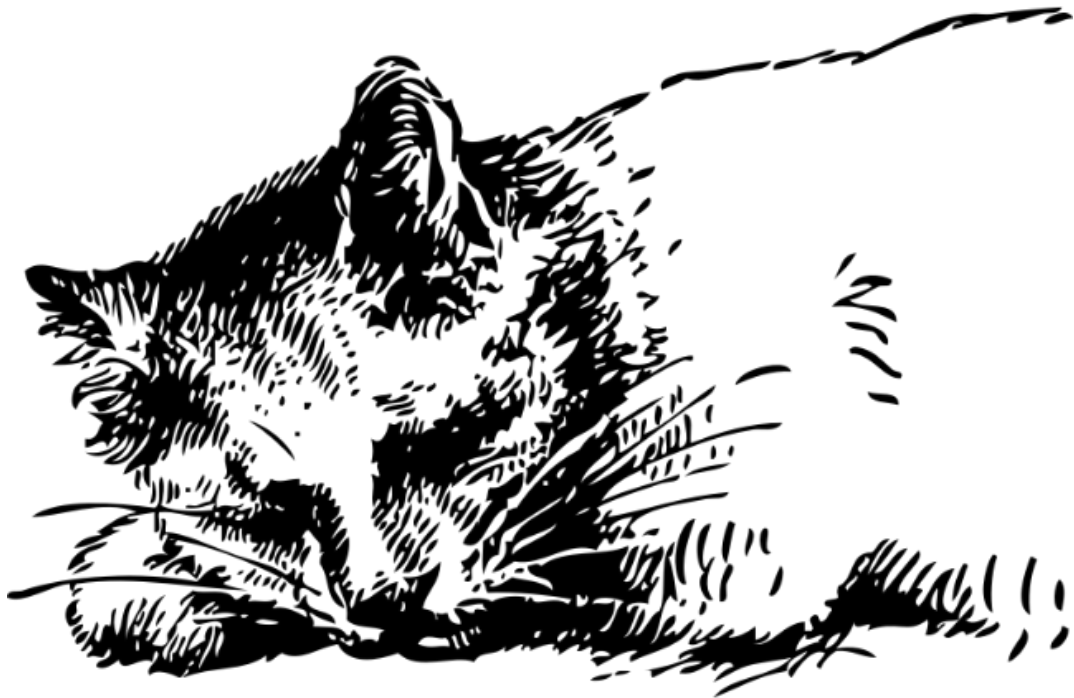


Mesáin, Mouse Hunters, and Martens:
a study of pet keeping in medieval Ireland based on
Old and Middle Irish written sources



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Abstract – This Bachelor’s thesis provides a broad overview of the practice of pet keeping in medieval Ireland, and aims to answer the following three questions: which animals were kept as pets, who kept them, and for what reason? This is done by first compiling a list of relevant *eDIL* entries and citations, and subsequently analysing the terms used, both in isolation and in context, to refer to pet animals. The analysis shows that there was no Old or Middle Irish equivalent for the English term ‘pet’, but that there existed three words to refer to companion animals (*treitell*, *eisrecht*, and *petta*), all of which are used in slightly different contexts. The citations show that the Irish kept cats and dogs as many do today, though little can be said about the exact breed or appearance of these animals. Furthermore, a variety of native mammal and bird species were also kept as companion animals, most notably the pine marten (*togán/togmall*). It seems that pet keeping was mainly reserved for men and women of rank, but many landowners also kept native animal species as pets. Young dogs and cats acted as playmates for children. Overall, pets seem to have had a similar function to the one they have today: to act as companions, which is an idea that is reflected in many of the consulted citations.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to Yippy, the sweetest dog I have ever known.

List of abbreviations

AL	Hancock, W. Neilson, et al. [ed. and tr.], <i>Ancient laws of Ireland</i> , 6 vols (Dublin 1865–1901).
B	Breton
CIH	Binchy, D. A. [ed.], <i>Corpus iuris Hibernici: ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum</i> , 7 vols (Dublin 1978).
eDIL	<i>eDIL 2019: An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language</i> , based on the Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language (Dublin 1913-1976) (www.dil.ie 2019).
EIF	Kelly, Fergus, <i>Early Irish Farming: a Study based mainly on the Law-texts of the 7th and 8th Centuries AD</i> . Early Irish Law Series 4 (Dublin 1997).
EModIr.	Early Modern Irish
Fr.	French
GPC	<i>GPC online</i> . University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh & Celtic Studies, 2014. https://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html .
LEIA	Vendryes, Joseph, <i>Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien</i> , 7 vols (Dublin 1959–1996).
OIr.	Old Irish
PCIt.	Proto-Celtic
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
SG	Scottish Gaelic
TBC-I	O'Rahilly, Cecile [ed. and tr.], <i>Táin bó Cúailnge: Recension I</i> (Dublin 1976).
TBC-LL	O'Rahilly, Cecile [ed. and tr.], <i>Táin bó Cúailnge: from the Book of Leinster</i> . Irish Texts Society 49 (Dublin 1967).
TBC-YBL	Strachan, John, and J. G. O'Keeffe [eds.], <i>The Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Yellow Book of Lecan: with variant readings from the Lebor na Huidre</i> (Dublin and London 1912).
W	Welsh

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1. Introduction

Animals are prevalent within the written record of medieval Ireland. The *Macgnímartha Finn* 'The Boyhood Deeds of Finn' features a salmon that possesses all of the world's knowledge, and the most well-known early Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* 'The cattle-raid of Cooley', tells of a war revolving around a bull and features a hero, Cú Chulainn, named after an animal ('Hound of Culann'). Animals no doubt also played a major role in daily life, as working animals and as a source of food and clothing. Animals might have been an important part of personal life as well, in the form of pets.

Looking more broadly, we can observe that animals have been kept as pets by humans since prehistory.¹ The bond between humans and their companion animals is often strong and many pet owners regard their pets as family members. Pets may have had a similarly important role in the past, and therefore, a thorough examination of the practice of pet keeping would be beneficial to our understanding of daily life in medieval Ireland. There has not previously been a dedicated study of pet keeping in medieval Ireland, and there is very little relevant literature on the topic in general, as I will discuss below. This thesis aims to shed light on the practice by examining medieval Irish written sources.

The intention is to provide a broad overview of the practice of pet keeping in medieval Ireland, as well as to provide information on the nature of the animals kept as pets, based on both linguistic and textual data from Old and Middle Irish. This is done by analysing the terms used, both in isolation and in context, to refer to these animals. This thesis aims to answer the following questions: which animals were kept as pets, who kept them, and for what reason?

The first question that needs to be addressed is what actually constitutes a pet. A pet, or companion animal, is generally defined as a tame or domesticated animal kept for pleasure or companionship.² As Kathleen Walker-Meikle notes in *Medieval Pets*, "[a]n animal only becomes a pet because its human owner chooses to keep it as one".³ Pets are usually actively cared for by their owners, and their freedom is generally limited in some way (e.g. the animal is kept indoors, on a leash, in a cage, has its wings clipped, etc.). What distinguishes pets from other tame or domesticated animals is typically the amount of care and affection they receive: in contrast to other domestic animals, most pets enjoy certain human 'privileges'.⁴ They are generally kept indoors, and are sometimes even allowed into more private spaces, such as bedrooms. Pets are often given names and perceived as having individual personalities. They are frequently spoiled with treats and adorned with accessories, and their deaths are usually mourned. However, the distinction between pets and other domestic animals is sometimes

¹ The earliest example of human attachment to a companion animal comes from the Bonn-Oberkassel dog remains dating to approximately 14,000 years ago. These remains represent two dogs, one of them a juvenile of at least 28 weeks. Not only were these animals buried along with two humans and a collection of grave goods, circumstances indicate that the younger dog might have been cared for through several bouts of illness. Examination of the remains indicates that the puppy might have suffered from canine distemper, in which case survival without intensive human care would have been unlikely. Seeing as the young canine held no utilitarian use throughout this period of sickness, it was presumably cared for out of compassion or empathy. See Janssens, Luc, et al., 'A new look at an old dog: Bonn-Oberkassel reconsidered', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 92 (2018) 126-138.

² This general definition is based on entries from several dictionaries, such as the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster*, and *Collins English Dictionary*.

³ Walker-Meikle, Kathleen, *Medieval Pets* (Woodbridge 2012): 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

vague, since any animal, even one technically kept for utilitarian purposes, could become an object of emotional attachment and affection for their owner.

In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether an owner regards their animal in a purely materialistic way or also as a companion. To give an example from medieval Irish literature, in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Cú Chulainn kills the fierce guard dog (*árchú* 'slaughter-hound') of Culann the smith.⁵ Culann laments the loss of his dog, whom he regarded as a man of his household (*fer muintire*). He exclaims *is bethu immudu mo bethu* 'my life is a life wasted'.⁶ Although this sounds very sentimental, *bethu* could have been used here in the sense of 'livelihood'.⁷ In that case, it could be that Culann merely bewails the fact that he now no longer has a guard dog to protect his livestock and property, and not the life of this specific dog. To avoid such ambiguities, and to limit the scope of this thesis, I will only look at animals that were kept for the sole purpose of providing companionship. An exception has to be made for cats, which were often kept to hunt mice. Since mouse hunting is in their nature, it would be impossible to make a distinction between cats kept for utilitarian and non-utilitarian purposes.⁸

Now that we have discussed the intention and the scope of this thesis, I will provide an overview of the available literature on the topic of pet keeping in medieval Ireland. I will discuss the two most important sources, *Medieval Pets* by Kathleen Walker-Meikle and *Early Irish Farming* by Fergus Kelly, and illustrate how this thesis touches upon subjects that have not received much attention in those works.

1.1 Medieval Pets

The most comprehensive overview of medieval pet keeping is given by Kathleen Walker-Meikle in *Medieval Pets*.⁹ She herself notes that the practice of pet keeping in the Middle Ages remains understudied.¹⁰ Therefore, she aims "to shed light on that practice and draw attention to the evidence for its prevalence in the medieval period, drawing on a range of historical, literary and iconographic sources".¹¹ Her study is limited to Western Europe and to pet animals that were kept indoors, thereby allowing her to disregard animals used in outdoor activities (e.g. hunting dogs, hawks, and horses) with which owners might also have shared a strong emotional bond. Walker-Meikle does also consider Ireland, but only refers to secondary sources. The majority of the information she cites for Irish practices comes from Fergus Kelly's *Early Irish Farming*, which I will discuss below.

Although the geographical scope of Walker-Meikle's study is much broader than that of this thesis, I will often relate my findings to hers. Her book provides a point of comparison, whereby certain aspects of the practice of pet keeping in Ireland can be placed in the context of medieval Europe.

⁵ *TBC-I* 17-19, lines 540-607.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 19.

⁷ O'Rahilly translates *bethu* as 'livelihood'. She also translates *fer muintire* as 'servant'. See *TBC-I* 141.

⁸ One could argue that many of the functions for which dogs are kept, such as herding, hunting, and guarding one's property and livestock are also (modified) natural behaviours. However, dogs are often trained to effectively perform these duties. Moreover, dogs, unlike cats, are bred for these specific purposes: a lap dog cannot be used to hunt or herd animals, and would most likely make an awful guard dog. This makes it possible to easily distinguish between dogs kept for utilitarian and non-utilitarian purposes, which is impossible for cats.

⁹ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. ix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

1.2 Early Irish Farming

For medieval Ireland, the only existing overview of animals kept as pets is given by Fergus Kelly in *Early Irish Farming*. Kelly dedicates a small portion of his chapter on livestock to pet animals, and includes sections on dogs, cats, and 'Other pets and captives'. The section on dogs is further divided into subsections on different types of dogs, including one specifically dealing with pet dogs. The section 'Cats' also includes a subsection specifically dealing with cat coat colours and cat names. The section titled 'Other pets and captives' is devoted to the more unusual animals that were supposedly kept as pets by the Irish, such as the *corr* 'heron; crane', the *senén* 'old bird', and a variety of native mammals, including wolves, foxes, and deer.

Most of the information in the section 'Other pets and captives' comes from the *Bretha Comaithchesa* 'Judgements of neighbourhood' and the commentary that was added to this text at a later date.¹² The *Bretha Comaithchesa* is a law-text that details the mutual obligations of neighbouring farmers. According to Kelly, the inclusion of the aforementioned native birds and mammals, which are each referred to as *petta* 'pet' in the text, shows that "many landowners had pets of native origin".¹³ Herons, wolves, and deer are of course not typical pets like cats and dogs, and therefore it seems unusual to categorise them as such without discussion. I suspect that Kelly takes Old Irish *petta* to be synonymous with English *pet*, although the Old Irish term actually has a more limited scope, as I will argue in section 3.3.2.

All of the information on pet animals and pet keeping in general in *Early Irish Farming* comes from legal texts, which is unsurprising, as the entire book is mainly based on legal material.¹⁴ At the beginning of the section 'Other pets and captives', Kelly does note that "[t]he prominence given to pets in legal material is matched in the sagas and saints' Lives".¹⁵ Unfortunately, he gives only very few examples of this. He mentions an episode in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in which Cú Chulainn kills Ailill's pet bird and Medb's pet *togmall* 'squirrel (?); pine marten', as well as two references to pet animals in the *Life of Saint Brigit* and *The Book of Timulling*.

Although Kelly only dedicates a small portion of his book to pets, these sections do include numerous observations on many different animals. Unfortunately, Kelly does not bring these separate observations together to create an all-encompassing view of what pet keeping in early Ireland might have looked like, as I intend to do in this thesis. Unlike Kelly, I will also take into account non-legal material, and provide a more in-depth analysis of the words used to refer to pet animals and pets in general. This will allow me to present a more complete overview of these animals and their upkeep.

As explained at the start of the introduction, I will be analysing terms used, both in isolation and in context, to refer to pets. My exact methodology will be explained in the following chapter. In the first part of the analysis, I will discuss three terms that were used to refer to companion animals in general: *treitell*, *eisrecht*, and *petta*. In the second part, I will discuss various types of pet animals. I have divided this part into four sections: dogs, cats, other mammals, and birds.

¹² *Ibid.* Kelly first mentions the text on page 124, and subsequently refers to it on pages 127, 129, and 130.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 124.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. xvi.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 124.

