

The Book of Ballymote and the Grammar of Irish

Deborah Hayden
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies
deborah@celt.dias.ie

The Book of Ballymote/Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta
Royal Irish Academy
5–6 February 2015

1) The *cethri ranna fesa na filidechta* four divisions of knowledge of the poetic profession¹

a) *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (ed. Macalister 1939: II, 118–19); cf. Van Hamel 1915: 133–4:

*Cethri randa raiter de
for suidi na Gaedilge:
Canoin, Gramadach, is Stair,
ocus Rim co n-a ro-bail.*

*Is i in Chanoin, ni cheleb,
Senchus Mor, Bretha Nemed –
Nochos derna duine do –
Ai Chermna 7 Ai Chano.*

*Is i in Gramadach na nglond
na tri chaicait craeb-ogom,
na remenna, reim nena,
is na duili deig-feda.*

*Is i in Stair, fa stiuir fessa,
na fessa, na foirfessa,
tana, togla, tricha scel,
ocus tri fichit foiscel.*

*Is i in Rim nocho rád om,
Bretha Cai can imarchor:
is esbach a sechna so,
cnesta na cethri rando.*

It is said that there are four divisions
on the scholarship of Gaelic:
Canons, Grammar, and History,
and Computus with its great prosperity.

This is the Canon, I shall not conceal it,
the *Senchus Mór*, the *Bretha Nemed* –
no (mere) man made it for him –
the *Aí Chermna* and the *Aí Chano*.

This is Grammar of the achievements,
the thrice fifty branching Oghams,
the declensions, the course of the letter (?),
and the *Duili deig-feda*.

This is History, under the guidance of knowledge,
the sojourns, the sieges,
cattle-raids, destructions, thirty tales,
and sixty subordinate tales.

This is Computus, it is no rude statement,
The *Bretha Cái* without error;
it is idle to shun these matters,
seemly are the four parts.

b) Commentary on *Uraicecht Becc* (ed. Breatnach 1987: 159):

IMus for-osnad .i. fursannadh imad feasa no foghlum on oide don dalta .i. **ceithre ranna feasa na filidhechta** , primaiceacht teora bliadan i ngach rann dib-sidhe fo duírgres a fhoghloma .i. **canoin** , **gramadach** , **sdair** , **rim** . IS i in canoin .i. Seancas Mar , Bretha Neimidh , Aí Cana , Aí Cearmna. IS i in gramadach .i. na tri .i. craeboghum , na reimeanna , na duili. IS i in sdair .i. na tana , na toghla , na tricha primscel , na tri fichit foscel. IS i in rim .i. Bretha Cái Cainbreathaig , Bretha Cath [...]

c) *Uraicecht Becc* (ed. Binchy 1978: 1596.32–5):

No ollam i. oll-uaim i. uaim bis fo aill: amail as dithoglaig i-side, is amlaid is ditoglaig int ollam im cетra rennaib fesa na filidechta do beth aigi, 7 primaicecht teora mbliadna i ngach rann dib-side fo duirges.

Or *ollam*, i.e. *oll-uaim*, a great cave, i.e. a cave which is under a cliff: just as that is impregnable, so is the *ollam* impregnable in having the four parts of knowledge of poetry, and three years of continuous study in each of those parts.

d) *Augustine, De genesi ad litteram* 1.1 (ed. PL 34; trans. Taylor 1982: 19):

Omnis divina Scriptura bipartita est, secundum id quod Dominus significat, dicens, scribam eruditum in regno Dei similem esse patrifamilias proferenti de thesauro suo nova et vetera, quae duo etiam Testamenta dicuntur. In Libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet quae ibi aeterna intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura praenuntientur, quae agenda praecipientur vel admoneantur.

