

*Tochmarc Cotreibe*  
An edition of a Middle Irish tale

Claudia Boshouwers

3131459

Supervised by dr. Ranke de Vries

BA thesis Celtic languages and culture

University of Utrecht

June 30 2011

## Contents

Contents	1
Introduction	2
About the story	4
Manuscripts	4
<i>A tochmarc?</i>	4
Purpose of the story	5
Characters	5
TCD MS 1336: text and translation	6
Textual notes on TCD MS 1336	7
TCD MS 1363: text and translation	10
Textual notes on TCD MS 1363	11
Linguistic and orthographical features	13
Dating	16
Bibliography	17

## Introduction

In an article published in *Ériu* 11 in 1932<sup>1</sup>, professor Myles Dillon translated a number of short stories found in two manuscripts, Trinity College Dublin MS 1336 and Trinity College Dublin MS 1363. The stories seem for the most part to serve to illustrate law tracts, although some of them are quite obscure themselves.

In his article professor Dillon gave the Irish texts and his own translations, but he provided hardly any notes, and although he gave some variant spellings for those stories which were found in both manuscripts, he did not thoroughly compare the two versions nor did he date the texts or analyze their language.

Clearly, there is yet some work to be done on these texts. And so for this BA thesis, I have chosen one of the stories to make a proper edition of it. It is the story by the title *Tochmarc Cotreibe cian co dil*, number VII in Dillon's article.

I will give the texts as D.A. Binchy transcribed them for his *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*<sup>2</sup>, since I have no experience transcribing Irish manuscripts and had no access to images of TCD MS 1363.

I will translate both versions of the text, give textual notes for each, point out the Middle Irish and Classical Irish forms in the texts, and make an attempt at dating the tale.

---

1 Myles Dillon, 'Stories from the Law Tracts', *Ériu* 11 (1932) 42-65.

2 D.A. Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 1978) 1532 & 2114-2115.

## About the story

### Manuscripts

Both manuscripts that contain the tale *Tochmarc Cotreibe cian co dil* are from the Early Modern Irish period.

TCD MS 1336 is a composite manuscript bound in six volumes<sup>3</sup>. Its contents are mostly law tracts, some of them accompanied by glosses and commentary, but there is also a great variety of other material.<sup>4</sup> As can be expected with a composite manuscript, the hands of several different scribes can be distinguished. Most of the manuscript seems to have been written in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the writing in columns 710-719 may go as far back as the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> *Tochmarc Cotreibe cian co dil* can be found in columns 665-666.

TCD MS 1363 is also a composite manuscript, consisting of 16 sections bound in 5 volumes<sup>6</sup>. Its leaves are of different sizes and it was also written by multiple scribes. Its contents are very diverse, but it mostly contains legal material. Its different sections vary from dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century to dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> *Tochmarc Cotreibe* is found on page 3 of this manuscript.

### A *tochmarc*?

Although the MS 1363 version of the story starts with the words 'Here follows a *tochmarc*'<sup>8</sup> and both versions of the text have a title which includes the term *tochmarc*, the story does not actually follow the usual outline of a *tochmarc* tale.

In a typical *tochmarc* tale, a man and a woman meet and fall in love. However, before they can officially be together, the girl, or her father, demands that the man prove his worth by performing a number of feats or tasks. Although these tasks are often difficult and dangerous, the hero succeeds, and thus wins the girl's hand.<sup>9</sup>

As the name *tochmarc* 'courtship, wooing' already suggests, the emphasis in a *tochmarc* tale is on the process of winning the girl's heart and her hand. This is not the case for *Tochmarc Cotreibe cian co dil*. There is no description of Cotreibe and Taidell meeting and falling in love, no mention of negotiations or demands being made of Cotreibe before he can 'have the girl', and the text certainly does not describe Cotreibe going on adventures to perform tasks in order to win Taidell's heart and hand. It simply states that Cotreibe and Taidell ran off together, and what legal consequences such an action should have. Therefore, despite its title and announcement, this story is clearly not a *tochmarc* story.<sup>10</sup>

---

3 Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 2005) 7

4 For a description, see Thomas K. Abbott and Edward J. Gwynn, *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin 1921) 125-139.

5 *Catalogue* 133

6 *Companion* 6

7 *Catalogue* 199-216

8 Although Binchy remarks "possibly added by a later scribe". *CIH* 1532 note (a).

9 Lisa M. Bitel, *Land Of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca and London, 1996) 44-56. Vincent A. Dunn, *Cattleraid and Courtships: Medieval Narrative Genres in a Traditional Context* vol.2 (New York & London 1989) 69-96.

10 If anything, the story has more elements of an *aithed*, an elopement story, in which a man and a woman run off together illegally, and usually end up in big trouble over this action. Still, even that genre description does not quite fit, because once again, the emphasis in this tale is not on the romantic history of the two lovers, but on the legal consequences of their running off together. Clearly this text was not written by a romance author intending to amuse his audience, but by a legal writer wishing to instruct his readers on how to deal with a case such as this. *Land of Women* 44-56.

