

Wisdom Literature in RIA MS 23 N 10

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The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction,
and concern for instruction is love of her,
and love of her is the keeping of her laws,
and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality,
and immortality brings one near to God;
so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

(Wis. 6:17–20)

1) The form and context of wisdom literature: some preliminary remarks

LAW, VIVIEN (1995) *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century: Decoding Virgilius Maro Grammaticus* (Cambridge: CUP)
MORAN, JOE (2018) *First You Write A Sentence: The Elements of Reading, Writing...and Life* (Viking)

2) The first four 'wisdom texts' in RIA MS 23 N 10

pp. 1–5.21: *Tecosca Cormaic* 'The Instructions of Cormac Mac Airt'
pp. 5.22–6.18: *Briathra Flainn Fína* 'The Sayings of Flann Fína'
pp. 6.19–z; 77: *Senbriathra Fíthail* 'The Ancient Sayings of Fíthail'
pp. 7–10; 98–101: *Trecheng Breth Fíne* 'The Triads of Ireland'

a) *Tecosca Cormaic*

MEYER, KUNO, ed. and trans. (1909) *Tecosca Cormaic. The Instructions of King Cormac Mac Airt*. Todd Lecture Series 15 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy)

§1 (ed. & trans. Meyer 1909, pp. 2–3):

'A húi Chuind, a Chormaic,' ol Carpre, 'cid as dech do ríge?
Ní hansa,' ol Cormac. 'Dech dó

Fosta cen feirg,
Ainmne cen debaid,
Soacallaim can mórdaitid,
Deithide senchasa,
Frithfolad fír,
Géill i nglasaib,
Slógad fri deithbiri,
Fír cen fuilleam [...]
Mess for crannaib,
Íasc i n-inberaib,
Talam torthach [...]

'O grandson of Conn, O Cormac,' said Carbre, 'what is best for a king?'
'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'Best for him
Firmness without anger,
Patience without strife,
Affability without haughtiness,
Taking care of ancient lore,
Giving truth for truth,
Hostages in fetters,
Hosting with reason,
Truth without addition, [...]
Mast upon trees,
Fish in river-mouths,
Earth fruitful [...]

b) *Briathra Flainn Fina* and *Senbriathra Fíthail*

IRELAND, COLIN, ed. (1999) *An Old Irish Wisdom-Text Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria: An Edition of Briathra Flainn Fhina maic Ossu*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 205 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies)

SMITH, ROLAND (1928) 'The *Senbriathra Fíthail* and related texts', *Revue celtique* 45: 1–92

1.1: *Ad-cota sochell saidbres* 'Generosity engenders wealth'

1.10: *Ad-cota serc briathra* 'Love begets words'

1.33: *Ad-cota imresan imned* 'Contention causes anxiety'

6.15: *Ferr suthaine séta[ib]* 'A long life is better than riches'

6.58: *Ferr síd sochocad* 'Peace is better than a successful war'

c) The 'Triads of Ireland'

KELLY, FERGUS (2004) 'Thinking in threes: the triad in early Irish literature', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 125: 1–18

MEYER, KUNO, ed. (1906) *The Triads of Ireland*. Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy)

MURRAY, KEVIN (2018) 'The late medieval Irish-language manuscript tradition in North Roscommon: the case of Royal Irish Academy MS 23 N 10', in *Roscommon History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, edited by Richie Farrell, Kieran O'Connor and Matthew Potter (Dublin: Geography Publications), pp. 191–209

§165: *Tri nóill doná dlegar fríthnóill: nóill mná fri búaitni, nóill fir mairb, nóill díthir.*

'Three oaths that do not require fulfilment: the oath of a woman in birth-pangs, the oath of a dead man, the oath of a landless man.'

§177: *Tri búada insci: fosta, gáis, gairde.*

Three glories of speech: steadiness, wisdom, brevity.

§204: *Trí beochracha aroslicet imráitii: mesca, tairisiu, serc.*

Three keys that unlock thoughts: drunkenness, trustfulness, love.