2. Methodology

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to provide a general account of the practice of pet keeping in medieval Ireland, based on sources written in Old and Middle Irish. This will be done by analysing the terms used, both in isolation and in context, to refer to pet animals.

To compile a list of relevant words and citations, I used *eDIL* (the full list of citations used can be found in the appendix). The majority of the words discussed in this thesis are relatively uncommon, which means that a larger percentage of all attestations is listed under each headword compared to the more common vocabulary, for which only a selection of attestations is included. Therefore, *eDIL* offers a fairly complete overview of the attestations of these uncommon words. I used the 'Advanced Search' option built into the website and searched for the terms 'dog', 'lapdog', 'cat', and 'pet' in all definitions and translations. This resulted in a list of relevant entries, as well as a handful of loose citations. In this list, I also included entries that were cross-referenced on *eDIL*.¹⁶ To make sure the resulting list was as comprehensive as possible, I looked at all the words and references that Kelly discusses in the sections 'Pet dogs', 'Cats', and 'Other pets and captives' in *Early Irish Farming* and included any relevant ones that I had missed.

At this stage, I only excluded entries and citations that, based on their definition or translation, did not refer to actual animals (e.g. *conchar* 'properly dog-loving'), or referred to wild or fantastical animals (e.g. *murchat* 'sea-cat?'). Moreover, I excluded entries that referred to animals kept mainly for utilitarian purposes (e.g. *árchú* 'a slaughter-hound; a watch-dog (?)', *gadar* 'a hunting-dog; a beagle', etc.), since these did not align with the definition of a 'pet' that I employ in this thesis. Lastly, I did not include entries that referred to an entire species (e.g. *catt* 'cat', *cú* 'dog, hound') or entire classes of animals (e.g. *matad* 'a common dog; a cur'), because the citations listed under these entries did not offer any or very little information on the characteristics of individual animals and their upkeep.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kelly lists a few native mammals that were supposedly kept as pets by landowners. Citations that refer to these wild animals held in captivity are included under the headword *petta*, because that is the term used to distinguish them from their wild counterparts. I did not include any other citations for these animals, as the often many citations listed under their respective *eDIL* entries generally refer to their wild counterparts. I did, however, include all the citations for the words *togmall* and *togán*, since the definition on *eDIL* indicates that it is unclear whether this animal is a pine marten or a squirrel.¹⁷ Since determining which animals were kept as pets is one of the research questions of this thesis, more information was required to determine which animal is meant by *togán/togmall*.

Before continuing with the analysis, I translated the citations included in the data set. The majority of the citations come from texts that have previously been edited and translated. I translated the remainder of the citations myself. During translation, it became necessary to exclude more citations, because for some words not all of the citations actually referred to animals (e.g. *treitell* 'darling, pet; warrior'), and these were thus not relevant to this thesis. For several reasons, I sometimes had to

¹⁶ For example, when searching for the definition 'pet', the search results include the entry for *togán* 'some small animal, sometimes kept as pet; squirrel (?), pine marten' (*eDIL* s.v. 2 *togán*), but not the entry for *togmall* 'some kind of small animal; squirrel ? marten ?' (*eDIL* s.v. *togmall*). However, the entry for *togán* mentions that this word is interchangeable with *togmall* and includes a direct reference to that entry. Seeing as both words are used interchangeably, I have included both entries.

¹⁷ For the definitions of *togán* and *togmall*, see previous footnote.

remove entire entries. In some cases, there was not enough information in the citations to discuss them: for example, the entry for *luan* 'dog, hound', which only includes one short citation.¹⁸ In other instances, all of the listed citations were from the Early Modern Irish period (e.g. *genc* 'snub-nose, snub-nosed animal (?), dog (?)').¹⁹ Throughout my thesis, I have included citations from *O'Davoren's Glossary*, and some of the discussed words are only found there. Although the glossary is dated to 1569, some of the included material is Early Irish; however, the age of the material cannot be guaranteed. In a few cases, the *eDIL* entry turned out not to be relevant to the research questions. For example, the entry for *gibne* 'a dog (?)' includes only two citations, and both of these explain that a *gibne* is a hungry or starving dog (*cú gortach*).²⁰

After translating the citations, I also included etymologies and cognates (where applicable) for the remaining words. For the etymologies, I mainly consulted the *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien*. However, for words of uncertain or contested origin, I have also included other proposed etymologies, which I will discuss throughout my analysis.

In the following chapter I will begin my analysis, starting with words denoting pet animals in general, followed by dogs, cats, other mammals, and birds.

¹⁸ *eDIL* s.v. 4 *luan*.

¹⁹ *eDIL* s.v. *genc*.

²⁰ *eDIL* s.v. 3 *gibne*.

3. Terms applied to pets and other captive animals

In this chapter, I will discuss the three words that were used to refer to pet animals in general: *treitell*, *eisrecht*, and *petta*.

3.1 *Treitell*

Out of the three words that I will discuss in this chapter, the word *treitell*, or *drettell*, is least often applied to animals. The word is used in the sense of ‘pet, favourite’ and ‘warrior’,²¹ and is either a direct loan from or a cognate of Welsh *trythyll*, *drythyll* ‘ardent, lively, unstable; debauchery’.²²

Of the few citations that refer to animals, only one directly comes from a medieval Irish text, namely the *Críth Gablach* (8th c.), a legal text on status and rank. In the text, it states that an *aire túise* (one of the noble grades) is entitled to *dreitle milcu la echraid. orca lia ben* ‘pet animals, a hunting dog, as well as (lit. with) steeds, a lap dog for his wife’ [MP].²³ Although this provides little information about the nature of these pet animals, it does show that pets were associated with men of high rank.

The other citations come from *O’Davoren’s Glossary* (1569):

- (1) *Drettell .i. peta, amail adeir Senchas [Mór]: na torc arabí treut na dretell .i. in torc peta.*
drettell, i.e. a pet, as saith the Senchas Mór: ‘neither the boar that is best of the herd, nor the pet’, i.e. the pet boar.²⁴
- (2) *Tretell .i. mesan, ut est cach tretell dorenar fo dire a milcon.*
tretell, i.e. a pet dog, *ut est* ‘every pet is paid for according to the fine of his hunting hound’.²⁵

From these two citations, it seems that *treitell* was used for both traditional pet animals, such as dogs, as well as for animals taken from the wild. Presumably, it could be used for any animal with which the owner shared some type of bond considering the meaning ‘favourite’. However, because there are only three citations, two of which lack the necessary context to fully understand their meaning, it is difficult to determine which type of animals could be referred to as *treitell* and what kind of relationship the word represents.

3.2 *Eisrecht*

The second word that I will discuss is *eisrecht*, a legal term. The literal meaning of this term is ‘one who is outside the law’, and it is especially used to refer to “persons or animals or articles not amenable to ordinary rules”.²⁶ The term is applied to kinless persons, ‘idiots’, and pet animals or toys, the latter being the usual meaning in the legal material.²⁷

²¹ eDIL s.vv. *treitell*, *drettel*.

²² LEIA T-133-134, s.v. *treitell*.

²³ CIH ii 567, line 26; CIH iii 783, line 33.

²⁴ Stokes, Whitley [ed. and tr.], ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 2 (1904): 310, no. 701.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 482, no. 1599.

²⁶ eDIL s.v. *eisrecht*.

²⁷ EIF 181, n. 162. Surprisingly, Kelly does not mention the legal term *eisrecht* in relation to pets in his chapters on pet dogs, cats, and other pet animals.

Unsurprisingly, most citations come from law-texts. In the *Senchas Már*, it is explained that *eisrechta* are pets (or tame animals): *cin cach eisrechta (.i. na petadha)* ‘for the trespass of every *eisrecht* (i.e. of the pets/tame animals)’ [MP].²⁸ Another text lists ‘household pets’ (*heistrechtaib in tighe*) alongside fowl and lambs, as animals attacked by a *minaigh*-dog.²⁹

In the majority of the other citations, pets are likened to playthings, for example:

(3) *eisrecta tiscena (.i. na heisrechta becca tindscetlaither ag neoch .i. coin ᵱ cait becc[a], no co ngabait gnimradh)*

early playthings (i.e. the little toys which are his first playthings, i.e. dogs and little cats, until they are capable of action).³⁰

(4) *milchoin ᵱ eisrechta olchena*³¹

greyhounds and playthings besides.³² (found in a list of items and entertainments present at a fair for a king’s son)

(5) *im esrechta macraide (.i. catín no lúb no bacan³³ no liatróit)*³⁴

for (the) toys of children (i.e. a kitten or a hoop³⁵ or a hook (?)³⁶ or a ball). [MP]

It seems that young cats and dogs served as playmates for children until they were old enough to perform other useful tasks (‘until they are capable of action’). Pets being likened to playthings is not uncommon: English *puppy* derives from Middle French *poupée* ‘doll, toy’.³⁷ This sentiment is also echoed in the English term ‘toy dog’, which is applied to small (breeds of) dogs (e.g. a Toy Poodle).

Though most commonly found in legal contexts, the term *eisrecht* is not restricted to them. In the *Birth and Life of St. Moling*, we learn that the saint lived together with a madman, a fox, a wren, and a fly “that used to buzz to him when he came from matins, till the wren hopped on it and killed it”.³⁸ Moling, who was obviously very attached to the small insect, curses the wren and exclaims:

²⁸ AL i 156, lines 28-29 & 160, lines 7-8; See also 162, lines 22-23 & 166, line 1.

²⁹ AL iii 416, lines 9-10 (Irish text; 417 (translation). A *minaigh*-dog appears to be a ferocious type of dog (see *eDIL* s.v. *minaigid*), which requires a leather muzzle.

³⁰ AL v 250, lines 4 & 15 (Irish text); 251 (translation).

³¹ Meyer, Kuno [ed.], ‘Sanas Cormaic. An Old-Irish glossary compiled by Cormac úa Cuileinnáin, king-bishop of Cashel in the tenth century’, in Bergin, Osborn, et al., *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts*, vol. 4 (Halle and Dublin 1912): 87, no. 1018.

³² Stokes, Whitley [ed.], and John O’Donovan [tr.], *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac’s Glossary*, Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society (Calcutta 1868): 129.

³³ On *eDIL* this is cited with a *fada*, but this is not present in the manuscript itself, see Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1336 (H 3.17) c. 405.

³⁴ *CIH* v 1901, lines 25 & 32.

³⁵ Presumably a hoop through which the ball was driven in hurling, see *eDIL* s.vv. *cluiche*, *lúb*.

³⁶ The term *baccán* is “applied to a variety of hook-shaped or angled objects” (*eDIL* s.v. *baccán*). In this context, I expect it refers to a stick used in a type of ball game, possibly hurling.

³⁷ Hoad, T. F., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford 1996): s.v. ‘puppy’.

³⁸ Stokes, Whitley [ed. And tr.], *The birth and life of St Moling: edited from a manuscript in the Royal Library, Brussels*. Specimens of Middle-Irish Literature 1 (London 1907): 56-57, No. 73.

- (6) *Cidh fil ann tra, ar Molling, acht intí ro mill immum in estrecht trūagh no bidh ic airfitiudh damh gurab hi fástigibh bes a trebh co brāth, ⁊ coraib bainne fliuch ann dogrés. Ocus co rabat macaimh ⁊ minndáine ic a orcain.*

“Howbeit,” says Moling, “but he that marred for me the poor pet that used to be making music for me, let his dwelling be for ever in empty houses, with a wet drip therein continually. And may children and small people be destroying him!”³⁹

It is curious that the word *estrecht* is used to refer to the insect, rather than either of the other two terms discussed in this chapter. The passage seems to emphasise the sentimental value of the fly to St. Moling, stating that it always flew to him as soon as he returned home and used to make music for him. It might be that the term *eisrecht*, although originally a legal term, acquired the connotation of an animal that provided joy and entertainment, through its frequent association with children’s toys. Alternatively, it could be that the fly, like the puppies and kittens mentioned above, was not regarded as useful, and is therefore labelled an *eisrecht*. Although it is highly doubtful that flies were actually kept as pets, this anecdote does show that the Irish recognised the emotional value that a pet could have.

The term *eisrecht* is most often used to refer to cats and dogs, but could also be applied to wild animals:

- (7) *is leth .u.s. ⁊ sesed eneclainne isin eisrecht nallaigh .i. leth in neich dobertha isin eisrecht cennaigh.*⁴⁰

it is half of 5 *séts*, and a sixth of [the] honour-price for the wild pet, i.e. half of what is given for the bought pet. [MP]

3.3 *Petta*

According to Kelly, *petta* is the most common word to refer to a pet animal in Old Irish.⁴¹ However, the most common pet animals, cats and dogs, are never referred to as *petta*. As can be seen from the citations (see appendix), the animals that are referred to as being *petta* are always animals with wild counterparts, such as wolves, cranes/herons, foxes, and deer. I will first discuss the etymology of *petta*, after which I will discuss the meaning of this term.

3.3.1 Etymology

There are three proposed etymologies for the term *petta*. Whitley Stokes simply states that it derives from a cognate of Fr. *petit*, but does not explain his reasoning behind this.⁴² According to Vendryes, it is a word of native origin: *petta* < *fetta* < *setta*.⁴³ He connects the word to the PIE root *swě(dh)*- “qui apparaît en latin dans *suēscō*⁴⁴ (*suētus*) et dans *sōdālis* et qui exprime la familiarité, l’habitude, les relations amicales” ‘which appears in Latin *suēscō* (*suētus*) and *sōdālis*, and which expresses familiarity, the usual, and friendly relations’ [MP].⁴⁵ Lastly, Graham Isaac proposes that *petta* is a loan from

³⁹ *Ibid.* No. 74.

⁴⁰ *CIH* ii 718, lines 20-21. According to *eDIL*, this is found on page 193 B^b of the manuscript (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1337 H 3.18), but it is actually found on page 193 C^a. See also *CIH* v 1873, line 25. *Cúig .s. do smacht isin cuirr ⁊ isin caoigh ⁊ in cach neisrecht uili cenmotha in agh no in mucc.*

⁴¹ *EIF* 125. Moreover, the English word ‘pet’ is possibly borrowed from SG *peata* ‘pet, spoiled child’, which in turn comes from OIr. *petta*.