## Purpose of the story

According to Liam Breatnach<sup>11</sup>, the story appears as commentary on a passage in the oldest of the *Bretha Nemed* law texts, the *Bretha Nemed Toísech* 'The first judgements on privileged ones'. This text is found in a manuscript called Nero A 7, which is at the British Library.<sup>12</sup> A transcription of this particular passage is found in *CIH 2229.5-10*.<sup>13</sup> It is part of a longer section on honour price and compensation, which is written in the form of a dialogue between the mythical judge Morand and his pupil Neire<sup>14</sup>. Morand addresses Neire and tells him what honour price should be paid in certain situations. In *CIH 2229.5-10* he explains that a sage declared that in the case of the carrying off of the daughter of Argoman the compensation to be paid was four female virgins:

*Mo nere nuallgnaith, diamba brithem, ni beru ni tuidcis tuidme for toiced tuargabha tochmarc coitribe cian coadil Abad maicne morindsan atbat find fargoman fomnach findan carudan cethir coir coigerta, cetheora hogu i naithgin nellnighe i noig nargoman, ar isruithe ol bo bil banogh bretha la se aurulog ceinnderb nairisi ar cach treise na tairsigh dia taigh tuidel mo neire.*

This is contrasted against the preceding passage, which speaks of a situation in which the compensation to be paid was in cattle. The text does not explain why exactly four virgins was deemed the proper compensation in this case, it only alludes to the story.

Possibly the tale *Tochmarc Cotreibe cian co dil* was intended to explain what should be done in a case where a girl was carried off by a man partly against her will, but also partly by her own wish. The *Cáin Lánamna* 'Law of couples' describes 9 forms of union between a man and a woman, among which are union by rape or stealth (in other words, union by force – this would probably include a forced elopement), and cases in which the girl consents to running away with a man.<sup>15</sup> But they say nothing about situations in which it is a bit of both, as is the case in this tale.

Perhaps though the key phrase in the story is not *aill ar eicen aill ar aiss* 'partly by force, partly by free will', but *baneladnach* 'skilled woman', and the tale is meant to illustrate the difference between the compensation to be paid for a highly trained girl of noble birth and that for a young woman of a more modest background (see my note on the word *baneladnach* in the textual notes on MS 1336 below). Since the passages surrounding *CIH 2229.5-10* are about the honour prices for different persons and the tale puts special emphasis on the term *baneladnach*, this seems most likely.

## Characters

Two well-known characters from the Irish Ulster cycle of tales occur in the story. The first is Conchobur mac Nessa, the legendary king of the Ulstermen and uncle to the great warrior Cú Chulainn. The second figure is Sencha, his chief judge and poet. In this tale Sencha is the judge who decides what compensation should be paid for the transgression by Cotreibe and Taidell.

---

11 *Companion* 86.

12 See Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988) 268-269.

13 *Companion* 86.

14 *Companion* 190 & 227.

15 *Guide to Early Irish Law* 79 & 136.

1. TOCHMARC COTREIBE CIAN CODIL

2. Bai ri amra *for* ultu, concobur a *ainm*; bai druth ac *conchobur*, cotrebe a *ainm*; cethri hingena la
3. cotrebe .i. *find* 7 femna, *findan* 7 caradan; robai *dā* fili amra i ferund *conchobuir*, argamain a
4. *ainm*; ingen *chæm* la suide, 7 robadar uili aga mothugudh ar febus a delba, taidell *ainm* na
5. *hingine*. Doluidh cotreibe go ruc in *ingen* leis aill ar ais aill ar egin, dochuadar i fuighell *tšencha*
6. *immi* co nepert *sencha*. Ceithri hoga i *nnaithgin* neillnide ar *cach* tresi na toirsed taieltaidh
7. taidell .i. ar *cach* tresi na toraig taidell dia thaig; 7 cid ni is mo bes and, is *amlaid* bias .i. laithi
8. aicenta 7 da laithi soerda *isin* tresi-sin, 7 baneladnach issi. 7 .iiii. mna gen eladhain ar son
9. aithgina a gnima; conadh *amlaidh*-sin rosoichit a cethora hingena o chotreibi arin *tressi-sin* .i. ar
10. da laithi; † *dā* *cach* ar *immad* .i. arna tresib imdha, 7 da la dec robui *immuigh* hi, 7 nemeladnach
11. issi and, 7 ben gen eladain ar son aithgina a gnima gach læ. Cadhe deithbir aturu-sin i bail i ta
12. bert *bætan* brig ba siur *barrinde*, badar da *chumail* i *cumma* gnima, go fuiled ceithri hogha and
13. so. iss e in *fath*: ænla robui thall gen a torachtain *immuig*, 7 da la *sund*; 7 baneladnacha iad i
14. cechtar de, 7 mna cen eladain ar son aithgena a gnima.

The long wooing of Cotreibe and its compensation

The Ulstermen had an extraordinary king named Conchobur. Conchobur had a jester named Cotreibe. Cotreibe had four daughters, namely Find, Femna, Findan and Caradan. There was moreover an extraordinary poet in the land of Conchobur, Argomain his name. The aforementioned<sup>16</sup> had a beautiful daughter, and all were amazed because of the excellence of her appearance. Taidell was the name of the girl.

