

**READING THE FADDAN MORE PSALTER:  
AN INTRODUCTION**

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Thanks to John Gillis and Bernard Meehan  
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In 2006 a medieval manuscript was found in a bog at Faddan More, Co. Tipperary. The book fell open upon discovery, and visible text revealed it to be a Latin Psalter, or book of psalms. The book can be dated on the basis of its script to around AD 800.

The Psalter is a section of the Old Testament Bible, containing Hebrew religious poetry and prayers, many of them attributed to the biblical David. It was particularly popular in early medieval Ireland, and was probably the principal text used to teach children to read before they were handed over to monks for further instruction. Monks were expected to know the psalms from memory.

The Faddan More Psalter is made up of 60 sheets of vellum, which are divided into five gatherings, or quires. The text is written in iron gall ink, and at least four pigments are used for decoration (yellow, red, black and white), although more may have been present originally. The text is arranged in a single column.

The book contains the standard 150 psalms. The opening letter of each psalm is marked by an

enlarged capital, and the opening words of Psalms 1, 51, and 101 are decorated, a convention used in other Irish psalters.

Preservation of the book varies greatly from page to page. In some cases only the edges of the page survives, and loose letters are all that remain of the centre of the pages.

A wallet-shaped leather cover with a flap protected the Psalter. Three horn buttons are fastened to the flap, and the cover was probably closed by wrapping a leather thong around the book. The outside of the cover is painted with black carbon-based pigment. A number of motifs seen on the outside of the cover are probably designs tried out by a scribe. Traces of gold found on the outside of the cover suggest that the scriptorium from which the Psalter came produced fine illuminated manuscripts.

The inside of the cover is lined with papyrus, a writing material from the eastern Mediterranean, principally Egypt. The papyrus acted as a stiffener for the leather cover. The manuscript was never



bound into the cover, but the gatherings were held together with a thread made of vegetable fibre. The cover is particularly important because most medieval manuscripts do not survive with their original cover intact.

The Faddan More Psalter was probably written around AD 800. Radiocarbon dates from the other material found during the excavation of the find spot indicate that it was deposited within a few hundred years of its production. It may have been written in a local monastery, and the dense network of sites in this rich and fertile land close to the River Shannon provides a number of possibilities. Scribes are known to have worked at the monastic sites of Lorrha, Birr and Terryglass, all of which are reasonably close to Faddan More.

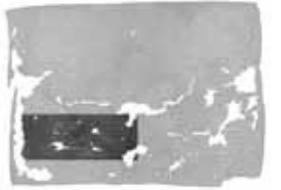
The significance of the Psalter goes beyond the fact that it is a unique find. The recovery of the original cover with the book, a rare occurrence, provides key information on early Irish book making. The papyrus that lined the leather cover probably shows that the early Irish

monasteries were in contact with continental Europe and beyond.

Because all medieval manuscripts are copies, no two versions are exactly the same. Scribes committed errors, and these were often replicated when copied. Other errors common in medieval manuscripts include eyeskip, where the scribe lost his place when copying from the original and accidentally amalgamated two lines. Study of the text of the Faddan More Psalter is ongoing. Work is progressing on trying to match loose pieces of text to their original page.

Extracts on the following pages show surviving portions of the psalms as they appear on the Faddan More Psalter along with their English translations.

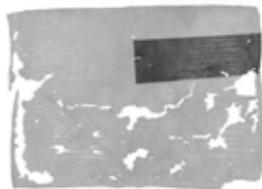




## Psalm 73

- LINE 22 [1] **Ut quid Deus repulisti in finem iratus est**  
 LINE 23 **furor tuus super oves pascuae tuae** [2] **me-**  
 LINE 24 **mor esto congregationis tuae quam posse-**  
 LINE 25 **disti ab initia redemisti virgam hereditatis tuae**  
 LINE 26 **mons Sion in quo habitasti in eo** [3] **leva manus tuas in**  
 LINE 27 **superbias eorum in finem quanta malignatus est**  
 LINE 28 **inimicus in sancto** [4] **et gloriati sunt qui oderunt te in medio**  
 LINE 29 **sollemnitatis tuae posuerunt signa sua**

