

**‘Our learned Primate’ and that ‘rare treasurie’: James Ussher’s use of Sir Robert Cotton’s manuscript library, c. 1603-1655.<sup>1</sup>**

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Sir Robert Cotton’s library is amongst the most famous collections of manuscripts in the world.<sup>2</sup> It contains many treasures including the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Cotton Genesis, and

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a dissertation submitted to the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies at University College London in September 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For the history of the library see Richard Ovenden, ‘The libraries of the antiquaries (c. 1580–1640) and the idea of a national collection’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* ed. by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I, 527-564; *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: essays on a Stuart Courtier and his Legacy*, ed. by C. J. Wright (London: British Library, 1997); Colin G. C. Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton* (London: British Library, 1994); Kevin Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton, 1586-1631: History and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and; C. E. Wright, ‘The Elizabethan Society of

the sole surviving manuscript of the Old-English poem *Beowulf*.<sup>3</sup> The library, numbering nearly 1,000 volumes at its greatest extent, was amassed by Cotton over a lifetime of collecting -- his first recorded acquisitions are dated 1588, when he was 17 -- and continued to grow via purchases and donations for many years after his death in 1631. The library passed to national ownership in 1702 after the death of Sir Robert's grandson, Sir John Cotton, and was one of the three foundation collections of the British Museum Library in 1753. In 1731, the library suffered a famous and devastating fire while housed in Ashburnham House, Westminster, in which approximately 100 volumes were totally destroyed and another 100 were severely damaged. Aside from the magnificent manuscripts it contains, Cotton's library has long been famous because of his willingness to open it to scholars, and for his willingness even to loan manuscripts to those who could not come to London to see them in person.

The first published catalogue of the library was written by Thomas Smith and published in Oxford in 1696.<sup>4</sup> Smith comments on the accessibility and status of the library, writing that

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Antiquaries and the Formation of the Cottonian Library', in *The English Library Before 1700: Studies in its History*, ed. by Francis Wormald and C. E. Wright (London: Athlone Press, 1958), pp. 176-212.

<sup>3</sup> London, British Library, Cotton MSS Nero D.IV, Otho B.VI, and Vitellius A.XV.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Smith, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae cottoniae cui praemittuntur illustris viri, D. Roberti Cottoni, equitis aurati & baronetti vita: et bibliothecae cottonianae historia & synopsis* (Oxford, 1696); Thomas Smith, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library 1696 (Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Cottonianae) reprinted from Sir Robert Harley's Copy, Annotated by Humfrey Wanley, Together with Documents Relating to the Fire of 1731*, ed. by C. G. C. Tite, introductory essays trans. by Godfrey F. Turton (Cambridge: Brewer, 1984).

“it is as if the Cotton library belonged not to a single family but to the whole nation”.<sup>5</sup>

Included before the start of the catalogue proper is a selection of *elogia et testimonia* of Cotton and his library, which includes quotations from many esteemed late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars, including William Camden, Isaac Casaubon, John Selden, and Thomas Gale. Three tributes from James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, and Priamte of All-Ireland are included in the compendium, of which this is one:

My most abundant supplies of manuscripts came from that noble Cotton library, which alone give more help to the achievement of a history of the British nation than all others combined. These were formerly made available by the great kindness, which for my part I reciprocate, of my friend Robert Cotton (whom Britain will always celebrate as keeper and dispenser of her antiquities), and the privilege is still continued by the favour of his son Thomas, his successor in the order of knighthood and rank of baronet and in care for the preservation and increase of the library, and who assuredly is not unmindful of the advice of Isocrates: ‘It is right for the children to inherit not only their father’s estate but his friends.’<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “De bibliotheca Cottoniana, quasi non unius familiae, sed totius gentis esset”. Smith, *Catalogus*, p. 2 of ‘Lectoris’ and Smith, *Catalogue*, ed. by Tite, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> “Quorum [codicum MSS.] prae alijs maximam mihi suppeditavit copiam Bibliotheca illa *Cottoniana* nobilis; quae una ad Britannicae gentis historiam perficiendam plura confert adminicula, quam mones omnium aliae junctae simul. Ea vero amicissimi D. Roberto Cottoni, (quem ut Antiquitatum suarum promum condum semper celebrabit Britannia) summa humanitate, non minus quam mea ipsius, & olim patuit, & continuata D. Thomae filij ipsius (tum in equestri ordine atq[ue] Baronetti dignitate, tum in Bibliotheca conservandae & augende cura successoris unici) benevolentia adhuc patet; Isocraticae illius monitionis hic certo non immemoris: *πρεπει τους παιδας, ωσπερ της ουσιας, ουτω και της φιλιας πατρικης*