⁴² Stokes, Whitley, ‘On the Linguistic Value of the Irish Annals’, *Bezenbergers Beiträge zur Kunde der Indogermanischen Sprachen* 18 (1892): 79.

⁴³ Vendryes, Joseph, ‘Irlandais *peta* (*petta*) ‘apprivoisé’’, *Revue Celtique* 44 (1927): 308–312.

⁴⁴ This also gives us the Latin verb for ‘to tame’: *mansuesco*, from *manus* ‘hand’ and *suēscō* ‘become accustomed’.

⁴⁵ Vendryes, ‘Irlandais *peta* (*petta*) ‘apprivoisé’’: 312.

Brittonic *petti- (W *peth*, B *pezh* 'thing, piece'), on the basis that it is “a simpler, and more direct, explanation for the word”.⁴⁶ Although it is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss these etymologies in depth, I believe Vendryes’ proposal to be the most likely.⁴⁷

3.3.2 Meaning of *petta*

As I mentioned above, the word *petta* is only applied to animals with wild counterparts. That does of course not mean that animals referred to as *petta* could not be pets. In the *Aided in togmaili* γ *in pheta eóin* ‘the death of the *togmall* and the pet bird’, an episode of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Cú Chulainn kills a *togán/togmall* that is sitting on Medb’s shoulder, and a bird that is sitting on Ailill’s shoulder (or Medb’s depending on the version).⁴⁸ Both of these animals are clearly pets, and in the *Book of Leinster* both are called *petta*.⁴⁹

In other instances, it is much more difficult to ascertain what kind of relationship humans shared with these animals. We know that animals referred to as *petta* were captive animals; the *Bretha Comaithchesa* ‘Judgements of neighbourhood’ states that the owner of any of these animals was subject to a so-called *smacht*-fine, a fine that is paid by the owner of an animal for its trespass on another’s land:

- (8) *Smacht peata chuirre ocus circe, ocus peata ois, ocus peata mictire, ocus peata seineóin, ocus peata sindaigh. Tairgille nairaib; ite indsin a caithche*

As to the 'smacht'-fine for pet herons and hens, and pet deer, and pet wolves, and pet old birds, and pet foxes; there is an additional pledge upon them; this is for their trespasses.⁵⁰

Although keeping some of these animals as pets would be almost unthinkable today, I can think of no other reason to keep animals such as these, since they have no utilitarian purpose. It also seems that the Irish were not the only ones to keep wild animals as pets.⁵¹ In the Welsh *Laws of Hywel Dda*, there are references to a tame stag belonging to a king (*hyd dof yr brenhin*),⁵² as well as tame martens and foxes (*beleu neu lwynawc*).⁵³

Even though many of the animals labelled as *petta* were probably kept for companionship, I would still argue that the semantics of the word itself are not comparable with the English noun ‘pet’, for the

⁴⁶ Isaac, G. R., ‘Varia I. Some Old Irish Etymologies, and Some Conclusions Drawn from Them’, *Ériu* 53 (2003): 152.

⁴⁷ Although Isaac’s proposed borrowing is certainly a more straightforward explanation, I believe it to be too simple. As Isaac himself states, Vendryes’ proposal is ‘phonologically defensible’, and the forms *setta* and *fetta* are attested, although they are rare. Isaac’s reasoning behind the semantic development from ‘thing’ to ‘pet, favourite’ seems rather weak. He claims that it is paralleled by the use of English ‘thing’ and Welsh *peth* as terms of endearment (e.g. ‘Dear little thing!’, ‘Y peth bach!’), though in these examples this use seems to be conditioned by the use of adjectives such as ‘dear’ and ‘little’. He also admits that there is no obvious explanation for the borrowing of the *i*-stem *petti- as an *io*-stem *pettyo-, which gives OIr *pettae. He gives no parallels and explains this away by arguing that “the exigencies of loaning, particularly in such a pragmatically marked semantic range as ‘endearment’, characteristically give rise to unexpected developments.” (see Isaac ‘Varia I’: 152).

⁴⁸ *TBC-I* 29.

⁴⁹ *TBC-LL* 35.

⁵⁰ *AL* iv 114, lines 10-12 (Irish text); 115 (translation).

⁵¹ Apart from the Welsh examples given below, many other examples of ‘unusual’ pets throughout history can be found in Walker-Meikle’s *Medieval Pets*; the Italian artist Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (1477–1549), known as Il Sodoma, kept a variety of pet animals, including badgers, squirrels and monkeys (p. 14-15). King Charles VIII of France (r. 1483–1498) kept a marmot as a pet (p. 14), and king Alfonso X of Castile (1221–1284) had a pet weasel (p. 4; 15).

⁵² Owen, Aneurin [ed.], *Ancient laws and institutes of Wales*, 2 vols (London 1841): 242 xi.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 412 xxx.

simple reason that its application is restricted to typically wild animals. According to Vendryes, the proper translation would be *apprivoisé* 'tamed'.⁵⁴ This translation is supported by some of the citations. For example, in the *Betha Brigte*, *petta sindaig* is given as a translation of *manusetam vulpem* 'a tame fox' in the *Vita prima sanctae Brigitae*.⁵⁵ Later in the same section, another fox appears and is explicitly labelled as 'wild' (*unam de vulpibus feris*).⁵⁶ This opposition between tame and wild is also found in the *Táin*, where Cú Chulainn and Ibar come across a flock of swans and Cú Chulainn asks *indat pettai sút nó indat eóin chena* 'are they tame or just birds?'⁵⁷

However, as Andrea Nuti notes: "the most specific, defining feature characterizing a *petta* is not necessarily, nor simply, mansuetude or domestication: cows or sheep are never mentioned".⁵⁸ Therefore, translating *petta* as 'tame' is an oversimplification: it disregards the special status of animals labelled *petta*. On the other hand, Kelly's statement that "the usual term for a pet in Old Irish is *pet(t)a*"⁵⁹ glosses over the specific application of the term. It seems that *petta* is not used to necessarily distinguish a pet (it is not applied to cats and dogs), but rather to distinguish a tame animal from its wild counterpart, while at the same time granting that animal a special status as a companion.

There is no exact equivalent for the term in English. The closest would be the use of English *pet* as an adjective, since this can also be used to distinguish a companion animal from its wild or domesticated counterpart, e.g. a pet snake, a pet pig, a pet fish, etc. (though 'pet dog' or 'pet cat' is also possible). Semantically, Irish *petta* seems very similar to the Welsh word used to refer to these types of animals: *lledfegin*. The literal translation of this term would be 'half-reared' (*lled* 'half, partially' + verbal root *mag-* 'rear, nourish' + adjectival suffix *-in*),⁶⁰ and similarly to *petta*, it seems to be applied exclusively to tamed wild animals.

⁵⁴ LEIA P-8, s.v. *petta*; Vendryes, 'Irlandais *peta (petta)* 'apprivoisé'.

⁵⁵ Hogan, Edmund [ed.], *The Latin lives of the saints: as aids towards the translation of Irish texts and the production of an Irish dictionary*. Todd Lecture Series 5 (Dublin 1894): 85.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ TBC-LL 32 (Irish text); 170 (translation). Earlier in the same section, Cú Chulainn asks the same of a herd of wild deer, see pages 31 (Irish text); 169 (translation).

⁵⁸ Nuti, Andrea, 'Irish *petta*: an etymological analysis and some new comparisons', in Zimmer, Stefan [ed.], *Kelten am Rhein: Akten des dreizehnten Internationalen Keltologiekongresses, 23. bis 27. Juli 2007 in Bonn, 2 vols*, vol. 2: *Philologie: Sprachen und Literaturen* (Mainz 2009): 184.

⁵⁹ EIF 125.

⁶⁰ GPC s.v. *lledfegin, lledfegyn*.

4. Different types of pets

In this chapter, I will consider the different types of pets that were kept by the Irish in the medieval period. I will discuss these types of pets in order of available material (and thus their perceived popularity), starting with dogs, before moving on to cats, other mammals, and birds.

4.1 Dogs

Dogs were the very first animals to be domesticated by humans: our relationship with them goes back at least 15,000 years.⁶¹ Today, there are over 400 different dog breeds, all descendants of the ancestral wolf, and all bred with a specific purpose in mind.⁶² In Old Irish, the general term for the species is *cú*. In *Early Irish Farming*, Kelly distinguishes four broad categories of dogs: guard dogs, hunting dogs, herding dogs, and lap dogs, a categorisation which he bases on that of Roman authors.⁶³ According to Kelly, “[a]ll these types are well documented from early Irish sources”.⁶⁴ However, we will only consider dogs that fall into the latter category, which Kelly labels ‘pet dogs’. There seem to have been two terms commonly used to refer to these types of dogs: *messán/meschú* and *oirce/oircne*.

4.1.1 *Messán/meschú*

The terms *messán* and *meschú* ‘pet dog, lap dog’ both have *mess* ‘favourite; fosterling’⁶⁵ as their first element; the first is a diminutive, the second a compound with *cú* ‘dog’.⁶⁶ In example (2) in the previous chapter (3.1), we already saw that a *messán* is an example of a *tretell* ‘favourite’.⁶⁷ Another reference to its status as a pet animal is found in *O’Davoren’s Glossary*, where it is referred to as an *eisrecht* (see section 3.2).⁶⁸

Most other citations refer to individual pet dogs, most often in association with (high-ranking) women. An exception is *Ossar*, the pet dog of king Conaire Mór, which appears in the *Togail bruidne Da Derga* ‘The destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel’.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Clutton-Brock, Juliet, *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals* (Cambridge 1987): 49. See also p. 6, n. 1 of the introduction of this thesis.

⁶² Clutton-Brock, *A Natural History of Domesticated Mammals*: 49.

⁶³ EIF 114. The Irish might have distinguished similar categories. In the *Ogam Tract*, four types of dog ogam are distinguished: *archu* ‘guard-dog’, *milchu* ‘hunting-dog’, *conbuachaill* ‘herd dog’, and *oirci* ‘lap-dog’. See Calder, George [ed. and tr.], *Auraicept na n-Éces: The scholars’ primer, being the texts of the Ogham tract from the Book of Ballymote and the Yellow book of Lecan, and the text of the Trefhocul from the Book of Leinster* (Edinburgh 1917): 292 & 294, lines 5740-5749.

⁶⁴ EIF 114.

⁶⁵ LEIA M-43, s.v. *mess*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Interestingly, in the *Sanas Cormaic*, it says that a *messán* is the worst of dogs (*aon is messa do c[h]onuib*), see Meyer, ‘Sanas Cormaic’: 75, no. 879. This is clearly a folk etymology.

⁶⁸ Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 326, no. 788.

⁶⁹ Stokes, Whitley [ed. and tr.], ‘The destruction of Dá Derga’s hostel’, *Revue Celtique* 22 (1901): 207-208 (b).

Another pet dog appears in a poem of the *Dinnshenchas Érenn* (11th-12th c.):⁷⁰

(9)	<i>Dabilla ainm in chon chóir</i>	Dabilla, the name of the faithful dog
	<i>robói oc mnái Nechtain nár-móir,</i>	who belonged to the wife of Nechtain, great and noble,
	<i>messán Bóinne co mblaid</i>	the lap-dog of Boand the famous,
	<i>luid ina diaid dia torchair.</i>	which went after her when she perished. ⁷¹

We also encounter a lap dog in the *Aidedh Echach* ‘Death of Eochaid’ (12th c.), which is found in the *Lebor na hUidre*.⁷² The story tells the origin of Lough Neagh ‘lake of Eochu’, in which Eochaid builds a house over a well “with a flap to cover the well and a woman to tend it continually”.⁷³ One day, the woman forgets to cover the well and water rises from it, killing Eochaid and most of his children. One of his surviving children, Liban, is stuck beneath the waters of Lough Neagh for a full year together with her lap dog (*mesán*), when she exclaims "O Lord, happy the one that should be in the salmon's shape, scouring the sea and swimming even as they do!"⁷⁴ She is then turned into a salmon and her lap dog into an otter, after which for three hundred years “Liban ranged the sea, with her lap dog in form [sic] of an otter close after her whichever way she went and never parting from her at all”.⁷⁵

These last two examples both portray the stereotype of the faithful dog, and it shows that the Irish also valued a dog’s seemingly unconditional love for its owner. Curiously, love for one’s dog is rarely expressed.

4.1.2 *Oirce/oirce*

Another word for a pet dog is *oirce* (Olr. *orcae*),⁷⁶ also found in the diminutive *oircne*. According to Vendryes, it is a derivative of *orc* ‘a young pig’, a term that was sometimes used to denote the young of other animals, as well as children.⁷⁷ He translates *oirce* as ‘chien bichon’, referring to a group of different breeds collectively referred to as bichon-type dogs, which includes the bichon frise and the maltese, among others. These little dogs, usually white and long-haired, are generally kept for companionship. Since we do not know what the *oircne* looked like, it is impossible to say whether it resembled a bichon-type dog (if the term even applied to a specific breed or a group of similar breeds).

Like the *messán*, the *oirce* is given as an example of an *eisrecht* in *O’Davoren’s Glossary*.⁷⁸ Other citations also attest to its status as an animal kept for companionship and entertainment. In the commentary on the *Senchas Már*, *oirce* are listed alongside cats, hurlets, balls, and hoops, as “goodly

⁷⁰ See also Atkinson, Robert [ed.], *The Book of Leinster sometime called the Book of Glendalough: a collection of pieces (prose and verse) in the Irish language, compiled, in part, about the middle of the twelfth century* (Dublin 1880): 144a, line 42. *Dabilla ainm meschon mná Nechtain*.

⁷¹ Gwynn, E. J. [ed. and tr.], *The metrical dindsenchas*, 5 vols, vol. 3. Todd Lecture Series 10 (Dublin 1913): 32-33, stanza 21.

⁷² Best, Richard Irvine, and Osborn Bergin [eds.], *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin 1929): 99, line 3086 & 100, line 3116.

⁷³ O’Grady, Standish Hayes, *Silva Gadelica (I–XXXI): a collection of tales in Irish, vol. 2: translation and notes* (London 1892): 266.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 267.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *eDIL* s.v. *oirce*. The form *oirce* is also found.