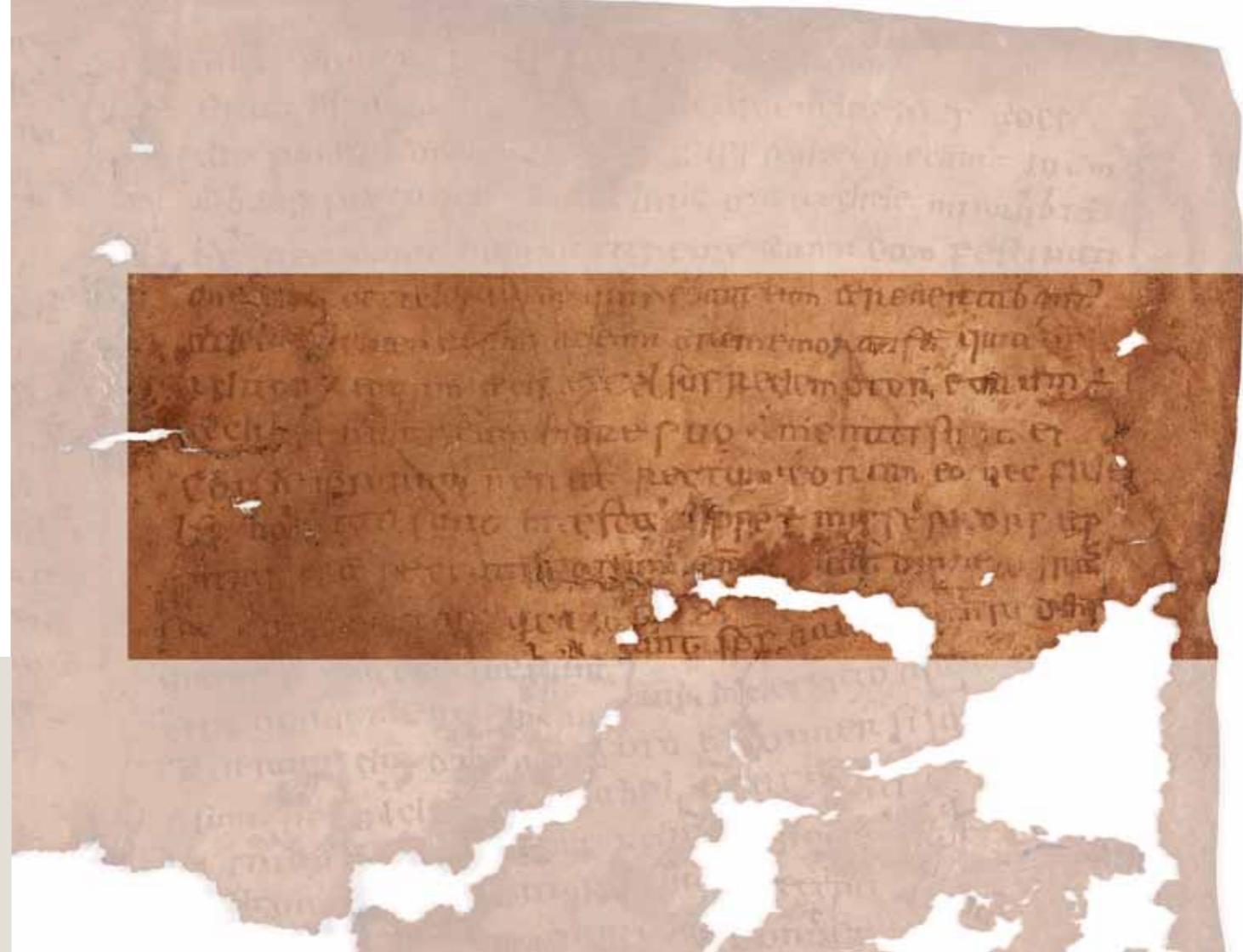
O God, why hast thou cast us off unto the end: why is thy wrath enkindled against the sheep of thy pasture? [2] Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed from the beginning. The sceptre of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed: mount Sion in which thou hast dwelt. [3] Lift up thy hands against their pride unto the end; see what things the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. [4] And they that hate thee have made their boasts, in the midst of thy solemnity. They have set up their ensigns for signs,