Cotreibe came and carried off the girl with him, partly by free will, partly by force. They<sup>17</sup> went to Sencha for judicial pronouncement on the matter and Sencha said: “Four virgins in compensation for defilement for every three-day-period that Taidell does not come [...], that is for every three-day-period that Taidell does not come to his<sup>18</sup> house. And if it is something greater that is in it, it is thus that it shall be: since there are a natural day<sup>19</sup> and two working days<sup>20</sup> in that three-day-period, and she is a skilled woman, four women without skill must be paid in compensation for her act. So that it is thus that his four daughters come from Cotreibe on account of that three-day-period, that is, on account of two days. Or else, each servant woman for that number of three days, that is, for every three-day-period, if she<sup>21</sup> was from home 12 days and if she is unskilled. A woman without skill must be paid in compensation for her act for each three-day-period then.”

What is the difference between them, that in the situation where Baetan carried off Brig<sup>22</sup>, who was a sister of Barrinde, there were two female servants for the same act, and it would be four virgins here? This is the reason: there she was away one day without returning, and here she was away for two days. And they are skilled women in each of these cases, and women without skill must be paid in compensation for her act.

16 i.e. Argomain

17 i.e. the people at Conchobur's court

18 presumably her father's.

19 i.e. 24 hours. See DIL *aicnetae*.

20 i.e. 12 hours each. See DIL 2 *saerda*.

21 a hypothetical eloping woman

22 I have not been able to find out what story this refers to.

## Textual notes on TCD MS 1336

line 1: *cían*

An o/a-stem adjective meaning 'long'. Although it follows the name Cotreibe, it probably belongs with the word *tochmarc* instead. The text describes the possibility of the elopement taking place over a longer period of time (multiple three-day-periods), so this is more likely than it referring to Cotreibe.

line 1: *dil*

This word can be an adjective meaning 'dear, beloved, previous, desirable'<sup>23</sup>, but also (spelled *dil*, with a long *í*) a noun meaning 'reparation, retribution, retaliation, atonement'<sup>24</sup>. Dillon seems to have gone with the first meaning in his translation<sup>25</sup>, making it into an adverb, probably describing the wooing. But I have decided to translate it as 'reparation'. This makes more sense to me given what the text is about – a criminal offence and the compensation to be paid for it.

line 2: *Bai ri amra for ultu, concobur a ainm* literally 'there was an extraordinary king upon the Ulstermen, Conchobur his name'. The formula 'there was a king X upon people Y, Z his name'<sup>26</sup> is a common way to introduce a tale in early Irish literature and reflects the Irish fascination with the kings and heroes of old. Even when the king of the land in which the story was situated played no further role in the tale, he was often mentioned at the beginning of it.<sup>27</sup> Cf. *boí rig amra for ulltaib, concubur a ainm* in MS 1363 line 2.

line 4: *aga mothugudh*, literally 'at their amazement'. Cf. *aca mothugud* in MS 1363 line 4.

line 5: *aill*.

An adjective meaning 'other, second, one of two'. From the last meaning comes the usage here in the construction *aill....., aill.....* : 'partly....., partly.....'. Cf. MS 1363 lines 5-6.

lines 5-6: *dochuadar i fuighell tsencha immi*, literally 'they went into the judicial pronouncement of Sencha about it'. Cf. *docodhar i fuigell thsencha imbe* in MS 1363 line 6.

line 6: *n-éillnide* 'pollution, corruption'.

The noun *éilned* is normally an o-stem or u-stem masculine and needs to be in the genitive singular here, but it does not look like the genitive singular of either of those stems. Instead it looks like a genitive singular of the ā-stem.

Similarly *n-eillnithi* in line 7 of MS 1363, which looks like a genitive singular of the io-stem.

line 6: *taieltaidh*

Since this is a nonexistent word, it must be a corruption. I can think of three possible scenarios to explain it:

1. The scribe began writing Taidell's name when he should have written the phrase *dia tigh* first. The latter would then be spelled *dia taidh*, with Middle Irish spelling of the word *tigh* 'house'. But he got confused and mixed up Taidell's name with the word *dia*. This seems like the most likely option because the other manuscript has *dia tigh* here.

2. The first part of the word was not supposed to be *dia*, but the girl's name. The scribe misspelled it and wrote *taiel*, forgetting the *-d-*, and then wrote the word *taidh* closely after it. Then he realized

---

<sup>23</sup> DIL 1 *dil*.

<sup>24</sup> DIL *dil*

<sup>25</sup> He translates the title as 'The Wooing of Cotreibe Long and Lovingly'. 'Stories from the Law Tracts', *Ériu* 11, 56.

<sup>26</sup> Kim McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth 1990) 48.

<sup>27</sup> Prionsias Mac Cana, 'Narrative openers and progress markers in Irish' in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in memory of Brendan O'Hehir*, ed. Kathryn A. Klar, Eve E. Sweetser and Claire Thomas (Lawrence MA 1996), 117.

his mistake and wrote her name again.

3. Perhaps *taieltaidh* in its entirety is a corruption of Taidell's name. The scribe started writing her name, got as far as *taiel* before he realized he had forgotten a *-d-*, tried again, got as far as *taidh* before he realized the *-h-* was not supposed to be there, and then finally managed to correctly write *Taidell*. This way it can also be explained that he felt the need to explain the sentence further by adding *.i. ar cach tresi na toraig taidell dia thaig*; 'i.e. for each three-day-period that Taidell does not come to his house', because in the original sentence it would not have been clear what place Taidell was supposed to go or return to. It would have simply said 'for every three-day-period that Taidell does not come'.

