following instruction from St Paul; later, it was Paul again who enabled Colcu to emerge triumphant in an acrimonious dispute with other scholars. It is intriguing to note that the *Scúap Chrábaid* itself invokes Paul as one of 'the perfect teachers who taught the spiritual meaning' (*Ateoch frit ina uile forcetaige forbthe forforcansatar in sians spirudala im Pol napstal*: Plummer 1925, 34-35), and concludes with a quotation from the apostle's letter to the Romans (Plummer 1925, 44).

Of greater significance to our present purpose, however, is the fact the same Pauline legends are referenced in the Irish colophon to the *Scúap Chrábaid* which Ó Cléirigh copied from the Red Book of Munster:

Is cuicce so tainic Pol apstal dia accallamh, ⁊ dia chobair forsin sétt, go ro gaibh a théigh liubar i Móin Tíre in Áir, ⁊ conid ro thaccair dara chend re Scoil Chuana meic Nois. Occus ase Pol apstal ro fhaccaibh co na berthar buaidh tacra o Cluain meic Nóis cen be sumh for nimh.

It was to him [Colcu] that Paul the Apostle came to converse with him and help him on his journey, and took¹² his satchel of books in Móin Tíre in Áir ... and answered for him to the School of Clonmacnoise. And it was he, the Apostle Paul, who left (as a legacy)

12 I have here emended Plummer's translation, which reads that Paul 'found his satchel of books'. Plummer appears to have been struck by the (coincidental) conjunction of the satchel with the place-name element *móin* (bog); influenced, no doubt, by the story of the finding of the Corpus Missal, within its satchel, in a bog (to which he makes reference in a footnote), he concluded that Paul 'found' Colcu's satchel. However, the meaning 'to find' is itself not found in the extensive entry on the verb in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (<http://www.dil.ie> (accessed 1 June 2010), s.v. *gaibid*), and the primary meaning of *ro gaibh*, 'he laid hold of / he grasped', is in much closer accord with Colgan's version of the story. Cf. also O'Donovan's translation (MartD, 55): 'he took his satchel of books'.

that pre-eminence in answering should never be taken from Clonmacnoise, as long as he remains in heaven (Plummer 1925, xviii).

This is clearly a summary of the same set of stories provided by Colgan: not only are the same events found in each narration, but even the same place-name, *Móin Tíre in Áir*. A third version of these legends is also preserved in the commemoration of Colcu at 20 February in the *Martyrology of Donegal* (MartD, 54), but this appears to derive directly from the traditions preserved in the Red Book of Munster: its description of the legends matches the Red Book's colophon practically word for word, albeit with some modernisation of the language. We may also note the information which MartD declares is contained in the *prologus* or *remhfocal* before the *Scúap Chrábaid*: *a deir... gurbo naomh, gurbo saccart, acus gurbo sgríbhneior do naomhaibh Erenn an Colga so* (MartD, 54). This happens to be a direct translation of the *remhfocal* preserved in the Red Book of Munster: *Oratio Colgan sancti sapientis et prespiteri et scribe omnium sanctorum incipit* (Plummer 1925, xviii). It would appear, therefore, that Ó Cuindlis' *Leabhar Ruadh* was the formal source for the entry on Colcu in the *Martyrology of Donegal*. The material source was probably one of Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's copies of the Red Book, presumably Ó Cléirigh¹, for the relevant portion of Ó Cléirigh³ was not transcribed until 1634, four years after the completion of the martyrology.

This, however, does not explain the relationship between the Red Book of Munster and Colgan's *Codex Chuanensis*, which contained the same legends regarding Colcu and Paul, and transmitted the *Scúap Chrábaid* under a near-identical *titulus*. It is, of course, possible that Colgan used the same source as the *Martyrology of Donegal*, that is, one of Ó Cléirigh's copies of the Red Book. Richard Sharpe has suggested that at least parts of Ó Cléirigh¹ had reached Louvain by 1630 (1991, 52), and Colgan himself appears to have had some familiarity with the manuscript (O'Grady, Flower & Dillon 1926-53, vol. 2, 448). However, it seems to me unlikely that Colgan was dependent on Ó Cléirigh¹ or Ó Cléirigh³. Certainly, these (relatively young) manuscripts may have been amongst the 'other ancient parchments' which Colgan referred to in his discussion of the *Scúap* (1645, 379, n. 9). However, in my opinion, there are a number of reasons why neither they nor their exemplar should be identified with the *Codex Chuanensis*.

