Virgilius Grammaticus and the earliest
Hiberno-Latin literature

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The curious grammarian Virgilius Grammaticus has been difficult to place in an historical milieu. For some he was Septimanian, for others a Jew and for more he was an Irishman. Professor Michael Herren examined the possible influence of Old Irish on Virgilius’s Latin and Professor Dáibhí Ó Cróinín has shown that the earliest quotations from his works appear in Irish sources. In a series of articles and a recent monograph, Dr Vivien Law has shown that Virgilius was more than a strange grammarian. His works can be placed in the tradition of wisdom literature for they show a preoccupation with wisdom, its attainment and how this is incompatible with the pursuit of worldly wealth. Law examined two florilegia and found the same themes in a number of shared passages. Some of these passages are attributed to Virgilius in the florilegia. Law concluded that the content, style, attribution and the position within sections of these fragments in the florilegia made it likely that they were derived from lost portions of Virgilius’s *Epitomae*. There are other overlapping passages from the florilegia which also concern wisdom and have some affinity with Virgilius. These passages may not necessarily have been written by Virgilius himself for some are before his floruit of c.650, but their content allows us to call them ‘Virgilian material’. This Virgilian material, in turn, is found in one of the earliest examples of Hiberno-Latin literature: the biblical commentary by Scottus Anonymus written, it seems, in the 640s. This commentary is, therefore, the earliest source to quote Virgilian material and this can help to establish a milieu for Virgilius and his ‘circle’.

To begin, something needs to be said about the main texts considered here. Scottus Anonymus’s commentary on the Catholic Epistles is the earliest commentary in the Western tradition on this part of the Bible to survive. The figures named in the commentary show that its author shared his scholarly milieu with some writers active in Ireland around the middle of the 1

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1 I have used two editions of Virgilius’s works: G. Polara and L. Caruso, *Virgilio Marone Grammatico*: *Epitomi ed Epistole* (Naples 1979) and D. Tardi, *Les Epitomae de Virgile de Toulouse* (Paris 1928). References to the *Epistolarum* (*Epist.* and the *Epitomae* (*Epit.*.) are by chapter and section numbers of Polara and Carnso. I am very grateful to Professor Donnchadh Ó Curráin for reading this article and his suggestion for its improvement.


seventh century.\textsuperscript{7} The eighth-century \textit{Florilegium Frisingense}\textsuperscript{8} [\textit{Flor. Fris.}] and the ninth-century \textit{Collectaneum} of Sedulius Scotus\textsuperscript{9} are the two florilegia from which Law recovered lost portions of Virgilius's \textit{Epitomae}. The \textit{Collectaneum} compiled by Sedulius is a vast florilegium made up of 'excerpts from classical, biblical, patristic, late antique and medieval Latin sources'.\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Flor. Fris.} is drawn from biblical, patristic and Insular Latin sources. Ps-Bede's \textit{Collectanea} is another text of significance for the present argument. It is a short work of around nine-thousand words and very different in scale and character to Sedulius's \textit{Collectanea}. To avoid confusion, Ps-Bede's \textit{Collectanea} will be referred to for the future as 'Ps-Bede' and Sedulius's \textit{Collectanea} in the abbreviated form \textit{Coll}. The manuscript of Ps-Bede's work is lost. It survives because it was printed among Bede's works in a sixteenth-century edition.\textsuperscript{11} Many of the sources from which Ps-Bede compiled his information have associations with Insular literature. It is accessible in an excellent, new edition.\textsuperscript{12} The editors conclude that it was compiled in southern Germany in the eighth century. However, it contains examples of the earliest Hiberno-Latin literature. The entry numbered 207 in the new edition is presented as prose. No source or analogues are given. It reads:

\begin{quote}
Cauete, filioli [mei]

feminarum species

per quas mors ingreditur

[et] non parva pernicies.