3) *Audacht Morainn* 'The Testament of Morann' and the *speculum principum* genre

- AHLQVIST, ANDERS (1984) 'Le Testament de Morann', *Études celtiques* 21: 151–70
- AHLQVIST, ANDERS (1987) 'I. Le Testament de Morann: addenda et corrigenda', *Études celtiques* 24: 325
- AHLQVIST, ANDERS (1990) 'Two notes on *Audacht Morainn*', *Celtica* 21: 1–2
- AHLQVIST, ANDERS (1990) "Paragraph 16 of *Audacht Morainn*: linguistic theory and philological evidence", in *Historical Linguistics and Philology*, edited by Jacek Fisiak, Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs 46 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter), pp. 1–10
- FOMIN, MAXIM (2013) *Instructions for Kings: Secular and Clerical Images of Kingship in Early Ireland and Ancient India* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag)
- KELLY, FERGUS, ed. (1976) *Audacht Morainn* (Dublin: DIAS)
- MCQUAID, ANDREW (2017) *Advice for Kings: an Investigation into a Subdivision of Early Irish Wisdom Literature*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow
- SMITH, ROLAND M. (1982) 'The *speculum principum* in early Irish literature', *Speculum* 2: 411–45

§§12–17 (ed. & trans. Kelly 1976: 6–7):

Apair fris, is tre fír flathemon mortlithi (mórslóg na) márlóchet di doínib dingbatar.
Is tre fír flathemon conid(?) márbhátha mármoini midethar.
Is tre fír flathemon fo- síd sámi sube soad sádili –sláini.
Is tre fír flathemon ath- (mór)cathu fri crícha comúamat –cuirethar.
Is tre fír flathemon ceib comarbe con a chlí ina chainorbu clanda.
Is tre fír flathemon ad- manna mármeso márfedo –mlasetar.

Tell him, it is through the justice of the ruler that plagues [and] great lightnings are kept from the people.

It is through the justice of the ruler that he judges great tribes [and] great riches.

It is through the justice of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquillity, joy, ease, [and] comfort.

It is through the justice of the ruler that he dispatches (great) battalions to the borders of hostile neighbours.

It is through the justice of the ruler that every heir plants his house-post in his fair inheritance.

It is through the justice of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted.

4) *De XII abusivis saeculi* ('On the twelve abuses of the world')

- BREEN, AIDAN (1987) 'Pseudo-Cyprian *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* and the Bible', in *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission. Ireland and Christendom: the Bible and the missions*, edited by Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), pp. 230–245
- BREEN, AIDAN (2002) '*De XII abusivis*: text and transmission', in *Irland und Europa in the early Middle Ages: texts and transmissions / Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Texte und Überlieferung*, edited by Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Dublin: Four Courts Press), pp. 78–94
- HELLMANN, SIEGMUND (1909) *Pseudo-Cyprianus De XII Abusivis Saeculi*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 34.1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche)
- MEENS, ROB (1998) 'Politics, mirrors of princes and the Bible: sins, kings and the well-being of the realm', *Early Medieval Europe* 7.3: 345–57
- MILES, BRENT (2014) 'The *Sermo ad reges* from the Leabhar Breac and Hiberno-Latin tradition' in *Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland*, ed. by Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden (Dublin: DIAS), pp. 141–58

- I) *Sapiens sine operibus bonis* 'Wise man without good works'
- II) *Senex sine religione* 'Old man without religion'
- III) *Adolescens sine oboedientia* 'Youth without obedience'
- IV) *De divite sine elemosyna* 'Rich man without almsgiving'
- V) *Femina sine pudicitia* 'Woman without modesty'
- VI) *Dominus sine virtute* 'Abbot-nobleman without virtue'
- VII) *Christianus contentiosus* 'Contentious Christian'
- VIII) *Pauper superbus* 'Poor man who is proud'
- IX) *Rex iniquus* 'Unjust king'
- X) *Episcopus negligens* 'Negligent bishop'
- XI) *Plebs sine disciplina* 'Sect without (unitary) discipline'
- XII) *Populus sine lege* 'People without the law'

5) Early Irish wisdom literature and the Bible

- CRENSHAW, JAMES L. (2010) *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox)
- MCCONE, KIM (2000) *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*, Maynooth Monographs 3 (Maynooth: Department of Old Irish)
- Ó CORRÁIN, DONNCHADH (1987) 'Irish vernacular law and the Old Testament', in *Irland und die Christenheit/Ireland and Christendom*, edited by P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta), pp. 284–307
- YOCUM, CHRISTOPHER GUY (2012) 'Wisdom literature in early Ireland', *Studia Celtica* 46: 39–58