First, there is the difference in nomenclature. Colgan is insistent that his source is a *Codex Chuanensis*: he repeats the name three times (1645, 379, notes 6, 7, 9). It is difficult to see why he should be quite so insistent were he using one of Ó Cléirigh's copies, where the colophons plainly state that their source is the Red Book of Munster. Second, there is the difference in detail of the narratives, and particularly the fact that Colgan's account of the Pauline legends is much more expansive than that found in the colophon from the Red Book. It is possible, of

course, that Colgan extrapolated his tales from the simple colophon, but I find it difficult to envision how he could have deduced that St Paul carried Colcu's satchel for the remainder of the journey from the simple statement *go ro gaibh a théigh liubar i Móin Tíre in Áir*, which could mean any number of things. Plummer, as we have seen above, decided that it must mean Paul had found Colcu's satchel after it was lost in the bog. However, Paul 'took his satchel of books in Móin Tíre in Áir' provides a perfect summary of Colgan's narrative: if one already knows the story.

Finally, there are slight differences which hint towards divergences in the transmission of the two traditions. The *titulus* of the *Scúap* was not quite identical in Ó Cuindlis' Red Book and Colgan's *Codex Cluanensis*, for while the former described Colcu as the scribe 'of all the saints' (*omnium sanctorum*), the latter referred to him as the scribe 'of all the Irish' (*omnium Scotorum*). The two readings, in all likelihood, originated in different expansions of the same abbreviation: *sctorum*. This, however, is exactly the kind of divergence which is utilised in traditional textual criticism to define different branches of the tradition in the manuscript transmission of a text. Furthermore, one element of the Pauline legend summarised in the Red Book's colophon is not mentioned by Colgan: the statement that, after his triumph in the dispute, Paul left to Clonmacnoise *buaidh taccra*, or pre-eminence in disputation, forever. While this may simply have been omitted by Colgan as irrelevant to his primary subject, Colcu, it is also possible that this portion of the legend was not preserved in the *Codex Cluanensis*.

Therefore, while the traditions surrounding the *Scúap Chrábaid* as it was transmitted in Colgan's *Codex Cluanensis* were clearly related to those preserved in the Red Book of Munster (and in its daughter-manuscripts, Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³), it seems to me most likely that this Book of Clonmacnoise represented a distinct witness to the text, which ought not to be identified with any of the surviving manuscripts or with the now-lost Red Book of Munster.

It is just possible that the *Codex Cluanensis* may have been the Red Book's exemplar. There is a strong Clonmacnoise connection in the Red Book's transmission of the *Scúap Chrábaid*: it is the only witness to identify the *Scúap*'s author as Colcu Ua Duinechda, of Clonmacnoise, and also the only manuscript to transmit the Pauline hagiographs, including the apostle's award of *buaidh taccra* to the midland monastery. Furthermore, in the Red Book the *Scúap* was immediately preceded by Plummer's 'Litany of Confession' (1925, 2-17), which was explicitly attributed to St Ciarán: *De Confessione Sancte Ciarane* [sic] (Plummer 1925, xvi, 2, n. 1); the same attribution is also found in London, BL, Additional 30512 and Dublin, TCD, 1285 (*olim* H.1.11) (Plummer 1925, 8, n. 1). The association between the *Scúap Chrábaid* and this 'Litany of Confession' was so close in the Red Book that the colophon in Ó Cléirigh³ declares: *gurab chnes re 'roile fuaras an dá ní gan eadartoidecht neith ele ettarrae* (Plummer 1925, xviii); 'it was cheek

by jowl [literally: skin to skin] that I found the two things, without anything else intervening between them'. Given the close association of the two pieces, the attributions to Ciarán and to Colcu, and the hagiographical material regarding Clonmacnoise, it would be fitting to postulate that the Red Book's source was a *codex Cluanensis*; when one considers the close correspondences between the Red Book of Munster and Colgan's 'Book of Clonmacnoise', it is tempting to suggest that the friar's *Codex Cluanensis* was Murchad Ó Cuindlis' exemplar. However, attempting to tease out the relationship between a hypothetical unidentified manuscript and a lost fifteenth-century codex, based solely on the testimony of two seventeenth-century scholars, is a very precarious game. In the end, all that can be stated with certainty is that there appear to be Clonmacnoise connections in the Red Book's transmission of the *Scúap Chrábaid*, and that the Red Book of Munster and Colgan's *Codex Cluanensis* appear to have been distinct, yet closely-related, witnesses to Colcu's 'Broom of Devotion'.

Sweeping Clean

There is one final mystery to which Murchad's Red Book may suggest a solution, that is, the rather eccentric name which has been the focus of this study: *Scúap Chrábaid*, the Broom of Devotion. For, while *crábud* (piety or devotion) may be entirely appropriate, it is difficult to imagine why any prayer might be referred to as a 'broom'.