Sacred Scripture, taken as a whole, is divided into two parts, as our Lord intimates when he says: A scribe instructed in the kingdom of God is like a householder who brings forth from his storeroom things new and old. These new and old things are also called testaments. In all the sacred books, we should consider the eternal truths that are taught, the facts that are narrated, the future events that are predicted, and the precepts or counsels that are given.

e) *De ratione computandi* §2 (ed. Walsh & Ó Cróinín 1988: 117; trans. Contreni 2014: 98):

Et hoc sciendum, quod, Agustino testante, quattuor necessaria sunt in ecclesia dei: Canon diuinus, in quo narratur et praedicatur uita futura; historia, in qua narrantur gesta rerum; numerus, in quo facta futurorum et solempnitates diuine enumerantur; grammatica, in qua scientia uerborum intelligitur.

Four things are needed for the church of God, as Augustine attests: divine scriptures, by which the future life is described and foretold; history, by which deeds are told; number, by which future events and divine rituals are calculated; and grammar, by which the wisdom of words is understood.

2) *Auraicept na nÉces* (ed. and trans. Calder 1917: 4–7; cf. Meyer 1913: 470):

Cid ara n-eper comad borb fiadh Dia inti legas in Gaedhelg? Ni di ata briathar and etir acht do uilideataid na feallsamnachta eter gramadaigh, dileachtaigh, rim, amal atbert in fili:

Foglaim, feallsamnacht is fas,
Legeand, gramadach, is gluas,
Litirdheacht leir ocus rim
Is beg a mbrig for nimh thuas.

Wherefore is it said that he who reads Gaelic is rude before God? Not to it is reference made here at all, but to the whole of philosophy, both grammar, dialectic, and metrics; as the poet said:

Learning and philosophy are vain,
Reading, grammar and gloss,
Diligent literature and metrics,
Small their avail in heaven above.

3) Metrics and grammar in the Book of Ballymote

- 1) 288a1-288bz (157va1-157vbz): MV III (FRAGMENT)
Thurneysen 1891: 72–81 (§§29–59)
- 2) 289a1-296b1 (158ra1-161vb1): MV III
Thurneysen 1891: 67–105; McLaughlin 2005
- 3) 296b2-14 (161vb2-14): Verses on the seven officers of the church, the seven grades of Latin scholars, the colour of clothing appropriate to various individuals, and the seven grades of poets
Meyer 1905: 499, §1
- 4) 296b15-299a5 (161vb15-163ra5): MV I
Thurneysen 1891: 5–22; Ó hAodha 1991
- 5) 299a6-299b30 (163ra6-163rb30): Tract on the types of satire, beg. *Cis lir fodla aire.*
McLaughlin 2008: 41–84
- 6) 299b31–301b23 (163rb31-164rb23): IN LEBOR OLLAMAN
McLaughlin 2009
- 7) 301b24-305b3 (164rb24-166rb3): MV II
Thurneysen 1891: 29–66
- 8) 305b3–9 (166rb3–9): A corrupt example of the metres *emain imrind* and *sainemain*.
- 9) 305b10–32 (166rb10–32): DE DUILIB FEDA
Calder 1917: 270–1
- 10) 305b33–47 (166rb33–47): A passage on rhyme and on vowels and diphthongs
Thurneysen 1933: 196–7
- 11) 305b48–306a13 (166rb48–166va13): A passage on lawful procedure in the poet's circuit.
Breatnach 2004: 30–2
- 12) 306a14–27 (166va14–27): A passage on the rewards for various metres of the *filid*
Thurneysen 1891: 113n1
- 13) 306a38–42 (166va38–42): A passage on the rewards for various metres of the *baird*
Thurneysen 1891: 109
- 14) 306a43-306b10 (166va43-166vb10): 'Appendix' to MV II (*Retlu fililideachta inso*)
Thurneysen 1891: 66
- 15) 306b11-308a40 (166vb11-167va40): MV I (abbreviated version)
Thurneysen 1891: 24–9; Ó hAodha 1991
- 16) 308a41-308b11 (167va41-167vb11): A fragment on the *trefocal* with metrical examples
- 17) 308b12–43 (167vb12–43): A passage (in two columns) containing a list of famous authors
Stokes 1901
- 18) 308b44-314 (167vb44-170v): THE BOOK OF OGHAMS
Calder 1917: 272–313; McManus 1986 & 1988
- 19) 314a–329a15 (170va–178ra15): AURAICEPT NA NÉCES
Calder 1917: 2–126
 - 315a (171ra): BOOK OF CENN FAELAD (Calder 1917: 6–54)
 - 321b1 (174rb1): BOOK OF FERCHERTNE (Calder 1917: 54–78)
 - 323bx (175rbx): BOOK OF AMAIRGEN (Calder 1917: 78–83)
 - 324b11 (175vb11): BOOK OF FÉNIUS, IAR MAC NEMA AND GAEL SON OF ETHER (Calder 1917: 82–126)
- 20) 329a16–330a17 (178ra16–178va17): Tract on declension I (*Coic filltigthi ficheat i reim*)
Calder 1917: 126–37
- 21) 330a18–331a24 (178va18–179ra24): Tract on declension II (*Do bhunadhaibh na remend ann seo sis*)
Calder 1917: 136–45
- 22) 331a25–331b3 (179ra25–179rb3): Tract on the two types of *imchomarc* 'questioning'
Calder 1917: 144–9
- 23) 331b4–34 (179rb4–34): TREFOCAL. (prose list of faults and correctives)
Calder 1917: 148–51
- 24) 331b35-332b31 (179rb35–179vb31): TREFOCAL (poem). *Trefocal tacrait filid.*
Calder 1917: 150–65
- 25) 332b32–49 (179vb32–179vb49): *Dúnta for nduan decid libh* (9 qq). On *dúnad* 'closure'.
Calder 1917: 164–7
- 26) 332b50–333a17 (179vb50–180ra17): *Da cuincead neach a ndliged* (9 qq). On retinues.
Calder 1917: 166–9
- 27) 335 (181ra): URAICECHT BECC. Status-text on the grades of various individuals.

