

CLASSICAL EPIGRAPHY IN AN IRISH TOPOGRAPHY

This essay recalls the cultural breadth and historical transformations of architectural inscription, from sententious epigraphy to signage. It then focuses on a case from the periphery of Europe, in Ireland, where classicising interventions were conditioned by the encounter with Gaelic civilization. In the late eighteenth century, Richard Robinson, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, remodelled the cathedral city of Armagh through the erection of a sequence of axially-related monuments and buildings which were also linked epigraphically. The essay explores how the inscriptions worked together to articulate the ambitions of Robinson's project and the meanings generated by the overlay of a classicising urbanistic intervention on an ancient Irish site with its own embedded topographical and literary relationships. Robinson's architectural inscriptions are not only in play with one another, but with earlier levels and kinds of monumental writing, pertaining to the Insular church and the pre-Christian mythological landscape. The architectural epigraphy is thus viewed as one manifestation amongst multiple strata of monumental and place-specific texts used to construct the pre-eminence of an ecclesiastical city.

This essay focuses on the Irish primatial city of Armagh, where saint Patrick supposedly established his principal church in an area which was already a rich mythic and ritual landscape¹. The city was reshaped in the eighteenth century by an archbishop who used inscriptions to highlight the significance and the axial configuration of his monuments. We will consider the inscriptions as one stratum in Armagh's long history of topographic literature, which encompasses Old Irish onomastic literature, early Christian legend and Humanist epigraphy. Within this multiplicity of place-specific texts, we examine how the eighteenth-century inscriptions work in their architectural and urban setting – and how their agency evolved as their civic context changed. The unique superimposition of classicising planning on an early Christian topography which was in turn impressed on a pre-Christian ritual landscape means that Armagh is discussed here intensively as an individual case, rather than extensively in relation to other Irish urban or religious centres. Since the essay at core concerns architectural inscription as one privileged form of interaction between text and sited object, we shall open with an introductory overview of the forms and roles which urban inscription can assume.

Preamble: from epigraphy to signage

Text on buildings reflects the ways that the built (urban) environment is or should be inhabited; it can be aspirational, normative, or descriptive

– read phenomenologically in the context of the lived city or promoting its abstraction into information. The deployment of text on architecture occurs in many cultures and at many levels, from monumental inscriptions to graffiti. The global character of the topic is evident in such varied examples as the long tradition of Qur'anic inscriptions, the epigraphy of South Indian temples or the complex Sanskrit poetry inscribed at the Khmer temples of Angkor.

Amongst the most obvious aspects of inscription is the language chosen; the preponderance of Latin in European architectural epigraphy reflects its status as a 'timeless', supranational language, intelligible to ruling elites. Humanist revival of Roman square capitals established enduring epigraphic and typographic norms with their seemingly perennial ability to connote cultural authority, even (or particularly) to an audience unable to read the words inscribed. Universality can more rarely be addressed through multilingualism, as at the Basilica della Santa Casa in Loreto, where the *Translatio miraculosa*, a text concerning the angelic transportation of the house of Mary, was inscribed on plaques affixed to the nave pilasters in eleven languages: Greek, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, French, German, "Slavic" (Serbo-Croat), Welsh, Irish, Scots and English². Alternatively, the potential for linguistic incomprehensibility or obsolescence could be evaded altogether by using pictograms or "hieroglyphs", as Alberti recommended, in a discussion that presaged the links between ep-

igrams, mottoes, gnomic sayings and devices which would flourish with Erasmus' *Adagia* (Paris 1500, rev. 1508) and Alciati's *Emblemata* (Augsburg 1531)³.

Architectural epigraphy in the sense of a text, often in a classical language exhibiting certain rhetorical features (e.g., brevity, wit, enigma), inscribed on a significant or monumental edifice in a display of intellectual, genealogical or social prestige is only one manifestation of text on building. Beyond this conception of epigraphy as architectural ornament, we can posit a continuum of signs which make buildings or urban spaces 'speak', ranging in pre-modern cities from classicising epigraphy to painted signboards and graffiti⁴. Signage may incorporate rebuses and heraldic devices, denoting or implying aristocratic endorsement, and was an early legal requirement for certain trades, such as brewers and innkeepers (required to erect advertising signs from 1389 in England and 1567 in France). A "citizen comedy" such as Ben Jonson's *Alchemist* (first performed 1610) shows contemporary London as a field of emblems and rebuses manipulated by the charlatan protagonists who play on disjunctions between word, image, referent and reality⁵. Here emblematics becomes co-extensive with civic life, providing the means to perform identity and articulate the urban context.

A century later, Addison discussed the devices invented to identify houses and businesses, designating the name, trade or even the humoral disposition of the proprietor⁶. The signage he de-



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Fig. 1 Armagh, Northern Ireland. Robinson Library, formerly Armagh Public Library (photo I. Maginess © Governors and Guardians of Armagh Robinson Library).

Fig. 2 W. Hogarth, *Beer Street*, 1751 (© New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Sarah Lazarus, 1891; public domain).

¹ I wish to thank Sean Barden, Curator of Armagh County Museum, Carol Conlin, Assistant Keeper of the Armagh Robinson Library and Anne Marie D'Arcy for their scholarly generosity and unstinting help and support with this article.

² The Latin original was composed by Pietro di Giorgio Tolomei (Il Teramano) ca. 1470. Vincenzo Casali, governor of the basilica 1578-82 had the first seven translations made for the benefit of pilgrims, while the tablets in the four languages of Britain and Ireland were created by the émigré English Jesuit Robert Corbington in 1634-35, perhaps in recognition of the political significance of pilgrimage to Loreto for Catholic princes (including the exiled Gaelic lords in 1608); see F. GRIMALDI, *La Historia della Chiesa della Santa Casa di Loreto*, Loreto 1993, pp. 498-510. Loreto is significantly the only case where the Celtic languages are shown together and co-equal with English; in Britain in 2020 an Irish-language only epitaph was prohibited by an English ecclesiastical court on the grounds that the language in itself constituted a political slogan.

³ L. B. ALBERTI, *De re aedificatoria*, VIII.2-4; Etruscan is his example of a language fallen into incomprehensibility. Collections of gnomic verse or inscriptions appear as early as the sixth century BCE poet, with a corpus of gnomic verse attributed to the Theognis; Demetrius of Phaleron was said by Stobaeus to have collected Hellenistic inscriptions. For transcriptions of fourteen Greek gnomicological collections, see <https://ancientwisdoms.ac.uk/library/gnomologia/intro-greek-gnomologia/index.html> (accessed 16 September 2022). Epigraphic sylloges played an important role in Humanist collections of antiquity, especially in smaller scholarly collections amassed in the fifteenth century; by the end of the century Poliziano complained in a letter of 22 April 1490 to Girolamo Donato that he was so pestered to produce mottoes for inscription that traces of his ingenuity coated every wall like the tracks of a snail. On epigraphic sylloges and Quattrocento antiquarianism, see K. CHRISTIAN, *Empire without End. Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350-1527*, New Haven 2010.

⁴ See J. LARWOOD, J. CAMDEN HOTTEN, *English Inn Signs*, Exeter 1985; A. HEAL, *The Signboards of Old London Shops: a Review of the Shop Signs Employed by the London Tradesmen during the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries*, London 1988.

⁵ In B. JONSON, *Alchemist*, London 1612, II.vi the charlatans devise an absurd rebus as a signboard for a tobacco vendor, claimed to be a “hieroglyphic” which will exert a “virtual influence” on passers-by. Jonson simultaneously composed erudite emblematic masques for the Stuart court.

⁶ J. ADDISON, “Spectator”, XXVIII, 2 April 1711, reprinted London 1883, I, pp. 107-110. Addison notes that young tradesmen setting up shop joined their sign with that of their former master, like the quartering of heraldic bearings on marriage.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 107.