⁷⁷ *LEIA* O-28, s.v. *orc*.

⁷⁸ Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 326, no. 788.

things which remove dulness [sic] from little boys” (cf. examples 3, 4, and 5 in section 3.2).⁷⁹ In the triads, lap dogs are also listed as one of the three entertainments of a gathering.⁸⁰

Similarly to the *messán/meschú*, these dogs are associated with high-ranking women. In the *Críth Gablach* (8th c.), we read that an *aire túise* is entitled to a hunting dog (*milcu*), whereas his wife should have a lap dog (*orca lia ben*).⁸¹ In the *Senchas Már*, the *oircne rigna* ‘lap dog of a queen’ is mentioned in the Law of Distress.⁸² A commentator has provided his own etymological guess for the word and equates the *oircne* with a *mesan*:

(10) *Im oircne rigna (.i. indiaid orcan na rigna bis, .i. mesan)*

for the lap-dog (*‘oircne’*) of a queen (i.e. after the foot (*‘orcan’*)⁸³ of the queen he follows, i.e. the lap-dog).⁸⁴

These dogs were kept for more than just providing companionship: they were also expected to protect a woman from the fairies (*túaithegeinti*) during child-birth.⁸⁵ If a woman’s pet dog is killed during this time, the perpetrator “must not only pay a fine of three *séts*, but must also provide a priest to protect her by reading from scripture day and night while she is in labour”.⁸⁶

Besides women, these types of dogs were also associated with certain professions:

(11) *Cair cia laisin coir oircne .Nī. occ briugaid ᵐ liaigh ᵐ cruitire ᵐ rigan.*⁸⁷

Who has the right to a lap dog? Not difficult. A hospitaller and a physician and a harpist and a queen. [MP]

According to Walker-Meikle, pets in the Middle Ages were most often associated with women and clerics, individuals who generally led an indoor lifestyle.⁸⁸ They were usually not allowed to participate in the outdoor lifestyle, which “embraced fighting and hunting”.⁸⁹ Walker-Meikle argues that the fact that “all these male professions which ‘allowed pets’ are all of the non-fighting variety illustrates the link between pet keeping and gender”.⁹⁰

4.1.3 Difference between *messán/meschú* and *oircne/oircne*

I have touched upon a lot of similarities between the applications of the terms *messán/meschú* and *oircne/oircne*. In some cases, both terms are even applied to the same animal; in the *Aidedh Echach* ‘Death of Eochaid’, which we saw above, Liban’s pet dog is referred to as both *messán* and *oircne*.⁹¹ We have also seen that *mesan* is equated with *oircne* in example (10) above.

⁷⁹ AL i 138, lines 31-33 (Irish text); 139 (translation).

⁸⁰ Meyer, Kuno [ed. and tr.], *The Triads of Ireland*. Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin 1906): 32, no. 241.

⁸¹ CIH ii 567, line 26; CIH iii 783, line 33.

⁸² AL i 150, line 12 (Irish text); 151 (translation).

⁸³ eDIL s.v. *orca*. Cf. the English expression ‘to be at someone’s heels’.

⁸⁴ AL i 152, line 34 (Irish text); 153 (translation). See also the commentary at p. 144, lines 9-10. *Im oirce, .i. bis ar cae* ‘path’ *oircne na rigna imesan* (leg. .i. *mesan*). *Ar cae* is an etymologizing spelling of *oirce*.

⁸⁵ EIF 120. See also AL i 144, lines 9-10, where it also mentions the lap dog in association with pregnant women (*mnaí toircsach*).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ CIH iv 1268, lines 16-17.

⁸⁸ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*: 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁹¹ Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre. mesan*: p. 99, line 3086 & p. 100, line 3116; *orci* p. 96, line 2967 & p. 99, line 3090.

Messán/meschú is less commonly used than *oirce/oircne*. As we have seen, most citations for *messán/meschú* refer to individual dogs, whereas *oirce/oircne* is also used in law-texts to represent a general category of dogs. Therefore, I believe that *oirce/oircne* is best translated as ‘lap dog’ (cf. Vendryes’ ‘chien bichon’)⁹² and refers to a type of dog (small in size and with a friendly temperament). On the other hand, I believe *messán/meschú* would be best translated as ‘pet dog’ (cf. Vendryes’ ‘chien favori’),⁹³ as it seemingly refers more to a dog’s purpose as a favourite companion.

This idea is supported by the story of Mug-éime, the name of the first lap dog (*oirce*) that was brought into Ireland, which is found in the *Sanas Cormaic*.⁹⁴ The story claims that no lap dog had ever set foot in Ireland before Mug-éime was brought to the island from Britain, and that she is the progenitor of every lap dog in Ireland. This shows that the *oirce* was perceived as a different type or breed of dog.

4.1.4 Other types of pet dogs

Apart from *messán* and *oircne*, there seem to have been two other words used to refer specifically to pet dogs: *sporan* and *lamthargair*. The *sporan*⁹⁵ is given as an example of an *eisrecht* in *O’Davoren’s Glossary*:

(12) *Esrecht .i. in t-oircne (.i. gairit), nó in sporan (.i. fada), nó in mesan, nó na rechta ro-uaisi bit agi.*

esrecht, i.e. the lapdog, (i.e. short), or the *sporan*, (i.e. long), or the petdog [sic], or the precious toy-animals which he has.⁹⁶

It seems that *gairit* ‘short’ and *fada* ‘long’ denote different types of pet dogs. Since lap dogs are generally small in size, I would suggest that maybe the distinction was between short- and long-haired dogs. However, because this is the only attestation of the word *sporan*, it is difficult to say. The word *lamthargair* is also found in *O’Davoren’s Glossary*:

(13) *Lamthargair .i. oirci beg no mesan, ut est lamthargair brigad .i. trian n-eneclainni ann in trath dogni coimitecht ⁊ comét adairt.*

lamthargair, i.e. a small hound [sic] or lapdog, *ut est ‘lamthargair brigad’*, i.e. a third of the honour-price therein when he accompanies or secures a pillow.⁹⁷

This type of dog was clearly associated with *briugu* ‘hospitaller’ (see example 11),⁹⁸ and was expected to accompany him and watch by his pillow. The first element of *lamthargair* seems to be the word *lám* ‘hand’.⁹⁹ The second element is obscure: the only phonologically similar word is *tairngire* ‘promise’ from *do-airngir* ‘promises’, but the semantics and the phonology are difficult.

⁹² *LEIA* O-28, s.v. *orc*.

⁹³ *LEIA* M-43, s.v. *mess*.

⁹⁴ Meyer, ‘Sanas Cormaic’: 75-77.

⁹⁵ I have found no explanation for the name *sporan*.

⁹⁶ Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 326, no. 788.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 400, no. 1153.

⁹⁸ See also *CIH* vi 2228, line 17. *Lamtarrngir briugad*.

⁹⁹ The term is also listed under *eDIL* s.v. *lám*.

4.2 Cats

Cats are the second most popular pet animal today, and our relationship with them goes back a long time. Early domestic cats originated from near-eastern and Egyptian populations of the African wild cat (*Felis sylvestris libyca*).¹⁰⁰ The earliest known example of a domesticated cat comes from Cyprus, and dates to about 7500-7200 BC.¹⁰¹

It is believed that domestic cats were introduced into Ireland from Roman Britain in the first centuries AD.¹⁰² The Old Irish word for the species is *catt*, which is either a direct loan from Latin *cattus* or comes from a much earlier period when it spread in its common form, PCl. **katto-* or **kattā-*, along with the animal throughout North-Western Europe.¹⁰³

Kelly states that “[b]y the time of our main records of the seventh and eight centuries, the domestic cat was obviously well established and of considerable economic importance”.¹⁰⁴ However, the only reference to an individual pet cat comes from the well-known Old Irish poem *Messe ocus Pangur bán*¹⁰⁵ ‘Me and Pangur bán’.¹⁰⁶ The author of the poem, a monk, compares himself to his cat, both concentrated on their respective tasks: hunting for the right words and hunting mice.

The cat’s importance is reflected in the laws: there were laws regulating the killing, injuring or stealing of another’s cat, which are found in the *Catslechtæ* ‘cat-sections’, of which unfortunately only fragments survive.¹⁰⁷ We know little else about the cats themselves and the care they required. For the large majority of the words I will discuss in this section there are only one or two citations given on *eDIL*. There are of course many citations for the word *catt* itself, but these tell us little of note. Most of the information found in this section has been adapted from the section ‘Cats’ in *Early Irish Farming* with my own additions.

4.2.1 *Meoinne* and *breo(in)ne*

The first two types of cat are the *meoinne* and the *breo(in)ne*, which I will discuss together as they are both described in very similar ways. Both of the available citations are very clear about what kind of cat a *meoinne* is:

- (14) *Meoinne .i. ainm cait, ut est meoinne is eissidhe cat cuileth .i. miu ina inde no meoan ina inde .i. meghel ina inde.*¹⁰⁸

meoinne, i.e. name of a cat, *ut est meoinne*, it is a cat of the storeroom i.e. a *miu* in its essence or a *meoan* in its essence i.e. mewing [is] its essence. [MP]

¹⁰⁰ EIF 121.

¹⁰¹ Vigne, J.D., et al., ‘Early taming of the cat in Cyprus’, *Science* 304/5668 (2004): 259. Researchers uncovered the remains of a cat buried in association with a human at the site of Shillourokambos. Examination of the surrounding sediment shows that the cat was deliberately buried. Cats were also introduced on the island by humans, since there is no evidence of any native felid species.

¹⁰² McCormick, F., ‘The domesticated cat in early Christian and medieval Ireland’, in Wallace, P. F. [ed.], *Keimelia: studies in medieval archaeology and history in memory of Tom Delaney* (Galway 1988): 218.

¹⁰³ LEIA C-50, s.v. *catt*.

¹⁰⁴ EIF 121.

¹⁰⁵ According to Kelly, “it has been suggested that this name is Old Welsh **pangur* (later *pannwr*) ‘fuller (of cloth)’ as he is a person who is likely to be covered in the white dust of fuller’s clay”. See EIF 123.

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, Gerard [ed. and tr.], *Early Irish lyrics: eighth to twelfth century* (Oxford 1956): 2-3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* For the surviving fragments of the *Catslechtæ*, see *CIH* v 1550, lines 15-23, cf. *CIH* i 110, lines 14-21.

¹⁰⁸ Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 417, no. 1246.

(15) *meone .i. trénchat dogní meighligh.*¹⁰⁹

meone, i.e. a strong cat that mews. [MP]

Both *miu*, *meoan* in example (14) refer to the meowing of a cat, and the name *meoinne* ‘little meow’ is clearly a word of onomatopoeic origin (cf. Fr. *minet* ‘kitty’). This type of cat was apparently associated with the storeroom (14), as this is also stated in another manuscript: *meone .i. cat cuileadh so ‘meone*, i.e. this is a storeroom cat’ [MP].¹¹⁰ Most likely, these cats were used to hunt mice attracted by the stored foods.

The citations for *breo(in)ne* are very similar to those we have seen for *meoinne*:

(16) *Breoinne .i. ainm cait, ut est breoinne .i. cat o andeth*¹¹¹ *esidhe .i. breoan ina inde cronan ina inde.*¹¹²

breoinne, i.e. name of a cat, *ut est breoinne*, i.e. a cat, from (?) i.e. *breoan* in its essence, purring in its essence. [MP]

(17) *Breone .i. Catt so ᵹ cronan ᵹ comet no foidh guiteach aci, ᵹ tri bai ind [...].*¹¹³

breone, i.e. this is a cat, and he has purring and guarding or an inarticulate cry, and three cows in him (he is worth three cows). [MP]

Like with the *meoinne*, the citations put a lot of emphasis on a typical cat sound that the animal makes: both *breoan* and *cronan* in example (16) refer to the purring of a cat. According to Kelly, the name *breo(in)ne* means “‘little flame’, and could refer to an orange-coloured cat”.¹¹⁴ The term *breóán* is either onomatopoeic in origin or is derived from *bréo* ‘flame’,¹¹⁵ though it is unclear to me on what basis.¹¹⁶ Be that as it may, it would seem more likely to assume that the name *breo(in)ne* refers to the cat’s ability to purr, rather than the assumed colour of its coat. Because *breo(in)ne* seems to be the exact same formation as *meoinne*, I would like to suggest ‘little purr’ as a more fitting name. Similarly to the *meoinne*, the *breo(in)ne* seems to have been used to guard against mice.

4.2.2 Other types of cats

Another type of cat is called *cruibne* ‘little paws’ (a diminutive of *crób*, *crúb* ‘paw, claw’), since they are *trean o croibi* ‘strong of claw’.¹¹⁷ These cats are associated with barns, mills and drying kilns, which they were expected to keep free of mice.¹¹⁸ It seems that this, like with the *meoinne* and the *breo(in)ne*,

¹⁰⁹ *CIH* v 1550, line 15.

¹¹⁰ *CIH* i 110, line 18.

¹¹¹ Obscure. On *eDIL*, the reading *andud* ‘act of lighting, kindling; farrowing’ is suggested (*eDIL* s.v. *andud*).

¹¹² Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 235, no. 241.

¹¹³ *CIH* i 110, line 14.

¹¹⁴ *EIF* 123.

¹¹⁵ *eDIL* s.v. *breóán*.

¹¹⁶ To some ears, the crackling of fire might sound like the purring of a cat (cf. ‘a roaring fire’), but this seems somewhat farfetched to me.

¹¹⁷ Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 263, no. 422.