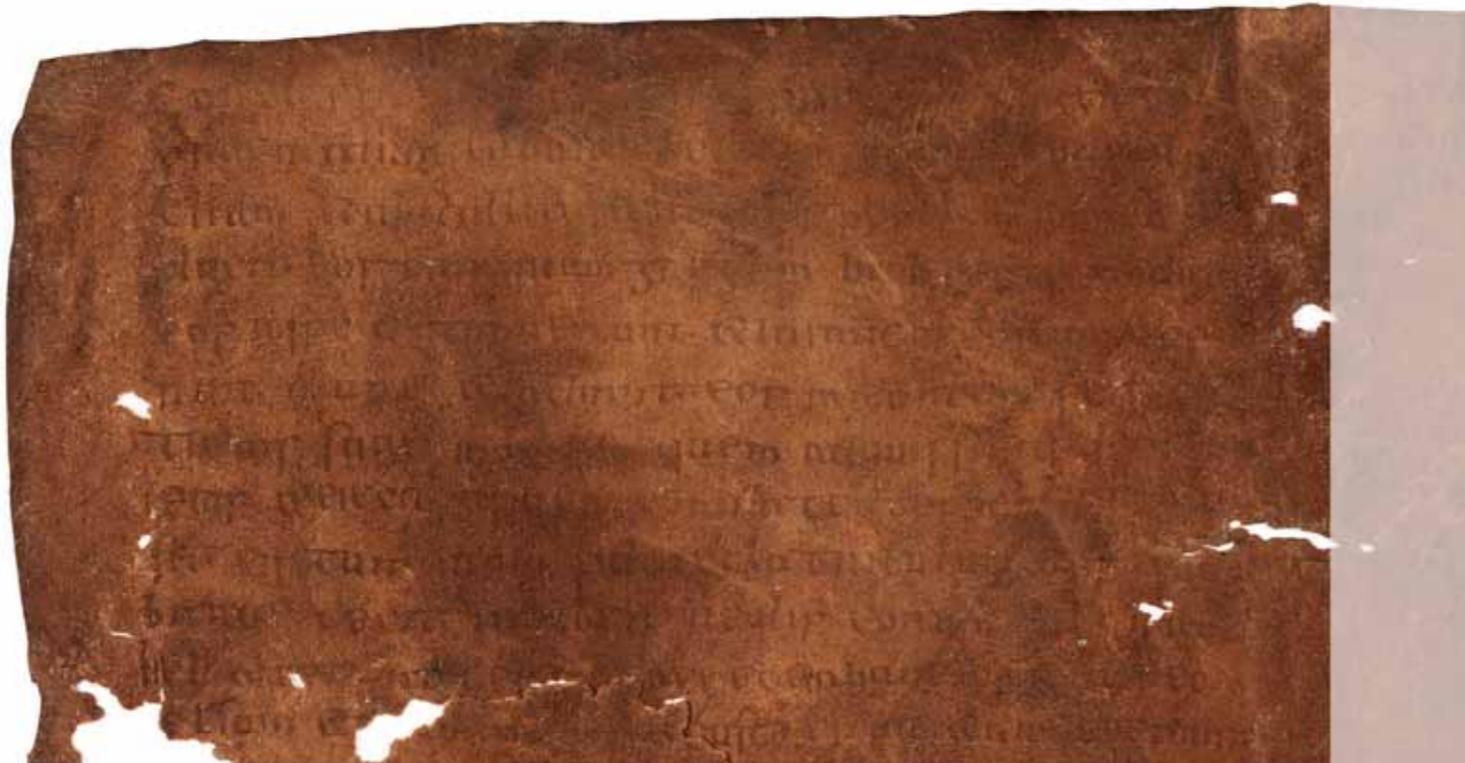
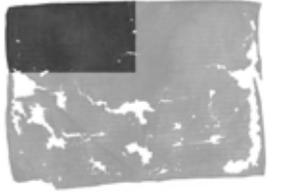