⁸ R. PAULSON, *Hogarth: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, III, Cambridge 1993, p. 345, notes that Hogarth “used signboards as one of the sign systems on which he structured his pictures”. An exhibition of painted signboards was staged in 1762 in London. Hogarth’s prints (authorised and pirated) had explanatory verses; the reading of his prints as pictorial texts is noted by Charles LAMB, *On the Genius and Character of Hogarth*, “The Reflector”, II, 1811, 3, pp. 61-77) and exem-



scribes, with its *grotesque*-like conjunctions of “Creatures of jarring and incongruous Natures” still follows the model of Renaissance *impresa* as evolved from the Humanist collections of apophthegmata assembled by Alciati or Erasmus. Addison described his essay as “a lively Picture of the Art of Modern Criticism”⁷; we might juxtapose his writings with Hogarth’s prints as the richest illustration of the convergence of classicising epigraphy or Humanist emblematics with the semiotic field of the early modern city, where the proliferation of epigraphic-emblematic signs (bills, inscriptions, devices, signboards, graffiti) is interwoven with narrative structures adapted from history painting⁸ (fig. 2). The emblematic continuum furnishes semantic context and commentary for the action, providing a means by which the urban background attains agency; devices also carry the political narrative, as

in *The Times* 1 and 2 (London 1762). This figural mode of reading the city would be replaced from the mid-eighteenth century by the development of street numbering and the gradual transition from pictorial or emblematic to written signage; what it meant to *read* the city thus changed profoundly⁹. During the eighteenth century, the introduction of street numbering in Vienna, Madrid, London and Paris amongst other cities replaced the pictorial designation of locale with a system of spatial legibility geared to administrative or military ends¹⁰. The purpose of street numbers was *not* to facilitate city dwellers but concerned the billeting of soldiers, the collection of taxes and the gathering of information for commercial purposes, particularly linked with the production of city directories, originating in London in 1667, which catalogued trades and their locations¹¹.

The compilers of city directories advertised the “economising” of time by the documentation of the “city-text” into lists of information which could promote and expedite commerce¹². The “spatial regime of inscriptions” produced by governmental requirements and commercial initiatives would ultimately result in the ‘abstract’ or ‘rationalized’ urban space of the modern city¹³. The city as text, as conceived by city trade directories and subsequently city managers or engineers, concerns the abstraction of urban geography into an index which can be read off with maximum speed and efficiency.

The utilitarianism of the compilers of city directories who declared that their compendia of urban facts allowed “no scope for the play of the imagination” contrasts with the figurative play of earlier signboards¹⁴. By the nineteenth century, despite the explosive growth of lettering types for signage, the figural rendition of the city lay chiefly in literature; Dickens’ fantastical descriptions of London, with their bizarre conjunctions and metamorphoses of objects, might be seen as the descendent of the emblematic play in Hogarth. In Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Paris 1922), the proliferation of commercial signs and the multiple strata which constitute civic identity in the modern city, from municipal bureaucracy to primordial myth, interweaves with the citizens’ consciousness, taking the city-text to a further degree of richness. The poetic counterweight to the factual, rationalized city-text is by now however a creation of an author’s individual imagination unlike the ‘public’ experience of Hogarth’s emblematic signboards which rely on a collective figural imagination, albeit encompassing various levels of erudition or wit.

Inscribed buildings are not just as discrete objects but nodal points in the evolving interaction between language and urban fabric. The theme may be most richly approached if regarded as a *spectrum*, with varying degrees of permanence,

authority and general or restricted legibility. A given inscription, whether monumental or subversive, poetic or technical, enduring or ephemeral, has a site-specific meaning but derives its further resonance in relation to the diversity of codes within the city and the multiple levels of institutional ordering which determine the possibilities and modalities of praxis. We can now turn to more concrete historical details to substantiate these arguments.

Epigraphy and urbanism at the margins of Europe

Architectural epigraphy in early modern Europe is often deployed on single buildings – a church or palace façade, for example, except in ephemeral decorations which transformed civic centres into celebratory theatres where individual edifices played an episodic role, articulated by their inscriptions¹⁵. Instances where inscriptions on permanent buildings denote and articulate a realised, transformative urban project are rarer. One such case however survives on the periphery of Europe, in the ancient Irish cathedral city of Armagh, which was renovated following centuries of episcopal neglect and destruction in the 16th-17th century English wars in Ireland by Richard Robinson, Archbishop of Armagh 1765-94¹⁶ (fig. 3). As we shall argue that Robinson’s epigraphy is mostly richly viewed as one stratum of topographical texts concerning Armagh, we shall review briefly its early mythology and history.

In the mid-fifth century saint Patrick is said to have founded his principal church in Armagh (Ard Macha, “the heights of Macha”), 2,6 km east of Navan Fort, one of the four ‘royal sites’ of early Ireland, generally identified with Emain Macha, the royal centre of Ulster in Irish mythology, in particular the epic Ulster Cycle where it is the court of King Conchobar MacNessa¹⁷ (fig. 4). Archaeology at Navan Fort has revealed a circular structure created ca. 95 BCE, 40 m in

plified by the attentive emblematic and sententious readings of Georg Lichtenberg in the “Göttenberg Taschenkalender”, 1784-1796, translated in *Lichtenberg’s Commentaries on Hogarth’s Engravings*, trans. I. Herdan, G. Herdan, London 1966. ⁹ Pendant signboards were also outlawed by acts of Parliament such as the Westminster Paving Act (1761) and city commissioners appointed to remove signs and emblems as annoyances; similar measures to remove signboards were taken in Paris in 1760.

¹⁰ See R.S. ROSE-REDWOOD, *Indexing the Great Ledger of the Community: Urban House Numbering, City Directories and the Production of Spatial Legibility*, “Journal of Historical Geography”, XXXIV, 2008, pp. 286-310. Hatton’s *New View of London*, 1708, noted the novelty of houses with numbering, providing a *terminus post quem*.

¹¹ The 1667 Little London Directory listed merchants and goldsmiths, in a period when goldsmiths started to act as bankers. The directory appears after the 1666 Great Fire of London which destroyed the medieval fabric of the city within the old Roman wall.

¹² ROSE-REDWOOD, *Indexing the Great Ledger...* cit., p. 296.

¹³ Ivi, p. 289.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 295.

¹⁵ See for example the description by Giovan Battista Cini of the *apparati* created for the entrance of Joanna of Austria into Florence on her marriage to Francesco de’ Medici, 1565.

¹⁶ See A. MALCOMSON, *Primate Robinson 1709-94: “a very tough incumbent, in fine preservation”*, Belfast 2003. Robinson’s architectural patronage also extended to his alma mater, Christ Church, Oxford, where he endowed the buildings of Canterbury Quad (1783).

¹⁷ On textual and archaeological evidence for Armagh’s early topography, see K. MUHR, *The Early Place-names of County Armagh*, “Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society”, XIX, 2002, 1, pp. 1-54; J. O’DRISCOLL, P. GLEESON, G. NOBLE, *Re-Imagining Navan Fort: New Light on the Evolution of a Major Ceremonial Centre in Northern Europe*, “Oxford Journal of Archaeology”, XXXIX, 2020, 3, pp. 247-273; C. LYNN, *Navan Fort: Archaeology and Myth*, Bray 2003; N.B. ATCHISON, *Armagh and the Royal Centres in Early Medieval Ireland: Monuments, Cosmology, and the Past*, Woodbridge 1994, which should be read with caution. The ‘royal centres’ are documented in literature from the eighth century CE; see C. NEWMAN, *Reflections on the Making of a ‘Royal Site’ in Early Ireland*, “World Archaeology”, XXX, 1998, 1, pp. 127-141. Despite the modern denomination ‘fort’, the earthwork surrounding the base of the site was not defensive. The mound and the ancient road which linked it to Armagh are clearly marked in Richard Bartlett’s 1602 map of Armagh. Bartlett in a map in the Cotton collection marked “Owen Maugh, the ancient seat of the Kingdom of Ulster”; this reference appears in W. CAMDEN, *Britannia*, London 1607, p. 766, in John Speed’s map of Ulster in *The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine* (1610) and in the maps of Ulster by the Dutch cartographers Joan Blaeu (1654) and Janssonius (1659).

Fig. 3 J. Black, *City of Armagh, 1810* (© Armagh County Museum).



¹⁸ On Ptolemy's map, see R. DARCY, W. FLYNN, *Ptolemy's map of Ireland: a modern decoding*, "Irish Geography", XLI, 2008, 1, pp. 49-69. J. STUART, *Historical Memoirs of Armagh*, Newry 1819, p. 608, provides a detailed account of the finding of horns in 1798, in Loughnashade ('lake of the treasures') where they were ritually deposited; only one remains, in the National Museum of Ireland.

¹⁹ See O'DRISCOLL, GLEESON, NOBLE, *Re-Imagining Navan Fort*... cit.; evidence of continuing occupation includes structures discovered through geophysical surveys, precious artefacts (four 6th-8th century penannular brooches) and environmental evidence for settlement and agriculture. The *Féilire Óengusso* was edited and translated by W. Stokes as *The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1905).