¹¹⁸ *CIH* v 1550, line 17-18. *cat sabaiill ᵹ muilinn ᵹ atha .i. bis oca nimcomet a triur* ‘a cat of barn and mill and drying kiln, i.e. which guards all three’. Translation by Kelly, see *EIF* 122, n. 139.

was this cat's primary function. The same might be true for another type of cat, the *íach*,¹¹⁹ which was kept for the purpose of *iathacht*, hesitantly translated by Stokes as 'mousing (?)'¹²⁰

The *folum* 'bare, unprotected (?)'¹²¹ was supposedly a type of cat used for herding or guarding cows, and was kept with them in the enclosure.¹²² Cats cannot be trained to herd animals because they are solitary animals that are not used to such cooperation like dogs (for dogs, herding is simply modified hunting behaviour). For this reason, it seems more likely that *buachailles*, which Stokes translates as a verbal form 'herds',¹²³ is actually a compound: *buachaill-les* 'cowherds-enclosure'. This would give *is eisiede cat buachailles* 'it is a cat of the cowherds-enclosure' [MP].¹²⁴ This construction is very similar to some of the other citations relating to cats found in *O'Davoren's Glossary* (see example 14).¹²⁵

Another cat mentioned in *O'Davoren's Glossary* is the *glas nenta* 'nettle-grey',¹²⁶ of which is said that it "is under the green nettle, or is taken from the green nettle, i.e. from the common nettle".¹²⁷ Kelly once again assumes that the name of the animal refers to the colour of its fur. However, there is no indication for this in the citation. It is rather named after its association with the plant, although the reason for this association is obscure.¹²⁸ Lastly, the name *rincne*, which possibly means 'spear',¹²⁹ was applied to a 'children's cat', because "it comes to the little children; or the little children reach to it".¹³⁰

Most of these cats seem to have been primarily kept for a specific function, rather than to provide companionship. The *rincne* might provide an exception to this, as it seems to have been a companion for small children (cf. *eisrecht*, section 3.2). In any case, there is one type of cat that might have been kept solely as a pet: the *baircne*.

4.2.3 *Baircne*

As Vendryes says, *baircne* 'pet cat (?)' is a "terme rare de sens imprécis".¹³¹ A popular contemporary explanation of the term seems to have been that it derived from *bairc-nia* 'champion of the ship', because this type of cat was brought on the ship of Bresal Brecc or the ark of Noah. This explanation is found in *O'Davoren's Glossary*, the *Sanas Cormaic*, and *Senchas Már*:

¹¹⁹ I have found no explanation for this name. Stokes suggests that "[i]f *iathacht* is a derivative of the lemma, we should probably correct *iach* to *iath*. But the word will still be obscure". See Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 391, no. 1109.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 391, no. 1109. It has been suggested that *iathacht* derives from *íadad* 'act of closing, enclosing', see *eDIL* s.vv. *iathacht* ?, *íadad*.

¹²¹ *eDIL* s.vv. 1 *folum*, *folomm*.

¹²² Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 351, no. 915.

¹²³ *Ibid.* The verb is not attested elsewhere (*eDIL* s.v. *búachaillid*).

¹²⁴ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 351, no. 915.

¹²⁵ See also Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 263, no. 422.

¹²⁶ *EIF* 123.

¹²⁷ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 379, no. 1045.

¹²⁸ Like for us humans, stinging nettles cause redness, swelling and itching in cats, so it seems likely that another plant is intended. When not in bloom, catnip can look very similar to the stinging nettle, but I do not know whether the Irish were familiar with this plant in the medieval period.

¹²⁹ *EIF* 124. Kelly refers to the following two *eDIL* entries: 1 *rincne* and 3 *rincne*. It is difficult to see a semantic connection between the words.

¹³⁰ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 438, no. 1365.

¹³¹ *LEIA* B-8, s.v. *baircne*.

- (18) *Baircne .i. cat; is eisidhe cat bán .i. bairc-níadh a bairc mic Laimiach tuca[d] artus. Nó baircnia trén tucad a bairc Breassail Bric.*

baircne, i.e. a cat, it is a white cat, i.e. *bairc-nia* 'barque-hero', out of the ark of (Noah) son of Lamech it was first brought. Or a strong *bairc-nia* that was brought out of the barque of Bresal Brecc.¹³²

- (19) *Barcne .i. cat ban, fobith is i mbairc dufucad.*¹³³

barcne, i.e. a white cat, for it is on a ship it was brought. [MP]

- (20) *Im baircne cat ban (.i. im baircnia, nia tren, tucadh a bairc Bresail Bric im-bit cait bronfinna duba).*

for the black and white cat (i.e. the 'bairc-nia,' i.e. the great champion which was taken from the ship of Breasal Breac, in which were white-breasted black cats).¹³⁴

In the latter example, the *baircne* is mentioned alongside the *oircne rigna* 'lap dog of a queen' in a list of items associated with women.¹³⁵ In another gloss on the same text, it also tells us that a *baircne* is the *ainm cait in sin bis for cerchaill oc mnaib c'aidche* 'name of that cat which is upon a pillow besides women all day long'.¹³⁶ Another version of the *Sanas Cormaic* takes this association with women even further and states that a *baircne* is a *catt boineand* 'female cat'.¹³⁷

Kelly interprets example (20) in a different way. He takes *baircne* to be a diminutive of *bárc* 'boat, vessel, container', and translates *baircne cat ban* as 'a basket for women's cats'.¹³⁸ However, he himself admits that in other citations the word clearly refers to a type of cat.¹³⁹ I would also argue that *ban* in examples (19) and (20) is not 'white', but the genitive plural of *ben* 'woman', and that a *baircne* is a woman's cat. As we saw above, this association with women is present in some of the citations. The colour of the cat's fur, on the other hand, is never explicitly mentioned, except in example (20) where it clearly states that these cats were predominantly black in colour. For these reasons, I believe that *cat bán* in *O'Davoren's Glossary* is a misinterpretation of the earlier material (see example 18).

¹³² Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 235, no. 242.

¹³³ Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic': 12, no. 115.

¹³⁴ *AL* i 152, line 32 (Irish text); 153 (translation).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 150, lines 11-12.

¹³⁶ *CIH* iii 889, line 23-24.

¹³⁷ Stokes, Whitley [ed.], *Three Irish glossaries: Cormac's Glossary, O'Davoren's Glossary and a glossary to the Calendar of Oengus the Culdee* (London 1862): 6, s.v. *baircne*. John O'Donovan translates *cat ban* in example (19) as 'she-cat', see Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*: 18, s.v. *baircne*.

¹³⁸ *EIF* 122, n. 142.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

4.3 Other mammals

In section 3.3, we saw that a variety of wild mammals were kept as pets by the Irish during the medieval period, and that these were referred to as *petta*. Unfortunately, the citations do not tell us anything about how these animals were kept and how their owners interacted with them. There is only one mammal for which the *eDIL* citations provide us with more information, namely the *togán/togmall*. However, based on the definition given in the *eDIL* entry, the identity of this animal remains unclear, as I will discuss below.

4.3.1 *Togmall / togán*

According to *eDIL*, a *togán*, or *togmall*, is a small animal that was sometimes kept as a pet, and ‘squirrel’ and ‘pine marten’ are given as possible translations.¹⁴⁰ Most of the *eDIL* citations for these two words come from an episode of the *Táin* called *Aided in togmaili ḡ in pheta éoin* ‘the death of the *togmall* and the pet bird’, which appears in all three recensions. In this episode, Cú Chulainn kills a *togán/togmall* that is sitting on Medb’s shoulder with a stone from his sling.¹⁴¹ The place where this occurred is henceforth known as Méithe Togmail.¹⁴² As is evident from the title, the pet bird, which is sitting on Ailill’s or Medb’s shoulder depending on the version, undergoes the same fate. Unlike for the other mammals that I mentioned above, here we have clear evidence that the *togán/togmall* was actually kept for the purpose of providing companionship, because it is allowed to sit on Medb’s shoulder.¹⁴³ This physical proximity indicates a type of intimacy that is generally only reserved for pet animals,¹⁴⁴ and at least attests to some kind of bond.

The words *togán* and *togmall* are used interchangeably to refer to the animal, and in the *Book of Leinster*, it is at one point also referred to as a *togmallán*.¹⁴⁵ I will now turn to the etymology of these words.

4.3.2 Etymology and cognates

According to Vendryes, *togán*, with the diminutive suffix, is ultimately derived from *toga* ‘act of choosing; choice’, verbal noun of *do-goa* ‘chooses’.¹⁴⁶ The word *togán* is also used in the sense of ‘favourite’, as in *oculus Christi .i. toghan .i. espoc [sic] eonan* ‘the eye of Christ i.e. [his] favourite i.e. bishop John’ [MP].¹⁴⁷ The semantic shift from ‘favourite’ to denoting a pet is not uncommon, as we have seen with *treitell/drettel* ‘pet, favourite’ and *messán* ‘a pet dog, a lap dog’. If this etymology is correct, the *togán*’s status as a favourable companion animal must have been well-known, seeing as the word is not only used to refer to the tame animal, but also to its wild counterpart. This would indicate that a *togán* was not a rare pet to have.

Vendryes mentions that the animal referred to by the term *togán* is also called a *togmall*.¹⁴⁸ Fergus Kelly, on the other hand, proposes that *togmall* is the earlier form and that *togán* is a diminutive derived from it,¹⁴⁹ though he does not explain why he believes *togmall* to be the older term. I have not

¹⁴⁰ *eDIL* s.vv. *togmall*, 2 *togán*.

¹⁴¹ *TBC-I* 29.

¹⁴² According to *eDIL*, this word might be connected to the word *méide* ‘neck’, s.v. 2 *Méithe*, ? *Meithe*.

¹⁴³ In the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, the animal is also with her in her chariot. See *TBC-YBL* 30, lines 767-768.

¹⁴⁴ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*: 56.

¹⁴⁵ *TBC-LL* 35, line 1275.

¹⁴⁶ *LEIA* T-92-93, s.v. *toga*.

¹⁴⁷ Stokes, Whitley, ‘Three Irish medical glossaries’, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* 1 (1900): 333, no. 20.

¹⁴⁸ *LEIA* T-93, s.v. *toga*.

¹⁴⁹ *EIF* 130, n.202.

been able to find any proposed etymologies for *togmall*. For *togán*, there appears to be a SG cognate *taghan* ‘marten’¹⁵⁰ (Scots *tuggin* ‘marten’).¹⁵¹

4.3.3 Squirrel or marten?

As I mentioned above, *eDIL* gives both ‘squirrel’ and ‘pine marten’ as possible translations for the words *togán* and *togmall*. I will first introduce these two animals, before explaining how the citations on *eDIL* can point us in the direction of the most likely choice between the two. In this case, I used all citations, both those that refer to the tame animal and those that refer to the wild animal. Furthermore, I have also taken into account citations from the Early Modern Irish period.

The Eurasian red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is an arboreal rodent common throughout Eurasia (see Figure 1), and it was the only species of squirrel present in Ireland during the medieval period. Modern-day Ireland is also home to another species, namely the eastern grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), but this species was introduced from North America in 1911.¹⁵²

The European pine marten (*Martes martes*) is related to the weasel, the badger, and the otter, all members of the family *Mustelidae* (see Figure 2). The pine marten is carnivorous and arboreal, and it is one of the rarest and most elusive mammals in Ireland. Nevertheless, in the *Topographia Hibernica* (1180s), Gerald of Wales notes that they are abundant in the forests of medieval Ireland.¹⁵³ Figure 3 shows an illustration of a pine marten and a few other woodland mammals that accompany the text of the *Topographia Hibernica* in Royal MS 13 B VIII (c. 1196-1223).¹⁵⁴



Figure 1: A Eurasian red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) ("[Red Squirrel](#)") by Martha de Jong-Lantink, [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)



Figure 2: A European pine marten (*Martes martes*) ("[Pine Marten](#)") by Caroline Legg, [CC BY 2.0](#)

¹⁵⁰ MacBain, Alexander, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (Inverness 1896): 355, s.v. *taghan*.

¹⁵¹ *Dictionaries of the Scots Language*, s.v. *tuggin*, <https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/tuggin>, accessed 18-06-2021.

¹⁵² Watt, H.B., ‘The American grey squirrel in Ireland’, *Irish Naturalists' Journal* 32 (1923): 95.

¹⁵³ Dimock, J. F., *Giraldi Cambrensis opera*, 8 vols, vol. 5: *Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica* (London 1867): 58.

¹⁵⁴ Curiously, in the description of the image on the online catalogue of the British Library the pine marten is called a hare. See <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIID=43310>, accessed 22-06-2021.



Figure 3: Miniatures of a stag, a pine marten, a badger, and a beaver in the lower margin of the folio, accompanying the text of the *Topographia Hibernica* (London, British Library, Royal MS 13 B VIII f. 10v)

One of the citations on *eDIL* immediately points in the direction of the pine marten. In the *Duanaire Finn* (17th c.), a collection of Fenian poems, it recounts how Finn's first exploit was to kill a *togán*.¹⁵⁵ In the poem (15th c.),¹⁵⁶ the animal is drawn to the scent of a slice of meat. Finn, who is then only an infant, strangles the animal for an entire day. When his caretaker, Bodhmann, returns, she skins the animal and puts the hide of the *cranncon na coille* 'tree-hound of the forest'¹⁵⁷ around the young boy. It seems that we are dealing with a carnivorous animal that is large enough for its hide to fit around a small child. It is also referred to as a *crannchú* 'tree-hound', which would be a fitting term for a pine marten, considering its arboreal lifestyle and its size (roughly that of a small dog).¹⁵⁸ The term *crannchú* will also prove to be significant later on in this section. Another citation, from the *Acallam na senórach*, refers to *togmaill breca a Berramhain* 'parti-coloured *togmaill* from Berramain' [MP].¹⁵⁹ Although 'parti-coloured' could apply to both the squirrel and the pine marten, the large yellow throat marking of the pine marten is much more distinctive.

Each of these arguments has previously been noted by either Thurneysen or Murphy, who both independently identified the *togán/togmall* with the (pine) marten.¹⁶⁰ To these arguments I wish to add that the SG cognate *taghan* also refers to the pine marten. Moreover, another poem (15th/16th c.)¹⁶¹ in the *Duanaire Finn* mentions both pine martens (*totháin*)¹⁶² and squirrels (*íara*) in the same stanza, both clearly distinguished by the use of different words:

¹⁵⁵ MacNeill, Eoin, *Duanaire Finn: The book of the lays of Fionn*, 3 vols, vol. 1: *Irish text, with translation into English*. Irish Texts Society 7 (London 1908): 33 (Irish text); 133 (English translation). Eoin MacNeill hesitantly proposes 'polecat' as a translation for *togán*, but the polecat was never present in Ireland.