But as I said, since MS 1363 has *dia tigh* here, the first option is most likely. On the other hand, the complete repetition of the phrase in MS 1363, with only some juggling around of the word order, is a bit odd. Perhaps the scribe of that manuscript came across something he could not make sense of either, tried to make sense of it the best that he could and hence basically wrote the same thing twice.

Line 7: *cid ni is mo bes and*, literally 'if it be something that is bigger than be in it'. This could mean that she stays away for a longer period than 3 days, or perhaps that the offence is more serious than just running away with a man, because she has in the meantime slept with him as well. But since the text is so concerned with the exact duration of the elopement, it is probably the former. Cf. line 8 in MS 1363.

lines 7-8: *laithi aicenta 7 da laithi soerda isin tresi-sin, 7 baneladnach issi. 7 .iiii. mna gen eladhain ar son aithgina a gnima*

Literally 'a natural day and two artificial days in that three-day-period, and she is a skilled woman, and four women without skill upon that of compensation of her act.' What is meant is 'since there are one natural day and two working days in the three-day-period that she was away, and she (Taidell) is a skilled woman, four women without skill must be paid in compensation of her act.' Cf. MS 1363 lines 8-9.

line 8: *baneladnach*

Most likely, a woman trained in fine embroidery, and therefore a woman of a high social class. All women in early Irish society were expected to be able to spin and dye wool, make fabrics and sew clothes out of them, but only the women of the elite had the time and the resources to receive training in the artistic craft of fine embroidery. As such, being able to create fine embroidery was a symbol of status and the compensation to be paid for a girl trained in this craft was higher than that for one not trained in it.<sup>28</sup> Cf. *banealadnach* in MS 1363 line 9.

lines 9-10: *ar da laithi*, literally 'on account of two days'. It seems strange that a 'three-day-period' would be two days, but presumably what is meant that one 'natural day' of 24 hours and two 'working days' of each 12 hours make two full days of each 24 hours.<sup>29</sup> Cf. MS 1363 line 10.

line 11: *gach lae*

Binchy commented 'hardly for *gacha treise*' here in his *CIH*, so it seems the manuscript says *gacha treise* 'every three-day-period' but Binchy felt that it needed to be corrected to *gach lae* 'every day'. However, I disagree with him. I think *gacha treise* makes most sense in the context and I hope my

<sup>28</sup> *Land of Women* 123-129.

<sup>29</sup> Thanks to Ranke for the solution to this mystery. See also DIL 2 *saerda*.

translation and the note I give below will make clear why.

MS 1363 line 12 has *gach læ* as well, but I still think that *gacha treise* is what it should be.

lines 10-11: *l dā cach ar immad .i. arna tresib imdha, 7 da la dec robui immuigh hi, 7 nemeladnach issi and, 7 ben gen eladain ar son aithgina a gnima gach læ [gacha treise].*

Literally 'Or else, each one upon the number, i.e. upon the numerous three-day-periods, and she was from home 12 days, and she is unskilled then, and a woman without skill on account of that in compensation for her act for each day [each three-day-period].'

Presumably what is meant is what must be done in a slightly different situation than that of Taidell ('or else'), namely, in the case of a woman who is not a *baneladnach* running off with a man.

The text explains that if the young lady is a *baneladnach* the compensation to be paid is four unskilled women for every three days that she is away from home, but if she is not a *baneladnach*, the compensation is one unskilled woman for every three days. So 'each one' probably refers to each of the women to be paid in compensation, and 'number' to the number of three-day-periods that was in the time that the woman was away from home, as the scribe correctly glossed. Cf. MS 1363 lines 10-12.

line 11: *deithbir*

Originally an adjective meaning 'proper, fitting, reasonable' and a noun meaning 'reason, cause'<sup>30</sup>, but in Middle Irish it also came to mean 'distinction, difference'<sup>31</sup>. That is the meaning it has here. Cf. *dxbir* in line 12 of MS 1363.

line 12: *da chumail*

The word *cumail* originally meant 'female slave' but later also became a general term of currency, roughly the equivalent of three milk cows.<sup>32</sup> It probably has the original meaning here. Cf. *di cumail* in MS 1363 line 12.

line 13: *ænla robui thall gen a torachtain immuig*, literally 'one day has been there without her arriving away', i.e. 'there she was away one day without returning'. Cf. *ænla roboi fein cen torachtain amuigh* in line 13 of MS 1363, literally meaning 'one day that she herself has been without arriving away'.

lines 13-14: *i cehtar de*, literally 'in each of these', i.e. in each of these cases. Cf. MS 1363 *i cehtar* in line 14.

---

30 DIL 1 *deithbir*.

31 DIL 2 *deithbir*.

32 *Guide to Early Irish Law*, 8, 112 & 116.

