

“Books Most Needful to Know”

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“Books Most Needful to Know”
Contexts for the Study of Anglo-Saxon England

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Légend hÉirenn: “The Learning of Ireland” in the Early Medieval Period

Máire Ní Mhaonaigh

Introduction

That the various cultures of Britain and Ireland were in continuous contact with one another down through the medieval period (and beyond) scarcely needs reiterating, nor does the fact that this constant interaction occasioned much opportunity for mutual influence and exchange of ideas in a wide variety of areas. Early evidence for contact between Ireland and England is of an ecclesiastical nature; the role played by the Irish mission in seventh-century Northumbria in the conversion of numerous Englishmen being particularly significant in this regard.¹ The English were also moved to journey to Ireland, Bede remarking that many of them travelled to study there.² Among those educated among the Irish, possibly at Iona,³ was King Aldfrith of Northumbria (d. 704) who may even have been accorded an Irish name, Flann Fína.⁴ A contemporary and correspondent of his, Aldhelm of Malmesbury (d. 709/710), has also been linked with that most famous of Irish monastic outposts;⁵ although elsewhere in his writing he seeks to dissuade colleagues from crossing the Irish Sea.⁶

Yet journey westwards many of them did, some settling in Ireland in the process. Bede refers to two English communities there:⁷ Rathmelsigi, which has been identified by Kenneth Nicholls as Cluain Melsige (Clonmelsh, Co. Carlow),⁸ and the more significant monastery of Mayo (Mag nÉo *na Saxan*, “of the Saxons”).⁹ The land for that establishment was provided by an unidentified *comes*¹⁰ and the intimate association between church and secular powers implied by this and other such acts ensured that cross-cultural connections were not confined to the religious sphere. Indeed Adomnán, abbot of Iona and a key figure in the English conversion process, first went to Northumbria on political business, visiting King Aldfrith to plead for the release of Irish hostages who had been captured in a Saxon raid on Brega in 685.¹¹ As Hermann Moisl has demonstrated, this represents but a single episode in a long, complex relationship between

Bernician royalty and the northern Irish dynasty of Uí Néill, indicating political contact at the highest level.¹²

That such interaction should have been reflected in intellectual endeavors is only to be expected since the learned classes of both Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England were based in ecclesiastical establishments, which comprised the countries' social elite.¹³ Their common features are seen most clearly in the manuscript productions of this early period, as witnessed in the scholarly debates concerning the precise place of origin of such illuminated gospel books as the late seventh-century Book of Durrow, the Lindisfarne Gospels, from about 700, and the eighth-century masterpiece, the Book of Kells.¹⁴ While discussion has often focused on script and manuscript illumination, the contents of the earliest Latin manuscripts from Britain and Ireland also bear comparison, liturgical texts in both areas having pride of place. Grammar is also a concern,¹⁵ as is hagiography,¹⁶ and law;¹⁷ Insular Latin culture manifests itself in Ireland and England in similar ways. Contact lines have frequently left their marks, as is evident from glosses in both Latin and Old Irish on Bede's *De rerum natura* and *De temporum ratione*, in what may be ninth-century Irish manuscripts now preserved in Karlsruhe and Vienna.¹⁸ The Rushworth Gospels, ascribed to one who bore the Irish name Mac Riaguil, and containing tenth-century Old English glosses, constitutes another vibrant witness to the positive results of a cultural confluence.¹⁹ The perpetrators of that continuing exchange are shadowy figures, remaining nameless apart from a few well-known exceptions. These include Josephus Scottus, a student of Alcuin of York (d. 804), whom the latter praised in a letter to Joseph's Irish teacher, Colcu.²⁰ Also well-known are a trio of Irishmen, Dub Sláine, Mac Bethad and Máel Inmain, of whom the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* relates that they set to sea without oar or rudder in 891, landing on the English coast, and made straight for the court of Alfred the Great.²¹

Given the focus of that king's intellectual program, they would have encountered vernacular learning alongside its Latin counterpart at his court, in a bilingual situation like the one with which they were familiar. Contemporary annalistic records in Old Irish and Old English survive from Alfred's time and earlier, as do vernacular martyrologies²² and a number of prose compositions, the subject-matter of which is, in the case of the Irish material in particular, remarkably diverse.²³ Early poetry has also survived in the two languages: an Irish equivalent of the book of vernacular verse, which Asser claims was given to Alfred by his mother, would have been a copy of *Audacht Morainn*, a metrical *speculum principum* with

a composition date of *circa* 700.²⁴ The rich corpus of Old Irish law tracts contains poetry, as well as prose, dating somewhere between the law-code of the sixth-century Kentish King Æthelberht and the ninth-century laws of Alfred the Great.²⁵

In the century or so after Alfred’s birth, *Beowulf*, as it survives, may have been composed. Comparable heroic Irish material is also difficult to date; what is clear, however, is that on two adjacent islands, pre-Christian heroes were embraced by churchmen and commemorated in the vernacular at roughly the same time. Poetry was the chosen medium of Anglo-Saxon authors, whereas their Irish counterparts preferred a prosimetric form with a predominance of prose. Notwithstanding this difference, the two literatures bear comparison. Patrick Wormald was tempted “to connect the major Irish role in Anglo-Saxon evangelization with the fact that Ireland and England were the only two parts of the West to celebrate ancestral heroes in their own tongue.”²⁶ Literary rather than cultural considerations have informed the recurrent attempts to link *Beowulf* specifically with Old Irish narratives; *Fled Bricrend* (Bricriu’s Feast), *Táin Bó Fraích* (The Cattle-Raid of Fráech), and *Sex aetates mundi* being commonly cited as sources or analogues in this regard.²⁷ David Dumville has sought to set such putative connections in their historical and literary context. In so doing, he stresses the common concerns of the two cultures, “as well as the clear possibility of direct influence by one on the other.”²⁸ Illumination of the latter cannot proceed properly without an exposition of the former. In addition, even where no connection can be shown to have existed, the parallel elucidation of two corpora born of similar social circumstances and subsequently sharing many comparable developments, can shed new light on each of the literatures in turn.

“Alfredian” Ireland

Comúaim n-ecalsa fri túaith

Alfred’s reign has frequently been cited as a convenient starting point from which to survey Old English material;²⁹ its productivity and specific focus on the production of vernacular texts ensured that the literary landscape was transformed by its end. Notwithstanding the substantial evidence for the cultivation of a wide range of compositions in Irish in Ireland’s equivalent of the pre-Alfredian era,³⁰ the ninth and tenth centuries also marked a perceptible shift in the use of the vernacular in the western-most island.³¹

This is evidenced most clearly in annalistic writing in which extensive use of Irish can be dated to around this time.³² Vernacular hagiography also dates from the ninth century, the earliest extant example being a Life of Brigit which, significantly, is a bilingual text of which roughly one quarter is in Latin.³³ Saints were also commemorated in Irish in martyrologies, the earliest of which, a metrical “Calendar of Óengus” (*Féilire Óengusso*) was composed in the early years of the same century.³⁴ The author of this work, Óengus mac Óengobann, describes himself as *céle Dé* (a companion of God), associating himself with a group of eighth-century ecclesiastics who sought to promote a purer, ascetic, more spiritual way of life. Their desire to communicate with the laity, as well as fellow clerics, has been linked with the growth in the production of devotional texts in the vernacular.³⁵ Somewhat earlier than Alfred and, for broadly similar reasons, *céli Dé* in Ireland were concerned with access to that which is “most needful to know.”

Alfred took the matter into his own hands, learning to read and write and gathering around him clerics who could establish his ambitious program of educational reform. By contrast, there is no evidence for court schools and very little for lay literacy in Ireland at this time;³⁶ textual production was firmly ensconced in an ecclesiastical embrace. Máel Muru of Othain (the monastery of Fahan, Co. Donegal), for example, is accorded the title *rigfili Érenn* (chief/royal-poet of Ireland) in his annalistic obit for the year 887.³⁷ Among the compositions of this monastic scholar is a lengthy pseudo-historical poem, *Can a mbunadas na nGáedel* (What are the origins of the Irish?), in which the wanderings of the Irish and their eventual conquest of Ireland are set out.³⁸ As a foundation-legend for Ireland’s noble families, the work was obviously of primary interest to the representatives of those groups ruling in Máel Muru’s own day. Thus, church personnel provided relevant texts for a secular elite, acquiring all-important political patronage in return. However, the precise mechanics of this mutually beneficial working relationship remain to some extent obscure.³⁹ Of key importance may well have been scholars who straddled both religious and royal spheres. These included Cormac mac Cuilennáin, king-bishop of Munster, who was killed in battle fighting Leinster and Connacht opponents in 908. His literary fame was such that numerous works were anachronistically attributed to him;⁴⁰ notwithstanding this he may indeed have written some extant metrical compositions.⁴¹ A genuine association with one of two versions of a Glossary bearing his name, *Sanas Cormaic* (Cormac’s Glossary), is also possible,⁴² indicating an interest in

diverse branches of learning.⁴³ We know less of his intellectual activities than we do of those of his English contemporary, Alfred; nonetheless, the surviving evidence suggests that the Irish king also actively pursued scholarly research.

In both his royal-episcopal persona and his learned compositions, which may include a saint’s eulogy as well as a list of Munster kings,⁴⁴ Cormac mac Cuilennáin embodies the spirit of close cooperation between Church and secular authorities. This was the defining feature of early medieval Ireland’s literary life. Its significance was highlighted by contemporary authors who sought to explicate the nature of this intellectual interdependency. An elaborate attempt is found in the eighth-century, so-called pseudo-historical prologue to the great collection of legal texts known as the *Senchas Már* (Great Lore).⁴⁵ In the tale that, according to John Carey, “symbolically portrays the creation of a Christian Irish culture,”⁴⁶ a consortium of nine men was chosen to arrange the laws, made up of three bishops, three kings, and three men of learning.⁴⁷ The textual basis of this arrangement is made clear in the comment that “*Nó-fis*, then, is the name of the book they arranged, i.e., the knowledge of nine men” (*Nófis didiu anim in liubair-se ro ordaigset, .i. fis nónbuir*).⁴⁸ The explanation found favor among the learned classes; it occurs in the ninth-century Glossary associated with Cormac in a form obviously dependent on the earlier prologue.⁴⁹

In the tradition of his predecessors, therefore, Cormac mac Cuilennáin (or a contemporary of his) sought to sanction the close cerebral connections between ecclesiastical and political powers operating in his own time by endorsing what had been earlier described as *comúaim n-ecalsa fri tuaithe* (the sewing together of Church and secular authority).⁵⁰ The case is made again in a later, well-crafted etiology concerning another aristocratic figure, Cenn Fáelad mac Ailella of the Northern Uí Néill, whose death as *sapiens*, an ecclesiastical scholar, is recorded in chronicle entries for 679.⁵¹ Of the historical figure nothing is known; his fame lies in the fact that he came to personify how Ireland’s literary heritage came into being. Wounded in the battle of Mag Rath in 637, according to an eleventh- or twelfth-century preface to the law tract *Bretha Étgid* (Judgments Concerning an Offense), Cenn Fáelad’s injury involved the removal of his *incinn dermait*, that part of his brain inclining him to forget.⁵² Thus unencumbered, he was in a unique position to profit from the learning to which he was exposed in his convalescent home, Tech Bricín Drecain, within whose monastic confines was housed “a school of Latin learning, a school

of law and a school of poetry” (scol leigind 7 scol feinechais 7 scol filed).⁵³ Having memorized all that he heard “he cast them into poetic form and wrote them on slabs and on tablets” (docuir-sium glonsnaithi filed fuithib 7 doscrib-sum iat a lecaib 7 i taiblib).⁵⁴ Cenn Fáelad’s significance was deemed such that part of “one of the central texts of early Irish learning,”⁵⁵ *Auraicept na nÉces* (The Poets’ Primer), was attributed to him; a version of the tale of his remarkable recovery was later prefaced to this work.⁵⁶

“Pre-Alfredian” Ireland

A mba ferr do cach bérlu

As a founding father of Irish literature, Cenn Fáelad has his English counterpart in Cædmon, another shadowy seventh-century figure, whose story “has in effect been taken as the foundation-legend of the Old English Christian poetic tradition.”⁵⁷ David Dumville has astutely compared the narratives concerning the two exemplary poets, despite the considerable chronological gap between them.⁵⁸ Doubts have been expressed about the authorship of much of the verse allegedly written by Cædmon. It is also far from clear whether the metrical compositions ascribed to Cenn Fáelad in the eighth-century law tracts, *Mtadslechta* (Sections concerning Rank) and *Bretha Nemed* (Judgments concerning Privileged Persons), are indeed by him.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, as Kim McCone has noted, their existence indicates that his association with learning is certainly earlier than the Middle Irish legend celebrating his literary prowess.⁶⁰

Cædmon’s poems display a familiarity with the Bible, specifically Exodus and Genesis; the first book of the Bible also inspired the author of the eighth-century poets’ manual, *Auraicept na nÉces*, with which Cenn Fáelad’s name was later associated.⁶¹ However, the story of the Tower of Babel with which the canonical part of the text begins was probably mediated through well-known sources, such as Orosius and Isidore of Seville.⁶² The starting point for the author of the *Auraicept* was the widespread doctrine of the three sacred languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek; nonetheless, he skillfully placed his own tongue among them by describing how it was invented ten years after the dispersal at the Tower by Fénius Farsaid who was asked to create a language out of many languages.⁶³ This he did: “a mba ferr iarum do cach bérlu ocus a mba lethu ocus a mba cáimiu, is ed do-reped isin nGoídilc” (what was best then of every language and what was

widest and finest was cut out into Irish).⁶⁴ His cultural confidence is further reflected in the Greek derivation he assigns to this master-language: “Goídelc ... ó Goídiul mac Angin ... do Grécaib” (Goídelc [Irish] ... named after Goídel son of Angen ... of the Greeks).⁶⁵ Moreover, it permeates his sustained comparison between Latin and Irish in which the vernacular is seen to be of equal status with its classical counterpart.⁶⁶

This scholarly sophistication bespeaks an intense engagement with Irish as a literary language, as well as an intimate acquaintance with Latin. Contact between them more than three hundred years previously had brought the earliest form of Irish writing, Ogam, into being, the inventors of which were familiar not merely with the Latin alphabet but with the works of fourth-century Latin grammarians as well.⁶⁷ While undoubtedly indebted to Latin, these earlier creators of what was an epigraphic script display something of the attitude of the *Auraicept* author. Damian McManus has underlined their “independence of mind” which ensured that Ogam was the perfect vehicle for the phonemic inventory of their own tongue.⁶⁸

That language developed from the Primitive Irish of the framers of the Ogam alphabet into Archaic Irish (600–700), Old Irish (700–900), and Middle Irish (900–1200), all three linguistic stages being reflected in manuscript sources. Those drafting the later Ogam inscriptions and the early manuscript scribes “must have been one and the same people”;⁶⁹ it is not surprising, therefore, that reverence for Ogam is evident in a variety of texts.⁷⁰ Chief among these is *Auraicept na nÉces*, since it is with the *beithe-luis-nin* or alphabet of Ogam that Latin is frequently compared.⁷¹ Yet by the time this text was composed Ogam was no longer being used in inscriptions, though the script was occasionally employed in manuscripts to provide an illustration of how it appeared, as well as in authorial inscriptions⁷² and in short functional texts on other kinds of material.⁷³ However, neither these scholastic Ogams, as they are termed, nor the Ogam inscriptions themselves record anything comparable with the section of the *Dream of the Rood*, carved in eighth-century runes on the Ruthwell Cross. Poetic compositions in Ireland, as in England for the most part, belonged on the manuscript page.