James Ussher has long been a controversial figure. Generations of writers have been unable to agree on the exact hue of his theological outlook; he is impossible to pin down simply as an ‘Anglican’, a Calvinist, or a puritan.<sup>7</sup> He took an active part in the drafting of the Articles of the Church of Ireland in 1615, and mixed in circles of ‘godly’ (i.e. Puritan) clerics.<sup>8</sup> However, he was also a strong royalist and a supporter of episcopal governance of the church. He was committed to the furtherance of the reformed, established church in Ireland, a cause which he supported by writing protestant interpretations of the history of Ireland and Britain, following the lead of continental protestant historians.<sup>9</sup> This style of

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κληρονομειν”. James Ussher *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates: quibus inserta est pestiferae adversus dei gratiam a pelagio britanno in ecclesiam inductae haereseos historia* (Dublin, 1639), sigs A[1]<sup>v</sup>-A2<sup>r</sup>; quoted in Smith, *Catalogus*, pp. xlviiii-xlix and Smith, *Catalogue*, ed. by Tite, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 32-56.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-103; Elizabethanne Boran, ‘An early friendship network of James Ussher, archbishop of Armagh, 1626-1656’, in *European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation*, ed. by Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), pp. 116-134.

<sup>9</sup> Ute Lotz-Heumann, ‘The Protestant interpretation of history in Ireland: the case of James Ussher’s *Discourse*’, in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe, Volume 2: the Later Reformation*, ed. by Bruce Gordon, (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 109-110; Alan Ford, ‘James Ussher and the creation of an Irish protestant identity’, in *British Consciousness and Identity: the Making of Britain, 1533-1707*, ed. by Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 187.

history attempted to demonstrate that the reformed church followed the pure practices of the first Christians in Ireland, and of St Patrick's own church, and that the Catholic church of Rome had, over hundreds of years, become increasingly, and irreparably, corrupt and corrupting. This view of history was intertwined with an apocalyptic approach to theology and biblical interpretation, in which the struggle between the reformed church Rome and was seen as the fight between Christ and the Anti-Christ in the end times.

Ussher built up a large personal library, and also contributed to the growth of the library of Trinity College Dublin.<sup>10</sup> He also visited most, if not all, of the major private and institutional libraries of his time in his search for sources to support his historico-theological views. In his historical works, Ussher ostentatiously uses a large number of sources to imbue his sometimes polemical writing with an overwhelming sense of historical authority.<sup>11</sup> He makes these tactics plain in the following quotation from the preface to his 1631 *Discourse on the religion anciently professed by the Irish and British*, which gives especial thanks to Robert Cotton's library.

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabethanne Boran, 'The libraries of Luke Challoner and James Ussher, 1595-1608', *European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation*, ed. by Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, pp. 75-115.

<sup>11</sup> It must be noted that Ussher's attempts to convert the Irish to the protestant faith through the medium of extensive historical publication were ultimately and undeniably unsuccessful. See Ford, 'Irish protestant identity', in *British Consciousness and Identity*, ed. by Bradshaw and Roberts, pp. 202-203 and 209-212; and Lotz-Heumann, 'The Protestant interpretation of history in Ireland', *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Gordon, pp. 116-120.

