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‘The riddle of the runes: Ogam Lochlannach and Gallogam’

In his book *A Guide to Ogam* (Maynooth 1991), Damian McManus devotes considerable attention to the problem of the origins of the ogam alphabet and its putative connection with the development of early runic forms. In this paper, I would like to consider the nature of the scholastic ogams found on Viking age artefacts and monuments within Ireland, the parallels and contrasts with ogam inscriptions from the Northern Isles and the influence which runology may have had on the evolution of ogam in the high middle ages. The later manuscript traditions include among their various categories of Ogam the two alphabets entitled *Ogam Lochlannach* and *Gallogam* respectively: the purpose of this paper is to try and identify whether these were merely relatively obscure forms of “wertlose Spielerei” (to use Zimmer’s term) or whether they represent more widespread practices in the Atlantic archipelago.