Slicht Libair ... inso

The pages that have survived from the two regions differ somewhat in date. The tenth-century Vercelli Book in which the *Dream of the Rood* survives in its entirety, along with its three companion codices of roughly the same

date, predate the earliest extant Irish manuscript in the vernacular, *Lebor na hUidre* (The Book of the Dun Cow), perhaps by some one hundred years.⁷⁴ In form it differs significantly from the four English poetic books since it contains a predominance of prose encompassing pseudo-historical literature,⁷⁵ as well as some religious material, including two homilies after which the scribe who inserted them was labelled by later scholars H (= Homilist).⁷⁶ Since only about half of the volume has survived⁷⁷ any attempt at ascertaining its original function must remain speculative; nonetheless, an interest in “the two legendary spheres of influence of Emain [Navan Fort] and Témair [Tara]” is clearly evident.⁷⁸ Máire Herbert has shown how many of the texts contained in *Lebor na hUidre* were carefully mediated to their audience in a manner revealing the very real contemporary concerns of their authors.⁷⁹ As living history, the book had an immediate resonance in its own time.⁸⁰

Part of its authority derived from the fact that it drew on pre-existing sources, the expression, *Slicht Libair ... inso* (an extract from the Book of ... here) being a common refrain.⁸¹ Our manuscript, therefore, provides important evidence for scribal activity, in the vernacular, at an earlier date. Among the works drawn on was *Cín Dromma Snechtai* (The Book of Druimm Snechtai), a codex named after the monastery of Drumsnat (Co. Monaghan),⁸² which is specifically referred to on five occasions in *Lebor na hUidre*.⁸³ Other references to this now lost manuscript, the most significant being in a sixteenth-century compilation of legal and literary material in London, British Library manuscript, Egerton 88, ensure that we can compile a putative table of contents for “The Book of Drumsnat.”⁸⁴ On the basis of the seventeen or so textual items assigned to it, each with different degrees of certainty, the codex constituted a varied collection of both prose and poetic narratives, many of which have a northern or midland bias. Encompassing some material which has been dated to the seventh century, it also contained other tales dating from the eighth.⁸⁵ Whether *Cín Dromma Snechtai* itself was written in the eighth century or whether it was a tenth-century “Book” copied from an earlier archetype continues to be debated.⁸⁶ Its significance as a “witness,” either directly or at one remove, to mature and confident writing in Irish at a remarkably early period, cannot be overstated.

In its preference for the vernacular, as well as in subject-matter, *Cín Dromma Snechtai* resembles *Lebor na hUidre*, not least because ten texts may have been common to both works.⁸⁷ By contrast, early Irish manuscripts are predominantly in Latin and, like the earliest English manu-

scripts, are for the most part religious in tone.⁸⁸ Alongside their copious vernacular glosses, some of these sources also preserve longer vernacular passages in prose and verse. Thus, we can still view traces of a vibrant literary tradition in contemporary dress. Bilingualism is its hallmark, as indicated by the alternating sections in Latin and Irish in a seventh-century Homily preserved in an eighth-century manuscript now in Cambrai.⁸⁹ Moreover, Latin retained primacy, as is evident from the interface between Irish and Latin texts on a manuscript page; the vernacular frequently occupied a marginal position, taking as its starting point the higher-status language of Scriptures.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding this, the creative manipulation by the scribes of their own tongue is demonstrable in the scattering of vernacular poems surviving in the eighth- or ninth-century manuscript, *Codex Sancti Pauli*, which include an artistic homage to a cat.⁹¹ Irony has also been mastered, a ninth-century weary pilgrim suggesting that a journey to Rome amounts to “a lot of work [for] little profit” (*mór saido, becc torbai*), continuing: “the King you seek here – if you don’t bring him with you, you won’t find him” (in *Rí chondaigi hi foss/ mani mbera latt ní fogbai*).⁹²

Without such journeys overseas, however, much of the earliest writing in Irish would have been lost, for it is in manuscripts which found homes in continental monasteries and libraries that it has, for the most part, been preserved.⁹³ Since a religious or grammatical codex was more likely to have been accorded space in the satchel of a scholar-traveller than *Cín Dromma Snechtai* or its ilk, the dichotomy between the nature of the surviving literary traces and allusions in later sources to a wealth of diverse material *in aliis libris* is easily explained.⁹⁴ Despite also being ecclesiastical products, these *araile libair* (other books)⁹⁵ were lost in an Irish context, taken to be read aloud at the more precarious setting of a king’s court perhaps, never to be returned.⁹⁶ Survival of some such codices into the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and beyond has ensured that some of their literary contents have survived, committed to parchment afresh by reverent learned successors. Yet, we can rarely determine with certainty the exact effect of the intervening hand(s).

Dúile feda

Notwithstanding this, the variety of material to which those hands had access is obvious, even if its survival in non-contemporary manuscripts means that the precise date of some of the texts in question is far from clear.⁹⁷ A chronological list of poems in Irish, containing thirty-three items apparently composed before 900, has been challenged at various

points;⁹⁸ nonetheless, its core of unquestionably Old Irish compositions bears witness to an early vernacular poetic tradition of remarkable vitality. Religious verse is prevalent, including hymns to saints Brigit and Columba,⁹⁹ as well as portraits of Christ in partial Irish dress.¹⁰⁰ One of these is a skillful reworking of a Latin version of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, perhaps late seventh-century in date.¹⁰¹ Another composition consists of a pair of interlinked poems addressed to Mary and attributed to a northern scholar, Blathmac, whose father, Cú Brettan was active in the middle of the eighth century.¹⁰² Such ascriptions need not be genuine; however, when compared linguistically with eighth-century glosses in contemporary manuscripts, Blathmac's poetry does appear to have been composed about this time. More problematic is the dating of early poetic fragments said to be the work of Colmán mac Lénéni, who died *circa* 606,¹⁰³ and of Dallán Forgaill's *Amra Coluim Cille*, an elegy to the Irish founder of Iona who died in 597.¹⁰⁴

Irrespective of whether the earliest extant poem in Irish was written before the end of the sixth century, Ireland boasts a corpus of devotional poetry, some of which was certainly composed as Theodore and Hadrian's famous school was flourishing in Canterbury. Credited with nourishing the development of religious verse in Old English,¹⁰⁵ the quality of this school was soon celebrated, at the expense of Irish centers of learning, in the case of Aldhelm of Malmesbury, as Rosalind Love remarks.¹⁰⁶ That the cultural climate in Ireland was conducive to such literary production explains why "thronging students by the fleet-load" assembled there, much to the disdain of the Anglo-Saxon bishop.¹⁰⁷ Aldhelm knew as much, of course, having received some training in Ireland's northern outpost, Iona;¹⁰⁸ whether prostitutes or pagan stories repelled him, he turned his back dramatically on an erstwhile intellectual haven, seeking perhaps through his anti-Irish rhetoric to settle old scholarly scores.¹⁰⁹

Of seventh-century Irish prostitutes nothing further is recorded and purely pagan stories have simply not survived. Had Aldhelm maintained his contacts with Ireland he might conceivably have experienced its narrative literature, a number of vernacular tales having been dated to the century of his death. These include a pair of interlinked compositions, *Echtrae Chonnlai* (The Expedition of Connlac) and *Immram Brain* (The Voyage of Bran), both of which feature supernatural women who lure unsuspecting men to an Otherworld of unparalleled pleasures.¹¹⁰ Its general tenor is Christian in tone, being a place "in which there is neither death nor sin nor transgression" (*i-nna-bí bás na peccad na imar-*

mus).¹¹¹ Indeed, as John Carey has noted, the description in the earlier of the two narratives, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, whence the woman has come (*Do-dechad-sa a tírib béo*, “I have come from the lands of the living”)¹¹² is used elsewhere of Heaven and is reminiscent of the biblical *terra uiuentium*.¹¹³ As the woman herself is the harbinger of Christianity, Heaven is her natural home.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, her appearance as a mysterious woman, “in unfamiliar clothing” (*i n-étuch anetargnad*),¹¹⁵ deliberately echoes that of goddesses in other tales.¹¹⁶ Thus, the author is seeking to synthesize the competing Otherworlds that formed part of his early eighth-century world view.¹¹⁷ What may be Ireland’s earliest extant vernacular story set the artistic stakes remarkably high.

Skill and sophistication are similarly the hallmarks of other early productions, as is a synthesis of old and new. A rich, substantial corpus of legal material has survived, the earliest datable text of which, *Cáin Fhuithirbe* (The Law of Fuithirbe), is roughly contemporary with the seventh-century law codes of Kentish kings.¹¹⁸ As Anglo-Saxon legal sources reveal close cooperation between Church and “State,” so too do their Irish counterparts point to intensive ecclesiastical involvement in the production of this legal material.¹¹⁹ Where they differ is in the extensive range of subjects covered by the Irish texts, amounting to a blueprint for society of the most detailed kind.¹²⁰ About fifty texts dating from the seventh and eighth centuries form a collection of law texts, the *Senchas Már*, which includes material on clientship, marriage and kinship, as well as bees, cats and dogs.¹²¹ Neighborly relations are regulated for,¹²² as is sick-maintenance of all kinds;¹²³ arrangements for the proper conduct of society are also pursued.¹²⁴ Having northern associations, the *Senchas Már* is complemented by a smaller group of texts emanating from Munster which appear to have been more restricted in range.¹²⁵ The southern sources are also distinguishable stylistically from the *Senchas Már* material, containing a greater proportion of *rosc(ad)* (an alliterative, stress-counting poetic form). Thus, they are often deemed the products of a poetico-legal school.

In its alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, as well as in its stylized syntax, *rosc* bears some resemblance to Old English metrical forms.¹²⁶ Irish poets employed syllabic rhyming quatrains alongside it, often in the same text.¹²⁷ Furthermore, both types of meter continued to be composed for a considerable period,¹²⁸ syllabic verse being the dominant unmarked type. By contrast, it did not become prevalent in England before the twelfth century, despite the occasional rhyming couplet which found its way into earlier works. The two regions have been

deemed to have had a different approach to poetry in other ways too, since verse is the primary medium for Old English heroic lore. Warrior literature in Irish may be predominantly in prose, yet what may be its earliest witness, *Verba Scáthaige*, which shares thematic concerns with Ireland's premier "epic," *Táin Bó Cúailngne* (The Cattle-Raid of Cúailngne [Cooley]), is a poetic text.¹²⁹ Furthermore, its companion pieces in *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, whose pages it once most likely adorned, are for the most part metrical or at least prosimetric in form. Thus, the Irish evidence scarcely suggests a strict dichotomy between prose and verse. *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* (The Vision of Conn Cétchathach [of the hundred battles]) is a prophetic king-list also contained in the lost *Cín* which is plausibly dated to the late seventh century when the last ruler mentioned in the text, Fínnecta Fledach, reigned.¹³⁰ It is written in an elaborate, alliterative style. Moreover, such stylized language is not confined to works like *Baile Chuinn*, which are somewhat riddling in tone.¹³¹ A didactic religious text, *Apgitir Chrábaid* (The Alphabet of Piety), which is ascribed to the abbot Colmán moccu Beognae (d. 611), but which may have been written a century or so after his time, is an ornate rhythmical primer which in its polished manner effectively gets its moral message across.¹³²

Whatever its precise date, the literary refinement of *Apgitir Chrábaid*, and of many of the other texts we have encountered, bears witness to a vibrant intellectual culture in the vernacular which produced complex, sophisticated compositions in considerable quantity from a very early date. Their thematic diversity is remarkable, ranging from devotional literature to legal texts and encompassing chronicles and narrative material as well; "books of lore" (*dúile feda*) were produced in very many forms.¹³³ The documentation was of a social elite, written in ecclesiastical establishments and reveals close ties between political rulers and the Church. It also demonstrates the engagement of its authors with ideas and sources current elsewhere in their day.¹³⁴ For much of this early period, the involvement of the Irish in England was also intense, as Irish-led missions dominated the developing English Church. Literary exchanges undoubtedly formed part of that contact and it may be that their eastern neighbors learned much from the confident control the Irish had of their own written tongue. If so, they gave much in return and the cultural benefits were shared in both directions. The Irish Sea was to remain a crucial conduit in the centuries to come.