As for the Manuscripts which I use, they are partly known to some of them [Ussher's opponents], partly notified in the marginall quotations of the Treatise itselfe: where the place is noted, in which they may be found. A great part whereof being gathered together in the rare treasure of that worthy Baronet, Sir Robert Cotton; I thought it not amisse to marke all such with an asterisk (\*) in the following Catalogue: to the end, that if any of the other side will bee pleased to looke into these things, hee may with more ease satisfie himself by perusing the chiefe of these monuments brought thus together into one place; and so as well examine the truth of my allegations, as take up what hee shall thinke meet for the patronage of his owne cause, my intention herein being to deale fairly, and not to desire the concealing of anything, that may tend to the true discovery of the fate of former times; whether it may seeme to make for me or against me.<sup>12</sup>

The "following catalogue" lists 103 authors, of which twenty five bear the asterisk denoting their presence in Cotton's library.

As is recorded by both of Ussher's early biographers, he made his first visit to Cotton's library in London in 1603, on the first of a sequence of triennial visits made to England with Luke Challoner, his father-in-law and the Vice-Provost of Trinity College Dublin.<sup>13</sup> These

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<sup>12</sup> James Ussher, *A Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and Brittish* (London, 1631), STC 24549, sigs \*1<sup>v</sup>-\*2.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Bernard, *The Life and Death of the Most Reverend and Learned Father of our Church Dr. James Usher [sic] Late Archbishop of Armagh, and Primate of All Ireland* (London, 1656), p. 42-43; Richard Parr, *The Life of the Most Reverend Father in God James Usher [sic], Late Lord Archbishop of Armagh, Primate and Metropolitan of All Ireland* (London, 1686), p. 11.

trips were made, in part, to buy books for the Trinity College Library, of which Challoner was librarian, but also for personal research and book-buying purposes. Ussher's involvement with Cotton's library continued well into the 1650s, practically to the year of his death in 1656.

Evidence of Ussher's use of Cotton's library survives in various forms. First there are the comments and references made by Ussher himself in his printed works, both in the text proper as illustrated above, but much more frequently in the marginal notes in form such as: "Cummian. epist. ad Segienum abbat. de Disputatione Lunae. MS. in Bibliothec. Cottonian.".<sup>14</sup> Secondly, correspondence between Ussher and Cotton often refers to loans of books that have been, or might be, made. Letters between other members of Ussher and Cotton's scholarly circles are also sometimes revealing of details of book movements.<sup>15</sup> Several of Ussher's personal notebooks survive and I have examined those that are now in the Bodleian library.<sup>16</sup> Extensive, although not comprehensive, lists of loans made from the Cottonian library survive in the British Library and have been edited by Colin Tite.<sup>17</sup> Lastly,

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<sup>14</sup> Ussher, *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed*, p. 94, noted, referring to London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius A.XII, art. 12.

<sup>15</sup> A notable example of this is the letter of 2 January 1624/5 between Ussher and theologian Samuel Ward published in Parr, *The Life of the Most Reverend Father in God James Usher*, p. 315 and in *The whole works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, ed. by Charles Richard Elrington, 17 vols (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847-1864), xv (1863), 229.

<sup>16</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Additional A. 91 (SC 27719) and A. 379 (SC 27615), and MSS Rawlinson C. 850 (SC 15429), D. 280 (SC 15428), and D. 1290 (SC 15438).

<sup>17</sup> Colin Tite, *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use* (London: British Library, 2003).

Ussher made some annotations in Cottonian manuscripts themselves which provide direct evidence of his personal interaction with them.<sup>18</sup>

The identification of specific Cottonian manuscripts from Ussher's comments is rarely straightforward. Cotton's famous system of emperor pressmarks was at least partly established by the time of his death in 1631, and before that, many of his manuscripts were at least sometimes referred to by the number assigned to them in an earlier manuscript catalogue.<sup>19</sup> Harleian and emperor classmarks are sometimes used in loan lists made by the Cotton family, and Ussher occasionally uses Harleian numbers in his personal notebooks.<sup>20</sup> Pressmarks are, however, never used as identifiers in Ussher's published works.