## Psalm 77

- LINE 6 **one** [34] **cum occideret eos quaerebant eum et revertebantur**  
 LINE 7 **et deluculo veniebant ad Deum** [35] **et rememorati sunt quia Deus**  
 LINE 8 **adiutor est eorum et Deus excelsus redemptor eorum est** [36]  
 LINE 9 **et dilexerunt eum in ore suo mentiti sunt ei** [37]  
 LINE 10 **cor autem ipsorum non erat rectum eorum eo nec fid-**  
 LINE 11 **eles habiti sunt in testamento eius**[38] **ipse est misericors et p-**  
 LINE 12 **ropitius fiet peccatis eorum et non disperdit eos et abundabit ut avertat iram suam et non accendet omnem iram suam** [39] **et**  
 LINE 13 **recordatus est quia caro sunt spiritus vadens et non rediens**

...[one] [34] When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned, and came to him early in the morning. [35] And they remembered that God was their helper: and the most high God their redeemer. [36] And they loved him with their mouth: and with their tongue they lied unto him: [37] But their heart was not right with him: nor were they counted faithful in his covenant. [38] But he is merciful, and will forgive their sins: and will not destroy them. And many a time did he turn away his anger: and did not kindle all his wrath. [39] And he remembered that they are flesh: a wind that goeth and returneth not



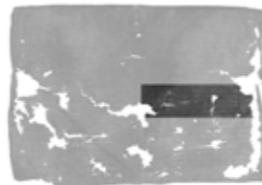


## Psalm 77

LINE 1 **conclusit** [51] **et percussit omne primitivum in Aegypto**  
 LINE 2 **praemitinm laborum eorum in tabernaculis**  
 LINE 3 **Cham** [52] **et abstullit sicut oves populum suum et per-**  
 LINE 4 **duxit eos tamquam gregem in deserto** [53] **et deduxit**  
 LINE 5 **eos in spe et non timuerunt et inimicos eorum ope-**  
 LINE 6 **ruit mare** [54] **et induxit eos in montem sanctifica-**  
 LINE 7 **tionis suae montem quem adquisivit dextera**  
 LINE 8 **eius et eiecit a facie eorum gentes et sorte div-**  
 LINE 9 **isit eis tamquam in funiculo tributionis** [55] **et ha-**  
 LINE 10 **bitare fecit in tabernaculis eorum tribus Isra-**  
 LINE 11 **hel**

...[51] And he killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt: the firstfruits of all their labour in the tabernacles of Cham. [52] And he took away his own people as sheep: and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. [53] And he brought them out in hope, and they feared not: band the sea overwhelmed their enemies. [54] And he brought them into the mountain of his sanctuary: the mountain which his right hand had purchased. And he cast out the Gentiles before them: and by lot divided to them their land by a line of distribution. [55] And he made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tabernacles.