We have seen, however, that in the Red Book of Munster the *Scúap* was immediately preceded by the 'Litany of Confession' which (as suggested by the title preserved in the manuscripts and adopted by Plummer) is highly penitential in character: it begins by requesting the Trinity to 'forgive me my sins' (*dilguid dam mo peccaig*: Plummer 1925, 2) and concludes with the triple repetition, 'forgive, forgive, forgive' (*Dilaig, dilaig, dilaig*: Plummer 1925, 16). Also noteworthy is the fact that our text is followed by the story *Da apstol decc na hErenn* (Plummer 1922, vol. 1, 96-102; vol. 2, 93-98), both in Ó Cléirigh¹ and Ó Cléirigh³ and thus, presumably, in the Red Book of Munster (Gheyn 1905, 386 (no. 27); Gheyn 1901, 319 (no. 11); MartG, ix-x). The primary focus of this tale, which initially presents itself as an account of St Brendan's voyage to the Land of Promise, is an elaborate description of the punishments of hell and a lengthy poem in which Judas Iscariot bewails his torments, both of which elements are ideally suited to the promotion of penitence.

It appears therefore that the *Scúap* was found within a decidedly penitential context in the Red Book of Munster. Indeed, this is further highlighted by another element of the Latin colophon which Ó Cléirigh copied from that book. Immediately after identifying the *Scúap* as the Prayer of Colcu (*Oratio Colgan*), it goes on to

declare: *Quicumque hanc orationem cantauerit, ueram penitentiam et indulgentiam peccatorum habebit, et alias multas gratias .i. Ateoch ꝛc* (Plummer 1925, xviii); ‘whoever will have recited this prayer will have true penance and indulgence of sins, and many other graces, i.e. *Ateoch* etc.’. Immediately preceded by the penitential ‘Litany of Confession’ and immediately followed by vivid descriptions of the punishments which await those who fail to do penance, the *Scúap Chrábaid* is here explicitly identified as a penitential prayer for the remission of sins.

This may explain why it is also explicitly identified as a ‘Broom of Devotion’. For the primary purpose of a broom is to sweep away dust and dirt and to leave a surface clean, just as penance was understood to wipe sins away and clean the soul. This may be why Colcu’s litany was known as the *Scúap Chrábaid*: it was understood (at the very least in the Red Book of Munster) as a penitential litany which swept the soul clean.

This interpretation finds some support in the occasional association of the image of the broom with the cleansing of the soul in the Christian literature of the Middle Ages. For example, Colcu’s contemporary, Theodulf of Orléans (died 821), in his poem on the capital sins, wrote of the soul casting aside ‘the diseased things of dread and the contagions of plague, as the coarse broom drives away the house’s filth’ (*Morbida seu ve abicit metus et contagia pestis, / Sic sordes aedis aspera scopa abigit: Carmina* 1; Dümmler 1881, 450, lines 231-38). Later, similar imagery was also adopted by Bernard of Clairvaux (died 1153), in a homily on the Virgin’s Assumption (*Sermo secundus in Assumptione Beatae Mariae*, 4. Leclercq & Rochais 1968, 234, lines 19-22), and, perhaps most notably, by the scholastic Peter the Chanter (died 1197), in his *Verbum adbreuiatum*, 2.53 (Boutry 2004, 809-10, lines 72-74, 83-95).

Significantly, this imagery was also known and used in medieval Ireland, perhaps as early as the eighth century. The *Life* of St Molua of Clonfertmulloe tells of the saint’s encounter with a certain layman who was unwilling to openly confess his sins to another. The saint is presented as admonishing the man for this position, making use not only of the relevant image, but also of the very word *scopa* which is itself the origin of the Irish *scúap*:

Nisi quis confessus fuerit sua peccata, veniam a Domino non consequitur. Et sicut pavementum domus cotidie scopa tergitur, ita anima omni die confessione peccatorum mundari indiget (Vita prior s. Lugidi seu Moluae, §37; Heist 1965, 139).

Unless one has confessed one’s sins, one does not obtain pardon from the Lord. For just as the floor of a house is cleaned daily with a broom, so every day the soul requires confession of sins to be made clean.