“Post-Alfredian” Ireland

The extent to which Vikings disrupted this cultural flow is debatable, as is their precise influence on the cultivation of literature on both sides of the Irish Sea. In the case of the western-most region, Máire Herbert has suggested that there was some interruption in scholarly activities in the tenth century, arguing that a variety of factors, including a more stable political situation, led to their resumption from the 980s or so onwards.¹³⁵ If the production rate of learned material in Ireland dipped somewhat, England appears to have entered a particularly active period propelled by Benedictine Reform. What Herbert sees as Ireland’s rejuvenation phase reveals concerns similar to those of the English reformists.¹³⁶ Hagiographical material is abundant, some of it cast in homiletic form. One such text, *Betha Adomnáin*, the vernacular *Life of Adomnán*, biographer of Iona’s founder, Columba, has been dated to the middle of the tenth century.¹³⁷ The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed a flowering of this genre, though many of the hagiographies in question have not yet been precisely dated.¹³⁸ As in England, apocryphal texts are prevalent; indeed the occurrence of the same apocrypha in both cultural regions has been cited as evidence for “mutual relationships ... between Irish and Anglo-Saxon.”¹³⁹ Close textual analysis is necessary to define the direction of any borrowing; notwithstanding this, the use of common works points to, at the very least, exposure to similar sources and influences. The Apocalypse of Thomas, for example, was employed liberally in both regions; among the Irish authors who drew upon it were those who penned the perhaps tenth-century religious works, *In Tenga Bithnua* (The Evernew Tongue), described by John Carey as, “an account of the mysteries of the universe,”¹⁴⁰ and a poetic psalter, *Saltair na Rann* (The Psalter of the Quatrains).¹⁴¹

Coimgne cinte cóem-cheneóil

As the extensive creation history versified in *Saltair na Rann* attests, the Bible continued to be a major source of inspiration for medieval Irish literati, as it was for their learned counterparts in England and elsewhere. It provided them with a framework for their own recorded history: *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (The Book of the Taking of Ireland),¹⁴² an elaborate prosimetric account of the origin of Ireland and her peoples. Drawing on biblical models, it alludes to the Exodus of the Israelites, with which the wandering Irish (*Gaidil*) are identified, as well as to the story of Noah and, in particular, of his son, Japheth, from whom all the invaders of Ireland

are said to descend. In his provision of “the certain historical knowledge [*coimgne*] of a fair race” (*coimgne cinte cóem-cheneóil*),¹⁴³ the perhaps late eleventh-century author of this enterprising composition had access to historical poems by previous scholars, primarily the tenth-century Armagh ecclesiastic, Éochaid ua Flainn (936–1004); the eleventh-century *fer léigind* (learned official) of Monasterboice, Flann Mainistrech mac Echthigirn (d. 1056); and the latter’s contemporaries, Gilla Coemáin mac Gilla Shamthainne (d. 1072) and Tanaide (d. *ca.* 1075), about whom little is known.¹⁴⁴ The author’s own creative input was considerable, however, and the resulting monumental “history” immediately found favor with the scholarly community, being revised and copied repeatedly in the twelfth century.¹⁴⁵

Unlike Byrhtferth of Ramsey, whose *Historia regum* is, like *Lebor Gabála*, an overarching history of a territory and its people,¹⁴⁶ the author of the more elaborate and expansive Irish work does not appear to have drawn significantly on contemporary chronicles. This despite the fact that annalistic writing continued to form a major part of the activities of the learned Irish.¹⁴⁷ As the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was continued in various places at different times by authors with specific biases, so too may the rich vein of Irish chronicling have as its starting point a common source, the now lost “Chronicle of Ireland,” which appears to have come to an end in the year 911.¹⁴⁸ Identifiable strands thereafter include one from Clonmacnoise, which comprises the *Annals of Tigernach*, *Chronicum Scottorum*, as well as a seventeenth-century English translation, the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*.¹⁴⁹ A Munster collection, the *Annals of Inisfallen*, also drew on this western material down to the middle of the eleventh century, as David Dumville and Kathryn Grabowski have shown.¹⁵⁰ Several southern monastic centers also contributed to this source, including Emly, Killaloe, and Lismore. A compilation of similar provenance, *Miscellaneous Irish Annals* (the first part of which is also known as Mac Carthaigh’s Book), which in its fragmentary extant form begins in 1114, represents for the most part a different southern strand.¹⁵¹ The *Annals of Ulster*, by contrast, is a northern work. It and the *Annals of Loch Cé*, which begin in 1014, initially have a common core that comes from Armagh. An input from Derry into these interrelated texts has been detected from the late twelfth century.¹⁵² Many of these compilations were employed in the seventeenth century, together with others now lost, by the so-called Four Masters whose *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* (The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland) forms a comprehensive history of Ireland, most of it based on

earlier work.¹⁵³ Identifying the early layers incorporated by the four ecclesiastical scholars, however, is a difficult task.

Yet even if not always retrievable in its contemporary form, the wealth and variety of the extant annalistic collections indicate that creating and maintaining a record of events remained a major intellectual activity in many centers of learning in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and beyond. Moreover, notwithstanding their ecclesiastical provenance, the breadth of subject matter contained in these chronicles reveals continued close cooperation between king and cleric: these were social documents of interest to all. To take a random example, in 1012, the year in which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* relates that Ealdorman Eadric and his counselors went to London, the *Annals of Ulster* remarks upon “an outbreak of colic ... in Armagh” (teidm tregait ... i nArd Macha) as a result of which three prominent ecclesiastics died. Two further entries deal directly with church matters, the deaths of two *airchinnig* (church officials) of Daiminis and Roscrea being noted in one; the slaying of the *airchinnech* of Slane by his rival, the *airchinnech* of nearby Dowth, in another. A third bears witness to the dependency of the Church on political patronage: on a march northwards, Brian Bórama, a Munster man and the most powerful king of Ireland in his day, “granted complete immunity to Patrick’s churches” (tuc ogshoere do chellaib Patraicc), the most important of which was Armagh. The remaining three accounts concern secular matters: notices of the murder of the king of Conaille Muirthemne and a battle among Uí Echach are preserved, while a more prolonged campaign by the king of the northern territory of Cenél nÉogain against his long-standing enemies and near neighbors, Cenél Conaill, is set out in more detail. On the final leg of his expedition, the ruler in question, Flaithbertach son of Muirchertach, “took the greatest spoils both in captives and cattle that a king ever took” (tuc gabhala is moamh tuc ri riam eter brait ocus innile) – “though they are not counted” (ce nach n-airmter).¹⁵⁴

The literary flavor evident in the latter remark is characteristic of numerous entries. The defeat of the troops of Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill the following year is attributed to the fact that “a small number of nobles” (*uathad degdaine*) among them were drunk and hence foolishly gave battle “out of pride” (*tre diumus*). Poetic matter is interspersed;¹⁵⁵ narrative material is incorporated. The tone of the account of the battle of Clontarf in 1014, for example, between Brian Bórama and an assembled host of Leinster and Norse allies, is not always that of a dispassionate annalist: “Gnithir cath crodha etorra dona frith inntsamail” (A valiant battle was

fought between them, the like of which was never [before] encountered). It also contains an augmented roll-call of the dead.¹⁵⁶

Caraid tairisi

If annal writers had recourse to embellished retellings of the events they were recording, authors of those elaborate narratives made use of annalistic material in turn. *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* (The War between Irish and Vikings), an early twelfth-century prose tale detailing Scandinavian attacks on Ireland, culminating in a highly subjective story about the encounter at Clontarf, is based in part on earlier collections of annals, some of them no longer available.¹⁵⁷ An eleventh-century text, the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, similarly dealing with relations between Irish and Norse, also preserves much annalistic material as part of its narrative account.¹⁵⁸ Anglo-Saxon matters are occasionally included: as in the *Annals of Ulster*, the slaying of Ælle, king of the northern Saxons, by Danes in York is recorded, while the *Fragmentary Annals* augment the information concerning the sacking of the city.¹⁵⁹ Greater detail still is provided concerning the banishment from Ireland and subsequent flight of Ingimund to King Alfred's daughter, Æthelflæd, wife of the ailing Æthelfred.¹⁶⁰ Not satisfied with the lands near Chester he was granted by the queen, the Norse leader led an army to Chester itself. The Saxons were victorious with the aid of the Irish among the Scandinavian forces, who turned upon their leaders having been reminded that the Saxons in the past "did not give greater honor to any Saxon warrior or cleric than they have given to every Irish warrior and cleric who came to them" (gach oglach agus gach cleireach Gaoidhealach tainig cuca-somh a hEirinn, ní tugsat a iomarcraídh onora d'oglach nó cleireach Saxon). Persuaded by the argument that the pagan foes should be as much the enemies of the Irish as of the Saxons, as "faithful friends" (caraid tairisi) of the English, the Irish turned sides.¹⁶¹

F. T. Wainwright accepted this incident in broad terms as historical, noting the record of Ingimund's presence in Anglesey in 902 in *Annales Cambriae* and linking it with the notice in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 907 of the rebuilding of Chester by Æthelflæd.¹⁶² While it may reflect an actual event, the Irish author feels the need to justify the story's inclusion ("níorbh áil dhamh a fhagbail gan a scribheann na ndearnsad Lochlannaig ar ndul a hEirinn," "I did not wish to leave unwritten what the Scandinavians did having left Ireland")¹⁶³ and manipulates the information he has received. The treachery of the Irish is said to have been directed primarily at the *Danair* (Danes), "because they were less friends

to them than the Norwegians" (úair ba lúgh ba caraid doibh iad ionáid na Lochlannaig).¹⁶⁴ The Norwegians fared no better, however, and elsewhere in the text it is in fact the Danes who are preferred.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, while memories of Irish missions may conceivably inform the comment that foreign clerics were treated honorably by the Saxons, the call to common cause against the heathen has a shrill literary ring.¹⁶⁶

Notwithstanding this, at the very least the author of the *Fragmentary Annals* displays some knowledge of historical rulers in the neighboring island, his portrayal of Æthelþlæd as a skillful battle commander echoing the depiction of this "lady of the Mercians" in Anglo-Saxon sources.¹⁶⁷ References to Saxons in other literary works are not always as well anchored. They are mentioned in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel), for example, in an elaborate section of the tale in which Ingcél, a professional British reaver, describes from afar the arrangement of the troops in Da Derga's hostel which he and his Irish allies are about to attack. The establishment is said to contain *imda na Saxanach* (the chamber of the Saxons), alongside the chambers of named heroes and of specific professions.¹⁶⁸ As in many other of the chambers, nine men are said to be present there with "cropped hair" (*monga forbaidi*), wearing "purple garments" (*lennae corcri*) and carrying "nine spears" [and] "nine crimson red shields" (*noí manaise .ix. cromsceith deirg*).¹⁶⁹ Following the pattern in this section of the narrative, they are identified by a watchman, Fer Rogain, an Irish plunderer, and one of three foster-brothers of King Conaire Már, who is also present in the hostel. Having named the foreigners as Ósalt, Osbrit and Lindas, each with two companions, he describes them as three Saxon heirs-in-waiting in Conaire's retinue ("tri rigdomna do Saxanaib sin filet ocond rí") and prophesies that they will share in the victory ("conrainfet in lucht sin búaid ngníma").¹⁷⁰ Two of the trio have Anglo-Saxon names, what may be Irish approximations of Oswald and Osfrith; the latter is given an Irish epithet, *lámfota* (long-armed). The origin of the third name is uncertain; one manuscript substitutes the alliterating "Oult" for "Lindas."¹⁷¹ Nor can any of the three be identified; indeed it is highly unlikely that they represent historical personages. Notwithstanding this, it is significant that an Irish author, most likely in the twelfth century,¹⁷² incorporated Saxon noble warriors into the army of a prehistoric Irish king.

Literary depictions of contemporary rulers occasionally accord them sway over neighboring islands; thus Brian Bórama is said to have levied "royal tribute" (*cíos rioghda*) upon the Saxons and Britons, as well as on

various groups in Scotland.¹⁷³ While the tenth-/eleventh-century Munster king is not known to have extended his political activities outside Ireland, his great-grandson, Muirchertach Ua Briain, who commissioned a biography of his glorious ancestor in the early twelfth century, certainly did so. Brian's triumphant international campaign, therefore, is a wishful portrayal of what his descendant would like to achieve.¹⁷⁴ Other literary encounters were less forceful: *Tochmarc Emire* (The Wooing of Emer) suggests that the mighty hero Cú Chulainn was fostered with a Saxon, Ulbecán.¹⁷⁵ Saxon ancestry was also considered desirable. Niall "of the nine hostages" (*noígíallach*), progenitor of the great dynastic conglomeration Uí Néill is portrayed as the son of Cairenn, the daughter of a Saxon king.¹⁷⁶

An eleventh-century composition, *Echtra mac nEchach Mugmedóin* (The Adventure of the Sons of Éochaid Mugmedón) presents Niall's biography in its fullest form.¹⁷⁷ Its author had access to earlier traditions about the northern king; his death-tale appears to date from the Old Irish period.¹⁷⁸ In the case of *Tochmarc Emire*, two versions of the narrative exist, an older one dating from the eighth century and a much expanded recension based on it, put together in perhaps the eleventh century.¹⁷⁹ An earlier form of *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* has also been preserved; a summary version of the more elaborate, much longer Middle Irish narrative is found in *Lebor na hUidre* where its source is specified as *Cín Dromma Snechtai*.¹⁸⁰ Preservation of early texts was considered important, though not for its own sake. As Máire Herbert has eloquently demonstrated, these works "provided access to a past which needed to be recovered ... because of its necessity for present and future."¹⁸¹ Frequently serving a political need,¹⁸² reworking might be repeated. A companion text of *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, *Aided Crimthainn meic Fhidaig* (The Death-Tale of Crimthann mac Fidaig), focuses on the Connacht cousins of Uí Néill, descendants of Niall's three brothers, Brian, Fiachra and Ailill.¹⁸³ It justifies the dominance of Brian's seed, one of whom, Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair (d. 1156) was probably in power when the text was composed.¹⁸⁴ *Cath Almaine* (The Battle of Allen), a perhaps tenth-century composition that may have drawn on eighth-century material, was rewritten completely in the twelfth century and Cathal mac Finguine was incorporated into the tale. By rehabilitating their politically astute ancestor, the Éoganacht descendants of this historical Munster ruler, who died in 742, sought to highlight their own distinguished past.¹⁸⁵ Their Uí Briain neighbors looked to Brian Bórama; the Éoganachta had an even earlier model monarch through whom they too could promote their own long-established greatness.