4) Stylistic devices in the tracts on declension (ed. and trans. Calder 1917: 136–9):

Fer a ainmnid uathaid (*fer* its nominative singular)
Feeर a mhallrughudh (*feer* its slowing)
Ser a chendfhochrus tuis (*ser* its change of initial)

5) The tract on *imchomarc* ‘questioning’

a) The Book of Ballymote (ed. and trans. Calder 1917: 144–5):

Incipit do ernailibh in imchomairc in so sis.
Atat da aithfeghad for imchomarc .i. imchomarc iar n-inni thoirni , imchomarc iar n-airbhirt nan-airbirenn bith.

Incipit to the divisions of analysis is this below.
There are two views to analysis, that is, analysis according to the meaning it denotes and analysis according to the method which it uses.

b) TCD MS 1337 (H 3. 18), p. 420 (heading):

Earnail imcomarc and sō .i. *ocht* randa na hindsci arna n-aithfēgad tré aicentaib na n-udar, òir nī fagar fregra na fíarfaigi *acht* ó cheachtar dīb sin do ní dá ticc tar beol duine.

Categorisation of questions (*imchomare*) here, i.e. the eight parts of speech after they have been considered through the minds of authorities, for an answer to any inquiry (*fíarfaige*) which comes across the mouth of a person is only found from one of those.

6) The curriculum of the *fili* in MV II (ed. Thurneysen 1891: 32–51):

§2: Is hi tra cetus foglaím na cetbliadna .i. coeca ogum im certoghum , airacept na neicsiné cona broluch , cona réimendaib [...]

This then is the learning of the first year, i.e. fifty Oghams including *Certoghum* and *Auraicept na nÉces* with its prologue and its declensions [...]

§18: Is hi dā fogluim na cethramad bliadna .i. l. drecht , bretha nemidh [...]

This then is the learning of the fourth year, i.e. fifty *drécht* and the *Bretha Nemed* [...]