## TCD MS 1363

- 1 INsipit<sup>33</sup> tocmarc.
2. TOCCHMARC COITRIB .i. boí rig amra *for* ulltaib, concubur a ainm; boí druith ic concubur,
3. coitrib a ainm; .iiii. *hingena* la coitrib .i. *find*, femna, *findan* 7 caratan; roboi dā fili amra i
4. farradh concubair, argoman a ainm; i[ngen] *coem* la *suidhe*, 7 *robatar* uile aca *mothugud*
5. arafebus a delba, taidhel a ainm na i[ngine]; doluidh coitrib co rucc *in* i[ngin] leis aill ar eicen
- 6 aill ar aiss; docodhar i *fuigell* thsencha *imbe* co *nebairt* sēnchoí:
7. Ceithre hógha i naithgin neillnithi ar *gac* treisi na toraig dia tigh taidhel .i. cach treissi na toraig
8. .t.[aidhel] dia tigh; cid ni is mo bes *and*, is *amlaid* bias. laithi aicenta 7 da laithi thsærdha isin
9. treisi; 7 banealadnach ísi, 7 .iiii. i<sup>34</sup> mna cen eladain ar son aithgena a ghnima conad
10. *amlaid-sin* dosoichid .iiii. *ingena* o coitrib arin treisi .i. ar da laithi; † dō cach ar imat .i. ar treisi
11. *imdha* .i. da la .x. robui imuich í 7 nemeladhadanach isi ann 7 *ben cen* eladain ar son aithgena
12. gach læ. Ca *dxbir etar sin* 7 in baili ata: *bert* bætan brigh ba siur baruind bert di *cumail*
13. *comgnime*, 7 co fuil .iiii.e hogha ann so? is é fath fodera: ænla roboi fein cen torachtain amuigh
14. 7 se laithi, 7 banealadnach iad i cehtar, 7 .iiii. mna cen eladain ar son a aithgina a gnima. fínit.

Here begins a wooing

The wooing of Coitreb

The Ulstermen had an extraordinary king named Conchubur. Conchubur had a jester named Coitreb. Coitreb had four daughters, namely Find, Femna, Findan and Caratan. There was moreover an extraordinary poet in the company of Conchubur, Argoman his name. The aforementioned had a beautiful daughter, and all were amazed because of the excellence of her appearance. Taidhel was the name of the girl.

Coitreb came and carried off the girl with him, partly by force, partly by free will. They went to Sencha for judicial pronouncement on the matter and Sencha said: “Four virgins in compensation for the violation for every three-day-period that Taidhel does not come to her house i.e. every three-day-period that Taidhel does not come to her house. If it is something greater that is in it, it is thus that it will be: since there are a natural day and two working days in the three-day-period, and she is a skilled woman, four women without skill must be paid in compensation for his<sup>35</sup> act. So that it is thus that four daughters come from Coitreb for the three-day-period i.e. for two days. Or else, each servant woman for that number of three days, that is, for every three-day-period. If she has been from home 12 days and she is unskilled then, a woman without skill must be paid as compensation every day.”

What is the difference between those cases, that where Baetan carried off Brigh, who was a sister to Barund, the same act carried two female servants, and so that it is four virgins here?

This is the reason that causes it: she has been from home one day herself and six days, and skilled women they were in each case, and four women without skill in compensation for her act. The end.

---

33 i.e. Latin *incipit*.

34 There is one 'i' too many here – there should only be four. It is likely the scribe got confused amidst the many legs of the number .iiii. and the following *mn-* of *mna*.

35 Coitreb's

## Textual notes on TCD MS 1363

line 2: *drúith*. This is Old Irish *drúth*, an o-stem masculine noun meaning 'jester'. But according to DIL, the word *drúth* was “later also *drúith*”<sup>36</sup>, which is what is the case here. This is probably because it came to be confused with the dental stem masculine noun *druí*, 'druid', which has many forms ending in palatal *-d* or *-th*.

line 5: *arafebus*. This is a corruption – Binchy himself thought it should be the verb *ar rofebus*<sup>37</sup>, but I think it is a corruption of *ar a febus* 'on (her) account of'.

line 10: *dosoichid*. Most likely a corruption of *rosoichid* 'comes', since a verb *dosoichid* does not exist and confusion of *do* and *ro* in verbs arose in Middle Irish.<sup>38</sup> The verbal ending looks like that of the present 3 singular, but it clearly refers to the four daughters. Sometimes scribes wrote *-d* instead of *-t* in Middle Irish<sup>39</sup>, as the *-t* was in fact pronounced as [d], so perhaps this was intended as a plural ending after all. I have translated it as a plural form of the verb.

line 11: *nemeladhadanach*. No doubt a corruption of *nemeladnach* 'unskilled'.

line 11: *ar son*, 'because of that', i.e. because of the fact that she is unskilled in this case.

line 12: *gach lae* makes no sense here. As in MS 1336, it should probably be *gacha treise* 'every three-day-period' instead, the phrase meaning that one female servant had to be paid as compensation for every three days that an unskilled woman was away from home. With the eloping woman having been away for 12 days, this equals four women to be paid.

line 12: *dxbir*. The letter *-x-* in Irish manuscripts stands for the sequence *-chs-*, which would make this a word *deichsbir*, but such a word does not exist and it is quite clear that it should be *deithbir* 'difference' instead, because that makes most sense in the context and it is in fact what the other version of the tale has. It is not uncommon for the spirants *ch* and *th* to be confused in Middle Irish.<sup>40</sup>

lines 12-13: *bert di cumail comgníme* 'the same act carried two *cumals*', i.e. two female servants had to be paid for the same transgression.

line 13: *fein* 'himself'. This is a masculine form of the reflexive pronoun, but it clearly refers to the woman, and it is not uncommon in later texts for *fein* to be used as a feminine form.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it had best be translated as a feminine form of the reflexive pronoun here.

line 14: *se laithi* 'six days'. One would expect the number *da* 'two' here, creating the same contrast as the MS 1336 text has between one day and two days that the woman in question was away from home. Possibly the scribe got confused with all the talk of compensations consisting of one servant per day versus one servant per three days (making two servants per six days), and one-day elopements versus two-day elopements. Or perhaps the archetype of the text used Latin numerals

---

36 DIL 2 *drúth*.

37 CIH 1532 note (e)

38 Liam Breatnach, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', *Stair na Gaeilge: in ómós do Phádraig ó Fiannachta*, ed. Kim McCone, et al. (Dublin 1994) 280 §11.4.