Na dindgnai-sa turmim

Purposeful pride in one’s ancestors was coupled with an identification with one’s own place, the two being combined frequently in *dindshenchas* (lore of famous places), narratives in which the deeds of past heroes were mapped tangibly onto their territories, captured in a place-name commemorating the man. Such naming of the landscape is a feature of myriad compositions: thus, the different recensions of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* encompass stories of how various landmarks acquired their names. Occasionally, the name in question is alluded to in passing, the implied association with a particular warrior being deemed sufficient to explain its origin.¹⁸⁶ On other occasions, the connection is made explicit: when Finnabair, daughter of the king and queen of Connacht, Ailill and Medb, realized that she had been used as a sexual pawn in her mother’s campaign, she died of shame (*atbail ar fhéili and sin*): “hence the place-name Finnabair Sléibe [Mountain-Finnabair]” (*is de atá Findabair Sléibe*).¹⁸⁷ Indeed at times the author engages in his own etymologizing, spelling out why Focherd is the name of a place: “Combad de sin dano rod lil a n-ainm as Focherd dond inud .i. fó cerd .i. maith in cherd gascid donecmaic do Choin Culaind and sin” (So it was from that exploit that Focherd remained as the name of the place, that is *fó cerd* [good feat], good was the feat of arms which Cú Chulainn performed there).¹⁸⁸

As in the case of Focherd (Faughart, Co. Louth), some of the dramatized places correspond to points on a modern map;¹⁸⁹ more presumably had medieval equivalents of which traces no longer remain.¹⁹⁰ It is unlikely, however, that all represent topographical reality; in a culture in which names had such resonance and in which a poet boasted of “these places I enumerate” (*na dindgnai-sa turmim*),¹⁹¹ geography and literature need not always be perfectly aligned. Imagination was paramount in the comparable depictions of personal names, the majority of which relate to personages who did not exist.¹⁹² Nonetheless, they continued to have relevance, part of the social patchwork in which contemporary occurrences also found a place, illuminated immeasurably by that which had gone before. The significance of these onomastic stories is indicated by their prominence in the corpus of eleventh- and twelfth-century material which has survived. Drawing on pre-existing matter, as well as employing considerable creative input themselves, learned scholars produced various compendia of names, veritable handbooks in which commentary on key individuals, dynasties and places were to be found. *Cóir Anmann* (The Fitness of Names), in its different Middle Irish recensions, focuses on the *dramatis personae* of

the literary stage.¹⁹³ Prosimetric compilations of *dindshenchas* dating from the same period underline how medieval Irish historical writing was also driven by a sense of place.¹⁹⁴

Fianna bátar i ...

While Anglo-Saxon England has nothing quite comparable with these comprehensive compositions, the source material employed therein by the Irish authors would have been familiar to scholars across the Irish Sea. Specifically, the use of glossaries in *Cóir Anmann*, in particular,¹⁹⁵ points to the fact that in Ireland, as in post-Alfredian England, such texts formed part of the curriculum of schools.¹⁹⁶ Isidorean psychology is dominant, his *Etymologiae* was intimately embraced.¹⁹⁷ Referred to as “the summit of learning” (*in culmen*), it was procured in exchange for the last surviving copy of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, according to a narrative linked to the latter, *De Fhailisugud Tána Bó Cúailnge* (The Finding of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*).¹⁹⁸ The tale bears witness to Isidore’s standing, but also provides a significant insight into the value Irish scholars accorded their own cultural tradition; the equivalent of the “Etymologies,” the *Táin* was not, surprisingly, considered to be in international demand.

Whether the *Táin* journeyed to England is a moot question, yet the heroic literature of the neighboring territories bears comparison in many ways, *fianna bátar i* (the champions who were in ...) Ireland and in England being celebrated in their respective cultures.¹⁹⁹ The circumstances of the survival of this literary genre is also comparable in the two regions, since whatever their original date of composition, the texts come down to us in later forms. Continuous engagement with them ensured their recreation: the recension of the *Táin* preserved in the late twelfth-century manuscript, the Book of Leinster, differs markedly from the version in *Lebor na hUidre* both in content and in tone.²⁰⁰ Heroic values are questioned; an evolving society directed its audience to issues of its own. To this end, new texts came into being, clearly linked to preceding compositions but signaling changing directions, both thematically and stylistically. *Cath Ruis na Ríg* (The Battle of Ros na Ríg), preserved alongside the *Táin* in the Book of Leinster, is one such text. Taking as its starting point the defeat (as it is presented) of Conchobar mac Nessa and his Ulaid kinsmen on the cattle-raid of Cúailnge (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*), the tale recounts how the Ulster king sought his revenge.²⁰¹ His allies on this occasion, however, are *carait écmaise* (absent friends), summoned “throughout foreign lands” (*fo iathaib Gallecda*).²⁰² Moreover, the king is sidelined somewhat, overshadowed

owed by Conall Cernach, his military commander – a Cú Chulainn of a different kind. While *Cath Ruis na Ríg* deals reverentially with its literary forebear, in a late-eleventh-century satire, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* (The Vision of Mac Conglinne), *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and other compositions are unambiguously mocked.²⁰³ A vibrant, thriving culture has scant need for sacred cows.

Scribthar na scéla sin

That culture’s cradle, the Church, was also not beyond ridicule. The eponymous hero of the *Aislinge*, Aníer mac Con Glinne,²⁰⁴ “a famous scholar” (*scolaigi amru*) from Armagh “with an abundance of knowledge” (*co n-immad eolais*),²⁰⁵ is sent to be crucified for reviling – with some justification²⁰⁶ – the monastery of Cork.²⁰⁷ A vision he experienced and subsequently related to the king of Munster, Cathal mac Finguine, thereby cured him of his insatiability and proved his salvation, the abbot’s treasured “cowl” (*cohall*) being bestowed upon him as a reward.²⁰⁸ Religious parody of the most delicious kind, *Aislinge meic Con Glinne* is comparable with satirical texts being composed elsewhere in Europe about the same time.²⁰⁹ Its appearance in Ireland coincides, not unexpectedly, with a shift in the Church’s intellectual role. Long the home of all kinds of learning, the Church gradually relinquished control of the cultivation of secular material to professional families, though it was not until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that these came truly to the fore. The transitional period may have been lengthy, but that at least some of these professional families had their origins in hereditary ecclesiastical dynasties ensured that a certain degree of continuity prevailed.²¹⁰ Nonetheless, tensions undoubtedly surfaced. The unambiguous vote of the author of the late twelfth-century narrative, *Acallam na Senórach* (The Colloquy of the Ancients), was for continued clerical participation in the cultivation of literature; no less a saint than Patrick was made to endorse the engaging “pagan” tales of *fian*-[warrior-band] members, Caílte and Oisín, his guardian angels proclaiming, “let those stories be written” (*scribthar na scéla sin*).²¹¹ Yet that he felt the need to do so meant that change was inevitable. The twelfth-century codices, Rawlinson B502 and the Book of Leinster, may be ecclesiastical products but later manuscripts were produced in a secular milieu.²¹²

Ireland’s counterpart to the world of Anglo-Saxon learning, however, is one with a deep ecclesiastical hue.²¹³ Royal figures such as Cormac mac Cuilennáin may have been authors, but these held clerical office and were the exception rather than the rule. Like the Anglo-Saxons, the Irish

had their learned abbots;²¹⁴ bishops too had a scholarly role.²¹⁵ *Fir léigind* (learned men) are attested with a church affiliation;²¹⁶ it was in ecclesiastical centers that texts continued to be written and that precious books were stored.²¹⁷ Yet royal patronage was paramount, a tenth-century “chief poet of Ireland” (*primecess Erenn*),²¹⁸ Cináed ua hArtacáin, offering his compositions, among others, to Amlaíb Cuarán, Norse king of Dublin.²¹⁹ His slightly later, fellow-*priméces*, Cúán ua Lothcháin, served the midland ruler, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill. His involvement in internal politics was such that he was killed in neighboring Tethba. Cúán’s slayers were to rue the day, however, since “the party that killed him became putrid within the hour” (*brenait a n-aenuair in lucht ro marb*), the annalist describing the incident as a poet’s miracle (*firt filed innsein*).²²⁰

Engagement with local affairs, on the one hand, was coupled with familiarity with a wider world. Cúán and Cináed were “chief poets of Ireland” and whatever the reality behind this eloquent title, a scholar’s circuit extended far beyond the remit of his own immediate territory (*túath*). Travel was sometimes international bringing with it exposure to new literary themes and forms. Foreign matter was adapted, none as enthusiastically as classical compositions, of which the Irish in many instances produced the first vernacular forms. Their version of the Alexander saga may be roughly contemporary with its Old English counterpart;²²¹ one recension of Dares Phrygius’s *De excidio Troiae historia* may also be based on a tenth-century Irish exemplar.²²² Such material remained popular; the twelfth century saw the transposition of Lucan’s *Pharsalia* and Statius’s *Thebaid*, among other such texts, into an Irish literary milieu.²²³ Latin learning was evidently sufficiently strong to furnish skillful “translators,” though the trend towards adaptation in itself may indicate a greater need for assistance with Latin texts. The potential audience was considerable, the primarily heroic matter appealing to a people who could readily draw comparison with the deeds of their own literary warriors; all the more so since classical events were also afforded room in the overarching historical framework which came into being about the same time.²²⁴ Moreover, clerical creators did not eschew the pagan nature of their material; as stated explicitly in *Acallam na Senórach*, pre-Christian material should also be embraced. These texts had significant influence on literary development in diverse ways.²²⁵

Conclusion

Ultimately, its predominantly "secular" feel may constitute the most perceptible difference between Old English and Medieval Irish literatures. The religious texts which form a prominent part of the Anglo-Saxon corpus were composed in Ireland also, but adorning the same manuscript pages are the exploits of kings and heroes; the lore of women (*banshenchas*)²²⁶ and that of saints (*naemshenchas*)²²⁷ are afforded the same creative space. Issues of transmission provide part of the explanation, *Beowulf* owing its precarious survival to its fortunate thematic connection with a group of other "more acceptable" texts. Yet this in itself is significant as an indicator of a markedly different cultural approach. The ninth-century author of *Félire Oengusso* may exult in the triumph of monasteries over pagan citadels;²²⁸ within the cloisters of the former, however, the imagined activities of the latter were given shape.

In a number of narratives, the role of the Church as intermediary is given expression: it is through St. Patrick's power, for example, that Cú Chulainn and the fifth-century pseudo-historic king, Láegaire mac Néill, are brought together in *Siaburcharpat Con Culainn* (The Magical Chariot of Cú Chulainn), a tenth- or eleventh-century tale.²²⁹ Cú Chulainn may urge Láegaire repeatedly to believe in God,²³⁰ yet his heroic exploits are related sympathetically and Scribe H adds his genealogy to the end of the tale.²³¹ The Ulaid leader, Conchobar mac Nessa, is said to have been spared hell,²³² the reason for which is provided in that king's death-tale, a number of versions of which have survived. One of two men in Ireland who believed before the coming of Christianity, Conchobar died of grief on hearing of the crucifixion of Christ.²³³ Finn mac Cumail too was a precocious Christian, understanding through his formidable mantic powers "that there was indeed a true and glorious God, someone who had direction and power over us all" (go raibi in fírdhia forórdha ann .i. in nech aca raibe comus ocus comachta orainn uili).²³⁴ As mediating forger of this rich, diverse material the Church assumed some measure of control.

As literary director, it could afford to be broadminded; indeed social circumstances demanded it must be so. The Book of Leinster may not be a patron's codex; nonetheless, the involvement of King Diarmait mac Murchada in its creation is tangible.²³⁵ Royal approval, therefore, was a dominant concern. This interdependency of ecclesiastical and political rulers ensured that a broad literary palette was preserved. Whether their cooperation was closer than in Anglo-Saxon England is a moot question;

the results of their working relationship, however, were different in the two regions, the complex reasons for which have yet to be addressed. This requires scholars with an intimate knowledge of each of the two cultures and an appreciation of the literary gems which both territories possessed. To those engaged in the teaching and study of Old English, this brief and, of necessity, eclectic introduction to “the learning of Ireland” (*légend hÉrenn*)²³⁶ can provide no more than a glimpse of the extraordinarily diverse material of that territory in the early medieval period. The richness and vitality of that literature bear witness to what was a remarkably inclusive definition on the part of the Irish of that which is “most needful to know.”²³⁷

NOTES

¹ For an overview of ecclesiastical contacts between Ireland and England in the seventh and eighth centuries, see Hughes, “Evidence for Contacts between the Churches of the Irish and the English,” pp. 49–67. See also Smith, “Writing in Britain and Ireland, c. 400 to c. 800,” pp. 14–49; and Ní Mhaonaigh, “Of Bede’s ‘Five Languages and Four Nations,’” pp. 99–119.

² Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (henceforth HE), III.7, 25, 27.

³ Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *Two Lives of St. Cuthbert* (Cambridge, 1940) pp. 140, 236, 238.

⁴ See Ireland, ed. and trans., *Old Irish Wisdom Texts Attributed to Aldfrith of Northumbria*.

⁵ See Michael Lapidge, “Aldhelm and the ‘Epinal-Erfurt Glossary,’” in *Aldhelm and Sherborne: Essays to Celebrate the Foundation of the Bishopric*, eds Katharine Barker and Nicholas Brooks (Oxford, 2010), pp. 129–63. On Aldhelm’s Irish connections, see also Yorke, “Aldhelm’s Irish and British Connections,” pp. 164–80.

⁶ The passages in question are discussed by Rosalind Love above, pp. 10–12.

⁷ HE III.27.

⁸ Ó Cróinín, “Rath Melsigi, Willibrord, and the Earliest Echternach Manuscripts,” pp. 17–49, esp. p. 23. A destroyed *rath* on the site lends support to the identification: see Fanning, “Appendix: Some Field Monuments in the Townlands of Clonmelsh and Garryhundán, Co. Carlow,” pp. 43–49.

⁹ It is described as such in an annalistic entry recording its burning in 783: Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, eds. and trans., *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)* (henceforth AU), 738.3. On the history of the monastery, see Orschel, “Mag nEó na Sacsan: An English Colony in Ireland in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries,” pp. 81–107.