Beware, little sons,

the beauties of women

through which death enters

and no little danger.
\end{quote}

This is recognisable as poetry with seven syllables per line, a characteristic of early Hiberno-Latin poetry, significantly it comes from Columbanus's \textit{De mundi transitu}.\textsuperscript{13} Dr David Howlett says this may have been written by Columbanus as early as 590 before he left Bangor for the Continent.\textsuperscript{14} The presence of Hiberno-Latin literature that predates Virgilius in Ps-Bede makes it less surprising that the compiler(s) had access to the works of Virgilius himself. Virgilius's etymology of \textit{philosophia} is found in Ps-Bede.\textsuperscript{15}

Ps-Bede has a lengthier example of Virgilian material that is related to sections in \textit{Flor. Fris.}, \textit{Coll.} and other texts. I propose to show how this piece concerning the Virgilian motif of wisdom and its attainment has influenced Scottus Anonymus's commentary. On the basis of present knowledge, it seems that Scottus was writing slightly earlier than Virgilius. If Virgilius is to be

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{9 Ed. D. Simpson, \textit{Sedulii Scotti Collectaneum Miscellaneum}, CCCM 76 (Turnhout 1988).}
\footnote{10 CCCM 67, ix.}
\footnote{11 M. Lapidge and R. Sharpe, \textit{A bibliography of Celtic-Latin literature 460–1200} (Dublin 1985) no. 1257 with reference to J. Herwagen, \textit{Opera Bedae venerabilis} (Basil 1563). This is the edition repr. in PL 94.}
\footnote{12 M. Bayless and M. Lapidge, \textit{Collectanea Pseudo-Bede}, SLH 14 (Dublin 1998).}
\footnote{15 Polara and Caruso, p. 26; Tardi, p. 51 = Ps-Bede, §144.}
\end{footnotes}
located in seventh-century Ireland, this suggests that the sapiential motif in his works is part of an already established tradition there. It also makes Scottus Anonymus the first writer to use what has been called 'Virgilian material'.

Remigius of Auxerre, in his glosses on Martianus Capella, also wrote on the incompatibility of wealth and wisdom. The theme is illustrated with an account of the philosopher Crates's dramatic renunciation of his inheritance.

Contemperant enim divitias amore philosophiae quia cupiditas multum obest studiis, unde et nonnulli amore philosophiae diuissi abrenuntiant sicut legitur fecisse Crates philosophus qui magnum pondus auri quod uendito patrimonio adquierat in mare proiecit dicens: 'Ite pessum male cupiditatae, ego vos demergam ne a uobis ipse demergar'.

They disdained wealth for the love of philosophy because greed greatly hinders studies. Therefore some renounced riches for the love of philosophy, as one reads of the philosopher Crates. Having amassed a great load of gold by selling his inheritance, he threw it into the sea, saying: ‘Go to your ruin …’

At the same point in his commentary on Martianus Cappella, the commentator identified as Dúnchad of Reims looks at the damaging effects of material wealth on the pursuit of wisdom. He tells us that the son of Fabricius, in similar fashion, threw his gold into a river to pursue wisdom more freely. Although this theme is by no means exclusive to Virgilius, it is found with characteristically greater frequency in his writings or in work attributed to him. Indeed, he begins Epit. I, 1 (‘Concerning wisdom’) on this subject.

The examination of our writings profits the whole world because we reckon with the pursuit of wisdom, not with commercial gain.

The Goballus Story

One of the more arresting treatments of this theme is found in both Ps-Bede and Coll. V.1. This is the story of the great bird Goballus. It gives birth to an ‘exceedingly beautiful and noisy chick’ but goes in search of a precious stone in the ocean ‘that is sometimes visible and at other times is covered by the sands’. During the unsuccessful search for the stone, a sea-monster devours the chick and Goballus, returning to find the nest empty, cries out seven times, sheds huge tears and

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‘plunges itself into the deep and dies’. At this point, Coll. launches into a moral explanation of the story. A somewhat garbled version is found in Ps-Bede. The moral presents the Virgilian motif of the incompatibility of wealth and wisdom as the key to interpreting the story. Indeed, Ps-Bede attributes the moralising piece to a figure mentioned by Virgilius. The longest account of the moral is found in Coll., but Ps-Bede had some version of this before him. The extended moral has received little attention and there are compelling reasons for associating it with Virgilius or his circle. The style of the story itself, however, is so different from Virgilius’s that Law says ‘it represents an independent recasting of this characteristically Virgilian motif into folktale form, whether by a member of his circle or by a later reader’.