¹⁵⁶ According to Murphy, "The language of this poem suggests that it was written about 1400 A.D.", see Murphy, Gerard, *Duanaire Finn: The book of the lays of Fionn*, 3 vols, vol. 3: *Introduction, notes, appendices and glossary*. Irish Texts Society 43 (London 1953): 31.

¹⁵⁷ MacNeill, *Duanaire Finn* i: 33 (Irish text); 133 (English translation).

¹⁵⁸ Murphy compares the term *crannchú* with the phrase *madradh crainn*, which others have claimed to be a modern Munster term for the (pine) marten, see Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* iii: 332, s.v. *toghán*.

¹⁵⁹ Stokes, Whitley, 'Acallamh na senórach', in Windisch, Ernst, and Whitley Stokes [eds.], *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, 4 vols, vol. 4/1 (Leipzig 1900): 21, line 733.

¹⁶⁰ For Thurneysen's arguments, see Thurneysen, Rudolf, 'Allerlei Nachträge', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 19 (1933): 127; For Murphy's arguments, see Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* iii: 332, s.v. *toghán*.

¹⁶¹ Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* iii: 170.

¹⁶² Cf. *bruic agus tuirc agus totháin*, see O'Rahilly, Cecile, *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghráinne: The pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne* (London 1924): 2. Neither Murphy nor O'Rahilly give an explanation for the *-th-* instead of *-gh-* (or EModIr. *-dh-*, *-gh-*).

(21) *Totháin do choillteach díamhra | dob iomdha íara ar do crannaibh*

The martens of your mysterious woods! | Many were the squirrels on your trees.¹⁶³

Although these citations clearly indicate that the *togán/togmall* is a pine marten, in the context of the *Táin* it would make more sense for the animal to be a squirrel, as I will explain below.

Pine martens, or martens in general, do not seem to have been common pets at any point in history. Walker-Meikle does not mention pine martens being kept as pets in *Medieval Pets*. She does occasionally mention some of the pine marten's smaller relatives, the weasel and the ferret, but these animals were not present in Ireland during the medieval period and do not fit the description of the *togán/togmall*. According to Murphy, "[i]t is well known that pine-martens are tameable".¹⁶⁴ However, references to tame martens appear to be very scarce. In his *History of Animals*, Aristotle says about the marten (ἰκτις) that it becomes very tame.¹⁶⁵ However, it seems that Aristotle is specifically talking about the beech marten (*Martes foina*) rather than the pine marten, because he comments that the animal has a white underbelly (τὸ λευκὸν τὸ ὑποκάτω) like the weasel.¹⁶⁶ In the *Laws of Hywel Dda*, a marten (*beleu*) is given as an example of a wild animal kept as a pet (*lledfegin*).¹⁶⁷ Although this indicates that there is at least precedent for the taming of a marten, it does not indicate that either species of marten was ever a common pet. Squirrels, on the other hand, were popular pets among the upper classes of society from the Late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance period.¹⁶⁸ They are commonly depicted wearing a collar and chain, usually made of silver (see Figures 4 & 5).¹⁶⁹



Figure 4: Detail from an illustration in the lower margin of the folio, depicting a woman in a coach with a squirrel on her shoulder (London, British Library, Add MS 42130 f. 181v)



Figure 5: An illustration in the lower margin of the folio, depicting a woman playing with a squirrel that wears a belled collar (London, British Library, Add MS 42130 f. 33r)

¹⁶³ Murphy, Gerard, *Duanaire Finn: The book of the lays of Fionn*, 3 vols, vol. 2: *Irish text, with translation into English*. Irish Texts Society 28 (London 1933): 372-373, LXVIII, stanza 8.

¹⁶⁴ Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* iii: 332-333, s.v. *toghán*.

¹⁶⁵ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, IX, 6.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Owen, *Ancient laws and institutes of Wales*: 412 xxx.

¹⁶⁸ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*. Walker-Meikle mentions squirrels several times throughout *Medieval Pets*. She comments on the popularity of squirrels on pages 5 and 14.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 48.

Fortunately, there is one passage in the *Agallamh na Senórach* that shows us that it is indeed pine martens that the Irish kept as pets. The passage mentions a hound that, according to the editor, “was at this instant no greater than a lap-dog such as a great lady or man of high estate may keep”.¹⁷⁰ However, the Irish text is the following: *nír mhó iná crannchú bhíos ac rígain nó ac ródhuine an uair sin í.*¹⁷¹ The editor has translated *crannchú* as ‘lap-dog’, but the more correct literal translation is ‘tree-hound’, and as we have seen above this term actually applies to the pine marten.

This shows us that Medb, who is of course a fictional character, was not the only owner of a pet pine marten. It seems that both male and female nobility were known for keeping these animals as pets, a practice that they may have possibly shared with the Welsh. Unfortunately, we know little else about such practices.

On the basis of the above, I suggest amending the definition of the lemmas ‘*togmall*’ ‘*2 togán*’ on *eDIL* to simply ‘pine marten’.

¹⁷⁰ O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica* ii: 237.

¹⁷¹ O’Grady, *Silva Gadelica* i: 209.

4.4 Birds

There are only a few loose citations referring to birds being kept as pets. One of these we have encountered in the previous section, namely the reference to the bird Ailill's shoulder. However, this animal is simply referred to as *én* 'bird', and the passage tells us nothing about the physical characteristics of the animal, so its identity is unknown. Most other references to captive birds have already been discussed quite extensively by Kelly in the section 'Other pets and captives' in *Early Irish Farming*. In this section, I will relay most of the information found there, in addition to my own findings.

4.4.1 *Corr*

The first term Kelly discusses is *corr*, a term that is applied to both the grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) and the common crane (*Grus grus*), also called the Eurasian crane (see Figures 6 & 7).¹⁷² The crane disappeared from Ireland as a breeding bird a few hundred years ago and is now only rarely sighted as a passage migrant.¹⁷³ However, it was formerly quite abundant, as is noted by Gerald of Wales in his *Topographia Hibernica*.¹⁷⁴ Kelly states that the *corr* is the most frequently mentioned pet in his sources, apart from cats and dogs,¹⁷⁵ but as we have seen, it is difficult to determine what kind of relationship the Irish actually shared with these birds. In regard to the references in the legal material, Kelly notes that "it is difficult to be sure which bird is intended".¹⁷⁶ However, the arguments that Kelly brings forth himself seem to indicate that the *peta cuirre* is more likely to be crane. In 'Birds in captivity in the Middle Ages', W. B. Yapp provides a few examples of cranes in captivity, some of which are also mentioned in Kelly's chapter.¹⁷⁷ Neither Yapp nor Walker-Meikle mention herons in captivity.



Figure 6: A grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) ("[Grey heron, November 2015, Osaka](#)" by Laitche, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#))



Figure 7: A common crane (*Grus grus*) ("[Common crane 2017-04-01](#)" by Thomas Landgren, [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#))

¹⁷² According to Kelly, herons are still called 'cranes' in some parts of Britain and Ireland. See *EIF* 125, n. 167.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 125.

¹⁷⁴ Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis opera* v: 46.

¹⁷⁵ *EIF* 125.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 126.

¹⁷⁷ Yapp, W. B., 'Birds in captivity in the Middle Ages', *Archives of Natural History* 10/3 (1982): 479–500.

4.4.2 Birds of prey and crows

The second term Kelly discusses is *senén* (lit. ‘old bird’), which may have applied to a variety of different birds.¹⁷⁸ In the *Bretha Comaithchesa* it is equated with the hawk (*sebacc*).¹⁷⁹ In *O’Davoren’s Glossary* it corresponds to an eagle (*cufir*) in one entry,¹⁸⁰ but is again equated to the hawk in another.¹⁸¹ In the latter, it is also identified as the *préchán*, a term that was used to denote a variety of birds of prey and carrion-feeders.¹⁸² Kelly concludes that “[i]n the absence of conclusive evidence it seems best to take the word *senén* as one which could be applied to various birds of prey”.¹⁸³

Finally, Kelly mentions two birds of the crow family (*Corvidae*): the (hooded) crow (*Corvus cornix*) and the jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*). The (hooded) crow (*teithre*) is mentioned in an Old Irish law-text called the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* ‘The first *Bretha nemed* (Judgments concerning privileged persons)’, which deals with its offences and states that it was required to be kept on a string.¹⁸⁴ The jackdaw (*cáóc*) is mentioned alongside the heron in legal commentary, where it is indirectly referred to as *eisrecht*.¹⁸⁵

4.4.3 The wren

Kelly has found “no references to the caging of smaller birds”.¹⁸⁶ The only other pet bird that I have found references to belonged to St. Moling: in the *Birth and Life of St. Moling*, we learn that the saint keeps a wren (*dreollán*)¹⁸⁷ as a pet (see Figure 8).¹⁸⁸



Figure 8: A Eurasian wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) ("[Eurasian wren \(*Troglodytes troglodytes*\), Forêt de Soignes, Brussels](#)" by Frank Vassen, [CC BY 2.0](#))

¹⁷⁸ EIF 129.

¹⁷⁹ CIH i 197, line 3.

¹⁸⁰ Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’: 256, no. 374.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 449, no. 1414.

¹⁸² EIF 129.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 130. For the relevant line in the *Bretha Nemed Toísech*, see CIH vi 2216, line 34.

¹⁸⁵ CIH v 1873, line 25. *Cúig .s. do smacht isin cuirr ḡ isin caoigh ḡ in cach neisrecht uili.*

¹⁸⁶ EIF 130.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. W dryw ‘wren’.

¹⁸⁸ Stokes, *The birth and life of St Moling*: 302-303, no. 73-75.

Besides exotic birds, such as parrots, some native bird species were also kept as pets in medieval western Europe.¹⁸⁹ However, wrens do not seem to be among them. Furthermore, as we have seen in section 3.2, St. Moling was also the owner of a pet fox and a pet fly. Although foxes might have been kept as pets by some (see section 3.3), keeping a fly as a pet is technically impossible. The taming and befriending of wild animals is a common theme in medieval hagiographies, and is not limited to Ireland.¹⁹⁰ The animals in saints' Lives are generally vessels of symbolism, rather than representatives of real human-animal relations; a saint's ability to tame a wild animal is a demonstration of sanctity, and echoes the Christian idea of man's authority over the natural world.¹⁹¹ At the same time, the keeping of animals by saints is a representation of their love for all of Creation.¹⁹² This idea is also present in the Life of St. Moling, as Fergus Kelly says: "Saint Mo Ling had a number of animals which he kept in honour of their Creator, and fed from his own hand".¹⁹³ For these reasons, we cannot regard Saint Moling's pet keeping habits as a realistic reflection of medieval Irish society.

¹⁸⁹ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*: 15. For a more comprehensive overview of this subject see Yapp, 'Birds in captivity in the Middle Ages'.

¹⁹⁰ Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*: 20-21.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* See also DeMello, Margot, *Animals and society: an introduction to human-animal studies* (New York, NY, 2012): 37-38.

¹⁹² Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*: 20-21.

¹⁹³ *EIF* 125.

5. Conclusion

Although the available material has allowed me to answer all of the research questions stated in the introduction of this thesis, to which I will come back below, it is unfortunate that many of the specifics of pet keeping in medieval Ireland remain unknown, unless new material comes to light. In this thesis, I have only considered animals that were kept for the sole purpose of providing pleasure or companionship. Of course, one could also take a broader definition of a ‘pet’ to include animals kept for other purposes with which owners might have also shared a close bond. By also taking account animals such as horses and hunting dogs, one could perhaps offer a more comprehensive overview of the attitudes towards different types of animals in medieval Ireland.

5.1 Pets in medieval Ireland

There does not seem to have been an equivalent for the English term ‘pet’ in Old or Middle Irish, but there existed three words to refer to an animal kept for the sole purpose of providing pleasure or companionship: *treitell* (3.1), *eisrecht* (3.2), and *petta* (3.3). The word *treitell* seems to have been used for any ‘favourite’ animal, be that a tame wild animal or a traditional pet animal, such as a dog. The legal term *eisrecht* seems to have been applied to animals that were not regarded as useful. It is most commonly used for kittens and puppies, which were kept as playthings for children until they were old enough to perform more useful tasks. The term could also be applied to tame wild animals, and in the *Birth and Life of St. Moling*, we even encounter a fly that is called an *eisrecht*. These animals, like the young dogs and cats, were not regarded as having any (economic) value, and were thus not ‘amenable to ordinary rules’, like livestock. The first of these terms seemingly emphasises the emotional value of an animal, whereas the second emphasises its lack of economic value. Finally, the term *petta*, which is the most limited in its application, was specifically used to denote a tame wild animal kept as a companion.

5.2 Which animals were kept as pets?

From what we have seen, it appears that the Irish kept some of the same pet animals that are popular today: cats and dogs. However, they seem to have also enjoyed the company of more unusual companion animals, including a variety of native mammal and bird species, most notably the pine marten (*togán/togmall*).

We can say little about the appearance of the pet dogs and cats kept by the Irish. There appear to have been different types of lap dogs, possibly short- and long-haired (4.1.4, example 12). Cats probably exhibited a variety of patterns and colours, though the name *Pangur bán* ‘white Pangur’ is the only explicit reference to the colour of a cat’s fur (4.2). Something that has not previously been commented on, is the amount of diminutive suffixes (-án, -ne) found in the data set; we have seen *messán*, *oircne* (also *sporan* if we take that to be a diminutive), *meoinne*, *breo(in)ne*, *cruibne*, *baircne*, and *togán*. It could be that these suffixes were used to indicate the small size of these animals¹⁹⁴ or as a sign of endearment.

5.3 Who kept pet animals?

Based on the discussed citations, it seems that pet keeping was a pastime mainly for men and women of rank, who could afford the luxury to care for an animal that served no other purpose than to provide

¹⁹⁴ As Walker-Meikle comments, “[m]any terms for pet dogs emphasize their small size: *catulus* or *caniculus* in Latin, *chienet* in Old French, *hündchen* in Middle German, *whelp* or *small hound* in Middle English, *cagnolo* or *cagnolino* in Italian and *perillo* or *blanchet* in Castilian”, see Walker-Meikle, Kathleen, *Medieval Pets: 2*.

companionship.¹⁹⁵ However, seeing as many medieval sources have a bias towards the representation of the upper classes of society, we should not take this as evidence that pet keeping was reserved for nobility.¹⁹⁶ Kittens and puppies acted as companions and playmates for small children (3.2). Pet dogs (*messán* and *oirce*) and pet cats (*baircne*) are mostly mentioned in association with women. Native wild mammals and birds, such as foxes, deer, 'old birds', and cranes, on the other hand, are linked with landowners. The *togán/togmall* seems to have been a pet kept by nobility of both genders. Unfortunately, the citations reveal little about how these animals were cared for.