Ussher was a man of broad scholarly tastes. The manuscripts which he consulted and borrowed included histories, hagiographies, bibles, and collections of letters and of laws, and spanned various languages, including Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Greek, and Hebrew. Since there is not space here to examine all of the manuscripts I have determined that Ussher consulted, I shall instead use one particular letter from Ussher to Cotton as a case study.

This letter was written on 12 July 1625, and is, in many respects, a microcosm of Ussher's use of and borrowing from Cotton's library:

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<sup>18</sup> These annotations have been identified by Tite, *Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library* in the following manuscripts: Tiberius C.III, fol. 3<sup>v</sup>; Claudius A.III, fol. 9\*; Claudius A.X, fol. 3<sup>r</sup>; Claudius E.v, fols 231<sup>v</sup> and 235<sup>r</sup>; Vespasian D.VI, fols 1<sup>r</sup> and 78<sup>r</sup>; Vespasian D.XV, fol. 102<sup>r</sup>; Titus A.II, fol. 134<sup>r</sup>; Titus A.XXVII, fols 171<sup>r</sup>, 171<sup>v</sup>, 172<sup>v</sup>, and 174<sup>r</sup>; Cleopatra C.XI, fol. 1<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> This catalogue is now found in British Library, MS Harley 6018.

<sup>20</sup> Such as his identification of MS Nero A.I as number 125, in his notebook now Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D. 280, fol. \*53<sup>r</sup>.

I have received from you *the* Historye of *the* Bishops of Durham, together with fowre ancient copyes of *the* Psalmes: whereof, that which hath the Saxon interlineary translation inserted, is the old Romanum Psalterium; the other three are the same with that which is called Gallicum Psalterium. But I have not received that which I stand most in need of: to wit, the Psalter in 8<sup>o</sup> which is distinguished with obeliskes, and asteriskes. I pray you therefore send it unto me by my servant, this bearer: as also the Life of Wilfrid written in prose by a namlesse author that lived about the time of Bede. The other written in verse by Fridegodus, I received from Mr Burnett: together with Willielmus Malmesburiensis de *Vitis Pontificum* Angl. et S. Aldhelmi.<sup>21</sup>

The nine manuscripts which Ussher mentions cover some of the categories—historical, hagiographical, and biblical—that he used most frequently.

Two historical manuscripts are mentioned here. The first is the “Historye of *the* Bishops of Durham”, which can be identified with Cotton Titus A.II. Titus A.II contains various histories and chronicles relating to Durham and its famous bishops; we can be certain that Ussher saw and used the volume as he has marked fol. 134<sup>r</sup> (the beginning of “*Libellus de ortu sancti Cuthberti*”) with the single word “Chronica”. This work is not however referred to explicitly by Ussher in any of his published works that I have examined.

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<sup>21</sup> British Library, MS Cotton Julius C.III, fol. 383<sup>r</sup>; published in Henry Ellis, *Original letters of eminent literary men of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries* (London: for the Camden Society, 1843), pp. 133-4 and in *The whole works Ussher*, ed. by Elrington, xv, 283-284. The Mr Burnett mentioned in this letter appears to have been an agent who helped with the exchange of manuscripts between Cotton and various scholars.

“Willielmus Malmesburiens de Vitis Pontificum Anglorum et Sancti Aldhelmi” (“the lives of the English bishops and of Saint Aldhelm”) can be matched to Claudius A.V, a manuscript containing various historical and hagiographical works, of which folios 46-134 are William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta pontificum anglorum* and *Uita sacti Aldhemi*, written at Belvoir Priory in the middle of the twelfth century. This manuscript is not mentioned explicitly in Ussher’s published works, although general book and chapter references to the *De Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* are frequently made.<sup>22</sup> This kind of use, in which only chapter references are given, is also made of Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and the sixteenth-century cardinal Cesare Baronio’s *Annales Ecclesiastici*. We can see this, for example, on page 94, of Ussher’s *Discourse*, where a quotation from Bede is followed by the reference “Bed. lib. 2. hist. cap. 19”.<sup>23</sup> We can assume that, as works such as the *Gesta Pontificum*, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and *Annales Ecclesiastici* were widely enough known and frequently enough printed that reference to any particular source was deemed unnecessary.