¹⁰ See Ní Mhaonaigh, “Of Saxons, a Viking and Normans,” pp. 411–26.

¹¹ AU 685.2 and 687.5. On Adomnán’s visit, see HE III.26; and Anderson and Anderson, eds. and trans., *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*, II.46.

¹² Moisl, "The Bernician Royal Dynasty and the Irish in the Seventh Century," pp. 103–26, esp. pp. 120–24. See also, Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 429–38; and Wadden, "The First English Invasion," pp. 1–33.

¹³ For a lucid analysis of the difficulties involved in isolating the "Irish strand in the English cultural weave," see Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, pp. 3–5, 10–11, 15–20, 30–1, 34–5.

¹⁴ For a brief summary of some of the contributions to the debate, see O'Sullivan, "Manuscripts and Palaeography," pp. 511–15 and references therein.

¹⁵ See Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians*; and a review-article of Law's book by Holtz, "Les Grammairiens Hiberno-Latins," pp. 170–84.

¹⁶ The earliest Latin Life from Ireland is Cogitosus' *Life of Brigit of Kildare*, on which see Sharpe, "Vitae S. Brigitae: The Oldest Texts," pp. 81–106; and McCone, "Brigit in the Seventh Century," pp. 107–45. Patrick has been served by two seventh-century biographers, Muirchú and Tírechán: see Bieler, ed. and trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, pp. 61–167; Columba's Life was written by Adomnán (d. 704), a successor of his as abbot of Iona: see Anderson and Anderson, *Adomnán's Life*. Richard Sharpe has argued that a group of up to ten Lives preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript, the *Codex Salmanticensis*, derive from an exemplar composed between ca. 740x850: Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, pp. 297–339. For a critical consideration of aspects of Sharpe's methodology, see Breatnach, "The Significance of the Orthography of Irish Proper Names in the *Codex Salmanticensis*," pp. 85–101. Other scholars have also questioned the early date of the collection: see John Carey, review of *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives*, by Richard Sharpe, *Speculum* 68 (1993), 260–62; and Ó Riain, "The O'Donoghue Lives of the Salamancan Codex," pp. 38–52. As far as later English-Irish relations are concerned, the provenance of the manuscript itself is interesting, on which see: Pádraig Ó Riain, "Codex Salmanticensis": A Provenance *inter Anglos* or *inter Hibernos*? in *A Miracle of Learning: Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning. Essays in Honour of William O'Sullivan*, ed. Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms (Ashgate, 1998), pp. 91–100.

¹⁷ See, in particular, Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*; Ó Corráin, Breatnach, and Breen, "The Laws of the Irish," pp. 382–438; and Breatnach, "Lawyers in Early Ireland," pp. 1–13.

¹⁸ Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II.10–37.

¹⁹ *The MacRegol or Rushworth Gospels*, with an introduction by W. O. Has-sall, Major Treasures in the Bodleian Library 10 (Oxford, 1978).

²⁰ Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York c. A.D. 732–804: His Life and Letters* (York, 1974), p. 15.

²¹ Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, trans., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 113–14. See also Dumville, *Three Men in a Boat*. Later unnamed compatriots were associated with a later ruler of Wessex, King Æthelstan (d. 939); of their activities, however, no more than traces remain: see Michael Lapidge, "Some Latin Poems as

Evidence for the Reign of Æthelstan,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981), pp. 61–98. On exchange of books between Ireland and England in Æthelstan’s reign, see Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” p. 90, n. 13.

²² For connections between English and Irish martyrologies, see J. E. Cross, “The Influence of Irish Texts and Traditions on the *Old English Martyrology*,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 81 C (1981), pp. 173–92; Ó Riain, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland*, and references therein, particularly to earlier work by John Hennig. A revised version of this article appears as “The Northumbrian Urtext of the Martyrology of Tallaght” in Pádraig Ó Riain, *Feastdays of the Saints*, pp. 43–52.

²³ For a general account of this material see Ó Cathasaigh, “The Literature of Medieval Ireland to c. 800,” I.9–31; and Ní Mhaonaigh, “The Literature of Medieval Ireland, 800–1200,” I.32–73. See also Ní Mhaonaigh, “Of Bede’s ‘Five Languages and Four Nations’”; and Clancy, “Gaelic Literature in Ireland and Scotland, 900–1150,” pp. 637–59.

²⁴ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*.

²⁵ Irish legal material has been elucidated by Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*; a detailed analysis of the contents of the tracts can be found in Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*.

²⁶ Patrick Wormald, “Anglo-Saxon Society and Its Literature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1–22 at p. 9; see also Dumville, “‘Beowulf’ and the Celtic World,” p. 120: “the attitudes of Irish clerics to – and their heavy involvement in – the cultivation of vernacular literature seems likely to have constituted a formative influence on the attitudes of their English counterparts.”

²⁷ Among the contributors to this debate have been (in chronological order): Max Deutschbein, “Die sagenhistorischen und literarischen Grundlagen des *Beowulfepos*,” *Germanisch-romanische Monatschrift* 1 (1901), pp. 103–19; Donahue, “Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good,” pp. 263–77, and “Grendel and the Clanna Cain,” pp. 167–75; Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History*; Puhvel, *Beowulf and Celtic Tradition*; Tristram, *Sex Aetates Mundi: Die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen und den Iren*; and Cronan, “Beowulf, the Gaels and the Recovery of the Pre-Conversion Past,” pp. 137–80.

²⁸ Dumville, “‘Beowulf’ and the Celtic World,” p. 158.

²⁹ Note, for example, the division into texts “of the Alfredian era and those of the Benedictine reform period and later,” in Elaine Treharne and Phillip Pulsiano, “An Introduction to the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Literature,” in their *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), p. 4.

³⁰ See Ó Cathasaigh, “The Literature of Medieval Ireland.”

³¹ See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 592–93.

³² This is clearly an oversimplification since the degree of use of the vernacular depended above all on the practice of a given annalist; a shift can be seen to have taken place in individual compilations at different times: see Dumville, “Latin and

Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*," pp. 320–41, which includes a brief comparison of Irish and English vernacular annalistic writing (pp. 333–34).

³³ Ó hAodha, ed. and trans., *Bethu Brigte*.

³⁴ Stokes, ed. and trans., *Félire Óengusso Céili Dé*; the text was dated to 797–805/7 by Thurneysen ("Die Abfassung des Féilire von Oengus," pp. 6–8), whereas Ó Riain has argued for a slightly later date of 828–833 ("The Tallaght Martyrologies Redated," pp. 21–38); this revised date has generated discussion, see Breatnach, "Poets and Poetry," pp. 74–75; and Dumville, "*Félire Oengusso*," pp. 19–48.

³⁵ See, for example, Carey, *King of Mysteries*, pp. 14–15.

³⁶ The prolific ninth-century scholar, John Scottus Eriugena appears to have been neither a cleric nor a monk: Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, p. 591 and nn. 27, 28. Although much of his scholarly life was spent in Francia, his early intellectual training must have been received in Ireland.

³⁷ AU 887.5; the term *fili* is broader in meaning than English "poet" with which it is frequently equated; "scholar" or "man of learning" are more appropriate translations.

³⁸ Best and O'Brien, eds., *The Book of Leinster formerly Lebor na Núachongbála*, III.516–23.

³⁹ See Ní Mhaonaigh, "The Literature Of Medieval Ireland," p. 37.

⁴⁰ These include *Lebor na Cert* (The Book of Rights) and the Psalter of Cashel; see Dillon, "On the Date and Authorship of the *Book of Rights*," pp. 239–49; and Ó Riain, "The Psalter of Cashel," pp. 111–12, 113–14, 116–17.

⁴¹ Breatnach has argued that he was the author of a eulogy of St. Senán, *Amra Senáin*: "An Edition of *Amra Senáin*," pp. 20–23. For a discussion of Cormac's literary career, see Ní Mhaonaigh, "Cormac mac Cuilennáin: king, bishop and 'wondrous sage,'" *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 58 (2011): 109–28.

⁴² Stokes, ed., *Three Irish Glossaries*, pp. 1–44; for the association with Cormac, see Russell, "The Sounds of a Silence," pp. 1–30.

⁴³ On medieval Irish glossaries in general, see Russell, "Laws, Glossaries and Legal Glossaries in Early Ireland," pp. 85–115; "*Graece ... Latine*: Graeco-Latin Glossaries in Early Medieval Ireland," *Peritia* 14 (2000): 406–20; as well as his general introduction to the genre: "*Read it in a Glossary*": *Glossaries and Learned Discourse in Medieval Ireland*.

⁴⁴ Mac Cana, ed. and trans., "A Poem Attributed to Cormac mac Cuilennáin (†908)," pp. 207–17; the list ends with Cormac's own predecessor as king, Cenn nGegáin.

⁴⁵ Carey, ed. and trans., "An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*," pp. 1–32. For a discussion of the date of the text, see McCone, "Dubthach maccu Lugair and a Matter of Life and Death," pp. 1–35; and Carey, "The Two Laws in Dubthach's Judgement," pp. 1–18.

⁴⁶ Carey, "The Two Laws in Dubthach's Judgement," p. 18.

⁴⁷ "Nónbur trá doérglas dond ordugud-sin .i. Pátraic 7 Benignus 7 Cairnech, trí epscoip; Loegaire mac Néill rí Hérenn 7 Dáire rí Ulad 7 Corc mac Lugdech

rí Muman, trí rí; Dubthach maccu Lugair 7 Fergus fili 7 Ros mac Trechim suí bélra Féne” (Nine men were chosen to arrange [the laws]: Patrick and Benignus and Cairnech, three bishops; Loegaire mac Néill king of Ireland and Dáire king of Ulster and Corc mac Lugdech king of Munster, three kings; [and] Dubthach maccu Lugair, and Fergus the poet, and Ros mac Trechim the expert in legal language): Carey, “An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue,” pp. 12, 19 (§8). Dubthach is described as “ríghili insi Érenn” (royal poet of the island of Ireland) at an earlier point in the text: Carey, “An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue,” pp. 11, 18 (§4).

⁴⁸ Carey, “An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue,” pp. 12, 19 (§8). *Nó-fis* derives from *noí-fis* (literally, nine-knowledge), a fanciful etymology of *nós* (a custom or law) of a type commonly concocted in medieval Irish texts: see Carey, “An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue,” p. 26.

⁴⁹ It also appears in another related glossary *Dúil Dromma Cetta*, for both of which see Carey, “An Edition of the Pseudo-Historical Prologue,” p. 26; and Binchy, “The Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már*,” p. 22.

⁵⁰ This is the phrase used in the eighth-century law tract *Córus Béscnai*, “The Prescribed Arrangement of Custom,” in Binchy, ed., *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, II.529.4; see also McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 25–26. It is echoed in the Pseudo-Historical Prologue: McCone, “Dubthach maccu Lugair,” pp. 21–23.

⁵¹ AU 679.2.

⁵² Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, I.250.37–38.

⁵³ Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, I.250.42.

⁵⁴ Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, I.251.2–3. Discussions of the narrative include Mac Cana, “The Three Languages and the Three Laws,” pp. 62–66; Slotkin, “Medieval Irish Scribes and Fixed Texts,” pp. 439–40; McCone, “Zur Frage der Register im frühen Irischen,” pp. 61–67, and *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, pp. 23–24. Note also McManus’s observation, with reference to the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville, that “the statement that Cenn Fáelad lost ‘his brain of forgetting’ ... might indeed be interpreted to mean that he learned to read and write.” In *A Guide to Ogam*, p. 184, n. 4.

⁵⁵ Charles-Edwards, “Language and Society among the Insular Celts,” p. 722.

⁵⁶ Calder, ed. and trans., *Auraicept na nÉces*, pp. 6–7 (lines 63–78).

⁵⁷ Dumville, “‘Beowulf’ and the Celtic World,” p. 147.

⁵⁸ Dumville, “‘Beowulf’ and the Celtic World,” pp. 147–48. Niles has discussed the possibility of Irish influence more generally on the *Cædmon* story: “Bede’s *Cædmon*: ‘The Man Who Had No Story’” (Irish Tale-Type 2412B), *Folklore* 117, no. 2 (2006): 141–55.

⁵⁹ Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 586.14; 2212.3.

⁶⁰ McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present*, p. 23.

⁶¹ The attribution was accepted by some earlier scholars; for discussion and references, see Ahlqvist, ed. and trans., *The Early Irish Linguist*, pp. 18–19.

⁶² Ahlqvist, *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 40 and n. 3.

⁶³ Ahlqvist, *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Ahlqvist, *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 48.

⁶⁵ Ahlqvist, *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 47.

⁶⁶ By way of example, we may note the following typical passage: “Inisce trá: cis lir insci do-chuisin? Ni ansae: a tri .i. ferinsce ocus baninsce ocus deminsce lasin nGoídil .i. mascul ocus femén ocus neutur lasin Laitneoir” (Gender then: how many genders are there? Not difficult: three, namely “man gender,” “woman gender,” and “non-gender,” according to the Irishman, masculine, feminine and neuter according to the Latinist): Ahlqvist, *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 49.

⁶⁷ See McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 27–31.

⁶⁸ McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ McManus, “Ogam,” p. 13. See also Harvey, “Early Literacy in Ireland,” pp. 1–15.

⁷⁰ See McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 148–66.

⁷¹ Note, for example, the following passage: “Attaat di ernail forsind apgitir Laitindai .i. guttai ocus consana. Attat dano di ernail forsín beithi-luis-nin ind oguim .i. feda ocus táebomnae” (There are two categories in the Latin alphabet, namely vowels and consonants. There are two categories in the Ogam alphabet, namely vowels and consonants ...): Ahlqvist, *Early Irish Linguist*, p. 48. The term *beithe-luis-nin* derives from the names designating three letters of the ogam alphabet: *beithe* (birch), *luis* (herb), *nin* (fork).

⁷² Sims-Williams has drawn attention to the use of an ogam authorial inscription in a copy of a late tenth-century book by Byrhtferth of Ramsey: “Byrhtferth’s Ogam Signature,” pp. 283–91; reprinted in his *Studies on Celtic Languages*, pp. 169–77.

⁷³ See McManus, *Guide to Ogam*, pp. 129–40.