5.4 What was the purpose of these animals?

Although these animals generally had no real utilitarian function, their emotional value is reflected by some of the terms used to refer to them: *treitell*, *messán/meschú*, and *togán*. Many of the consulted texts also refer to their function as companions: Liban's pet dog roamed the waters of Lough Neagh with her for three hundred years, not once leaving her side (4.1.1); Dabilla followed its owner, Boand, even in death (4.1.1); the lap dog of a hospitaller was expected to accompany him and watch by his pillow (4.1.4), whereas a woman's lap dog was there to protect her from fairies during childbirth (4.1.2); young cats and dogs served as playmates for children (3.2 & 4.2.2); Medb and Ailill's pet animals accompanied them while sitting on their shoulders (4.3.1 & 4.4); a *baircne* supposedly spent its day sleeping on a cushion besides its female owner (4.2.3), and even St. Moling's pet fly was so important to him that he mourned the loss of the little insect (3.2).

Although references to pet animals are rare in the written record of medieval Ireland, I believe this thesis has shown that for at least some these animals were an important part of daily life as beloved companions.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 3-5.

¹⁹⁶ See also Walker-Meikle, *Medieval Pets*: 5.

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Appendix: relevant *eDIL* citations with translations

Headers for each set of citations correspond exactly to the headword given on *eDIL*. The appendix does not include all of the citations given under the headword on *eDIL*, but only the ones cited in this thesis or other relevant citations that were not included in the main text. Identical citations are listed under the header where they are most relevant. Some of the citations included here were expanded to include more context than what is given on *eDIL*. Furthermore, some have been taken from a different source than the one listed on *eDIL*, and can therefore look different.

Pets

treitell

eDIL definition: pet, favourite.

Citations:

Treitell .i. mesan, ut est cach tretell dorenar fo dire a milcon.

treitell, i.e. a pet dog, *ut est* 'every pet is paid for according to the fine of his hunting hound'.¹⁹⁷

drettel

eDIL definition: darling, pet, favourite.

Citations:

Drettell .i. peta, amail adeir Senchas [Mór]: na torc arabí treut na drettell .i. in torc peta.

drettell, i.e. a pet, as saith the Senchas Mór: 'neither the boar that is best of the herd, nor the pet', i.e. the pet boar.¹⁹⁸

[...] *ni aisc dreitle milcu la echraid. orca lia ben [...]*.¹⁹⁹

[...] he may have (lit. it is not a disgrace to him) pet animals, a hunting dog, as well as (lit. with) steeds, a lap dog for his wife [...]. [MP]

eisrecht

eDIL definition: one who is outside or not bound by the law; (1) kinless persons (2) idiots (3) pet animals or toys.

Citations:

cin cach eisrechta (.i. na petadha).²⁰⁰

for the trespass of every *eisrecht* (i.e. of the pets/tame animals) [MP].

¹⁹⁷ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 482, no. 1599

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 310, no. 701.

¹⁹⁹ *CIH* ii 567, line 26; *CIH* iii 783, line 33.

²⁰⁰ *AL* i 156, lines 28-29 & 160, lines 7-8; See also 162, lines 22-23 & 166, line 1.

eisrecta tiscena (.i. na heisrechta becca tindscetlaither ag neoch .i. coin ᵱ cait becc[a], no co ngabait gnimradh).

early playthings (i.e. the little toys which are his first playthings, i.e. dogs and little cats, until they are capable of action).²⁰¹

[...] *milchoin ᵱ eisrechta olchena.*²⁰²

[...] greyhounds and playthings besides.²⁰³

*Im esrechta macraide (.i. catín no lúb no bacan no liatróit)*²⁰⁴

For (the) toys of children (i.e. a kitten or a hoop or a hook (?) or a ball). [MP]

Srublingi con minaign; srublaingi im a gob in chon do ní minigecht re henaib ocus re huanaib, ocus re heistrechtaib in tige.

A muzzle for the 'minaigh'-dog, i.e. a muzzle of leather is fastened on the snout of the dog that makes small attacks upon fowl and lambs and the pet animals of the house.²⁰⁵

[...] *is leth .u.s. ᵱ sesed eneclainne isin eisrecht nallaigh .i. leth in neich dobertha isin eisrecht cennaigh.*²⁰⁶

[...] it is half of 5 *séts*, and a sixth of [the] honour-price for the wild pet, i.e. half of what is given for the bought pet. [MP]

Cidh fil ann tra, ar Molling, acht intí ro mill immum in estrecht trūagh no bidh ic airfitiudh damh gurab hi fástighbh bes a trebh co brāth, ᵱ coraib bainne fliuch ann dogrés. Ocus co rabat macaimh ᵱ minndáine ic a orcain.

“Howbeit,” says Molling, “but he that marred for me the poor pet that used to be making music for me, let his dwelling be for ever in empty houses, with a wet drip therein continually. And may children and small people be destroying him!”²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ AL v 250, lines 4 & 15 (Irish text); 251 (translation).

²⁰² Meyer, ‘Sanas Cormaic’: 87, no. 1018

²⁰³ Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*: 129.

²⁰⁴ CIH v 1901, lines 25 & 32.

²⁰⁵ AL iii 416, line 9-10 (Irish text); 417 (translation).

²⁰⁶ CIH ii 718, lines 20-21.

²⁰⁷ Stokes, *The birth and life of St Molling*: 56-57, No. 74.

petta

eDIL definition: a pet, usually of a tame or domesticated animal.

Citations:

Indat pettai sút nó indat eóin chena?

Are they tame or just birds?²⁰⁸

*In torc peta [...].*²⁰⁹

A pet pig [...]. [MP]

*Im rubu foichlige ([...], .i. bainb beca ocus peta ocus oircpeta muc²¹⁰ bid i ndeghaidh cáich, [...]).*²¹¹

For animals that scrape ([...], i.e. little pigs and pet pigs [and] pet pigs which follow people). [MP]

[...] *coros ort in petta n-éoin buí fora gúalaind [...].*

[...] and killed the pet bird on her shoulder.²¹²

[...] *peata aige allta [...].*

[...] a pet hind [...].²¹³

*Ticc iaram peta cuirre roboi isin mainistir ⁊ berid cen fuirech a suil asa chionn.*²¹⁴

Then comes a pet crane that was in the monastery and it immediately takes his eye from his head. [MP]

Smacht peata chuirre ocus circe, ocus peata ois, ocus peata mictire, ocus peata seineóin, ocus peata sindaigh. Tairgille nairaib; ite indsin a caithche

As to the 'smacht'-fine for pet herons and hens, and pet deer, and pet wolves, and pet old birds, and pet foxes; there is an additional pledge upon them; this is for their trespasses.²¹⁵

²⁰⁸ TBC-LL 32 (Irish text); 170 (translation).

²⁰⁹ AL ii 368, line 15.

²¹⁰ Leg. *peta oirc ocus peta muc*.

²¹¹ AL I 190, line 16.

²¹² TBC-LL 35 (Irish text); 173 (translation).

²¹³ Calder, *Imtheachta Æniasa*: 108 (Irish text); 109 (translation).

²¹⁴ Meyer, 'A medley of Irish texts': 309.

²¹⁵ AL iv: 114, lines 10-12 (Irish text); 115 (translation).

[...] *oeti inpeta préchan* [...].

[...] from the flying of the pet scaldcrow [...].²¹⁶

[...] *petta sindaig* (= *mansuetam vulpem*).²¹⁷

[...] a tame fox (= a tame fox). [MP]

Senen .i. prechan no seabac, ut est smacht peta seneoin ⁊ sinnaig.

senén, i.e. a kite or a hawk, *ut est* 'the *smacht*-fine for a pet hawk and a (pet) fox.'²¹⁸

altilia .i. petai auium.²¹⁹

fattened birds i.e. pet birds. [MP]

Na petada en uili [...].²²⁰

The other pet birds [...]. [MP]

Dhá pheata odhra [...].²²¹

Two tame cormorants (?) [MP]

⁊ *is étáil liumm in béist bec-so d'[fh]águail di-a tabairt do'n ingen-sin, co ndenai petta di*.²²²

And I desire to get that little beast in order to give him to that girl, so that she might make a pet for herself. [MP]

pettán

eDIL definition: pet (of animals).

Citations:

dhá pheatán Chreite Rúaidhe [...].²²³

two pets of Chreite Rúaidhe [...]. [MP]

²¹⁶ Stokes, *On the calendar of Oengus*: lxxiii (Ap. 7).

²¹⁷ Hogan, *The Latin lives of the saints*: 85.

²¹⁸ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 449, no. 1414.

²¹⁹ Stokes, 'The Irish verses, notes and glosses in Harl. 1802': 368.

²²⁰ *AL* iv 116, line 15.

²²¹ Ní Shéaghda, *Agallamh na seanórach* iii: 78, line 2328.

²²² Atkinson, *The passions and the homilies from Leabhar Breac*: 242, lines 7204-7205.

²²³ Ní Shéaghda, *Agallamh na seanórach* iii: 79, line 2335.

Dogs

mes(s)án

eDIL definition: a pet dog, lapdog.

Citations:

*Mesan .i. aon is messa do c[h]onuib.*²²⁴

Mesan i.e. one that is worst of hounds.²²⁵

Measan .i. cú beag.

measan i.e. a little dog.²²⁶

*Bliadain lán trá do Líban ina grianán fó'n loch agus a mesán ina farrud ann [...].*²²⁷

Now for a full year Liban had been in her bower beneath the loch and her lap-dog with her there.²²⁸

Im oircne rigna (.i. indiaid orcan na rigna bis, .i. mesan).

For the lap-dog ('*oirne*') of a queen (i.e. after the foot ('*orcan*') of the queen he follows, i.e. the lap-dog).²²⁹

Esrecht .i. in t-oirne (.i. gairit), nó in sporan (.i. fada), nó in mesan, nó na rechta ro-uaisi bit agi.

esrecht, i.e. the lapdog, (i.e. short), or the *sporan*, (i.e. long), or the petdog [sic], or the precious toy-animals which he has.²³⁰

Gáir Ossir (.i. messan Conaire).

The howl of Ossar (Conaire's lapdog) [...].²³¹

²²⁴ Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic': 75, no. 879.

²²⁵ Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*: 115, s.v. *mesan*.

²²⁶ Miller, 'O'Clery's Irish glossary': 22.

²²⁷ O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* i: 236.

²²⁸ O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* ii: 267.

²²⁹ AL i 152, line 34 (Irish text); 153 (translation).

²³⁰ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 326, no. 788.

²³¹ Stokes, 'The destruction of Dá Derga's hostel': 207-208 (b).

Dabilla ainm in chon choir robói oc mnái Nechtain nár-móir, messán Bóinne co mblaid luid ina diaid dia torchair.

Dabilla, the name of the faithful dog who belonged to the wife of Nechtain, great and noble, the lap-dog of Boand the famous, which went after her when she perished.²³²

meschu

eDIL definition: a pet dog, lap-dog.

Citations:

Measchu .i. cú beag.

measchu i.e. a little dog.²³³

*Dabilla ainm meschon mná Nechtain.*²³⁴

Dabilla, the name of the lap dog of the wife of Nechtain. [MP]

Blegon na elte sin, tra, ised doberti donmeschoin báí hifail inna ingine .i. Cruimthiris.

The milk of that doe it is that used to be given to the lapdog that was near the virgin, namely Cruimtheris.²³⁵

oirce

eDIL definition: a pet dog, a lap-dog.

Citations:

*Hylax .i. horcae milchu no conbocail.*²³⁶

Hylax i.e. a lap dog, a hunting hound or a herding dog. [MP]

[...] *a orci i rricht dobran.*²³⁷

[...] her lap dog in the shape of an otter. [MP]

Oirc .i. cú beag, no measchú

oirce i.e. a little dog, or lapdog.²³⁸

²³² Gwynn, *The metrical dindsenchas* iii: 32-33, stanza 21.

²³³ Miller, 'O'Clery's Irish glossary': 22.

²³⁴ Atkinson, *The Book of Leinster*: 144a, line 42.

²³⁵ Stokes, *The tripartite Life of Patrick*: 232-233.

²³⁶ Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus* ii: 48, line 31. This is an archaic writing for *con-búachaill*.

²³⁷ Best and Bergin, *Lebor na hUidre*: 96, line 2967.

²³⁸ Miller, 'O'Clery's Irish glossary': 30.

Trí airfite dála .i. druth, fuirsire, oirce.

Three entertainers of a gathering: a jester, a juggler, a lap-dog.²³⁹

Im essrechta macru, .i. anaithgin, ar ain, .i. na hi ro uaisi gatus sirg dona macaib beca, .i. camana, ocus liatroití, ocus luboca act [no oirce] no cait, uair ar treisi aithgin na cat.

For the toys of children, i.e. they must be restored in one day, i.e. these goodly things which remove dulness [sic] from little boys, viz., hurlets, balls, and hoops, except little dogs and cats, for it is in three days the cats, &c. are to be restored.²⁴⁰

*Mugh-eme dano ainm in c[h]etna oirci cetarabae ind-Heri.*²⁴¹

Mug-éime, that is the name of the first lapdog that was in Ireland.²⁴²

*Ba banc[h]ú tra in t-orci [...].*²⁴³

The lapdog, being a bitch [...].²⁴⁴

[...] *cloicend lom ind orci [...].*²⁴⁵

[...] the lapdog's bare skull [...].²⁴⁶

dael oc a diul méitighther oirce [...].

a stag-beetle as big as a lap-dog [...].²⁴⁷

Conogam [...] oirci ar aicme ailme [...].

Dog Ogham [...] lapdog for group A [...].²⁴⁸

²³⁹ Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*: 32 & 33, no. 241.

²⁴⁰ *AL* i 138, lines 31-33 (Irish text); 139 (translation).