²⁰ The earliest recension of the *dindsenchas* is the twelfth century Book of Leinster which incorporates pre-Christian material; see MUHR, *The Early Place-names*... cit.; E. HOGAN, *Onomasticon goedelicum locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae: an index, with identifications, to the Gaelic names of places and tribes*, Dublin 1993 (first ed. Dublin 1910); E. GWYNN, *Poems from the Dindsenchas: text, translation, and vocabulary*, Dublin 1900; *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, edited by E. Gwynn, Dublin 1991 (first ed. Dublin 1903-1935); C. BOWEN, *A historical inventory of the dindsenchas*, "Studia Celtica", X-XI, 1975-1976, pp. 113-137.

²¹ See the verses on Ard Macha and Emain Macha in GWYNN, *Metrical Dindsenchas*... cit., IV, pp. 124-131, 308-311. See MUHR, *The Early Place-names*... cit.; G. TONER, *Macha and the Invention of Myth*, "Ériu", LX, 2010, pp. 81-109, notes that a fourth Macha, not mentioned in the *dindsenchas*, is one of the three *morrigna* (war goddesses). Toner and Muhr discuss use of *emain* to designate other actual or otherworld places, particularly islands.

²² GWYNN, *Metrical Dindsenchas*... cit., IV, pp. 310-311.

²³ The Bachall Ísu, supposedly given to Patrick at Christ's direction by a hermit on an island in the Tyrrenian Sea, was enclosed in a gold and jewelled cover or shrine and destroyed at the Reformation, ca. 1538. The Bachall Ísu is described by Bernard of Clairvaux in his *Life of St Malachy* and he notes that possession of the staff and the Book of Armagh denoted jurisdiction of Armagh; see M. RONAN, *St Patrick's Staff and Christ Church*, "Dublin Historical Record", V, 1943, pp. 121-129; A. D'ARCY, *Joyce and the Irish Middle Ages; Saints, Sagas and Insular Culture*, Chapter 2 (forthcoming). The *Book of Armagh*, now in Trinity College Library, Dublin, TCD MS 52, dated to 807 contained two *Lives* of St Patrick, his *Confessio*, the *Liber angeli*, portions of the Vulgate New Testament with Pelagius' prefaces to the Pauline Epistles, the Eusebian Canon Tables, Jerome's letter to Pope Damasus and a unique recension of Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St Martin of Tours*.

²⁴ Christian Armagh is celebrated as 'overthrowing' Emain Macha in the "Tripartite Life" of Patrick (*Vita Tripartita*) and the martyrological *Féilire Óengusso*, which lists the legendary royal sites laid waste by Christian foundations; see ARCHISON, *Armagh*... cit., pp. 189-190. The Macha chariot race myth is mirrored in the legend of Patrick's punishment of his sister Lupait whom he ran over at the *oenach* three times for unchastity; like Macha she dies at the assembly due to a (king's) chariot; see MUHR, *The Early Place-names*... cit., pp. 39-41. Since textual transmission appears in Ireland with Christian-

diameter containing concentric rings of wooden posts, then filled with limestone blocks, ritually burnt and earthed over to form a mound. Exotic and precious artefacts were found deposited in the area, including the skull of a Barbary ape (carbon dated 390-320 BCE) and four magnificent Iron Age decorated bronze horns; it is probably the site marked "Regia" in mid-Ulster on Ptolemy's second century CE map of Ireland¹⁸. Structural activity at the site continued in the medieval period, at variance with the narrative in Christian texts such as the ninth century *Féilire Óengusso* (Martyrology of Oengus), which claimed that Armagh had displaced the pagan landscape of Emain Macha¹⁹.

Ard Macha and Emain Macha are interwoven in Irish medieval topographical literature, such as the onomastic *dindsenchas*, which constructed the natural and monumental landscape through the lore of places²⁰. The metrical *dindsenchas* concerning Emain Macha and Ard Macha relate legends of the eponymous Macha – the name of four female characters in Irish mythology – and attempt to gloss the word *emain*, relating it either to the words for a brooch or for twins²¹. They discuss Macha as the wife of the colonist Nemed who cleared the plain of Macha, or as the daughter of the High King Áed who fought and defeated her father's cousins, Dithorba and Cimbáeth, for the right to the kingship and forced Dithorba's sons to construct Emain Macha for her in punishment for attempting to rape her when she pursued them into the wilderness, where

she overmastered them physically and sexually. This Macha traces out the plot of Emain Macha with her brooch (*comhuin*). The alternative onomastic myth concerns Macha (also called *Gri-an*, "sun") the Atalanta-like supernatural wife of Crunnchu; when her husband boasts of her athletic prowess, she is compelled to race the king's chariot despite being pregnant. She wins but as she gives birth to twins (*emon*) before the male assembly (*oenach*), she curses the men of Ulster to suffer labour pains as they enter battle for nine generations. Macha's curse and the myth of the generational debility of Ulster's warriors (*Noínden Ulad*) plays a crucial role in the greatest Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cúailgne* (Cattle Raid of Cooley).

These striking legends concern a woman who successfully avenges herself on male injustice by reversing the polarities of male aggression and female (gravid) vulnerability; in the curse/couvade myth, the Ulstermen fall into birth pangs as Macha screams in labour²². The metrical *dindsenchas* on Armagh says that Macha is buried at Ard Macha and concludes with allusion to saint Patrick as bringing Christianity and as a king (*rí*) "overthrowing" Emain Macha, whose plot Macha had traced with her brooch like a saint drawing the plan of a church; Patrick is indeed said to have traced the cathedral plot with his jewelled *cambutta* or staff, the *Bachall Ísu* (staff of Jesus), Armagh's most precious medieval relic and part of the *vexilla* or insignia of the *comarba Pátraic* (successor of Patrick), along with St. Pat-



Fig. 4 Armagh, Northern Ireland. Navan Fort (© Crown DfC Historic Environment Division).

rick's bell (*Cloc ind Édachta*, the Bell of the Testament), and the *Book of Armagh* (*Canóin Pátraic*, Patrick's Testament)²³.

The verses move from a landscape of Macha, her plain and hill, 'fort' and grave, to a contrast between the site 'founded' by an Amazonian figure and a Christian saint who differentiates the topography, claiming the height for his church and laying waste to the pagan plain, recalling the sense of *pagus* as an outlying rural area or desert place (this landscape of hill and plain also exaggerates the gently rolling hillocks or drumlins of Armagh, as depicted in Black's painting, fig. 3). These literary formulations and other statements on the 'destruction' of Emain Macha with the coming of Christianity form part of the foundational Christian mythology of Armagh – in which Emain Macha becomes the pagan 'twin' against which Patrician Armagh develops²⁴. This contrastive topography appears also in the accounts of Patrick's foundation of a church in Armagh: he requests a site on the summit of Ard Macha (termed the Ridge of Willows, *Dorsum salicis*, *Ard Saileach*) from the local chieftain, Dáire, but is initially given land at its foot, negotiating the hilltop site after the performance of miracles²⁵.

I signal this early literature to stress the foundational character of writing about topography to Armagh, in which landscape features and monuments 'hold' myths which generate and orient relationships to the environment. This forms the deep background for Robinson's epigraphic-ur-

banistic interventions, so that we might see his projects as early modern contributions overlaid on the textual-topographic strata that formed the cathedral city, which is itself represented as arising from a wider landscape associated with an eponymous territorial queen or solar figure (Macha as Grian, "the sun of womankind")²⁶. In Armagh we can perceive architectural epigraphy as a particularised manifestation of the larger articulation of the environment as a topography disclosed, transformed and manipulated through language.

Armagh's ecclesiastical supremacy was claimed in the *Liber angeli*, dated between 640-70²⁷. Alongside the episcopal see a school arose in proximity to the abbey of Saints Peter and Paul which became an important centre for study (as attested by Bede and Aldfrith) and for manuscript production, most famously the *Book of Armagh*; at the Synod of Clane (1162) it was proclaimed that only alumni of Armagh should be lecturers in divinity in Irish schools²⁸. Armagh and its school suffered from Danish and later Anglo-Norman plundering and declined from the twelfth century due to Norman subjugation of Ulster and the arrival of the Cistercians and continental mendicant orders²⁹. Armagh's medieval floruit in short coincides with great age of Insular art, the European spread of Irish monastic learning (notably the preservation of Greek) which would culminate in the Carolingian period with Eriugena and Sedulius Scottus and the copious production of Hiberno-Latin literature³⁰. Despite the

ity, mythological material was generally recorded by clerical scribes. In the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the chronicle of medieval Irish history compiled between 1632 and 1636 by four Gaelic scholars led by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, Emain Macha is destroyed by the three Collas, three brothers and princes, in 331 CE.