⁷⁴ The date of the manuscript is a matter of continuing debate centering on whether one of the main two scribes of the manuscript, M, or a later one, H, can be identified with Máel Muire mac Celéchair, who died in 1106. However, the length of time separating the scribes does not appear to have been great: see, Ó Concheanainn, “The Reviser of Leabhar na hUidhre,” pp. 277–88, and “*Aided Nath Í* and the Reviser of Leabhar na hUidhre,” pp. 146–62; Oskamp, “Mael Muire: Compiler or Reviser?,” pp. 177–82; Mac Eoin, “The Interpolator H in Lebor na hUidre,” pp. 39–46; and Caoimhín Breatnach’s review of that volume, *Éigse* 29 (1996), 200–8, at 206–7. A recent study of the manuscript by Herbert takes as its working hypothesis, “that Lebor na hUidre is an eleventh-century Clonmacnoise product”: Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” p. 92. On H’s working methods, see Toner, “Scribe and Text in *Lebor na hUidre*,” pp. 106–20; and Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, pp. 64–100. See further the essays in Ó hUiginn, *Lebor na hUidre*.

⁷⁵ I follow Poppe here in using the term “pseudo-historical” to cover “a significant part of what is traditionally called medieval Irish ‘literature,’ namely the nar-

rative texts of the so-called Mythological, History (or King), and Ulster (or Heroic) cycles:” Poppe, “Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory,” pp. 33–34.

⁷⁶ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*. The contents, and other aspects of the manuscript, have been discussed by Ó Concheanainn, “Textual and Historical Associations of Leabhar na hUidhre,” pp. 65–120, and “Leabhar na hUidhre: Further Textual Associations,” pp. 27–91. See also now the essays in Ó hUiginn, *Lebor na hUidre*. For discussion of some of the homiletic material in the manuscript, see Boyle, “Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland,” pp. 216–30, and “Eschatological Justice in *Scéla Lai Brátha*,” pp. 39–54.

⁷⁷ For a brief description, see Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, p. xiii.

⁷⁸ Ó Concheanainn, “Textual and Historical Associations,” p. 75.

⁷⁹ Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” pp. 91–93.

⁸⁰ See the various essays in Ó hUiginn, *Lebor na hUidre*.

⁸¹ There are also references to *araile libair* (other books) and *in aliis libris*: Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, lines 7953 and 474, respectively.

⁸² Despite its name, Mac Cana argued that the codex was written at the important monastery of Bangor, which had an association with Druimm Snechtai: “Mongán mac Fiachnai and *Immram Brain*,” pp. 103–06.

⁸³ See Ó Concheanainn, “Textual and Historical Associations,” pp. 84–86, with references to previous discussion.

⁸⁴ The list of texts it most likely contained is discussed by Carey, “On the Interrelationship of Some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* Texts,” pp. 71–72, building on work by Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Carey, “On the Interrelationship of Some *Cín Dromma Snechtai* Texts,” p. 91, gives a summary of the dates of the texts.

⁸⁶ Mac Mathúna has argued for the later date on the basis of his reading of the linguistic evidence of one of the tales contained in the manuscript: *Immram Brain*, pp. 425–58; Kim McCone’s analysis of the textual transmission of the latter text and its sister narrative, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, leads him to conclude that “an eighth-century date for the tantalizing *Cín* remains perfectly possible although a tenth-century one cannot be excluded”: *Echtrae Chonnlai and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland*, p. 67.

⁸⁷ Ó Concheanainn, “Textual and Historical Associations,” p. 83.

⁸⁸ For a description of these manuscripts, see Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, I.xiii–xxvi and II.ix–xl.

⁸⁹ Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II.244–47, and II.xxvi for a description of the manuscript. On the text itself, see Ó Néill, “The Background to the *Cambrai Homily*,” pp. 137–47; and Stancliffe, “Red, White and Blue Martyrdom,” pp. 21–46. Other bilingual texts include the incantations against various ailments preserved in an eighth- or ninth-century St. Gall manuscript: Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II.xxvii and II.248–49.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Ford's analysis of the nature poem, *Dom-fharcai fídbaide fáil*, linking the frequent occurrence of pronouns therein with the grammatical content of the adjacent Latin text: "Blackbirds, Cuckoos and Infixed Pronouns," pp. 162–70. For a similar approach to another marginal stanza, see Ahlqvist, "*Is acher in gaíth ... úa Lothlind*," pp. 23–25. On the relative status of the two languages, see Charles-Edwards, "Language and Society," p. 721.

⁹¹ Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II.xxxii–xxxiv and II.293–96. The poem on the celebrated cat, Pangur Bán, has been much anthologized; see, for example, Murphy, ed. and trans., *Early Irish Lyrics*, pp. 2–3; and Greene and O'Connor, eds. and trans., *A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry*, pp. 81–83. For discussion of the poem, see Toner, "Messe ocus Pangur Bán," pp. 1–22; and Luran Toorians, "Reclusive Blackbirds and a Scholarly 'White Fuller': Two Notes on Irish 'Nature Poetry,'" *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 61 (2011): 87–90.

⁹² Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II.xxiv and II.296. Elizabeth Boyle discusses this poem in "Lay Morality, Clerical Immorality, and Pilgrimage in Tenth-Century Ireland: *Cethrur macclérech and Epscop do Gáedelaib*," *Studia Hibernica* 39 (2013): 9–48, at 42–48. On pilgrimage more generally, see Hughes, "The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 11 (1960): 143–51.

⁹³ Notable exceptions include the late seventh-century liturgical manuscript, "The Antiphony of Bangor," and the ninth-century Patrician collection, "The Book of Armagh:" see Griggs and Warren, ed., *The Antiphony of Bangor*; and Gwynn, ed., *Liber Ardmacchanus*. For discussion of books produced in Ireland but transmitted elsewhere, including Northumbria, see Sharpe, "Books from Ireland, Fifth to Ninth Centuries," pp. 1–55.

⁹⁴ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, line 474.

⁹⁵ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, line 7953.

⁹⁶ Charter evidence provides a parallel from Anglo-Saxon England, since only those charters which "found their way at some point to ecclesiastical archives" have survived: Wormald, "Anglo-Saxon Society," p. 10.

⁹⁷ For an account of Ireland's earliest extant literature, see Ó Cathasaigh, "The Literature of Medieval Ireland."

⁹⁸ Carney, "The Dating of Early Irish Verse Texts," pp. 177–216. See also his, "The Dating of Archaic Irish Verse," pp. 39–55, in which he argues for a fifth-century date for a collection of Leinster poems. For lucid arguments against this early date, see Ó Corráin, "Irish Origin Legends and Genealogies," pp. 59–67. See also Breatnach, "Poets and Poetry," pp. 75–76.

⁹⁹ *Birgit bé bithmaith* (Brigit, ever excellent woman), also known as Ultán's hymn after the seventh-century bishop to whom it is attributed in some manuscripts: Stokes and Strachan, eds. and trans., *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, II.325–26; *Fo réir Choluimb céin ad-fias* (As long as I speak [may I be] obedient to Colum), and *Tiughraind Bhécáin* (The last verses of Bécán), both attributed to the

seventh-century poet, Bécán mac Luigdech: Kelly, ed. and trans., “A Poem in Praise of Columb Cille,” pp. 1–34, and “Tiughraind Bhécáin,” pp. 66–98. A seventh-century date appears to fit the linguistic evidence in the case of all three poems.

¹⁰⁰ *Imbu maccán cóic bliadnae* (When I was a five-year old boy); *Tair cucum a Maire boid* (Come to me, loving Mary); and *A Maire, a grian ar clainde* (Mary, sunshine of our people), in Carney, ed. and trans., *The Poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan*.

¹⁰¹ McNamara and Herbert, eds. and trans., “A Versified Narrative of the Childhood Deeds of the Lord Jesus,” I.455–83.

¹⁰² Carney, *The Poems of Blathmac*.

¹⁰³ Thurneysen accepts the ascription in his edition of the poems: “Colmán mac Lēnēni and Senchān Torpēist,” pp. 193–209. This cleric-poet has been compared with Cædmon by Ireland, “The Poets Cædmon, and Colmán mac Lénéni,” pp. 172–82.

¹⁰⁴ Stokes, ed. and trans., “The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille,” pp. 30–55, 132–83, 248–87, 400–37. While the core of this text may be from the late sixth or early seventh century, Jacopo Bisagni has shown that it was revised and enlarged in the ninth century: “The Language and Date of Amrae Coluimb Chille,” pp. 1–11.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Lapidge, “The School of Theodore and Hadrian,” *ASE* 15 (1986): 45–72; and Wormald, “Anglo-Saxon Society,” p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ See pp. 11–12, in this volume.

¹⁰⁷ Lapidge and Herren, trans., *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, p. 163: “Why, I ask, is Ireland, whither assemble the thronging students by the fleet-load, exalted with a sort of ineffable privilege, as if here in the fertile soil of Britain, teachers who are citizens of Greece and Rome cannot be found?”; see further Love, pp. 11–12, in this volume.

¹⁰⁸ Lapidge, “Aldhelm and the ‘Epinal-Erfurt Glossary’”; see also his “The Career of Aldhelm,” pp. 15–69; and Love, p. 12, in this volume.

¹⁰⁹ On prostitutes and pagan stories, see Lapidge and Herren, trans., *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, pp. 154–55; and Love, p. 12, in this volume.

¹¹⁰ McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*; and Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain*; on their date, see McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 29–47.

¹¹¹ McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 121, 132 (§3).

¹¹² McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 121, 132 (§3).

¹¹³ Carey, “The Rhetoric of *Echtrae Chonlai*,” pp. 45–46.

¹¹⁴ McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 122, 178 (§11). Carey sees the woman as “a pre-Christian harbinger of Christian revelation” (“The Rhetoric of *Echtrae Chonlai*,” pp. 57–58), whereas for McCone she is a symbol of the Church (*Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 100–04).

¹¹⁵ McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, pp. 121, 130 (§1).

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Vendryes, ed., *Airne Fíngéin*, p. 1; and Nic Dhonnchadha, ed., *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Carney first proposed this reading of the tale: "The Deeper Level of Early Irish Literature," pp. 160–71; it was expanded upon by Carey, "The Rhetoric of *Echtrae Chonlai*."

¹¹⁸ Breatnach has dated it to between 678 and 683: "The Ecclesiastical Element in the Old-Irish Legal Tract *Cáin Fhuithirbe*," pp. 439–59.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Ó Corráin, Breatnach, and Breen, "The Laws of the Irish"; Ó Corráin, "Irish Vernacular Law and the Old Testament," pp. 284–307; Breatnach, "Canon Law and Secular Law in Early Ireland," pp. 439–59, and his "Lawyers in Early Ireland."

¹²⁰ For a comprehensive introduction to the material, see Kelly, *Guide to Early Irish Law*; and Breatnach, *Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici*.

¹²¹ *Cáin Aicillne* (The Law of Base Clientship); *Cáin Lánamna* (The Law of Couples): Thurneysen, ed. and trans., *Studies in Early Irish Law*, pp. 1–75. *Cáin Iarraith* (The Law of the Fosterage-fee); *Bechbretha* (Bee-judgements): Charles-Edwards and Kelly, eds. and trans., *Bechbretha. Catshlechta* (Sections Concerning Cats) and *Conshlechta* (Sections Concerning Dogs).

¹²² *Bretha Comaithchesa* (The Judgements of Neighborhood).

¹²³ Binchy, "Bretha Crólige (The Judgements of Sick-maintenance)," pp. 1–77; and Binchy, "Bretha Déin Chécht (The Judgements of Dían Cécht)," pp. 1–20.

¹²⁴ *Córus Bésgnai* (The Arrangement of Customary Behavior).

¹²⁵ It includes *Cáin Fhuithirbe* and the two *Bretha Nemed* (Judgements Concerning Privileged Persons) texts: *Bretha Nemed Toísech* (The First *Bretha Nemed*), and *Bretha Nemed Dédenach* (The Last *Bretha Nemed*).

¹²⁶ For a description of *rosc*, see Breatnach, "Zur Frage der *roscada* im Irischen," pp. 197–205.

¹²⁷ See, for example, McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, p. 123 (§14), where a three-stanza, syllabic poem stands in contrast to the *rosc* used elsewhere. Other examples of this parallel usage are cited by Carey, "The Rhetoric of *Echtrae Chonlai*," p. 59.

¹²⁸ The tenth-century tale, *Orgain Denna Ríg* (The Destruction of Dinn Ríg), for example, concludes with a contemporary *rosc*: Greene, ed., *Fingal Rónáin and Other Stories*, p. 23; for discussion, see Ó Cathasaigh, "The Oldest Story of the Laigin," pp. 13–17.

¹²⁹ Henry, ed. and trans., "Verba Scáthaige," pp. 191–207.

¹³⁰ Murphy, "On the Dates of Two Sources," pp. 145–51.

¹³¹ *Fínnechta*, for example, appears under a playfully etymologized form of his name: *ibthius Snechta Fína shirfess*; "Snechta Fína [Snow of Wine < *fin* (wine) and *snechta* (snow); *Fínnechta* being interpreted as *Fínshnechta*] who shall pour shall drink it": Murphy, "On the Dates of Two Sources," pp. 147, 149.

¹³² For the text, see Hull, ed. and trans., "Apgitir Chrábaid," pp. 44–89. Its date continues to be debated; see, for example, Ó Néill, "The Date and Authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*," pp. 203–15; and McCone, "Prehistoric, Old and Middle Irish," pp. 34–35.

¹³³ The translation of the phrase (which occurs in a list of the kinds of

activities engaged in at the “Fair” of Carmain) is by Gwynn, ed. and trans., *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, III.20–21 (line 239). *Fid*, literally “wood,” is used to mean “letter,” usually a letter of the ogam alphabet. A text entitled *De Dúilib Feda* lists all the ogam supplementary characters (*forfeda*): Calder, *Auraicept na nÉces*, pp. 270–71.

¹³⁴ *Apgitir Chrábaid*, for example, draws on the work of John Cassian: Ó Néill, “Date and Authorship of *Apgitir Chrábaid*.”

¹³⁵ Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries.”

¹³⁶ Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” p. 99.