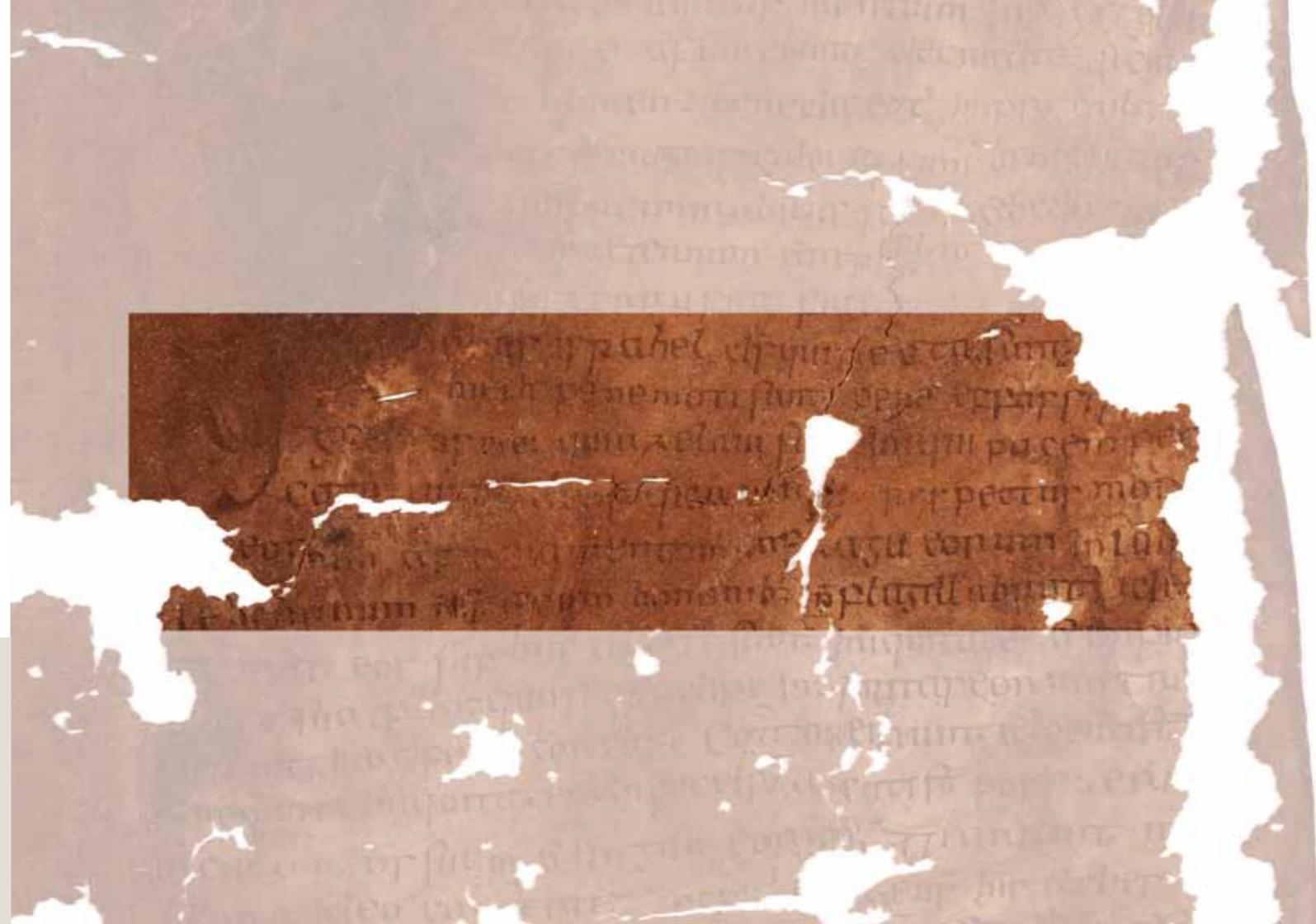
Folio 29 recto



Psalm 72

LINE 16 [1] **Quam bonus Israhel Deus qui recto sunt**  
LINE 17 **corde [2] mei autem paene moti sunt paene effussi sunt**  
LINE 18 **gressus mei [3] quia zelavi super iniqui pacem pec-**  
LINE 19 **catorum videns [4] quia non est respectus morti**  
LINE 20 **eorum et firmamentum in plaga eorum [5] in lab-**  
LINE 21 **ore hominum non sunt et cum hominibus non flagillabuntur**