39 Liam Breatnach, 'The first third of the Bretha Nemed Toisech', *Ériu* 40 (1989) 3.

40 G. Dottin, *Manuel d'irlandais moyenne* (Paris 1913) 12.

41 For instance, the story *Aided Echach maic Maireda* in *Lebor na hUidre* has *conid si fein* 'so that it was she herself' in line 2969 (thanks to Ranke for pointing this out). *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow*, ed. R.I. Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin 1929) 96 line 2969.

and its original *.ii.* accidentally became *.ui.*<sup>42</sup>

---

42 Thanks to Ranke for the suggestion.

## Linguistic and orthographical features

Both texts contain a number of Middle Irish features.

1. The confusion of *-a* and *-ae* after broad consonants.<sup>43</sup> In both versions of the tale, this is found in *amra* (MS 1336 lines 2 and 3, MS 1363 lines 2 and 3), a *io/ia*-stem adjective. Each time it appears in the texts, it is connected to a nominative singular masculine noun, and so it should be *amrae* in Old Irish.
2. Old Irish *nd* and *mb* becoming *nn* and *mm*.<sup>44</sup> MS 1336 shows this development in *immi* (line 6) for Old Irish *imbe*, and *immad* (line 10) for Old Irish *imbed*. In addition, as a result of this change from *nd* to *nn*, there was often confusion of *nn* and *nd* in Middle Irish, resulting in words which originally had *nn* now being spelled with *nd*, a so-called hypercorrection. An example of this is found in *ferund* in line 3, for Old Irish *ferann*. The MS 1363 version of the tale has *imat* (probably via *immat*) for Old Irish *imbed* in line 10 and *ann* (line 13) for Old Irish *and*.
3. Old Irish *c* developing into *g*<sup>45</sup> gives *aga* (line 4) for Old Irish *oca*, *go* (lines 5 and 12) for Old Irish *co*, *égin* (line 5) for Old Irish *éicen* and *gen* (lines 8, 11 and 13) for Old Irish *cen* in the MS 1336 version of the story. MS 1363 has *gac* (line 7) and *gach* (line 12), both for Old Irish *cach*.
4. The falling together of diphthongs<sup>46</sup>. The MS 1336 text shows this in *bai* for Old Irish *boí*, (twice in line 2), and *robai* (line 3) and *robui* (lines 10 and 13), for Old Irish *ro boí*. MS 1363 also has *robui* for Old Irish *ro boí* in line 11, and *coem* for Old Irish *cáem* in line 4. Finally, *amuigh* in line 13 for Old Irish *immaig* is another example, although according to DIL<sup>47</sup>, that is in fact a Modern Irish form.
5. The falling together of vowels in unstressed syllables<sup>48</sup> is the cause for Old Irish *oc* being spelled *ac* in line 2 of MS 1336, and *oca* being spelled *aga* in line 4, since prepositions were always unstressed. It is also seen in *ferund* (line 3) for Old Irish *ferann*, *febus* for Old Irish *febas* in line 4, and *immi* for Old Irish *imbe* in line 6. The 1363 version shows this development in *ic* for Old Irish *oc* in line 2, as well as *aca* for Old Irish *oca* (line 4); furthermore in *arafebus* (= *ar a febus*) line 5 where Old Irish would be *febas*, and in *imat* in line 10 for Old Irish *imbed*. Another possible example is *a aithgina* in line 14, because the *a* could be a possessive 3 singular masculine or feminine, but it could also be a Middle Irish spelling of the preposition *i* 'in'. Finally, there is *amuigh* for Old Irish *immaig* in line 13, and *Sencha* being spelled with *-a* the first time and with *-o* the second time in line 6.
6. The loss of hiatus is seen in both texts in the word *siúr* for Old Irish *siür*, and in the MS 1336 version of the story also in *dec* for Old Irish *déac*.<sup>49</sup>
7. Perfect forms of the verb being used in place of the preterite<sup>50</sup> occur in MS 1336 in *robai* and *robui* (lines 3, 10 and 13), and *robadar* in line 4. Also in *ruc* (line 5), perfect 3 singular

43 *Stair na Gaeilge* 345 §2.3.

44 *Ibid.*, 354 §2.15; *Manuel d'irlandais moyenne* 11.

45 *Stair na Gaeilge* 235 §3.23.

46 *Ibid.*, 233 §3.8.

47 DIL: see *immaig*.

48 *Stair na Gaeilge* 230 §3.1, 344 §2.3.

49 *Ibid.*, 231 §3.2.

50 *Ibid.*, 286 §11.30.

prototonic of *beirid*. This is a suppletive verb, with the forms taken from the weak verb *ro-uccai*, because *beirid* has no *ro*-forms of its own.<sup>51</sup> And finally in *dochuadar* in line 5, perfect 3 plural deuterotonic of *téit*.