Senchas na Relec ('History of the Cemeteries'), ed. R. I. Best and O. Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin, 1929), pp. 127–32; trans. J. O'Donovan (1845) in G. Petrie, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland anterior to the Anglo-Norman Invasion; Comprising an Essay on the Origin and Uses of Round Towers of Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges & Smith), pp. 97–101

Mórrí mórbrethach ro gab os Herind .i. Cormac mac Airt meic Cuind Cetchathaig. Bá maith iarom baí ind Erin ria lind fó déig ro scailed breth rechtgae fo Éirind acciseom [...] ar baí cretim in óenDé oc Cormac do réir rechta. ar ro ráidseom na aidérad clocha ná crunnu acht no adérad intí dosroni ⁊ rogo chomsid ar cul na uli dúla .i. in t-óenDia nertchomsid ro crutaig na dúli is dó no chreitsjed. Conid eseam in tres ro creti i nÉirind ria tíachtain Patraic [...] Morand mac Corpri Cind Chaitt indarna fer. [...] ⁊ ane is doig co ndeochatár drem aile for a slicht imón cretim sin.

A great king of great judgements assumed the sovereignty of Erin, i.e. Cormac, son of Art, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles. Erin was prosperous in his time, because just judgements were distributed throughout it by him [...] for Cormac had faith in the one true God, according to the law: for he said that he would not adore stones, or trees, but he would adore him who had made them, and had power over all the elements; in him he would believe. And he was the third person who had believed, in Erin, before the arrival of St. Patrick. [...] Morann, the son of Cairbre Cinncait, (who was surnamed Mac Main) was the second person [...] and it is probable that others followed on their track in this belief.

6) 'Family wisdom' in *Briathra Flainn Fina* (ed. & trans. Ireland 1999):

6.48: *Ferr dán déinmichi* 'A skill is better than idleness'

4.9: *Descad étrebairé rolabrae* 'excess talk is a characteristic of indiscretion'

4.25: *Descad romescae roól* 'much drinking is an inducement to much drunkenness'

7) Attitudes to women

a) *Proverbs* 31.10–23 (on the 'wife of noble character'):

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.

She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.

She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.

She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.

[...]

When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

b) *Triads of Ireland* (ed. Meyer 1906: 8–9):

§73: *Tri búada trebairi: tarvad do degmnaí, fognam do degflaith, cōemchlód fri dagferann* 'Three excellent things for a householder: proposing to a good woman, serving a good chief, exchanging for good land.'

c) *Briathra Flainn Fina* (ed. Ireland 1999: 78–9):

§5.20: *Tosach sothcaid dagben* 'A good wife is the beginning of good fortune'

§5.21: *Tosach dothcaid drochben* 'A bad wife is the beginning of misfortune'

8) 'Things that are hateful to God'

MARSTRANDER, CARL, ed. and trans. (1911) 'Bídh crínna', *Ériu* 5: 126–43

RIA MS 23 N 10, p. 27:

Sapiencie sine operibus. Duine burnaidhe gan oiprigthe maithe. Arsaighecht gan crapha ⁊ c[roidh]e gan umlacht. Saibhres gan deirc. Tiagarna gan firinne. Prelaid mainnechtuach. Ben gan naire. Rígh gan comairledh. Bocht gan creidim. Tuath gan certachad. Popul gan lex. Moghadh gan eglad. Isiat sin na neithi is miscais la dia.

Wisdom without works. A prayerful man without good works. Old age without piety. A heart without humility. Riches without charity. A lord without truth. A negligent prelate. A shameless woman. A king without counsel. A poor man without belief. A country without control. A people without law. A slave without fear. These are the things which are hateful to God.