I quote here from the first *Life* of Molua in the *Codex Salmanticensis*, part of the so-called O'Donohue collection which may date from the eighth or ninth century (see Sharpe 1991, 318-34; note, however, the challenge of Breatnach 2005). The other published versions of the *Life* also relate the same episode, and contain the same image (Heist 1965, 386 (§20); Plummer 1910, vol. 2, 216-17 (§30)). This demonstrates that the association of penitential cleansing of the soul with the sweeping of a broom was current in medieval Ireland. Considering the penitential context of the *Scúap Chrábaid* in Ó Cléirigh's copies of the Red Book of Munster, this may help to explain why that prayer was known as the 'Broom of Devotion'.

Our investigation of this 'Broom' has swept us into the nooks and crannies of many unexpected corners, but, when the dust settles, we are left with a number of conclusions. (1) Kuno Meyer's edition of the *Scúap Chrábaid* in fact constitutes a reproduction of a series of litanies from Ó Cleirigh², and is an inaccurate representation of the 'Broom of Devotion'; his §§34-37 (Plummer's 'Litany of the Saviour' and 'Litany of the Virgin and All Saints') do not form part of the *Scúap Chrábaid*. (2) Charles Plummer's edition of the text, as the 'Litany of Jesus I' and 'Litany of Jesus II', is to be preferred, as it more accurately reflects the manuscript transmission and the contents of the *Scúap*. (3) In order to delineate the 'Broom of Devotion', we may adopt Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's definition, based on the lost *Leabhar Ruadh Muimhneach* of Murchad Ó Cuindlis, which suggests that the 'Litany of Jesus I' and 'Litany of Jesus II', when combined in that order, constitute the *Scúap Chrábaid*. (4) Murchad's Red Book was related to the now-lost *Codex Cluanensis* known to John Colgan, which may have been the *Leabhar Ruadh*'s exemplar. (5) The penitential context within which the *Scúap Chrábaid* was transmitted in the Red Book of Munster suggests that the name 'Broom of Devotion' may have arisen because the prayer was understood to function as a penitential sweeping or cleansing of the soul.

Finally, we may conclude with some more general observations. There are many difficulties in establishing the original text of any eighth-century Irish composition, given that the text itself almost always survives in manuscripts written at a much later date, the standard problem of variant readings in the different manuscript copies, and often the poor quality and obscurity of the manuscripts themselves (a feature which was frequently the focus of complaints by the medieval and early modern scribes: see Plummer 1926, 12, 22-25, 28-29). In the case of the litanies, designed for liturgical (or paraliturgical) performance and therefore inherently fluid in response to local and temporal needs, the difficulties are increased further, and it may even be an oxymoron to speak of an 'established text' (see O'Loughlin 2000, 154-57).

The differences between Meyer's and Plummer's editions of the *Scúap Chrábaid*, and the understandable confusion which has often resulted in subsequent

scholarship, provide an apt demonstration of some of the consequences of such difficulties in the transmission of an Old-Irish text. It is certainly convenient for scholars to rely on the apparently-stable text of a modern printed edition, but it can also, on occasion, be dangerous to overlook the surviving manuscript witnesses, as failure to pay sufficient attention to the transmission of a text may inhibit our understanding of the very text we wish to study. The contemporary advent of digital scholarship and, in particular, the excellent digital facsimiles of Irish manuscripts provided by *Meamram Páipéar Ríomhaire / Irish Script on Screen* (<http://www.isos.dias.ie/>) have expanded significantly our ability to access the original witnesses to many early Irish texts (although some important limitations should also be borne in mind, such as the artificial manner in which digital facsimiles may obscure the codicological elements of manuscript study by focusing our attention on the image of a page rather than the codex itself as a physical object). Such resources make it much easier for scholars to consult all surviving versions of an early text, both in manuscript and printed form, thereby improving our scholarship and our understanding of the text(s).

This paper, which presented a comparative study of the two published editions of the *Scúap Chrábaid* and the manuscript sources on which they are based, has demonstrated some of the benefits of such an approach. For example, it has revealed the *Scúap*'s prologue in the Red Book of Munster as the probable source for the entry on Colcu in the *Martyrology of Donegal*, while also noting the close relationship between the Red Book and John Colgan's *codex Cluanensis*. Perhaps most significantly, the penitential context within which the *Scúap Chrábaid* is found in Ó Cléirigh's copies of the Red Book has provided a possible key to deciphering the rather unusual name associated with the text. We may hope that future studies which are similarly sensitive to the transmission of texts in the original manuscripts will further improve our understanding of the Irish litanies and of early Irish literature as a whole.

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| Ó Cléirigh ² | Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, cod. 4190-200. |
| Ó Cléirigh ³ | Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, cod. 5100-04. |
| YBL | Dublin, Trinity College, 1318 (<i>olim</i> H.2.16). The 'Yellow Book of Lecan'. |

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