The eastern associations of tales of great birds make it more likely that if there was adaptation it was the other way around – from folktale to moral. Professor Martin McNamara shows how one such tale is found in the Insular glosses on the Psalms in Vatican, MS Pal. lat. 86 written perhaps in the late seventh century. This brings such exotic tales closer to the time of Virgilius. However, the moral itself can be shown to be a borrowing from some wisdom text that was attached at some time to the Goballus story.

The basis for Law’s recovery of the lost fragments by Virgilius was that they are found in both Coll. and Flor. Fris. In both, the fragments are independent borrowings and therefore go back to a common source that she says was probably a lost section of Virgilius’s Epitomae. It is significant, therefore, that part of the moralising piece that follows the story is found in both Coll. and Flor. Fris. This is the longest, continuous text on a Virgilian theme common to both Coll. and Flor. Fris. so far discovered. Parts of the moral also overlap with Ps-Bede and, taking account of the variations among the three witnesses, it is possible to attempt a reconstruction of the moralising section. The following is from Coll. and Ps-Bede, but is not found in Flor. Fris. The Virgilian tenor of the piece is clear.

Et tu, homo, Goballus es, habens naturam decoram nimirum quae generat sapientiam uenustam. Lapis autem in mari amor diuitiarum est, quae seduct hominem et, relicta sapientia, uolat ad diuitias congregandas. Cetus autem magnus stultitia est quae aufer t sapientiam simul cum divitiis. Stultitia nascitur et homo perdit sapientiam, perdit diuitias et infelici rapitur morte.

And you, man, with such a beautiful nature which begets pleasing wisdom, are Goballus. Now the stone in the sea is the love of riches which seduces man. Once wisdom has been abandoned, he flies to accumulate riches. The great monster is stupidity which carries away wisdom as well as the riches. Stupidity grows, the man loses both wisdom and riches, and an unhappy death carries him off.

At this point, Ps-Bede attributes the rest of the moralising section to a Gelflidius. This brings the moral very close to Virgilius for Gelflidius has been identified as the Gelbidius named by him in the Epitomae. What follows is found in Coll. and Ps-Bede with minor but significant variations. Text peculiar to Coll. is given in round brackets, text peculiar to Ps-Bede in square brackets.

[Unde Gelflidius ait]: Melior [est] sapientia auro, et consilium pretiosius argento, et (prudentia pretiator) [praecelarius] omni lapide pretioso et disciplina praeminentior omni vestitu gemmate. [Sapientia, quae de fontis aurei liquidissima uena prorumpit, gemmis omnibus, uariisque margaritarum generibus, et cunctis pretiosior inuenitur gazis, quae suos sectatores ad aulam coelisitis paradisi deducit. Melius est una hora vivere cum sapientibus, quam vinum bibere cum insipientibus].

[Of this Gelflidius says], 'Wisdom is better than gold, counsel is more valuable than silver, (prudence is preferable to) [is brighter than] all precious stones and learning excels all jewelled clothes. [Wisdom, which flows in the purest stream from a golden fount, is found more valuable than all gems, than pearls of different kinds and every treasure, for wisdom leads its followers to the heavenly court of paradise. It is better to live one hour with the wise than to drink wine with the foolish']).

Here Ps-Bede reports Gelbidius/Gelflidius teaching on the triad of wisdom, counsel and learning. The evidence found in Coll. and supported by a range of texts discussed below indicates that behind the praecellarius of Ps-Bede lies a fourth quality, prudentia. The base text of the piece found in Ps-Bede therefore refers to a tetrad of wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning. The contrasting of riches with the attributes that lead to wisdom is a typically Virgilian concern. The final statement that it is better to spend an hour with the wise than to drink with the foolish has also the Virgilian flavour of forsaking the mundane in the search for wisdom. Ps-Bede finishes his moral on the story of Goballus at this point, but in Coll. the tetrad is developed further by 'a certain philosopher' for the tetrad of wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning is said to increase the intellectual stature of the one who cultivates them and, significantly, this is also found in Flor. Fris. §§ 448–50—a section with Virgilian borrowings. Text peculiar to Coll. appears in square brackets and text found in Flor. Fris. alone in round brackets.