9) *Apgitir chrábaid* 'The Alphabet of Piety'

CAREY, JOHN (2000) *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* (Dublin: Four Courts Press)
HULL, VERNAM, ed. & trans. (1968) '*Apgitir chrábaid: the alphabet of piety*', *Celtica* 8: 44–89

a) §10 (ed. Hull 1986: 62; trans. Carey 2000: 236):

Cid as imgabthai do duine etail? Ní anse. Írugud menic, mórtu cen dán cen folad, díscra fri airchinnech, maille fri cloc, coicne fri antestai, imbeth forluamno, fáitbe mbráithre, bríathra inglana, acairbe tathisc, toisam fri secnapaid, sithugud fri cúrsachad, comarb do manchaib, mence chestaigtho.

What should be avoided by a holy person?

Not hard to answer:

recurrent anger,
vanity without skill, without property,
boldness toward a superior,
slowness in answer to the bell,
conspiring with false witnesses,
too much travel,
mocking the brethren,
impure words,
sharpness in answering,
holding out against the prior,
resisting reproof,
quarreling with the monks,
asking questions often.

b) §18 (ed. Hull 1986: 68; trans. Carey 2000: 240):

Corp con-oī anmnuin; anim con-oī menmuin; menmæ con-oí cride; cride con-oí iris; iris con-oí Día;
Día con-oí duine.

The body shelters the soul.
The soul shelters the mind.
The mind shelters the heart.
The heart shelters faith.
Faith shelters God.
God shelters man.

10) Monastic rules

a) The Rule of Ailbe of Emly (RIA MS 23 N 10, pp. 79–82)

O'NEILL, JOSEPH (1907) 'The rule of Ailbe of Emly', *Ériu* 3: 92–115, at pp. 96–7:

*Apair dam fri mac Saraín,
is tromm int aire gebes,
bad léir, bad féig a chubus,
cen góí n-íabair, cen feles.*

*Bad toé díscéoil a monar,
íathbad mbriathar nád labair,
dénad adlaic cech lobair
la cobair cech fir galair.*

*Bad fossud cen chuit merbae,
bad indéin fri cach torbae,
dénad adlaic cech duini,
frecrad fuli cech anmae.*

*Cen díummus, cen chol clóine,
fáitbiud cen gen, cen gári,
cen indechad for duine,
cen íaill n-íabair, cen áni.*

Say for me to the son of Saran, heavy is the burden he takes; let his conscience be diligent, be keen, without proud lying, without vanity.

Silent and without speech be his work, fewness of words which is not talkative; let him perform the need of every sick person, together with helping of every sick.

Let him be steady without a particle of weakness; let him be an anvil for every profitable thing; let him perform the desire of every person; let him answer the sins of every soul.

Without pride, without sin of perversity, smiling without a grimace, without laughter, without vindictiveness towards anyone, without proud arrogance, without pomp.

b) The rule of Cormac mac Cuileannáin (RIA MS 23 N 10, pp. 78–9)

STRACHAN, JOHN (1905) 'Cormac's rule', *Ériu* 2: 62–8, at p. 63:

*Dán buidech briathar dimbrass,
oc toil ind rúirech rognas.
Ní bu báas, ní bu amless,
umlae dond áes bud chomdas.*

A grateful gift is speech without boasting,
to be ever at the will of the King.

Humility to fitting folk
would be no folly, no disadvantage.

c) **The Rule of Mo Chuta/Fothaid na Canóine (RIA MS 23 N 10, pp. 82–6)**

MEYER, KUNO (1907), 'A medley of Irish texts X: Regula Mucuta Raithni', *Archiv für celtische Philologie* 3, edited by Whitley Stokes and Kuno Meyer (Halle: Max Niemeyer), pp. 312–20

11) Wisdom and didactic narrative in the Book of Ballycummin

BEST, R. I., ed. and trans. (1916) 'The battle of Airtech', *Ériu*, 8: 170–90

CAREY, JOHN (1995) 'On the interrelationships of some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* texts', *Ériu* 46: 71–92

FOMIN, MAXIM (2009) *Briathartheosc Con Culainn* in the context of early Irish wisdom-literature', in *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Maynooth 24–27 June 2005*, edited by Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (Maynooth: An Sagart), pp. 140–72

MCCONE, KIM, ed. and trans. (2000) *Echtrae Chonnlai and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland*, *Maynooth Medieval Irish Texts 1* (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland)

O'CONNOR, RALPH (2013) *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel: Kingship and Narrative Artistry in a Mediaeval Irish Saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)