Other historical manuscripts in the Cotton Library used and cited by Ussher include Humfrey Llwyd’s *Chronica Walliae*, Cotton MS Caligula A.VI; William le Breton’s *Gesta Philippi Regis*, Cotton MS Vespasian D.IV; the *Glastonbury Chronicle*, Cotton MS Cleopatra C.X, art. 3; John of Brompton’s *History of Jervaulx*, Cotton MS Tiberius C.XIII; John of Fordun’s *Scotichronicon*, Cotton MS Vitellius E.XI; and a chronicle previously attributed to Marianus Scotus that is now believed to be by Henry of Huntingdon, Cotton MS Nero C.V.

Ussher used accounts of the lives of saints as historical documents providing information about ecclesiastical policy and practices in the times of their subjects, or at the time of their composition. In the letter above, we see that Ussher mentions two lives of St.

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<sup>22</sup> For example, Ussher, *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed*, p. 115, note b, “[...] Gulielm. Malmesbur. lib. 3. de gest. Pontific. Angl.”.

<sup>23</sup> Ussher, *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed*, p 94, note e.

Wilfrid. The life of Wilfrid written in verse by Fridegodus can readily be identified as Claudius A.I, the only copy of this work present in Cotton's library. Ussher quotes from this manuscript in the *Discourse* in order to illustrate Wilfrid's opinions on the celebration of Easter in support of a similar quotation from Bede.<sup>24</sup>

Investigating the identity of the other hagiographical work in this letter, the "Life of Wilfrid written in prose by a namlesse author that lived about the time of Bede" reveals interesting details about the cataloguing of manuscripts in Cotton's library. Today there is one life of Wilfrid thought to be by an anonymous author, the manuscript Titus A. XVIII, and it is possible that this is the manuscript to which Ussher refers in his letter.<sup>25</sup> There is, however, a different Cottonian Life of Wilfrid that was formerly believed to be anonymous. The Cottonian contents page of MS Vespasian D.VI states that the Life was written by an "anonymous but ancient author".<sup>26</sup> This manuscript has been annotated in Ussher's hand on both the contents page and at the start of the life to indicate that this text was in fact written by "Stephanus called Eddius". Ussher notes in *Britannicum ecclesiarum* that he saw both the Cotton copy of this Life and the copy held at Salisbury Cathedral.<sup>27</sup> He was therefore presumably able to identify the authorship of Cotton's copy with reference to the Salisbury version. Ussher's request in the 1625 letter for the "anonymous life" was likely to have been based on Cotton's partial knowledge of the contents of the manuscript.

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<sup>24</sup> Ussher, *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed*, p. 103, note e.

<sup>25</sup> This identification is made by Henry Ellis in his edition of this letter. Henry Ellis, *Original letters of eminent literary men of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries* (London: for the Camden Society, 1843), pp. 133-134.

<sup>26</sup> "Autore Anonyo [sic] sed Antiquissimo", fol. 1r.

<sup>27</sup> James Ussher, *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates*. p. 922, note \*.

Of the Biblical manuscripts (all psalters) mentioned in this letter, only two are easily identifiable. The Roman Psalter “which hath the Saxon interlineary translation inserted” is the so-called Vespasian Psalter, Vespasian A.I. It is today believed to be the oldest surviving copy of the Roman Psalter.<sup>28</sup> This illuminated psalter was made in the early eighth century at St Augustine’s, Canterbury, and is probably the oldest surviving product of the scriptorium there. An Old English gloss (in the Mercian dialect) was added to the psalter in the ninth century, making this easy to match to Ussher’s description. In a note in a notebook about the Cotton Genesis, Otho B.VI, Ussher compares the pictures in that book to those in “*the* Latin pictures of Sr. Rob. Cottons old Psalter”, which is most likely to have been Vespasian A.I.<sup>29</sup> Further evidence of Ussher’s use of this manuscript is Ussher’s collation of the Athanasian Creed (Quicumque vult) in a different notebook, in which siglum W indicates “the creed in the Saxon interlineated version in the Cottonian library”.<sup>30</sup>