[Therefore a certain philosopher referring to this puzzle said], 'I saw four streams flowing from one fount and also a tree – the smallest of all the trees – placed among them. When it was incessantly watered and surrounded by these streams it grew in height above all the trees so that it could reach the stars in the highest summit. These are the four streams: wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning. [These four flow from the same nature, which is the fount of all good things]. Now, the small tree which these four (good rivers of the virtues) water is the poor, undistinguished, naked man: wisdom enlightens, counsel supports, prudence makes wary and learning directs the impulses'.

p. xli and Herren, ‘Some new light’, p. 35. Calder says that Zimmer believed these names were Celtic in origin. On the identification of Gelbidius with Gelbidius, see P. Kitson, ‘Lapidary traditions in Anglo-Saxon: part I’, 23; Law, Wisdom, authority and grammar, 46. 27 CCCM 67, 20; SLH 14, 118. 28 CCCM 67, 20. The text in the Florilegium Frisingense is edited in CCSL 108D, 37 and divided into three entries. The next entry continues the theme: 'In tanquam hic omnes super crescit, ut etiam regibus proceribus ac diutibus merito praeponatur'. 
This gives us compelling reasons for believing that the Goballus story or, more precisely, its moral explanation, has some connection with Virgilius. The tetrad and its elaboration are found in both Flor. Fris. and Coll., the two sources from which Law recovered lost fragments of Virgil's works. Secondly, the tetrad occurs in the context of a discussion of the nature of wisdom and its incompatibility with worldly wealth, a theme that preoccupied Virgilius. This is not to suggest the tetrad is by Virgilius himself because it is to be found in sources that predate him, but that Virgilius and these sources come from a similar milieu.

This is supported by the Prebiarum [sic] de multorium [sic] exemplaribus, a work that shares the same historical context as Ps-Bede and Flor. Fris. Flor. Fris. was compiled by Peregrinus at the episcopal scriptorium of bishop Arbeo of Freising (764–84). The manuscript containing the Prebiarum was also written in Arbeo's scriptorium. This area of southern Bavaria was influenced by Insular culture at this time. According to some, this was where Columbian monasticism lasted longest. Robert E. McNally, the editor of the Prebiarum, believed that it originated in a circle of Irish or Irish-influenced scholars in this region in the eighth century. He wrote that Salzburg and its monastery of Saint Peter was its focus. St Virgilius of Salzburg, who left Ireland for the Continent c. 742, was abbot of St Peter's. The association of Salzburg with the see of Freising and its bishop Arbeo is interesting. Arbeo was a friend of Virgilius of Salzburg and Virgilius's successor, Arno, appointed by Charlemagne, was educated and ordained in Freising.

The Prebiarum's sources are varied and include Insular Latin and patristic material. It, too, shows a concern with theories of wisdom and of Creation; it opens with a consideration of the nature of wisdom and ends with a series of questions taken from a dialogue on Genesis attributed to Augustine and Orosius. It brings together the disparate elements of the works considered here. The opening sections are quoted here as they appear in the edition:


The Prebiarum gives the tetrad found in Coll. and Flor. Fris. Like Coll., it names the actions of each of the qualities that lead to wisdom and says that wisdom originates in nature. The substance of the moral and the texts in which it is found suggests a connection with Virgilius Grammaticus. Coll., Flor. Fris., Ps-Bede and the Prebiarum show that the tetrad of wisdom, counsel, learning and prudence and its elaboration are taken from a source that was joined at some time to the Goballus legend where it became the basis for the moral explanation.

The commentary on the Catholic Epistles by Scottus Anonymus is a key text in the identification of a group of ecclesiastical scholars active in Ireland in the seventh century. This commentary is important because its date (before 650) and provenance (southern Ireland) can be established with more than the usual degree of certainty for early Hiberno-Latin works. It would seem that Scottus Anonymus was writing at about the same time as Virgilius Grammaticus. Scottus also shows a certain concern with wisdom, its nature and origin. In his comment on Jm 1:6, 'If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God …', he quotes 2 Ch 1:10, 'Give me wisdom and knowledge', and gives a series of apophthegms on wisdom. Like the Prebiarum, the comment begins by defining the three types of wisdom:

Prima sapientia hominis est deuiter mala, facere bona, sperare proemia. The first part of man's wisdom is to avoid evils, do good things and to hope for rewards.