²³ The account appears in the Book of Armagh. Patrick's first church was called Teampall Na Ferta ("Temple of the Relics"); see MUHR, *The Early Place-names...* cit., pp. 38-40.

²⁴ GWYNN, *Metrical Dindsenchas...* cit., IV, pp. 126-127.

²⁵ Texts concerning Armagh's foundation and primacy include the *Liber angeli* and Muirchú's *Vita Patricii*, both of which appear in the Book of Armagh; in the *Annals of the Four Masters* Armagh's foundation is dated 457. See also G. STOKES, *The Primacy of Armagh, in Ireland and the Celtic Church. A History of Ireland from St. Patrick to the English conquest in 1172*, London 1886, pp. 330-349.

²⁶ See G. RAMSEY, *Artefacts, Archaeology and Armagh*, in *Armagh: history & society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish County*, edited by A.J. Hughes, W. Nolan, Dublin 2001, pp. 1-42; W. REEVES, *A Memoir of the Public Library of Armagh. A Paper read at the 7th Annual Meeting of the Library association of the United Kingdom, September 30, 1884*, London 1886; ID., *The Ancient Churches of Armagh*, "Ulster Journal of Archaeology", 2s., IV, 1898, 4, pp. 205-228; C. McCULLOUGH, W.H. CRAWFORD, *Irish Historic Town Atlas, 18 (Armagh)*, Dublin 2007; S. LEWIS, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland: comprising the several counties; cities; boroughs; corporate, market and post towns; parishes; and villages...*, London 1837, pp. 346-347. Bede noted the numerous English students at Armagh in the mid 7th century, reflected in the *Trian Saxon* or Saxon quarter (literally 'third') of the medieval city; see W. REEVES, *On the Book of Armagh*, "Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy", II, 1891-1893, pp. 77-99. The abbey of Peter and Paul housed Augustinian canons, probably introduced by St Malachy (1094-1148).

²⁹ Armagh also suffered repeated destruction by fire, notably in 1020, when only the library survived. Continental Cistercian reforms of the Irish church were initiated by saint Malachy, primate of Armagh and associate of Bernard of Clairvaux.

³⁰ Armagh was a centre for metalwork, as attested by the bronze Clonmore Shrine, ca. 600 CE, the earliest example of Irish Christian metalwork. Hiberno-Latin texts exhibited a recondite vocabulary and word play characterised as "hispanic" after the playfully obscure *Hisperica famica*. See D. Ó CRÓINÍN, *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200*, Harlow 1995, pp. 169-233.

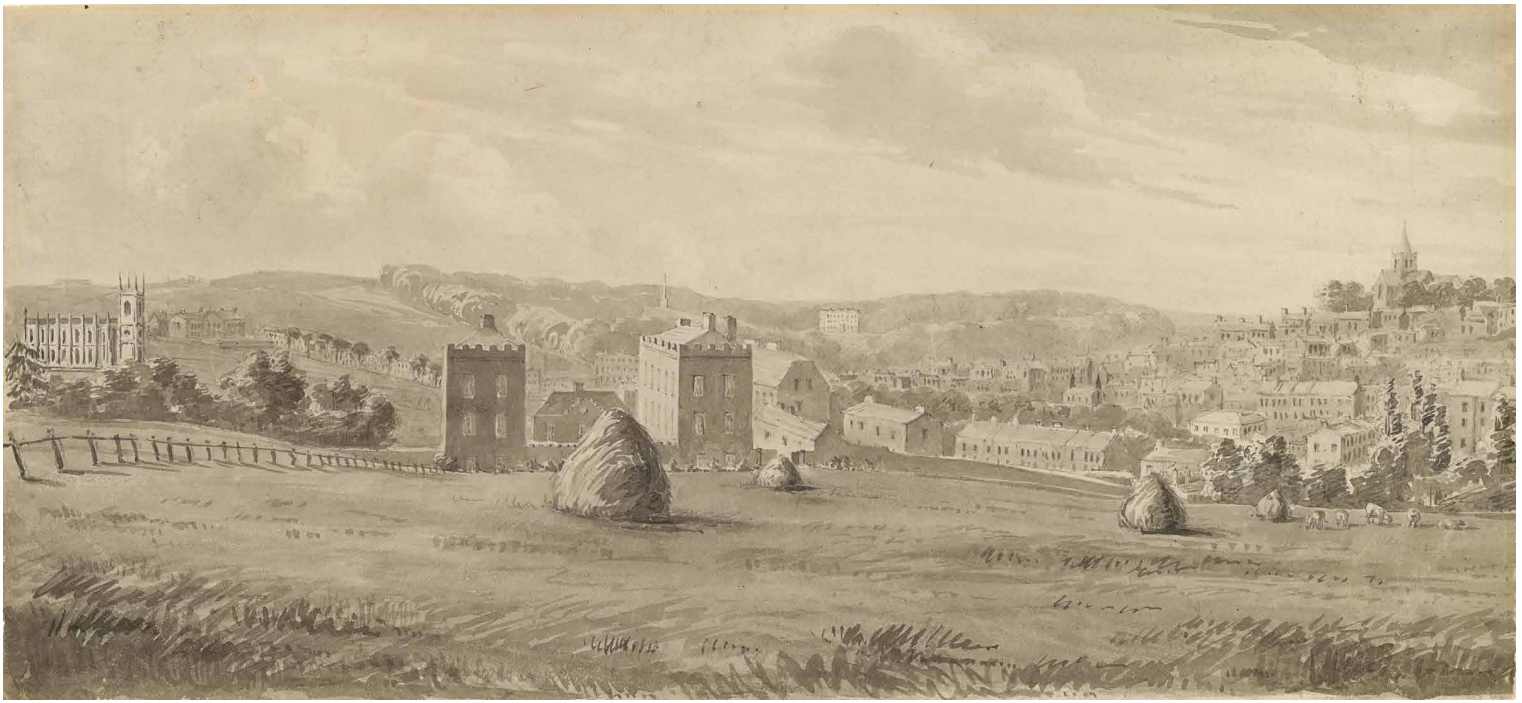


Fig. 6 P. Bainbridge, *View of Armagh from the Observatory hill*, 1843 (© Armagh County Museum).

waning of the Irish church from the late twelfth century, Armagh however retained its metropolitan status and remains the Catholic and Anglican primatial see of all Ireland³¹.

Robinson transferred the primatial residence from Drogheda (close to Dublin) to Armagh, building a bishop's palace (1770), a public library (1771) behind St. Patrick's cathedral and an astronomical observatory (1789)³² (fig. 1). He also assisted in financing public buildings: the infirmary (1767, completed 1774), and the 1774 relocation and rebuilding of the 1608 Royal School. He left funds for the creation of a university in Armagh and for St. Marks (1811), a chapel of ease on the east side of the Mall, a circus-shaped common used for horse racing, enclosed by Robinson and released by his successor Primate Newcombe to the Grand Jury (town council) as a public amenity³³. The Mall was also transformed by the erection of the gaol (1780) at its south end, during Robinson's period, and the facing Court House at the north end, in 1809. The library, school, palace and gaol were designed by Thomas Cooley (1742?-1784), the observatory, St. Mark's and Court House by Francis Johnston (1760-1829), two of most able contemporary architects in Ireland. The observatory was the most ambitious of these mostly educational projects, appropriate to Robinson's aim to (re)establish Armagh as a university city; inspired by Herschel's discovery of the planet Uranus, it was equipped with the pioneering Troughton equatorial telescope³⁴. The public library and obser-

vatory were established by Acts of Parliament to ensure their independence in perpetuity and commemorated with medals, described below.

Like Augustus, who found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble, Robinson was untruly claimed to have found Armagh a "nest of mud cabins and endeavoured to leave it a city of stone and slate"³⁵. While the primate was the principal landowner in Armagh³⁶, Robinson did not group his projects together in a new development, in the manner of an eighteenth-century New Town, but sited them across the city so that they related to each other and to the cathedral; the buildings "were ingeniously woven into a single landscape while enjoying separate intimate landscapes of their own, the single greatest achievement being the archbishop's own demesne"³⁷. They are thus most richly viewed in terms of their inter-relationships in the topography of an ancient site, although this does not imply that Robinson was concerned with the *forma urbis* of medieval Armagh³⁸.