²⁴¹ Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic': 75, no. 883.

²⁴² Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*: 111.

²⁴³ Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic': 76, no. 883.

²⁴⁴ Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*: 112.

²⁴⁵ Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic': 77, no. 883.

²⁴⁶ Stokes and O'Donovan, *Sanas Chormaic*: 112.

²⁴⁷ Stokes, *The martyrology of Oengus the Culdee*: 42, no. 15 & 43.

²⁴⁸ Calder, *Auraicept na n-Éces*: 292-295, lines 5740-5748.

oircne

eDIL definition: a pet dog, a lapdog.

Citations:

*Im oirce, .i. bis ar cae, oircne na rigna imesan,*²⁴⁹ *no ac mnaí toircesach.*²⁵⁰

For a lap dog, i.e. which is on the path, the lap dog of the queen, i.e. a pet dog; or on (the lap of) a pregnant woman. [MP]

*Cair cia laisin coir oircne .Nī. occ briugaid ⁊ liaigh ⁊ cruitire ⁊ rigan.*²⁵¹

Who has the right to a lap dog? Not difficult. A hospitaller and a physician and a harpist and a queen. [MP]

sporan

eDIL definition: some kind of pet dog (?)

Citations:

Esrecht .i. in t-oircne (.i. gairit) nó in sporan (.i. fada), no in mesan, nó na rechta ro-uaisi bit agi.

esrecht, i.e. the lapdog, (i.e. short), or the *sporan*, (i.e. long), or the petdog [sic], or the precious toy-animals which he has.²⁵²

? *targair*

eDIL definition: no definition given.

Citations:

Lamthargair .i. oirci beg no mesan, ut est lamthargair brigad .i. trian n-eneclainni ann in trath dogni coimitecht ⁊ comét adairt.

lamthargair, i.e. a small hound [sic] or lapdog, *ut est 'lamthargair brigad'*, i.e. a third of the honour-price therein when he accompanies or secures a pillow.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Leg. .i. *mesan*.

²⁵⁰ AL i: 144, lines 9-10.

²⁵¹ CIH iv 1268, line 16-17.

²⁵² Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 326, no. 788.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 400, no. 1153.

Cats

baircne

eDIL definition: pet cat (?)

Citations:

im baircne cat ban (.i. im baircnia, nia tren, tucadh a bairc Bresail Bric im-bit cait bronfinna duba).

for the black and white cat (i.e. the 'bairc-nia,' i.e. the great champion which was taken from the ship of Bresal Breac, in which were white-breasted black cats).²⁵⁴

*Baircni .i. ainm cait in sin bis for cerchaill oc mnaib c'aidche.*²⁵⁵

Baircne i.e. [the] name of that cat which is upon a pillow besides women all day long. [MP]

Baircne .i. cat; is eisidhe cat bán .i. bairc-níadh a bairc mic Laimiach tuca[d] artus. Nó baircnia trén tucad a bairc Breassail Bric.

baircne, i.e. a cat, it is a white cat, i.e. *bairc-nia* 'barque-hero', out of the ark of (Noah) son of Lamech it was first brought. Or a strong *bairc-nia* that was brought out of the barque of Bresal Brecc.²⁵⁶

*Barcne .i. cat ban, fobith is i mbairc dusfucad.*²⁵⁷

Barcne, i.e. a white cat, for it is on a ship it was brought. [MP]

Baircne .i. catt boineand [...].

Baircne i.e. a female cat [...].²⁵⁸

breo(in)ne

eDIL definition: a type of cat.

Citations:

*Breone .i. Catt so 7 cronan 7 comet no foidh guiteach aci 7 tri bai ind [...].*²⁵⁹

Breone, i.e. this is a cat, and he has purring and guarding or an inarticulate cry, and three cows in him (he is worth three cows) [...]. [MP]

²⁵⁴ AL i 150, line 11 & 152, line 32 (Irish text); 153 (translation).

²⁵⁵ CIH iii 889, line 23-24.

²⁵⁶ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 235, no. 242.

²⁵⁷ Meyer, 'Sanas Cormaic': 12, no. 115.

²⁵⁸ Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*: 6, s.v. *baircne*.

²⁵⁹ CIH i 110, line 14.

Loose citation referring to a *breo(in)ne*, found under the headword *breóán*:

*Breoinne .i. ainm cait, ut est breoinne .i. cat o andeth esidhe .i. breoan ina inde cronan ina inde.*²⁶⁰

Breoinne, i.e. name of a cat, *ut est breoinne*, i.e. a cat, from (?) i.e. *breoan* in its essence, purring in its essence. [MP]

cruibne

eDIL definition: a type of cat.

Citations:

Cruibne .i. ainm caitt, ut est cruibne [is eissidhe cat] sabail 7 muilinn .i. nia tren trean o croibi.

cruibne, i.e. the name of a cat, *ut est 'cruibne*, this is a cat of a barn and a mill', i.e. a strong champion strong of (his) claws.²⁶¹

*Cruipne .i. trencat a lus a cruipe. cat .s. 7 muilinn 7 atha .i. bis oca nimcomet a triur.*²⁶²

Cruipne i.e. a strong cat of foot [and] of claw. A cat of barn and mill and drying kiln, i.e. which guards all three. [MP]

1 *folum*

eDIL definition: a type of cat (? bare, unprotected).

Citations:

Folumh .i. ainm cait, ut est folum is eisiede cat buachailles .i. cometar ccusna buaib isin lis [no bis gusna buaib isin liss].

Folumh, i.e. the name of a cat, *ut est 'folum*, he is the cat that herds the cows', i.e. is kept with the cows in the garth, or who is with the cows in the garth.²⁶³

[...] *ar cia airmither tri cait aili ann .i. iach, folum, glas neannta.*

[...] for though three other cats are numbered there, i.e. *iach, folum, glas nennta.*²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 235, no. 241.

²⁶¹ *Ibic.* P. 263, no. 422.

²⁶² *CIH* v 1550, lines 17-18.

²⁶³ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 351, no. 915.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 445, no. 1395.

2 *íach*

eDIL definition: a type of cat.

Citations:

íach .i. ainm cait, ut est *íach* dorenar lethdire .i. cat gabur .i. do iathacht.

íach, i.e. name of a cat, *ut est* 'a cat that (for which) a half-fine is paid', i.e. a cat that is taken, i.e. for mousing (?).²⁶⁵

meoinne

eDIL definition: a type of cat.

Citations:

Meoinne .i. ainm cait, ut est *meoinne* is eissidhe cat cuileth .i. miu ina inde no meoan ina inde .i. meghel ina inde.²⁶⁶

Meoinne, i.e. name of a cat, *ut est meoinne*, it is a cat of the storeroom i.e. a *miu* in its essence or a *meoan* in its essence i.e. mewing [is] its essence. [MP]

meone .i. tréchat dogní meighligh.²⁶⁷

meone, i.e. a strong cat that mews. [MP]

Loose citation referring to the *meoinne*, found in *Early Irish Farming*.²⁶⁸

Meone .i. cat cuileadh so [...].²⁶⁹

Meone, i.e. this is a storeroom cat [...]. [MP]

3 *rincne*

eDIL definition: a type of cat, a children's cat.

Citations:

Rincne .i. cat, ut est *rincne* is eisside cat mac .i. iarsinni riachas na macaime becca, no rigait na macaim eissimh.

rincne, i.e. a cat, *ut est* '*rincne*, this is the boys' cat', i.e. because it comes to the little children; or the little children reach to it.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 391, no. 1109.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 417, no. 1246.

²⁶⁷ *CIH* v 1550, line 15.

²⁶⁸ *EIF* 123, n. 151.

²⁶⁹ *CIH* i 110, line 18.

²⁷⁰ Stokes, 'O'Davoren's Glossary': 438, no. 1365.

Other mammals

1 *togán*

eDIL definition: favourite.

Citations:

*Oculus Christi .i. toghan .i. espoc [sic] eonan.*²⁷¹

The eye of Christ i.e. [his] favourite i.e. bishop John. [MP]

2 *togán*

eDIL definition: some small animal, sometimes kept as pet; squirrel (?), pine marten.

Citations:

*a feōil tarra togāin.*²⁷²

O flesh of the belly of a marten. [MP]

[...] in togā bōi hi carput la Meidb [...].²⁷³

the pine marten that was in the chariot with Medb. [MP]

Nó dano is for gúalaind Medba bátár immalle eter togán ⁊ én, [...].

Or, according to another version, both marten and bird were on Medb's shoulder.²⁷⁴

Na coin allta, ocus na sinnaigh, ocus na brain,²⁷⁵ no na bruic ocus na doain²⁷⁶ amuil na conu cenndu um a fhoglaibh comaithchesa.

The wild dogs, and the foxes, [and the otters], or the badgers, and the 'togans,' are as the tame dogs with respect to their trespasses in the co-tenancy.²⁷⁷

Cach esreacht allaid im̄ na domelar [...] sinnach ⁊ toghan, [...].²⁷⁸

Now, every wild pet that is not eaten [...] a fox and a pine marten, [...]. [MP]

²⁷¹ Stokes, 'Three Irish medical glossaries': 333, no. 20.

²⁷² Meyer, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung I*: 28, no. 63.

²⁷³ *TBC-YBL*: 30, lines 767-768.

²⁷⁴ *TBC-I*: 29 (Irish text); 151 (translation).

²⁷⁵ Leg. *dobrain*.

²⁷⁶ Leg. *togain*.

²⁷⁷ *AL* iv 120, lines 1-3 (Irish text); 121 (translation).

²⁷⁸ *CIH* v 1585, lines 78-80.

*Na coin allta ᵱ na sinnaich ᵱ na dobrain ᵱ na toghana amal na conu cennta ima foghlaibh comhaithchesa [...].*²⁷⁹

The wild dogs, and the foxes, and the otters, and the pine martens, are as the tame dogs with respect to their trespasses in the co-tenancy. [MP]

*Na dobrana ᵱ na togana ᵱ na hiaranna ᵱ na hesa amal na cata.*²⁸⁰

The otters, and the pine martens, and the squirrels, and the stoats are as the cats. [MP]

Tógán re táoibh na coille | teid i ngoire don chúasán.

A *toghán* (polecat?) by the wood-side passes near the hollow : it comes to the smell of the slice (?)²⁸¹

Íadhais a ghlaic mo ttóghmann.

He closes his grasp round the *togmann*.²⁸²

Tig ag tachtadh in togháin.

he keeps choking the *toghán*.²⁸³

Fenntar go tric in toghán.

Speedily the *toghán* is skinned.²⁸⁴

togmall

eDIL definition: some kind of small animal; squirrel ? marten ?

Citations:

[...] *in togmall boí for gúalaind Medba* [...].

[...] the marten on Medb's shoulder [...].²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ *CIH* i 98, lines 31-32.

²⁸⁰ *CIH* vi 2187, lines 16-17.

²⁸¹ MacNeill, *Duanaire Finn* i: 33, line 15 (Irish text); 133 (English translation).

²⁸² *Ibid.* line 17 (Irish text); 133 (English translation).

²⁸³ *Ibid.* line 18 (Irish text); 133 (English translation).

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* line 22 (Irish text); 133 (English translation).

²⁸⁵ *TBC-I*: 29 (Irish text); 151 (translation).

[...] *togmaill breca a Berramhain* [...].²⁸⁶

[...] parti-coloured *togmaill* from Berramain [...]. [MP]

Aided in togmaill ᵱ in pheta eóin.

The death of the marten and the pet bird.²⁸⁷

*togmall i foir foinchi (.i. ēn toghain fo sinnach).*²⁸⁸

a pine marten in the lair of a black fox (i.e. [the] one favourite²⁸⁹ under a fox?).

[...] *goro ort in petta togmalláin báí fora gúalaind* [...].

[he] killed the pet marten which was on her shoulder.²⁹⁰

Loose citations relating to the *togán/togmall*, found under the headword *crann*:

Croicionn crannchon na coille, [...].

hide of the tree-hound of the forest [...].²⁹¹

*Ocus in chú rómór do bíodh gach láí aca oc seilg nír mhó iná crannchú bhíos ac rígain nó ac ródhuine an uair sin í.*²⁹²

But the huge hound which daily they had in the chase was at this instant no greater than a lap-dog such as a great lady or man of high estate may keep.²⁹³

Loose citations referring to the *togán/togmall*, found in *The book of the lays of Fionn*:

Totháin do choillteach díamhra | dob iomdha íara ar do crannaibh.

The martens of your mysterious woods! | Many were the squirrels on your trees.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁶ Stokes, 'Acallamh na senórach': 21, line 733.

²⁸⁷ *TBC-I* 29 (Irish text); 151 (translation).

²⁸⁸ Meyer, 'Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften [part 2]': 360.

²⁸⁹ *eDIL* s.v. 1 *togán*. According to *eDIL* this is perhaps an etymologising guess of the scribe (*eDIL* s.v. 2 *togán*).

²⁹⁰ *TBC-LL* 35 (Irish text); 173 (translation).

²⁹¹ MacNeill, *Duanaire Finn* i: 33, line 23 (Irish text); 133 (English translation).

²⁹² O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* i: 209.

²⁹³ O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* ii: 237.

²⁹⁴ Murphy, *Duanaire Finn* ii: 372-373, LXVIII, stanza 8.

Birds

dreol(l)án

eDIL definition: wren.

Citations:

*Mo dreollan rocaith mo chat.*²⁹⁵

My cat ate my wren. [MP]

[...] *ro marbh in dreollen in cuil.*

[...] the wren killed the fly.²⁹⁶

Loose citation referring to birds, found in *Early Irish Farming*.²⁹⁷

*Cúig .s. do smacht isin cuirr ᵹ isin caoigh ᵹ in cach neisrecht uili cenmotha in agh no in mucc, [...].*²⁹⁸

Five *séts* for [the] *smacht*-fine for the herons and for the jackdaws and for every other pet, except the cow and the pig. [MP]

²⁹⁵ Stokes, 'Poems ascribed to S. Moling': 26, v, stanza 10.

²⁹⁶ Stokes, *The birth and life of St Moling*: 302-303, no. 75.

²⁹⁷ EIF 130, n. 196.

²⁹⁸ CIH v 1873, lines 25-26.