In the same way, MS 1363 has *roboi* twice, in lines 3 and 13, and *robatar* in line 4. It also has the same perfect form *rucc* as MS 1336 in line 5, and *docodhar* (an alternative spelling of *dochuadar*) in line 6.

8. The loss of distinction between the nominative and the accusative in nouns<sup>52</sup> is seen in the word *ingen* in line 5 of MS 1336, which looks like a nominative singular while it should be accusative singular. This was *ingin* in Old Irish. And also in *chumail* (line 12), which according to DIL<sup>53</sup> is accusative plural of *cumal* 'female servant' (though it looks like accusative singular) while the word should be in the nominative here as it is the subject. MS 1363 also has *cumail*, in line 12, and it has *ríg*, accusative singular of *rí*, in line 2. The confusion can be explained by the fact that all the other forms in the paradigm of this word have a *g*.
9. Re-analysis of phrases leading to new forms of words. Both texts have the word *amlaid* 'thus, so' in line 8, which was *samlaid* in Old Irish. It lost its *s*- when the common phrase *is samlaid* was re-analysed as *is amlaid* during the Middle Irish period.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the phrase *is sí* was re-analysed as *is í* and thus *í* came into existence as a form of the personal pronoun 3 singular feminine<sup>55</sup> (though another explanation for the emergence of the form *í* could be that it was modelled on its masculine counterpart *é*).
10. The use of independent pronouns as the subject of a verb<sup>56</sup>. In MS 1336, this can be seen in *baneladnach issi* (line 8), *ro buí immuigh hí* (line 10, with also the Middle Irish form *í* of the personal pronoun 3 singular feminine), *nemeladnach issi* (lines 10-11) and *baneladnach iad* (with the Classical Irish form *iad*) in line 13. MS 1363 has *banealadnach isi* (line 9), *robui imuich í* and *nemedhadanach isi* in line 11, *co fuil [...]* *é* in line 13, and *banealadnach iad* in line 14.
11. Confusion of the forms of the numeral 'four'<sup>57</sup>. Both texts use a masculine accusative form, *ceithri* in H.3.17 (line 6) and *ceithre* in H.4.22 (line 7), but it belongs with a feminine noun here so it should be either *cethóir* or *cethéora*. By contrast, H.3.17 does use the correct Old Irish form *cethora hingen* once, in line 8.
12. The loss of the distinctive dative plural ending in the article and adjectives<sup>58</sup> has occurred in *arna tresib imdha* in MS 1336 line 10, for Old Irish *arnaib tresib imdaib*.
13. unhistorical *f*<sup>59</sup> can be found in two words, both in the MS 1363 manuscript, which has *farradh* for Old Irish *arrad* in line 4, and *arafefbus* for Old Irish *ar a febas* in line 5.
14. The Old Irish compound verb *ro-saig* 'comes, reaches' has been made into a simple verb with present stem *rosoich-* in *rosoichit* (MS 1336 line 9) and *dosoichid* (MS 1363 line 10)<sup>60</sup>.

---

51 See GOI §759.

52 *Stair na Gaeilge* 242 §5.4, 243 §5.6, 249 §5.11.

53 DIL: see 1 *cumal*.

54 *Stair na Gaeilge* 235 §3.22.

55 *Ibid.*, 274 §10.20.

56 *Ibid.*, 270 §10.14, 272 §10.19.

57 *Ibid.*, 261 §8.5

58 *Ibid.*, 252 §6.3, 259 §7.5.

59 *Ibid.*, 235 §3.21.

60 *Ibid.*, 282-284 §11.16-11.19, 392 §7.1.

Moreover, *dosoichid* shows confusion between *do-* and *ro-*<sup>61</sup>, and possibly Middle Irish spelling *-d* for Old Irish *-t*.<sup>62</sup>

15. The word *fuil* (*fil*), a special verbal form of the substantive verb, was indeclinable in Old Irish, but in MS 1336 line 12 we find *fuiled*, where it has been given a verbal ending.<sup>63</sup>

16. Lenition of an adverb<sup>64</sup> occurs once: MS 1336 has *thall* for Old Irish *tall*.

17. MS 1363 has two examples of *ea* for Old Irish *e* in spelling, which is typical for Middle Irish orthography<sup>65</sup>: *banealadnach* and *ealadain*, both in line 9. The *e*'s were added in subscript<sup>66</sup>, so apparently they were originally not there.

In addition, both texts also contain some Early Modern Irish features. Both MS 1336 and MS 1363 have the personal pronoun 3 plural *iad* (*é* in Old Irish, *iat* in Middle Irish)<sup>67</sup>. They also both show the Classical Irish scribal habit of prefixing *t-* or *th-* to lenited *s* in the name *tSencha/thSencha*.<sup>68</sup> And MS 1363 has *amuigh* for Old Irish *immaig*, which according to DIL is a Modern Irish form, and it has *a ghnima* (line 9) where *h* is used to indicate lenition of the letter *g* where before it was only used for that with *t*, *c* and *p*.<sup>69</sup>

Remarkably correct Old Irish though is the verb *fodera* 'which causes it' (MS 1363 line 13) from *fo-fera* 'causes, produces' with infix pronoun 3 singular neuter class C, leniting *-d-*. In the Middle Irish period the Old Irish system of infix pronouns broke down, and those verbs in Middle Irish that still had an infix pronoun often showed irregularities.<sup>70</sup> This verb is perfectly correct Old Irish though, and it even has a neuter infix pronoun, while the neuter also disappeared during the Middle Irish period.