The Gallican psalter “distinguished with obeliskes, and asteriskes” is Galba A.XVIII, which is indeed marked by these Alexandrian critical markings. This psalter was formally known as the ‘Aethelstan Psalter’, but is now more commonly referred to as the ‘Galba Psalter’.<sup>31</sup> Ussher was particularly interested in these marks; he corresponded with the biblical scholar Arnold Boate about them, and discusses them in chapter five of his 1655 work on the

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<sup>28</sup> David H. Wright, *The Vespasian Psalter: British Museum Cotton Vespasian A.I* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967), p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. D. 1290, fol. 98<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> “W. notat symbolum in saxonica versione interlineata: MS in Bibliotheca Cottoniana”. Bodleian Library, MS Add. 91, fol. 111<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Deshman, ‘The Galba Psalter: pictures, texts and context in an early medieval prayerbook’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 26 (1997), 109-136, notes 1, 7, and 118.

Greek Septuagint.<sup>32</sup> There is a record of Ussher finally having been lent the manuscript on 23 February 1646/7.<sup>33</sup> He refers to it in his notebooks, recording details from the rules for calculating feasts bound at the start of the codex, and collating it along with several other Gallican psalters.<sup>34</sup>

The three other Gallican psalters are much harder to identify because the Cottonian library contains a large number of psalters, and Ussher gives no details, except for the version of the translation, of which he has received. Ussher's notebook of collations does, however, provide evidence of Ussher's study of several Gallican psalters from Cotton's library.<sup>35</sup> This evidence is insufficient for ascertaining which manuscripts were sent in summer 1625, and the absence of any given manuscript from the notebook does not signify that Ussher did not see it. From the list of sigla to the collation of Gallican psalters, we can, however, be certain that Ussher saw the following four Gallican psalters in the Cotton Library:

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<sup>32</sup> See the letters of 6 September 1651, June 1651, and 29 November 1651, in Parr, *The Life of the Most Reverend Father in God James Usher*, pp. 564-566, 621, and 621-622. James Ussher, *De Graeca Septuaginta, Interpretum Versione Syntagma: cum Libri Estherae Editione Origenica, Vetere Graeca Altera ex Arundelliana Bibliotheca Nunc Primum in Lucem Producta* (London, 1655), pp. 47-55.

<sup>33</sup> No one else is recorded as having been lent this book before Ussher. Cotton owned it in 1612, as can be seen from his dated signature on fol. 1. He possibly acquired it following the death of Prince Henry in 1612 or from the Royal Library.

<sup>34</sup> First, a marginal note referring to the rules for computing feasts in Galba A.XVIII, fols 2-28, "Regulae computi praefice Psalterio Aethelstani Regis, in Bibliothecâ Cottonianâ", Bodleian Library, MS Add. A. 379. Secondly in a heading, "In eadem Psalterio Aethelstani descripta est sequens notatio", Bodleian Library, MS Add. A. 91, fol. 72<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Add. A. 91.

- D. Psalterium, omium (in fallor) quae uspiam extant antiquiss. Majusculis literis ante annos 1000. descriptis (Psalmis cujusque argumento, picturâ antiquissimâ et vere Romanâ *expressionis*) MS. In Bibliothecâ Cottonianâ
- ~~E. R.~~ Psalterium Aethelstani Anglorum Regis [...] MS in eâdem Bibliothecâ
- F. Psalterium admodum antiquum, in Hiberniâ literis quadratis (Hibernis seu Saxonis) descriptum: habetur in eâdem Bibliothecâ. In fine additur. » [quotation in Old English]
- G. Psalterium caractere vetustissimo Hibernico descriptum: in eâdem Bibliothecâ. cui praefixa fuerunt haec verba: » Liber oswini Deirorum Reges.<sup>36</sup>

Siglum R in this list, 'Psalterium Aethelstani', is Galba A.XVIII, the Psalter already discussed distinguished with asterisks and obelisks. Siglum F, an ancient Psalter with square Irish letters, has been convincingly identified as Vitellius F.XI by Ussher's reference to the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 72<sup>v</sup>.