This is also found in Flor. Fris. §423 and twice in the Prebiarum (§§1 & 29). Scottus Anonymus names the three categories of worldly and sacred wisdom before describing the origin of wisdom. Like Coll. and the Prebiarum it is said to begin in good nature and like them Scottus uses the verb procedere. He then presents the Virgilian tetrad of wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning as found in Ps-Bede, the Prebiarum and also, most importantly, in both Flor. Fris. and Coll.

Sapientia ex natura bona procedit. Sapientia inluminat, consilium stabiluit (sic), prudentia astutum facit, disciplina firmat actus. Wisdom comes from good nature. Wisdom enlightens, counsel supports, prudence makes wary and learning directs impulses.

The grammatical work of Virgilius is very different from the exegetical work of Scottus Anonymus. It is significant that the tetrad of wisdom, counsel, prudence and discipline is found in the commentary by Scottus Anonymus and in texts associated with Virgilius since it strengthens the ties between the enigmatic Virgilius and this group of Irish Latin scholars. Furthermore, the bearer of the strange name Gelbidius/Gelflidius to whom Ps-Bede attributes the piece containing the tetrad – or a garbled version of it – would seem to have been a real writer and not a figment of Virgilius's fertile imagination. It is possible that the circle of friends and associates mentioned by Virgilius has some basis in fact. Scottus Anonymus may also be considered the earliest Insular writer to use what has been termed Virgilian material.

Of all the analogues, the Prebiarum comes closest to Scottus Anonymus. It is the clearest witness to the text on which Scottus drew. This was probably a wisdom text, although there are hints that suggest a connection with another type of literature in which Virgilius himself shows a considerable interest. Interpretations of the opening of Genesis and the story of the Creation also preoccupied Virgilius. He claims to have written a commentary on 'the creation of the world'
directed, it is interesting to note, ‘against the pagans’. He says in Epist. 4.13 that everyone who is wise should know and examine how man is composed of two elements: a body made from the mire (ex limo) and a soul (affla “breath”) from on high. This is based on exegesis of Gn 2:7, ‘God formed the man of the slime (de limo) of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life’. A quotation he takes from a figure he names as Origen the African concerns the nature of the immortality enjoyed by prelapsarian man: ‘… if the condition of man were to remain as it was at the start, it would have no infirmity, but would be esteemed somehow immutable and eternal’. The moral attached to the Goballus story itself contains paradisical imagery and the allegorising of the four streams flowing from the same spring recalls the exegesis on the four rivers of paradise in Gn 2.10–14.

Ps-Bede also shows an interest in the interpretation of Genesis. Indeed, the Goballus story occurs immediately after what appear to be selections from a commentary on Genesis. Comparing them to a Genesis commentary that shares a connection with Ps-Bede’s south German provenance in Gn 353, says the same. The idea is also found in Ps-Isidore’s Liber de ordine creaturarum: un anónimo irlandés del siglo VII. The same line is taken in the definition of death. A close parallel is found in BN lat. 10616. §§58–59 of Ps–Bede read:


Ps-Bede gives the Augustinian definition of evil as an abstract value having no existence in a positive sense. The same line is taken in the definition of death. A close parallel is found in BN lat. 10616:

Quid est igitur malum nisi corruptio boni? Quid est mors nisi absentia uite?

examples other than those mentioned here, see Law, Wisdom, authority and grammar, pp 38–40. He quotes the opening in Epist. 7:4: ‘Multa sunt huius rei exempla iuxta illo illum quod et ego hesterno feceram anno, cum librum de mundi creatione commentatorium aduersus paganos ediderim, cuius principium est: “absque deo nullus est solo, qui omnia creat”, Polara and Caruso, p. 322.

The next entries (§§60–61) in Ps-Bede are also significantly close to BN lat. 10616. Although there is no reference in this part of Ps-Bede to the rivers of paradise, §§110–11 name the four paradisical rivers and the waters of this world:


How many are the rivers of paradise? Four: Phison, Geon, Tigris, Euphrates; milk, honey, wine and oil. How many are the waters of the world? Two: salt and (fresh-)water.