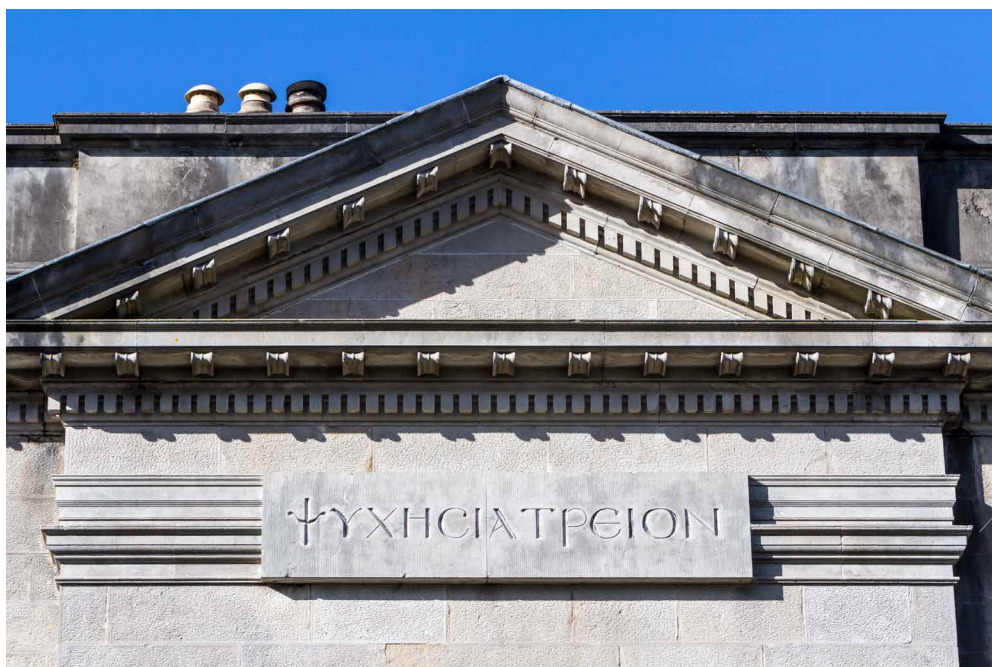
The library stands between the cathedral and the infirmary on Vicar's Hill, while the observatory and Royal School occupy facing sites on College Hill. The central node of the project appears to have been the Bishop's palace; Richard Oram produced a schema that revealed Robinson's urban projects as aligned in a kind of trident spreading out from his palace, with the observatory axis as the central line and the cathedral (extending to the library, marked with a lighter line) on the left axis and St. Mark's on right; the St. Mark's

³⁶The Armagh infirmary beside the library was built on Caulfeild lands (marked "Manor of Charlemont" in a 1767 survey); lands seized by the English Crown and granted to Toby Caulfeild in Armagh in 1620 included the Augustinian monastery of Peter and Paul. In Robinson's period, James Caulfeild, Lord Charlemont (1728-99), was the grand tourist who authored a history of Italian poetry and patronized Piranesi. Lord Charlemont modelled the neighbouring town of Moy (site of an international horse fair) on the Lombard town Bosco Marengo.

³⁷R. ORAM, *The Architectural Heritage of County Armagh, in Armagh History and Society...* cit., pp. 991-1035: 1002. YOUNG, *A Tour in Ireland...* cit., p. 48 comments on the civic buildings as improving the view from the palace "so placed as to be exceedingly ornamental to the whole country".

³⁸Robinson's least sympathetic interventions concerned the cathedral where he replaced the tracery windows with "inelegant lights" (STUART, *Historical Memoirs...* cit., p. 448) and attempted unsuccessfully to replace the tower with a 100-foot tower in imitation of Magdalen College Oxford.

Fig. 7 Armagh, Robinson Library. Detail of inscription $\Psi\Upsilon\chi\text{HC}\text{IATPEION}$, 1848 (© Governors and Guardians of Armagh Robinson Library).



axis passes through the goal and beside the barracks, crucial elements of British order in Ireland³⁹ (fig. 5). Behind this trident Oram's schema shows a single axis extending beneath the palace which terminated in the Rokeby obelisk, erected on Knox's Hill at the highest point in the palace demesne⁴⁰. The cathedral (left) axis passes through the ruins of the thirteenth century Franciscan Friary in the demesne; the axes from the Rokeby obelisk to palace and from palace to cathedral are equidistant, each measuring 0,9 km⁴¹.

Oram's proposal of axial alignments is reflected in a print by John Martyn (1819) which shows the obelisk on the horizon at the axial convergence of the school and palace, from a viewpoint at the base of the observatory hill⁴². Martyn's viewpoint was widened in Philip Bainbridge's 1834 drawing of Armagh viewed from higher up the same hill, where the central perspective runs through the Royal school to the obelisk, with St. Mark's and the cathedral placed symmetrically left and right (fig. 6). Bainbridge suggests an axis from the observatory through the school to the obelisk – a monument type long associated with perpetual fame, axial planning and astronomical observation, as in the Solarium Augusti in the Campus Martius.

Robinson thus encompassed the renovated city within the landscaping of his palace, in a kind of planning novel in Ireland or Britain, but whose antecedents are hinted by Oram's description of its "baroque statement in marked contrast to the restrained classicism of Robinson's build-

ings"⁴³. Robinson's 'baroque' planning is familiar to students of Renaissance and Baroque urbanism where palaces were planned in relation to urban topographies, with landscaping and axial planning providing a medium which linked a palace or villa to a townscape⁴⁴. Thus we might consider two levels of interest in Robinson's urbanistic projects, the first being the employment of 'baroque' planning in which buildings and monuments act as nodes, creating axes or vistas within an existing cityscape and the cityscape is conceived as a perspective radiating from a palace. The most celebrated instances occur in 16th-18th century Rome, the archetypal sacred city on hills, with its 'trident' street plan, its sacred buildings dispersed on multiple hills connected via axial roads marked by obelisks and its opulent prelates' villas within suburban parks, planned in alignment with the surrounding urban topography⁴⁵. Such planning is distinct from the projection of New Towns in eighteenth century Britain and Ireland, laid out in squares and crescents away from existing civic centres⁴⁶.

The second level of interest lies in the overlay of a planning derived ultimately from Italian Renaissance-Baroque urbanism on an early Irish topography. If Robinson's structures were dispersed over the city's hills, Armagh's landscape is distinct from the verticality of Italian hill-town topography, whose dramatic impact lies in the tension between luminous summit and grotto. Armagh instead shows the concentric topography characteristic of early Irish royal and ecclesiastical sites, where a central hill or mound is encir-

³⁹ Thanks to Sean Barden for providing an updated version of Oram's schema. The lighter line extending from the cathedral to the library is my addition.

⁴⁰ The obelisk was designed by John Carr and financed by the Duke of Northumberland whose support of Robinson it commemorates; it was also a construction project in a period of local unemployment.

⁴¹ Thanks to Sean Barden for this observation.

⁴² Martyn's print appears in STUART, *Historical Memoirs...* cit.

⁴³ R. ORAM, foreword to *Border Heritage: Tracing the Heritage of the City of Armagh and Monaghan County*, edited by M. Bailey, Armagh 2008, p. xii. On the unique character of Robinson's plan as incorporating the city within the landscaping of his demesne, see R. MCKINSTRY, *The Buildings of Armagh*, Belfast 1992, p. 172.

⁴⁴ Amongst multiple examples we might recall early sixteenth century Medici palace projects for Via Laura (Florence) and Piazza Navona (Rome) and villa planning in sixteenth century Rome, from Bramante's Belvedere to the Villa Montalto, created by Sixtus V in the heart of his urban renovation.

⁴⁵ Later Roman villas grew into huge suburban parks; Villa Doria Pamphili (1670s) extended to 240 hectares. See D.R. COFFIN, *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome*, Princeton 1991. The claim that Armagh, like Rome, rested on seven hills arose in publicity literature following the rededication of the new Catholic cathedral in 1904. D. CHART, *The Broadening of the Church*, in *History of the Church of Ireland, from the earliest times to the present day*, III (*The modern church*), edited by W.A. Phillips, London 1933, pp. 242-286: 244, speaks hyperbolically of Armagh's "many hills crowned with stately public buildings". In the early Middle Ages, assertions relating Armagh as primal city to Rome appear in the *Liber angeli* and the *Annals of Ulster*; see ARCHISON, *Armagh...* cit., pp. 207-210, 274-275.

⁴⁶ Most notably the New Town of Edinburgh; Irish examples include the Dublin squares and Newtown Pery, Limerick.



Fig. 8 J. Kirk, Library medal showing original façade and motto, dated 1771, struck ca. 1777 (© Governors and Guardians of Armagh Robinson Library).