Old-Irish colophon of the manuscript.<sup>37</sup> Siglum G refers to Galba A.V, a manuscript written in old Irish characters, which Ussher says was the book of King Oswin.<sup>38</sup>

The remaining psalter, siglum D, is harder to identify. I suspect, from the description, that it may be the manuscript that is now the Utrecht Psalter, formerly Cotton MS. Claudius C.VII, and now Utrecht, University Library MS 32. This manuscript contains the text of the Gallican Psalter, and is certainly “Roman” in appearance, being written in the majuscule script of rustic capitals and containing a famous cycle of line-drawn illustrations. It is now dated to the early ninth century, which accords with Ussher’s rough dating of “before 1000 AD”.<sup>39</sup> Ussher is known to have seen the Psalter, so it is possible that that he did collate it at

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<sup>37</sup> Anne O’Sullivan, ‘The colophon of the Cotton Psalter (Vitellius F.XI)’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 96 (1966), 117-180; Martin McNamara, ‘The Psalms in the Irish Church: the most recent research on text, commentary, and decoration – with emphasis on the so-called Psalter of Charlemagne’, in *The Bible as book: the manuscript tradition*, ed. by John L. Sharpe and Kimberley von Kampen, (London: British Library, 1998), p. 94.

<sup>38</sup> Smith describes the manuscript as “Characteribus Hibernicis vetustissimis, [...] Dicitur fuisse liber Oswini Regis”, *Catalogus*, p. 61. This identification is also reached by Martin McNamara, ‘The Psalms in the Irish Church’, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> Koert van der Hoerst, and Jacobus H.A. Engebregt, *Utrecht-Psalter: vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat der Handschrift 32 aus dem Besitz der Bibliothek der Rijksuniversitet te Uretcht*, trans. by Johannes Rathofer, 2 vols (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1984), II.

some point.<sup>40</sup> I would, therefore, tentatively suggest that Vitellius F.XI, Galba A.V and the Utrecht Psalter are the three Gallican psalters mentioned by Ussher in his letter of 12 July 1625.

There are other types of manuscript used by Ussher that are not mentioned in the letter above. Ussher on occasion makes reference to a subject much beloved of the antiquaries in Cotton's circle: the ancient laws of the British Isles, including those of Edward the Confessor and the tenth-century Welsh king Hywel Dda.<sup>41</sup> He also frequently uses a particular volume of canon law.<sup>42</sup>

The Cotton library is rich in collections of letters, and Ussher used them frequently in his published works as primary sources for the actions and beliefs of early Christian leaders, kings, and popes. In his earliest published work, *Gravissimae quaestionis*, Ussher illustrates his remarks about the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the governance of

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<sup>40</sup> Ussher mentions the manuscript in *De romanae ecclesiae symbolo apostolico* (London, 1647), p. 4. This is identified in Thomas Duffy Hardy in *The Athanasian Creed in connexion with the Utrecht Psalter* ([London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1872]), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ussher, *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates*, p. 41, note o, and p. 104, note f refer to the laws of Edward the Confessor concerning the limits of English kings. Ussher states that he has collated a Cottonian manuscript, presumably MS Vitellius E.V or maybe MS Julius C.II, with William Lambarde's *Archaeologia, siue de priscis anglorum legibus libri* (London, 1568), STC 15142. Ussher, *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed*, p. 53, note k, cites the laws of the tenth-century Welsh king Hywel Dda, found in MS Cleo. B.V, art. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ussher refers to MS Otho E.XIII repeatedly throughout the *Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed* (p. 24, note h; p. 34, note p; p. 36, note a; p. 52, note d; p. 65, note b; and p. 107, p. i), calling it "Canonum, titulorum 66".