§91: Is hí dā foglaim na hochtmaide bliadna .i. fiscomarca* filed .i. duili berla , clethchor choem , reicne roscadach [...]

*var. fis ímchomarc [*Laud 610*]

This then is the learning of the eighth year, i.e. *fiscomarca filed* ('knowledge-questions of the poets?'), i.e. the elements of speech and *clethchor choem* and *reicne roscadach* [...]

§92: duili bélraí, sicut est: duil dromma cett.

The elements of speech, as is: *Dúil Dromma Cetta* (name of a glossary).

7) *Cóic Conara Fugill* (H), ed. Thurneysen 1926: 30:

§15: [...] No coir n-achomairc [...] uair tosach eolais imcomarc do gres, amal is-beir i mbrethaib etge: fescomharc Cathair.

[...] Or *coir n-achomairc* [...] for the beginning of knowledge is always *imchomarc* ‘questioning, analysis’, as it says in *Bretha Éitgid: fescomharc Cathair*.

8) An Address to a Student of Law (ed. and trans. Ní Dhonnchadha 1989: 165 & 169):

Féagh an deasrodharc ar dtús,
is déan gach feaschomharc fós
a mhacaoimh bhreathghlainn na mbreath,
leathfaidh tar gach leath do nós.

Examine the easy procedure firstly and make every knowledge-invocation in addition; clear-judging youth of the judgements, your renown will spread throughout every region.

References

- AHLQVIST, ANDERS, ed. & trans. (1983) *The Early Irish Linguist: An Edition of the Canonical Part of the Auraicept na n-Éces: with Introduction, Commentary and Indices*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 73 (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica)
- BINCHY, D. A., ed. (1978) *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 6 vols (Dublin: DIAS)
- BREATNACH, LIAM, ed. and trans. (1987) *Uraicecht na Ríar. The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, Early Irish Law Series 2 (Dublin: DIAS)
- BREATNACH, LIAM (2004) ‘On satire and the poet’s circuit’, in *Unity and Diversity. Studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic Language, Literature and History*, ed. Cathal G. Ó Háinle and Donald E. Meek, Léann na Tríonóide 1 (Dublin: The School of Irish, Trinity College), pp. 25–35
- BREATNACH, L. (2005) *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, Early Irish Law Series 5 (Dublin: DIAS)
- CALDER, GEORGE, ed. and trans. (1917) *Auraicept na nÉces. The Scholars’ Primer* (Edinburgh: John Grant)
- CAREY, JOHN (1997) ‘The three things required of a poet’, *Ériu* 48: 41–58
- CONTRENI, JOHN (2014) ‘Learning for God: education in the Carolingian Age’, *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 24: 89–129
- HAMEL, A. G. VAN (1915) ‘On Lebor Gabála’, *ZCP* 10: 97–197
- HOFMAN, RIJCKLOF (2013) ‘Latin grammars and the structure of the vernacular Old Irish *Auraicept na nÉces*’, in *Spoken and Written Language: Relations between Latin and the Vernacular Languages in the Earler Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary Garrison, Árpád B. Orbán and Marco Mostert, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 24 (Turnhout: Brepols), pp. 185–98
- MAC AIRT, SEAN (1958) ‘Filidecht and Coimgne’, *Ériu* 18: 139–52
- MACNEILL, EOIN (1923) ‘Ancient Irish law. The law of status or franchise’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 36C: 265–316
- MCLAUGHLIN, ROISIN (2005) ‘Metres in *Mittelirische Verslehren III*’, *Ériu* 55: 119–36
- MCLAUGHLIN, ROISIN (2008) *Early Irish Satire* (Dublin: DIAS)
- MCLAUGHLIN, ROISIN (2009) ‘Fénius Farsaid and the alphabets’, *Ériu* 59: 1–24
- MCMANUS, DAMIAN (1986) ‘Ogam: archaizing, orthography and the authenticity of the manuscript key to the alphabet’, *Ériu* 37: 1–31
- MCMANUS, DAMIAN (1988) ‘Irish letter-names and their kennings’, *Ériu* 39: 127–68
- MCMANUS, DAMIAN (1991) *A Guide to Ogam*, Maynooth Monographs 4 (Maynooth: An Sagart)
- MEYER, KUNO (1905) ‘Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften: Siebenteilung aller geistlichen und weltlichen Rangstufen’, *ZCP* 5: 498–9
- MEYER, KUNO (1913) ‘Ein Gedicht aus Additional 30, 512’, *ZCP* 9: 470