How good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart! [2] But my feet were almost moved; my steps had well nigh slipped. [3] Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners. [4] For there is no regard to their death, nor is there strength in their stripes. [5] They are not in the labour of men: neither shall they be scourged like other men





## Psalm 39

LINE 1 [7] sacrificium **et oblationem noluisti** aures autem  
 LINE 2 perfecisti mihi holocaustums **et pro peccato nonpostulasti** [8]  
 LINE 3 tunc dixi ecce venio **in capite libri scriptum est de me** [9] ut  
 LINE 4 facerem voluntatem tuam **Deus meus volui et legem tuam**  
 LINE 5 in medio cordis **mei** [10] **adnuntiavi iustitiam in ecclesia**  
 LINE 6 magna ecce **labia mea non prohibebo** Domine tu scisti

[7] Sacrifice and oblation thou didst not desire; but thou hast pierced ears for me. Burnt offering and sin offering thou didst not require: [8] Then said I, Behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of me [9] That I should do thy will: O my God, I have desired it, and thy law in the midst of my heart. [10] I have declared thy justice in a great church, lo, I will not restrain my lips: O Lord, thou knowest it.

Folio 22 recto



Psalm 50

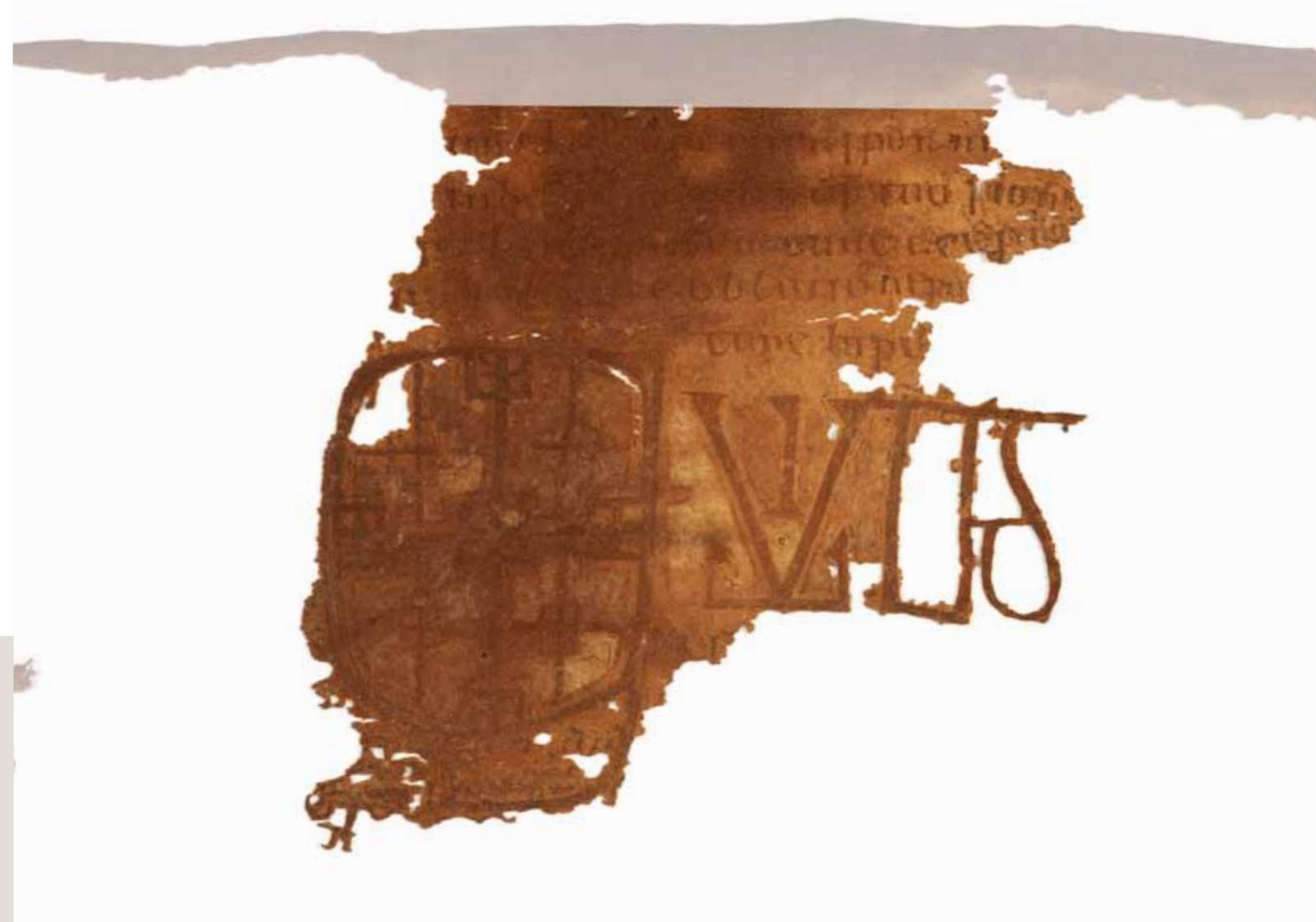
LINE 1 **humiliatum** Deus non spernet [20] benigne fac Domine  
LINE 2 **in bona voluntate tua Sion** et aedificentur  
LINE 3 **muri Hierusalem** [21] **tunc acceptabis**  
LINE 4 **sacrificium iustitiae oblationes** et holocausta  
LINE 5 **tunc inponent** super altare tuum vitulos