England by citing a letter from William the Conqueror to Pope Gregory VII, and two letters between Pope Paschal II and Henry I.<sup>43</sup> In his *Answer to a challenge made by a Iesuite in Ireland* he refers to a letter from Charlemagne to King Offa as an example of the practice of praying for the dead.<sup>44</sup>

In his *Discourse of the religion anciently professed* Ussher uses the complaint of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Toirdelbach Ua Briain, eleventh-century King of Munster, about the baptism of infants without the use of chrism provides as evidence about early baptismal practices.<sup>45</sup> Such was the importance of letters to Ussher's historical work that he eventually published a collection of fifty "old Irish letters, of which part were written by

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<sup>43</sup> James Ussher, *Gravissimae quaestionis, de christianarum ecclesiam, in occidentis praesertim partibus, ab apostolicis temporibus ad nostram usq[ue] aetatem, continuâ successione et statu, historica explicatio* (London, 1613), p. 182, note r refers to MS Nero A.VII, art. 1, fols 1-39; p. 180, note q and p. 187, note f refer to MS Claudius A.I, art. 2, fol. 37<sup>v</sup>; and p. 187, note g refers to MS Tiberius C.III.

<sup>44</sup> James Ussher, *An answer to a challenge made by a Iesuite in Ireland wherein the iudgement of antiquity in the points questioned is truly delivered, and the noveltie of the now Romish doctrine plainly discovered* (London, 1631), STC 24544a, p. 203, note l. The letter is said by Ussher to be found among the letters of Alcuin in the Cotton library, and therefore probably in MS Tiberius A.XV or MS Vespasian A.XIV.

<sup>45</sup> Ussher, *Discourse of the religion anciently professed*, p. 45, note a. The letters of Lanfranc are preserved in MS Nero A.VII art. 1

the Irish, part to the Irish, and part about the Irish or Irish matters”, which includes at least seven letters on various topics that Ussher found in the Cottonian library.<sup>46</sup>

The example of Archbishop James Ussher provides a valuable insight into the function of Cotton’s library, and also into the broader scholarly climate of the early seventeenth century. Though Ussher’s access to the library was sometimes hindered by his physical distance from London and by the changeability of travelling conditions, the fact that he continued to praise Cotton’s library strongly suggests that these limitations were accepted by him as necessary and inescapable. Conversely, it seems that despite the risks involved (of the late return of manuscripts, or of their complete loss), Robert Cotton and his family continued willingly and generously to lend library stock to a great number of scholars, of whom Ussher was just one.<sup>47</sup>

The library’s success was built upon active participation from readers. A collaborative relationship between reader and librarian enabled all concerned to make the most of the manuscripts preserved. Poor, or non-existent cataloguing, was compensated for by the sharing of knowledge in person, in correspondence, and through readers’ marginal interventions in the manuscripts themselves. Manuscript librarians today still often rely on the activities of readers to learn about interesting items in the contents of their libraries, but the relationship between

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<sup>46</sup> James Ussher, *Veterum epistolarum hibernicarum sylloge: quae partim ab hibernis, partim ad hibernos, partim de hibernis vel rebus hibernicis sunt conscriptae* (Dublin, 1632), STC 24557. The seven letters found in Cottonian manuscript sources are letters XI, from MS Vitellius A.II, art. 12; XIII, from MS Domitian IX, art. 1; XVIII, perhaps from MS Tiberius A.XV; XXI, from MS Vitellius A.XII, art. 7; XXVIII, from MS Nero A.VII, art. 1; and XXXI and XXXII, both from Claudius A.XI.

<sup>47</sup> Tite, *Early records of Sir Robert Cotton’s Library* lists 270 discrete loan records.

the two is now more often one of 'service provider' and 'customer' than of two co-conspirators on a scholarly expedition. Cotton assembled a collection of manuscripts which was highly regarded by the best minds of his time, and which they were eager to use. For Ussher, the library constituted a significant intellectual resource, capable of assisting him in the pursuit of a sustained and scholarly enterprise.