¹³⁷ Herbert and Ó Riain, eds. and trans., *Betha Adamnáin*. The date of this and other compositions indicate that learning in some form continued in the Viking era, suggesting that the greater proliferation of extant texts from the eleventh century could also reflect “on-going activity emerging into visibility in a more stable era”: Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” p. 88.

¹³⁸ For a general account of the genre, see Herbert, “Hagiography,” pp. 79–90, and her article, “Latin and Vernacular Hagiography of Ireland from the Origins to the Sixteenth Century,” III.327–60.

¹³⁹ McNamara, *The Apocrypha in the Irish Church*, p. 2. For a general account of this material, see also Dumville, “Biblical Apocrypha and the Early Irish,” pp. 229–338. A list of relevant texts has been compiled by O’Leary, “The Apocrypha and Their Transmission,” accessed via www.ucc.ie/celt/Apocrypha.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ For this description and a general account of the text, see Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun*, pp. 75. For more detailed commentary, an edition, and translation of the text, see his *Apocrypha Hiberniae II, Apocalyptica 1*.

¹⁴¹ For an edition, see Stokes, ed., *Saltair na Rann*; Carey translates three cantos in *King of Mysteries*, pp. 98–124; the story of Adam and Eve as related in the text has been edited and translated by Greene and Kelly, *The Irish Adam and Eve Story from Saltair na Rann*, Vol. 1; Vol. 2 by Murdoch consists of commentary. A prose version also exists: Dillon, ed. and trans., “Scél Saltrach na Rann,” pp. 1–43.

¹⁴² The text commonly known as “The Book of Invasions” is available in an unsatisfactory edition by Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, 5 vols; see also the introduction to the reprint of this edition: Carey, *A New Introduction to Lebor Gabála Éirenn*. For commentary on the narrative, see Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, and his “*Lebor Gabála* and the Legendary History of Ireland,” pp. 32–48; as well as Scowcroft, “*Leabhar Gabhála* Part I,” pp. 81–142, and “*Leabhar Gabhála* Part II,” pp. 1–66.

¹⁴³ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas*, III.20–1 (line 265); this is another of the activities said to have occurred at the Fair of Carmain.

¹⁴⁴ The poems attributed to these poets are listed in Carey, *A New Introduction*, p. 5, nn. 11–14.

¹⁴⁵ For some evidence of this, see Carey, *A New Introduction*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ The *Historia regum* is, of course, very different both in purpose and in tone from the *Lebor Gabála*. Notwithstanding this, Byrhtferth did have some

connection with the world of Irish learning since he used ogam letters on an authorial inscription, as noted above: see Sims-Williams, “Byrhtferth’s Ogam Signature.” R. R. Davies astutely compared *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* to Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*: “The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: IV, language and historical mythology”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6.VII (1997), pp. 1–24 at p. 20; see further Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, “Seanchas traidisiúnta, idirnáisiúnta: cruthú na staire in Éirinn san aonú agus sa dara haois déag,” in *Litriocht na Gaeilge ar fud an Dombhain I: Cruthú, Caomhnú agus Athbheochan*, ed. Máirín Nic Eoin, Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, and Regina Uí Cholataín (Dublin, 2015), 1–21.

¹⁴⁷ For a brief introduction to this material, see Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, and Ó Corráin, “Annals, Irish,” I.69–75. For a more detailed account of the genre, see Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles*, and McCarthy, *The Irish Annals*. The views of the latter remain contested: see, for example, the review of the volume by Charles-Edwards, *Studia Hibernica* 36 (2009–10): 207–10.

¹⁴⁸ For an account and attempted reconstruction of this source, see Charles-Edwards, trans., *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 2 vols. See also Flechner, “The Chronicle of Ireland: Then and Now,” pp. 422–54.

¹⁴⁹ Stokes, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Tigernach*; Hennessy, ed. and trans., *Chronicum Scotorum*; Murphy, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*.

¹⁵⁰ Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Mediaeval Ireland and Wales*. The Munster collection has been edited and translated by Mac Airt, *The Annals of Inisfallen*.

¹⁵¹ Ó hInnse, ed. and trans., *Miscellaneous Irish Annals*; see also Mac Niocaill, *Medieval Irish Annals*, pp. 26–29.

¹⁵² Gwynn, “Cathal Óg mac Maghnusa and the Annals of Ulster,” *Clogher Record* 2, no. 2 (1958): 230–43; 2, no. 3 (1959): 370–84. The Annals of Loch Cé have been edited and translated by Hennessy, *The Annals of Loch Cé*, 2 vols.

¹⁵³ O’Donovan, ed. and trans., *Annála Rioghachta Éireann*.

¹⁵⁴ AU 1012.2.

¹⁵⁵ Much of it by later copyists, including a stanza on another defeat of Máel Sechnaill’s men, also in 1013: AU 1013.5.

¹⁵⁶ AU 1014.1; this is discussed in Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru*, pp. 54–65.

¹⁵⁷ See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, “*Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* and the Annals: A Comparison,” *Ériu* 47 (1996): 101–26.

¹⁵⁸ Radner, ed. and trans., *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*.

¹⁵⁹ AU 867.7; Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 128–29 (§348). An earlier attack on York is recorded uniquely in Irish sources: Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 118–19 (§330).

¹⁶⁰ The terminal nature of the king’s illness is mentioned no less than three times in the passage: Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 166–73 (§429).

¹⁶¹ Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 166–73 (§429).

¹⁶² Wainwright, “Ingimund’s Invasion,” pp. 145–69; his view is endorsed by Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 206–7. Herbert has examined the entry in the context of a broader study of the Fragmentary Annals, the results of which she presented at a workshop at St. Catherine’s College, Cambridge, July 2008, as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded event, “Crossing Conquests: Literary Culture in Eleventh-Century England.”

¹⁶³ Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 168–69 (§429). In an earlier section of the narrative, he adopted a different approach: having noted the return to Scandinavia of Amláib (Norse, Óláfr) to assist his father in battle, he remarks, “since it would be lengthy to tell the cause of the conflict, and since it is of little relevance to us, although we have knowledge of it, we forego writing it, for our task is to write about whatever concerns Ireland, and not even all of that” (uair ba fada ra inisin cúis a cogaidh ocus ara laighead tremdhírgeas cugainn cidh again na bheith a fhios, fagbhaim gan a scribeann, úair atá ar n-obair im neoch as d’Erinn do scribeann ocus cidh ní iad-saidhe uile): Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 144–45 (§400).

¹⁶⁴ The term *Lochlannaig* is used for Scandinavians generally before coming to signify the inhabitants of Norway: see Ní Mhaonaigh, “Literary Lochlann,” in *Cànan & Cultar. Language and Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* 3, ed. Wilson McLeod, James E. Fraser and Anja Gunderloch (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 25–37; and Colmán Etchingham, “The Location of Historical *Laithlinn/Lochla(i)nn*,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium of Societas Celtologica Nordica*, ed. Mícheál Ó Flaithhearta, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Celtica Upsaliensia (Uppsala, 2007), pp. 11–31. In this text, it is employed in opposition to *Danair* to specify a particular group of Scandinavians, thus Radner translates it “Norwegians.”

¹⁶⁵ Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 90–95 (§235): “is iad na Danair rug búaidh ocus cosgar tria rath Padraicc, ge ro badar na Lochlannaig tri chuttruma risna Danaroibh, nó ceithre cudruma” (it is the Danes who took victory and spoils through the grace of Patrick although the Norwegians were three or four times the number of the Danes). Their partial piety is cited as a reason for this preference: “uair as amhlaidh ra bhatar na Danair, ocus cinele crabhaidh aca, .i. gabhaid sealad fri fheóil ocus fri mhnáibh ar chrabhudh” (for the Danes were like that, and they had kinds of piety – that is, they abstained from meat and from women for a while, for the sake of piety). On the nuanced portrayal of Vikings in this texts, see Downham, “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly,” pp. 28–40.

¹⁶⁶ In the context of the Crusades, its resonance would have been all the greater; for examples of such echoes in other texts, see Ní Mhaonaigh, “Pagans and Holy Men,” pp. 143–61.

¹⁶⁷ She is similarly depicted in an account of another Viking-Saxon encounter later in the text in which her cunning cleverness (*gliocas*) is specifically commended: Radner, *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, pp. 180–81 (§459).

¹⁶⁸ These include *imda na ndaleman* (the chamber of those distributing drink), *imda Tulchinne drúith* (the chamber of Tulchinne the jester), *imda na*

muccidi (the chamber of the swineherds), and *imda Chúscraid meic Conchobair* (the chamber of Cúscraid son of Conchobar): Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, pp. 231–32. For an edition of the tale without translation, see Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. There is an earlier edition with translation by Stokes, ed. and trans., "The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel." It has been analyzed by O'Connor, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*.

¹⁶⁹ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, p. 233; Stokes, ed. and trans., "Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel," p. 291.

¹⁷⁰ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, p. 233; Stokes, ed. and trans., "Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel," p. 291; the trio has been discussed by Tremaine, "The Three Saxon Princes," pp. 50–54.

¹⁷¹ Stokes, ed. and trans., "Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel," p. 291, n. 3.

¹⁷² The passage in question is found in an interpolation in *Lebor na hUidre* made by scribe H, whose date is debated, as noted above, n. 74.

¹⁷³ Todd, ed. and trans., *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, pp. 136–37.

¹⁷⁴ See Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, "Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: Some Dating Considerations," *Peritia* 9 (1995): 354–77, esp. pp. 375–76.

¹⁷⁵ Meyer, ed. and trans., "The Oldest Version of Tochmarc Emire," pp. 446–47; van Hamel, ed., *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories*, p. 48 (§64.6). The first element of the name is a representation of the Germanic element "Wulf."

¹⁷⁶ "Caireand Casdub, ingen Sgail Bailb, ri Saxan, máthair Neill" (Curly-black haired Cairenn, the daughter of silent Sgal, king of the Saxons, was Niall's mother): Stokes, ed. and trans., "The Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach," pp. 190–91. Alternative variants of the Saxon king's name, namely "Saxaill," occur in another version (Stokes, ed. and trans., "Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach," p. 190, n. 1); "Sacheill" is the form found in Niall's earlier death-tale: Meyer, ed. and trans., "How King Niall of the Nine Hostages Was Slain," p. 88. For this and other examples of Saxons in medieval Irish literature, see Ní Mhaonaigh, "The Outward Look," pp. 381–97.

¹⁷⁷ Two versions of the tale survive, one prose, one metrical: see Stokes, "Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach," pp. 190–203, and the poem edited and translated by Joynt, "Echtra mac Echdach Mugmedóin," pp. 91–111. It has been discussed by Downey, "Intertextuality in *Echtra mac nEchdach Mugmedóin*," pp. 77–104.

¹⁷⁸ On the various versions of this text, see Ní Mhaonaigh, "Níall Noígiallach's Death-Tale," pp. 178–91.

¹⁷⁹ See Toner, "The Transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*," pp. 71–88. The version of the text edited by Meyer ("Oldest Version") has been dated to the eighth century; the version edited by van Hamel (*Compert Con Culainn*) is the later one.

¹⁸⁰ There are two references to *Cín Dromma Snechtai* in the text: Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, line 8005, *Slicht Libair Dromma Snechtai inso* (This is the version of The Book of Druimm Snechtai) and 8025, *Slicht na cíni béos* (This is still the version of the *Cín*). This summary version is sometimes referred to as *Orgain Brudne Uí Dergae* (The Slaughter of Ua Derga's Hostel), the title

used in *Lebor na hUidre*, to distinguish it from the longer tale. For an account of its transmission, see West, “Leabhar na hUidhre’s Position in the Manuscript History,” pp. 61–98; see also Ó Cathasaigh, “On the *Cín Dromma Snechta* Version of *Togail Brudne Uí Dergae*,” pp. 103–14.

¹⁸¹ Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” p. 98.

¹⁸² See Herbert, “Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries,” pp. 99–100.

¹⁸³ Stokes, ed. and trans., “Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach,” pp. 174–89.

¹⁸⁴ As argued by Ó Corráin, “Legend as Critic,” pp. 33–35. On the basis of tendentious claims which undermine Munster’s right either to Túadmumu or to Osraige (Stokes, ed. and trans., “Death of Crimthann Son of Fidach,” pp. 186–89), Ó Corráin has suggested that the text belongs to the period between 1114 and 1130 when Tairdelbach Ua Conchobair was attempting to destroy the power base of the Munster dynasty, Uí Briain.

¹⁸⁵ Ó Riain, ed., *Cath Almaine*, p. xxiv. There is an earlier edition with translation by Stokes, “The Battle of Allen,” pp. 41–70.

¹⁸⁶ “Dofuric araid nÓrlaim meic Aillello ocus Medba i Tamlachtaí Órlaim fri Dísiurt Lóchait antúaid bicán oc béim feda and” (He [Cú Chulainn] came upon the charioteer of Órlam, son of Ailill and Medb, at a place called Tamlachta Órlaim a little to the north of Dísert Lochait where he was cutting wood): O’Rahilly, ed. and trans., *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 27 (lines 870–72), 149; cf. O’Rahilly, ed. and trans., *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, pp. 33 (lines 1219–21), 171–72.

¹⁸⁷ O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 192 (line 3365), 215; cf. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, pp. 107 (line 3889), 243.

¹⁸⁸ O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 61 (lines 195–97), 179.

¹⁸⁹ The fight of the bulls at the end of the text gives rise to a series of place-names all of which are readily identifiable; one of the two animals, Donn Cúailnge, drops the loin (*lián*) of the other, In Findbennach, at a particular place “whence the name Áth Luain” (gorop de dá tá Áth **Lúain** [Athlone, Co. Westmeath; the ford of the loin]); he subsequently goes to Trim, Co. Meath [Áth **Troimm**, “the ford of the liver”] where he deposited In Findbennach’s liver (goro fácaib a **thromm** ind Fhinbennaig and); he then threw In Findbennach’s thigh as far as Port Lárge (ra chuir a **láraic** de co Port **Large** [Waterford, thigh-harbor]), before throwing his rib-cage as far as Dublin (ra chuir a **chliathaig** úad go Dublind), “which is called Áth Cliath” (rissa ratter Áth **Cliath**): O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster*, pp. 135–36 (lines 4903–09), 272; cf. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I*, pp. 124, 237.