- NÍ DHONNCHADHA, MÁIRÍN (1989) ‘An address to a student of law’, in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, ed. by Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breathnach and Kim McCone, Maynooth Monographs 2 (Maynooth: An Sagart)
- Ó HAODHA, DONNCHA (1991) ‘The first Middle Irish metrical tract’, in *Metrik und Medienwechsel = Metrics and the Media*, ed. Hildegard L. C. Tristram, ScriptOralia 35 (Tübingen: Narr), 207–44
- Ó HAODHA, DONNCHA (1994) ‘An bhairdne i dtús a ré’, *Léachtáí Cholm Cille* 24: 9–20
- Ó CONCHEANAINN, TOMÁS (1981) ‘The Book of Ballymote’, *Celtica* 14: 15–25
- POPPE, E. (1995–7) Natural and artificial gender in *Auraicept na n-Éces*. *Studia Hibernica* 29: 195–203
- POPPE, ERICH (1996) ‘Die mittelalterliche irische Abhandlung *Auraicept na n-Éces* und ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Standort’, in *Theorie und Rekonstruktion. Trierer Studien zur Geschichte der Linguistik*, ed. K. D. Dutz and H.-J. Niederehe (Münster: Nodus), 55–74
- POPPE, ERICH (1999a) ‘Latinate Terminology in *Auraicept na n-Éces*’, in *History of Linguistics 1996, Volume 1: Traditions in Linguistics Worldwide*, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences 94, ed. D. Cram et al. (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins), pp. 191–201
- POPPE, ERICH (1999b) ‘*Grammatica, grammatic*, Augustine, and the *Táin*’, in *Ildánach, ildírech: a Festschrift for Próinsias Mac Cana*, ed. by John Carey, J. T. Koch, and Pierre-Yves Lambert, CSP 4 (Andover, MA: Celtic Studies Publications), pp. 203–10
- POPPE, ERICH (2002) ‘The Latin quotations in *Auraicept na n-Éces*: microtexts and their transmission’, in *Ireland and Europe in the Early Middle Ages. Texts and Transmission*, ed. Próinséas Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Dublin: Four Courts Press), pp. 296–312
- STOKES, WHITLEY (1901) ‘A list of ancient Irish authors’, *ZCP* 3: 15–16
- TAYLOR, J. H., trans. (1982) *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 2 vols (New York: Newman Press)
- THURNEYSEN, RUDOLF, ed. (1891) ‘Mittelirische Verslehren’, in *Irische Texte III.1*, ed. Whitley Stokes and Ernst Windisch (Leipzig: S. Hirzel), 1–182
- THURNEYSEN, RUDOLF (1928a) ‘Zu Verslehre II’, *ZCP* 17: 263–76
- THURNEYSEN, RUDOLF (1928b) ‘*Auraicept na n-Éces*’, *ZCP* 17: 277–303
- THURNEYSEN, RUDOLF (1933) ‘Colmān mac Lēnēni and Senchān Torpēist’, *ZCP* 19: 193–209
- WALSH, MAURA & DÁIBHÍ Ó CRÓINÍN, eds (1988) *Cummian’s Letter De controversia Paschali, together with a Related Irish Computistical Tract, De ratione computandi*, Studies and Texts 86 (Turnhout: Brepols)