Parallels are found in the Genesis commentaries of BN lat. 10616, fol. 27v and the Reference Bible, BN lat. 11561, fol. 12v which name seven liquora. Although the Goballus story follows a series of entries relating to exegesis on Genesis, Ps-Bede does not relate the four sapiential virtues to the four rivers. He writes, however, that wisdom 'springs forth from the most pure vein of the golden fountain'. When compared to BN lat. 10616, Ps-Bede's wording and the description of the four rivers in the other sources provide further evidence to link the moralising section attached to the Goballus legend to interpretations of Genesis.

Coll. says that the four rivers of wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning flow from a single fount which is defined as nature (this is not found in the parallel section of Flor. Fris.). Prebiarum §3 states that wisdom comes from a single fount which it too calls nature. In his edition of Prebiarum, McNally says that the source is Pelagius's commentary on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In his comment on 1 Co 1.19, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise', Pelagius cites Si 1.1, 'Indeed it is written “All wisdom comes from the Lord”. His high estimation of man's natural goodness independent of grace led him further to refine this statement on the origin of wisdom: … id est, de bona natura ducit exordium 'that is, it [wisdom] takes its origin from good nature'. Pelagius presents the same ideas as the texts considered here, but his formulation is very different. The commentary in BN lat. 10616 gives the usual topoi when considering the four rivers of paradise. It compares them to the four evangelists and to the four theological virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice. However, the description of the origin of the virtues comes very close to the account of the origin of wisdom and the sapiential virtues in the Prebiarum and Coll. The Paris commentary reads:

Sicut enim ab uno fonte quattuor uniunt flumina, sic ab uno fonte bone nature cetera procedunt uiruties (BN lat. 10616, fol. 90r). Just as the four rivers come from a single fount, so the other virtues flow from the one fount of good nature.

Coll. allegorises the four rivers in the moral on the Goballus legend and compares them to wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning. It describes the origin of the four rivers and their sapiential qualities as follows,

… quae quatuor ex cadem natura omnium bonorum fonte procedunt.

45 §§60. ‘Est enim uita carnis anima, uita animae Dominus’, is widely attested, as the editors say, but no text has this exact wording. The closest analogue they give is from Bede who has carnis; the other analogues give corporis. However, the parallel in BN lat. 10616, fol. 91r is close and it also gives carnis: “Mortalis eris ab ista die in qua morducabis, siue morieris ipsa die morte animae”. Uita enim carnis anima, uita animae deus est’. §61, ‘Despicet Deus, si quis exultet in malis alterius, nam possit Deus ordinem ut terra serviret corpori, corpus animae, anima menti, mens Deo = BN lat. 10616, fol. 90v. 46 Ed. and trans, SLH 14, pp 134–5. See J. O’Reilly, ‘The Hiberno-Latin tradition of evangelists and the Gospels of Mael Bricte’, Peritia 9 (1993) pp 290–309. 47 CCSL 108B, p. 161. 48 PLS 1, col. 1184; PL 26, col. 749.
The Genesis commentary and Coll. link wisdom with good nature flowing from a single fount and both use the verb *procedere*. Law holds that the works of Virgilius Grammaticus are a reaction against the trammelling of scholarly thought within narrow, clerical lines. If so, it would not be going too far to suggest that the tetrad of wisdom, counsel, prudence and learning looks like a “humanistic” counterpart to the four theological virtues. *Flor. Fris.* refers to the ‘four good rivers of the virtues’. Furthermore, if this tetrad is connected with exegesis on Genesis, it would be in keeping with the cosmogonical interests of Virgilius.

**Scottus Anonymus, Virgilius and Ps-Jerome**

There are other parts in his commentary where Scottus Anonymus shows some association with Virgilius. Ps-Bede begins with a definition of the woman breast-feeding her children as wisdom⁴⁹ which comes from Virgilius’s *Epist. XV*.⁵⁰ It is also found in *Coll. II.1*. Among the figures mentioned by Scottus Anonymus is Laithcenn mac Baith. He is the author of the *Eleggo de Moraltibus in Iob*, an abridgement of Gregory’s *Moralia*. He is associated with the midlands monastery of Cluain Ferta Molua and the annals record his death in 661. He is numbered among the circle of Latin scholars active in the southern part of Ireland in the seventh century and Scottus mentions him twice, first as ‘Lodcen’, in the second reference his name appears as the abbreviated ‘Lath’.⁵¹ In the comment on *lac rationabile* of 1 P 2.2, Scottus Anonymus associates the breast-feeding woman with wisdom:

Lodocenses dicit: ‘Lac rationabile’, id est in uberibus matris que rationabili<s est> quia adheret pectori, loco rationabili. Unde dicitur. *Larga ubera sapientiae conspicite.*

It is significant that Scottus Anonymus should include a definition given by Virgilius and repeated by Ps-Bede. The attribution of this piece is also important. Could ‘Lodocenses’ be a garbled reference to Laithcenn or ‘Lodcen’, as Scottus Anonymus referred to him earlier, or to ‘a follower – or followers – of Laithcenn’? If it is the work of Laithcenn, it would seem to indicate a certain currency of ideas among Laithcenn, Virgilius and Scottus Anonymus.

Law discovered that some apophthegms attributed to a Jerome in *Coll. VIII.i.6* are like Virgilius’s writing in style and content. She says that although they may be the work of some medieval Ps-Jerome, they may possibly be by Virgilius himself.⁵² It is also possible that this Jerome was another of Virgilius’s circle. *Flor. Fris.* §§78–97 bears the general heading *Hieronymus: De lectionis adsiduitate*. §§96–97 are repeated in §§440–41 at the very end of the florilegium in the section containing the moral on the Goballus story. (§96 = *Coll. II.5*; §97 is attributed to Virgilius). In all, eleven sentences in this section are attributed to Jerome, including one *item* that applies to him. Albert Lehner, the editor, found sources for seven in the genuine works of Jerome. Another is from Ps-Clement’s *Recognitiones*. The entries for which no sources are named by the

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compiler of Flor. Fris. have mostly to do with wisdom. §86, *Uelocitas audiendi dociblēm hominem facit*, is one such entry without attribution, although it is preceded and followed by entries attributed to Jerome and it has some association with his commentary on Ecclesiastes. Scottus Anonymus's comment on Jm 1.19–20, 'Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger', is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it provides yet another example of material known to both the compiler of Flor. Fris. and to Scottus Anonymus. Secondly, it shows how §86 is definitely to be associated with the enigmatic 'Jerome' for, although there is no direct reference 'Jerome' in Flor. Fris., Scottus Anonymus, in the following extract, names him as the source.

... ut Hieronimus dixit: *Velocitas audiendi facit hominem dociblēm. Tarditas adloquendi hominem mansuetum facit. Pithagorici per quinquennium silent. Ita et nos prius discamus et postea docemus.*

... as Jerome said: Quickness of listening makes a man instructable, slowness of speaking makes a man gentle. The Pithagorians keep silent for five years. So should we first learn and then teach.

Again, this piece pertains to wisdom. It occurs, in part, in Flor. Fris. in the midst of sentences attributed to Jerome and in Scottus Anonymus where Jerome is named as the source. This Jerome may therefore have been a member of Virgilius's circle or he may have been influenced by the ideas on wisdom that also affected Virgilius. From this we can infer that Scottus Anonymus may in part have known the work of the 'Jerome' associated with Virgilius.

Another seventh-century commentary on the Catholic Epistles is attributed to a Ps-Hilary. Dr Aidan Breen has tentatively suggested that this Ps-Hilary could be an Irish writer. He proposes a floruit of 670–90. Ps-Hilary repeats Ps-Jerome’s aphorism without naming him as the source. He names the three types of wisdom as found in Scottus Anonymus and Flor. Fris. §423. Breen says that Ps-Hilary used material known to Virgilius. It seems that Scottus Anonymus also used works associated with Virgilius. He is therefore the earliest Irish writer to attest to Virgilian material. The nature of this material indicates that it derives from sapiential literature, a type of writing that appealed to Virgilius. If Scottus Anonymus is contemporary with or slightly earlier than Virgilius, then Gelbidius and Ps-Jerome must have been writing before him and certainly before Virgilius. The conclusion is that Virgilius was following an established tradition of wisdom literature practised by these writers and this helps to establish an historical context for him.