Then there are *cen* and *cach* with their original *c-*, and perhaps *boí* can also be seen as Old Irish, though this was probably a perfectly acceptable spelling of the word in Middle Irish as well since all diphthongs fell together and were used interchangeably.

---

61 *Stair na Gaeilge* 280 §11.4.

62 Liam Breatnach, 'The first third of the Bretha Nemed Toísech' 3.

63 *Ibid.*, 323 §12.191.

64 *Ibid.*, 238 §4.7.

65 Liam Breatnach, 'The first third of the Bretha Nemed Toísech' 3.

66 *CIH* 1532 notes (h) & (i).

67 *Stair na Gaeilge* 429 §9.1.

68 *Ibid.*, 360 §3.5.

69 *Ibid.*, 33 §4.3.

70 Damian McManus, *Introduction to Middle Irish* §69.

## Dating

To conclude, I think this text dates from the Middle Irish period. It has far too many features typical of Middle Irish and too few typical Old Irish forms for it to date back to the Old Irish period. Those few features typical of Old Irish it does have can probably be attributed to scribes using archaic language to make the text seem ancient and important. In addition, the admittedly remarkably sound Old Irish phrase *is é fath fodera* to me looks like it could be a standard phrase which kept on being used long after the Old Irish system of infixed pronouns broke down. Therefore I do not believe it points to the story having an origin in a much earlier stage of the language than the Middle Irish period. A number of the Middle Irish features described above came into the language only gradually or fairly late, such as the use of independent pronouns as the subject of verbs other than the copula<sup>71</sup>, and the development of *c-* into *g-* in words like *cach* and *cen*<sup>72</sup>. The two texts are very consistent in the use of independent pronouns as subjects but show a mixture of spellings for *cach* and *cen*, with original *c-* outnumbering innovative *g-*. But as said, perhaps the scribes spelled these words with *c-* to make their texts seem older than they really were.

Therefore I think the tale was probably composed in the mid- or late Middle Irish period. The few Early Modern Irish features the texts contain may also point to a date of composing late in the Middle Irish period, bordering on the Classical Irish period, but since there are so few of them, perhaps they simply crept into the texts because the manuscripts date from the Early Modern Irish period.

---

71 *Stair na Gaeilge* 270 §10.14, 272 §10.19.

72 Uáitéar Mac Gearailt, 'The language of some late Middle Irish texts in the Book of Leinster', *Studia Hibernica* 26 (Dublin 1992) 177-178.

## Bibliography

Abbott, Thomas Kingsmill and Gwynn, Edward John, *Catalogue of the Irish Manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin 1921)

Ahlqvist, Anders, 'Litriú na Gaeilge', *Stair na Gaeilge: in ómós do Phádraig ó Fiannachta*, ed. Kim McCone, et al. (Dublin 1994) 23-59.

Bergin, Osborn and Strachan, John, *Old Irish Paradigms and selections from the Old-Irish glosses* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Dublin 1949)

Binchy, D.A., *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 7 vols (Baile Átha Cliath 1978)

Bitel, Lisa M., *Land Of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca and London, 1996)

Breatnach, Liam, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin 2005)

Breatnach, Liam, 'An Mheán-Ghaeilge', *Stair na Gaeilge: in ómós do Phádraig ó Fiannachta*, ed. Kim McCone, et al. (Dublin 1994) 221-333.

Breatnach, Liam, 'The first third of the Bretha Nemed Toísech', *Ériu* 40 (1989) 1-40.

Dillon, Myles, 'Stories from the Law Tracts', *Ériu* 11 (1932) 42-65.

Dottin, G., *Manuel d'irlandais moyenne* (Paris 1913)

Dunn, Vincent A., *Cattleraid and Courtships: Medieval Narrative Genres in a Traditional Context* (New York & London 1989)

Gregory, Isabella Augusta, *Cuchulain of Muirtheme* (London 1902)

Kelly, Fergus, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988)

*Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow*, ed. R.I. Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin 1929)

Mac Cana, Prionsias, 'Narrative openers and progress markers in Irish' in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in memory of Brendan O'Hehir*, ed. Kathryn A. Klar, Eve E. Sweetser and Claire Thomas (Lawrence MA 1996) 104-120.

McCone, Kim, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth 1990)

Mac Gearailt, Uáitéar, 'The language of some late Middle Irish texts in the Book of Leinster', *Studia Hibernica* 26 (Dublin 1992) 167-216.

McManus, Damian, 'An Nua-Ghaeilge Chlasaiceach', *Stair na Gaeilge: in ómós do Phádraig ó Fiannachta*, ed. Kim McCone, et al. (Dublin 1994) 335-445.

McManus, Damian, *Introduction to Middle Irish* (unpublished work).

Ó hÓgáin, Dáithi, *Myth, Legend & Romance: an Encyclopaedia of Irish folk tradition* (London 1990).

Quin, E.G., *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, compact edition (Dublin 1983).

Thurneysen, Rudolf, *A grammar of Old Irish*, revised and enlarged edition, translated by D.A. Binchy and Osborn Bergin (Dublin 1946).

### **Online**

Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language: <[www.dil.ie](http://www.dil.ie)>