Fig. 9 W. Mossop, Observatory medal with motto, dated 1789, struck 1791 (© Armagh County Museum).

cled by an enclosure, sometimes ringed by surrounding hills; this topography is fossilized in its street plan⁴⁷ (figs. 3, 5). This superimposition of derivative baroque urbanism on an ancient concentric topography is most suggestive, but for the purposes of this publication Robinson's interest lies in the key role played by inscriptions which form a kind of summa of his urban ambitions⁴⁸.

We have seen the topographical significance of the Rokeby obelisk, erected in 1783 at the highest point in the palace demesne which displays on the pedestal the arms of Henry Percy, Duke of Northumberland and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1763-65 (instrumental in Robinson's translation to the lucrative see of Armagh), and the British royal arms; the shaft displays Robinson's arms as Baron Rokeby, his primatial arms and his motto *NON NOBIS SOLUM SED TOTI MUNDO NATI* (Born for the whole world, not for ourselves alone). The motto combines personal or familial glory with proclaimed public service; we might see the obelisk as the convergence point of Robinson's urbanistic and scientific projects, as Bainbridge's drawing suggests – like a Sistine obelisk or *solarium Augusti* in his 'Augustan' urban renovation⁴⁹.

The library and observatory likewise bear inscriptions. The observatory's south façade has a plaque quoting Psalm 19 in English translation, "The heavens declare the glory of God"⁵⁰ and the library's entrance façade originally carried the Greek inscription *ΤΟ ΤΗΣ ΨΥΧΗΣ ΙΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ* (*to tēs psychēs iatreion*, the healing place of the soul), altered in the 1848 remodelling and extension of the library attributed to Robert Monsarrat to *ΨΥΧΙΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ*⁵¹ (fig. 7). The library and observatory were commemorated in medals struck in bronze and sil-

ver in or after 1777 and 1791 (although dated 1771 and 1789) respectively; the library medal commemorates the opening of the library but names Robinson as Baron Rokeby of Armagh in the Irish peerage, a title he received in 1777. Commemoration of the building was thus tied to Robinson's ennoblement, celebrated also in the obelisk⁵² (figs. 8-9). Robinson was a keen numismatic collector; his valuable collections of ancient, medieval and early modern coins, of engraved gems and gem impressions by James Tassie are conserved in the library⁵³. The architectural inscriptions can be viewed as instances of Robinson's wider interest in engraved objects, from miniature gemstones to monumental epigraphy.

Planning organised around axially related monuments, exemplified by the Rome of Sixtus V, relies on markers which give symbolic significance to axes which would otherwise be perspectives or circulation routes. These markers can be monuments whose form carries symbolic associations like obelisks or fountains, but inscription plays a vital role in articulating the meaning of the intervention, as well as proclaiming the builder's fame. What role then did the inscriptions of Robinson's obelisk, observatory and library play beyond commemorating him through his works?

The obelisk as noted acts as an axial and thematic marker, illustrating the prospects from palace to cathedral (and library) and to the observatory. If we read the observatory's motto, "The heavens declare the glory of God" in conjunction with the obelisk, we see the latter as pointing a way to the stars through its form and its illumination of an urban axis from observatory to bishop's palace, or from palace to cathedral⁵⁴. Beyond its astronomical applicability, the inscription suggests

⁴⁷ On Armagh's concentric topography, see AITCHISON, *Armagh...* cit., pp. 211-288. The concentric or D-shaped topography where the landscape is drawn into an 'encircling' relation with a central eminence recurs in the ancient royal sites, in early Christian settlements at Clogher, Kells and Clonmacnoise or the stronghold of a ruling dynasty, as at the Hill of the O'Neill at Dungannon.

⁴⁸ Bishop Richard Mant discussed Robinson's library and observatory through their inscriptions in R. MANT, *History of the Church of Ireland*, London 1840, pp. 633-634.

⁴⁹ The observatory's seven astronomical meridian markers, sited in the palace demesne and surrounding townlands included an obelisk or obelisk-bearing structures although these post-date Robinson's death; see J. BUTLER, *The Meridian Marks of Armagh Observatory*, "Astronomy and Geophysics", LVII, 2016, 2, pp. 2.27-2.31. MALCOMSON, *Primate Robinson...* cit., discusses Robinson's securing of Irish estates for his family.

⁵⁰ As a Protestant (Anglican) prelate, Robinson quotes scripture in the vernacular, using classical languages for familial or personal mottoes and for civic inscriptions.

⁵¹ The 1848 library remodelling undertaken by Robert Monsarrat involved the enlargement of the former entrance from three to five bays and the moving of the entrance plus inscription to the side façade, facing the cathedral.

⁵² The 1791 striking of the observatory medal may reflect the 1791 Act of Parliament which established the observatory; see n. 69 on these Acts.

⁵³ The gems are conserved in contemporary daktyliothecae which Robinson had created; he collected almost 4000 gems including 3100 Tassie gemstone impressions. Tassie devised his technique for gemstone impressions in collaboration with the Dublin physician Henry Quinn, whose bibliophile son Henry George Quinn (d. 1805) left a valuable collection of rare Renaissance printings to Trinity College Library Dublin.

⁵⁴ In the urbanism of Sixtus V, the roads linking the Roman basilican churches whose axes culminated with recycled ancient obelisks were celebrated as a way (*via*) leading to the stars, with allusion to Mary's stellar iconography.



⁵⁵ STUART, *Historical Memoirs*... cit., pp. 536-539.

⁵⁶ Important Armagh manuscripts include British Library Harley Mss. 1023 and 1082 (dated 1138).

⁵⁷ The other early manuscript in Irish miniscule is the early eighth century *Antiphonary of Bangor* in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. Reeves was obliged to sell the *Book of Armagh* to Primate Beresford, the first Irish archbishop of Armagh since 1702, who donated it to Trinity College Dublin. Reeves published widely on early Irish calligraphy, topography, antiquities and ecclesiastical history, saving Navan Fort from agricultural destruction; see *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/reeves-william-a7612> (accessed 16 September 2022). See n. 23 on the *Book of Armagh*, like the *Bachall Isu*, as part of the insignia denoting jurisdiction of Armagh; its custodianship was a hereditary office until the eighteenth century.

⁵⁸ Diodorus based his account on the fourth century BCE *Aegyptiaca* of Hecataeus of Abdera. Since no trace of a library in the Ramesseum has been discovered, it was proposed by L. CANFORA, *La biblioteca scomparsa*, Palermo 1986, pp. 86-89, 154-167, 172-173, that the *bibliothekē* was not a room but a recess or structure containing scrolls and that *psychēs iatreion* above the *bibliothekē*, where *psychē* translates the Egyptian *ka* (the vital spirit of a god or ruler, conceived as localised in certain places within mausolea), referred not to the book repository but designated the successive chamber (the final room before the pharaoh's tomb) as the place where Rameses' *ka* was operative. In Shelley's *Ozymandias*, the boastful inscription and a mutilated colossus appear as ruins of despotism.

⁵⁹ For Platonic medical-philosophical analogies, see inter al. *Gorgias* 462e where the contrast between philosophy and rhetoric is likened to the contrast between medicine and cookery or *Laws* 720a-e on legislation discussed through analogy to medicine.

⁶⁰ C. LUTZ, *The Oldest Library Motto: ΨΥΧΗΣ ΙΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ*, "The Library Quarterly", XLVIII, 1978, 1, pp. 36-39. Poggio Bracciolini's pre-1455 Latin translation of Diodorus Siculus (printed Bologna 1472) mistranslated *iatreion* as medicine rather than medicine place, a misreading perpetuated in John Skelton's English manuscript translation. The Greek text of Diodorus recirculated from 1539. Other ancient allusions to the "medicine of the soul" include CICERO, *Tusculanae disputationes*, III.1.; J. CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Colossians*, 9.

⁶¹ LUTZ, *The Oldest Library*... cit., p. 37. The Abbey and scriptorium developed from an Irish foundation founded in the seventh century by Gall, who accompanied Colombanus, founder of the abbeys of Annegray, Luxeuil, Fontaines and Bobbio, in his exodus from the Irish monastic school of Bangor. The library hall dates to 1767; this library and its adjacent infirmary were planned together in a decree of 1757.

a typological dimension in the urbanism – centred on the archbishop's palace from whose park the renovated city 'extended'.

If Psalm 19 inscribed on the observatory had obvious pertinence for ecclesiastically sponsored astronomy, the library inscription PSYCHĒS IATREION has some curious features. In the library medal, which shows Cooley's design prior to extension, the inscription is prominent, with the word *psychēs* stamped decisively above the building (fig. 8). James Stuart describes the inscription above the door, presumably in a tablet beneath the central window with the date 1771 carved in Greek characters αψοα⁵⁵.