Psalm 51

LINE 6 [3] **QUID g**loriatur in malitia qui potens est iniquitate

O God, thou wilt not despise. [20] Deal favourably, O Lord, in thy good will with Sion; that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up.[21]Then shalt thou accept the sacrifice of justice, oblations and whole burnt offerings: then shall they lay calves upon thy altar.

[3] Why dost thou glory in malice, thou that art mighty in iniquity?





Psalm 52

LINE 1 est intellegens aut; **requires Deum** [4] omnes  
LINE 2 declinaverunt **simul inutiles** facti sunt **non est** qui faciat bonum  
LINE 3 non est usque ad **unum** [5] **nonne** scient omnes; **qui** operantur iniquitatem  
LINE 4 **qui devorant plebem meam** ut cibum panis [6] Deum non  
LINE 5 invocaverunt **illic** **repidabunt** timore ubi non fuit timor  
LINE 6 quoniam Deus **dissipavit** ossa eorum qui hominibus placent confusi  
LINE 7 sunt quoniam **Deus sprevit eos** [7] **quis** dabit ex Sion salutare  
LINE 8 **Israhel dum convertit Deus captivitatem plebis** suae  
LINE 9 exultabit **iacob et laetabitur** Israhel Psalm 53 [3] Deus in nomine

that did understand, or did seek God. [4] All have gone aside, they are become unprofitable together, there is none that doth good, no not one. [5] Shall not all the workers of iniquity know, who eat up my people as they eat bread? [6] They have not called upon God: there have they trembled for fear, where there was no fear. For God hath scattered the bones of them that please men: they have been confounded, because God hath despised them. [7] Who will give out of Sion the salvation of Israel? when God shall bring back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad. Psalm 53 [3] O God, by thy name

Folio 17 recto



Psalm 38

LINE 1 [4] **concaluit** cor meum intra me et in  
LINE 2 **meditatione** mea {eyeskip} **notum fac** mihi Domine finem meum et  
LINE 3 **numerus dierum** meorum quis est ut sciam quid  
LINE 4 **desit** mihi  
exardescet ignis Locutus sum in lingua

[4] My heart grew hot within me: and in my meditation {eyeskip, omitted by scribe: *a fire shall flame out.* [5] *I spoke with my tongue:*} O Lord, make me know my end. And what is the number of my days: that I may know what is wanting to me.