¹⁹⁰ For a discussion of the topography of one particular section of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, see Muhr, “The Location of the Ulster Cycle,” pp. 149–58.

¹⁹¹ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindsenchas*, III.76–76, from a poem concerning the Liamuin in Leinster.

¹⁹² For a series of such explanations of a particularly humorous kind, see Thurneysen, ed., *Scéle Mucce Meic Dathó*, pp. 10, 12, 13–14 (§§10, 12, 14).

¹⁹³ See Arbuthnot, ed. and trans., *Cóir Anmann*. There are some place-names also in the tract which she discusses in "Short Cuts to Etymology," pp. 79–88.

¹⁹⁴ Prose and metrical versions are found alongside one another in many of the manuscripts, but have unfortunately been edited separately: see Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, and Gwynn, ed. and trans., "The Dinnsenchas in the Book of Uí Maine," pp. 68–94; Stokes, ed. and trans., "The Prose Tales in the Rennes Dindsenchas"; Stokes (ed. and trans.), "The Bodleian Dinnsenchas," pp. 467–516, and "The Edinburgh Dinnsenchas," pp. 471–97.

¹⁹⁵ See Arbuthnot, *Cóir Anmann*, pp. 45–47.

¹⁹⁶ For an introduction to the Glossary tradition, see Russell, "Laws, Glossaries and Legal Glossaries," and 'Read it in a Glossary.'

¹⁹⁷ See Baumgarten, "Etymological Aetiology in Irish tradition," pp. 115–22; and Arbuthnot, "Medieval Etymology," pp. 1–20.

¹⁹⁸ Best and O'Brien, eds., *The Book of Leinster Formerly Lebor na Núachong-bála*, p. 1119 (lines 32881–83), which has been edited and translated by Murray, "The Finding of the *Táin*," pp. 17–24 (with references to discussion of the tale); for other manuscript versions, see Meyer, ed., "Die Wiederauffindung der *Táin Bó Cúailnge*," pp. 2–6. The exchange is also recorded in the ninth-century collection, the Triads of Ireland: "Trí hamrai la *Táin Bó Cúailnge* .i. in cuilmen dara héisi i nÉrinn ..." (Three wonders concerning *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, i.e., the "summit of knowledge" came to Ireland in its stead ...): Meyer, ed. and trans., *The Triads of Ireland*, pp. 8–9 (§62).

¹⁹⁹ The full quote from a poem attributed to Cináed ua hArtacáin (d. 975), reads as follows: "Fianna batar i nEmain/ ir-Raith Chruachan, i Temair/ il-Luachair luatis curaid/ i n-Alind, i n-Íarmumain" (Champions who dwelt in Emain [Ulster], in Rathcroghan [Connacht], in Tara [Leinster], in Luachair [Munster] which heroes used to celebrate, in Allen, in West Munster): Whitley Stokes, ed. and trans., "On the Deaths of Some Irish Heroes," *Revue celtique* 23 (1902): 303–48 at 304–05 (§1).

²⁰⁰ See, for example, Greenwood, "Some Aspects of the Evolution of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*," pp. 47–54.

²⁰¹ Hogan, ed. and trans., *Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn*. For an analysis of the tale, see Patrick Wadden, "Cath Ruis na Ríg for Bóinn: History and Literature in Twelfth-Century Ireland," *Aiste* 4 (2014): 11–44.

²⁰² Hogan, *Cath Ruis na Ríg*, pp. 14–15.

²⁰³ Meyer, ed. and trans., *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 124–25; for discussion of this section of the tale which occurs only in the shorter version, see Herbert, "Crossing Literary and Historical Boundaries," p. 101. There is a later edition of the longer version of the tale (without translation) by Jackson, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*.

²⁰⁴ His name is explained as "non-refusable" in the longer version of the tale: "... uair ní thanic remi ocus ní ticc dia eissi bu duilge aer no molad, conid aire atbertha Anera friss, iarsinni ní feta éra fair" (since there had not come before him

and will not come after him one whose satire or praise was harder to bear, and on account of that he was called Anéra [*an-* negative particle; *éra* “refusal”], because of that there was no refusing him): Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 8–9.

²⁰⁵ Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 8–9; he is termed *ollam maith* (a good *ollam* [the highest grade of scholar]) in the shorter version of the tale: Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 114–15.

²⁰⁶ The bed that awaited him there was “full of lice and flees” (*ba mílach derg-natach*): Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 10–11; his ration amounted to “a small cup of church whey-water, two sparks of fire in the middle of a wisp of oaten straw and two sods of fresh peat” (*cuachan .i. corcca do médgusci na heclaise, ocus da óibell tened im medón suipp sílcátha corcca ocus da fhót do úrmónaid*): Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 14–15.

²⁰⁷ According to the repulsive abbot, Manchín, “our counsel will be none other than to crucify him tomorrow, for my honor and that of St. Finbarr and of the Church” (*nib a comarile aile acht a chrochad imbarach imm enech-sa ocus enech Barra ocus ina heclaisi*): Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 18–19.

²⁰⁸ Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, pp. 128–29.

²⁰⁹ For examples of these, see Peter Dronke, “Profane Elements in Literature,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford, 1982), pp. 569–92; *Aislinge meic Conglinne* in its European context is discussed briefly in Ní Mhaonaigh, “Pagans and Holy Men,” pp. 159–61.

²¹⁰ Mac Cana, “The Rise of the Later Schools of *Filidheacht*,” pp. 126–46; Simms, “An eaglais agus filí na scol,” pp. 21–36.

²¹¹ The precise instruction of the pair of guardian angels is as follows: “... ocus scribthar na scéla sin i támlorguibh filed ocus i mbriathraibh ollaman, ór budh gairdiugudh do dronguibh ocus do degdáinibh deridh aimsire éisdecht frisna scéluib sin” (... and have these stories written on poets’ tablets in refined language, so that the hearing of them will provide entertainment for the lords and commons of later times): Stokes, ed., “*Acallamh na Senórach*,” p. 9; Dooley and Roe, trans., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, p. 12. For discussion, see Ní Mhaonaigh, “Pagans and Holy Men,” pp. 147–48. For general comment on the text, see Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*; and Parsons, “The Structure of *Acallam na Senórach*,” pp. 11–39 (with further references). On the body of literature of which the *Acallam* forms a part, see also the essays in *The Gaelic Finn Tradition*, edited by Arbuthnot and Parsons.

²¹² These include a late fourteenth-century manuscript, the *Book of Ballymote*, written by a number of scribes attached to a law school of Clann Aedhagáin, probably in the house of a local ruler, Tomaltach Mac Donnchaidh: see Ó Concheanainn, “The Book of Ballymote,” pp. 15–25. The *Book of Lecan* was written in the house of its principal scribe, Gilla Ísu Mór Mac Fhirbhisigh (d. 1418); one of his pupils, Murchadh Riabhach Ó Cuindlis, who contributed to the *Book of Lecan*, was the sole scribe of another early fifteenth-century manuscript, *Leabhar*

Breac ("Speckled Book"): see Ó Concheanainn, "The Scribe of the Leabhar Breac," pp. 64–79.

²¹³ Johnston discusses the world of medieval Irish learning in *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland*.

²¹⁴ In 871, Cú Roí "a learned abbot and the most expert in the histories of the Irish" (abbas, sapiens et peritissimus historiarum Scotticarum) died: AU 871.6. Of his work nothing has remained. A variety of texts ascribed to an almost exact contemporary of Ælfric, Aibertach mac Cosse Dobráin (d. 1016), has survived; he too was a monastic official (*airchinnech*) of Ros Ailithir, Co. Cork: AU 1016.8.

²¹⁵ These include Cormac mac Cuilennáin and a slightly earlier ninth-century bishop of Cork, Domnall, an excellent scribe (*scriba optimus*): AU 876.4. An eleventh-century bishop, Patrick, to whom a significant corpus of material has been attributed, was educated in Worcester during the time of Wulfstan II; for his postulated writings see, Gwynn, ed. and trans., *The Writings of Bishop Patrick*; see also Elizabeth Boyle, "The Authorship and Transmission of *De tribus habitaculis animae*," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 22 (2012): 49–65. One of the scribes of the Book of Leinster was Finn, bishop of Kildare, on whose identity, see Bhreathnach, "Two Contributors to the Book of Leinster," pp. 105–07.

²¹⁶ A prominent example is Flann Mainistrech, of Monasterboice, whom we have already encountered, "eminent lector and master of the historical lore of Ireland" (*airdfer leighinn ocus sui senchusa Erenn*): AU 1056.8.

²¹⁷ Several of those belonging to Monasterboice and Armagh, including *In Lebor Buide* (The Yellow Book) and *In Lebor Gerr* (The Short Book), are listed in a passage by Scribe H in *Lebor na hUidre*, for discussion of which, see Herbert, "Crossing Historical and Literary Boundaries," pp. 92–93.

²¹⁸ He is thus described in his obit: AU 975.4.

²¹⁹ Gwynn, *Metrical Dindshenchas*, I.52–53: "Amlaíb Átha Cliath cétaig/ rogab rígi i mBeind Étair/ tallus lúag mo dúane de/ ech d'échaib ána Aichle" (Amlaíb of hundred-strong Dublin, who gained the kingship in Bend Étair, I bore off from him as price of my song a horse of the horses of Achall). For discussion, see Ní Mhaonaigh, "Friend and Foe," pp. 399–400, and references therein.

²²⁰ AU 1024.3.

²²¹ Peters, ed. and trans., "Die irische Alexandersage," pp. 71–264.

²²² Gearóid Mac Eoin, "Das Verbalsystem von *Togail Troi* (H.2.17)," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 28 (1960–1): 73–136, 149–223 at 202. See also Mac Gearailt, "*Togail Troi*," pp. 71–85.

²²³ For a general introduction to this material, see Ní Mhaonaigh, "Classical Compositions in Medieval Ireland," pp. 1–19; Poppe, "Mittelalterliche Übersetzungsliteratur im insular-keltischen Kulturraum," pp. 33–58; and most recently Ralph O'Connor, "Irish Narrative Literature and the Classical Tradition, 900–1300," in his *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval Irish Narrative*, *Studies in Celtic History* 34 (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 1–22.

²²⁴ See Poppe, "Reconstructing Medieval Irish Literary Theory," p. 39, n. 32.

See also Clarke, “An Irish Achilles and a Greek Cú Chulainn,” pp. 238–51.

²²⁵ See Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland*; and the essays in O’Connor, *Classical Literature and Learning*.

²²⁶ A prose and metrical catalogue of the names of famous women, known as the *Banshenchas*, has been preserved: Dobbs, ed. and trans., “The Ban-shenchus.” For discussion of the text, see Ní Bhrolcháin, “The Manuscript Tradition of the Banshenchas,” pp. 109–35; and Connon, “The *Banshenchas* and the Uí Néill Queens of Tara,” pp. 98–108.

²²⁷ See, for example, the list of mothers of Irish saints, as well as the litany of Irish saints preserved in the *Book of Leinster*, alongside saints’ genealogies: O’Sullivan, *The Book of Leinster Formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, VI.1692–705; Ó Riain, ed., *Corpus genealogiarum sanctorum Hiberniae*.

²²⁸ Stokes, *Féilire Óengusso*, p. 24 (§165); “Atbath borg tromm Temra/ la tairthim a flathe/ col-lín corad sruithe/ maraid Ard mór Machae” (Tara’s mighty burgh perished at the death of her princes; with a multitude of venerable champions the great height of Machae [Armagh] abides).

²²⁹ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, pp. 278–87.

²³⁰ “Creit do Dia ocus do náemPatraic, a Loegairi ...” (Believe in God and in holy Patrick, Láegaire ...): Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, pp. 280 (line 9301), 287 (line 9535); the latter example in the hand of Scribe H.

²³¹ Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, p. 288 (lines 9549–65).

²³² Best and Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre*, p. 285 (lines 9462–63).

²³³ Meyer, ed. and trans., *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes*, pp. 8–11 (§12) (version A).

²³⁴ Stokes, ed., “Acallamh na Senórach,” p. 41; Dooley and Roe, *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, p. 45.

²³⁵ The direct involvement of Diarmait in the manuscript’s creation has been refuted by Ó Corráin, “The Education of Diarmait Mac Murchada,” pp. 75–76. Sympathy with Diarmait is evident in a note made in 1166 by one of the manuscript’s scribes, Áed Úa Crimthainn of the monastery of Terryglass: “A ri nime is mor in gnim doringned i nHerind indiu (.i. Kl Aug) .i. Diarmait mac Dondchada meic Murchada ri Lagen ocus Gall do innarba do fheraib Herend dar muir. Uch, uch, a Chomdiu, cid dogen” (O King of Heaven, dreadful is the deed that has been perpetrated in Ireland today [i.e., the calends of August], namely, Diarmait son of Donnchad Mac Murchada, king of Leinster and the Foreigners, has been banished overseas by the men of Ireland. Alas, alas, O Lord, what shall I do?): Best, Bergin, and O’Brien, *The Book of Leinster Formerly Lebar na Núachongbála*, I.xvii. See also Mac Eoin, “The Provenance of the Book of Leinster,” pp. 42–70.

²³⁶ The phrase occurs in the *Triads of Ireland* which claims that the monastery of Ros Ailithir is the home of *legend hÉrenn*; it may designate specifically ecclesiastical learning, as to various ecclesiastical centers are ascribed other branches of learning: “féinechas hÉrenn Clúain hÚama ... senchas hÉrenn Imblech Ibair ... brethemnas hÉrenn Sláine” (the law of Ireland – Cloyne; the lore of Ireland

– Emlý; the judgement of Ireland – Slane): Meyer, *Triads of Ireland*, pp. 2–3 (§§12, 15, 17, 21).

²³⁷ This contribution was submitted for publication in 2007; I have made minor changes since then and have added bibliographical references to material published after that date, but it has not been substantially rewritten. I have benefited much from comments made on an earlier draft by Dr. Elizabeth Boyle and Dr. Helen Imhoff, as well as by my colleague and fellow-author in this volume, Dr. Rosalind Love.



Bibliography

This is a highly selective bibliography, drawing primarily on the works cited in the accompanying article, arranged under headings designed to assist those not necessarily familiar with the material. The headings are as follows:

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