When the library was extended under Primate John Beresford, the shortened inscription ΨΥΧΗCΙΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ was carved not in adaptations of Roman square capitals but in elegantly designed uncials, in an epigraphic translation of biblical majuscule (fig. 10). The reason for the changed lettering style remains unclear; uncials are obviously associated with insular manuscript production which had an important centre in Armagh⁵⁶. Reeves, who described the characters as "archaic letter" (a more fitting description for Irish than Greek uncials) bought for the library in 1853 the most important Armagh manuscripts and one of the earliest surviving documents in Irish miniscule or pointed hand, the *Book of Armagh*⁵⁷.

There are two antique sources for the *psychēs iatreion* motto: Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historia* (I.49) and Epictetus' *Discourses* (III.23.30). Diodorus recounts that the words *psy-*

chēs iatreion were inscribed above the *bibliothekē* in the Ramesseum of Thebes, the monumental complex of Pharaoh Ozymandias (Rameses II), described as a great builder whose epitaph challenged posterity to outdo his works⁵⁸. Epictetus in his *Discourses* spoke of his philosophical school as an *iatreion*, in a passage contrasting oratory as a public entertainment with philosophy as medicine, whose salutary severity is essential to effect a cure. Epictetus' *iatreion*, which continues a long tradition of Socratic-Platonic medical analogies for philosophy, does not so much imply a therapeutic locale (like Plato's Academic grove or Epicurus' Garden) as a surgery where drastic treatments are administered⁵⁹.

By 1771, when Robinson established his public library, the *psychēs iatreion* motto had become a humanist topos about the beneficial effects of learning underpinned by the old Socratic theme of philosophy as a cure for souls. It was glossed by Justus Lipsius in *De bibliothecis syntagma* (Antwerp 1602), stamped in gold (in Swedish) by the librarian Erik Benzelius on the covers of velum-bound books of the Royal University Library at Uppsala in 1710 and placed over the portals of the libraries of the monastery of Santa Croce at Fonte Avellana in the Marche (1733) and the ducal palace, Modena (1764)⁶⁰. The most famous inscription of *psychēs iatreion*, in a cartouche above the 1781 entrance created by Franz Anton Dirr to the magnificent library of St. Gall, post-dates Armagh by a decade⁶¹.

Robinson's expansion of *psychēs iatreion* with the addition of definite articles into *to tēs psy-*

Fig. 10 Armagh, Robinson Library. Detail of inscription ΨΥΧΗΛΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ, 1848 (© Governors and Guardians of Armagh Robinson Library).

chēs iatreion in his epigraphic and numismatic inscriptions substantivizes the phrase into the emphatic designation of a concrete place; the library is *the* healing place for the soul. We might link this decisive assertion with the placing of the inscription on the street façade, rather than an internal portal – a unique deployment of the motto in the eighteenth century, to my knowledge⁶².

For a reader today, there is a tension between the proclamation of spiritual or mental wellbeing on the façade of a public building and the elitist language in which it is announced. The unusual inscription of the date in Greek characters and the prominence of the motto on the library medal suggest the centrality of the Greek inscription in Robinson's conception, although his interest in Greek has not been otherwise documented. The inscription was undoubtedly topical in the sense that the library as repository of *medicina animi* (its early collections consisted mainly of theology, classics and history plus a rich architectural library and a near-complete set of Piranesi) stood between a venerable primatial cathedral as place of care of souls and a newly-erected infirmary, as site for bodily cures⁶³.

This brings us to two conclusions about the library epigraph. First, it was a way of simultaneously presenting and restricting a public good. The *psychēs iatreion* motto had been thus used in the title page of Rodolphe Capel's *Lectio-num bibliothecarium memorabaliū syntagma* (Hamburg 1682), where the motto is engraved on the archway of a library entrance, whose steps are engraved with paraphrases of celebrated lines concerning ritual banishment of a 'profane' public in two canonical Latin poems: "Procul este profani" (paraphrasing VIRGIL, *Aeneid*, VI.258) and "Odi profanum vulgus et arceo. Favete bonique pii" (paraphrasing HORACE, *Odes*, III.1)⁶⁴. These banishing verses recall the ancient apotropaic function of threshold inscrip-

tions, first used in expelling malign influences from sacred places and subsequently deployed in the greatest ancient 'university', the Platonic Academy in Athens, over whose entrance was reputedly carved AGEŌMETRĒTOS MĒDEIS EISITŌ (let no-one ignorant of geometry enter here)⁶⁵.

Like Capel, for Robinson the 'healing' capacity of his library implied the banishment of profaners (*profanum* meaning literally before and thus outside the temple)⁶⁶. We might recall in this regard that Robinson's Armagh university project aimed to consolidate Protestant ascendancy in Ireland and that he opposed relaxation of the Penal Laws which severely disenfranchised and oppressed the majority Irish Catholic population from the late seventeenth century until their gradual repeal, notably with the Catholic Relief Act (1793) and Catholic Emancipation (1829)⁶⁷. Robinson may have known the writings of his most illustrious Protestant primatial predecessor, the foremost Irish Humanist scholar James Ussher (1581-1656) who argued that the early Irish church had been isolated and independent from Rome until the twelfth century, when St. Malachy's reforms brought it into conformity with papal authority⁶⁸. Ussher's works provided a narrative which could have bridged the scholarly achievements of the Insular church, famed for its transmission of Greek, with Robinson's projects for a university city which would consolidate the Protestant ascendancy.

Robinson's choice of the architectural and numismatic motto for his library thus worked in various ways. It declared the library's lineage in a series of famous libraries constructed by great builders, culminating with Rameses II (the pharaonic association also suggested by the obelisk). Robinson's determination to ensure the library's perpetuity was reflected in the 1773 Act of Parliament which established it as an independent institution; in the title and preamble to the

⁶²The motto continued to be used in libraries, in the library of the University of Rhode Island (carved 1992-1995) and University of Amsterdam library (1963-1965) where it appears on the street façade at cornice level, on a carving of a ship symbolising Amsterdam protected by Poseidon and Hermes.

⁶³The inscription on the neighbouring infirmary is modest, consisting of a small limestone slab inscribed COUNTY INFIRMARY. The architectural books came from Robinson's brother Thomas, the amateur architect who added a Palladian wing to Vanbrugh's Castle Howard.

⁶⁴The Cumaean Sibyl cries "procul este profani" as she opens the path to Hades within her grove and expels the uninitiate from her rites (*Aeneis*, VI.258); Horace opens *Odes* (III.1) "Odi profanum vulgum et arceo, favete linguis", disdaining the vulgar public with religious language (*favere*). The frontispiece of Capel's *Lectio-num ... syntagma* is reproduced in I. ODELSTIERNA, ΨΥΧΗΣ ΛΑΤΡΕΙΟΝ, in *In Donum Grapeanum: Festschrift tillägnad överbibliotekarien Anders Grape*, Uppsala 1945, p. 398.

⁶⁵On the Academic inscription, see H. SAFFREY, ΑΓΕΩΜΕΤΡΗΤΟΣ ΜΗΔΕΙΣ ΕΙΣΙΤΩ: Une inscription légendaire, "Revue des Études Grecques", LXXXI, 1968, 384-385, pp. 67-87. The earliest allusions to the inscription appear in the scholia of the fourth century sophist Sopater to Aelius Aristides, *Third Oration to Plato: in Defence of the Four* and in Julian, *Oration VII. To the Cynic Heracleios* (362 CE); Saffrey doubts the existence of the inscription, regarding it as a rhetorical fiction promoted by sixth century Alexandrian authors (Philoponus, Olympiodorus) which passed thereby into Byzantine scholarship, appearing in J. TZETZES, *Chiliades*, VIII.974-977 (ca. 1110-1180). Threshold inscriptions could be subject to humorous variations, like the amended inscriptions proposed by Diogenes to the Cyzicians in *Cynic Epistles* (Diogenes) XXXVI.

⁶⁶Capel's frontispiece labours the point with the inscription PORTA PATENS ESTO. NON OMNIBUS, SED PIIS. BONIIS. ERUDITIS. engraved on the lintel of the library entrance. In Capel's frontispiece, we look through the inscribed library entrance of to a second, closed set of doors, above which appears the Hebrew tetragrammaton.

⁶⁷The Penal Laws as the instrument of British rule in Ireland via the establishment of a pro-British Protestant ascendancy were described by Edmund Burke as "a machine [...] as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man" (*First Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe*, Dublin 1792). Despite the suppression of Gaelic civilization, the most significant literary activity in the Armagh region during the eighteenth century lay in post-classical Irish poetry.

⁶⁸Ussher constructed his history of the Irish church in *A discourse of the religion anciently professed by the Irish* (London 1631), *Veterum epistolarum Hibernicarum sylloge* (Dublin 1632) and *Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* (Dublin 1639); see A. FORD, *Shaping History: James Ussher and the Church of Ireland*, in *The Church of Ireland and Its Past: History, Interpretation and Identity*, edited by M. Empey, A. Ford, M. Moffitt, Dublin 2017, pp. 19-35, who notes the influence of Ussher's narrative in eighteenth century Ireland.

Act, the word “forever” appears no less than three times⁶⁹.

Then there is the relationship between inscriptions and urbanism. If the Armagh *psychēs iatreion* motto was unique in its street appearance, its interaction with its civic context became more pronounced in the 1848 re-carving. The use of uncial lettering opened the epigraphic connotations to early Christian palaeography, and thence to the role in manuscript production – and the preservation of Greek – of the Insular church, headed by Armagh. The re-carved inscription coincided in time with William Reeves’ scholarship on the early Irish church and antiquities, although Reeves did not become Keeper of Armagh library, for which he collected local antiquities, until 1861⁷⁰. The inscription thus endured yet modified to add a further dimension of significance to the “healing place of souls”, namely Armagh’s textual, intellectual and spiritual heritage as metropolitan see of the Irish Church⁷¹. The library also occupied a site – at the corner of Abbey Street and Callan Street – within the ecclesiastical enclosure, or *ráth*, of the medieval town, whose eastern entrance was marked with a 8th-9th century high cross which appears Richard Bartlett’s 1602 map and Black’s 1810 painting (fig. 3)⁷². The *ráth* was the sacred precinct, the place of souls rendered in Humanistic terms in Robinson’s library inscription; amongst the buildings within the *ráth* was Armagh’s first library, the *Teach Screapta* or *scriptorium*⁷³.

Thus, the change of lettering style can alter or expand the connotations of epigraphy; if Robinson’s urbanism superimposed baroque-style planning over an Irish town, the nineteenth century re-inscription suggests remembrance of Armagh’s early history, its ancient library and *scriptorium*, whose treasures were (briefly) restituted, as a further level of meaning. Armagh’s church history was also renovated from 1840 with the

construction of the new Catholic cathedral of St. Patrick on a hill northwest of old St. Patrick’s⁷⁴. The memory held by the memorial is not fixed or static, but amenable to enrichment. If we recall Erasmus’ semantics in the *Adagia*, where the meaning of an adage develops in a cumulative fashion with the contexts of each usage, the inscriptions of Armagh library and observatory enrich the associations of the urban topography both by recalling earlier states of the city and widening their significance with its subsequent development.

We have seen how a later re-carving of the library inscription opened historic allusions which long predated the Enlightenment library created by Robinson. We might also note that the *psychēs iatreion* motto had unforeseeable connotations given the coinage of the term “psychiatry” by Johann Christian Reil in 1808 to designate a new branch of psychological medicine to complement internal (pharmacological) medicine and surgery⁷⁵. Reil’s conception of the interaction of chemical, mechanical and mental elements in all illness as “an affection of the one process of life” extends a Humanist motto about salutary scholarship into wider connotations⁷⁶. As a town which suffered grievous casualties in the Northern Irish conflict of 1969-1994, when its rural hinterland, South Armagh, was the most heavily militarised zone in Western Europe, the therapeutic healing of “the one process of life” in Armagh is indeed topical. In terms of Armagh’s recent history, the library as “healing place of the soul” signals the fragility of cultural heritage in conflict zones and its inestimable value as a literal, not merely metaphorical *medicina animi* in recovering from the psychic and societal trauma of war. The civic context with which the library continuously interacts provides the horizons of meaning for the *psychēs iatreion* inscription beyond the personal pretensions of its founder.

⁶⁹The Act is 1773 - 13 & 14 George III cap. 40 (Ireland) “An Act for settling and preserving a Publick Library in the City of Armagh forever”. The 1791 Act establishing the observatory similarly insists on its creation “forever”. Primate Marsh likewise drew up a bill, enacted in 1707, to incorporate Marsh’s library, “An Act for Settling and Preserving a Public Library forever”.

⁷⁰Appointed Keeper by John Beresford, Reeves remained Librarian and in 1875 Dean of Armagh under Beresford’s successor and cousin, Marcus Beresford. The antiquities he collected under Marcus Beresford include an inscription in the Ogham alphabet, the earliest Irish writing system.

⁷¹John George Beresford’s major architectural intervention was the renovation of the cathedral.

⁷²On the buildings within the *ráth*, see REEVES, *The Ancient Churches...* cit.

⁷³AITCHISON, *Armagh...* cit., pp. 270-271, quotes the accounts in the *Vita Tripartita* and fifteenth century *Lebor Brecc* of St. Patrick laying out the *ráth* by processing clockwise with the *Bachall Isu*, following an angel, like the angel with a measuring rod of Ezekiel 40.3.

⁷⁴The associated public library of the Catholic cathedral, the Cardinal Ó Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive, holds significant Irish language and history collections.

⁷⁵On Reil, see E. SHORTER, *Historical Dictionary of Psychiatry*, New York 2005, pp. 117-118, 232-233.

⁷⁶A. MAREROS, *Psychiatry’s 200th Birthday*, “British Journal of Psychiatry”, CXCIII, 2008, 1, pp. 1-3.

In conclusion, we can review the multiple associations of the inscriptions on Robinson's buildings. At surface level, there is the ambiguity for an audience today in the civic 'healing' of a public library proclaimed in an exclusive manner, or of a city renovated for optimal viewing as a landscaped prospect from an archbishop's palace. We then pass into a deeper level of association, in which the eighteenth-century epigraphy is just one level in the strata of topographical-textual relationships which constituted the city, such as the processional recitation of psalms or hymns in circumambulation or the regalia which denoted possession of the primatial office – the *Book of Armagh*, St. Patrick's Bell and the *Bachall Isu* with which Patrick traced the cathedral's plot under angelic direction⁷⁷. Beyond these Christian legends lie the topographical myths of the *dindsenchas* which recount how Macha like Patrick traced the plot of Emain Macha with her brooch.

Armagh's multi-valent topography encompassed an eighteenth-century urban project articulated by inscribed monuments, an area for astronomical observation marked by a circle of meridian markers and an ancient cathedral city with a radial-concentric organization which itself supplanted the older sacred site of Navan Fort, with its circular earthworks. The observatory inscription in this sense forms a line of connection back to the symbolism of a medieval cathedral city – which is not to claim that Robinson intended this association.

Robinson's interest in inscribed objects (architectural epigraphy, numismatics, engraved gems) corresponds to the continuum of artefacts bearing *imprese*, from miniatures to monumental inscriptions discussed in Tesaurio's encyclopaedic manual of *concettismo*, *Il Canocchiale aristotelico* (Torino 1654). The semantic working of such objects is discussed by Erasmus in the prologue to the *Adagia* which describes how

objects adorned with *sententiae* function topically, generating meaning via allusion and context. Thus, the precious engraved objects (gems, medals) acquired by Robinson and the engraved monuments which he erected can be seen in Humanist terms as a continuum of emblematic objects, which generated significance through textual-visual interplay, through intertextual allusion and through contextual or site-specific meanings. In this sense a group of inter-related inscribed buildings will be related through their axial alignments and civic functions, but also through their type and the other instances of the inscription, as we saw in the library, where even a change of lettering style opened new dimensions of meaning. What we find in Armagh is the overlay of this kind of Humanist contextual reading upon earlier narratives which brought together treasures, texts and sited meaning: the onomastic lore of the *dindsenchas* and medieval literature which insisted on possession of the *Book of Armagh* and *Bachall Isu* as the insignia of the bishopric.

We have argued that such contextual significance can continue to expand or accrue in the urban context, as the inscribed edifices continue to relate to the changing circumstances of the city – both progressive development and archaeological recovery. The case of Armagh shows that the relationship between topography, literature and significant artefacts extends back into pre-urban landscape myths and beyond the classical world.

⁷⁷ AITCHISON, *Armagh...* cit., p. 267, quotes allusions in the *Liber angeli* and the *Book of Armagh* to processional recitation of psalms in circumambulation from the cathedral to the Teampall Na Ferta.